Omnis Determinatio est Negatio: A Genealogy and Defense of the Hegelian Conception of Negation

Russell Newstadt
Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1481

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

Creative Commons License
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2015 Russell Newstadt
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

OMNIS DETERMINATIO EST NEGATIO: A GENEALOGY AND DEFENSE OF THE HEGELIAN
CONCEPTION OF NEGATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY
RUSSELL NEWSTADT
CHICAGO, IL
MAY 2015
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been thinking about the subject of this dissertation for some time, and so I have incurred quite a few debts on the way to arranging my thoughts into a dissertation, beginning with the debt I owe my first philosophical hero as an undergraduate at Berkeley, Donald Davidson, who regrettably will have to be thanked in absentia. I owe much more immediate thanks to the members of my dissertation committee, each of whom has taught me something essential about philosophy. Adriaan Peperzak showed me that philosophy was still the sort of vital project Plato took it to be. Through the course of my time at Loyola, Blake Dutton instilled in me a passion for careful reading and argumentation, even if these are not always exhibited in the more speculative moments of my work. As for Andrew Cutrofello, the imagination, intelligence and generosity he has shown as the director of my dissertation, and as a philosophical mentor and interlocutor, will require the remainder of my life to account for.

The love and encouragement of my mother, brother and sister have made it possible for me to persist with something I seemed, at times, destined to abandon. A number of friends and relatives have also pushed me affectionately, when necessary. Finally, to my lovely wife Larisa and my adorable daughter Aurelia, I owe thanks for compelling me to see my devotion to philosophy in the proper context of loving and devoting myself to them.
Die Leistung der Urteilsfunktion wird aber erst dadurch ermöglicht, dass die Schöpfung des Verneinungssymbols der Denken einen ersten Grad von Unabhängigkeit von der Erfolgen der Verdrängung und somit auch vom Zwang des Lustprincips gestattet hat.

– Sigmund Freud

Jedes “Nicht” in jedem Nicht-sagen, ob sprachlich ausdrücklich oder nicht, hat als Sprechen von...den Charakter des Aufzeigens.

– Martin Heidegger
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: THE DISCOURSE OF NEGATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: PLATO: NEGATION AND THE DISCURSIVE INTERVAL</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: BOETHIUS: CONTRADICTION, DIVISION AND THE (DIS)UNITY OF THOUGHT</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION: NEGATION, PHILOSOPHY AND THE LIMITS OF EXPERIENCE</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores the Platonic and medieval roots of a philosophical conception of negation that finds its full expression in Hegel’s dialectic. I set out the basic features of this conception and defend it against the prevailing Fregean treatment of negation as, in effect, a semantic switch, i.e., one that converts true to false, and false to true. According to the Hegelian conception, negation is both what opens up the *predicative interval*, the logical space between subject and predicate, and what guides the determination of concepts through the judgments in which they are employed. As such, negation is the fundamental engine of discursive thought and expression.

I argue that this conception originates with Plato, who rescues negation from the extensional semantics of names and the corresponding bivalent metaphysics of being and non-being. With Boethius the vital role of negation is denied, and indeed forgotten, although he retains a formal sense of its original, propositional setting. It is Hegel, however, who recognizes in negation the ground of concepts, inference and truth. Plato’s recasting of negation as difference also underpins the traditional Aristotelian and scholastic treatment of *differentiae* and is tied to a view of concepts (and kinds) as hierarchically determined, and to a method for mapping out this hierarchy, i.e., the *method or science of division*. This method is introduced by Plato, developed by Aristotle, institutionalized by Boethius, and reconceived in Hegel’s *Logic*. 
INTRODUCTION

THE DISCOURSE OF NEGATION

Section One. Philosophy and Negation

Negation, like being, is said in many ways. Indeed, properly understood, it is never not said. This remains true despite the fact that, unlike being, it is rarely spoken of at all, and what little philosophical attention is historically granted it is largely devoted to marginalizing its use or registering its logical, metaphysical or ethical shortcomings. Aristotle associates it with indeterminacy, Augustine, in a crucial setting, with privation, and in particular the privation of good (privatio boni), and so evil, and Duns Scotus observes that it is derivative (and so in principle dispensable), insisting that it is "clear that we can know negations...only through affirmations, since negation is not intelligible except through affirmation," and indeed that negative predicates are always reducible to positive ones.¹ He elsewhere adds to his list of reasons against the possibility of knowing God, or anything else, through negation, the observation that "we do not love

negations to the highest degree,"² a consideration that presumably holds sway because God is the most proper object of our love.

This same disregard for negation is expressed by, amongst others, Schelling, Henri Bergson³ and, under the acknowledged influence of Scotus and Bergson, Gilles Deleuze. Whilst for the former it is associated with the inaccessibility of a transcendent metaphysics, for Deleuze and Deleuzians the issue is pointedly socio-political as well - not is the ensign of despotic prohibition and territorialization. Negation is also, of course, associated with denial, rejection and prohibition, and has the broader cultural significance of moralism, alienation, nihilism, non-being and death. Nowhere is its philosophical marginality more emphatically declared than in contemporary analytic philosophy where it is left to the perfunctory catalogues of logical expressions with which logic textbooks typically begin - following Frege, its proper use is defined by the prescriptions of formal logic, which treats negation as a truth function, i.e., a semantic switch, so to speak, that converts truth values, mapping true to false and false to true. This then is the consensus view of the role and function of negation.

Yet even if marginalized, negation appears to be an ineliminable component of thinking and what we think about, and although this on its own need not confer

² Negationes etiam non summe amamus, in John Duns Scotus, Ordinatio 1, d. 3, pars 1, ed. Vatican, vol. 3, 5, n.10. Aristotle makes a related claim at Metaphysics, 4.2.1003b 9-11. All citations of the Metaphysics are from Metaphysica, ed. W. Jaeger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), and, unless otherwise indicated, all translations of this text are my own.

³ Bergson defends a position exactly contrary to Frege's, arguing that negation is always applied to rather than being a part of the content of a proposition. See Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 288.
philosophical significance, the case for the general philosophical interest of negation is quite compelling. Without some notion of negation it would seem difficult, for example, to understand the basic logical connectives of disjunction and implication (e.g., to understand their connection to one another), or the fundamental laws of non-contradiction, \( \neg(P \& \neg P) \), and excluded middle, \((P \vee \neg P)\), whether these are construed in logical or metaphysical terms. And, on the other hand, the non-being, absence or emptiness associated with negation, rather than depriving negation of philosophical interest, might be thought of as recommending its study, since it might turn out that it is necessary to contend with such deficits as irreducible elements of the world we experience or because they ground the linguistic, cognitive or evaluative systems we use to describe, comprehend or assess it. More specifically, systematic interruption, punctuation, or difference might turn out to be a fundamental condition of all systems, be they grammatical, conceptual, logical, psychological, moral, political or metaphysical, inasmuch as an uninterrupted expanse of grammatical, conceptual elements, etc., is likely inapprehensible,\(^4\) just as unbounded enjoyment, freedom, affirmation, or perception is likely impracticable.

Beyond merely conceding a place for it, however, there is also a philosophical tradition that accords negation a fundamental role in the differentiation and

\[^4\] It should be noted in this context that even an, in principle, uninterrupted series such as that of the irrational numbers is only made intelligible on the basis of an interpolation (a Dedekind cut) into the segmented series of rationals. Similarly, a string of morphemes is just that, an already segmented series, not a continuous stretch of undifferentiated sound. This last point is the basis of Plato’s presentation of the myth of the Egyptian God Theuth’s determination of the elements of language in Plato’s *Philebus*, 18b6-d2. See Plato’s *Philebus*, trans. J. C. B. Gosling (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
deployment of concepts, and in accessing the kinds, universals and particulars to which concepts apply, a tradition associated with Hegel, in whom it finds its most complete development. This tradition provides the logico-metaphysical basis for the more limited, but still substantive, application of negation one finds in a number of other vital philosophical lines. For example, in the main lines of Neoplatonism negation takes on a more strictly metaphysical character, serving primarily as a causal principle governing the grades of an ontological hierarchy. A similarly circumscribed view of negation shows up in the negative theologies of Nicholas of Cusa, Maimonides, etc., which likely descend from that of Pseudo-Dionysius. The *via negativa* that frames such theologies, though it specifies a path of epistemic ascent rather than descent, considers negation with regard to its use in negative predication, and this exclusively in relation to the knowledge and description of God. Because such knowledge and the negative form it assumes are associated with God’s attributes, not his nature or essence, here negation is not thought to play any general role in facilitating conceptual determination or constraining ontology.

According to the tradition with which I shall be concerned, however, such determination is precisely the role played by negation, and in the domains of concept and object alike.\(^5\) The aim of this dissertation is to shed light on the conception of

---

\(^{5}\) The claim that negation plays a role in determining not just concepts themselves but their extensions is no doubt controversial, and will have to be left to emerge in the course of the dissertation, as the crucial theme of the metaphysical basis of logic is developed. Two general considerations might mitigate the perhaps counterintuitive character of this claim: one, that the extensions of our concepts can only be made out as parcels of the experienced world that are parceled out, so to speak, by these very concepts,
negation underlying this tradition and thereby to defend the philosophical significance of negation as such. The route I take is that of philosophical genealogy, which though it proceeds chronologically, aims primarily at conceptual rather than historical clarification. That is, attention to the historical lineage of this tradition is intended to clarify the conception of negation itself and to establish its presuppositions, cognates and broader philosophical setting, rather than to trace the historical lines of succession and influence. Furthermore, a complete genealogy, even granted these constraints, is impossible within the limits of a single volume. Thus although I touch on other figures within this lineage, and give some indication of how it continues beyond Hegel in 20th century and contemporary philosophy on both sides of the continental/analytic divide, what I present here constitutes the mere beginning of a philosophical study of negation.

I focus on the three signal moments of this lineage, each the subject of a separate chapter, and discussed in the following order: i) its starting point in Plato’s *Sophist*, where Plato develops a method of logical analysis he calls *division (diairesis)* and connects it with what I will call *determinate negation*, that is, negation as a

---

and two, that the more abstract objects that philosophers typically privilege tend to cleave rather closely to the abstract concepts we have of them, inasmuch as they are defined primarily by their essential properties, which have nothing to do with such concrete properties as place, time, position, etc., through which we regularly identify mind-independent particulars.

---

6 Philosophical genealogy, as I intend it, has little to do with the broader ambitions of its Nietzschean or Foucauldian models. In particular, it does not aspire to socio-political critique or intervention.

---

7 Plato regularly mentions Prodicus as his predecessor on the topic of division, but no other discussion of the method exists anywhere before Plato and it is clearly Plato’s model that Aristotle and the succeeding traditions follow.
differentiating principle, recast as, and so identified with, *formal difference* (to *heteron*), and, extensionally, with the metaphysical bounds (*perata*) of *being(s)* (Chapter 1); ii) its institutionalization by Boethius, who in his *De Divisione*\(^9\) establishes the *science of division* (*scientia divisionis*) as the primary instrument of conceptual analysis, but paradoxically disavows the philosophical relevance of negation even as he concedes its necessity for this very method (Chapter 2), and iii) its full realization in Hegel’s dialectic, where negation is revealed as the very engine of judgment, conceiving and metaphysical differentiation, as that which “propels the concept onward,”\(^10\) under the guiding principle, *omnis determinatio est negatio* (literally: *every determination is negation*) (Chapter 3). Hegel famously attributes this principle to Spinoza, but criticizes him for having failed to grasp its real significance.\(^11\) Yet given the relative weight each assigns it, it is properly speaking Hegel’s, not Spinoza’s principle, and I will treat it as such.

---

8 The expression is Hegel’s, but I hope to show that conceiving of negation as an instrument of determination originates with Plato.

9 Boethius’ *De Divisione* was a key text of the old logical and metaphysical canon, the *Logica Vetus*, and the only such text to remain influential until well beyond the thirteenth century, when, with the rediscovery of the rest of Aristotle’s *Organon*, the remaining texts of this canon recede in importance. The other works comprising the *Logica Vetus* were Boethius’ Latin translations of Aristotle’s *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, and of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Boethius’ commentaries on these same works and on Cicero’s *Topics*, plus his own *Topics* and *De Syllogismo Hypothetico*.


I refer to the conception of negation at work here as Hegelian because it is in Hegel’s Logic and the Phenomenology of Spirit that it is most fully expressed, and because I proceed from the standpoint of the broader Hegelian semantics and metaphysics to which this conception of negation belongs. However, although Plato and Boethius are read in light of, and with the promise of illuminating, Hegel’s views, it is also hoped that light is cast in the other direction as well, that an understanding of Plato’s and Boethius’ views is advanced by approaching them through Hegel. To the extent possible, the readings I offer of each figure are also intended to be philosophically autonomous. Plato’s discovery of the place of negation in conceiving and cognition, for instance, as well as the method of division used to tabulate these, are significant philosophical achievements in their own right. However, I believe we can only appreciate the importance of Plato’s discoveries with a view to their (largely unremarked) development in Hegel’s logic.\(^\text{12}\) Finally, it is the philosophical significance of negation as such that I hope to demonstrate, despite the largely historical framing of much of the discussion that follows.

Perhaps the most difficult figure to place within this framework is Boethius, who, in his De Divisione, denies negation the very role it seems so obviously to serve. I argue

\(^{12}\) While there are occasional references to Plato in the literature on Hegel, and in particular to his Sophist, these amount to little more than vague indications of philosophical indebtedness. Dieter Henrich’s remarks in his Between Kant and Hegel is perhaps the most suggestive, though nothing further is made of the observation, for example, that “Hegel’s Logic of Being (i.e., the logic of determinateness) is a refined exposition of what Plato called heterotēs (otherness. It is actually an attempt to resume the dialectics of Plato’s Sophist within the context of modern philosophy.” See Dieter Henrich, Between Kant and Hegel, ed. David S. Pacini (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 320.
that despite this concentrated spectacle of denial, Boethius nonetheless approaches negation as a fundamental operation of discursive cognition and, through the enduring influence of this text, along with his commentaries on Aristotle, establishes this view of negation within the logical canon of scholastic philosophy. Boethius’ reasons for proscribing negation are simultaneously logical and metaphysical, though they express a revealing and important inconsistency in his views. He embraces a Platonic semantics of names, even as he obscures it in viewing this semantics through the prism of an Aristotelian model of categorical predication, and in a language, i.e., Latin, that is at once near and foreign to the Greek in which that semantics is natively formulated. More importantly, although he accepts the isomorphism of logic and ontology, he is more attuned to the logical import of ontological assumptions than to the ontological import of logical assumptions. For Boethius, in naming, ontology is paramount, whereas in predication it is logical syntax that takes precedence. It is both his failure to connect the Platonic semantics of names to that of predication, together with, and more specifically and paradoxically, his avowed metaphysical Platonism, that lead Boethius to his proscription of negation.

The difficulty of seeing a unified approach to the semantics of names and propositions derives, in large part, from the separation of the logics of division and syllogistic Aristotle is seen to have established as a matter of philosophical orthodoxy,
although for his part Aristotle also insists on linking the two as deductive systems.\textsuperscript{13} Hegel, as we shall see, argues for a more profound link between the two, showing, by way of the development of his logic, that the logic of division is \textit{already} the logic of syllogistic, although a formal expression, if not a formal apparatus, of the syllogism is required to show how and that this is the case.

**Section Two. The Philosophical Discourse of Negation\textsuperscript{14}**

So what does the Hegelian conception of negation look like? Since this is a question to which the dissertation as a whole is addressed, what I can usefully provide here, removed from the philosophical settings in which its features are arrived at, is a brief, general overview. To put things simply to begin with, negation is part of a more general semantics that treats concepts as interconnected and hierarchically differentiated. As it turns out, this semantics is also aligned with the very specific metaphysics of Platonism. This is hardly surprising, given the ontological opulence of realist semantics and metaphysics more generally and Platonism in particular: if universals are to be countenanced as the abstract extensions of general terms, then the something similar readily goes for other linguistic expressions such as negation.

\textsuperscript{13} This is taken up in Chapter 2, while the resumption of a connection between division and syllogistic is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{14} By “discourse” I mean to indicate a set of theoretical commitments or theses, rather than any specific treatise or doctrine, roughly what Foucault describes as a “discursive formation,” though without the suggestion of historical discontinuity or of ideological latency. Thus what I present here is an account not of influence, but of philosophical lineage, plotted in terms of the three critical moments of its expression. For his introduction of the notion of discursive formation see Michel Foucault, \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge}, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).
Within this semantics, negation is what makes conceptual interconnection possible, since it divides concepts and thereby reveals their lines of contiguity. As such, negation is not itself a concept but an instrument, indeed the basic instrument, of conceptual differentiation, and this is Plato’s initial insight, although he lacks the logical tools to work out its ramifications. So understood, it is in the first place an operation of conceiving, of demarcating concepts. To this extent it would seem that its explicit, linguistic expression in negative predication and judgment is derivative, and that all other lexically overt uses of negation depend upon this primary use. Yet, as Hegel will finally demonstrate, concepts themselves are demarcated in the divided terrain of the propositions they comprise. The more fundamental use of negation thus lies in its establishment of discursive expression, and to this extent it is therefore logically prior to assertion, the exclusive mode of logical engagement accepted since Frege.\(^\text{15}\) However, to say this is also to place negation and assertion on an equal footing: just as assertion, traditionally understood as affirmation (\emph{kataphasis/affirmatio}) and expressed by the copula, is an operation of composition or conjunction that brings an affirmative proposition into logical or linguistic play, negation is an operation of \emph{separation} or \emph{division} that thereby brings a given proposition into play. However, Hegel, like his

\(^{15}\) While this claim directly contradicts Frege’s privileging of assertion as the \emph{only} true form of semantic engagement, it also runs counter to the priority accorded \emph{affirmation} in Aquinas, Duns Scotus and most scholastic philosophers. Frege also thought assertion to be an extra-propositional feature of judgment, denying, in essence, not only that the traditional categorical forms of proposition are semantically engaged simply by virtue of their form, but also that his own function/argument conception of the proposition involves such engagement. I take up these issues in Chapter 3.
scholastic forebears and unlike Frege, thinks that negation and affirmation alike are both forms of semantic engagement and are *internal* to the structure of the proposition.

Plato understands this role of negation in largely structural terms, as differentiating the kinds or *forms*\(^{16}\) on which our concepts depend, and structuring those concepts themselves, although it is also this structuring that determines the grounds and truth of predication, attribution and speech more generally. However, I will argue that in the *Philebus* Plato also describes an operation of *delimitation* or *finitization* that he associates with the method, or as we should put it, the *logic of division* (*diairesis*), and in the *Sophist* identifies this operation with the primary function of negation. In Boethius, this structure becomes the more strictly regimented hierarchy of Porphyrian predicables, of genera and species, based upon Aristotle’s table of categories. At the same time, through Boethius’ concentration on negative, privative and *infinite* predication, again deriving from Aristotle’s accounts of the same, negation is aligned more closely with categorical *judgment* and thus with the primary *act* of predicative engagement, i.e., the separation (*diairesis/separatio*) of a subject term from a predicate term that is subsequently joined to it via the copula. The priority of propositional separation (*diairesis*) over composition (*synthesis*), however, is logical

\(^{16}\) Throughout the dissertation italicized uses of the term “form” refer exclusively to Platonic *forms* (*eidē* or *ideai*). This is simply an expedient to distinguishing reference to such specifically determined metaphysical items from reference to all other kinds of aesthetic, graphic, logical, or structural, forms and from the more technical notion of form I introduce based upon Spencer-Brown’s *calculus of forms*. See G. Spencer-Brown, *The Laws of Form* (New York: Elsevier-Dutton Publishing, 1979). This last use of the term “form” will always be explicitly identified where context is an insufficient indication of provenance.
rather than historical or genetic, and derives in part from its obvious connection to the method or science of division \((\text{diairesis})\). All this implies what we might call a \textit{jigsaw} picture of semantics: propositions are put together from pieces that belong together, but only because they are contiguous parts of wholes that have been separated from one another in the first place.\(^{17}\)

In Hegel, the deductive system of syllogistic logic is tied to the logic of division and freed from the undemonstrated tables of categories and predicables. It thereby becomes the expressive terrain proper to conceptual and propositional determination alike. Here negation emerges as the engine of thinking itself, as that by which concepts are parsed and thought through the propositions they ground. Behind his joining of \textit{diairetic} and syllogistic logic lies the traditional double-concept view of the proposition, and so the view that propositions themselves are still to be understood as discursive extrapolations of their subject (and predicate) concepts, even where Hegel considers a subsumption model of predication, as he does in the final part of his \textit{Logic}. If negation is what demarcates our concepts, it is also therefore the basic operation of predication.

\(^{17}\) Note that these need not be taken to imply that the \textit{whole} itself is finite, even if we are only privy to a finite segment of that whole. Yet for Hegel this is indeed the implication. The passage from whole to totality that constitutes the extrapolations of his \textit{Logic} is thus the \textit{finite}, discursive passage from an indeterminate or abstract (and infinite) universality to a determinate infinite. As Hegel puts it in the \textit{Science of Logic}, “But the process of this finite cognition and this finite action transforms the initially abstract universality into totality, whereby it becomes complete objectivity [i.e., the discursive correlate of the \textit{infinite idea}].” (12.178).
and attribution, and this is part of what Hegel means in insisting that consciousness itself is pure negativity.\textsuperscript{18}

While Hegel’s account of negation provides the template for the philosophical discourse of negation I will be attempting to make out, it will nonetheless be helpful to set forth a few of the theses that define this discourse in more or less neutral terms, by way of providing a roadmap for the dissertation. The first of these is that (1) negation, in its fundamental use, is asymmetric, contextual and scalar:\textsuperscript{19} asymmetric, because it divides the conceptual or discursive field asymmetrically, establishing a region in which the negated element is included (a closed interval or boundary), and one in which it is not (an open interval or boundary); scalar, in the strict sense that each application of negation establishes a higher order of determination (though it may also, within, for example, Neoplatonic metaphysics, yield a lower ontological rank); contextual, because how each rank is specified and, more importantly, what specific content negation yields, depends on the immediate context in which it is applied. A privative application within a Porphyrian taxonomy, for example, occasions descent from genus to proximate species, whereas a perfective application occasions ascent from species to proximate genus. In


\textsuperscript{19} This is broadly along the lines spelled out by J. N. Martin in his presentation of scalar negation in \textit{Themes in Neoplatonic and Aristotelian Logic: Order, Negation and Abstraction} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 25-52. Though Martin’s discussion focuses on the Neoplatonist metaphysics of Proclus, and more specifically on the analysis of Neoplatonic causality, the central dependence of taxonomic structure on the method of division derives essentially from Plato’s account of forms (specifically according to their authoritative treatment as exemplars or paradeigmata in the \textit{Parmenides}) and the complementary relation of participation (metechein) their efficacy depends on, which relation can be understood structurally.
Hegel, the dominant modality of negation is ascending, i.e., that marked by the elevating inclusion of the negated term in *sublation* (*Aufhebung*). In terms of the determination of content, to use one of the more vivid examples from Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, the negation of space as such yields the point, whose negation in turn yields the line, etc. From a structural standpoint, negation both illuminates and orders a hierarchy, which hierarchy can be viewed either in the direction of ascent or in the direction of descent. Whether the corresponding role of negation is privative or perfective is thus a matter of philosophical perspective or concern, e.g., within the Proclean picture, descent (*procession* or *proodon*) is metaphysical and ascent (*reversion* or *epistrophē*) epistemic.

Connected to thesis (1), and more significant from a philosophical standpoint, is a thesis, already hinted at, that (2) negation is fundamentally discursive, both in the sense that it is what establishes what I call the *discursive interval* between the two terms of the categorical proposition that provides the basic configuration of judgment, and that it is inextricably, if secondarily, linked to the broader context of discourse, from the ground-level circumstance of dialogic exchange, to the more complex settings of

---

20 G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences, Part II* (1830), trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), §256. Hegel’s discussion of space in this section of the *Encyclopaedia* is one of the more illuminating discussions of negation anywhere in Hegel, for it so clearly illustrates the fundamentally contextual and the disclosive/determinative character of negation. Hegel goes on to remark that the negation involved here, since it is to begin with reflexive, is the negation *of* space both in the (objective genitive) sense that it is directed towards space and in the (subjective genitive) sense that it is constituted *by* space, and is thus itself spatial.

social and political interaction. The two senses of discursivity are still more closely connected if we consider the form of a simple judgment as the limiting case of self-discourse in which the collation of an object of representation more immediately available to consciousness and an abstract concept or universal more remote to consciousness is exhibited as a possible content of judgment.

Moreover, a seemingly still more primitive collation can be seen to occur in the mere act of naming, in which the name, or nominal expression, is first distinguished from and then consigned to its immediate, indexically ostended referent.\textsuperscript{22} “Theaetetus” thus functions as a name insofar as the indexically located person immediately before us, or our minds, i.e., Theaetetus, is distinguished from and linked to it.\textsuperscript{23} This is not to suggest, as Russell famously did with regard to proper names, that nominal expressions are all disguised definite descriptions, since such descriptions are themselves indexically established, but that they are, in effect, and rather more surprisingly, disguised definite ascriptions, e.g., “This (Theaetetus), that is to say Theaetetus,” in which the ontological difference underlying the distinction between use and mention is implicitly acknowledged: Theaetetus, and so not “Theaetetus,” through which we nonetheless designate Theaetetus.

\textsuperscript{22} Arguably, the ontological gap between the name and its extension, between signifier and signified, is what underlies Derrida’s notion of différance. See Jacques Derrida, \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-28.

\textsuperscript{23} How reference is ultimately explained is of course a more complicated matter, but this isn’t in principle at issue for the present point, which is just that behind every use of a referring expression, however it succeeds semantically, lies an implicit ascription of that expression to its designatum.
The dialogic, propositional and nomenclatorial conjoining of epistemically and
metaphysically disparate moments implies both the presence of cognitive engagement,
since diversity is defined relative to the consciousness or subject that thinks or
expresses itself, and its fundamentally discursive orchestration, which is I believe why
Frege, for example, insists that assertion is the proper subject matter of logic. However,
since it is the recognition of this disparity that negation expresses in the first place, it is
negation rather than assertion in which the basic character of attribution and naming is
first expressed.

The discursivity thesis lies at the center of what I attempt to defend here, and its
two sides are captured by the epigraphs from Freud and Heidegger that stand at the
opening of this dissertation. On the one hand, the thesis expresses a claim about the
cognitive or psychological operation of configuring the content of cognition so as to
make it available for judgment. Freud’s stratification of psychic deployment into the
interrelated domains of conscious, preconscious and unconscious processes is to be
contrasted with the, albeit mythical, possibility of an immediate, simple and
undifferentiated registering of phenomena, the simple reception of the thread of
experience, in Bergson’s illuminating expression.\textsuperscript{24} While Bergson wants to claim that

\textsuperscript{24} This phrase is taken from a remarkable passage in Henri Bergson’s Creative Evolution in which the
merely receptive basis of affirmation is contrasted with the complex ideational character of negation. For
reasons too bound up with Bergson’s overall philosophical program, he instead charges negation with
introducing an element of expression that is extraneous and foreign to cognition. His own remarks suggest
precisely the opposite: “Endow this mind with memory, and especially with the desire to dwell on the
past; give it the faculty of dissociating and of distinguishing: it will no longer only note the present state of
the passing reality; it will represent the passing as a change, and therefore as a contrast between what
negation introduces an element that is foreign (étranger) to intellection, his characterization of this alien element suggests, on the contrary, that it pertains exclusively to intellect, independent of its consonance with some bit of the world. Bergson’s claim is that negation “is an attitude taken by the mind toward an eventual affirmation.” When I say of a black table “the table is not white,” I say something not about the object before me, i.e., the table, but about the possible judgment that the table is indeed white (for why else would I venture the claim that it isn’t?).

Bergson’s point seems to be that while affirmation involves a direct, intentional engagement with the world, negation is characteristically engaged with another’s (or one’s own) intentional engagement, and a shift from the former to the latter reflects a move from thought to communication, and more specifically to legislation, instruction, or some other practical, and hence extra-cognitive, enterprise. Yet it is far from clear why the affirmative statement is not similarly embedded in a communicative network as a matter of presumption. Surely if I declare that “the table is black” I do so in relation to a question concerning its color, or within the context of sorting black objects from others, etc. And, on the other hand, expressing the absence or privation of an attribute would seem to be as much about the relevant object as expressing the presence of one.

has been and what is. And as there is no essential difference between a past that we remember and a past that we imagine, it will quickly rise to the idea of the ‘possible’ in general. It will thus be shunted on to the side of negation. And especially it will be at the point of representing a disappearance.” See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 294.

But insofar as he points to the extra-referential context of negation Bergson is surely right. He is also right, as Heidegger more directly instructs us, that in the case of negation I exhibit, for example, the possibility that the table is white and deny the actuality of that possibility; or, though Bergson never considers the attributive use, I exhibit the whiteness of the table as a foreclosed, but possible, attribute of the table. Since modality is here connected to metaphysical profile or lineage, i.e., to the kinds of properties kinds of things can have, negation also brings to the fore the relevant field of attribution, e.g., color, in a way that the complementary affirmation doesn’t. We can thus think of the undifferentiated recording of phenomena that is proper to affirmation or positive attribution as contrasted, in negation, with situating phenomena according to the modalities of possibility, actuality or necessity, and according to categories of attribution determined by metaphysical lineage. According to Freud’s picture, negation brackets the acknowledgment of traumatic or psychically overabundant experience, and does so by bracketing the content of judgment. If we project the vertical axis of psychic transparency onto the horizontal axis of conceptual or ontological modality, then negation may be thought of as analogously bracketing the obligations, commitments and implications that are tied to the content of affirmation.

However, there is a still more instructive and profound lesson to be learned from Freud. While the sign of negation, the “not,” makes possible the bracketed expression of a possible content of thought or judgment, for Freud, a content otherwise in the psychically subdued terrain of the unconscious, that terrain is itself already the terrain
of an unspoken, and unspeakable, negation. The unconscious, that is, as the repository of repression, is the product of the pre-symbolic *instinct (Trieb)* of exclusion that the negation sign makes symbolically expressible. And of course the unconscious is expressed symptomatically and phantasmatically (in dreams), without the expedient of a symbolic stamp of origin, i.e., *made in the unconscious*. Similarly, what the traditional Aristotelian account of *differentiae* makes clear is that the negation sign expresses, in the first place, the differentiating negation that is already part of the variegated terrain of concepts and their interrelation. In this sense, negation is already at work behind the scenes, and differentiating terms like *rational, mortal*, etc., operate on their own as instruments of exclusion and thus negation. *Differentiae* then are, as it were, the logico-metaphysical *symptoms* of discursive determination. Finally, just as it is the aim of psychoanalysis to unearth the negated content of repression that obscures the self in an opaque tissue of symptoms, so the aim of philosophical analysis, one might suggest, is to unearth the negated content of thought that obscures the concept from consciousness that conceives it.

---

26 “Negation” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 669. For the German text, see Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, XIV, ed. A. Freud, E. Bibring, W. Hoffer, E. Kris, O. Isakower (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1976), 11-15. On the general relationship of affirmation and negation to instinct, Freud tells us: “The polarity of judgment appears to correspond to the opposition of the two groups of instincts which we have supposed to exist. Affirmation - as a substitute for uniting - belongs to Eros; negation - the successor to expulsion - belongs to the instinct of destruction.”

27 The subterranean level of negation also explains, for example, why the instance of Hegelian infinite judgment we will be examining in Chapter 3, i.e., “The spirit is a bone,” is indeed *infinite*. “Bone” here encapsulates a framework of analysis that itself *negates* spirit, and is thus a negative or *infinite* expression, despite its lexical form: within this context “bone” is the logical equivalent of “*non-spirit*.”
The discursivity thesis thus appears to imply a number of corollary theses: (3) that concepts and/or universals are delineated and differentiated from one another via negation, and (4) that the instantiations of concepts and/or universals are also (in part) distinguished from their covering concepts by negation. To these we might add (5) that the application of negation to concepts yields a hierarchy of relations amongst concepts and between concepts and their instances, (6) that the hierarchical relations amongst concepts determine an order of predication, and (7) that difference, otherness or what, in an extension of Heidegger’s use of the expression, I call ontological difference, is the metaphysical correlate of negation and is as fundamental to the domain of beings and being as negation is to the domain of concepts and propositions. To put this more strongly, while negation itself is a fundamental feature of cognitive comportment, ontological difference is a fundamental feature of ontological disposition, and the former expresses the latter.

There are also three more general semantico-metaphysical theses that while not directly concerned with negation spell out the logic of terms and (categorical) propositions within which the discourse of negation seems to be naturally embedded: (8) that (categorical) propositions are to be thought of as linear expressions of the hierarchical relations between the concepts expressed by the terms that comprise them; (9) that the truth of such propositions derives from and expresses the truth (understood as the essential makeup or definition) of the concepts comprising them,
and (10) that the order of concepts, and hence of predication, mirrors the order of things, i.e., logic and ontology are isomorphic.\footnote{28}

The last of these, i.e., (10), can be fleshed out in a number of ways, but here again Hegel’s formulation will guide us: “Logic thus coincides (zusammenfällt) with metaphysics, i.e., the science of things captured in thoughts that have counted as expressing the essentiality (Wesenheit) of things.”\footnote{29} This has been taken to express the deflationary view that logic is naturalized metaphysics (as Pippin, Pinkard et al seem to argue\footnote{30}), which seems to deprive both enterprises of their characteristic concerns, or the reductive view that logic just is metaphysics (as Houlgate, Zizek et al prefer it\footnote{31}), which seems to simply muddy the distinction between the two. Yet if the coincidence between logic and metaphysics is to have any philosophical significance, the basic distinction between concepts, propositions and implication, on the one hand, and objects, circumstances and their interrelation, on the other, needs to be preserved.

Hegel’s point, and the position I will be trying to motivate, seems to me to be best

\footnote{28} It should be obvious that some theses imply others, e.g., (7) is just an instance of (10) as it relates directly to negation. On the other hand, some are independent and thus, for example, a number of rather different and indeed inconsistent semantic and metaphysical programs might adopt the isomorphism postulate, without adhering to a two-term conception of propositions. Frege’s logic offers just such an example.

\footnote{29} Encyclopedia Logic, §24.


understood then as a claim about how logical analysis leads to metaphysical insight and vice versa. Hegel’s claim is the still stronger one that it is only through the logical determination of concepts, judgment and inference, etc., that metaphysics can be accomplished, i.e., that it is only in *thinking things over* (*Nachdenken*), the *modus operandi* of logic, that the “true nature of the object emerges in consciousness.”32 And indeed Hegel’s *Logic*, which proceeds from *Being* to *Essence* and finally to *Concept*, i.e., from the logic of metaphysics to the metaphysics of logic, shows precisely how each enterprise is implicated in, without collapsing into, the other.33

These theses allow one to see immediately, for example, why one standard objection to the notion of a determinate negative expression, i.e., that because negative expressions designate *infinitely* and thus improperly they are ill-formed or ill-conceived,34 derives from a mistaken view of the sort of determination involved, a view encouraged by an extensional or set-theoretical account of concepts or universals, which in effect leaves no semantic or metaphysical place for negation as such. If the

---

32 *Encyclopedia Logic*, §23.

33 In the *Science of Logic*, §21.48, Hegel distinguishes between objective and subjective logic, the former developing into the latter, which seems to show that for Hegel the basic questions of metaphysics have to be thought through as, and so become, questions of *logic*, whether this is best put in terms of metaphysics serving as the basis of logic, or vice versa. While analytic philosophers, following Quine, might readily agree to this convergence, the terms have to be reversed to express the appropriate direction of reduction: ontology just *is* logic, inasmuch as *everything* countenanced by logic exists, pure and simple. However, while the point of Hegel’s claim is to extend the domain of logic to include, or overlap with, that of metaphysics, the Quinean point would be to radically reduce the role of metaphysics to semantic stipulation, i.e., to specifying a *domain of discourse* for the basic terms of a formal language.

34 Abelard’s is perhaps the most explicit formulation of this objection, although similar objections are to be found throughout scholastic commentaries on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, the obvious source of all such objections. I discuss this at length in Chapter 2.
extension or meaning of a concept is just a set (and not an ontologically discrete *universal*) defined by its instances or members, then a non-x, if it indeed corresponds to a concept at all, is just given by the collection or set of things that aren’t x. Regardless, identifying the concept with its extension, just as establishing the exact character of that extension, is a matter for argument not presumption. Likewise, the level at which negation operates, and whether, for example, when applied to a concept it produces a new concept, are issues of substantial philosophical consequence and cannot be settled in advance by assuming the transparency of extension. In this regard, the standard objection is question-begging.

To pursue this polemical line a bit further, though sets, because defined by an axiom of extensionality that identifies a set with its members, are thought an intuitively obvious way of making sense of abstract entities (that is, *by doing away with them*) there are a few obvious problems with set-theoretical accounts of such entities. First, and most obviously, they do away with entities (i.e., the abstract ones) with which we otherwise seem to have unproblematic dealings. Second, in order to identify the relevant members of the extension class or set of a given concept, there has to be a way of identifying the property or characteristic that qualifies them for inclusion that doesn’t circularly refer back to members constitutive of the relevant class. Third, there are properties of sets (of individuals) that cannot be properties of the properties named by concepts for which such sets are supposed to provide the extension: the set of all red things, for example, is defined by its members, while the *redness* its members possess
has no members at all; *redness* belongs to anything that is red, is better or more vividly exemplified in some specimens than others, etc., while equivalent claims about the set of red things make little sense. It might of course be argued that the virtues of the extensional account justify changing the way we think and speak of properties, kinds, etc. However, fidelity to the language under analysis would seem to be a *desideratum* of any semantic model, and so to insist on the virtues, in particular the ontological parsimony, of the extensional account despite its incompatibility with ordinary usage is to abandon the very purpose for which that model is putatively designed.

If abstractions such as *mortality, immortality*, etc., are logically or cognitively more intractable than the conglomerates of things to which these abstractions apply, this is hardly a reason for resorting to the artificiality of conflating the two, and this holds equally for negative and non-negative expressions. But the point can be made still more strongly. Consider, for example, the expression *infant*, construed as a lexicalized form of the negative (or infinite) expression *non-speaking*. If we conceive of things in purely extensional terms it would seem quite natural to say that the attributive use of the expression *infant* distinguishes the set of things that don’t speak, comprising pretty much everything in the world, including a few human beings, from the set of things that do speak, comprising most human beings and possibly some robots, even if so dividing serves no obvious purpose.

Yet purpose and context are of the essence! The attributive use of *infant*, in the more restricted etymological sense I have just been emphasizing, applies not to
everything that doesn’t speak, but only to those who can be expected to but *do not yet* speak. And the fact that it is not assigned a vast and heterogeneous extension cannot be thought a consequence of its lexicalization, since the same would hold true of *non-speaking* provided the appropriate context of use. More precisely, the expression naturally applies to human beings for whom the capacity to speak has yet to be realized. So understood, it is a concept of the sort of thing that Aristotle identifies as a *privation* (*sterēsis*), rather than a negation, in the sense that it is attributable to that which “though it would naturally have the [negated] attribute... has it not.” However, it is not strictly privative in Aristotle’s precise sense either, since it applies not to things that are such as to possess the property (i.e., speaking) they do not in fact possess, but to things that are such as to possess actually that property that they for the moment merely possess *potentially*. This has obvious relevance for understanding Aristotelian physics, which rests fundamentally on the processes and terms of *actualization*, and therefore for understanding the pervasive Aristotelianism of medieval philosophy. Negation, in the sense under discussion, would seem inherent to all potentialities relative to their corresponding actualizations, i.e., not merely infinite expressions such as *irrational*, *immobile*, etc., but to non-negative expressions as well, such as *cold*, *smooth*, etc.36

---

35 Aristotle’s *Metaphysics IV* 1022b27-30. This is the third of the four senses of *sterēsis* Aristotle lists, and the only one of direct relevance.

36 I explore this suggestion at greater length in Chapter 2.
Its disclosure of what resides in potentia reflects in more specific terms the general character of what I have referred to as the determinative character of negation, inasmuch as it draws attention to its unique mode of contextual determination: negation indicates what is proximately absent from, and thereby discloses what is characteristic of, a given subject of attribution: saying that a flower is not yellow, tells us, amongst other things, that it is colored. What is also thereby revealed is the stratification of subject and substance, their divided disposition between potentiality and actuality, as between presence and futurity. Insofar as negation indicates what is intrinsic to or characteristic of a subject, but unrealized, or differently realized, in it, it identifies a specific content and direction of determination, e.g., from the undetermined capacity to speak, to the determinate realization of that capacity.

So, when applied in the hierarchical context of genus-species filiation, negation discloses a lower order concept inherent within a higher order one, and no lower, or, applied at the level of the differentiae, distinguishes one concept from its adjacent complement, though here again the distinction remains hierarchical. Non-mortal, for example, does not designate anything and everything that isn’t mortal or a man, such as rocks, chickens, etc. Since negation here operates within the confines of the genus-species branch in which it is applied, it can only in fact qualify what lies within that branch, in this case yielding non-mortal (or immortal), rational, animate, corporeal being, or, in other words, planet, as opposed to mortal, rational, animate, corporeal
being, or man.\textsuperscript{37} Admittedly, the hierarchical model of conceptual differentiation is not yet realized, though it is already implicit, in Plato. And, on the other hand, the strict hierarchical model is discarded in Hegel’s phenomenological approach to logic. How negation and division work in the absence of such a model is part of the story to be told in the following chapters.

I want to argue, further, that the robust metaphysical character of 	extit{disclosive} or \textit{determinative negation}, is still more pervasive both in philosophy and those fields that impinge upon philosophy, where it is often present without acknowledgment. In the first place, this is because negation so conceived is the basis of the logical and grammatical roles it is more conventionally and officially assigned, e.g., the truth-functional conception of negation simply views negation within the restricted context of a bivalent semantics for propositions. But more significantly, as already suggested, this conception underpins the traditional, scholastic notion of the \textit{differentia} (what paradigmatically yields a species when applied to a genus),\textsuperscript{38} and the more general notion of \textit{ontological difference} (in the non-technical sense of difference in ontological

\textsuperscript{37} The fact that the negative expression, i.e., \textit{non-mortal}, in this instance seems to yield a higher ranking term than the base expression raises questions about the ordering function of negation. I address this and related issues in the next section of the introduction. It is enough to point out here that within the discourse of negation, every term is negatively determined, even where morphology obscures this.

\textsuperscript{38} That \textit{determinative} or \textit{disclosive} negation underpins the traditional, scholastic notion of \textit{difference} or \textit{differentia} can be seen from the way in which \textit{difference} is treated in Boethius and the tradition that proceeds from him, despite the fact that Boethius, echoing Aristotle, insists that species are related as contraries rather than as contradictories to one another. I take up this claim in Chapter 2.
status)\textsuperscript{39} to which it is historically and logically tied. Despite its regular marginalization, it is thus implicitly present in scholastic philosophy as a whole, and so in the philosophical lineage scholasticism gives rise to. More specifically, it is inextricably bound to the scholastic model of concepts as interconnected and mutually differentiated, to the method of division, and to the double-concept view of the proposition and thought, both first broached by Plato and later formalized by Aristotle. The method itself reflects this symplectic\textsuperscript{40} model of concepts and forms, and illuminates their hierarchical relations, which relations, in turn govern the form and unity of thinking. What’s more, if division is indeed the method Plato, Aristotle et al take it to be, then the articulation of kinds and instances it makes possible is also the articulation of what there is. A veridical logic of negation is therefore at the same time a metaphysics of difference, or rather, of ontological difference.

Plato understands the role of negation in largely structural terms, as differentiating the kinds or forms on which our concepts depend and structuring those concepts themselves, though it is also this structuring that determines the grounds and truth of predication, attribution and speech more generally. In Boethius, this structure becomes the more strictly regimented hierarchy of Porphyrian predicables, of genera,

\textsuperscript{39} That ontological difference here is ultimately allied with Heidegger’s technical notion of ontological difference would of course require further demonstration. I turn to this briefly in the Conclusion of the dissertation.

\textsuperscript{40} The term derives from Plato’s use of the Greek symplókē to describe the relationship a given concept bears to other concepts, as well as the relationship between the subject and predicate terms of a sentence or proposition (logos).
and species, based upon Aristotle’s table of categories. At the same time, through Boethius’ concentration on negative, privative and infinite predication, again deriving from Aristotle’s accounts of the same, negation is aligned more closely with categorical judgment and thus with what I argue is the primary act of predicative engagement, i.e., that of separation (separatio) or negatio (apophasis in Greek). In Hegel the deductive system of syllogistic logic is dislodged from the rigid and unproven structures of categories and predicables, and becomes the instrument itself of conceptual organization and propositional expression. Here negation emerges as the engine of thinking itself, as that by which concepts are parsed and thought through the propositions they ground. It will be important to show, however, that behind this lies the traditional double-concept view of the proposition, and so the view that propositions themselves are to be understood as discursive extrapolations of their subject concepts. If negation is what demarcates our concepts, it is also therefore the basic operation of predication. This is part of what Hegel means in insisting that consciousness itself is pure negativity.

As suggested above, the intrinsic connection of negation to cognitive and metaphysical organization is made evident in its employment in that method of conceptual analysis designed to map out definitions and (equivalently) essences (logoi/rationes), i.e., the method of division. Division provides a view equally into the network of concepts through which we cognize and form judgments about the world, and into whatever it is that is thereby cognized and propositionally assessed, i.e., the
universals, particulars, individuals and facts, to the extent and insofar as these are conceptually localizable. While division, as an analytic instrument, reveals the hierarchy of relations amongst concepts, it is via negation that these relations are established in the first place. On the other hand, though negation, as indicated above, is basic to predicative expression, division in effect provides a combinatorial map of the available forms of judgment, inasmuch as it exhibits the nodes and lines of subordination and subsumption that govern the appropriate combination and separation of concepts in judgment.

Division is therefore simultaneously an instrument of logical and of metaphysical analysis. The virtue of this method, that is, its making visible the relationship between unit kinds or universals (genē or eidē) and the multiplicities (ta polla)\(^{41}\) of their instantiations, which Plato puts abstractly in terms of the relationship between the one and the many, lies precisely in its enabling us to parse things as they are, “to carve kinds at their natural joints according to their species (kat’ eidē ... diatemnein kat’ arthra hēi pephuken),”\(^{42}\) i.e., according to the actual parts, joins and filiations of things. If it shows that the basis of all concepts is difference, and the basis of difference negation, then it also shows that things themselves, from kinds to individuals, are differentiated or individuated by non-being, or by an equivalently forbidding correlate of negation. Of

\(^{41}\) *Philebus* 16c18.

course for Platonists like Plato, Boethius, Aquinas, and Henry of Ghent, to name a few, the logical dispositions of concepts necessarily coincide with, to recur to Hegel’s preferred expression, the metaphysical dispositions of fundamental existents.

I also argue that owing to the intrinsic relation between conceptual and predicative structure, division also provides the basis for a compositional or combinatorial treatment of the proposition that is fundamentally different from the formal treatment familiar from the quasi-propositional logic of the Stoics, or more clearly from the propositional logic contemporary philosophers take for granted, but which is not evident before Ockham or, perhaps, Abelard.\(^43\) It follows from this account that negation is an intrinsic feature of all propositions, or as Hegel will more or less demonstrate, infinite judgment, of the form A is non-B, exhibits the form of every judgment and thus every proposition.\(^44\)

Yet if negation functions as all this suggests, then it expresses the basic bounds or limits within concepts, between concepts, and between concepts and their instances. Negation so understood is an implicit feature of language and thought, though one that can be, and indeed must be, made explicit in the course of conceptual exposition, definition and application. Since what it marks within individual referring expressions is

\(^{43}\) For a useful discussion of the difference between the scholastic (Boethian) and the modern conceptions of the proposition, see, amongst others, Christopher J. Martin’s “The Logic of Negation in Boethius,” Phronesis 36 (1991): 277-304.

\(^{44}\) The relationship between judgments and propositions is a rather vexing one in Hegel. I do my best to explain the difference in Chapter 3, although the bases for explaining Hegel’s view are, I hope, established in the preceding chapters on Plato and Boethius.
both the broader conceptual field in which it occupies a specific place, and the narrower extensional field of its application, it is also the pivot of propositional expansion, of the discursive interval that is intrinsic to structure of the concept. This implies that negation is already at work within the logically simple subject-predicate array of the categorical proposition, as what, in the first place, provides for the difference between subject and predicate terms that supplies semantic significance or force to identity statements, and secondarily to predicative propositions, without which, as Hegel regularly remarks, such statements would be vacuous. While the standard shift in quality from affirmative (kataphatikos) to negative (apophatikos), is marked by the sign of negation, the difference between the two, as standardized by Aristotle, can be expressed in terms of combination and division, with negation providing the line of juncture (in the former case) and disjuncture (in the latter case).

On the metaphysical side of things, negation has its correlate in what Heidegger calls the ontological difference, between Being as such, and individual beings, in the relation between a given universal or abstract particular and the complementary universals (or abstract particulars) adjacent to it, and between a given universal and the individuals that instantiate it. As this brief sketch of the corresponding metaphysics makes clear, negation in the philosophically robust sense accorded it within the tradition I am examining, implies a strong form of realism, historically some form of Platonism. While this is a fairly easy case to make in relation to Plato and Boethius,
Hegel’s Platonism is certainly more problematic to establish, though that is precisely what I shall be attempting to do.

**Section Three. Negation and the Ontology of Form**

While my preference throughout is to stick as closely as possible to the language of the philosophical traditions under examination, and while there are certain terms that enjoy a remarkable consistency across these traditions, the relevant idioms of Greek, scholastic and Hegelian philosophy are significantly different from one another. It will thus prove helpful to have a model set out in neutral terms to discuss the interconnection between negation, division and conceptual determination. For that purpose, I will regularly make use of a model of conceptuo-metaphysical *form* derived from Spencer-Brown’s logic of form.\(^45\) Beyond providing a formal picture of the basic structure of conceptual form, for instance, this model also helps brings into relief the contextual and asymmetric character of negation described in thesis (1) above.

According to Spencer-Brown’s basic calculus, a form is constituted by an operation of division, of "drawing a distinction" that divides a graphic, logical, conceptual or ontological space asymmetrically into a contained and an excluded domain, into the distinguished region of the form proper and its *outside* or *environment*, respectively. Although a form is determined by the operation of applying the distinction or demarcation itself, and is, by default, identified with the interior or contained side of

---

\(^{45}\) The version of Spencer-Brown’s general system I use owes something as well to Niklas Luhmann’s adaptation of it in *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
the partition, it encompasses both sides of the demarcated field. A form is therefore double-sided, comprising both interior and exterior sides of a distinction, or mark of difference.\footnote{Spencer-Brown’s definition of form is stipulated as follows: “Call the space cloven by any distinction, together with the entire content of the space, the form of the distinction,” \textit{Laws of Form}, 3.}

In the calculus of forms, all formal marks are identified with the operations used to establish them, and all presupposed psychological events (intention, motivation, etc.) are identified with the formal operations they might underlie. Thus organic, psychological, logical and pictorial expressions of form are logically equivalent, and the precise pictographic or ideographic shape the form assumes has no intrinsic relation to the system of operations it is used to represent – each shape simply serves the purpose of representing those operations. The \textit{distinction} that establishes a form is equivalently made by a call for distinction, i.e., a definition or stipulation, a \textit{mark} that designates such a call, or a \textit{crossing} that such a \textit{mark} establishes the possibility of, i.e., the \textit{traversal across a differentiating mark} from one side to another, from its interior to its exterior or vice versa. What is important, for our purposes, however, is that an inscribed, and thus in part internal, distinction is taken as fundamental. It is this that underlies every sign, symbol or synecdoche with which drawing a distinction, that is, \textit{marking a difference}, can be identified.

Within the domain of conceptual forms, negation, properly speaking, is the line, or equivalently, the operation of demarcation that establishes conceptual form by
dividing a pre-conceptual or higher order conceptual terrain between an included and excluded content of a given concept. As such, to anticipate a quibble with Heidegger’s reading of Plato, negation is at once disclosive and exclusive. The negative particle itself, the sign of negation, e.g., *ouk, mē, non, not, nicht, ne*, etc., may be used to name or mark such an operation, but, as mentioned above, negation, in its most fundamental use, like the line of demarcation and association between a kind and its instances, occurs behind the scenes, even if there are also prescribed signs for expressing it. Though every concept is defined by the configuration of boundaries established by negation, negation itself occurs neither within nor outside the boundaries marked, since it simply is the differentiating operation of the mark that divides them, albeit through the enlistment of those contiguous elements by which a given term is bounded. To put this in terms of the Hegelian model in which the place of negation is most fully realized, every concept is infinite in structure, in the technical, Boethian sense that it has the logical form not-x, and is negated by contiguous concepts. On the other hand, if a conceptual form, or concept, is what is so internally negated, it follows that nothing that is not so negated is a concept. More dramatically, perhaps, it follows that a Platonic Form, on the traditional way of conceiving it, is not a form, and so a fortiori, is not a conceptual form. Thus, for example, in the specific domain of genus-species relations with which Aristotle and the scholastic tradition are mainly concerned, a so-called highest genus such as *being or substance*, cannot be a form, concept, etc., until and unless it is subject to division. Similarly, *being* as such is
not a concept, though once situated within the divisions of the Porphyrean Tree it becomes one. This is why, though it is not the only reason why, Hegel identifies pure being (reine Sein) with nothing: being qua being, at least on one way of conceiving of it, is not nothing as such, it is simply nothing conceptually circumscribable. This is to begin with simply a matter of how being is traditionally regarded. The seeming paradox does not arise, for example, for those who follow the metaphysical taxonomy Plato sketches in the Republic, where the good stands beyond being (epekeina tēs ouσiās) and thus provides an extra-formal ground for a form of being as well as all the forms or concepts subordinate to being. Here being may well be the most universal form, but only because there is something more universal, or more ontologically fundamental than it, that is not in the strict sense a form. Though Plato says of the good (to agathon) that in relation to being it is surpassing in rank and capacity (presbeia kai dunamei huperechontos), which suggests it simply stands at the top of the ontological scale, its role in illuminating the other forms, on analogy with the sun, suggests a transcendent relation to forms.

One of the claims I will argue for is that in the Sophist Plato moves from the ontologically absolute notion of Form to one that converges upon a notion of conceptual form.

The calculus of forms offers a model that exhibits the salient features of the relationship between negation, (conceptual) form and propositional structure, though

---

at this level of abstraction it cannot be precisely correlated with any of the specific accounts I will be examining. On this model, the complete network of concepts or forms, or any suitably circumscribed region of it, is itself a determined conceptual form, which in its totality we might identify with being, the one, etc., provided these admit of (negatively) determined content. The network is defined, or determined, by the array of concepts and the boundaries that separate these from, and relate them to, one another. The boundaries themselves are maintained by the differentiating operation of negation, which operation is indexically signaled whenever a concept is invoked or otherwise employed. As to negation itself, the model is open to both Platonist and intuitionist or constructivist readings, though the picture just sketched suggests a Platonist construal. According to this discourse the logical operation of negation, the application of any formal sign or symbol of negation, discloses, rather than establishing, the lines of demarcation that circumscribe a given concept, or the existent of which that concept is a concept.

What I hope finally to make clear is that the science or method of division is best understood as a logic of forms of the sort just outlined. The aim of division is to reveal the lines of demarcation, and thus to map the (or a) system of distinctions, exclusions and inclusions that defines the network of concepts or forms. It serves the syllogistic logic of the categorical proposition, for example, by furnishing it with a map that mirrors the “joints of nature,” illuminating the lines of contiguity and ancestry that connect affiliated concepts. The categorical proposition itself, in the simplest case, isolates and
combines two concept forms within this network, as governed by the direction of
subsumption set by the hierarchical organization of the concepts themselves (which is
why individuals are not predicable of anything). In its strictest use, the direction of
subsumption is determined by the asymmetric character of negation, which, for
example, separates a genus into its contiguous species (contra Boethius), and,
depending on how one accounts for individuation, individuates the species themselves.

As I hope this brief sketch suggests, Spencer-Brown’s model fits talk of concepts
or concept-like entities particularly well. However, though I have thus far spoken
indifferently of concepts, universals and forms, and included a postulate of logico-
metaphysical isomorphism amongst the theses of the discourse of negation, there are a
number of distinctions to be made out, especially if the isomorphism thesis is to amount
to anything. It is useful and indeed necessary to start out speaking of concepts,
universals and forms, though our discussion is ultimately directed towards an analysis
and presentation of Hegel’s metaphysically robust notion of the concept, which notion
can only be understood as the combined development of both its logical and its more
recondite metaphysical aspects. As Hegel puts it:

The concept (Begriff) is at first to be regarded as the third to being and essence, to
the immediate and to reflection. Being and essence are therefore the moments of its
becoming, but the concept is their foundation (Grundlage) and truth as the identity
into which they have sunk and in which they are contained.\footnote{\textit{Science of Logic}, §12.11.}
Because Plato’s *eidē* or *ideai*, the scholastics’ *species* or *intentiones*, and Hegel’s *Begriff* are central to their respective logical and metaphysical views, and because, though there is much overlap, the ontological status of each is somewhat different, it is important to have some basic distinctions before us, even if some prove more difficult to retain. Again, basic ontology is crucial because this is also the domain of negation according to the tradition I am trying to describe. Whether one phrases things in terms of concepts or universals is of course a matter of some importance, and the distinction itself can be drawn in several ways, depending on one’s views about what each is. On the simplest way of conceiving of the distinction, concepts are mind dependent and universals are not. According to the standard Aristotelian account adopted by most scholastics philosophers, words refer to concepts, which in turn stand for universals or particulars, though some think concepts identical to universals. As far as it goes, this tripartite semantics is nonetheless metaphysically neutral. Nominalists can simply maintain that any reference to universals is to be cashed out in terms of reference to particulars. On the other hand, realists, at least scholastic realists, distinguish three distinct ontological grades of universals: *ante rem* universals, which are metaphysically and epistemically prior to their instantiations, e.g., Platonic *forms*, *in re* universals, traditionally associated with Aristotelian *forms*, or the common quality or kind that is in each thing that exemplifies the universal, and *post rem* universals, concepts that designate the *in re* universals in those things (*rēs*) that fall under them.
While scholastic philosophy abounds with such distinctions the relevant oppositions are easy enough to canvass: (1) real or mind-independent versus conceptual or mind-dependent, i.e., *entia realia* versus *entia rationis*, in the language of scholastic philosophy, (2) material versus immaterial, (3) particular versus universal or general, and (4) concrete versus abstract. Though in the traditional discussion of universals such distinctions, even when drawn, are often elided, either deliberately or through oversight, it would seem essential to distinguish them if one is to have any hope of disambiguating *concepts, universals, forms*, etc., and so of making sense of the domain and character proper to negation.

The standard examples of distinction (4), found in both Plato and Aristotle, are mathematical: while the mathematically conceived line is *abstract*, the visible, extended line of the edge of a table, for example, or a line drawn between two points, are both *concrete*; while numbers themselves are *abstract*, collections of things of the corresponding cardinality are *concrete*. Here what is *concrete* is what is tangible or perceptible, and perhaps necessarily thereby *particular*. And yet there are, *ex hypothesi, in rē* universals, which are both concrete and universal, and numbers (and perhaps Platonic forms), for example, are abstract and particular. Thus (3) and (4) must be distinguished. Through the geometrical constructions involved in mastering geometry we learn about the properties of geometrical objects, though the shapes we draw are *concrete*, while the objects they teach us about are *abstract*. Both Plato and Aristotle think that abstract objects are *abstracted* from their concrete occurrences, but Aristotle
thinks they are therefore bound to those occurrences, whereas Plato thinks the former are independent of, and indeed the models for, the latter.

It is Plato’s view that matters first for the tradition under examination. Plato considers the study of mathematics a pedagogical prerequisite for advancing to the knowledge of forms (eidē) in the Republic precisely because it affords us the chance to approach abstract entities indirectly, through their concrete instances, e.g., triangularity itself and number through triangular objects or images and collections of things, and to see, nonetheless that the abstraction is ontologically prior to its instance.\textsuperscript{49} For abstraction is merely heuristic to epistemic access, or rather recovery, and we ought not to confuse it with the results of its application, as mathematical intuitionists or constructivists might be accused of doing. A triangle is not any or all of the concrete instances in which triangularity is instantiated, but neither is it merely the common feature(s) abstracted from those instances. Similarly a form (eidos) is not any or all of the concrete instances that participate in or otherwise instantiate it, although it is through the latter that we come to recognize and cognize the former. However, without access to the form of triangularity, no triangle would be recognizable, even if it is also true that traffic with triangles reacquaints us with triangularity, and the act of abstraction is vital to this re-acquaintance (anamnesis). In fact forms are not strictly speaking abstracted from their instances at all. For if they were so abstracted, Socrates’ disregard for instances in seeking definitions would be unprincipled. Understanding

\textsuperscript{49} See, for example, the Republic 510d-e3.
mathematical objects can nonetheless help us to understand what kind of thing a form is in relation to its participants. In particular it can help us to appreciate the prior reality of things that are in themselves unavailable to perception. A Platonic, as opposed to an Aristotelian, form is an abstract entity, then, not in the sense that it is derived from anything concrete, but in the sense that it is beyond anything concrete.

It should be clear, then, that forms are not concepts, inasmuch as concepts are the products of thought or intellection, i.e., entia rationis. Yet they are conceptual to the extent that they are epistemically grasped, if they are grasped at all, exclusively through intellection. More to the point, from the Platonic perspective, concreteness is inversely related to ontological status: the more concrete a thing is, the less real it is. On the other hand, for Hegel, the vector of concreteness is reversed: the greater the concreteness, the higher its ontological status. From Hegel’s perspective, “[t]he Platonic idea is nothing else than the universal, or more precisely, it is the concept of the subject matter/object (der Begriff des Gegenstandes).” However, on Hegel’s view, “it is only in the concept” that it “has actuality,” because it is only there that it finds its determinate, concrete content. Here concreteness has its more etymologically precise sense of formal development and unity, from the Latin con-crescere, to develop together. Thus, though the Platonic idea is abstract and the Hegelian Begriff concrete,

---

50 Science of Logic, 30.

51 Ibid.
both are nonetheless opposed to “the side of tangibility and of sensuous self-externality,” which Hegel calls the side of “nullity.”

Part of what this shows is that the distinctions above, though useful, are also fluid. In particular, though an Hegelian Begriff is certainly immaterial, rather than material, its being an ens rationis is precisely what makes it an ens reale. How more precisely to parse the ontology of concepts, universals and individuals will occupy us throughout the following chapters. For the moment it suffices to say that whatever differences one might make out amongst singular or mass terms, concepts and their extensions, the connection between logical and metaphysical entities is an important part of what must be rethought in assessing the discourse of negation.

The claim I argue for, essentially thesis (8) above, namely, that beginning with Aristotle it is not merely that categorical propositions are made up of categorical terms, plus the copula, but that such propositions are essentially predicative expansions of their subject terms, implies a still closer connection between division-defined terms and syllogistic argument, and thus between negation and inference. Commitment to syllogistic logic thus reinforces dependence on the method of division, which entails commitment to a notion of determinate negation and so to a version of Hegel’s principle that we can therefore reformulate more precisely as follows: omnis divisio est negatio. This also provides yet further reason for the claim that despite their rejection of the philosophical conception of negation, Aristotle, Boethius and scholastic philosophy

---

52 Science of Logic, 30.
as a whole are nonetheless party to it. On the other hand, this view of the connection between categorical terms and propositions lies behind an explicit, guiding principle of Hegelian logic, namely that syllogistic inference is driven by the content of the concepts employed in the constituent propositions of a given syllogism or sorites.

Let me conclude with a few cautions. What I attempt in this dissertation is not an exhaustive study of negation, philosophical negation, or the more general notion of negativity in Hegel or elsewhere. Nor is it meant as a philosophical history of negation or negativity, though it is hoped it will provide the basis for such a history, and it is my intent to contribute something to such a project in subsequent work. Nonetheless, if the focus is narrow, indeed so narrow as to be identifiable, at times, with the attributive use of negation in noun or adjective expressions of the form not-x, i.e., infinite predicates in traditional terms, its ambitions and implications are quite broad. While I concentrate on the seemingly limited use of negation in the method of division, this method provides the basic logic of the concept, and thus, as I argue, the basic conception of the categorical proposition, from Plato through Aristotle and so the entire scholastic tradition. It also lies at the heart of Hegel’s engagement with Kant and the preceding philosophical tradition, and undergirds much of what is in contention in recent and contemporary engagements with Hegel, in the work, for example, of Martin Heidegger,

53 There is of course the case of Eriugena, who accepted a robust metaphysical version of determinative negation, and one with decidedly Neoplatonic roots, but he is something of an exception.
Henri Bergson, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Robert Brandom and John Mcdowell, to name but a few.
CHAPTER 1

PLATO: NEGATION AND THE DISCURSIVE INTERVAL

Section One. Negation, Logic and Metaphysics

In Plato’s *Sophist* negation as such makes its philosophical debut, along with the first direct philosophical treatment of concepts, predication and discursive speech more generally. That these topics make their philosophical debut together is no accident, for they are intrinsically connected. In the first place, the *predicative interval*, i.e., the logical space between concept and determination, is the arena proper to negation: the relationship between the subject and predicate terms of the traditionally conceived proposition is defined by the specific combination of their difference and identity, and difference (*to heteron*), Plato is first to observe, constitutes the fundamental meaning of negation. The reason for stating this in terms of the *predicative interval* rather than the proposition through which that interval is articulated, to begin with, is that *difference* properly understood is what creates the space that a given predicate, when it functions as a predicate, must cover: every predicate defines the *difference* opened up by negation. The proposition, in turn, is the result of traversing and, in part, closing that space of difference, and so is linguistically and logically secondary. On the other hand, to
the extent that it is in the proposition that this interval is expressed, in another sense the proposition is virtually simultaneous with the concept.

Indeed, in discovering the differentiating function of negation, Plato also uncovers the inherently discursive character of the concept, the logico-metaphysical successor of the more exacting Form (eidos), and a conception of the proposition, or statement, as expressing what is inherent in or otherwise related to the concept or individual designated by its subject term.¹ More dramatically, albeit more controversially, if concepts are formally articulated in the way I have suggested, then Plato’s discovery of discursivity is in essence a discovery of the concept of the concept itself! To reiterate, negation is what launches discursivity, inasmuch as it is with negation that the characteristic contribution of mind to the cognition of world is made apparent. Whatever the relationship between mind and world is taken to be, it is through negation that mind takes its first step beyond the world into the autonomy of expression.² This first step, the emergence of the autonomy of expression is not to be identified with, but is connected to what Freud describes in terms of the constitution of the unconscious. As mentioned in the Introduction, although the unconscious, according

¹ The discursiveness of the concept should hardly seem a surprising notion to contemporary philosophers, for whom Frege’s treatment of the concept as a function that converts referring expressions into propositions is canonical. In his From Plato to Platonism (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2013), Lloyd Gerson argues, similarly, that a discursive line on concepts is canonical for Plato, Platonists and Neoplatonists alike.

² This autonomy can be made out even in the most radical idealism, since to the extent that such idealism is intelligible the distinction between world and mind persists, but as an internal one between the mind and what it constitutes.
to Freud, *knows* no negation it is itself the outcome of the primary operation of repression to which the expression of negation is psychogenetically and symbolically linked, and, owing to this link, it is through the conscious enunciation of negation that access to the unconscious is made possible.

Plato can be thought of as making the same point, but from a logico-metaphysical standpoint: although *being* itself, along with every other autonomous *Form*, *knows* no negation, it is made visible as and in a world, i.e., as an integrated multiplicity, by virtue of the *difference* negation makes expressible within it. To align Plato’s analytic remark with Freud’s psychoanalytic one: when one says the things that are (*ta onta*), it is as certain that one thereby says the things that are not (*ta mē onta*), by virtue of the fact that one *says* anything at all. While Freud unveils the subterranean layer of psychic content behind the use of negation, Plato unveils the subterranean play of negation behind the scenes, in the multitudinous world of ordinary speech. This marks a significant divergence from Parmenides, for whom there is no world, since there is no multiplicity, and from Plato’s allegiance in earlier dialogues to an ontology of remote intelligibles.

Falsehood, so it will turn out, is philosophically important for Plato not primarily because the sophist must be accounted for, but because it is through falsehood that the role of negation arises as a philosophical issue, because in explaining falsehood we are compelled to employ negation in order to speak of the categorical way in which speech
and the world diverge. In the much earlier *Cratylus*, most famously, Plato ventures the idea that a name or referring expression (*onoma*) is an educative (*didaskalikon*) instrument (*organon*), that is, one that permits the discrimination or determination of being (*diakritikon tēs ousias*). His acknowledgment of the possibility that names can go astray might be considered a recognition that naming itself is autonomous, although it turns out that, properly construed, it is simply a difficult matter to accomplish. At any rate, although there may be an analogy to be drawn between names and statements, and, more importantly for our purposes, between the possibility of misnaming associated with the former and that of falsehood associated with the latter, Plato neglects to draw it.

While the noetic record of perceptual encounter is of course cognitive, the mind in this circumstance is an instrument of reception, simply registering what is presented to it through the senses. On the other hand, both abstraction to the intelligible content and the integration of that content into the structure of judgment require the sort of

---

3 *Cratylus* 388b13-c1. I take it, along with most translators, that the *kai* conjoining *didaskalikon* and *diakritikon* is exegetical, i.e., explanatory, although nothing much turns on whether there are other respects in which names might be thought to be educative. It is perhaps instructive that Augustine, for example, argues in *De Magistro* that names are of little didactic value, but this has to do with their use in teaching and so is consistent with their being revelatory, which is what Plato really seems to mean in this context. On the other hand, Proclus, in his commentary on this passage, uses precisely the same term - *revelatory* (*ekphantorikos*) - to describe the role of names Plato seems to be getting at. See *Procii Diadochi In Platonis Cratylum Commentaria*, edited by G. Pasquali (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1908), §XLVIII.

4 Plato’s ultimate position in the *Cratylus* has been variously characterized, with most recent commentators, e.g., Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato’s Cratylus* (New York: Routledge, 2001), disputing the conventionalist view attributed to Plato, as a matter of course, by the majority of earlier commentators.
differentiation whose principal operation is negation. As indicated in the Introduction, the implication here is that for Plato (and following him, Aristotle) negation is fundamentally, and natively, propositional, but not because it is *sentential*, in the familiar sense of being a truth function on sentences or propositions.\(^5\) Rather, negation is propositional in the sense that it is what in the first place marks the boundary between any two terms that can be brought into relation with one another, either in the unifying composition of the affirmative, or the differentiating division of the negative proposition. Another way of putting this is to say that negation is what stands between terms such that they can be brought into the basic relations of difference and identity with one another. That, at any rate, is what I will argue is what Plato shows us in the *Sophist*, and what Aristotle gives a formal account of in the *Prior Analytics*. However, between what Plato *shows* us and what Aristotle *gives an account* of there lies not merely the distance between a picture sketched and an explicit, formal theory, but the profound gap between a view of discourse that assigns negation a central role (Plato) and one that marginalizes its use and importance (Aristotle).

\(^5\) It is perhaps a confusion between these two claims that has led many commentators on both Plato and Aristotle to insist that negation is fundamentally or exclusively attributive for both. Robert Turnbull’s assurance, as a matter of settled presumption, that “both Plato and Aristotle think of negation rather as negation of terms than as a sentential connective” is typical of the rather baffling expression of confidence in a view that is decisively contradicted by passages in the *Sophist* and in Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, where, for example, Aristotle declares that “‘not-man’ is not a name, nor is there any correct name for it. It is neither a phrase nor a negation *(apophasis)*”(16a29) and later that “without a verb there will be no affirmation or negation” (19b11). See Robert G. Turnbull, *The Parmenides and Plato’s late Philosophy: Translation of and Commentary on the Parmenides with Interpretative Chapters on the Timaeus, the Theaetetus, the Sophist, and the Philebus* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998).
By subject, and indeed by its traditional title, this dialogue is concerned with the kinds, degrees and facsimiles of being and non-being – non-being simpliciter (to mē on), non-beings or things-that-are-not (ta mē onta), copies or imitations (mimēmata), images (eidōla), simulacra (eikones), apparitions (phantasmata), and, at its center, an apparitional form of human being, the sophist himself. Whatever the sophist might be, he is not plainly visible, and the substantial philosophical reason for this is that what he does, what would make him visible qua sophist is either difficult or impossible to make out. This is because the characteristic activity of the sophist, i.e., presenting falsehoods as true, “saying things but not true ones (legein men atta, alēthē de mē),” involves him in “opining or saying things that are not (doxazein ē legein ta mē onta).” Because the sophist’s métier is thus “what is not,” and so what is in principle unavailable to sense or intellect, he is himself, qua sophist, invisible if non-existent, in the broad sense of not being present in or to appearance (phantasia).

It is important from the outset, however, to distinguish the broad sense of invisibility, absence or inapprehensibility that pertains to the sophist from the more narrow sense of the invisible (aoratos) that pertains to incorporeal forms (eidē/idea𝑖), which, though unavailable to the senses, are for Plato the very essence of what is

---

6 Sophist 236e2. All translations of Plato’s Sophist are adapted from Plato’s Sophist or The Professor of Wisdom: Translation, Introduction, and Glossary, translated by Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem (Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library, 1996), except where indicated.

7 Sophist 260c3.
present to intellection, and thus of what can appear veridically (phainetai). The possibility of the sophist’s inaccessibility foreshadows the far more serious possibility of the inaccessibility of truth, in part because the sophist himself may be regarded as the shadowy double of the philosopher, committed to the illusion of knowledge and truth rather than knowledge and truth themselves, though still thereby retaining a fundamental relationship to the latter. Of course both the philosopher and the sophist are in principle as available to sense as any other sensible objects, qua men. What separates the philosopher from the sophist is the former’s commitment to the truth, and the visibility afforded him by the ontological eminence of ta onta, although that commitment is not on its own enough to secure the semantic and epistemic access to which his/her identity is fundamentally connected.

The deeper issue at stake here, as already suggested, concerns the ontological status of the empirically remote, under which general rubric we ought to include fictional and mathematical objects along with those of immediate relevance - forms, meanings, concepts, and the correlates of statements or judgments. Part of what Plato is grappling with in the Sophist are the diverse kinds of existence or being within the environment of our cognitive and perceptual interactions that the coarse dichotomy between being and non-being seems inadequate to account for. Plato first broaches the

______________________________

8 Sophist 247b1-5. Veridical appearance is the standard sense of the Greek verb phainetai plus a participle, which thus through the ordinary resources of grammar marks a distinction between the veridical and mere appearance, for which dokei plus the infinitive is typically used instead.
issue in terms of the enumerability of existents, e.g., names, whose discernibility from their *designata* would appear to grant them an existence independent of the latter (244b-245d).

There is more to say in this regard, for the profusion of names and definitions cast forth to capture the sophist, to render him intelligible, suggests a further, albeit equally coarse, opposition between philosophical loquacity and silence, or, more to the point, between the philosopher who, in the interest of truth, ventures pronouncement and the philosopher who, on the same basis, falls silent upon a principle of parsimony applied in its most radical form, in the form, that is, of Parmenides’ edict against attribution. And so, if the alternative paths of truth and falsehood, or of being and non-being, Parmenides describes⁹ are that of the monist and that of the sophist, respectively, then the *Sophist*’s Xenos, the *foreign* or unfamiliar other, defines, at the very least, a third path, that of the plurality of *truths*, and a third philosophical or *conceptual persona*,¹⁰ the *heterologist*, i.e., the philosopher of *difference*, whose

---


¹⁰ The expression “conceptual persona” is borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (see their *What is Philosophy?*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), although talk of a philosopher of difference is meant, in part, as a challenge to Deleuze’s critique of Plato’s identification of negation with difference, in his *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul R. Atton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Deleuze’s argument is roughly that a *negative* account of difference robs difference of its philosophical significance. Curiously, Hegel complains about Plato’s account that it fails to give *negation* its due negativity, i.e., in the form of contradiction. The polemical intent here is to recover the philosophical significance of difference as negation.
pluralism, to be more precise, commits him not to the relativity of truth, but to its discursiveness, to what Badiou, from an ontological perspective, has called the multiple.\textsuperscript{11} Because difference as such will turn out to be expressed by negation, the philosopher of difference will also turn out to be the philosopher of negation.

However, in this interplay of proximate figures and problems, the crucial parallel concerns the official philosophical issue at the center of the dialogue as a whole, i.e., the possibility of falsehood. The exploration of falsehood and its modes of simulation and duplication reveal the still more pressing concern with truth and its principal mode of expression. For this reason the account of negation here constitutes a specifically philosophical debut, one in which it is made the basis of the philosophical analysis, first, of false speech, i.e., saying the things that are not (legein ta mē onta), and second, and more importantly, of discursive speech and thought tout court. Beyond this, the accord granted negation expresses a new conception of the relationship between philosophical expression and ordinary language, and more pointedly, within philosophy itself, an alternative view of the relationship between metaphysics and logic, or dialectic (hē technē dialektikē) as it is usually designated, which Plato defines as “the art concerning

\textsuperscript{11} How one ought to understand “the multiple” is a crucial issue for Badiou, and that which separates him from Deleuze and what has been identified as the traditional metaphysics of presence, to which Badiou thinks Heidegger is still beholden, and to which he seeks to oppose the minimalist ontology of the “pure multiple,” which he identifies with “algebraic topology and functional analysis” i.e., the bare form to which anything that is must conform. See Alain Badiou, \textit{Being and Event}, translated by Oliver Feltham (London; New York: Continuum, 2005) 14.
logoi (hē peri tōn logōn technē),”¹² or “the method of logoi (hē methodos tōn logōn),”¹³ where “hoi logoi” may be understood as referring either to propositions/statements, or collectively to discursive speech in general.

What I mean is this: It is a presupposition of the argument of Parmenides’ great philosophical poem that, to put it simply, metaphysics is the basis of logic, that what being is determines what we can legitimately say of it, and what we can meaningfully say about anything, in purely formal terms, and this appears to be an assumption shared by Plato for much, though not all, of his philosophical life. For both Parmenides and the early and middle Plato, our ordinary talk about what things are and how they are to be defined runs afoul of how things actually are, although it is also through an examination of the universal elements or structures of speech that we can lay claim to how things are. If ordinary talk is to be made to accord with how things are it must be constrained by the logical picture that best corresponds to how things are, whether this leads to the unforgiving monophony prescribed by Parmenides, or the merely straitened discourse of forms defended by Plato. The metaphysics of forms, i.e., the proper objects of philosophical understanding or knowledge (epistēmē), determines what is to count as a philosophically well-formed claim. Such claims, as we learn throughout the early and middle dialogues, must, in particular, assume the logical form proper to the

¹² Phaedo 90b.

¹³ Sophist 227a.
identification of what a thing is, its essence, i.e., of the *ti esti* or *ho esti* of the *definiendum*. This *form* requires making the relevant item of philosophical analysis the subject of predication, and the terms of its definition the predicate(s) of a proposition (*logos*), e.g., *pleasure is (a kind of) restoration*. Of course grammar has a role to play as well, since it is through syntax, inflection and the grammar of, for example, demonstratives and general terms, that such roles are expressed: “*This is x,*” for example, is formally inadequate to the task of saying what *Xness* is. This general privileging of metaphysics over logic and grammar is still evident in Plato’s *Parmenides*, which nonetheless represents Plato’s most sustained examination of the *logic* of being and non-being.

However, in the *Sophist*, Plato acknowledges, in addition, a grounding relation that runs in the opposite direction, from the general requirements of speech to metaphysics. In moving from the combinatory rules of *forms* to those of letters in words (*onomata*), and finally to those of words in propositions (*logoi*), Plato suggests a correlation between phonetics, grammar and logic, on the one hand, and ontology on the other. The suggestion here is not that metaphysics is determined by logic, but that it is exhibited and thus revealed in the basic logical structures of speech. The crux of this shift lies in the phenomenon of negation, whose logical appearance seems initially without any obvious or palatable ontological correlate. To see this, as well as much else that is important for the development in Plato’s thought I am trying to trace, depends,
in part, upon seeing the *Sophist* in relation to the *Parmenides*, where the behavior of
negation is examined from the largely metaphysical standpoint of non-being, within the
context of a semantics of naming and without a direct examination of negation itself.
Nonetheless, on the basis of metaphysical considerations the discussion in the
*Parmenides* establishes the framework for a logical analysis of negation and thereby
points beyond naming to the logic of predication presented in the *Sophist*. I begin,
therefore, with a discussion of passages from the former that are central to our concern
with the logic and metaphysics of negation.

**Section Two. The *Parmenides*: The Limits of Naming**

Plato’s *Parmenides* is regularly and justifiably, because philosophically, divided
into two parts, the first an attempt to explain the participation relationship (*methexis*)
between forms (*eidē/ideai*) and their instances or exemplifications, the second an
examination of the problem of the one and the many (which the specification of the
participation relation was supposed to have resolved) through eight (or nine)
deductions based upon four hypotheses. Although commentators have differed on how
best to see the philosophical connection, if any, between the two parts, the first part
can be understood as giving way quite naturally to the second, inasmuch as the second
can be seen as an oblique approach to explaining the participation relation through the
terms that comprise it, once the direct route of explaining this relation has given way to
impasse.\textsuperscript{14} Since, as Plato informs us in the \textit{Philebus},\textsuperscript{15} it is via speech (logos) that the problem of the one and the many arises, the issues at stake concern not only the relationship between forms and their instances, but also the kinds of linguistic expressions that depend upon and express that relationship. Parmenides had famously argued against there being any relationship at all between the one and the many, in effect claiming that any such connection constitutes a foray from being into non-being, and thus challenged both the metaphysical possibility of multiplicity and the logico-semantic one of predication.

Yet despite the concurrence of these topics in a single dialogue, and the regular association of participation with predication, participation (methexis) is never presented here as an \textit{account} of predication. This is in part because before the \textit{Sophist} Plato simply has no descriptive vocabulary for, let alone a theory of, predication.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore,

\textsuperscript{14} My view of the relation between the two halves of the text coincides roughly with Turnbull's in supposing that the second half furnishes what Turnbull calls the “logical structure” of the world. However, I depart from Turnbull with regard to what this \textit{logical structure} amounts to. In particular, Turnbull’s claim that “both Plato and Aristotle think of negation rather as negation of terms than as a sentential connective” is contradicted by passages from both Plato and Aristotle and grossly underestimates the role of negation in logical structure. Turnbull’s rejection of Cornford’s construal of the hypotheses as claims about \textit{forms} rather than as claims about “terms” is also partially correct, in my view (see Francis MacDonald Cornford, \textit{Plato and Parmenides} (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). Yet it is also importantly wrong in not recognizing that what I call the syncategorematic hypotheses, which Turnbull calls “Platonic,” signify a shift from forms to concepts, as I argue below.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Philebus} 15d4-8.

\textsuperscript{16} That Plato is indeed talking about predication when he speaks of participation is generally assumed by commentators, e.g., Vlastos, Ackrill, Owen, etc. It is also a remarkable feature of these commentators that having saddled Plato with an interest in predication they then go on to point to one or more fairly obvious distinctions he is alleged to have missed. Needless to say if Plato is not giving an account of predication in
Plato never claims that to say that “x is y” is just to say that “x participates in Y,” or even that “x is y” means, or is true (if and) only if “x participates in Y.” So although he regularly uses participation to account for what we would consider predicative relations, he never indicates that in doing so he is providing an analysis, semantic or otherwise, of predication as such, or of sentences or propositions. What he does seem to be doing, quite explicitly, is providing the metaphysical basis for an account of naming.

In a familiar and characteristic account from the *Phaedo*, to take but one example, participation in a relevant form X is cited as the explanation for something’s *being* x and being called or *named* x. Here, as in many other passages, Plato, recurring to what is surely more exemplar than mere example, speaks of “the many beautiful things (tōn pollōn kallōn), such as human beings, or horses or cloaks” as *homonymous* with the *form* of the beautiful in which these many partake.18 Though Plato often characterizes this relationship in terms of *eponymy* (epōnymia) rather than *homonymy* (homōnymia), the point seems clear: participant objects are named *from* that in which they participate. Again, this is not to deny, of course, that things related to one another through the expressions used to designate them bear further relations to one another some context then he can’t fairly be accused of having failed to recognize that it comes in two or more varieties, e.g., “normal” and “Pauline” predication, as Gregory Vlastos informs us (“A note on ‘Pauline Predications’ in Plato,” *Phronesis* 19 (1974): 95-101).

17 Throughout I use lower case letters for the names of non-*forms*, upper case letters to name *forms*.

18 *Phaedo* 78d10-e3.
that pertain to predication (a connection Aristotle makes clear in the *Categories*). It is just to say that *methexis* itself is fundamentally ontological, and that this bears directly on the semantics of naming, not predication.

So what does this semantics amount to? We can attempt an answer to this in terms of eponymy or homonymy, since it is roughly in these terms that Aristotle will venture an alternative view in the *Categories*. If “Beautiful” names the *form* of the beautiful it does so as a nominal expression “the Beautiful (to kalon),” and is equivalent to “beauty.” To say that “the Beautiful is beautiful” is to say something obviously true because “the Beautiful” and “beautiful” name the same thing, i.e., the *form* of the Beautiful. But then it is not to predicate “beautiful” of “the Beautiful,” despite the long-standing view that Plato accepts the self-predication of *forms*! On the other hand, if “Plato is beautiful” is true, then it is not because “Plato” names what “beautiful” names, but because Plato *has*, in some appropriate sense of “having” purportedly captured by the participation relation, what “beautiful” names. Plato is named “beautiful” derivatively, not as an extension of “beautiful” but rather as something that participates in what “beautiful” names, which, absent an account of the predicative use of names, is what being named homonymously or eponymously amounts to for Plato. It is to the extent that Plato permits the elision of naming and predication that he accedes to the logical parity of “the Beautiful is beautiful” and “Plato is beautiful” and is thus drawn into the third-man consequences of self-predication. Logical parity, in other words,
suggests ontological propinquity, i.e., it suggests that the form and its participant(s) are like one another, resemble one another, and in particular that they resemble one another with respect to the property the former communicates to the latter. This appears to be the inference conceded in the first part of the Parmenides itself, where forms are characterized as paradeigmata en tēi physei, as patterns, paradigms or exemplars in nature, their participants as likenesses (homoiōmata), and the relation between the two (i.e., participation) as being made in their likeness or image (eikasthēnai).\(^{19}\)

Now whatever the ontological status of paradigms in nature might amount to, it is clear from the context that their being in nature represents a response, or at the very least a marked alternative, to Parmenides’ objection to conceiving of forms as mere concepts or thoughts (noēmata).\(^{20}\) Parmenides is quick to point out that it is what the noēma is of or about that things must participate in, unless those things themselves are also to be regarded as mere thoughts. Yet if the participant is a likeness or icon (eikōn) of the form, then resemblance would appear to constitute its very essence, and, since resemblance is symmetric, so the argument goes, the form will also resemble its participant, which it can only do if both the form and its participant participate in another form to ground their resemblance, which grounding form will necessitate yet

---

\(^{19}\) Parmenides 132d1-4.

\(^{20}\) “Alla, phanai, ὁ Parmenidē, ton Sōcratē, mē tôn eidōn hekaston ēi toutōn noēma,” Parmenides 132b3.
another form to explain the resemblance between itself and the original form, and so

on ad infinitum. As Plato presents it:

PARMENIDES: If then something is like (eoiken) the form (eidei), would that form not be such as to be like the thing made in its likeness (tōi eikasthenti), to the extent that that thing was made like (aphōmoiōthē) it, or is there some device through which the like might not be like a like thing? SOCRATES: No there is not. PARMENIDES: Then is there not a great necessity that that which is like what is like it participate in one and the same form?²¹

The infinite regress here attaches to likeness or resemblance, but while this does indeed amount to a reductio argument against conceiving of participation in terms of a symmetric resemblance relation, it does not thereby constitute an argument against participation as such, or against the role of intelligible exemplars, i.e., forms. What is more, Plato acknowledges as much, having Socrates finally concede the point that “it is not by likeness (homoiotēti) that the many partake of (metalambanei) the forms.”²²

But if not by likeness then by what? To begin with, the conception of forms as patterns or exemplars (paradeigmata) was introduced to forestall their inclusion in the plurality of likenesses (homoiōmata). A plurality of likenesses, without any exemplar to bind them, is necessarily heterogeneous, since likeness is not transitive, and so not susceptible to being known. Plato ventures this description of the participation relation in order to highlight the ontological divide between the unicity of the original form and the plurality of its participants, following an earlier version that makes no explicit

²¹ Parmenides 132d9-e1.

²² Parmenides 133a5.
provision for ontological difference and gives rise to a formulation of the third-man argument that emphasizes the unspecified causal power of forms to generate and explain the appearance of whatever it is they are forms of. This earlier version is put in terms of the one-many relation, specifically, between the totality of, for example, large things and the form of largeness “by which all these things appear large (hōi tauta panta megala phainesthai).”

Here the regress of forms proceeds directly from their causal-explanatory role, and, since Aristotle first so identified it, it is this version of the third-man argument that has underwritten its common formulation (beginning with Ammonius) in terms of self-predication: If everything of which \( F \) is predicated is \( F \) by virtue of its participation in the form \( F \), then if the form \( F \) is itself \( F \) (and how can it not be?), it must be so by virtue of its participation in a higher order form \( F_1 \), in which it participates along with its own original participant(s) and which, in turn, must participate in a yet higher order, form \( F_2 \), in which the lower order forms \( F \) and \( F_1 \) and its participants participate, and so on ad infinitum.

But having introduced a more ontologically freighted account of participation, why then does Plato accede to Parmenides’ second version of the argument, which continues to presuppose ontological and logical parity? Why does he not simply insist, as his commentators do, that exemplars and the copies derived from them are, in the

---

23 Parmenides 132a7-8.

24 Aristotle discusses and so designates the third-man argument in several places, but most notably in Metaphysics I 990b15-17 and VII 1038b34.
specific case of form-participant exemplification, ontologically disparate? This is the essence of what Syrianus claims, for example, in responding to Aristotle’s criticism of Platonic forms in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, remarking that “the form is not synonymous with the many,” i.e., it does not share its definition (logos) with the many that are its *paronyms*. The obvious problem with such a rejoinder, of course, is that the exemplification/facsimile conception of methexis does indeed suggest ontological proximity – though the model or exemplary instance of a thing is unique in serving as a model, and perhaps in its temporal and ontological priority, its copies, facsimilies or simulacra, of necessity bear a likeness to one another and to that of which they are copies: likeness (*homoiotēs*) is precisely what the of relation between a copy and that of which it is a copy amounts to. And as such, there is nothing wrong in saying of any two like things that they are like one another, without requiring a third thing to explain their likeness.

The problem lies elsewhere, in the productive power of forms that is one of the principal bases for positing their existence in the first place: forms make things appear the way they do, rather than simply being that which copies or participants are like, although Plato provides no clue as to the nature of this productive power. Parmenides’

---

argument is that if *forms* generate likenesses, and are themselves likenesses, then,
given that they are like their likenesses, they too must be generated by higher-order
*forms*. On the other hand, if *forms* are not likenesses with respect to their facsimiles, it
isn’t clear in what sense they can be *paradeigmata*.

The issue is this: *Forms* need to be close enough to, or like, sensible particulars to
allow for participation and thus to explain our cognitive and semantic and epistemic
commerce with ordinary objects. But they also need to be suitably remote from
ordinary objects to ensure their *separateness*, literally their *being separate* (*einai
chōris*), to ground our capacity for knowledge, which, at least according to the exacting
standards of the *Republic*, is epistemically disjoint from belief (*doxa*) and its objects, i.e.,
the sensible particulars mentioned above. In other words, the competing requirements
stem from the competing metaphysical and epistemic purposes for which *forms* are
invoked in the first place.26

*Forms* are defined on the basis of the epistemic, semantic and metaphysical
roles they are called on to serve, e.g., in making the *many* that exemplify them
semantically representable and communicable, in constituting the proper objects of
*episteme*, etc. Yet what *forms* do doesn’t fully determine what they are and how they
do what they do, and the two primary roles just mentioned entail incompatible


26 For a useful account of the philosophical demands underlying Plato’s development of an account of
*forms*, see Russell M. Dancy’s *Plato’s Introduction of Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2004).
features. Plato attributes to *forms* characteristics that are essential to his general metaphysical and epistemological views, and so what they are in general terms, namely, transcendent verities, and what they make explicable, i.e., knowledge, virtue and meaning, are more clearly articulated than what they are essentially, and how we access or make use of them. By the time of the *Parmenides* Plato had yet to reach a definitive account of what connects a form to its participants, and once he is compelled to abandon casting participation (*methexis*) as likeness (*homoiotēs*), the rather dire consequences of having no account are easy to see. If no such connection can be made out, and *forms* are made separate (*aphorizomena*) from the things that are (*tōn ontōn*), that is, “the things among us (*ta par’hēmin*),” they would prove incapable of serving their principal role as the proper objects of knowledge. Their transcendence would safeguard their unicity, immutability and immiscibility, but at the expense of their

This goes to the heart of the matter concerning the nature of Plato’s commitment to *forms*. The view I take throughout is that Plato thinks that there must be something like forms to explain our capacity for meaning anything reliable, communicable, intelligible and knowable, despite the fact that most of what we interact with and think and speak about in the world is unreliable, incommunicable, unintelligible and unknowable. The explanatory demands of *forms* require that they possess certain features, different ones for different grounding purposes, and these are the (changing) features we are entitled to think of *forms* as possessing. I am not sure it is helpful to characterize Plato’s commitment as commitment to a *doctrine or theory of forms*, which we then have to think of as changing over the course of his philosophical life, rather than as more heuristic commitment to there being something transcendent in the world by which we can explain our occasional epistemic or philosophical success. For a vivid example of an approach that insists on a theoretical commitment, see Samuel C. Rickless’ *Plato’s Forms in Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Rickless’ penchant for systematization is admirable, if ultimately barbaric. It has the unfortunate consequence of deriving a “theory of forms” that no longer applies to anything that Plato would have recognized as a *form*. In particular, Rickless’ conclusion that the arguments raised against the “theory of forms” in the *Parmenides* leave Plato acknowledging that “forms are sensible” (p. 249) would seem to rob *forms* of much of the essential purpose they seem intended to serve throughout Plato’s work, i.e., to explain how we can signify and formulate opinions about sensible objects and how we can advance to knowledge of what makes these other capacities possible.
ontological and epistemic accessibility (to those whose being and cognitive capacities belong to the incommensurable domain of the many).

The gist of Syrianus’ and other Platonists’ disagreement with Aristotle is that the relationship between forms and their participant instances is fundamentally ontological and asymmetric, i.e., it holds between an original reality and an image or copy, between things of distinct ontological orders, even if this ontological relationship is also supposed to ground the homonymous or eponymous extension of a relevant name or expression and, with this, provide the veridical ground of predication. Participation, like the homonymy or eponymy that marks it linguistically, is not in fact symmetric, and we are only inclined to think it is, along with the Socrates of the first half of the Parmenides, to the extent that we conceive of it in terms of relations such as that of resemblance, and to the extent that we identify predicative relations with participation relations. Yet, as indicated above, a predicative construal of the argument runs up against the simple fact that forms themselves are not eponymously or paronymously named, and so can’t be counted amongst the participants that are so named!

Some hint at an alternative, more promising way of looking at things can be offered in advance in terms of an analogy that will prove fundamental for both Plato and Aristotle, even as Aristotle seeks to correct what he takes to be the inadequacies of Plato’s account. In the first chapter of the Categories Aristotle gives, as an instance of an

\[28\]

For an exhaustive survey of approaches to the argument see, again, Rickless, *Plato’s forms in Transition*. 
homonymous pair, man and picture (TEGRAMMON), which share the name animal (zōon), but differ with regard to “the definition of being which corresponds to the name.” It seems unlikely that this example of a relationship tied to the participation relation is a matter of coincidence, given as well that the question of resemblance between pictures and men shows up so in frequently Plato’s dialogues, and would surely have been a standard example in the Academy. At any rate, it behooves us to consider the example more closely.

Aristotle’s point is, of course, semantic, but the ontological upshot is part of that point. Though in everyday speech we tend to speak otherwise, a picture of a man no more resembles the man of whom it is a picture, than a photograph resembles its subject, or a pond the image reflected in it. Of course the image registered in each medium must resemble that of which it is an image, since “being an image of” bears a determinate relation to that of which it is an image. It is the persistence of the image within a photograph or painting that leads us to identify each with its image, which we are not inclined to do, for example, with reflective surfaces such as those of ponds or mirrors on which reflected images quickly and (potentially) interminably give way to others. This, then, is the relevant sense of participation (methexis): each participant reflects a part, the surface or image, of what it participates in. And, something like this is put most clearly in the well-known discussion of the “three beds” in the Republic. Here

---

29 Aristotle Categories 1a4.
Plato identifies the mirror as the perfect instrument of reproduction, since “with it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else.”\(^{30}\) Yet despite its versatility, which is illustrative of, and like, the productive versatility of the sophist, what it reproduces are “appearances...not the things themselves as they truly are.”\(^{31}\)

Something to note immediately about the mirroring relation between image and original is that it requires no additional third likeness to connect the two, because the relevant reflection is asymmetric. Image and original are directly related to one another by virtue of the fact that the former is the reflection of the latter, and not vice versa, and the direct cause of the resemblance of the relevant image is just the reflective instrument or medium itself, i.e., the paintbrush, camera or reflective surface, that produces it. Though Plato does call pictures, paintings and the like imitations, we need not think him committed to the falsehood that the artifact itself resembles the subject painted or pictured, in the way that a copy of a painting resembles an original painting. And, on the other hand, the ontological disparity between intelligible forms and their sensible participants rules out any straightforward visible likeness of appearance.

\(^{30}\) Republic 10, 596d7-e2.

\(^{31}\) Republic 10, 596e3-4.
In the *Cratylus*, to take another example, Plato remarks that a *name* (*onoma*), just like a painting or picture, is an imitation (*mimema*) of what it names, and certainly whatever relation holds between names and their designata it is not one of symmetric, visible resemblance.\(^32\) Since Plato’s conception of naming is ultimately neither conventionalist nor naturalist, what he appears to mean here, and what is strongly suggested by the term *mimema* itself, along with the anamnetic picture of knowledge that no doubt furnishes a backdrop to the discussion of the epistemic value of names, is that names are *reminders* of the things they name, though not entirely reliable ones. This is in sharp contrast to the naïve naturalism promoted by Cratylus, for whom the *mimetic* connection between name and object is naturally determined in such a way as to suggest a *natural* resemblance between the two. Furthermore, while Socrates concedes some sort of resemblance relation between names and *beings*, he eventually argues that we are better off seeking the “truth of things that are (*tēn alētheian tôn ontōn*)”\(^33\) from “those things themselves (*ex hautōn*),”\(^34\) rather than from the sort of etymological meditation suggested by Cratylus, recurring to the presumption of the priority of metaphysics over language or logic.

\(^32\) *Cratylus* 430e10.

\(^33\) *Cratylus* 438d8.

\(^34\) *Cratylus* 439b7.
Plato’s dismissal of onomastics as a philosophically useful enterprise has significant implications for the argument of this dissertation. If the analysis of names is not a guide to how things are (though they might still reflect how things are), then the method of division, which serves precisely this purpose, cannot amount to providing the origin or semantics of names as such. While the method is, by stipulation, designed to reveal the relations amongst forms or concepts, it cannot be undertaken through an analysis of the vertical, extensional relations of names for those forms or concepts. Instead, it will be the horizontal or hierarchical predicative relations that will be at issue.

*Forms* don’t explain resemblance, they explain phenomena, i.e., the manifestation of existence, which is the insight that defines the *scala entis* of Plotinus and the Platonists and Neoplatonists that follow him. And herein lies the difference between a *form* and a concept: a *form* is something immaterial, simple (as opposed to a complex) and mind-independent, a concept is a mind-dependent, logically complex structure whose partitioning is reflected in items named in ordinary speech. The degree of mind-dependence can be left open enough to include conceptions such as Hegel’s that treat the concept not merely as the correlate of an object but as the object

35 It is this distinction that Boethius has in mind in talking of two kinds of forms in the *Quomodo*, which I will discuss in the following chapter. The distinction is made as well by Simplicius, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories*, although here in terms of a distinction between three senses of *common notions*. See Simplicius, *On Aristotle’s Categories* 1-4, trans. Michael Chase (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).
itself as conceived. This is one central implication of Hegel’s claim, cited earlier, that logic coincides with metaphysics.\(^{36}\)

Without arguing the matter here, however, it is sufficient to point out that had Plato recognized a clear distinction between naming and predication he would have had little need to accept a crucial premise on which the argument is based, namely that everything named by a term is named from the name of a form in which it participates. While both the beautiful itself and those things that are derivatively so called, are all called beautiful, calling in the former case is just naming, while in the latter it is predicating, and simple naming itself does not depend upon participation, i.e., the name I apply to a thing need bear no relation to that thing beyond the conventionally determined semantic one of standing for it. The Beautiful itself is, strictly speaking, the only proper referent of the nominal expression (onoma) “the Beautiful.” On the other hand, the kinds of things that participate in the form, e.g., beautiful persons, horses, etc., are not named by “the Beautiful,” but are the subjects of predicative propositions of the form “…is beautiful.”

While it is only in the Sophist that Plato explicitly recognizes and provides an account of a distinction between predicates and names, or between the extensional and the predicative use of names, there is already an indication of a metaphysical version of it in Book 5 of the Republic, where Plato is discussing the fundamental difference

\(^{36}\) Encyclopedia Logic, §24.
between the objects of knowledge (episteme), i.e., forms, and the objects of belief (doxa), i.e., the many that participate in them. In response to Socrates’ prompting, Glaucon confesses about the latter that “one cannot understand them firmly (pagiōs) to be or to not be, or to be neither or both.”

Commenting on the passage, R. E. Allen once suggested that the context makes it clear that these formulae are short-hand for predicative claims, that, for example, such things as participate in the form of the beautiful cannot be firmly understood as being beautiful, or not being beautiful, etc. However, the context would appear, instead, to support a more straightforward reading of the passage as concerning existence claims, albeit claims upon which predicative claims, or the impossibility thereof, may be thought to rest. The objects of doxa, unlike the objects of epistēmē, fall under the rubric of becoming rather than being. Because they are ontologically ambiguous, i.e., because they are neither nothing nor beings, they cannot be identified with the form of any property that is attributed to them, and thus cannot, strictly speaking, be named by them. Naming, in the strict sense proposed in the Cratylus, is veridical, the language of the forms, whereas predication belongs to the province of ontological ambiguity, the discursive language of doxai: each thing that is beautiful thing is also not the beautiful, etc. What Plato affirms here is that for the many things that are, for example, beautiful (in the derivative, participatory sense) no relation

37 Republic 479c9.

38 See, for example, R. E. Allen’s “Participation and Predication in Plato’s Middle Dialogues” cited above.
to the Beautiful applies *simpliciter*. Indeed, this is one way of deciphering what it means for something to *participate* in a given *form*, namely, that it has a *partial* relation to that *form* by virtue of *sharing* that property exemplified by it, rather than by virtue of *being* that property.

Another analogy might be helpful. Consider the concept *prime number*, and its standard definition: a number divisible only by itself and 1 without remainder. Someone in possession of the concept has to know its definition, and to this extent has to know that the proposition “A prime number is....” is true. So much is just a matter of the stipulated definition of this kind of mathematical object. Now in addition to the concept *prime number*, there are individual prime numbers, e.g., 2, 3, 5, etc., and beyond that, at least for Platonists, there is something that each of these numbers is which is also that of which the concept *prime number* is a concept, namely, *prime number* itself, or what Plato would call the *form* of *prime number*, call it *prime numerality*. Now consider the proposition that there is no greatest prime number. Since Euclid constructed a proof to show that there is no such thing, there isn’t one, and hence the concept of a prime number includes its covering an infinite number of instances, and so having the concept *prime number* would arguably have to consist in knowing that there is an infinite number of them. But what does it mean to know this about *prime numbers* or about the *form* *prime number*?
If the form prime number is just what it is to be a prime number, then if I know that form, I know, at least implicitly, whatever is true of it, including that its exemplars are infinite, and so if I know the form I don’t need to know or to have surveyed any proofs demonstrating any of its characteristics. However, on another way of understanding what I know when I know what a prime number is, I can no more know this without understanding the variety of relevant proofs establishing its characteristic attributes than I can know what chairs are without direct or indirect commerce with chairs, e.g., with sitting on them. Mathematical proof thus corresponds to the everyday practical procedures for establishing the identity and acquiring knowledge of the objects of sensory experience. Frege’s Begriffsschrift was designed to make available to the eye, synoptically, let us say, what is contained in a proof, and so what is contained in the concept that a given proof illuminates. So it is also possible to imagine the concept’s immediate synoptic presence to the mind, perhaps facilitated by having the full set of proofs pertaining to its properties set out before one in something like the pictorially perspicuous script of Frege’s Begriffsschrift.

Along these lines, one might think that there are two ways of thinking about what it is to know something like a form, one involving knowing it immediately, through something like intellectual intuition, and another involving knowing its discursive structure, i.e., its definition and its relation to other forms. However, there is also a

---

sense in which these are not, and cannot be, two ways of knowing the same thing, but are instead two distinct avenues of epistemic approach to distinct but related kinds of thing. I want to suggest that concepts are the cognitively interposed media through which we can come to know forms, though it may not be the only way we can do so. In short, Plato believes that it is through concepts that we can come to know or to recollect their corresponding forms. Frege believes the same thing, but he only believes in two forms, the True and the False.

In the Parmenides, Plato has yet to discover that the puzzle to which methexis was to have provided a solution, a puzzle stemming from the problem of the one and the many, could only be resolved in terms of the mediating domain of concepts. Nonetheless, having run twice into the same sort of difficulty trying to define the participation relation, Plato pursues a new starting point in the second half of the dialogue in which the assumption of logical and metaphysical parity between forms and participants is simply suspended, along with an insistence on their being bound together by participation. Plato sets aside the project of explaining the participation relation, and seems to follow the more modest course of delineating what relations one can and must make out between something that stands as a One to its instantiations and those many instantiations. Since any form stands as a One in relation to the many it serves to explain, this exploration and its results may be taken as a schema for any form and this is precisely how Parmenides presents things, taking up the hypothesis of the One after
considering Likeness (*homoiotēs*), Motion (*kinēsis*) and Rest (*stasis*), etc., as possible starting points for the sort of “gymnastic training” (*hē gymnasia*) he urges upon Socrates.\(^\text{40}\)

Although the language and logic of *original* and *copy*, *semblance* or *image* will continue to frame explanations of the connection between *forms* and participants, the second half of the *Parmenides* will begin from the other end, so to speak. Instead of trying to define the participation relation, and work out the consequences of one definition or another, Plato elects instead to specify the relevant logical and metaphysical connections a participation relation will have to account for. In particular, what he explores are the manifold relations of difference and identity that can be made out between these two disparate ontological domains.

In other words, what occurs in the second part of the dialogue is an examination of what follows from the claim that a unit *form* exists or does not, with or without regard to the possible existence of the many or others (*ta alla*) that might participate in it. These two claims – that the One exists, and that it does not – are thus treated as the antecedents of conditionals whose consequents are to be determined, yielding four hypotheses, two concerned exclusively with the One, and two with its participants. These four hypotheses, in turn, split into eight deductions, each hypothesis yielding a pair of contradictory results, depending, as I will try to show, on whether the subject

\(^{40}\) *Parmenides* 136b5.
term is approached as predicatively or ontologically closed or open, that is, whether it is treated categorically or syncategorically, in a sense that can be seen to apply indifferently to the domains of logic and ontology. In its traditional, scholastic sense, a categorematic expression – paradigmatically, the subject or predicate term of a categorical proposition – is semantically autonomous. A syncategorematic term, on the other hand, only signifies in combination with a categorematic one. Analogously, anything whose determination depends upon another may be thought of as ontologically syncategorematic.41

This logical structure becomes more explicit in the second set of hypotheses (5-8), which argue from the meanings of the elements of the proposition used to express the non-existence of the one, i.e., the one is not, and the apophatic character of this proposition changes matters significantly, because, I would suggest, the occurrence of negation indicates the irreducible discursivity of the subject term. Plato, in a rather startling anticipation of Frege, seems to recognize this as requiring us to consider the extension (or intension) of the subject term in the context of the proposition in which it occurs. Though it might seem counterintuitive at first blush, the fact that the existence of the subject is denied, while the meaningfulness of the negative proposition remains intact, suggests, at the very least, the semantic independence of the proposition.

41 Robert Turnbull offers an analogous way of dividing the eight deductions in terms of a Parmenidean and a Platonic “version” of the four basic hypotheses. The Parmenidean version “requires that there be no predication at all,” whereas the Platonic version “allows for predication, indeed, introduces duality (of One and Being), throughout everything,” See Turnbull, The Parmenides and Plato’s Late Philosophy, 5.
The link to Frege’s *context principle* should not be entirely surprising, as the distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic terms already indicates the interrelationship between standalone and semantically dependent elements: the meaning of a syncategorematic term can only be determined within the context of the composite expression formed in combination with a suitable categorematic term. The categorematic-syncategorematic distinction itself has been linked to Frege’s distinction between saturated and unsaturated expressions,42 the latter associated most consistently with Frege’s conception of the concept as an open function, essentially one that yields propositions, the basic unit of semantic determinacy for Frege. It seems that Frege’s distinction and the distinction recognized by scholastic logicians represent the same, or similar, fundamental insight that there are expressions within the context of a proposition that signify *incompletely or indefinitely*, yet provide for the coherence or unity of judgment or of the proposition, which semantically transcends the designative properties of its parts. It is instructive for our purposes that Frege speaks of the “predicative character of the concept” as “a special case of the need of supplementation, [i.e., its *unsaturatedness*],”43 since he captures in more explicit terms


what Plato is struggling to make sense of, and so addresses succinctly an idea
explored at much greater depth, if more obscurely, by Hegel.

The point here, however, is that this idea of a composite unity distinct from the
simple unity of a form itself, or the seemingly intractable relation of a form to its
participants, is already evident to Plato in the Parmenides, though it is perhaps Boethius
who first touches on it explicitly.\(^4^4\) If this establishes a link between Plato and Frege, as I
argue in Chapter 3, it also connects this observation in Plato to a central drive of Hegel’s
logic, i.e., the overcoming of the syncategorematic. I want to make the further hazard
that we see in this alternation between categorematic and syncategorematic terms a
more profound metaphysical modulation between forms and concepts, the former
being fundamentally categorematic, the latter fundamentally syncategorematic, the
implication being that syncategorematicity is fundamentally conceptual. This discussion
in Plato also anticipates, without explicitly articulating, the distinction he will make, in
the Sophist, between the paratactic listing of names and the syntactic integration of a
predicative proposition. Finally, I want to suggest that we see here an exploration of
different way of construing a term logic, according to which the terms of a categorical

\(^{44}\) Boethius, for example, already anticipates a broader notion of syncategorematicity, though he speaks
instead of consignification, according to which any term that signifies indefinitely (requiring some further
determination to signify determinately) would count as syncategorematic. See Boethius’ Commentarii in
Librum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias, ed. C. Meiser (Leipzig: Teubner, 1887, 1880) which I discuss in Chapter
2.
proposition are each completed, so to speak, by the copula that joins them. But first things first.

It will be enough to establish this insight in the *Parmenides* to look at the first two deductions, since this should make it clear how the other cases are to be handled. I will also look at the fifth deduction, the first to proceed from a negative, *apophatic* hypothesis, since it both confirms the reading I am suggesting and establishes a clear philosophical connection to the discussion of negation in the *Sophist*. The first two affirmative or *kataphatic* deductions proceed from the proposition that “the One is,” the first deducing its non-existence, the second its existence, along with the existence of *the many*. In the first deduction, the subject term, “the One” is treated categorematically, that is, as predicatively or propositionally closed. In essence, although syntactically propositional, “The One is” is semantically concatenative - “the one, is.” The predicate “is” is thus taken as applying externally to a subject that is considered determined independently of its predicative complement, and, since according to its internal determination as a singular unity the One cannot admit of parts, change, temporality, spatiality, etc., or any other property, it turns out to be intrinsically cut off from the copula itself. Since there is nothing that it *is*, it *isn’t* anything that is,

---


46 The literature on the *Parmenides* is vast and inconclusive, and taking account of even a small portion of it is quite beyond the scope of this discussion.
from which it follows that “there’s no name for it nor account, nor... any knowledge of it, nor perception, nor opinion.” If there is nothing for it to be distinguished from, i.e., that it is not, in other words, including its name or any cognitive or semantic relation to it, the proposition “One is” stalls at the outset. If it cannot be drawn into the rudimentary relation with the copula, naming itself is foreclosed. As Hegel will put this point in the first section of the *Science of Logic*, entitled the *Doctrine of Being*,

we can see how, starting from this proposition [that the One is], [Plato] performs the transition to the non-being of the One. It happens by way of a comparison between the two determinations of the presupposed proposition, namely of “the One is.” This proposition contains “the One” and “being”; but “the one is” contains more than when one only says “the One.” In this, in their being distinguished, the moment of negation is demonstrated. This approach to the proposition as a “comparison of the two determinations,” though it occurs in the first part of the *Science*, belongs, from Hegel’s perspective, to the second part, the *Doctrine of Essence*, because it is only here that anything like the distinction between something and its being, let alone some *kind* of thing and its contingent instances, can be accounted for. Indeed, Hegel’s point is that despite the seeming elementary character of the proposition in question it throws us into the midst of the propositional divide within the concept itself, if not quite into the domain of judgment proper. This is the point of Hegel’s remark a few lines later that “the dialectical treatment of the One in the *Parmenides* must also be regarded rather as a dialectic of

47 *Parmenides* 142a4-5.

external *reflection*.” Reflection in the strict logical sense is the quasi-determinative relation between *essence* and *instance*, and as such, I would like to suggest, provides us with a way of understanding what stands in for the relation of participation at this stage of Plato’s thought.

If the moment of external, abstract negation is revealed in the first deduction, isolating the One from its predicative complement, the moment of internal negation is revealed in the second, for it is here, from the same proposition, that Plato, in joining the *being* of the One to the One, conjoins its unicity with what is *not* its unicity, i.e., its being, and thus ushers in the multitude of characteristics and instances to which it is predicatively bound: its being in motion, at rest, whole, partial, in itself, in another, etc. The fundamental difference here is that the One is now treated syncategorematically, as semantically and ontologically bound to its determinations, from which it also removed, since it is also *non-identical* to them.

A quick look at the first of the four *apophatic* hypotheses, i.e., the fifth hypothesis, that “The One is not,” confirms this reading, and tells us still more about how Plato sees the role of negation. While we begin, again, with a categorematic construal of the subject, the apophatic hypothesis yields what would appear to be the consequence of predicative engagement, and thus seems to proceed from a syncategorematic standpoint. The reason for this is simple, if surprising, and goes to the

---

heart of the discursive character of negation: Parmenides argues that because the
proposition “The One is not (to hen mē esti)” can be understood, and, in being
understood, is differentiated from the contrary proposition (tounantion), that “not-One
is not (mē hen mē esti),” or from any other negative existential, such as “largeness is not
(megethos mē esti),” and since these propositions only differ with respect to their
subject terms, their subject terms, despite the hypothetical assertion of their non-
existence, must be different or other (heteron) rather than non-existent, since, by
presumption, all non-existent things, properly speaking, are identical nothings. The
negative existential thus compels us to consider the internal, contextual operation of
negation.

What is surprising is that the resolution of the problem of empty reference Plato,
through Parmenides, proffers here seems to foreshadow, if not presuppose, the
doctrine of negation as difference/otherness presented in the Sophist.50 Making sense of
the negative existential requires starting from the context of the proposition, since its
hypothetical truth cannot be derived from a non-existent subject, and this shift in
semantic grounding is marked by a shift from direct to indirect speech, i.e., from “if the

50 This passage, amongst other considerations, has prompted Kenneth Sayre to place the Parmenides after the Sophist in the order of composition. See Kenneth Sayre, “Dialectic by Negation in Three Late Dialogues,” in Reading Ancient Texts Volume I: Presocratics and Plato, edited by Suzanne Stern-Gillet & Kevin Korrigan (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 189-212. The absence of any explicit reference to the account of predication found in the Sophist makes this a doubtful hypothesis in my view. It seems to me more likely that Plato may have arrived at the view of apophasis in terms of difference before both dialogues and explored this view first in more metaphysical and then in more logical terms in the Parmenides and Sophist, respectively.
one is not”\textsuperscript{51} to “saying whether the one is not”\textsuperscript{52} and here the problem to which the Sophist will turn more directly, announces itself: the problem of saying what is not, understood here, as it will be initially addressed in the Sophist, as a problem of semantic analysis, of saying what it means to say (that) something is not.

What it apparently means, in the first place, is that the One is independently known (gnōston), that it is nonetheless in a certain state, or, more literally, disposed in a certain way (houtōs echei).\textsuperscript{53} In other words, the hypothesis tells us what every apophatic proposition tells us fundamentally, namely, that something is differentiated in some way. The relevant antecedent, “if One is not,” amounts to the hypothesis that “whatever is not is other than the different things.”\textsuperscript{54} One must already be differentiated, and thus is recognized (gnōston), by which Plato appears to mean that it is cognized and so designated, but the reason for its being known is obscure, unless the not (mē) tells us something about the preceding One, namely that it is distinguished from the copula that would connect to it and thereby from the others, i.e., the determinations with which the copula would establish its association.

\textsuperscript{51} Parmenides 137c4.

\textsuperscript{52} Parmenides 160c1.

\textsuperscript{53} Parmenides 161e4.

\textsuperscript{54} Parmenides 160c5-6.
Section Three. *The Sophist*: The Metaphysical Ground of the Concept

And now we are in position to see why, in turning to Plato’s *Sophist*, before discovering its central concern with the discursive (or predicative) interval, it is concerned not merely with falsehood, or with speech as such, but with the grounding relation of participation. The problem of negation first arises in the *Sophist* over the problem of falsehood, over what Plato glosses as *saying the things that are not* (*legein ta mē onta*), and so it is with this formula that we must first concern ourselves. The formula directly alludes to Parmenides’ notorious proscription cited earlier in the text against precisely this, i.e., *legein ta mē onta*, and predictably, the difficulty turns out to be implicated in truth as well, in saying *what is* (*ta onta*), as Parmenides had long before noted, and as Plato himself devotes some time to acknowledging in the *Parmenides*.

Parmenides’ great poem had treated of non-being, without addressing negation or predication directly, but behind his infamous proscription of talk or thought of *what is not* (*to mē eon*),\(^{55}\) lies a recognition of the same collocation: if “being and thinking are the same (*to gar auto noein esti te kai einai*)”,\(^{56}\) and “all being is simultaneous, coterminous (*nun esti homou pān*),”\(^{57}\) homogenous (*homoion*)\(^{58}\) and indivisible (*oude*...
predication is impossible because every claim beyond that of attributing
being to being is necessarily a foray into what is not simply being, and is thus non-being.
Plato’s attempt to abide, in part, by Parmenides’ proscription, to ground predicative talk
or thought in forms of the same ontological purity as Parmenides’ One, one for each
relevant predicate, so to speak, is finally shown in the Parmenides to run into similar
difficulties: the ontological transcendence of each form, each a One, so to speak,
isolates it from the very attribution it is supposed to sustain; any relevant association
with its participant many robs it of its formal character, determines it as a non-form. The
predicative relation, Plato will discover, depends upon a kind of negative intercalation of
the many into the one, which is the proper meaning of Plato’s formula, legein ta mê
onta (saying things that are not).

But to return to the initial problem, on the extensionalist model of speech that
Plato begins with, and in terms of which the problem of false speech first arises, the
meaning of any simple expression (onoma) is given by its extension, whatever that
expression picks out in the world (whether it be the world of intelligible forms, or
noēmata, or that of material objects) and the meaning of any complex expression (a
sentence, for example) is given by the extensions of the simple expressions comprising
it, roughly speaking. Extensions, moreover, are directly expressed, or mirrored, as the
locution “speaking the things that are/are not” (legein ta onta/ta mê onta) seems to

---

59 Parmenides B 8.22.
suggest. Such talk accords with standard usage in Greek, but the underlying semantics can be seen to lead to impasse on a number of fronts, and in relation to false speech in particular. If the meaning of any expression is given by its extension, then if false speech, i.e., speaking what is not, is indeed speech and not mere babble, then what it says (legein), i.e., "the things that are not (ta mē onta), exist somehow," which is to say that false speech implies the being of non-beings.

The onomastic conception of meaning is clear here: every element of any expression and every complex expression, including that of the proposition, functions more or less as a name. This conception is also thus inherently atomistic: the question raised about the meaning of the copula "is," and the location of the problem of falsehood in the negative particle ou or mē, make this clear. Given such an approach to semantics, it would seem that the most obvious meaning, i.e., extension, of negation, "not," whether applied nominally or sententially, is itself non-being, just as being is the most obvious referent of "is." Plato’s solution to the problem of falsehood will involve moving beyond this semantics of naming (onomazein) and its atomistic treatment of negation. For if speaking falsely is just naming what is not, then it does seem to be a variety of speech that necessarily miscarries, and thus certifies its own inexistence.

---

60 Constructions involving legein/epein plus an accusative object are common in Greek, e.g., legein ti (saying something), epos epein (to speak a word/speech), an internal or cognate accusative construction frequent in Homer.

61 Sophist 240e3-5.
However, it is Plato’s own analysis of the formula, *legein ta mē onta*, that leads directly to the overturning of the semantic model it serves. We can rule out three possible ways of construing this formula at once: (1) using the phrase “*ta mē onta,*” (2) speaking [of] negative facts, or (3) speaking [of] negative things or beings. (1) is ruled out because using the phrase "*ta mē onta*" is neither sufficient nor necessary for uttering a falsehood. The second and third are ruled out for similar reasons. If one thinks there are such things as negative facts (2), or things (3), talk of them need hardly involve one in falsehood. “There are no ten-foot ants” is likely true, and if what makes this true is the fact that there are no ten-foot ants then talking about such non-existent things is consistent with saying something true while saying *ta mē onta*. Similarly, there are non-Americans living in America, and declaring this about non-Americans is saying something true, not false. On the other hand, if one is convinced such things do not exist and that *all* talk of things that do not exist is false (a view we will have occasion to consider at some later point), the converse of the view that all false speech is directed towards non-existent things, then (2) and (3) will always amount to speaking falsely. However, this would simply amount to one variety of falsehood, and, more importantly, Plato doesn't express the view here or anywhere else that using such expressions automatically involves one in falsehood. In fact what he does ultimately say about negative expressions contradicts any such view.
This leaves us with the following possible construals of the formula: (4) claiming [to be the case] what is not the case, (5) speaking [of] things that are not, and (6) speaking [of] non-beings. If (4) seems to be the most obviously relevant sense to assign here, that is only because it accords with contemporary philosophical intuition about what falsehood is. But it says both more and less than Plato's formula, *legein ta mē onta*, would seem to imply. It says more, because it says that falsehood involves a kind of contradiction: saying $P$, when $\sim P$ is the case. It says less, because it does not capture what Plato considers crucial to falsehood, and what generates paradox, namely that we in fact speak (of) or refer to what is not, not just that we speak of what is not the case. The difference here between a fact, the circumstance we might take to correspond to a proposition, and a thing, the being or non-being we might think the possible extension of an expression or referring term, is crucial to keep in mind, since part of what is at issue here is what kind of ontological commitment speaking implicates one in.

It is thus only (5) and possibly (6) that seem to capture what *more* the problem with falsehood might be. The initial problem, as Plato seems to frame it, concerns our talk counting as talk, or our propositions counting as propositions, when extension or reference fails. For example, if it is false that Theaetetus is flying, then it isn't clear that there's anything I'm referring to when I declare that he is, and if there isn't anything I'm referring to, if what I'm attempting to refer to doesn't exist (5) or is (in some manner
that falls short of *being*) a kind of non-being (6), then my talk is not merely false but empty, and so isn't talk at all.

Now we might wonder why the consequence just canvassed would be so troublesome to Plato. Could he not simply accept the notion that only true speech is truly speech, that false speech is not in fact speech at all? The Sophist would then turn out to be someone who, though he appears to be speaking, does not speak at all, and, perhaps more dramatically, it would turn out that most, in fact all, of us only succeed in speaking some of the time, i.e., when what we say is true. One obvious problem with such an account is that most of what we call speech will have to be disqualified as speech, depending on how strictly we construe the criteria of truth. In addition, whether we are speaking or not will regularly depend upon circumstances beyond our mere *utterance* of linguistically recognizable sounds, for indeed employing the same sentence, e.g., "Theaetetus is sitting," when Theaetetus is sitting and later when he is not will qualify the first, but disqualify the second instance, as speech. Perhaps more seriously, it would void the distinction between true and false speech, and discredit speech as a or the natural locus of truth, since it isn't clear what we might mean by a sentence's or utterance's being true if there weren't any other kinds of sentences or utterances. My contention, however, is that it is not because, or not primarily because, such an account runs against our intuitions about the nature of truth and language that Plato feels compelled to solve the conundrum of speaking *what is not*, but because in a sense to be
made clear, all speech involves *legein ta mē onta*.

Plato’s argument proceeds from an analysis of false speech, to negative expressions and speech as such, to the extent that these involve *meaning* or naming what is not, *legein ta mē onta*, and thus fail of reference. (Because the extensional drift is so strong for Plato, as for Aristotle and Boethius, the distinction, loosely speaking, between object language and metalanguage is nowhere made explicit.) He argues that we can avoid violating the Parmenidean proscription (*aporrhesis*) against speaking of non-being, and so preserve reference to fundamental *forms*, and thus to anything that falls under them, which is to say *everything* else. We can do so by recognizing that the extension, the ontological correlate, of the negative particle, here, whether nominal or sentential (*mē* or *ou*, respectively), is *otherness* or *difference* (*to heteron/thateron*) rather than contrariety (*t’anantion*), and so that negation generates difference rather than non-being:

Then whenever the negative (*apophasis*) is said to signify (*sēmainei*) a contrary (*enantion*) [of being], we won’t grant it, but only this: that "non" and "not" (*to mē kai to ou*), when placed before the names that come after them, disclose (*mēnuei*) something other than those names, or rather something other (*ti tôn allōn*) than the things (*pragmata*) to which the names uttered after the negative are set forth (*ke-ētai*).62

Once this is granted, the problem of extensional failure that seems to have beset false speech is apparently resolved.

62 *Sophist* 257b8-c2.
This solution works, however, only to the extent that we can make out a
difference between otherness and contrariety, such that saying what is different from
being speech is not tied to non-being. The immediate treatment of otherness seems to
sidestep this issue, inasmuch as it is assigned to the pantheon of highest forms and so
vouchsafed its being, but we shall have cause to return to this matter at the close of this
chapter. The semantics of negation is arrived at through an examination of the
semantics of speech as such, and in particular the ontological import of predicative
speech, which, as Parmenides and Plato both insist, revolves around the problem of the
one and the many, the focus of the Parmenides, as we have seen. The stranger
introduces the issue in terms of the character of everyday attribution:

We speak of man, I suppose, but name him many things (poll’ atta eponomazontes):
we add colors to him and shapes, etc... In all these attributions and thousands of
others we declare him to be not only man but also good and infinitely many other
things. And the same holds for other things as well: we assume that each thing is
one, but take it back by speaking of it as many and with many names.\textsuperscript{63}
The analysis of attribution, of saying many of one, leads to an observation about what
licenses attribution, which in turn leads to a discussion of the relationship between the
basic kinds of things to which everything we speak about must be related, and to the
relations between those most general kinds themselves: being, motion, rest, and
eventually otherness and sameness.

\textsuperscript{63} Sophist 251a8-b4.
The conclusion of this analysis is that everything we speak or think about as a subject of attribution or identification is both one and many, and in a number of senses, but most importantly in the two complementary senses that it is an instance of a kind or form and that it is possessed of and identified by and with its attributes, with which it is, in both cases, non-identical, and non-identical because it is also a totality of all sorts of other things (both essentially and accidentally) with which totality no other instance of that kind, nor the kind itself, is identical. An instance, or merely a particularization, of a kind or form, as a matter of definition, is not that kind or form itself, though its identity derives from that kind or form. The problem (explicitly inaugurated in Plato’s Parmenides) lies in making sense of instantiation, explaining what it means for an instance or particularization to be an instance of a kind, whether this amounts to nominal or attributive exemplification, such that it is not identical to that kind or any other of its instances. One wants an account of how things are to be thought of as ones, as individuals, and how these ones are to be connected to the essential and accidental attributes they may share with others. The issue is thus at once logical and metaphysical. Every declarative proposition represents an attempt to draw multiplicity into unity, to conceive identity in difference.

The upshot of this discussion is that everything we regularly speak or think of, and, more importantly, all the forms that make such talk or thought possible, insofar as they are capable of discursive engagement involve things that are not (ta mē onta), and
thus all legein is legein ta mē onta, because non-being (to mē on), itself a genus (genos), is, as he puts it “dispersed (diesparmenon) amongst all things that are (panta ta onta).” The relationship between forms and their participants, i.e., the transient objects of perception and everyday speech, is explicitly treated in discussing the battle between the friends and enemies of forms. And it is here already, in reformulating their relationship to one another, that the form of negation, i.e., difference (to heteron), will be introduced as integral to the interconnection of forms, though the interconnection of forms is in turn established on the basis of the demands of cognition.

Stranger: And you declare that with the body (sōmati), through sensing (dia aisthēseōs), we commune (koinōnein) with becoming (genesei), while with the soul (psychēi), through reasoning (dia logismou), we stand in relation to genuine being (pros tēn ontōs ousian), which always persists in just the same condition, while becoming is in a different condition at different times. If it is through reason that speech arises, as Plato regularly insists, then statements (logoi) about transient, indeterminate particulars must involve their translation into the proper objects of rational understanding, i.e., forms, and we might well suppose that such statements are expressions of this translation, and that it is through such translation that a given subject is rationally determined. Plato goes on to argue that if forms are indeed so employed in cognition, then they cannot be unchanging (akinēta), and that if they are changeable, then they are not simple, self-same verities, but are

64 Sophist 260b7-8.

instead riven by negation and hence by non-being, even if this will finally be understood as difference or otherness from being. The argument extends over several pages, but, in brief, runs as follows:

(1) The cognition (to gignōskein) of forms, i.e., ta onta, and their being cognized (to gignōskesthai) is what is meant by the communion of the soul with what is (hē ousia) properly speaking.

(2) Communing (koinōnein) is “a being affected (pathēma) or a doing (poiēma) that comes to be (gignomenon) out of some power (ek dunameōs) and from the coming together of things, one against the other (apo tōn pros allēla suniontōn).”

(3) Cognition of the forms and their being cognized are kinds of doings (poiēmata) and happenings (pathēmata), respectively.

(4) If forms are unchangeable (akinēta) and always self-same, then they are unknowable, as Plato puts it, “there is mind (nous) in nothing, about nothing, nowhere.”

(5) On the other hand, if forms are “carried about and moving” (pheromena kai kinoumena), then they are also unknowable, since the objects of thought are necessarily self-same.

(6) If forms are cognizable, they are necessarily changeable (kinēta), and so participate in both the form of change/motion (kinēsis) and that of rest (stasis).

(7) To the extent that each form is cognizable it thus participates in both change and rest, yet because each, apart from the forms of change or rest themselves, is also not either change or rest, respectively, and each is, in addition, although not being itself, each participates in otherness and non-being.

Plato’s insight consists in seeing that precisely what makes falsehood possible is also what makes the many the many, and ultimately what makes speech possible,

---

66 Sophist 248b5-8.

67 Sophist 249b5-6.

68 This conclusion is finally reached much later at 256d9-e4.
namely, the \textit{other-than-itself}, and the negation that expresses this, that makes anything susceptible to determination or predication so susceptible.\textsuperscript{69} Parmenides had argued as much about the character of speech as such on the basis of the fact that anything predicated of a subject is either identical to it or not, and if not identifies that subject with what is \textit{non-identical} to it, and thus \textit{is not}. Parmenides concluded that this required us to refrain from predication, to foreclose the discursive interval, so to speak. Plato, on the other hand, sees that this simply requires us to provide a semantics of negation that makes speaking of non-being intelligible. Part of what we have to contend with here is the way in which speaking, including speaking about speaking, involves us in negation, whether or not we employ it formally or explicitly. Further, if being so susceptible is a condition of both truth and falsehood, it follows that the philosopher, or more precisely the philosopher’s engagement with truth, is under threat along with the nefarious being of the sophist.

To be clear, this is not because negation can be employed in true statements, i.e., in expressing negative truths like “Socrates is not a triangle,” but because it is an implicit part of every statement, because \textit{what is}, at least what “is said to be,” apart from \textit{being} as such (\textit{ousia}), which as such is \textit{undefined} and \textit{indefinable}, is \textit{defined} in

\textsuperscript{69} I set aside for the moment a distinction that emerges, without acknowledgement, between ascending extension to intelligible kinds, and descending extension to individuals and instances of those kinds. It will be Plotinus’ complaint about Aristotle’s categories that they apply to individuals of the sensible world, rather than to intelligible substance; Porphyry’s defense of Aristotle that he only intends them to apply to the former.
terms of general-particular, or kind-instance relations, which relations are in turn differentiated, or more properly divided, via negation. While Plato does not yet have at hand the Aristotelian formula of the tode ti, his analysis of the basic form of speech or thought (logos) places something like the divided configuration of a tode ti at the heart of things. Conversely, with Aristotle’s rejection of negation as a constitutive element of differentiation, the logico-metaphysical configuration of the Aristotelian tode ti remains opaque.

And thus the ultimate philosophical focus of this dialogue is not the narrow one of falsehood, nor simply speech as such, but the logic, and hence the metaphysics, of conceptualization that grounds discursive speech and thought. However, if legein ta mē ontai, as a fact about the semantics of speech, is involved not just in speaking falsely but in speaking as such, then it cannot in the end be identified with falsehood either, as Plato first suggests. Plato's aim in this dialogue, as it turns out, is to recover the possibility of thought and speech from the predations of negation apparent in falsehood, while preserving the distinction between true and false speech, without which philosophy would seem to be impossible. What he ends up discovering, according to the reading I am defending, is that that thought and speech are, properly speaking, discursive, and that this derives from the cloven structure of ordinary and transcendent names (onomata) or the concepts they designate.

In the first section of the Phenomenology, Hegel makes this point, in relation to
the demonstrative *this*, that it acquires meaning, beyond its universal application, in the penumbra of negations it elicits. In its attempt at immediacy it demonstrates its mediation through negation, and in so doing exemplifies the "*Now that has been* (gewesenes)" which he identifies with the "truth of being." This should recall for us, more than anything else, Aristotle's puzzling expression for essence, *to ti ēn einai*, literally *the being of what was*, which in binding the present of an articular infinitive (*to einai*) to an imperfective mode of the *ti esti* formula (*ti ēn*) suggests the confounding (in)accessibility of the past in the present. The ensuing passage from the now that is, to its negation as the now that has been, to the now reinstated through the negation of the now that has been, exemplifies, for Hegel, the ineliminable dialectic of cognition, language and consciousness. Hegel puts it as follows: "The ‘this’ is therefore posited as *not this*; that is, as sublated, and thereby as not nothing but as a determinate nothing, that is, as a *nothing of a specific content*, namely, of the ‘this.’"70 If Hegel sees in the use of the demonstrative the gap and interplay between the universality of the sign and the fleeting singularity of the extension, Plato certainly anticipates him in recognizing the place of negation in this interplay, and thus the dialectical governance of conceptual organization. For Plato, as we shall see, momentarily, that dialectic is the captured in the method of division.

But before turning to division, let us ret *Phenomenology Phenomenology* urn to

---

Plato’s solution to the problem of intrinsic negation. Plato, recall, argues that in specifying the meaning of false speech, and in determining the meaning of ordinary speech, the *mē* or *ou* involved in semantic explanation is to be understood as *difference* (to *heteron*), allowing us to reparse the phrase “*ta mē onta*” as “what are different from what is.” Every individual kind or form,71 in particular, is differentiated as such by participation in difference (to *heteron*), in the first place from its mere being, and as such is a specific, differentiated *kind* by virtue of not being identical to its mere being, or to the genus *being*. As Plato phrases it:

> with respect to all kinds (*genē*), the nature (*physis*) of *difference*, by producing each as *other* (*heteron*) than Being, makes each not-being (*ouk on*),” the nature of this *portion* (*morion*) of difference, i.e., difference in relation to being, being not-being.72

Plato’s claim, however, turns out to be not merely that *difference*, the alleged extension of the negative particle, differentiates every kind by distinguishing it from being, but that it does so by differentiating each kind from every other with respect to its *being*:

> we showed that the nature (*physis*) of *difference* (*thateron*) is and that it is chopped up and distributed through all the things that are in their relation to one another,

71 Plato refers to *being*, *difference*, *stasis*, etc., both as *kinds* (*genē*) and as *forms* (*eidē*), which might of course tell us something about how he regards *forms*, but his so doing doesn’t on its own tell us that he is no longer talking about the sorts of things he has tended to refer to as *forms*. On the other hand, the discussion of a *gigantomachia* between the partisans of *becoming* and the “friends of the *forms*” (*hoi tôn eidōn philoi*), and the stranger’s remark that the latter consider true being (*alēthinēn ousian*) to be “certain thought-things (*noêta*) and incorporeal forms (*asōmata eidē*),” suggests that an important part of what is at issue here is precisely the ontological character of such *forms*.

72 **Sophist** 256b1-9.
and we dared to say about each portion of this nature, in *its opposition to Being*, that this very portion is in its very being Non-being.\textsuperscript{73}

The connection between semantics and metaphysics is made still more vivid by a later passage that repeats the stipulation concerning the negative particle just cited in metaphysical terms, i.e., in terms of “that which is not,” stating that “that which is not” (*to mē on*) has “no less being than that which is in itself, and [that] it indicates not a contrary to that but... an other than it.”\textsuperscript{74}

However, it is only on the assumption of negation’s attaching directly not to the referring expression itself but to its *being* that one can make sense of the demand that what is thereby signified is *not* contrariety but difference. If not-beautiful did not amount to *not-being-beautiful*, it wouldn’t amount to a case of *legein ta mē onta*, and so wouldn’t require an alternative semantics for negation. This should be kept in mind once we turn to Boethius, who will argue instead, following Aristotle, that *contrariety*, and not contradiction, is what enables us to differentiate species, precisely because *negation* attaches to the *being* of an expression rather than the expression itself. The *good*, for example, is individuated by virtue of its relation, amongst other *forms*, not to non-bad, but to *not-being-bad*. In other words, negation’s point of attachment, so to speak, is always the *specific being* of the kind or *form* named. But why does Plato think this?

\textsuperscript{73} *Sophist* 258d9-e3.

\textsuperscript{74} *Sophist* 258b3-4.
It should be clear from what has been said that as long as legein is understood extensionally, as simple naming (onomazein), falsehood cannot consist merely in legein ta mē onta, since it would follow that speech as such is in some respect false, and Plato clearly wishes to avoid this implication. It should be clear, that is, that the legein involved in false speech cannot be identified with onomazein. While the semantics of negation as difference gives us the basic framework for making sense of referring to things that are not (ta mē onta), the discursive splitting of the concept through the operation of negation leads to a problem of the unity of the concept, so-called to associate it with, yet differentiate it from, its better known congener, the problem of the unity of the proposition, to which it is nonetheless logically and historically prior. To take Plato's example, the problem involved in seeing how "Theaetetus sits" differs from "Theaetetus," "sits" (one way of putting the problem of the unity of the proposition) is that by merely naming the subject and predicate one has not succeeded in naming the relation supposed to hold between them, because indeed there is no name furnished to do so.

75 There has been much written of late on the unity of the proposition, and rather different, yet in the end all unsatisfactory solutions, to the problem have been offered. The most notable of these are Donald Davidson's Truth and Predication (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), Martha Gibson's From Naming to Saying: The Unity of the Proposition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), and Richard Gaskin's The Unity of the Proposition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
But even if there were, the relation between that first relation and each of the names or terms flanking it would not have been named, and so on. Plato's solution, however, the fact that what is said is *about*, literally *of*, its subject, namely Theaetetus, introduces a further problem, since what the statement is about in part depends upon what we take the actual relation between the referents of its constituent parts to be. This, I take it, is why the stranger's second example is not "Theaetetus flies," but "Theaetetus, with whom I am now conversing, flies." If I am right, then the problem here lies in the fact that the concept of Theaetetus, if there is one, is riven by negation. It is a composite of concepts that are and are not identical to it, and unless we know what makes that composite a whole we cannot tell how any attributive property ascribed to it relates to it, or, more profoundly, what concept or thing it is that that property is being ascribed to.\(^{76}\) This problem, however, persists well beyond Plato, and can be seen to haunt Fregean and post-Fregean semantics as well.

\(^{76}\) However, it should be noted that a version of the difficulty involved here can be generated even if negation is left out of the equation, and perhaps independently of any other specific semantic constraints but this: that the meaning of a concept is given in part by the range of propositions in which it is directly or indirectly involved. One version of such a semantics is to be found in Frege, as grounded in a context *principle*, which has conceptual content dependent upon the propositional context, i.e., the propositions in which a concept is sensibly or truthfully employed. As Stephen Yablo has recently written in a paper entitled "Carving Content at the Joints" in *Things: Papers on Objects, Events and Properties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 246-268, it is the propositional context of use that enables us to refine our understanding of a given concept, to "carve" its contours." The passage in Frege runs as follows: "The judgment 'Line a is parallel to line b', in symbols: a \(\parallel\) b, can be taken as an identity. If we do this, we obtain the concept of direction, and say: 'The direction of line a is equal to the direction of line b'. Thus we replace the symbol by the more generic symbol =, through removing what is specific in the content of the former and dividing it between a and b. We carve up the content in a way different from the original way, and this yields us a new concept." See Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic: a Logico-Mathematical Enquiry into the Concept of Number*, trans. J. L. Austin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1980), §64.
And so, Plato’s stranger finally observes that the mere concatenation of “words spoken in sequence (synechōs legomena) do not amount to speech in the relevant sense,\(^{77}\) that falsity and truth only arise when a speech (logos), in the sense of an evaluable statement, moves beyond mere naming, and “places an end/boundary” (tī perainei), that is, “by weaving together verbs with names (symplekōn ta rhēmata tois onomasi),”\(^{78}\) or as he puts it a little latter “by putting together a thing and an action through a name and a verb (syntheis pragma praxeī di’ onomatōs kai rhēmatos),” i.e., when a nominal and a verbal expression (onoma and rhema) are combined in such a way that a unity is formed, that is, that the unit of a statement or proposition (logos) arises.\(^{79}\) Only when so constituted do “things uttered (ta phōnēthenta)...indicate (dēlōi) the action (praxia) or inaction (apraxia) or being (ōusia) of something that is (ontos) or is not (mē ontos).”\(^{80}\)

There are various ways we might conceive of this shift from an onomastic to a combinatorial model of speech and thought, and perhaps a comparison with Wittgenstein’s turn from the specular semantics of logico-metaphysical isomorphism set

\(^{77}\) Sophist 262b2-3.

\(^{78}\) Sophist 262d2-5.

\(^{79}\) Sophist 262e12.

\(^{80}\) Sophist 262c2-4.
forth in his *Tractatus* to one of autonomous and dynamic "forms of life" developed in the *Philosophical Investigations* is a helpful one.\(^8\) The simplicity of the former and its guarantee of veridicality are undercut by its artificiality (in particular its reliance on a pictorial correspondence between the logical features of language and the ontical features of the world). On the other hand, the more plastic conception of logico-epistemic practice that belongs to the latter model leaves questions of verification unanswerable. It may also be that the distinction Gilles Deleuze draws between a semantics of repetition, which replicates without mediation, and one of generality, which operates through symbolic approximation or resemblance, is more to the point.

In any event, Plato’s new *symplokē* or combinatorial model implies that nominal expressions and verbs on their own are incomplete elements of speech properly conceived. A *rhema*, as Plato construes it, is best understood as a predicate, that is, as anything that is said of the subject to which it is attached, including what will become the standard form of the predicate, the copula plus a noun or adjective. On the onomastic model, however, the grammatical distinction and the grammatical concord between *rhema* and *onoma* are logically inert. Each element of a candidate proposition simply *names* a discrete thing, and together they name a group of discrete things whose unity, if it has any, reduces to the fact that each is named in compact succession, e.g.,

---

\(^8\) An interesting comparison between Plato’s original theory of forms and Wittgenstein’s *Tractarian* semantics is first suggested by Elizabeth Anscombe, and was taken up more recently in a paper by Robert Pippin entitled "Negation and Not-being in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and Plato’s *Sophist*," Kant-Studien 70 (1979): 179-196.
Theaetetus, sits. But a string of referring expressions does no better at indicating anything true or false than a simple referring expression. Each functions as a name, the former as a complex name of a cluster of things, the latter as a simple name of an individual thing. Unless an utterance says of any one element that it belongs or does not belong, is or is not an attribute of, or is or is not identical to another the question of correctness, the question of adequacy or truth never arises.

Speech (logos) thus has to be understood as expressing a horizontal relation between a subject and predicate, and not just a vertical relation between expressions and their referents. What this amounts to, remember, is ti perainein, which is translated, for example, by Eva Bramm as "bringing something to closure." However, the phrase is surely more accurately and transparently translated as determining something, providing a peras, a limit, boundary or determination, with the indefinite pronoun ti functioning as an internal accusative. In addition, as we shall see in a moment, this way of formulating the aboutness condition allows us to see an important connection between predication and division. For the moment, it suffices to point out that by contrast a list of names determines nothing, since no distinction between what

---

82 Eva Brann’s translation of the Sophist is careful and thoughtful, but is also, despite its attempt at philosophical neutrality, profoundly tendentious. See Plato’s Sophist or The Professor of Wisdom: Translation, Introduction, and Glossary, trans. Eva Brann, Peter Kalkavage, and Eric Salem (Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library, 1996). In this case, however, her translation reflects the consensus of both translators and commentators, e.g., see Crivelli, Cornford. My suggested translation accords with Seth Benardete’s, who offers “puts a limit on something,” in his translation. See his The Being of the Beautiful: Plato’s Theaetetus, Sophist and Statesman. Translated and with Commentary (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), II.60. It also accords with the use of perainō elsewhere in Plato, e.g., Gorgias 472b8, Symposium 217c1–2, Republic 4. 426a2, Theaetetus 180a6–7.
is open and what constitutes a *peras*, between a syncategorematic element and its categorematic supplement, to recall our reading of the *Parmenides*, can be made out.

Yet clearly the requirement of grammatical and logical concord will not be sufficient either. “Athens reclines” combines elements of the proper categories, i.e., name and verb, and can be thought of as expressing a determination, a *peras*, of Athens. Yet it isn’t obviously either true or false, since it isn’t clear what it means at all, or how we would go about determining its truth value. On the other hand, though “Theaetetus sits” is an appropriately constituted *logos*, this fact simply tells us that it is susceptible to being true or false, or that it has a truth value. Knowing that it is grammatically and logically well formed does not tell us anything yet about how we might go about assessing its truth value. For this, the further condition of relatedness, of the involvement of two terms with one another, needs to be satisfied. In Plato’s initial formulation of this further condition, what must be expressed, as we just saw, is that of which an action, being, etc., is indicated, an *of which* that is either *something that is* (*on*) or a *something that is not* (*mē on*).

However, this formulation is puzzling, since it seems to suggest that non-existent objects, however understood, can be the subjects of predication. However, to return to the question of why Plato insists that negation attaches to the *being* of what it negates, *e.g.*, *not-being-beautiful*, we can make out an answer in this initial formulation: negation is attached to the *being* of what is negated, because its operation is directed to the
discursivity of the relevant concept, to its being x. When we negate an expression we are expressing its being different from some appropriate subject, i.e., not-being-beautiful is a way of expressing the predicative function or interval “...is not beautiful.” The initial formulation presents the predicative side of this interval, joining the copula, whether in its base or its negative form, to the subject of attribution: the aboutness of a proposition is represented by “… is” or “…is not,” which thus closes the interval between subject and attribute.

In its subsequent formulation, aboutness is given a more circumscribed characterization: “Whenever there is speech (logos), it's necessary that it be speech about/of something (tinos einai logon), and impossible for it not to be about anything (mē de tinos adunaton).”\(^{83}\) Once more, however, this represents a condition for being a statement, and thus a condition for being true or false, but not yet a condition for being one or the other. According to the analysis Plato will finally offer, “Theaetetus sits” is true just in case sitting is amongst the things that are about, or of, Theaetetus, the present interlocutor of the stranger. “Theaetetus flies,” on the other hand, is false of this same Theaetetus, but may possibly be true of an eponymously named bird, because while it says something that is other than, or different from, the things that are of Theaetetus, this something might be found amongst the things that are about our hypothetical bird. Now what about “Theaetetus is not flying.”? Plato doesn’t consider

\(^{83}\) Sophist 262e5-6.
negative statements here, whether true or false, but the general characterization of statements suggests that even these are to be thought of in terms of the appropriate sort of combination or symplexis. If what determines truth or falsity is whether or not what is said belongs to the things that are about the relevant subject, then our true negative statement will be true just in case it is to be found among the things that are of or about Theaetetus.

But how are we to understand this? In an earlier passage, Plato tells us that a statement (logos) is false “when it says that things that are not (ta onta mē einai), and that things that are not are (ta mē onta einai).”\(^\text{84}\) If our negative statement is true, it would seem it says (of) things that are not, that they are not. However, the aboutness requirement relativizes the semantic relation, and there are two ways of thinking of this:

(1) either not-flying is amongst the things that are about Theaetetus, or (2) flying is amongst the things that are not concerning Theaetetus. In either case, something that isn’t is, relative to Theaetetus, whether it is the specific non-being of non-flying or the general class of things that are not, vis a vis Theaetetus. At 263b11-12, however, Plato remarks that “there are many things that are, and many things that are not about each thing (peri hekaston einai),” which seems to point to the latter construal. “Theaetetus is not flying” is true just in case flying is one of the things that are not about Theaetetus.

What we want to know then, is what this relation amounts to. How, in other words,

---

\(^\text{84}\) Sophist 241a1-2.
does Theaetetus, or anything for that matter, bear a specific relation to what is not, or to what is?

What is on offer here is an ontological theory of truth, one that associates more complex expressions, such as may be identified with propositions, with what is [the case] as well, and thus sees propositional truth as derivative of and reducible to ontological truth. The truth of "Theaetetus is sitting," for example, is identifiable with what is the case concerning Theaetetus on the occasion of his sitting, just as the truth of "Theaeteus is a man" is identifiable with what is the case concerning Theaetetus upon the enduring circumstance of his being a man, but both are true not insofar as they correspond to what is, but because what they say is. Yet, the being of Theaetetus and man or sitting is not enough to guarantee the being of Theaetetus’ sitting or being a man. Sitting, or being a man, has to be connected to Theaetetus, a relation Plato expresses grammatically through the genitive case, with or without the preposition peri. Moreover, this aboutness relation itself is indifferent to the kind of connection involved, i.e., between the semantics of “Theaetetus is sitting” is true and that of "Theaeteus is a man." We want to say that both express what is about Theatetus, the former as a matter of circumstance, the latter as a matter of essence, yet nothing here allows to make out this distinction between accidental and essential predication. What is nonetheless clear, however, is that Plato thinks the analysis he has provided applies to both kinds of claims. At least there is not indication that he thinks otherwise.
The aboutness (peri tinos or tou) relation is an obvious precursor of Aristotle’s being said of something as subject (kath’ upokeimenou tinos legomenon) relation, although Plato makes no distinction between essential and accidental predication, or between individuals and universals, etc. However, Plato’s interest here lies not in cataloging the kinds of things that can enter into such a relation, but in saying how things’ being in that relation enables us to formulate statements (logoi) that are true or false. But of course what follows from the claim that something’s being in the appropriate relation to a subject of discourse is what it means for it to be true or false is that determining whether a statement is true or false involves determining whether or not it stands in the appropriate relationship, that is, determining whether what is said to be or not to be of a subject is in fact one of the things that are or are not of that subject.

Heidegger was surely right that in Plato’s insistence on the aboutness of propositions or statements, his adding to the accusative construction of legein ta onta a genitive one of legein tinos (speaking of something), one sees a recognition of intentionality as a fundamental feature of speech, though we need not follow Heidegger in thinking this is to abandon the reflective or apophantic model for a correspondence model of truth. What is implicitly conceded is that an apophantic

85 Sophist 262e6.

language of forms can never be directly about the sorts of individual particulars that language is supposed to grant us veridical access to: if ta onta properly speaking, i.e., the forms, are the proper extensions of such a language, then we certainly cannot employ the same language to speak of the particulars that instantiate these forms. To try to do so is to reconceive forms as predicable universals, i.e., as something closer to concepts, and it is in admitting nonbeing, in the guise of difference, into the domain of forms that this reconception is accomplished. The forging of concepts is thus driven by the demands of an analysis of discursive language that allows us to see the simple unity of things or beings through the multiplicity of their attributes, each of which is neither identical to any other nor to the being of which it is predicated.

I am suggesting that what we ought instead to see here is Plato recognizing the fundamental discursivity of speech and thought, in part autonomous in function, but metaphysically grounded in the way things are. As such, speech/thought is indeed, as Plato concludes in the Sophist, a species of the image-making (eidōlopoiikē) arts, the eikastic art of verisimilitude honed by the philosopher, and the phantasmatic one of illusion, honed by the sophist. But it is precisely because speech as such is not a system of forms, but a system of concepts, or conceptual forms of the Spencer-

87 This is a difficult claim to make out, because Plato, or rather the Eleatic stranger we take to speak in his stead, talks interchangeably about forms and beings as things and as things that are said. I believe it is nonetheless supported by the text.

88 Sophist 264c4-5.
Brownian variety, that it can be put to the ignoble use of fabrication that the
sophist’s success depends upon. The philosopher’s instrument of verification, of
ontological authentication, as it turns out, is precisely the method of division, the
method by which he will also be permitted to demonstrate the imposture of the sophist.

Section Four. Division, Negation and Predicative Form

The method of division (diairesis)\textsuperscript{89} is first mentioned in the Phaedrus,\textsuperscript{90} is
taken up again in the later Philebus,\textsuperscript{91} in the Sophist, where it appears to take center
stage, and in the Statesman. Because the most concise and earliest description of it
occurs in the Phaedrus, I begin with it:

SOCRATES: The first [stage/method] consists in seeing together (synorōnta) things
that are scattered everywhere and collecting them into one kind (eis mian te idean),
so that by defining each thing we can make clear the subject of any instruction we
wish to give...

PHAEDRUS: And what is the other thing you are talking about, Socrates?

SOCRATES: This, in turn, is to be able to carve through each kind according to its
forms/kinds along its natural joints (to palin kat’ eidē dunasthai diatemnein kat’

\textsuperscript{89} Plato sometimes refers to Prodicus of Ceos as a predecessor on matters concerning division, definition,
and more generally the topic of orthology, i.e., the correct employment of names or words. But aside
from a few attested titles none of Prodicus’ texts, nor any other similarly focused text prior to Plato, is
extant, and it is Plato who is Aristotle’s and Plotinus’ reference point, who in turn, though more
prominently Aristotle, inform the medieval tradition from Boethius onwards.

\textsuperscript{90} Phaedrus 265d-e.

\textsuperscript{91} On the connection between the Philebus, the Sophist, and earlier dialogues, D. Davidson’s dissertation
Plato’s Philebus (New York: Routledge, 2012) and G. Gadamer’s Plato’s Dialectical Ethics:
Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus, edited and translated by Robert M. Wallace
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) are of particular interest, though for different reasons.
arthra hēi pephuken), and to try not to splinter any part, as a bad butcher might do...⁹²

Socrates identifies two procedures here, the first that of seeing together, the second that of carving. The first involves moving from a dispersed plurality to a unifying form (idea), the second from a unit form to a natural plurality, kat’ arthra hēi pephuken, literally, according to the joints (arthra) in virtue of which it is naturally what it is.

Though these have typically been identified as the methods of collecting and dividing, respectively, it is important to note that the indeterminate plurality of the first method is not the regimented plurality of the second, and that the first is less clearly a method than a kind of cognitive rule, an instruction for properly concentrating the gaze of cognition (synorōnta) from the array of instances to the kind. The demand for the first is characteristic of Plato’s general approach to philosophy: identifying and defining the sort of thing in question, rather than cataloguing its instantiations. On the other hand, if arriving at a natural plurality appears to be required for applying the method of division, Plato’s practice, when employing the method, is rather to invoke the collection of instances within the course of, rather than prior to, pursuing the lines of division.⁹³

The general procedure of division is to articulate, for any kind (or class) under examination, the network of kinds under which it is subsumed and in terms of which it is

---

⁹² Phaedrus 265d4-266b4.

logically and ontologically determined. The method involves beginning with the
highest genus or kind to which the definiendum or explanandum belongs, and
*separating out*, along the divisions *natural* to each genus, first that highest genus,
typically dichotomously, and then all subordinate genera or kinds, always keeping to the
relevant side of the dichotomy, until the sought kind is reached. According to the logic
of form outlined in the introduction, this involves a succession of *cuts*, each of which
further differentiates the relevant form, dividing each successively divided logical space
into an included region and an excluded one.

However, while the *Phaedrus* presents a concise account of the method, it is the
*Sophist* that offers us the most complete illustration of its use. Indeed, the *Sophist*, on
one way of reading it, is in large part an exploration of just how division can be applied
in the service of philosophical analysis.\(^9^4\) In brief outline, the *Sophist* opens with an
exploration of *diairesis* as a method of conceptual determination or, more precisely,
definition, applied initially, as a test case, to the definition of the fisherman (219a-
221c2), and then to the Sophist (221c4-236d3); it then runs into a couple of problems
surrounding falsehood and nonbeing (237a1-2), describes and then presents a way of

\(^{94}\) There is some dispute about what Plato is describing in the relevant passages from the *Sophist* (253d-e),
with some commentators denying it is the method of division at all, e.g., J. R. Trevaskis, “Division and its
Seinsbegriff in Platons ‘Sophistes’: Eine Untersuchung zu 242 b6 –249 d5,” *Theologie und Philosophie* 66
(1991): 493 –529. In my view it is pretty clear he is talking about the same method of division and
collection he discusses elsewhere. I hope this becomes obvious in what follows.
resolving these problems (237a3-264b3) that makes the existence of the sophist at least possible, and finally completes the definition of the sophist that was its intended quarry (264b5-268d4). According to this sketch the method of division would seem to be confirmed as a legitimate tool of philosophical analysis, inasmuch it appears in the end to yield a definition of the Sophist that is "true to kind," literally, "of this breed and blood (tautēs tēs geneās kai haimatos).”

On the other hand, roughly three quarters of the dialogue is taken up with the problem of false speech, negation and nonbeing, and the method of division seems beset by more fundamental difficulties than the specific definition of the Sophist poses for it. There are six alternative genealogies of the sophist on offer before the Stranger pauses over his "inscrutability" and the difficulties of falsehood, and all, including the last, seem equally tendentious. Moreover, no non-arbitrary way is suggested for deciding amongst these or restricting their further proliferation. Indeed the seventh, "true to kind" diairesis with which the dialogue concludes offers perhaps the least cohesive derivation of the Sophist of all, although the defining genus of the eikastic is finally illuminating. If this diairesis does in fact represent the proper application of the method in question, as the stranger's embrace of it suggests it does, then it is far from

95 Sophist 268d3.
clear that its purpose is to generate unique definitions. It is unclear, then, what such a method is a method of.\textsuperscript{96}

And yet, if, as we have seen, what is not, or its linguistic equivalent, \textit{ou} or \textit{to mē}, i.e., negation, is what divides things from one another, which is ultimately how we are to understand negation as difference,\textsuperscript{97} then it would seem that the method of division is precisely the tool the philosopher needs to know how to deploy. As Plato puts it, the philosophical art (\textit{technē}) of \textit{dialectic} or more literally \textit{dialectical knowledge} (\textit{hē dialektikē epistemē}) requires knowing how "to divide according to genera (\textit{kata genē}),\textsuperscript{98}" i.e., according to the actual parts, joins and filiations of things, and thus of the concepts corresponding to them, a \textit{technē} he earlier characterizes as "a purification (\textit{katharmon}) as regards thinking."\textsuperscript{99}

But if mastery of this art amounts to knowing where the cuts are, so to speak, it amounts to knowing how \textit{difference}, or logically, negation, is distributed. For in the account we are given of the differential interweaving (\textit{symplokē}) of \textit{forms},


\textsuperscript{97}\textit{Sophist} 253d1-2.

\textsuperscript{98}\textit{Sophist} 253d1.

\textsuperscript{99}\textit{Sophist} 227c2.
paradigmatically those that make up the five highest genera (*megiste gene*), i.e., Being (*ousia*), Difference (*to heteron*), Sameness (*to auton*), Motion (*kinesis*) and Rest (*stasis*), we are told, as quoted above that “each one [of the forms] differs from the others not because of its own nature but because of its participation in the form (*ideās*) of difference (*thaterou = tou heterou*).” In principle, the method of division thus generates a logical picture of the way the things that are *are*, namely connected to and divided from one another, and thus knowing them might indeed amount to knowing how they are so connected and divided. And if the way that things are fundamentally is in fact made logically visible in the lines of division, then so are the proper, i.e., true, lines of predication.

And, as it turns out, Plato regularly identifies the method of division with what will come to be identified with logic, namely dialectic (*dialektikē*), which he defines as “the art concerning statements (*hē peri tôn logōn technē*),” or “the method of statements (*hē methodos tôn logōn*).” In the *Phaedrus*, one finds the striking claim that the purpose of the method is to enable one “to speak and think (*legein te kai phronein*).” The claim, it should be noted, is not that the method facilitates speaking

---

100 *Sophist* 255e3-6.

101 *Phaedo* 90b.

102 *Sophist* 227a.

103 *Phaedrus* 266b4-6.
or thinking well, truthfully or knowledgeably, but that it makes it possible to speak and think *simpliciter*. Nonetheless, it will become clear that the *method* or *logic* of division does indeed permit us “to carve through each kind according to its forms/kinds along its natural joints (*to palin kat’ eidē dunasthai diatemnein kat’ arthra hēi pephuken*).” In other words, the distinction, as well as the connection, between division as the constitutive operation of discursive thought and speech and the *method* of division, as the regulative *logic* of such thought. As we have seen, in the *Sophist* Plato attributes this same pivotal role to negation.

The question still remains, therefore, how we can tell about a particular genus-species line that it is veridical, or how we can in any case know that the method itself has a veridical ground. If we can never tell when that ground is reached, if the method supplies no criterion for determining whether or not a given division captures an actual division amongst kinds, classes, genera or species of thing, then it will be of little use. This is the gist of Aristotle’s complaint about the method: that it cannot demonstrate the necessity of the line of divisions it purports to deduce. As he puts it, “it is evident that one cannot either refute through this procedure, or deduce (*syllogisasthai*) something concerning an accident or a peculiarity, or concerning a genus, or deduce in

---

104 *Phaedrus* 265d4-266b4.

105 Aristotle *Prior Analytics* 45a31-46b38.
those cases in which it is not known whether it is this way or that.\textsuperscript{106}

One way of putting this criticism, in terms of the determinative role we are trying to make out for negation, is to say that given that most of what a thing \textit{is not} provides little or no determination of what it is, but to know which attributes the negation of which helps us to hone in on what a thing is seems to presuppose determinations that are not themselves reached through negation. For example, the first division suggested by the Sophist in relation to the angler is that between the \textit{technical} and the \textit{nontechnical}, and we do not appear to derive this disjunction from any prior one, or from any prior instance of negation, and in any case nothing is provided here that assure its relevance to the definition or determination of the fisherman. On the other hand, that skills, arts or vocations are so divided, \textit{seems} right, and it is the differentia of the \textit{technical} that divides the genus at its most general level.

And here the determinative use of negation emerges in its characteristic guise, not as the sign of negation itself or a negative form of the differentia, but in the way that the differentia operates in relation to that of which it is the differentia. A differentia functions as the proximate negation of the genus, dividing the space of that genus, so to speak, into an indicated and an excluded region that are its two species, thereby demarcating a conceptual form (of the indicated species), of the Spencer-Brownian variety. \textit{Mortality}, for example, hierarchically negates and thereby divides \textit{rational}

\textsuperscript{106} Prior Analytics 46b26-9.
animal into man and planet, in the sense that what is not merely rational animal is proximately mortal or immortal. If that is the line of division, then the corresponding line of predication is the reverse: man is a rational animal, although it remains true that man is also not, because it is also other than, i.e., non-identical to, rational animal.

However, we’re getting a little ahead of ourselves. The question remains how, if ever, the veridicality of the contours of a division can be established. That this method does not issue in results that command conviction in the dialogues in which it features with any detail, i.e., the Sophist and the Philebus, may tell us what Plato ultimately thinks of it, despite his reverential endorsement of it. But it may also reveal, instead, something about what is under discussion, i.e., the Sophist and pleasure, respectively. If it is true of the Sophist, for example, that he can be derived indifferently through any number of diaireses, this may tell us that there are indeed no natural divides within his nature, that he strictly speaking has no essence, and that he therefore is not in a strict sense a kind of thing at all, that he is not to be found amongst the things that can be known.107 The method, then, in its failure, would seem to provide us, at least, with a way of identifying false forms or pseudo-beings. But it is also possible, that although the final division of the Sophist seems to run afoul of those that precede it, it does indeed capture the nature of the sophist, at least insofar as this can be discerned in relation to

107 This much coincides with the view, for example, of Lesley Brown, in his "Definition and Division in the Sophist," in Definition in Greek Philosophy, ed. David Charles (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 151-171.
the nature of the philosopher. The preceding missteps then simply exhibit the
difficulty of defining something so elusive as a practitioner of illusion. However, even if
the absence of conviction demonstrates the indeterminacy of a thing, it doesn’t follow
that the presence of conviction demonstrates its determinacy.

In an especially careless dismissal of the method of division, Gilbert Ryle once
insisted that “what Plato cannot give us is some sort of decision procedure to tell us in
any given case what is and what is not a natural kind.” Yet, setting aside the question
of whether or not what is required is a decision procedure, what Plato does appear to
provide us with is a method for demonstrating whether a given kind is natural or not,
and what the defining characteristics of that kind are, which does for us what a decision
procedure would do for us. The method, clearly on display in the *Sophist*, is simple: a
kind is a natural kind if and only if its *diaireses* yield a unique definition of that kind, and
if it does yield such a kind then the terms of the differentiated line leading to that kind
indicate its defining attributes. Deriving two or more incongruous *diairetic* lines shows
that there is no natural articulation of a candidate kind.

Some have argued that the application of the method of division in the *Sophist* is
designed to highlight the dangers of proceeding too hastily, but the *seven* attempts at
definition here hardly suggest incaution, and indeed no intermediate branch in any of


\[\text{109 See, for example, S. Menn’s *Collecting the Letters,* cited above.}\]
these divisions is obviously incorrect. The problem is rather that there appears to be an indefinite number of ways of correctly proceeding, though the results may not be consistent. That Plato would have devoted himself to such a demonstration can, again, best be explained in terms of the persistence of the ontological deficits of the sophist. The sophist is the condition of linguistic expression to the extent that what he does is everything that is permitted by the medium of such expression. This is not, however, to promote inference from the indeterminacy of the sophist to the indeterminacy of what the sophist concerns himself with. The suggestion is just that the indeterminacy of the sophist reveals the dangers of indeterminacy that are proper to the medium of expression he exploits, i.e., the medium of discursive speech.

While contemporary commentators have insisted that the method is intended as an instrument of taxonomy and/or definition, and Aristotle suggests a third, complementary, function, albeit one Aristotle thinks it serves inadequately, namely, deductive explanation, Plato plainly indicates its role in determining lines of predication. While definition and taxonomy are both served by the method, the former more importantly than the latter, the principal function of division is to map out the lines of discursive expression proper to a given concept, and to a region, perhaps the exhaustive totality, of concepts to which that concept belongs.
Section Five. Philebus: Limit (Peras) and the Indeterminate (Apeiron)

As to how division is supposed to facilitate speech and thought, Plato’s most explicit account is presented in the *Philebus*, where we are told that its most general virtue lies in its enabling us to resolve the “problem of the one and the many.” Plato in fact identifies three kinds of claims/propositions alleged to involve one-many difficulties: (1) those whose subjects are individual particulars, e.g., Protarchus, Socrates, (2) those whose subjects are wholes, and (3) those whose subjects are universals.\(^{110}\) He declares the first two sorts of problem "commonplace," easily resolvable and so of little moment: predicating relative terms, like short and tall, of Protarchus, for example, or predicating of him, as a whole, attributes that are properly predicable only of his parts, involve simple and resolvable errors.

Presumably the triviality of cases of the first two kinds derives, in part, from their being about contingent, generable (*gignomena*) or perishable (*apollumen*\(a\)) things, although it hardly follows from this that the method does not facilitate speech about or even definitions of such subjects. And, as we have seen in the *Sophist*, Plato will come to think the expressive demands of ordinary speech of considerable significance. What’s more, Plato insists that the kind of contradiction involved here occurs in "everything that is ever said, both anciently and at present."\(^{111}\) Nonetheless, he considers the third

---

\(^{110}\) *Philebus* 15a1-2.

\(^{111}\) *Philebus* 15d4-6.
kind of proposition to be of the greatest importance. This is also clearly what he has in mind in speaking here of those things that provide answers to the *ti esti* (i.e., *what is it*) questions his dialogues are typically organized around, e.g., What is virtue? What is piety? What is justice? Their peculiar character, their being "both one and many," raises a number of questions for Plato:

First, there's the question whether we should suppose there are any such units (*monadas*) in the strict sense; then how they can be such that while each is a unit and remains unchanged, admitting neither of generation nor destruction, it is nevertheless unshakably one, but then as found in the indeterminate number of perishable things it is questionable whether it has to be posited as scattered abroad and becomes many or, as itself while whole separated from itself, which seems absolutely impossible, becoming the identical one at once in a one and a plurality.\(^\text{112}\)

In asking first about their existence and then about their manner of existence, Plato here anticipates the traditional formulation of the problem of universals in Boethius, although Plato is concerned less with the ontological status of monadic elements than in how identity and being are distributed between such elements and their instances or exemplifications.

Answering these questions, that is, resolving the problem of the one and the many properly conceived, requires the *method of division*, for which he claims divine provenance. The description of the method establishes, in simple form, pretty much the entire range of issues Hegel will later elaborate on, and adds a few key details about the

\(^{112}\) *Philebus* 15b1-c1.
method and its metaphysical grounding that the Phaedrus and the Sophist do not provide. It is also the most complete account of the method anywhere in Plato:

... those things which are always said to be (tōn aei legomenōn einai) are from the one and the many and...they have a determinant (peras) and an indeterminacy (apeirian) naturally united (symphuton) in them. Therefore, since this is how things are ordered (toutōn houtō diakekosmēmenōn) we should always posit one form in respect to everything on each occasion (aei mian idean peri pantos hekastote themenous) and search for it – we shall find one there – and if we are successful then after the one we should look for two, if there are two, or otherwise for three or whatever the number is; each of these ones should be treated in the same way, until one can see of the original one not only that it is one (hen), many (polla), and an indefinite number (apeira), but also its precise quantity (hoposa). But one should not attribute the form of the indeterminate (tēn de tou apeirou idean) to the plurality (pros to plēthos) until one can see the complete number between the indeterminate and the one (ton arithmon autou panta katidēi ton metaxu tou apeirou te kain tou henos).

The interpretation of this passage as well as the two illustrative examples that follow have been the source of much disagreement amongst commentators. It is enough here to give some indication of how negation, in its recasting as difference (to heteron), and thus as what differentiates kinds, genera, species, etc., from one another, provides the paradigm of negation as an instrument of discursive determination.

For our purposes, the key to interpreting this passage is finding an appropriate sense for peras and apeiria, translated above as determinant and indeterminacy, respectively. Literally, a peras is a limit or boundary, apeiria the state of not having a peras, but the more specific philosophical resonance of such terms would certainly have been paramount for Plato. Anaximander had spoken of to apeiron as a first principle, as

113 Philebus 16c2-17a6.
that out of which everything in the world had come to be, and the idea of an
indeterminate or undifferentiated beginning is to be found in Anaxagoras as well, who
also speaks of to apeiron. Anaxagoras, whom Plato mentions in several dialogues with
some admiration, as well as disappointment, is of particular interest here since he thinks
it is through the operation of nous, mind or intellect that discrete kinds and individuals
are brought into existence out of the apeiron. Plato’s complaint about Anaxagoras is
that he treats nous as a mere causal principle that does nothing to explain the
phenomena it effects. Yet the notion that the ordering of the world requires some sort
of principle of intelligibility was what Plato found appealing to begin with, and this must
be the starting point for any interpretation of this passage.

As Plato tells us later in the Philebus, it is reason that orders and assigns
proportion to what is without limit (apeiron), and it is precisely through the imposition
of limit (peras) that such ordering occurs. Since we are told here that such elements are
components of things themselves, it matters little whether we speak of conceptual or
ontological boundaries. If we get things right conceptually, we will have succeeded in
designating a boundary in things themselves. The interpretation I am suggesting takes
its cue from the discussion of predicative speech in the Sophist, in particular from the
specification of the unity proper to such speech in terms of its ti perainei, its providing a
boundary or limit. If a verb or predicate tells us something about “something that is,” it
specifies a delimitation of that thing, and in the case of indicating its proximate genus
and species, expresses what the thing itself is, i.e., its essence. As we shall see, in Hegel it is negation as such that constitutes such a limit.

Section Six. Conclusion: Division and Platonic Formalism

The *Philebus* account is focused on how the method of division allows us to order, and therefore understand, the relationship between indefinite multiplicities and ordered multiples and unities, between, for example, the indeterminate multiplicity of vocalizable sounds (*ta phōnēenta*) and its differentiated multiples, i.e., vowels, consonants and individual letters, to take Plato’s most famous illustration.\(^{114}\) While this provides us with a way of making sense of the otherwise intractable profusion of one-many attributions speech ordinarily involves us in, it also thereby provides us with a model of what is involved in predicative speech and thought as such, i.e., of discursive rationality, of which the proposition (*logos*) is the most basic expression. In other words, if the *method or science* of division is that logical *organon* that enables us to evaluate our everyday attributions, this is because *division* is the very procedure through which the *apeiron* is rationally organized in speech in the first place. In its most basic form, the operation involved in such delimitation, in determining the unlimited, is negation. This, I want to argue, is the crucial discovery of the *Sophist*: to see in the *logic of division* the procedures of attribution that constitute discursive thought and speech, and to observe in both the ineluctable operation of negation.

\(^{114}\) *Philebus* 18b6-c3.
Of course the recasting of negation as difference does not assure us that non-being is no longer anything we need worry about, although Plato’s argument for so conceiving of negation is supposed to provide just such a demonstration. It is meant to show that non-being is not the infernal gateway to non-existence we had worried it might be, because it “has as much being as being.” The question is whether this really dispels the concern about non-being and hence negation. And indeed we might wonder whether we are any better off with something that is other than being, or rather we might wonder what this might amount to if it isn’t non-being. To put it simply, we might wonder how, in other words, something might be, while being different from being?

Plato initially suggests that otherness than being is understandable in terms of imaging, more specifically in terms of images (eidōla), which he then distinguishes from likenesses (eikona). This provides us with two senses in which something might be thought to differ from being while somehow still being: illusion and verisimilitude. Yet we are also told that false speech (logos) is not merely the naming of one or the other of these, but predicating of what is not that it is, or of what is that it is not (241a). Thus there seem to be two varieties of falsehood: (1) naming to on, and saying of it that it is not (mē einai), and (2) naming to mē on, i.e., an image of what is, and saying of it that it is (einai). Whether discord with how things are is how we ought to have understood the initial account of falsehood as saying what is not, it now seems that it is just this ontological discord between the two parts of a speech, between what is named and
what is said or predicated of what is named that constitutes falsehood. The question would seem to arise, however, why, when we say of what is not, insofar as this involves not naming “utter non-being,” but merely something that has a modicum of being, by virtue of its being an image (or likeness?) of being, it is false to say that it is. It may be the case that it isn’t in the sense that it isn’t being as such, but then nothing but being as such is! As for negative falsehoods, the question remains what it means to say that something that is isn’t (mē einaī), since one way of not being is to be like what is, in which saying that what is is not isn’t entirely false, again unless what one is talking about is just being.

Plato tells us that “it is owing to the interweaving (sumplokē) of Forms with each other that speech has arisen for us.” But how are we to understand this, since symplokē relations, which are horizontal, seem quite different from participation relations, which are vertical? He also claims, at 260b5, that "not-being came to light for us as some one genus, of others, that is (on), and is dispersed (diesparmenon) amongst all things that are (panta ta onta)." If forms are both divided from one another by to heteron, and so interwoven with it, and interwovenness amounts to participation as well, then it is not merely that all Forms differ from one another but that they all differ from being, which seems to leave us with the potential problem of making sense of a

115 Sophist 259ε3.
Form as being an image of being (since it can't be different from it in the sense of being contradictory to it, i.e., not being).

One answer to this problem would run roughly as follows: It is by virtue of the fact that Forms are interwoven that we are capable of stringing together meaningful sentences (logoi), although this does not mean that our stringing together logoi is the same kind of interweaving, just that if all Forms were either identical or immiscible there would be no relation between things, properties, etc., either because the Forms corresponding to things would bear no relation to one another, yielding a kind of atomism of Forms, or because there would be no actual relata to stand in relation to one another. Carving things properly, we should recall, must proceed kat’ eidē, according to the Forms, not merely according to the natural joins of things. While the latter applies to the ordinary objects of nature and common discourse, the former applies to the relations among Forms. Division, then, must be attentive to the fundamental logic and ontology of Forms, as it attends to dividing kinds and individuals according to their essential and contingent attributions or determinations. For Aristotle, it is the former that will constitute, in effect, the logic of categories. The distinction between the logic of Forms and the division of kinds, I would like to suggest, is also the basis of the distinction it will take two centuries to fully unpack, between formal logic, i.e., the calculus, though not a purely abstract one, of the basic forms of expression and
thought, and *material logic*, i.e., the logic of discursive thought in the rich, natural environment of propositional expression and inference.

At 253c Plato makes explicit the connection between knowledge of the communion of kinds (*genē*) and the knowledge of division, which he calls *dialectic*, remarking that “there are some kinds, which, present throughout many (*dia pantōn*), hold the other kinds together (*synechonta*), so that they can intermix (*symmeignusthai*), and again...other kinds which, where there are divisions (*diairesi*), are causes of division (*tēs diareseōs aitia*) throughout the whole.”

“Dialectical knowledge (*episteme dialektikē*),” i.e., knowing how to “divide according to genera and not regard the same Form as other nor the other as the same.” Further, we are told:

...if a person can do that, he’ll be capable of adequately discriminating a single form (*mian idean*) spread out (*diatetamenēn*) all through [the] many (*dia pollōn*), each of which stands separate from the others. In addition he can discriminate forms that are different from each other but are included within a single form that’s outside them, or a single form that’s connected as a unit throughout many wholes, or many forms that are completely separate from others. That’s what it is to know how to discriminate by kinds how things can commune (*koivōnein*) and how they can’t.  

As we learn a few pages later, at 260b8, it is the *Form* (*idea*) of difference (*to heteron*) that will turn out to be scattered amongst all the things that are (*kata panta ta onta diesparmenon*), and it is *negation* that designates this *Form*.

---

116 *Sophist* 253c1-5.

117 *Sophist* 253d5-e1.
On the reading I am defending, Plato thinks that it is because difference is part of the structure of things, at least the sorts of properly defined things that are the appropriate objects of philosophical or scientific knowledge (episteme), that negation is part of what structures discursive speech. It is precisely because things are determinate with regard to one another, i.e., because they are discretely, rather than fuzzily, differentiated from one another, that negation is the proper operation for marking the boundaries or joints between things, and that the method of division enables us to “carve things at the joints.” In short, negation, on this reading, is the very instrument of dividing or carving. The divine character Plato attributes to it derives from the otherwise inexplicable fit between ontological and conceptual organization. Though it turns out to be a more complicated matter to apply the method than Plato at first suspects, in part because language is divided everywhere, so to speak.

In the first half of the Sophist, Plato formulates the problem of false, propositional speech in terms that more properly expresses the persistence of naming, because the semantics of naming is still the only semantics at work until the second half of the Sophist, where he discovers the essential otherness of predication. It is here that the role of division can finally be fully explored because the relationship between the indeterminate and limiting elements of concepts and forms only becomes clear here. A subject concept in the act of naming is functionally monadic, and unitary; in the context of predication its syncategorematic nature is brought to the fore, or rather the
indeterminacy inherent to it is invoked, requiring its determination by an appropriate syncategorematic peras or limit. Here is what Plato tells us:

But you concede, I suspect, that some of 'the things that are' are spoken of by themselves, and some are always spoken of in relation to different things... Yes, but the other (is) always relative to another, isn't it? ... They wouldn't be, if 'that which is' and "the other" did not differ entirely from one another. But if the other (thateron) participated in both of the pair of species, just as 'that which is' does, then at some time or other there would also be some other of the others not in relation to another, but, as it is, it has simply (artlessly) turned out for us that whatever is other is of necessity that which it is as of another... Then among the species which we choose, the nature of the other (to heteron) must be counted as being the fifth...And we'll assert besides that it has gone through all of them, for it's not on account of its own nature that each one is different from all the rest, but on account of its participation in the form (idea) of the other.¹¹⁸

This “of another” relation, as it turns out, is precisely what Plato develops as the basic structure of a declarative logos, the structure that will draw the syncategorematic elements of a propositional array into the logical unity of a proposition proper. The unity of the proposition, then, is established by the simultaneous disseveration and composition accomplished by negation, the sign of the form of difference.

The logic of diairesis is not formal in the sense that Aristotle’s syllogistic is. It does not, as Aristotle’s does, provide a formal language into which sentences or propositions of ordinary language can be translated and evaluated for inferential significance on the basis of their formal character. However, in his method of division Plato provides a way of determining the boundaries of concepts and their integration in

¹¹⁸ Sophist 255c12-e5.
the constellation of concepts through which we cognize and communicate about the
world and ourselves, and to this extent it is, for all intents and purposes, a logic of the
concept, or at the very least a semantics of names built upon a model of forms, the first
in a lineage that concludes most famously with Frege’s rather different but recognizably
Platonic Begriffschrift. If this logic exhibits, amongst other things, the limitations of the
atomic, onomastic approach to the analysis of discursive speech, it also points beyond
those limitations and provides the basis for an account of predicative relations. It thus
shares the broader philosophical intentions of both Wittgenstein’s and Frege’s
approaches to logic, though split between two works, the Parmenides and the Sophist.
Like Wittgenstein, Plato thinks that a formal account of language that abstracts from
ordinary usage yields either identity or contradiction (the lesson of the second part of
the Parmenides), but like Frege he thinks that when the structure of the concept itself is
properly expressed the discursive unity of the basic components of speech (logos) is
made apparent (the lesson of the Sophist). However, contrary to Frege, Plato thinks it is
negation, rather than assertion, that emerges as the principal discursive operation, that
which differentiates the concept and establishes what I have called the predicative
interval, i.e., the ligature between a concept and its determinations. In this regard, it is
Plato’s method of division, rather than Aristotle’s syllogistic, that is the original
precursor of Hegel’s phenomenological logic.
Division thus emerges not as an ad hoc instrument of analysis, as some commentators have suggested, but as one intrinsically bound to the model of conceptuo-metaphysical exemplarity that underlies Plato’s theory of participation (methexis), on the one hand, and to the account of predication he first arrives at in the Sophist, on the other. The transition from the vertical ontology of participation to the horizontal ontology of congruence or community (koinōnia), and more importantly the corresponding transitions from the vertical semantics of naming to the horizontal semantics of predication, which will ultimately have to be approached as operations rather than structures, are an important part of the story to be told, and division is fundamental to both transitions.

Plato comes to see negation as central to division and so to predication, yet he discovers this only in addressing Parmenidean qualms about speaking of what is not (to mē on), which leads him to recast negation as to heteron: otherness or, less literally, difference. Such qualms persist, however, since even as difference negation will involve reference to what is other than being. It is for this reason, that Aristotle isolates the relevant sense of to heteron (heterotēs) in diaphora, explaining that “difference (diaphora) is different from something, in something (tinos tini diaphoron),” that is, the specific use of difference involved in the speciation of a genus. In explaining difference in relation to another, as opposed to the being of that other, Aristotle

---

119 Aristotle’s Metaphysics X 1054b22.
obscures the link between the method of division and negation, although the role of
*diaphora* in the categorical system continues to carry the logical and metaphysical
weight of its association with negation. This is the legacy Boethius will in turn transmit
to the following centuries of scholastic philosophy.

Finally, that there is a shift in Plato’s thinking from the *Parmenides* to the *Sophist*
is quite clear, and I think this can be made out in a number of ways. While prior to the
*Sophist*, Plato had thought of the community of *forms* as both the metaphysical and the
logical anchor of veridical speech and thought, the *Parmenides* revealed its fundamental
shortcomings as a model for discursive speech. While there are a number of historically
useful shifts to compare this to, Wittgenstein’s turn from the austere rigors of the
*Tractatus* to the rich phenomenological descriptions of the *Philosophical Investigations*,
is perhaps the most revealing. While, in typically provocative fashion, Slavoj Žižek has
suggested that we read the “passage from the first to the second part of *Parmenides* as
homologous to the Hegelian passage from phenomenology to logic,”¹²⁰ I would suggest
that this passage is only properly managed in the *Sophist*, where the logical and
metaphysical dimensions of predication are simultaneously explored, while in the
*Parmenides* logical structure is still bound to the semantics of naming, and predicative
relations remain obscure at best. Though Žizek’s suggestion seems to be confirmed by
Hegel’s own remarks on the *Parmenides* in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, this is because Hegel

reads the logic of naming in the *Parmenides* as though it were already, albeit in preliminary form, the logic of predication in the *Sophist*. 
CHAPTER 2

BOETHIUS: CONTRADICTION, DIVISION AND THE DIS(UNITY) OF THOUGHT

Section One. Introduction

As we have just seen, Plato attends to three types of statement or proposition, distinguished according to the three types of subject involved: (1) specific natural or cultural kinds (such as, and in particular, the philosopher and the sophist), (2) forms (eidē/ideai), in particular, the greatest (= most general) kinds (megista genē), i.e., being, sameness, etc., and (3) individuals, such as Theaetetus, Socrates, etc. Though the method of division is only explicitly applied to statements of the first type, its applicability to the other two is directly implied, can readily be made out, and in other dialogues, such as the Philebus, is in fact applied to, for example, the form of pleasure. Boethius, who praises and proceeds directly from Porphyry’s Isagōgē, and likely from his much-cited but now lost commentary on the Sophist as well, gives us a clear indication that the use of the method, what he calls the science of dividing (scientia dividendi), extended to cases other than those of essential or universal attribution. In particular, Boethius, following Porphyry, following Plato, lists sitting (sedēre), and standing (stare), as statim relinquentes differentiae, literally immediately departing, or what we might call transient contingent differentiae. Such differentiae, like all differentiae, are differentiating features, but belong to the more general class of accidental, per accidens differentiae, which general class also includes concomitant differentiae (consequentes
differentiae), which though they also apply per accidens, are enduring features, such as curly hair or grey eyes, which we might call permanent contingent differentiae.\(^1\) Thus while Boethius, like Aristotle, is principally concerned with definition, and thus with essential or per se differentiae, he makes it clear that the science of division yields accidental differentiae as well, and indeed suggests a way of distinguishing the former from the latter. (Aristotle, recall, had already indicated the usefulness and limitations of division in establishing the lines of essential predication, e.g., *Posterior Analytics*, 96b30.)

The view of division as providing a discursive map of the possible lines of predication for a given subject of thought or talk thus acquires further detail in Boethius, and confirms an account of predication that covers both the static conditions of essential attributes and the dynamic conditions of accidental ones. That is, it is relevant to providing definitional statements like “Man is a rational, mortal animal” and contingent truths, like “Theaetetus is sitting.” As for the role of negation, which Boethius proscribes at the moment of acknowledging its appearance, once again we will have cause to return to Freud’s observation concerning the sign of negation (*das Verneinungssymbol*), that beyond its specific therapeutic value of allowing for the expression of repressed material, it also has the much broader function of enabling judgment in the first place. It does so by giving symbolic form to the instinctual drive of exclusion that, as Freud understands it, establishes the unconscious. So conceived, the

\(^1\) *De Divisione*, 880d7-881a1.
unconscious is to be understood as a domain of included exclusions. As suggested in the introduction, this fundamental psychical structure can be seen as repeated symbolically in the categorical proposition, which discursively differentiates and combines the elementary expressions that comprise it. The proposition can therefore be understood, in turn, as the linear representation of an included exclusion, when affirmative (kataphatic), or an excluded inclusion, when negative (apophatic).

Both the psychic system and the discursive system it gives rise to can be thought of in terms of a Spencer-Brownian logic of form of the sort outlined in the introduction: the form of the psyche includes both the unconscious and the conscious (with the pre-conscious marking the bondary between them), just as the proposition is the unit form of subject and predicate. Negation, or more precisely the operation of negating, is in the first instance the basic operation of division, and the sign or symbol of negation is just the logical record of that basic operation. If the act of negation makes visible the form in the first place, the negation sign makes visible what makes that form visible. When I speak of the sophist, for example, I do so by virtue of the chain of disjunctions that in effect make up his logical and ontological genealogy; when I say of the sophist that he is not a fashioner of veridical images, or that he is a fashioner of non-veridical images, I thereby show something internal to the determination of that chain.

The importance of Boethius, and in particular the text I will be focusing on in this chapter, his De Divisione, lies precisely in the negation that lies at its center, that is, the negation of the role of negation in division. The proscription of negation that this
amounts to derives from a recognition of the fundamentally propositional character of negation and the difficulty of reconciling this with the attributive use of negation, and thus with the discursive nature of concepts themselves, which is fundamentally at odds with Boethius’ Platonist commitments. This work constitutes the canonical treatment of the method of division, and thus establishes the basis for the treatment of predication throughout scholastic philosophy. Its proscription of negation, along with its discursivity, thus becomes a tacit postulate of the term logic (and its underlying metaphysics) that dominates medieval philosophical thought, despite the ineluctable place of negation in the science of division from which that logic is understood to proceed. Yet, it is precisely because negation is proscribed that the logic it underpins retains its authority up through Kant, beyond the turn to propositional logic that begins with Abelard and Ockham. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is Hegel who will decipher the principle of negation encoded within the logic that proscribes it. The argument of the present chapter, then, is that it is through, though not by, Boethius that the enunciation of this principle is transmitted, albeit under the guise of its repudiation.

**Section Two. Division, Contradiction and the Discursive Logic of Terms**

In his *De Divisione*, Boethius promises to provide not merely a technical account of the *scientia dividendi*, but an exhaustive classification and discussion of the philosophically relevant kinds of division (*divisio*). By way of justifying his efforts he cites
as a precedent a book of the same title by Andronicus of Rhodes\textsuperscript{2} that attests to the
great benefits (\textit{magnos fructus}) of the method and the esteem accorded the subject by
the peripatetic tradition (\textit{disciplinam peripateticam}), by which Boethius and Andronicus
would primarily have meant Aristotle. He reports that Plotinus expresses the same high
regard for division in his \textit{Enneads} (II.6) and that Porphyry praises its utility (\textit{utilitas}) in his
commentary on Plato’s \textit{Sophist}\textsuperscript{3} and in his \textit{Isagoge}, the introduction to Aristotle’s
\textit{Categories} already discussed.

This catalogue of antecedents is also an inventory of Boethius’ principal
philosophical influences, with St. Augustine being the only notable omission. It is helpful
to have such an inventory before one from the outset, as his interest in harmonizing the
seemingly divergent metaphysical and logical positions of his predecessors is what
governs, and so often explains, the views he ultimately defends. On the figures of
greatest influence, Plato and Aristotle, Boethius is entirely clear. He tells us in his second
\textit{Commentary} on Aristotle’s \textit{De Interpretatione} that he intended to translate and write
commentaries on the works of Plato and Aristotle\textsuperscript{4} in order to bring their opinions

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Andronicus of Rhodes (\textit{circa} 100 B.C.) is traditionally, perhaps apocryphally, identified as the 11\textsuperscript{th}
successor of Aristotle’s Academy and is credited, by Porphyry (\textit{Vita Plotini}, §24), with having provided the
first critical edition of Aristotle’s works. His \textit{De Divisione} is not extant, and is otherwise unattested.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Again, this commentary is unfortunately no longer extant and is otherwise unattested.
\item \textsuperscript{4} While his commentaries on the \textit{Categories} and \textit{De Interpretatione} are extant and were available
throughout the scholastic period, his translations and paraphrases of the rest of the \textit{Organon} were lost
and only recovered in the middle of the twelfth century. On the range and purpose of Boethius’
throughout the scholastic period, his translations and paraphrases of the rest of the \textit{Organon} were lost
and only recovered in the middle of the twelfth century. On the range and purpose of Boethius’
translations and commentaries see Sten Ebbesen’s “The Aristotelian Commentator,” in \textit{The Cambridge
Companion to Boethius}, ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34-55, and
his “Manlius Boethius on Aristotle’s \textit{Analytica Posteriora},” \textit{Cahiers de l’Institut du Moyen Age Grec et Latin},
\end{itemize}
sententias) into a “single concordance (unam concordiam)” and to "demonstrate their consistency on the majority of issues and certainly on those most important in philosophy (his in philosophia maximis)," a familiar Neoplatonist aspiration he no doubt inherited from Porphyry, or from Proclus, Alexander, or Ammonius, with whose writings he seems to have had some familiarity. It is Boethius’ Platonism, as has already been suggested, that will be the key to deciphering a key passage of this text.

The complete philosophical background of this text would thus include the relevant works of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Porphyry (specifically his Isagoge and In Aristotelis Categorias Expositio), St. Augustine, and a Neoplatonist text or two. The summary significance of this background can be put as follows: Boethius approaches the topics of division and negation as an orthodox Aristotelian, yet within the broader framework of a Platonist metaphysics and semantics. It is Plato’s model of division together with Aristotle’s Categories and De Interpretatione, which he translated and wrote commentaries on, that provide the basic principles that define Boethius’ views and dictate the issues of real philosophical concern: the structure and ontology of relations between genus and species, essence and accident, universal and particular.


5 Commentarii in Lbrum Aristotelis Peri Hermeneias, edited by C. Meiser (Leipzig:Tuebner,1887, 1880), 79-80. This and all translations of the De Interpretatione commentaries are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

6 On the question of whether Boethius’ contact with Ammonius or his commentaries on Aristotle is direct or derived, see, for example, Pierre Paul Courcelle, Late Latin Writers and their Greek Sources, translated by Harry E. Wedeck (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969), and Johh Marenbon, Boethius (New York: Oxford University Press), 208.
Likewise, his outright dismissal of the role of negation in division is an expression both of his commitment to an Aristotelian account of *differentiae* and his sensitivity to the metaphysical worries associated with the grounding of Platonic and Neoplatonic semantics in an ontology of eternal *forms or exemplars*.

The strategy of this chapter is to spell out Boethius’ views on the method of division and negation through an analysis of passages in *De Divisione* where these views are most explicitly expressed, namely those passages dealing with the logic of definition. I also compare the views expressed here with remarks on negation and division that appear elsewhere in Boethius’ writings. While the general framework of Platonic and Aristotelian views has already been provided for in the previous chapter, here I briefly discuss germane passages from Plato and Aristotle where called for. Since Boethius’ views are still not always easy to make out I also discuss passages from Porphyry and Ammonius, whose writings Boethius certainly knew, as well as later medieval commentaries on Boethius and on the use of negation in concepts and propositions, where doing so helps illuminate an otherwise less intelligible point or has bearing on the reading I am arguing for.

But first a few preliminaries: Boethius’ *divisio*, which, despite the slight difference in etymology and connotation, we can take as a more or less transparent translation of Plato’s and Aristotle’s *diairesis*, is used both of the logical procedure of

---

7 What I offer here is not intended as a reading of the text as a whole, in part because Magee’s edition, translation and commentary on *De Divisione*, to which I shall regularly refer, already provides such a thing.
dividing relevant terms and of the results of so dividing, i.e., the ontological hierarchy	hereby articulated, and so, as we saw with Plato and Aristotle, the issues that arise are
simultaneously logical and metaphysical. Unlike the more or less unspecified terms of
division in Plato, however, here both the domain of application and its terms are
narrowly demarcated, largely according to the Aristotelian model to which Porphyry had
given canonical form, as discussed in chapter 1. As we saw for Aristotle, the definition,
at least the predominant variety of essential definition and, equivalently, the essence
of a given object of cognition, is arrived at through the delineation of its genus/species
filiations, and it is in the service of formulating definitions that divisio is primarily,
though not exclusively, employed. It is thus in the correspondence between essence and
definition that division most clearly reveals both its metaphysical character and its
epistemological value. However, if Plato is the first philosopher to recognize this, and
Aristotle the first to set forth the requirements of definition in detail, only with
Boethius does the method of division itself, and with it the construction of definitions,
come to occupy so central a position in the philosophical enterprise as a whole. This
happens despite Aristotle’s criticism of the explanatory power of the method in

---

8 The conception of definition as specifying the essence of the definiendum is taken over from Aristotle’s discussion in the Topics and Prior Analytics. Plotinus, as we have seen, and Porphyry as well, despite their differences with Aristotle, take much the same position. As Plotinus puts it, “the diairesis of Plato is used for the discrimination (diakrisis) of Forms (eidôn) and in relation to the ‘what is it?’ question, to the first/highest genera (prôta genê) and noetically/intellectually (noērōs) weaves together (plekousa) those things that are derived from these” (Enneades I.III.4, in Volume 1 of Plotinus. 7 Volumes, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988)).

comparison with his own syllogistic, and in part owing to the absence of Aristotle’s Prior and Posterior Analytics from the philosophical canon until its retrieval, through Arabic translations, towards the end of the twelfth century.

As we have seen, the topic of division, on its own, carries with it a host of metaphysical assumptions, including assumptions concerning negation. It follows that before, or rather without ever deliberately staking out any specific ontological or semantic position, Boethius already finds himself in fairly deep, if ambiguous, metaphysical waters. What I mean, in the first place, is this: of the six kinds of divisio classified in De Divisione, all except the semantic variety concern the five predicables (rhētheisai in Aristotle's Greek, praedicabilia in Boethius' Latin translation) Porphyry discusses in his Introduction (Isagoge) to Aristotle's Categories, that is, genus, difference, species, accident, and property. By presumption, given the metaphysical character of Aristotle's categories (katēgoriai, or praedicamenta in Boethius' Latin), at least in their canonical presentation in the Categories, the predicables, all of which fall under one or another of the categories, are also things rather than expressions, though


11 In his Porphyry Introduction, translated, with a commentary by Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), J. Barnes, amongst others, questions whether Porphyry really intends this work as an introduction to Aristotle's Categories, and suggests it is only incidentally so, since Aristotle’s Categories is itself studied as the first treatise on logic. However, his reasons for doubting its intended use are puzzling at best. He claims that Porphyry himself tells us that it is preparatory for “the study of the theory of predication, and the construction of definitions, and, in general, matters connected with division and with proof (1.3 –6),” which he takes to mean that “Porphyry presents his essay as a preparation for the study of logic” (XV). If Aristotle’s Categories is indeed the basic logic textbook, as it surely is, given its place in the Organon, then an introduction to logic is ipso facto an introduction to the Categories, if not to the categories as such.
as *predicables* they are just the things that our expressions can pick out or express. With regard to definition, moreover, the relevant predicables - *species, genera* and *differentiae* - are substances, albeit *secondary* (*deuterai*) ones, from an Aristotelian perspective.\(^\text{12}\)

Now Boethius tends to follow Porphyry, who, though he brackets metaphysical questions in the *Isagoge*, adopts a primarily linguistic or semantic reading of the categories in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, where he is metaphysically more partisan. What this amounts to, however, is hardly the clear-cut view he suggests, along with most ancient and medieval discussions of semantics before Ockham, that semantic and metaphysical questions are inextricably connected. In this commentary, Porphyry opposes the *metaphysical* character of the *predicables* to the principally linguistic character of the *categories* (*katēgoriae*), arguing that since “beings and their genera and species, and differentiae are things (*pragmata*), not words (*phōnai*)” one ought not to admit *On the Genera of Being* or *On the Ten Genera* as alternative titles for the

---

\(^{12}\) See Aristotle’s discussion of substance at *Categories* 2b8-9: “A substance – that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all – is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject, e.g., the individual man or the individual horse. The species in which the things primarily called substances are, are called secondary substances, as also are the genera of these species.” As remarked earlier, on Aristotle’s view the ontological hierarchy runs, in order of primacy, from individual, to species, to genus: “Of the secondary substance the species is more a substance than the genus, since it is nearer to the primary substance,” in *Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. J. L. Ackrill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).
*Categories*, since the latter is not “about things *qua* things, but instead is about the words that are used to signify things.”\(^{13}\)

Porphyry’s argument for a semantic reading of the *Categories* is rather unconvincing, however, and amounts to pointing out that in introducing the ten categories Aristotle focuses on the extensions of categorical terms, i.e., on what they *signify*, which he would not have done had he been interested in ontological classification. Yet even if semantics is the principal concern of this text, a list of the *significata* of simple expressions is nonetheless a list of things (*chrēmata* or *rès*), not expressions (*onomata*). So in the end it seems all Porphyry needs, wants and is entitled to claim is that while Aristotle’s *Categories* is concerned with semantics, and in particular the extensions of simple (i.e., non-compound), referring expressions, the *categories* themselves are just the kinds of things that such expressions can signify. Porphyry’s approach to the *Categories* (and categories) is no doubt shaped by that of Plotinus, who attacks Aristotle for departing from Plato’s robust realism with regard to *Forms*.\(^{14}\) All the same, even if a semantic construal of the categories is poorly supported, not required by a semantic reading of the *Categories* and at odds with a metaphysical construal of the predicables, it is clear that as far as the *predicables* are concerned Porphyry holds that they are things (*chrēmata*), and Boethius, following Porphyry, takes the same view.

---


\(^{14}\) Plotinus *Ennead* 6.1.1-24, in Volume 6 of *Plotinus, 7 Volumes*. 
But that the predicables are things tells us nothing yet about what sorts of things they are. Accordingly, Porphyry famously poses, and then brackets, as lying beyond the scope of his *Isagoge*, a set of three ontological questions that Boethius, equally famously, takes up in his commentaries on Porphyry’s text, his *In Isagoge Commentaria*. Since we will have reason to turn to Boethius’ account of universals later on, it will be useful, as we proceed, to have in mind Porphyry’s three ontological questions concerning genera and species: (1) whether they subsist (*hyphestēken*/*subsistunt*) and are situated (*keitai*/*posita sunt*) in bare thoughts alone (*en monais psilais epinoiais*/*in solis nudis purisque intellectibus*), (2) whether, if they subsist (beyond mere thought), they are bodies (*sōmata*/*corporalia*) or incorporeal (*asōmata*/*incorporalia*) and (3), if the latter, whether they are separate (*chōrista*/*separata*) or subsist in perceptible things (*en aisthētois*/*in sensilibus*) and in relation to them.\textsuperscript{15}

If we take it that to be a thing (*chrēma* or *rēs*) is minimally to be more than a mere product of intellection or conceptualization, literally, residing in bare thought alone (*en monais psilais epinoiais*), then, on the assumption that genera, species, etc., are such things, we need answers to questions (2) and (3), that is, whether they are corporeal or incorporeal, and, if incorporeal, whether they are independent of or resident in things that are corporeal or sensible. Since Boethius offers an explicit answer to these questions in his much discussed views on universals in his commentary on the

Isagoge, to finally determine his position on the ontological status of the praedicabilia, it will be necessary to examine these texts, and to take a brief detour through Porphyry (and still more briefly through Plotinus). But before venturing such detours there is a fair amount to be learned directly from De Divisione itself.

Boethius begins his discussion by identifying two broad classes of division: division according to itself (secundum se), which we might call internal or essential division, inasmuch as it yields what is intrinsic to the dividendum (what is divided), and division according to accident (secundum accidens), which we might call external or accidental division, inasmuch as the results of division, the dividentia, bear a contingent, non-intrinsic relation to the dividendum. He identifies three subclasses of secundum se division and one of secundum accidens division, under which he in turn distinguishes three modes. The full classification then looks like this:

I. Essential Division (Secundum se)
1. Speciating - of genus into species (genus in species)
2. Mereological - of whole into its proper parts (totum in propias partes)
3. Semantic - of spoken sound into its proper significations (vox in significationes proprias)

II. Accidental Division (Secundum accidens)
4a. of subject into accidents (subiectum in accidentia)
4b. of accident into subjects (accidens in subiecta)
4c. of accident into accidents (accidens in accidentia)

While each variety of division is of some philosophical interest, it is the discussion of 1 that contains the most explicit evidence for his views on the

---

16 See Section Four below.
metaphysical dimension of division and negation. What is established in this context, however, applies across the board to all varieties of division, and whatever the role of negation may turn out to be, it is thereby established as serving in all varieties of division, which I would suggest cover every context of discursive expression.

Boethius, presumably following Aristotle (who insists, in *Metaphysics Z*, for example, that “the differentiae by which the genus is divided are contrary (enantiae),”17) thinks it necessary in this context to establish *contrariety*, and to rule out *contradiction*, as the variety of opposition involved in speciation, that is, the division, or differentiation, of genera into species or kinds (*divisio generis in species*), which, as he later tells us, is required for the analysis and definition of genera, species, and thus essence. In the course of trying to prove this point, he proscribes the use of negation, arguing, in stark metaphysical terms, that rather than designating or determining a complementary species negation destroys the *substance* of the species it is applied to:

*not being man (non esse hominem)* is not a species; for every species constitutes being (*esse*), but negation disjoins (*disiungit*) being (*esse*) from something that is, no matter what it presents. For example, when I say 'man,' I have spoken as if there is something; but when I say "non-man (non homo)," with the negation I have destroyed (*destruxi*) the substance (*substantiam*) of *man*. So it is, then, that the division of a genus into species has *per se* nothing to do with negation.18

He will ultimately argue that if negation cannot be used to constitute (name or establish?) complementary species, then the defining relation between such species cannot be that of contradiction, since contradictories are related to one another

---

17 *Metaphysics Z* §12 (1037b19-10).

18 *De Divisione*, 882b.
precisely as negations each of the other. The complete argument then runs roughly as follows:

1. If something is a species it constitutes being (*constituit esse*)
2. For any X that *is*, the *non of* non-X disjoins being (*esse*) from that X
3. Whatever disjoins being (*esse*) from X, destroys the substance (*substantia*) of X
4. Whatever disjoins being (*esse*) from X does not constitute being (*esse*) (from 3 and the meaning of *destroy*)
5. For any species X, *non esse* X (or *non-X*) destroys and so does not constitute *esse* (from 2, 3 and 4)
6. For any species X, *non esse* X (or *non-X*) is not a species (from 1 and 5)
7. Therefore: *The division of a genus into species has per se nothing to do with negation* (from 6)
8. Contradiction is an opposition between terms that are each the negation of the other (definition of contradiction)
9. *Divisio generis in species* is not effected through *contradiction* (from 7 and 8)

For present purposes, what concerns us is the argument for 7, which I will attend to first, focusing initially on premises 1, the logico-metaphysical thesis on which the argument turns, 2, the complement of 1, and 3, its metaphysical upshot. I think it can be shown that a proper understanding of 1 does not allow us to conclude 6, but that even if we accept the argument up through 6, 7 doesn’t follow. Similarly, even if 7 does indeed follow from the preceding premises, it doesn’t, with 8, imply 9. Briefly, the argument concerning contrariety depends upon extending a relation that is well defined with respect to propositions to the terms that comprise propositions. A term is the contrary of another just in case the proposition ascribing the first and one ascribing the second to the same subject cannot both be true, though they can both be false. A term is the contradictory of another if each of two such propositions always takes the opposite
truth value of the other. However, the distinction applies only roughly, because two 
apparently contradictory terms, such as black and non-black, just like two contrary 
terms, might very well simultaneously be applied to the same subject, and thus the 
statements ascribing each to that subject might both be false. For example, eyesight is 
neither black nor non-black. As I will try to show, the proscription of negation and 
contradiction, though it appears to  This is likely the result of forgetting that the 
hierarchies of categories or genera and species are fundamentally predicative rather 
than nomenclatorial.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Boethius’ argument falters on several fronts, it 
remains of great philosophical interest, since the reasons for its failing are a direct 
consequence of its commitment to the discursivity of concepts (and so universals), 
which in turn implies the very role of negation Boethius is at pains to deny. It is 
paradoxically in this very argument, therefore, that Boethius installs within the 
material dimension of the *logica vetus* the determinative conception of negation that I 
argue lies at the heart of Hegel’s logic and dialectic.

We begin, then, with premise 1, according to which “every species constitutes
esse.” The first thing to notice about this claim is what it does not say. In particular, it 
does not say, as we might have expected it to, that every species is or constitutes a 
substance. Now we might suppose that this is because Boethius, in an egregiously 
careless moment, conflates esse and substantia, so that by the infinitive esse he simply 
means substantia. However, identifying esse with substantia would amount to a truly
remarkable lapse on Boethius’ part. For although there is no explicit discussion of these terms in *De Divisione*, the distinction between *substantia*, in the relevant sense of a universal predicable, and *esse, Being* as such,\(^{19}\) is adduced as one of the seven logico-metaphysical principles or rules (*regulae*) from which the most metaphysically explicit and important of his theological tractates, the *De Hebdomadibus*, i.e., *Concerning the Seven*, derives its traditional title. Given his principled recognition of the ontological difference, i.e., of the distinction between *beings* and *Being*, attributing a conflation of expressions for the two to Boethius would be uncharitable at best. On the other hand, he can hardly be claiming that every being constitutes *Being* as such, since this status is reserved for *Being* itself, which is neither a genus nor a species.

A clue to the proper construal of this first premise, however, is in part given us by the second premise. Premise 2 claims that *non* disjoins *esse* from whatever it is applied to, and again, as a general claim about the logic of negation it is puzzling enough, and is particularly baffling in this context, where we are putatively considering the status of negative nominal expressions of the form *non*-X. And with this we arrive at the crux of the matter: the intermediate conclusion (6), with which Boethius’ presentation of the argument actually begins, states not that “*non homo*” is not a species, but that “*non esse hominem*” is not one. The claim seems to be that when “*non*” is applied, for example, to the expression “*homo*” it produces an expression

---

\(^{19}\) This point is made more complicated by the fact that Boethius’ use of the term *substantia* is equivocal. He sometimes uses it to refer to a typical Aristotelian primary or secondary substance, i.e., *that which is* (*id quod est*), and elsewhere uses it to refer to *absolute Being*. It is clear, at any rate, that a substance in the first sense cannot be Substance in the second sense.
whose meaning is *non esse hominem*, for Boethius cannot be claiming that “*non esse hominem*” is itself the form of the expression thereby generated, since it patently isn’t. But if that is indeed the semantics of such expressions on offer, then either the *esse* is part of the meaning or extension of “*non*,” or it is part of the meaning or extension of the base expression, “*homo*. And as the name of an exemplary predicatable, then, the term “*homo*” is quasi-propositional, its meaning, or conceptual content, i.e., *esse hominem*, discursive, although it is through the application of negation that this discursive interval is exhibited in the first place. How does this help us make sense of Boethius’ vivid talk of the *destruction* of substance?

While the terms involved - *constituo, destruo, esse* and *substantia* – are decidedly metaphysical in hue, clearly suggesting a focus on ontology and ontological relations, it is just as clear that Boethius is not talking about the biblical possibility of destruction (or creation) through speech or language, i.e., his talk of noun phrases, species and genera, etc., is semantic in focus. On the other hand, the simultaneous concern with metaphysical and semantic issues, or more specifically the presumption of the metaphysical grounding of logic and language, will hardly be surprising to anyone familiar with Aristotle, Porphyry or the Neoplatonic tradition Boethius relies upon. Any reader of the *Categories* has to contend, for example, with the fact that it is things and not their names that Aristotle calls homonymous, synonymous and paronymous, even
while they are so called according to how they are designated. In general, for this tradition, logical facts reflect, or had better reflect, metaphysical ones. While for contemporary, analytic philosophers, on the other hand, the reverse dependency, the logical basis of metaphysics, to borrow from the title of Michael Dummett’s classic text, is perhaps more readily intelligible, the tendency is still to set metaphysical issues aside, because they are considered irrelevant, insoluble, or, as Carnap most famously argued, a matter of logical confusion.\textsuperscript{20} We can only make sense of Boethius if we resist this tendency.

The gist of the above interpretation is that Boethius’ proscription of negation in speciation follows from his conceiving of it as fundamentally discursive in function: negation, properly speaking, belongs to the domain of propositions, not names. In its logically proper employment, negation serves to separate or divide the two terms of a given proposition that are otherwise joined together by the copula, esse. However, when applied outside the propositional context, negation simply severs the copula from the predicative expression that might otherwise have been joined to an appropriate subject term. And so we might well ask why Boethius doesn’t simply tell us that negation is inappropriately applied to nominal expressions. The answer, as it turns out, is that he simply doesn’t believe this to be the case!

In his commentaries on Aristotle’s *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, as in his *De Syllogismo Categorico* and *Introductio ad Syllogismos Categoricos*, Boethius articulates what I will call a *copulative* conception of negation, according to which negation is understood as attaching to the copula of a categorical proposition, transforming an instrument/sign of composition into one of decomposition or separation (*divisio*).

However, he also seems to recognize an attributive use of negation in the construction of *infinite or indefinite* expressions (*nomina infinita* or *sermones infinitae*). He thus appears to recognize both a quasi-propositional and a nominal use of negation. Yet Boethius never speaks of a distinction between these two uses and there is no other ground for thinking he regards them as logically or grammatically distinct. Although he acknowledges the existence of *infinite or indefinite* expressions, on the one hand, and negative propositions, as opposed to affirmative ones, on the other, their difference seems to derive from a difference in the grammatical or logical context of application, not from a distinction between two types of negation. The relevant context, I would suggest, is that of the sort of logical analysis afforded by the *scientia divisionis*, which has its principal use in the delineation of the proper lines of predication, and treats genera and species primarily as *predicables*, and thus as discursively deployed.

On the other hand, C. J. Martin has argued in a number of recent publications that Boethius does not in fact recognize what we would regard as a propositional use of negation, since he has no relevant notion of the proposition as a formal unit of logical operation, and thus no strictly *logical* conception of negation as, in essence, a truth
function that takes true or false propositions as arguments and issues false or true ones, respectively, in return. A recognizable distinction between a propositional and a non-propositional use of negation is not explicitly drawn before Abelard, who distinguishes between intrasentential or separative negation, and extrasentential or extinctive negation, the first applying to the copula, and thus operating within the sentence, the second applying to the proposition or sentence as a whole.

However, Martin’s point is overstated. Rather than claiming of Boethius that he has no relevant notion of the proposition as a formal unit, one ought instead observe that he has no notion of the proposition as a simple logical unit. For Boethius, as for Aristotle and, implicitly, Plato, the formal character of the proposition is fundamentally composite, consisting of two terms, in the typical case, and a copula conjoining them. Negation, from this perspective, is fundamentally a negative copula, expressing the relation of separation, but is for all that nonetheless propositional in the intrasentential sense. If this captures the fundamental and exclusive use of negation, then the attributive or nominal use of negation in infinite names involves an extension of this use to non-propositional contexts. However, if this is right, and if the rejection of the use of negation in the speciation of a genus follows from thinking this extension of the use of


22 See Abelard, Logica Ingredientibus in Peter Abaelardus philosophische Schriften, ed. by Bernhard Geyer (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933), 396.
negation illegitimate, then one would expect to find in Boethius a rejection of nominal or attributive negation *tout court*. However, no such thing is to be found.

**Section Three. Nominal Negation: Infinite and Indefinite Expression**

To begin with, Boethius doesn’t appear to think that all infinite, i.e., *non*-*, expressions are empty, i.e., that they designate nothing. They seem, rather, to designate too many, indeed a potentially infinite number of, things. “*Non-homo,*” for example, would appear to apply to apple, goat, and any number of other substances that are non-identical with *homo*, though it might also apply to non-substances. Second, this claim to an overabundant extension is precisely what Boethius argues elsewhere. In particular, in his discussion of such *indefinite (infinita)* expressions in his second commentary on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*, Boethius says of such expressions, whether names (*nomina*) or predicates (*orationes*), that they signify (*significant*) an infinite number of things (*infinita*), not that they signify nothing or no substance at all.²³ Third, though such *infinite* terms may not on their own be used to *determine*, constitute or differentiate a complementary species, there hardly seems to be a problem using them predicatively of, and so to designate, such species, albeit equivocally, precisely in order to pick out that of which they are complementary species. If indefinite terms *can* be so used, then it simply isn’t true, as Boethius is trying to establish, that speciation has nothing to do with negation, unless *designating* complementary species has nothing to do with negation,

²³ “*Cum vero dico *‘non-homo’, significo quidem quiddam, id est id quod homo non est, sed hoc infinite. Potest enim et canis significari et equus et lapis et quidcumque homo non fuerit.*” Boethius, *In De Interpretatione*, ed. Ila, rec. Meiser, 61, 30-62, 7.
but the assumption of this interpretation is precisely that *constituting* is to be understood semantically, as picking out or otherwise designating.

On the other hand, the language of constituting and destroying substance would seem, at best, a misleading way of speaking about merely semantic relations. Where Boethius *is* explicitly engaged in semantic talk, as he is in the passage from his *De Interpretatione* commentary just cited, he uses the familiarly transparent language of signification, i.e., *significare, ponere*, etc. This naturally pushes in the direction of a semantic construal, and there is a passage in chapter 2 of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* that Boethius certainly knew, commented on, and may very well have had in mind in the remark on negation we are discussing, that falls on the semantic side as well, and perhaps suggests a way of avoiding the pitfalls of our first attempt to make sense of Boethius’ proscription. At 16a29 Aristotle says:

> “Not-man” (*to d’ ouk anthrōpos*) is not a name (*onomα*), nor is there any name we ought to call it, for it is neither a proposition (*logos*) nor a negation (*apophasis*). Let us call it an indefinite name (*onomα aoriston*).\(^{24}\)

We have an instance of *prima facia* contradiction here that is almost identical to the sort Boethius commits, and the straightforward way of handling it in Aristotle’s remarks might readily be applied to explain away the apparent contradiction in Boethius. For Aristotle, “not-man” is not *strictly speaking* a name because it doesn’t do what names are designed to do, namely *name* or designate (*sēmainei*). A name, Aristotle tells us, is a “spoken sound that is significative by convention, without time, and that of which no

---

\(^{24}\) Aristotle *De Interpretatione*, 16a29.
part is independently significative (φόνη σήμαντική κατα συνθēκην ανευ χρονου, ἡς μέδεν μερος εστὶ σήμαντικον κεχώρισμενον).\(^{25}\) If negative or infinite names fall short of this definition, it cannot be because they violate the last constraint, since the negative particle is not independently significative, and the substantive expression “man” which, though on its own has the extension man, does not make an extensional contribution to the indefinite expression, in the way it would in the expression “tall man.” It must be that it fails to satisfy the first condition, i.e., that of being significative as a whole, and thus that being significative requires determinacy. In other words, such terms do not signify in the proper sense, i.e., determinately, and this is just what Boethius observes in his commentary on these lines. As he goes on to say, such names do nonetheless designate incompletely or indeterminately, and to this extent may be called *indefinite* or *indeterminate* names. An *indefinite* name, in other words, is not a special kind of name, in the way that a deciduous fruit is a kind of fruit, or a bad idea a kind of idea. It is rather more like a plastic fruit, or a vague concept, something that possesses incompletely the characteristics or capacities that define the unqualified, proper instances of a kind.

We might argue similarly, on Boethius’ behalf, that what makes such a name *indefinite* is, as a matter of definition, the negative particle, and that such *indefinite names* are ill-formed, because negation, strictly speaking, does not properly apply to names. So applying it yields a logically ill-formed expression that while it performs

\(^{25}\) Aristotle *De Interpretatione* 16a19.
semantically does so defectively. While the resulting expression is not a name in the strict sense, it isn’t a proposition (*logos*) either, since the resulting expression lacks the temporal index required of propositions. More to the point, it isn’t a *negative proposition* (*apophasis*), the proper milieu, so to speak, of negation. Note that in the case of alpha- or in-privative expressions, ill-formedness hardly seems an appropriate charge, since such forms are grammatically natural and readily comprehended. The charge, in these instances, would have to be that inasmuch as such prefixes are stand-ins for *non* (or *ouk*) they are nonetheless *logically* ill-formed, though this might raise questions about what else such prefixes might be doing and why, if they are doing something else, the negative particle itself might not be operating similarly, and thus differently from the way we are accustomed to thinking of it as operating.

Aristotle makes a related, but superficially more puzzling claim about future and past tensed verbs, namely, that they are not, strictly speaking, verbs. This case is a little more difficult to understand, since such inflected forms would appear to meet the condition of temporal determinacy, and are otherwise exactly like finite verb forms in the present tense. In his commentary on this line of *De Interpretatione*, Ackrill offers the explanation that Aristotle considers the present tense primary, and that of which the secondary past and future tenses are *inflections*, and thus not temporal references in their own right, just as inflected nouns are not considered referential in their own right, but depend on the reference of the default nominative form. Yet Ackrill points out, as
well, that Aristotle does not draw this connection between nominal and verbal inflections, and thus leaves us without much of an explanation at all.

An explanation, however, is forthcoming if we consider Aristotle’s discussion of future contingent propositions in *Di* 9, where the same strict notion of designation or designative power appears to be at work. Though I cannot argue the point at length here, one way of making sense of Aristotle’s arresting claim that future contingent propositions are neither true nor false, i.e., that the law of excluded middle fails in such cases, is to see that such propositions fail of semantic reach, and in particular that they fall short of being assessable for truth because neither the corresponding state of affairs nor the contradictory state of affairs yet obtains. But what is true of future tensed verbs is also true of past-tensed ones: both purport to but fail to refer to what does not exist, because what they purport to refer to does not yet exist, in the former case, or no longer exists, in the latter. The apparent inconsistency with Aristotle’s treatment of past, true contingent propositions is merely apparent. Past true propositions are made true by past states of affairs, and so are true now by virtue of having been assigned the truth value *true* when those states of affairs obtained. And indeed this is the precise point Aristotle seems to be making about verbs (*rhemata*) in chapter 3 of *Di*: “it additionally signifies (*prossēmainei*) what obtains at present (*to nun uparchein*). And it is
always a sign (*sēmeion*) of things that obtain/are the case (*tōn uparchontōn*), that is, of things [said] of a subject (*tōn kath’ hypokeimenou*).”

Designation, on this view, is irreducibly indexical: inflected nominal expressions fail of designation because there is no indexically accessible correlate of the dative, genitive or accusative case, just as there is no indexically accessible correlate of the future, aorist, pluperfect, etc., tense of a verb. Similarly, then, indefinite names do not, strictly speaking, designate because there is no indexically accessible correlate of the negated referring term, since the relevant referent is too ontologically diffuse. A term that purports to refer to an infinite number of things, or alternatively to something infinite, i.e., a set or collection of an infinite number of things, is simply *not* a referring term. All such cases involve indexical miscarriage, grammatical in the first instance, temporal in the second, and metaphysical in the last. Indeed, in his commentary on *De Interpretatione*, Boethius draws this very comparison between *nomina infinita* and the oblique cases (*obliqui casus*) of common nouns, explaining that while the former fail because part of the name is not a name, the latter fail because adding a verb fails to yield a statement:

> In truth these oblique cases, when joined with “is” or “is not” on no account completes a statement (*enuntationem*). For in fact a statement is the completion of an intelligible utterance to which truth or falsity apply. So if someone should say “Of Cato there is,” it is not yet a complete sentence. For what is “of Cato’ is not said.$^{27}$

---

$^{26}$ *De Interpretatione*, 16b9.
Nonetheless, in assimilating infinite expressions to the oblique forms of common nouns, he seems to suggest that the sign of negation itself, like the case endings, is non-designative, but that it nonetheless changes the meaning, perhaps the intension, of the expression.  

One immediate problem with this account is that Boethius, in the passage from his commentary on De Interpretatione cited above, claims not that infinite expressions fail to refer, but that they refer to an infinite number of things. While associating such expressions with inflected forms, Boethius also provides a curious reason for treating the former and not the latter as a kind of name. Unlike in the case of Catonis est, he tells us, adding the verb est to non Socrates, for example, generates an expression, namely, Socrates non est, which is indeed a statement (locutio), because it satisfies the sufficient condition of being susceptible to truth or falsity, because it is in fact true, if Socrates is mortuus, and false if he is alive. This is a curious argument because Boethius seems to assimilate Non Socrates est, i.e., non-Socrates exists, to Socrates non est, Socrates does not exist, and on the infinite extension construal of infinite expressions, the former is

27 “Hi vero obliqui casus iuncti cum est vel non est enuntationem nulla ratione perficiunt. Enuntiatio namque est perfectus orationis intellectus in quem veritas aut falsitas cadit. Si quis ergo dicat: Catonis est, nondum plena sententia est. Quid enim sit Catonis non dicitur.” Commentaria De Interpretatione, 64.

28 This is, for example, is the reading De Rijk suggests in “The Logic of Indefinite Names in Boethius, Abelard, Dun Scotus, and Radulphus Brito,” in Aristotle’s Peri Hermeneias in the Latin Middle Ages. Essays on the Commentary Tradition, ed. Henk A. G. Braakhuis and Corneli Henri Kneepkens (Groningen: Ingenium Publishers, 2003), 207-233.
true as long as anything that isn’t Socrates exists, regardless of whether Socrates is dead or alive.

Abelard, in his *Ingredientibus*, will later censure Boethius for precisely this, for taking infinite expression to designate *infinitely* rather than *indefinitely*, in effect, for misconstruing *infinitus* and its adverbial form, *infinite*. Abelard argues that a referring expression designates, and is only designative to the extent that it designates, *one thing* (*res*). If an infinite expression designated *infinita* (i.e., an infinite number of things) then it would properly be said to designate some infinite thing (*res*), which, by presumption, it cannot do since there are no such things (God, though infinite, is not a thing). What is *infinitus* about such expressions is not their *significata* but the way they signify (*significare*), what Abelard here calls the *force of signification* (*vis significationis*):

Boethius, however, in his first [commentary] on the *Categories* says that expressions of this sort are called *infinite* because they signify an infinite number of things…But in truth Boethius paid more attention to the reason for the translation of this kind of expression, which is infinite, than to the force (*vis*) of its signification and the property in virtue of which it applies to expressions. For it is not applied to expressions in accordance with the fact that they signify infinite things, but because they signify *indefinitely*, that is *remotely*, as we have said. Otherwise, a thing, since it contains everything, would be something infinite.29

What Abelard means by *remotely* (*remotive*, i.e., by removal), and thus by *infinite*, is roughly this: A designative term is a term that designates a *thing* (*res*), but an infinite expression, in purporting to refer to whatever is not referred to by its base, definite

---

term, designates not *everything* non-identical with that term’s referent, but what is left over from the *remotio finiti*, that is, from the removal of the referent of the corresponding finite expression (*rem sui finiti perimendo*), an observation he also credits to Aristotle (*DI* 10, 19b9), and not the removal of the finite expression itself. It thus designates any one of those things (*res*), though none specifically, and thus designates non-specifically. What Abelard’s claim to univocality seems to mean here is that, though the infinite expression may be used of any number of objects, its reference is just what is picked out of each such thing in common, i.e., its not being X.

We can, I think, reconcile all three positions. Abelard, in effect, tells us that numerosity of reference amounts to indefiniteness of reference, but both he and Boethius may be taken as offering accounts that assign such terms an attentuated capacity to refer, and it seems natural, following Aristotle’s example, to say that attentuated reference isn’t reference *strictly speaking*. Abelard just provides us with a better explanation than Boethius of why one ought to say such a thing of indefinite terms. So this furnishes us with a way of making sense of what Boethius has to say about *indefinite expressions*. Unfortunately, to return to our passage from *De Divisione*, Boethius doesn’t claim here that the species terms generated through negation are *indefinite*, nor does he say of such terms that they fail to designate or that they do so

---

infinitely. If something like this is what he ought to say, means to say and has the resources to say, why doesn’t he just say so?

The answer, I want to suggest, is that the charge of referential diffuseness cannot be raised in this context because what is stake here are the sorts of terms that, for different reasons, appear to have a related semantic property of referential diffuseness, i.e., universal terms. Genus and species terms, we should remember, are terms that apply to many, indeed an indefinite (if finite) number of, things differing in species or number, respectively. But unless being said of or applying to many things is supposed to mean something different from designating many things, then requiring univocal extension of such terms would disqualify universals as designative expressions, and thus as expressions as such. What Boethius seems to be arguing is not that such expressions don’t designate, but that they don’t designate species. The real reason then is indeed that a given species, as a substance, is not to be identified with its instances. There is indeed a difference between what a species term applies to and what it designates, which is after all what the opposition between realists and nominalists turns on, with the latter claiming, in effect, that there is no such distinction to be drawn. To appreciate, however, why the use of negation is so strictly proscribed and why it is expressed in such patently metaphysical terms it is helpful, so I want to argue, to turn back to Plato, to the real precursor of Boethius’ De Divisione, namely the Sophist.

Recall that for Plato it turned out that negation always attaches to the being, to the einai (esse) of a given kind. He is therefore at pains to point out that the extension
of negation is not to enantion, what is typically translated as contrariety, though in Aristotle this becomes the general term for opposition, but to heteron, difference or otherness. The suggestion in the previous chapter was that in Aristotle’s notion of diaphora the connection to negation, and thus the real ontological import of differentiation, division, etc., is lost, but that the link to negation and the metaphysical risks it represents nonetheless remain part of the Platonic inheritance that defines the method of division. A sense of the residue of negation, and in particular the negation of being, in difference, or, more technically, in the differentia, persists in Boethius.

Boethius’ claim appears to be that negation nullifies instead of determining the complement of the species it qualifies, and thus that contradiction cannot be used to differentiate (divide) the species of a given genus. And, on the face of it, the justification for making such a claim seems compelling enough. It is difficult to make sense of, much less differentiate, a being or substance that is just the non-substance or being of another substance, say, man. Relative to the genus animal, man has as its special complement planet, and certainly this does not seem to be determinable simply as what is not man. Negation is just too blunt an instrument to carve out anything specific enough to count as a species.

Compelling or not, however, the above considerations are fundamentally wrongheaded. While a planet, for example, is not definable as non-man, if non-man is not predicable of it, that is if "A planet is a non-man" is not true, then it is unclear it constitutes an appropriately discrete species, and thus a species at all. The disjunction
between any two complementary species must be exhaustive, that is, either something falls under a species s or it falls under its complement ~s, and if it falls under one it does not fall under the other. Thus even were negation not employed as an instrument of speciation, it remains relevant to determining whether a species is indeed a species. At the very least, it would seem a necessary condition of being a species that the negation of any complementary species of a given genus be predicable of it. This is important, because any overlap between divisions of a proximate genus would disqualify them for use in definition, since they will not satisfy the exclusivity condition of providing all and only what is essential to the definiendum.

Yet Boethius is not merely claiming that negation cannot function determinatively, or that its use is always parasitic on an already determined concept, content, or substance, etc. He is not merely observing, as Aristotle does in the Categories, that negation produces indeterminate or what will come to be called infinite (aoristoi) expressions, designating indeterminate substances, or failing of reference altogether. Rather, he is arguing that it nullifies whatever it is applied to, and it is much less clear, upon further consideration, what this claim amounts to. For one thing, though a negated substance may not define its complement, on its own, the negation of every substance with which that complement is non-identical would, it seems, define the complement. Though so specifying a substance might be too cumbersome to be useful, cumulatively, negation would indeed serve to identify a given species, just as removing all non-apples from a bowl of fruit would serve to identify all and only the apples in it,
assuming the bowl contains apples in the first place, and this need not mean knowing beforehand what apples are, although it would require knowing something about apples or about each of the other fruits present in the bowl.

Finally, however, Boethius cannot be making a claim so obviously at odds with the logic of speciation Aristotle had already made standard, namely, that species are differentiated by differentiae. Indeed Boethius makes clear his recognition of this standard procedure in an earlier passage in De Divisione: "just as bronze changes into a statue upon the reception of form, so genus changes into species upon the reception of a difference/differentia (sic ut aes accepta forma transit in statuam, ita genus accepta differentia transit in speciem)." So, if “non-man” is indeed the name of a complementary species it is nonetheless not formed from that species but from a genus and a differentia, which differentia, however, one of the two generated species will possess, and the other not. The relevant differentia in the case of homo is mortalitas, which belongs to one side of the proximate genus rational animal, namely homo, and not to the other, namely planeta. Now since it does indeed appear that once one has a relevant differentia at hand the complementary species is indeed constituted by negation, it seems the point Boethius should have been arguing for here is that not having the differentiating property, in this case mortalitas, is not to be identified with having the negative property, nonmortalitas or immortalitas.

31 De Divisione, 879c10-11.
Now, while this might be because either nonmortalitas or immortalitas is an illegitimate form, this is not the point Boethius in fact makes, and indeed he seems perfectly happy to endorse the use of immortalis. If we take the proximate genus to which non-man would presumably belong, namely rational animal, the appropriate division to be generated at this node, according to Boethius, is that between mortalis and immortalis, and it seems obvious enough that the privative in- of immortalia, the equivalent of the Greek alpha-privative in athanatos, functions as an attributive use of "non." Thus, if non-man is not a substance, then neither is immortal rational animal, which would certainly trouble Boethius, who believes there are indeed such immortal beings, namely the planets just mentioned.

It thus appears that both in those cases where there is a recognizable species, but no ready non-negative expression for it, but also in those cases where such an expression is conventionally available, negation, or at least the grammatical equivalent of the negative particle non, does not destroy the substance of the species it qualifies. The seemingly plain contradiction involved here is not obviously helped by two qualifications Boethius quickly inserts: (1) that it is "necessity that sometimes requires this, not nature," and (2) that when negation is so employed it must follow a kind of logical or cognitive rule of sequence, i.e., that the negative or infinite expression must follow the simple or affirmative one, since negation (negatio) is posterior to and unintelligible without affirmation (affirmatio). The first of these tells us, in effect, what

---

32 De Divisione, 877c5.
we’ve already been given reason to infer, that there are no negative substances to 
ground the use of negative expressions of this kind, although something compels us to 
employ language that implies otherwise. The second qualification, though hardly novel, 
suggests that negation does nonetheless leave us with some, if minimal, content, such 
that, for example, *non homo* and *non planeta*, are not coextensive, or at least not 
cointensive, for otherwise it wouldn’t matter much what substance term followed the 
negative particle, and so wouldn’t matter whether or not the extension or intension of a 
positive substance term had been established beforehand.

As just remarked, the discursive force of negation is part of what links negation 
inextricably to the method of division (*diairesis*) Boethius inherits from Plato. It also 
appears that the unpalatable metaphysical and logical consequences of its discursivity 
are an important part of why negation is proscribed. For Plato, these consequences 
have to do with the threat of disunity to *forms*; for Boethius, following Aristotle, it is the 
disunity of essence, what corresponds to the definition of a thing, that is at stake. While 
Boethius does not speak of definition in this passage, the real philosophical value of 
differentiating species (and thus of division) lies precisely in its use as a method for 
generating definitions. As he tells us: "we may pretty well say that division and 
definition are in essence concerned with the same thing (literally, the *task* of division 
and definition are involved with the same sphere (*in eodem divisionis definitionisque 
ratio versetur*), since a unit/compact definition (*una definitio*) is composed of conjoined
divisions (divisionibus iunctis).\textsuperscript{33} What enters into a definition, i.e., the speciation of genera via differentiae, is, as he puts it "a matter of nature (ad naturam pertineat),"\textsuperscript{34} and, more precisely, because, on the Aristotelian model Boethius follows, definition is identified with, and states, the essence of a thing,\textsuperscript{35} which, as Aristotle tells us, "is in every case universal and affirmative,"\textsuperscript{36} precisely what is, and in no way is not. Indeed, it is because it enables us to identify what a thing is, not merely to stipulate the meaning of a term designating it, that Plato thinks the method "divine," because, as he puts it in the \textit{Sophist}, it enables us to "divide according to the genera," that is, according to how things are divided \textit{in reality}. Given all this, it would then be quite natural to think that conceding a place for negation in division, and thus definition, amounts to conceding a place for non-being in what most properly \textit{is}, which remains troublesome despite Plato’s recasting of \textit{non-being} as \textit{other-than-being}.

Now if a definition states the essence of a thing, and the essence of thing, its \textit{quid est} and \textit{quale est} (Aristotle’s \textit{to ti ἐν einai}), is above all a qualitative unity, then

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} \textit{De Divisione}, 880c9-11.
\item \textsuperscript{34} \textit{De Divisione}, 879b1.
\item \textsuperscript{35} The conception of definition as specifying the essence of the \textit{definiendum}, though deriving from Plato, finds its first clear articulation in Aristotle, who defines definition as a logos signifying the \textit{to ti ἐν einai}, his difficult formula for essence, both at \textit{Topics} 1.5 101b38-102a1 and \textit{Metaphysics} 7.5 1032a12. Porphyry and Plotinus, despite their differences with Aristotle, take much the same position. Plotinus, for example, says that "the \textit{diairesis} of Plato is used for the discrimination (\textit{diakrisis}) of Forms (eidōn) and in relation to the 'what is it?' (i.e., essence) question, to the first/highest genera (\textit{prōta genē}) and noetically/intellectually (\textit{noērōs}) weaves together (\textit{plekousa}) those \textit{things} that are derived from these" (\textit{Enneades} I.III.4).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
there is at least one way in which the *linguistic expression* for an essence and the essence itself diverge. While it may be true that there is no composition within the essence, there is indeed some such a thing in the definition that designates it, and the same would hold true for any species term, considered as part of a definition or not – it too is a composite of the hierarchy of genus-species relations that lead to it. Certainly, then, if negation is applied to such a term we might imagine it directed at any number of these Porphyrean cuts. But consider, for example, the mortality that is part of the definition of man. On the more likely way of construing the possibility Boethius abjures, its *meaning* derives directly from the negation of the immortality of planets, i.e., of the species *immortal, rational animal*. Man’s mortality, then, amounts to his non-immortality, and thus despite its positive lexical register, “mortal” is logically, i.e., according to the logic of division, a negative or *infinite* expression. The negation Boethius is worried about, in other words, is not what is expressed by the negative particle “non” or any of its lexicalized equivalents; rather, it is precisely the negation inherent in the *differentia* that *establishes* the opposition between coordinate species, which Boethius maintains is present only if the *differentiated* opposition is conceived of in terms of contradiction. More to the point, Boethius’ proscription of negation is, properly understood, a denial that *differentiae* are schismatic, that they divide, and so *determine* the space of a given genus into contradictory species, i.e., ones that stand to one another as negations each of the other. In other words, the argument as presented above gets things a bit backwards: it is the purported fact that differentiated species are
not related to one another as contradictories that is supposed to show that negation
has nothing to do with speciating division, rather than the other way around. It remains
to say whether either claim is true or supports the other.

**Section Four. Separative Negation: The Discursive Suture**

Boethius’ seeming inconsistency in the treatment of negation derives from the
fact that the discussion of infinite expressions is primarily logical in focus, while the
discussion of contradiction in division is primarily metaphysical. In the former context, it
is the character of the expression itself and what this tells us about its designative
power that are at issue. In the latter context, the concern is with the nature of what is
designated, i.e., a species. Because the question for Boethius here is not what the
expression *non-homo* designates, but whether it is a possible designation of a species
term, and so whether that term is incorporable into a definition, its occurrence within a
genealogical tree is crucial. Within such a tree, however, it is not simply false that the
relevant *non-homo* is not a substance, but obvious what substance it is, namely a
planet! What Boethius seems to want to reject here is that a planet is a non-man, and
more generally that any species can be the contradictory of another. Since
contradictories are each the negation of the other, the example Boethius chooses to
make this point might well conceal another real basis of concern, that man is a non-
planet, and, the logically more precise formulation of such a claim, that man is a *non-
immortal*. 
Whatever else he thinks, Boethius believes, with Aristotle and Porphyry, that genera and species are substances, as we have already seen, but, as against Aristotle who calls them secondary (*deuterai*), he also believes that they are ontologically prior to the individuals that instantiate them, ontological priority moving from highest genus to the lowest species, whereas for Aristotle ontological primacy belongs to the individual instance of the more universal natural species it instantiates. Still, Boethius parses ontological priority much the way Aristotle does, in terms of what survives the extinction or non-existence of what: "Hence it is true...that if the genus is destroyed (*interimatur*) the species immediately perish (*depirire*), but if a species is destroyed (*interempta*), the genus is not destroyed and remains unaltered in its nature (*in natura consistere*)." On the other hand, Boethius also claims that "a genus is always a whole in relation to its proper species and more universal," and that in the case of part-whole divisions the "more universal" (*universalius*) element, the *dividendum*, in this case the *whole*, is ontologically subordinate to its *dividentia*, i.e., its parts, and thus the whole does not survive the destruction of its parts. It thus follows that taken as wholes genera are ontologically subordinate to their species and so perish with their destruction.

The apparent contradiction is resolvable, though no such resolution is in fact undertaken, either in terms of a distinction Boethius draws following Aristotle between

37 Aristotle *Categories* 5, 2b8-9.

38 *De Divisione*, 879c2-4.

39 *De Divisione*, 878d11-12.
natural and perspectival priority, between what is prior (proteron/prius) and more knowable (gnōrimōteron) by nature (tēi physei) or simpliciter and what is prior relative to us (Posterior Analytics, 70b34-72a5), or in terms of a distinction between quantitative and qualitative difference. The first concerns quality and essence, the second quantity, and it is in terms of quantity and quality, amongst other things, that Boethius distinguishes genus-specis from part-whole division. The claim might be that qua genus, as a matter of its nature or essence, a genus is ontologically prior to its species, but not quantitatively, qua whole, or relative to us. Thus though the genus of rational animal is not as such affected by the existence of its species, considered as a whole, as made up of the two species, mortal and immortal, its existence is directly dependent upon the existence of its species. Perhaps we might think of the situation as follows: If there were no species of man, of mortal rational being, then the genus of rational being would simply not be the quantitatively specific genus consisting of mortal and immortal rational beings, though there would still be a genus of rational beings, a kind that includes anything that is rational. We would then say (or would we?) that while for us, or alternatively quantitatively, the genus has no being beyond its species, to the extent that it is through the species that we come to know the genus, qualitatively, or in its essence, the existence or being of a genus is independent of its speciation.

The trouble with such a solution is that it creates more problems than it solves, since it fails to tell us how these two kinds of priority are connected to one another. Is merelogical dependency subordinate or prior to genus-species dependence? And, given
that kinds of relation are directly connected to the kinds of *relata* the relation links, is mereological (quantitative) existence subordinate or prior to essential (qualitative) existence, and is a distinction to be drawn between two types of being, or between (essential) *being* and (quantitative or part-whole) existence. Boethius makes no such attempt to resolve the initial contradiction, and so none of these further difficulties are addressed. Thus within the confines of this text itself we are left with the rather unsatisfactory view that the ontology of, and ontological relations between, genera and species are either description relative or muddled or both. Yet this is more or less what Boethius’ account of universals would have led us to expect.

Briefly, Boethius’ account of universals, as presented in his second commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, is that they are incorporeal, *universal* entities insofar as they are grasped by the intellect, and, so grasped, *subsist in themselves (per se)*, but that they *subsist* in sensible, *singular* things, and depend upon them for their existence, insofar as they are sensed. To explain the coincidence of universality and singularity in a single subject, Boethius invokes the curious analogy of the simultaneous occurrence of a convex and a concave line in a given object. This suggests, however, that the intelligible universality and the sensible singularity of universals are merely two aspects of, or two ways of viewing, the same thing, i.e., the universal. Yet Boethius also confesses that in

---


the context of a commentary on the *Isagoge* it is natural to highlight the Aristotelian picture, since it is Aristotle’s *Categories* that Porphyry’s text is intended to introduce, while in other texts, in particular the *Quomodo*, where Boethius is expressing his own views on such matters, he adopts a more explicitly Platonic stance. At any rate, if Boethius’ broad concern to reconcile Platonic and Aristotelian views often generates inconsistency, it may also reveal something about the philosophical issue itself. The interplay between universality and singularity, for example, is precisely what the application of concepts to individuals seems to allow us to express, a point that Hegel will insist upon, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The point here, however, is not only that, however more precisely construed, genera and species are substances for Boethius, and thus *beings*, but that division itself establishes or at any rate reflects an ontological hierarchy amongst such substances. One question to be raised here is what kind of hierarchy this amounts to, whether, as Platonists such as Plotinus and Proclus will maintain, divisional descent is indeed isomorphic with ontological descent, every division involving a diminution in the degree of being, or whether the relations between *dividenda* and *dividentia* are to be understood purely in terms of dependency, without ontological degree or scale. And here we come upon the most compelling reason for Boethius’ interdict against negation: if speciation is indeed accomplished through negation, in the metaphysically significant sense that a *differentia* differentiates a genus into species that are each the negation of the other, and together the negation of the genus, i.e., a mortal rational animal, is not a
mere rational animal, then there is an obvious sense in which it involves ontological
decline of the sort Platonists and Neoplatonists are at pains to explain. We might then
understand Boethius' proscription as a rejection of the Plotinian, or more broadly the
Platonist, model of ontological descent.

Regardless of the precise focus of Boethius’ metaphysical or semantic
apprehension, we can now make out its likely provenance. While Boethius makes no
reference to Plato’s treatment of negation in the *Sophist*, he mentions the dialogue and
Porphyry’s commentary on it, and certainly must have known the dialogue itself.
Inasmuch as he recognizes the exclusive disjunctive relation between any two species,
he recognizes the *separative* character of differentiation. His insisting on contrariety
rather than contradiction to characterize the relation between the *designata* of
differentiated terms simply registers, as already noted, his agreement with Aristotle’s
views, but the categorical character of this insistence is simply a way of formally stating
Plato’s semantic principle that the force of negation in such contexts is differential, that
it indicates *difference*, not the *notness* or non-being of the *designatum* of the
differentiated term. That he construes negation discursively, that is, in terms of
contradiction, is to be expected, since the native context of contradiction is the
proposition, not the singular term.

The seeming inconsistency of Boethius’ views on negation is thus rather
attributable to his failing to distinguish the analysis of expressions, e.g., *infinite* nominal
or adjectival terms, from the analysis of the reference and predicative roles of such
expressions. In the discussion of speciating division, Boethius is clearly interested in the ontological relations that hold between complementary species of a common genus, not in the semantics of \textit{not} in one or another of the expressions that designate these species. Indeed, this amounts to the obverse of Abelard’s acute observation about Boethius’ account of infinite expressions. Here he does indeed attend to the logical force (\textit{vis})\textsuperscript{42} that contradiction would impose upon divided species, but fails to take sufficient note of the determinate expressions that designate these species. It is thus that Boethius, instead of embracing the differentiating force of negation and acknowledging its role in determination, translates Plato’s declaration that all negation is difference into what he no doubt regards as the equivalent pronouncement, that where we think we see contradiction in division it is rather contrariety that reigns.

Yet contrariety, no less than contradiction, or privation (the third variety of opposition Boethius considers) for that matter, has plenty to do with negation. None of these would appear to be intelligible if it is not expressible in terms of negation. If \textit{planet}, or cow or elephant are not \textit{non-man} it isn't at all clear that these are species separable from man. In other words, it would seem to be a necessary condition of being a species that the negation of any complementary species of a given genus, or of any genealogically more remote species, be predicable of it. This is important, because any

overlap between divisions of a proximate genus would disqualify them for use in definition, since they will not satisfy the exclusivity condition of providing all and only what is essential to the *definiendum*. Negation, in other words, marks the fundamental separation between classes, and the method of division maps the degree and terms of separation, even if it does not provide for the qualitative particularity of a given class. But, on the other hand, if negation still seems the most plausible candidate for capturing the determinate separation between species or kinds, and thus for grounding the operations of division and composition that delimit our acts of cognition and predication, we are compelled to acknowledge in the familiar habits of naming, attribution and inference by which we continue to identify ourselves as rational animals a kernel of inveterate, if not constitutive, nihilism, whether this is the profound metaphysical acknowledgment of nonbeing, or the more palatable possibility of logical or conceptual cancellation.

**Section Five. Conclusion**

While what is of direct concern to Boethius might initially appear to be the fairly narrow topic of genus-species and subject-accident relations, it should be clear at this point that the real framework of concern is the much broader one of the fundamental constituents of speech and thought, extending from the sensible domain of images and singularity, to the intelligible domain of concepts, universals and truth. Organizing epistemological and metaphysical concerns around the classification of things and names or concepts begins, as already indicated, with Aristotle's table of ten *kategoriae,*
categories, which have been transmitted to us as *predicaments (praedicamenta)* in Boethius’ Latin translation. This translation of the term *katēgoria*, and even more so its familiar transliteration, however, obscures its etymological and, as it turns out, its philosophical significance, since the word has a juridical and thus a normative use whose philosophical implications cannot be entirely ignored.

In its principal use in Classical Greek *katēgoria* is a technical term for accusation. The cognate nominal form, *katēgoros*, designates the respective accuser, prosecutor or critic, and a variety of cognate verbal forms are found in accounts of legal contest, most famously in Plato’s account of Socrates’ trial in the *Apology*. Socrates’ *katēgoroi* are clearly not Aristotle’s *katēgoriai*, and the latter would have done little good against the former, who accused Socrates in the empty formulae of political and religious censure. Nonetheless the root shared by these terms shows up as well in the common noun *agora*, the assembly, the economic and cultural marketplace, what Hegel envisions as the communal space of the "spiritual daylight of the present," and in the verb *agoreuo*: to address, to call to assembly. The full address, the enunciating injunction (to borrow, if somewhat incongruously, two Lacanian notions whose proper province is rather the symbolically situated subject) is the collective discourse of communities or institutions, even if that of Socrates’ *kategoroi* issues in the infamous discourse of political expulsion. Aristotle’s *kategoriae*, understood in the loosely Lacanian sense of their governing interrogatory intent, are the basic elements of address, nomination, predication and thought.
To follow the lessons of etymological analysis a little further, if the juridical, communal and rhetorical meanings are still present or recoverable in the matter-of-fact designation of what can be said and meant, then what we have in the *kategoriae* is a logical *decalogue*, the tenfold laws of speech and thought, of thinking about and saying what there is and what is true or false of what there is. Yet the Aristotelian, unlike the Mosaic, *decalogue*, addresses itself not to the possibility of (logical and metaphysical) infringement, nor to the community of those for whom this possibility is a matter of instinct, but to those for whom the rules of abstraction, division and composition are already established and internalized, though they have not yet been formally expressed or concretely realized.

The Aristotelian *decalogue*, in other words, is neither strictly normative, nor descriptive, but has instead the character of pure enunciation, or if one prefers, of a kind of belated philosophical performative. Aristotle speaks not of what ought to be the case, but of what is *already*, albeit implicitly, the case, though the *is* here betokens the magisterial authority of the Philosopher's voice: the *Categories*, i.e., the text itself, begins and ends with talk of things that "are said" (*legetai*), both in the more technical sense of being predicated and in the more colloquial sense of being customarily asserted. The point I wish to make here is that the *Categories* is not an ethnographic mapping of logical practice, or even ontology – to recall again that it is *things*, rather than the expressions standing for them, that are said to be predicable of one another or not, essentially or accidentally - but that in its cataloguing of predicaments and
predicative relations, and thereby providing the basis for distinguishing individuals from universals, substances and subjects from their attributes and predicates, it records as much as it announces a particular kind of thinking, one epitomized in the verb form most often used to describe it: *kategoreitai*. That this is a third person, middle form, employed impersonally, establishes a crucial difference both from Plato’s more idiomatic *legetai* (which Aristotle also employs synonymously with *katēgoreitai*), and from the modern, Cartesian *cogito*, whose grammar, i.e., its first person, active form, emphasizes the prerogatives of the *subject* of thought, while *kategoreitai* focuses on the ordinances of the *predicate* and discursivity in general. From this perspective *legetai* is the unmarked term for discursive expression, its semantic coverage equally dispensed between subject and predicate.

From Aristotle’s perspective, the community in question, though historically the philosophical community of Athens, is logically the universal community of human beings, *anthropoi*, as animals possessed of speech and (equivalently) reason (*logos*): any rational being will recognize the elements of his or her own discursive comportment in the categories addressed to him/her. Yet the fact that we intuitively acknowledge the hold this table of categories has over us is hardly justification for its legislative force. What’s more, there are features of the table that defy intuition rather than immediately enlisting its assent. First, there is included in the list of *kategorai*, as its first member and thus as the highest genus, a category that is not indeed a *kategoria* at all, for, as we learn, it meets neither of the two criteria established for predicates: it is neither said of,
nor present in a subject. This category, that of substance (ousia), corresponds to the universal "being," and to the individuated beings of a given species, to man as such, and to the particular man, for example. To the extent that we commit ourselves to the system of predicables, or are addressed as though we had done so, despite finding ourselves at once within and beyond its parameters, we bear the relation of incommensurability to a transcendent performative that defines us as subjects of the discursive law.

The anchors of metaphysics and epistemology, primary substance and the substantial universal, respectively, lie both within and constitutively beyond the system of categories, and define two different but crucial unities: the simple unity of the universal, and the composite unity of the hylomorphic subject. This contradictory position of ontological and epistemic primacy is achieved through two kinds of negation: the divisive or separative negation of differentiae that produces and so includes them in the system of predicables, and the abstractive negation that removes and places them beyond it (and here we might recall the quotation from Schelling with which Zizek begins the third chapter of The Ticklish Subject: "The beginning is the negation of that which begins with it." If there is always something that begins what is begun, and is thus before what begins, we can say as well that there is always something that determines what is determined, and thus ultimately something that is not determined. This, I would claim, is precisely how negation, or the consciousness that negates, is to be identified. While we may learn here that the particular human being is thus a unity of the
hylomorphic variety and that its ontological status is the product of a double negation, this does not tell us what he or she might be as the object of his own self-reflection. If we can say that the subjectivity of this subject is here identifiable in the third person *kategorei, he/she/it predicates*, that is, as that visible agency present in the granting and withholding of attributes and essences, we have not yet identified anything that can be distinguished as an interiority, as a subject or *I*.

Neither Plato nor Aristotle is directly concerned with subjective interiority or self-knowledge of this or any other subject, and this remains true for Boethius and the medieval tradition as well, despite the resounding influence of Augustine, in whose exploration of the modalities of sensuous and affective temptation, and in particular of the self's dispersion in *molestia*, in book ten of the *Confessions*, Heidegger\(^4\) discerns an analytic inventory of the lineaments of Dasein's facticity. Yet we might say that while Plato discovers in negation the fundamental operation of discursive consciousness, and its attunement to ontological structure, and Aristotle provides us with the ordinances of discourse and ontology themselves, i.e., the categories, it is Boethius, via Porphyry, who brings out the legislative character of the predicables and categories, who attempts, at any rate, to tell us how these must be arrived at, first as a matter of methodological consistency, and indirectly on the basis of fundamental ontological relations.

In short, we cannot consider it an inessential circumstance that the disclosure of negation as the fundamental operation of cognition is delivered in a concentrated spectacle of denial. For properly speaking what is disclosed here is not simply a logical or cognitive maneuver, but that interior moment of dissent and decision, that might or might not conform to the categorial edict(s). Neither Boethius nor the tradition that follows him can quite acknowledge the authority of ontology in the prerogative of negation, although Freud has alerted us to the modes of resistance, so that we can recognize disclosure in Boethius' denial. Thanks to Freud, we can also recognize in negation not merely the instrument of dissent, but the founding instinct of subjectivity.\footnote{Although this is not of course the primary concern of this dissertation, what I hope to have shown thus far, is that before the successive elaborations of subjectivity in Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Freud, to say nothing of Lacan, there is already between Plato and Boethius a subject of negation, even if it makes its appearance exclusively in the third person.} The predicative array is that through which both the world and the subject become intelligible and knowable, each according to its own limits. The question we finally arrive at is whether this happens through the construction or the accommodation of what I have called the Aristotelian decalogue, or of whatever system of genera and species succeeds or displaces it.

The question I propose to address in the following chapter can be considered a more specific formulation of the question just posed, but now in direct conversation with Hegel, concerning in part the notions of division and composition, lexically reformulated by Kant as those of analysis and synthesis, respectively. This lexical shift is
reflected as well in the succession of verbs that supplant the Aristotelian *katēgorein*, Boethius’ *praedicare*, literally *to speak before or say what is prior*, and finally the verb that with Descartes becomes the signature of the modern subject: *cogito, cogitare*, in its etymological sense, *to drive, compel or marshal together*, though arguably it will take Kant to tease out the priority of synthesis its morphology implies. While both *cogitare* and *katēgorein* imply combination and assembly, the Greek, etymologically, presumes the assembly under address, whereas the Latin expresses an operation that itself establishes an assembly or community, as Augustine had observed much earlier in the *Confessions*, where he offers the following philosophical etymology:

> [things] have to be brought together (*cogenda*) so as to be capable of being known; that means they have to be gathered (*colligenda*) from their dispersed state. Hence is derived the word *cogitate*. To bring together (*cogo*) and to cogitate (*cogito*) are words related as *ago* (I do) to *agito* (agitate) or *facto* (I make) to *factito* (I make frequently). Nevertheless the mind claims the verb cogitate for its own province.45

As already suggested, the *cogito* proceeds in the name or authority of the first person, whereas *kategoreitai* proceeds in the name of the third, idiomatically the impersonal, and perhaps universal, subject of logical authority.

In Hegel we shall see a third lexical shift, and with this a philosophical reorientation, from the Latin *cogitare* to the German *Andenken*, *to think through*, and to a distinctive incorporative mode of negation, *sublation* (*Aufhebung*), through which the complementary procedures of division and collection that define the logic of *division* are reconceived. *Thinking through* is fundamentally historical and local, bound to the

---

broader cultural discourse of its epoch and its more immediate philosophical context. It is in its historicity, and more specifically with its insistence on the immanence of negation to the specific context of philosophical development, that Hegel’s Logic will seek a ground for the basic elements of thought and being that will avoid the charge of arbitrariness.
CHAPTER 3

HEGEL: NEGATION AND THE LOGIC OF THE CONCEPT

Section One. Introduction

If the method of division is the method by which definitions are established, and definitions conform to, and indeed state, the essence of a thing, then it is through division that the homology between logic and metaphysics is most clearly demonstrated, all the more so since though division primarily serves the interests of the systematic knowledge of general truths, it is also in principle applicable to the full range of predicables, including accidents, and so makes visible a link between ontology and ordinary talk about contingent truths and particulars as well. So much is clear in both Plato and Boethius, and thus for the conception of logic that prevails throughout scholastic philosophy, yet it is precisely the ontological import of negation, as we have seen, that drives Boethius to abjure what is clearly entailed by the method he champions as the centerpiece of the logica vetus, namely, the operation of negation involved in parsing the divisions of a given genus-species lineage. This is why his proscription of negation is framed in terms of a rejection of contradiction.

Boethius’ argument that the application of negation issues in the destruction of being turns out to have depended upon a conception of negation that, while Platonic in terms of the ontological import it assigns negation, sidesteps Plato’s more specific
identification of negation with ontological difference. More significantly, the conception of negation relevant to the generation of contraries in division is at odds both with the extinctive conception Boethius neglects to recognize and the separative conception he is apparently bound to. Rather, what drives Boethius’ proscription is the looming threat of ontological disunity in the fabric of those things about which philosophy and theology are most urgently concerned: being, truth and essence. Together, the system of predicables, the conception of the proposition and thought that system is supposed to ground, and the method of division that reveals the permissible lines of attribution imply a principle at odds with the largely Aristotelian account of determination that prevails from Boethius onwards, the principle, namely, that all determination is negation (omnis determinatio est negatio).

As suggested in the introduction, this principle of negative determination (PND) can be seen as following from two principles that precede it historically: (1) all division is negation, and (2) all determination is division. Thus far I have, in effect, argued that (1) is more or less Plato’s principle and that (2) is roughly Boethius’. On the familiar Hegelian model of phenomenological dialectic, Hegel himself comes to the principle by way of a kind of deductive inheritance, which is to say not that he deduces it from the principles of his philosophical forebears, but that he arrives at it through the inferential force of the tradition itself, just as, for example, the formalism of Stoic logic can be seen, from Hegel’s perspective, to imply the development of self-consciousness by realizing, in
effect, (a law of) the autonomy of calculative thought,\(^1\) although this implication was unavailable to the Stoics themselves, for whom the relation between thought and consciousness remained to be thought. To this extent, Stoic logic, or Stoicism more generally, is to be thought of as a *formal* expression whose determinate meaning awaits its realization in subsequent philosophical or cultural discourse.

Likewise, Plato’s discovery of the role of negation in the differentiation of forms and concepts amounts to a formal expression of the negativity of discursive thought, which, though also implicit in the foundations of scholastic logic and metaphysics, as we have seen, is first explicitly realized and articulated in Hegel, and encapsulated in the logico-metaphysical law he ascribes to Spinoza, i.e., PND.\(^2\) In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel tells us that the principle is the “basis of the absolute unity of substance” but that Spinoza’s mistake was to have conceived negation as mere “*determinateness* (Bestimmtheit) or quality” and not “as absolute, that is, *self-negating negation*.”\(^3\) This, according to Hegel, is to understand the determinative role of negation as limited to particularization (*Besonderung*), that is, as *external* to substance, which *qua* substance admits of no particularization. But if negation remains an operation external to

---


\(^2\) As mentioned in the introduction, Hegel cites a version of this principle from Spinoza, but its intended use in Spinoza is far more restricted.

\(^3\) *Science of Logic*, 11.376.
substance, then substance itself stands against whatever is particularized in relation to it, and to this extent remains undetermined. To be sure, it remains thereby the very exemplar of pure being (inasmuch as it is unqualified by negation) and unity (inasmuch as it is therefore internally undifferentiated). Yet substance is also thereby, so Hegel insists, something devoid of content, and so is the complement of a world that, in actuality, has no worldly reality. Hegel, apparently following Salomon Maimon, calls such a view acosmism, inasmuch as “according to this philosophy there is actually no world at all in the sense of some positive being (eines positiv Seienden).”

This account of individuation, which in some form or other makes its appearance in Porphyry, Boethius, Eriugena, Odo of Tours, Anselm, Gilbert of Poitiers, and others, has been called the “standard theory of individuality” in medieval philosophy. The basis for this account is the proposition that what makes an individual substance individual is the specific set of properties and accidents possessed by that and no other substance. The view that Hegel, in effect, attributes to Spinoza is that the relationship between these accidents and the substance they individuate is that of negation. His complaint is

---


5 The opposition between atheism and acosmism can apparently be traced back to Salomon Maimon’s discussion in his autobiography. See Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte, edited by Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1984).

6 Encyclopedia Logic, §50.

7 This designation and an extensive discussion of the principal claims of such a theory are to be found in J. J. E. Gracia’s Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages (Philosophia Verlag, 1984). See also Peter King’s “The Problem of Individuation in the Middle Ages,” Theoria 66 (2000): 159-184.
that because the relation, and so the attributes themselves, are external to the
substance in question, they fail to determine it at all, and simply define a non-
substance. At the heart of this complaint lies an objection of the sort familiar from
contemporary critiques of what is typically called the bundle theory of individuation,\(^8\)
i.e., that individuals are defined by the unique set of properties they possess, although
most bundle theorists claim not that the relevantly bundled properties are negations of
the substance they individuate, but rather that there is no substance apart from such
bundles. Another way of putting Hegel’s objection, then, would be to say that Spinoza’s
view of the relationship between properties and substance implies a conception of
individuation that leaves the relevant substance untouched by the properties that
would determine it, or leaves a world of property clusters (bundles) without substance,
and therefore without being (since being, in this instance, is, as a matter of stipulation
external to the properties determined in relation to it).

While spelling out and assessing Spinoza’s position are not our direct concern, it
is nonetheless helpful in trying to make sense of Hegel’s view on negative determination
to see what he finds inadequate in Spinoza’s, and, if he does misrepresent Spinoza, to
understand why he might be inclined to do so. Now Spinoza does indeed cite a
quantification-free version of the principle, i.e., *determinatio est negatio*, in his

---

\(^8\) See, for example, Michael Loux’s discussion of the objection in *Metaphysics: A Contemporary
Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 93. Loux poses the objection in terms of a difficulty bundle
theories have explaining the meaning of ordinary subject predicate propositions that purport to attribute
a property to an object that possesses them.
correspondence with a certain Jarig Jelles in defense of the claim that "figura negatio [est]," where figura is contrasted with integram materiam (matter as a whole). Since Spinoza appears to take the position that substance is itself an undivided whole (integra) this claim about figura might well be thought, on analogy, to imply that its modes, understood as determinations, may to this extent be regarded as negations of that substance.

However, in the context of Spinoza’s response to Jelles, determinatio clearly carries a far more restricted sense. The (roughly) geometrical relationship between materia and figura is analogous not to the relationship between substance and mode, but to individual things or modes and their “extrinsic denominations, relations or, at best, circumstances (denominationes extrinsecas, relationes, aut ad summum circumstantias).” Here’s what Spinoza writes to Jelles:

...figure applies only to finite and determinate bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure, thereby means to indicate simply this, that he apprehends a determinate thing and the manner of its determination. This determination therefore does not pertain to the thing in regard to its being; on the contrary, it is its non-being. So since figure is nothing but determination, and determination is negation, figure can be nothing other than negation.11

---

9 Epistola L, dated June 2, 1674. For translations of this and other letters, see The Letters, translated by S. Shirley; introduction and notes by Jacob Adler, Steven Barbone, and Lee Rice (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995). Jelles was a Dutch merchant and a member of a small circle of intellectuals with whom Spinoza regularly met and corresponded.


11 Epistola L.
While he cites *determinatio est negatio* as a general principle, the notion of *determinatio* he has in mind here is that of finite limit, i.e., that which confers the specific shape, boundary or, more abstractly, finitude upon what is finite, and so has nothing obvious to do with being or substance as such, or with the essence of the modes.

If negation plays a role in particularization or individuation, i.e., in making something the contingent particular it is, as it seems to, it is certainly not by way of establishing the *determinations* (or actualizations) of being. At best, negation produces a finite reflection of the absolute attributes or modes of the divine substance. This still amounts to construing negation as a mechanism of *particularization*, but presumably without acosmist consequences. On this account, Spinoza holds that the entire cosmos is actually, and infinitely, present in divine substance, but is also finitely reflected in the determinations used to cognize it. Yet since such reflective determination is necessarily external to substance, this still does not yield an actual *world*, even if it presupposes an actual, ontologically replete, substance. If what we mean by the world is what we think we mean, that is, something we finitely inhabit, cognize, etc., then it will have only as much reality as our *reflected* determinations can muster, which, if negation functions as

---

12 This, in its essentials, is the interpretation of Spinoza’s use of the principle of negative determination offered by Yitzak Melamed in his "‘Omnis determinatio est negatio’ – Determination, Negation and Self-Negation in Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel," in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. E. Förster and Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 195. More specifically, Melamed argues that the use of negation yields a “partial negation” of the absolute attribute, though it isn’t quite clear what the partiality of negation amounts to.
this construal of the principle says it does, isn’t quite enough to make it something existent, let alone something sufficiently unified to count as a world or cosmos.

To treat negation as an instrument of particularization, from Hegel’s perspective, is thus to misidentify the locus and range of negation, namely, to hold that it has no intrinsic relation to substance, which substance, in turn, admits of no negation or differentiation within it. When applied to substance so conceived (as pure being), without differentiated content, it therefore yields simple non-being, if it yields anything at all. And thus if being is all that is, then however rich in delimiting determinations (i.e., particularizations) the world constituted in relation to it might be, it strictly speaking isn’t. If this is the case, then negation so applied is a determination not in the sense of providing or realizing the content of substance, but in the sense of externally delimiting what is already substantively determined by other means.

Alternatively, if negation is instead taken to be virtually internal to substance, i.e., as the potential medium of cognition, then substance itself might instead be conceived as possessing a kind of potential, virtual or rational (that is, discursively realizable) plenitude that can be actualized through its successive determinations. On such a view, substance is already a Stimmung, a potentiality for all the determinations (Bistimmungen) that can be determinately expressed or derived from it. In one sense, then, substance here is already, in potentia, all the determinations that can be drawn from it. On the other hand, it would not be determinately, in actu, any of these determinations, taken individually or collectively. Hegel attributes something like this
position to Leibniz, whom he thinks presents an inevitable counterpoint to Spinoza, or more pointedly, whose *Monadology* he thinks remedies “the lack of *immanent reflection* that affects both the Spinozist exposition of the absolute and the doctrine of emanation.”¹³ The problem with Leibniz’s view is that while granting the immanence of determination – each monad is “the totality of the content of the world,” but is only “a negative reflected into itself”¹⁴ – determination is assigned an *external* principle, that is, in Hegel’s terms, it is *in itself*, but not *for itself*, the requisite plenitude of substance.

For Hegel, by contrast, negation is *immanent* both to substance and thought, and is thus an internal principle of conceptual and ontological realization alike, or more precisely it is the internal principle of the latter *because* it is the internal principle of the former. This follows from the fact that for Hegel the logic that “coincides with metaphysics” is finally a logic of the concept. For its part, *negation* is not merely that which “propels the concept onward,”¹⁵ but is present in “reality itself.”¹⁶ Negation is thus internal to the concept itself and corresponds, as Plato first made apparent, to the internal *otherness* of every substance, i.e., its being a totality of determinations that are both other than it and constitutive of its totality. Hegel, unlike Plato, however, will insist

---

¹³ *Science of Logic* II.378.

¹⁴ *Science of Logic* II.378.


on the interior contradiction this entails, rather than taking refuge in the more benign notion of affine alterity.

To begin with, Hegel links negation to propositional expression, but also develops the *inheritence* conception of the proposition he inherits from the scholastic tradition, according to which the proposition is grounded in, and is an expression of what inheres in, the concept (*Begriff*), which Hegel identifies as the “general form” of philosophical or speculative thought.\(^\text{17}\) Hegel describes the crucial role of negation, or more specifically *determinate negation*, as follows:

The one thing needed to achieve scientific progress – and it is essential to make an effort at gaining this quite simple insight into it – is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is *equally* positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its particular content; or that such a negation is not just negation, but is the negation of the determined fact which is resolved, and is therefore determinate (*bestimmte*) negation; that in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives – a tautology indeed, since the result would otherwise be something immediate and not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a determinate negation, it has a content. It is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding – richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite. – It is above all in this way that the system of concepts is to be built (*bilden*) – and it has to come to completion in an unstoppable and pure progression (*Gange*) that admits of nothing extraneous.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{17}\) *Encyclopedia Logic*, §9.

\(^{18}\) *Science of Logic*, 21.38.
And here, in brief, is the full logic of conceptual form,\(^{19}\) cast in much the same terms as Plato casts the *hodos diaireseōs*, the method of division, as that through which “everything that has been discovered pertaining to *technē* has come to transparency (*phanera gegone*).”\(^{20}\) At its center lies the differentiating instrument of *determinate* (*bestimmte*) negation, which is *positive* in just the sense that it brings about, and so in effect *posits*, a new content, and thus a new, *higher and richer* concept, since it retains, while superseding, the content of its negated precursor. This basic mode of such negation, the process through which it *builds* content, is what Hegel calls *sublation* (*Aufhebung*), and in its establishing, as a *result*, an ordered system of concepts it is no longer a mere instrument of discovery (*heuresis*). *Aufhebung*, then is negation as a *formative* principle of differentiation. However, its operation and the conceptual “progression” Hegel speaks of here will turn out to depend fundamentally on the engagement of the concept in the proposition (*Satz*), what amounts to, for Hegel, judgment (*Urteil*). It is therefore with Hegel’s treatment of judgment that we must begin, inasmuch as it is here that negation exhibits this characteristic mode of operation.

\(^{19}\) The reference here, it should be clear, is to the logic of form based on Spencer-Brown’s *Laws of Form*, which I discuss in the Introduction.

\(^{20}\) Plato *Philebus* 16c2-3.
Section Two. Infinite Judgment and the Immanence of Negation

In a curious section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* entitled *Observing Reason*, Hegel generates one of the more curious pronouncements of occidental philosophy, what would appear to be a moment of surpassing philosophical bathos: "The Spirit is a bone."\(^{21}\) Appearances notwithstanding, this aphorism, and the breadth of its meaning earn it such a designation, is the crystallization and critique of a philosophical tendency, depending on how one records its history, that begins with Anaxagoras, as Plato alerts us in the *Phaedo*, and continues in the raft of contemporary explorations of naturalism in epistemology, philosophy of mind and metaphysics.\(^{22}\)

So construed, it expresses, on Hegel’s first gloss, the fact that "the universality that each individual as such attains is pure being, death."\(^{23}\) If we seek an empirical record of consciousness, mind or Spirit we will indeed find one in its appearance, acts and effects, but in none of these will one find the vital individuality of that consciousness or Spirit itself. The phenomenon, here the visible materiality of an immaterial substance, in its dead if accessible particularity, is in the first place the

---

\(^{21}\) The original form of the proposition is "The being of Spirit is a bone," which serves to highlight its connection to the Aristotelian identification of individual substance as the subject proper of predication. In other words, insofar as "the Spirit" properly serves as the subject of predication it is precisely its being, its substance, that awaits determination, as I hope will be brought out in what follows.

\(^{22}\) The thoroughgoing naturalism contemporary analytic philosophers such as Pinkard, Pippin and Forster attribute to Hegel seems to me fundamentally mistaken. Yet the failure of the kind of brute empiricism on display in *Observing Reason* does not on its own discredit these readings, and there is much of great interest and value, for example, in Michael N. Forster’s *Hegel’s Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

\(^{23}\) *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §452.
material residue of conscious life, and in the second place, evidence of a departed, empty transcendence, its *mere* existence, that is, its lost relation to the category of *being* itself, the *genus generalissimum*. Yet because, as Hegel remarks in the preceding section on *Self-consciousness*, death is also “the *natural negation* of consciousness,” the bone, as it turns out, is not simply the residue of consciousness, but its negation, which is why this judgment, for all its uncouth irregularity, is, according to the formal requirements of such judgments, *infinite* (*undendlich)*.

Yet Hegel also tells us that as an instance of *infinite judgment* (*unendliche Urteil*) our proposition "would be the fulfillment of life that comprehends itself,“ that is, the fulfillment, or, more precisely, the *actualization*, of the promise of what he calls *absolute knowing*. It thus stands as a kind of sphinx at the crossroads, or, what amounts to the same thing, as a riddle whose answer leads either to the end of philosophical thought, or to its proper beginning in the restoration of logic as a medium of veridical expression and so as an instrument of speculative metaphysics. For Hegel, that restorative logic, elaborated first in the *Science of Logic*, and then in the more succinct *Encyclopedia Logic*, will ultimately reconceive the traditional logical relationship between concept and proposition/judgment, seeing the latter as the necessary

---

24 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §188.

25 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §346.
elaboration of the former. This is reflected in Hegel’s insistence that “[j]udgment is the determinateness of the concept posited (gesetzte) in the concept itself.”

In the preceding chapters I argued that the picture of the concept as the stratified ground of the proposition is first sketched in Plato’s *Sophist* and subsequently transmitted to the scholastic tradition in its more developed Aristotelian form by Boethius. Hegel’s logic is thus, in its essentials, a recovery of a semantic model that is, so to speak, buried in the tradition. It is Hegel’s achievement, however, to have applied this model outside the Aristotelian and Porphyrian network of categories, genera and species, and as against Kant’s reconfigured table of a priori concepts. What will emerge is a more purely conceptual precursor of Frege’s *Begriffsschrift*, a concept logic that, like Frege’s, grants pride of place to semantic engagement, but locates such engagement in *negation* rather than *assertion*.

If Hegel’s conception of logic looks forward to Frege, however, it also points backwards not merely to Aristotle’s syllogistic but to Plato’s *diairetic* logic. As Hegel puts things in the *Science of Logic*:

...because it is absolute negativity, the concept divides and posits itself as the negative or the other of itself...in this division the unity of the concept is still only an external connection. Thus, as the connection of its moments posited as self-subsisting and indifferent, the concept is judgment.

---

26 *Science of Logic*, 12.53.

27 This is argued for in Chapters 1 and 2.

Because the concept, for Hegel, is to begin with unthought, and so a virtually undivided unity, judgment (Urteil), to begin with, “is the originative division (Teilung) of an originative unity.” On the other hand, the division that brings the concept to propositional form is driven by the concept itself, or rather by the thinking initiated by its “absolute negativity.” Parsing the lines of division within a given concept amounts to thinking through the judgments to which the concept gives rise. In Hegel’s version of Platonic diairetic, therefore, division discloses the conceptual and inferential relations that are immanent to the specific stage of philosophical development in which a given concept is deployed, rather than adumbrating a received lineage that transcends the contingencies of local discourse. The form of infinite judgment, i.e., A is non-B, exhibits the negative, diairetic dynamic of judgment as such, and therefore the divided character of the concept as well. To show that this is the case for Hegel is to explain the riddle of infinite judgment, which will be the task of the first section of this chapter.

While negation is the basic mode of conceptual determination and the principal instrument of analytic division in general, the gist of the present argument is that the formal progression of infinite judgment in the Phenomenology illustrates the immanence of negation in the procession of conceptual thought and so thought as such. A complete picture of Hegel’s adaptation of the method of division requires seeing both how it is connected to the process of sublation (Aufhebung) and how the structures of Aristotelian syllogistic facilitates the exposition and rationalization of the concept,

---

29 *Science of Logic*, 12.55.
which, though touched on in this section, will not be spelled out until the last section of this chapter.

**Section Three. Infinite Judgment and the (Dis)unity of the Proposition**

In order to uncover the logic of “The Spirit is a bone,” it is necessary, for reasons I hope will become clear, to first say something about the immediate context of its derivation and about the broader deductive framework to which that derivation conforms. With regard to the former, it is the evidentiary force of properties and expression that is at issue in this section of the Phenomenology. The central question under discussion here is whether material appearance is the manifestation of an interior essence, and if so, whether this manifestation expresses that essence exhaustively or inadequately, or displaces it entirely. Since in phrenology, the exemplar here of empirical science, the relevant essence is that of the soul, mind or Spirit, it is not simply the absurd and irrelevant pseudo-science history has judged it to be. Its concern, on the face of it, is identical to the concern of the Phenomenology itself: the historical occurrence of consciousness, subjectivity and spirit in the material world.

As a summary conclusion of that discussion, a preliminary construal of the proposition would make it a claim about the epistemic and metaphysical primacy of appearance, understood here as its visible materiality. So understood, the proposition would constitute an inversion of the traditional hylomorphic order, metaphysically and syntactically, since the *form* of spirit is revealed in and as the *matter* of the bone, and inferentially as well, since though on its Aristotelian conception the premises of a
syllogism stand to its conclusion as matter to form, our formula would instead appear to deliver its premises, whatever they might be, to the indeterminate, or incalculable, materiality of its conclusion. On this construal, the force of the predicate, and of the logical form of identity in general, is meant to furnish for its indeterminate subject a determinate *immanence* in experiential or experimental encounter. The reconstructed syllogism might run as follows:

The matter (i.e., material form) of the spirit is a bone (i.e., the skull)
The Spirit is (just) its matter
The Spirit is a bone

However, in its elevation of matter, in its identification of instantiation or realization with material form, the proposition, along with the rule of empirical science that governs it, succumbs to incoherence. Matter, as what *qua* matter is devoid of determination, is in the end evidence, in its open potentiality, of everything, and thus the form of nothing, unless of course it is the materiality of some determinate form, in which case it is not matter at all, strictly speaking.30

Yet the overt logical incoherence of the judgment is arguably more important than its metaphysical inversion, for it is precisely the incongruence, what Hegel describes as the “complete inadequacy,” between subject and predicate that initially marks an infinite judgment as *infinite*.31 Aristotle, who, as we have seen, was first to

---

30 While Aristotle is nowhere mentioned in this context, his presence in this text and in Hegel’s thinking is ubiquitous. The discussion of the category of being and the extensive meditation on matter in this section make the identification of matter with Aristotle’s conception irresistible.

31 *Encyclopedia Logic*, §173.
classify such judgments, did so in terms of the negative terms (of the form non-x) comprising them, calling them indefinite (aoristoi) expressions. He applies the term first to names (onomata) and verbs (rhemata) and then derivatively to propositions containing such expressions.  

When Boethius renders the Greek term in Latin by infinitus, the ambiguity between indefinite and infinite enters into the treatment of such expressions, and it is in part this ambiguity that Hegel is still grappling with in his unendliche Urteil. Such judgments, for Hegel, are indeed indefinite or indeterminate, but they are also infinite, i.e., without Ende, oros, finis, terminus, or limit, in the sense that the terminations and determinations they provide their subject concepts are open-ended, inviting further determination, ad infinitum. Indeed for Hegel, this feature of infinite judgment, and so its inadequacy, is implicit in all judgments, in part because, as he puts it, every judgment, in retaining its traditional categorical structure, expresses the general proposition that, or as we might put it, has the general logical form, “The individual is the universal.” On the face of it, then, infinite judgment is simply a formal expression of the logic inherent to judgment as such.

The problem with the categorical proposition, through which judgment proceeds, lies in its inadequate negotiation of the competing demands of content, which


34 Encyclopedia Logic, §166.
depends on a difference between its component terms, and unity, which depends on their identity. Frege introduced his two-tiered semantics of sense and reference in response to precisely this difficulty, arguing that making sense of the informational content of sentences such as “The morning star is the evening star” requires differentiating between the divergent senses (Sinne) and common reference (Bedeutung) of the two expressions flanking the copula.\(^{35}\) The problem, however, persists even with this distinction in place, because once identified as true, such statements resume their formal status as tautologies, as truths without assertible content.

Syntax or inflection might appear to settle the issue grammatically, but grammar is a matter of convention and has nothing directly to tell us about logic, and neither enables one to discriminate between identity and attribution, or, for example, between substance and accident. Much the same, we might imagine, goes for the medieval distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic terms, and for the original Aristotelian one between rhemata and onomata. The trouble in each case is that the structures of the categorical proposition ensure identity regardless of the ontological or epistemic difference intended or otherwise signified, and despite the opacity of the unity that is thereby established.

On the other hand, if identification somehow miscarries, if, for example, the component terms are fundamentally incommensurable, as they are for the infinite judgment under discussion, and difference prevails over the logical force of the copula, then it is the unity of the proposition that becomes an issue. In this case, once again, it is not enough to say that the relevant identity statement is false, for in some sense no statement arises at all, even if the form and expression of the proposition persist in suggesting otherwise. The problem of the unity of the proposition is just the other side of the problem of semantic indifference.

Hegel observes that identity and difference are formally undermined in the propositions that express them, and in particular by the logical laws, or laws of thinking (Denkgesetze) as he calls them, of identity and non-contradiction that apparently govern all such propositions. He says of the former, in particular, that "...it is nothing but the law of the abstract understanding" that "the propositional form already contradicts."36 This is because,

a proposition (Satz) also promises a difference between subject and predicate, but this proposition does not accomplish what its form requires. But it will be sublated in particular by the subsequent so-called laws of thinking that make into laws the opposite of this law. – If one maintains that this proposition cannot be proven but that each consciousness proceeds in accord with it and experientially concurs with it as soon as it hears it, then it is necessary to note, in opposition to this alleged experience of the school, the general experience that no consciousness thinks, has representations, and so forth, or speaks according to this law, that no concrete existence of any sort exists according to this law.37

36 Encyclopedia Logic, §115.
37 Ibid.
The "universal experience" Hegel refers to here is that of the vacuousness of identity statements, which, though allegedly governed by the principle of identity, Hegel here tells us confirms "the contrary of this law," the principle of difference. In addressing different but related concerns, Wittgenstein will later diagnose a philosophical hazard of the same kind in terms of the tautologization of truth, which he claims is an inevitable outcome of logical analysis. Wittgenstein puts the matter starkly: "The identity of the meaning of two expressions cannot be asserted." For Hegel, identity can indeed be asserted, but in being so asserted initiates an interchange between identity and difference that is in principle interminable. To put this more precisely, while judgment (Urteil) can and indeed must assume the form of identity, it cannot do so merely through the proposition (Satz) used to express it.

In the *Phenomenology*, the problem takes on a slightly different shape, since the logical subject of relevance here is that of *Spirit* or consciousness. Nonetheless, what remains of concern is still the structure and economy of judgment itself, and thus the relationship between judgment and the propositional form it assumes, for it is in this form, in the interval between subject and predicate terms, that Hegel locates both the condition of thought and the source of its immobility. It is only in reconceiving propositional form in terms of the speculative proposition (*der spekulativ Satz*), which

---

properly understood is simply the speculative (begreifende) apprehension of a given proposition, that thinking, as self-conscious conceptualization, can be realized:

Usually, the Subject is first made the basis, as the objective fixed self; thence the necessary movement to the multiplicity of determinations of predicates proceeds. Here, that Subject is replaced by the knowing 'I' itself, which links the Predicates with the Subject holding them. But, since that first Subject enters into the determinations themselves and is their soul, the second Subject, viz, the knowing 'I', still finds in the Predicate what it thought it had finished with and got away from, and from which it hoped to return into itself; and, instead of being able to function as the determining agent in the movement of predication, arguing back and forth whether to attach this or that Predicate, it is really still occupied with the self of the content, having to remain associated with it, instead of being for itself.39

This is an account, in outline, of the dynamic of categorical or predicative judgment for Hegel, albeit not the formal outline given in the Logic. It is also, more specifically, a breathtaking synopsis of the scattering of subjectivity (both metaphysically and psychologically conceived) in the orderly process of attribution, of which Lacan's analysis of the divided self and its fractured entry into the symbolic is an obvious descendent (though not so obviously an heir, as Slavoj Zizek and Mladen Dolar have insisted40). Its immediate philosophical predecessor is, and quite obviously is, the Kantian observation, with its accompanying deduction, that judgment is "nothing other than the way to bring

39 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §60.

40 This is not entirely fair to either Zizek or Dolar, who both have much to say about the connection between Hegel and Lacan that is subtle and interesting. But their hagiographic reading of Lacan leads, in my view, to an overly psychological reading of the *Phenomenology*. I'll save my fairness to them for another occasion, but for a marvelous account of the philosophical kinship between Hegel and Lacan see M. Dolar's "Hegel as the other side of psychoanalysis" in *Jacques Lacan and the other side of Psychoanalysis. Reflections on Seminar XVII*, ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). For Zizek's latest discussion of Hegel's importance for Lacan see his *Less than Nothing*. 
given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception." For Hegel, on the contrary, it is the concept and the full compass of its philosophical cognition that will provide the relevant unity.

What Hegel says in this passage does more than simply disband the unity of apperception Kant had thought the linchpin of judgment. It would seem to make of the Kantian account of cognition, from the recruitment of categories and concepts, through the inventions of the schematism, to the intuitive register of phenomena, a mechanics of immobilization. Of course it is not specifically or merely Kant that Hegel alludes to here. Aristotelian and scholastic logic as a whole are equally at issue, since the indifference problem resides in the structure of the categorical proposition itself. Still, there is little question that Kant is profoundly implicated. Hegel’s further elucidation of the passage makes this still more clear:

Formally, what has been said can be expressed thus: the general nature of the judgment or proposition, which involves the distinction of Subject and Predicate, is destroyed by the speculative proposition, and the proposition of identity which the former becomes contains the counter-thrust against that subject-predicate relationship.

The double-concept model of the proposition, which both Kant and Hegel inherit from the scholastic tradition, formalizes attribution as inclusion or union, and so at least formally establishes what we might call a semantics of indifference, the propositional expansion of the concept “characterized by the reciprocal indifference of its moments,”

---


42 Phenomenology of Spirit, §61.
as Hegel will put it.\textsuperscript{43} The problem is that nothing in either of the two concepts comprising a given proposition differentiates them logically, i.e. allows one to see or determine either the logical difference between "A is B" and "B is A," or any distinction between statements of attribution, identity or definition, etc. On the other hand, if they were to be so differentiated, the copula nonetheless confounds in identity whatever distinction is supposed thereby to have been established.

While both Hegel and Kant recognize the need to redress the indifference of logical structure to metaphysical or epistemic fact, Kant thinks, along Aristotelian lines,\textsuperscript{44} that the solution lies in the categorial differentiation and subsumption of the relevant terms, and ultimately upon the apperceptive grounding of the categories. In particular, as regards the subject term, he says:

Through the category of substance, however, if I bring the concept of a body under it, it is determined that its empirical intuition in experience must always be considered as subject, never as mere predicate; and likewise with all the other categories.\textsuperscript{45} Categorical assignments determine specific roles within the specific forms of judgment with which they are correlated. In a categorical proposition of the form "A is B," though formally indistinct, either A or B cannot be anything other than a substance (\textit{substantia}) and if so then either B or A, respectively, cannot occur as anything but a predicate, given

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Science of Logic}, 12.31.

\textsuperscript{44} I am referring here, of course, to Aristotle's metaphysical differentiation between substance and accident in terms of the opposition between the relations of "being in" and "being said of."

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, B129.
its subsumption, for example, under the category of accident (accidens). Thus if "A is B" is the canonical means of expressing this, then the converse "B is A" necessarily expresses something else, and moreover something necessarily incoherent because logically ill-formed. For Kant, the categorical proposition bridges the gap between intuition and concept.

However, there are some obvious difficulties with such a solution. First, it remains unclear how the distinction is maintained through the passage of attribution or identity the copula is supposed to signify. We might call this the puzzle of logical or discursive opacity. Second, it seems to replace the old logical quandary with a new metaphysical one, which we might accordingly call the problem of metaphysical indifference: the puzzle concerning how the logical distinction between subject and predicate is expressively maintained is simply replaced by one concerning how the copula itself or its linear syntax differentially identifies and conjoins substance and accident. More to the point, while one concept's (e.g., that of a body) falling under another (e.g., the category of substance) might readily be seen as law-governed, what regulates subsumption of an object or content of empirical intuition under either is more difficult to make out. Finally, it isn’t clear how the content of an empirical intuition can enter into the proposition or judgment in the first place without taking on the minimal conceptual structure required of names. If it acquires no such structure, on the other hand, then bridging the gap between intuitive content and conceptual form seems difficult to explain.
The invocation of *substance* and *accident* here, and their inclusion in Kant's table of categories itself, underscores the abiding influence of Aristotelian metaphysics in Kant as well, and more specifically in this case Aristotle's account of the four senses of "substance" in *Metaphysics Z.3*, where *subject* is identified as its most characteristic sense, according to which it is "that of which the other things are said, but which itself is never said of any other thing." Its being exclusively the subject of predication is furthermore connected to its being a singular unity, a *tode ti*. In the *Categories* its preeminent role as the subject of predication and its singularity are tied to *primary substance*, which expresses as well the metaphysical sense of substance as *essence*. But since it is substance and accident that *determine* patterns of logical and grammatical employment, and not the other way round, what we need, as it were, are the ordinances of substance, which the copula on its own patently fails to express, and which failure of expression cannot be remedied by stipulation, since stipulation is characteristically arbitrary.

Yet while the copula is supposed to both distinguish and unite subject and predicate for Kant, what it does most importantly is to express the fact that both belong to the *object* of representation, the object = X. It does this by expressing the fact that judgment is a judging of some particular consciousness, of a single, unitary I. As he puts it: "For this word ["is"] designates the relation of the representations to the original

---

46 The complicated sense in which a *tode ti* is a unity at all raises further difficulties for the burden of propositional organization Kant reserves for it. I discuss the composite character of the *tode ti*, as both immediate particular (*tode*) and universal kind (*ti*) in Chapter 2.
apperception and its necessary unity." The copula, in other words, is an expression of apperceptive engagement that Kant thinks objectively differentiates substance from accident through the asymmetric relation it bears towards each, and presumably in particular through the epistemic priority it assigns the former. It tells us where the articulating subject begins, i.e., necessarily with what is metaphysically prior, and where it ends, i.e., with what is metaphysically posterior. In other words, it establishes the order of cognition and, ipso facto, the direction of judgment and attribution.

How it does so, however, remains obscure. For if syntactic primacy reflects epistemic primacy which in turn reflects, or, to put it more plainly, represents, metaphysical primacy, then the ultimate ground of logical ranking would appear to be the inaccessible domain of things in themselves. The categories are indeed supposed to be ordered on a priori grounds, independently of their application to the objects of experience, but the point is that their employment in judgment obscures this intrinsic ordinality. This is of no small consequence, since the deduction of the categories needed to ground Kant's critical philosophy proceeds from the very structure and operations of judgment.

As regards the empirical use of the categories, Kant does indeed have an account, for example, of how certain manifolds of intuition are cast as substances and others as attributes or accidents, etc., but again the logical form of judgments confounds such ontological discriminations and so, more importantly, points to their

\[47\] Critique of Pure Reason, B142.
groundlessness. If phenomenological criteria such as continuity and persistence are
what license the categorical identification of substance, for example, it remains unclear
what governs the determination of continuity and persistence. To put it plainly,
continuity and persistence are paradigmatically subject to the kind of inductive
indeterminacy Nelson Goodman famously defined in terms of projectability. The
concept or name applied to a substance having property p intermittently, i.e.,
accidentally, before and at time t is no more projectable than the concept or name
applied to that same substance until time t but possessing this same property p
persistently, and so essentially, after time t. In other words, no finite stretch of
persistence or continuity is inductively sufficient to establish the unity, essence or
substantiality of anything to which a substance term is to be applied.

Yet even if we set aside the puzzle of substance-accident differentiation, the
problem that Kant seems to ignore and that Hegel seems attuned to remains, that is, a
problem residing in the very form of judgment itself. Regardless of how subject and
predicate are differentiated to begin with, within the predicative framework of
judgment that is the hallmark of thinking, or at least of discursivity, logical differences of
this sort are dissolved. For as already observed, on the traditional model the logical
form of every such judgment is that of identity. From Hegel's perspective, the problem is
not form as such, but form conceived as empty, contentless structure, something he

detects in Kant but which will only find its full expression in the mathematical and logical formalisms explored at the end of the 19th century.

Questions of form are paramount for Hegel since it is through the forms they assume that concepts are realized, and not in the weak sense of merely achieving materiality or visibility, but in the robust Aristotelian sense of becoming the actualized concepts they are beforehand merely potentially. Hegelian phenomenology is thus directed less towards the visibility of truth than towards its actualization. This is why, for example, Hegel can speak so naturally of propositions, judgments and epistemic states, along with political, aesthetic and religious movements and institutions, as shapes or forms of consciousness, or, equivalently, of the concept or truth. Hegel’s solution to the troubles of the categorical proposition will depend upon shifting the burden of semantic differentiation from the logical form of the proposition to the accumulated shapes of conceptual determination. This is what lies behind Hegel’s rejection of the strict opposition between form and content, and his insistence that “the form is content and, in keeping with its developed determinacy, it is the law of appearance (das Gesetz der Erscheinung).”

Section Four. Judgment, Cognition and the Semantics of Difference

The passage from the Phenomenology cited above (PS §61) suggests that Hegel’s solution to the indifference problem, and implicitly to the unity problem as well, is to be found in the notion of the speculative proposition, and ultimately, as he will

49 Encyclopedia Logic, §133.
subsequently make clear, the \textit{speculative concept} (what he will later call the \textit{Idea}) from which its corresponding proposition expands. Yet, as this passage also indicates, what Hegel means by such a proposition has little to do with propositional form or structure at all, since no such structure survives its speculative recasting. What Hegel is gesturing at here, rather, is the speculative grasp of concept and proposition, what he calls \textit{speculative thought} (\textit{das begreifende Denken}), in which, as he informs us, “the negative belongs to the content itself [of the proposition]...both as the immanent movement and determination of the content, and as the whole of this process.”\textsuperscript{50} Yet inasmuch as such thinking is \textit{begreifende}, i.e., conceptual, it necessarily unfolds in the medium of the proposition.

And therein lies our first clue concerning the philosophical virtue of \textit{infinite judgment}: its graphic display of the discursivity and plasticity of (speculative) thought, i.e., of its elastic and simultaneous accommodation and refusal of propositional form.\textsuperscript{51} It manages this feat of presentation by recording the incongruity of terms and the operative presence of negation in the evolving forms of the categorical proposition. The claim, in short, is that \textit{infinite judgment}, in its distinctive Hegelian variant, is the

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §59.

\textsuperscript{51} The allusion to Catherine Malabou’s \textit{The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic}, trans. L. During (New York: Routledge, 2004) reflects a philosophical appreciation, though far from an embrace, of the notion of \textit{plasticity} introduced in this important reading of Hegel. Her notion of plasticity as “the excess of the future over the future” is meant as an interpretive cipher for the Hegelian project in its totality. I apply the term “plasticity” far more specifically to the sensitivity of a logical or cognitive system to local, historical context. It is then just the logico-epistemic correlate of what I see as the \textit{immanence} of truth, negation and determination in Hegel.
exemplary form of speculative thought, and so of thinking itself as the unfolding of a subject concept, albeit still cast in the formal garb of the categorical proposition. That it can be both true and incoherent, depending on its context and form, is an indication of the double role it plays in expressing truth, perhaps the truth, within an historically specific philosophical setting and exhibiting the logico-grammatical form of discursive expression as such.

Its ambiguous status is further revealed in the dramatically opposed treatments Hegel accords it within a single text, whether it be the Phenomenology itself or either of the two Logics. In the Encyclopedia Logic, for example, under Qualitative Judgment, Hegel compares infinite judgment to the kind of transgression involved in radical evil, remarking that while the propositions such judgments express "are indeed the truth of the immediate, so-called qualitative judgment" they are nonetheless "not really judgments at all." On the other hand, in the final section of the same text infinite judgment is identified with the Idea itself, that is, with the determinate realization of the concept:

The Idea is the infinite judgment, of which the sides are each the independent totality, while (precisely because it completes itself in this way) each of them has also passed over into the other. None of the concepts that are determined otherwise is this totality that is completed in both of its sides – both as the Concept itself and as objectivity.53

52 Encyclopedia Logic, §173.
53 Encyclopedia Logic, §214.
What this identification amounts to, however, is complicated by the fact that the *Idea*, unlike the judgment, “is essentially a process,” and thus the totality of the latter is a mere snapshot of the incessant movement within the *Idea* between the concept it begins with and the instantiations that successively determine it.

Nonetheless, if for Aristotle and the scholastic tradition there are two basic kinds (*qualities*) of categorical proposition, affirmative (*kataphasis*) and negative (*apophasis*), corresponding to two kinds of cognitive operation, composition and separation or division, for Hegel judgment is fundamentally, that is to say, constitutionally, negative, or *apophatic*, a vivid counterpoint to the Fregean (and since Frege our own) intuition about such things, mentioned above, that all judgments are assertoric. This does not yet amount to saying that all judgments are *infinite*, nor even that all are formally negative (as opposed to affirmative) in quality, but only that judgment, as we have seen, is fundamentally driven by the negation of, and within, the concept it extrapolates. It therefore also underpins a correlation between the primacy of negation in the constitution of the proposition and the fundamental place of the method of division in Hegelian logic.

As I have argued in the preceding chapters, negation is fundamental to the traditional method of division, since it is negation that *divides* genus into species and thus, through its iteration, places the subject of a judgment within the conceptual lineage that successively defines it. Judgment so understood is the linear abbreviation of one branch or another of the extended Porphyrian tree that constitutes the totality of
concepts and the individuals these delineate. Within this categorical framework, judgment follows and expresses the hierarchical lines of subsumption. Yet if Socrates is subsumable under man, and thus under rational, since man falls under the latter, this only gives us part of the picture, indeed, as stated, merely the bare essentials of the full picture of Socrates’ defining features. How are we to understand division and subsumption outside the narrow Porphyrian framework? In part, this is also to ask how we can understand how the formal relations of subsumption expressed by a derived division and the propositions expressing these are employed in judgment.

For the tradition I have been tracing (from Plato, through Boethius, to the scholastics, etc.), there is no clear distinction to be drawn between judgment, statement and proposition, and the affirmative or negative quality of a proposition just expresses the route of its composition. To judge that x is y, just as to judge that x is not y, is, as we saw Plato putting it in the Sophist, to provide the boundary (peras) of an incomplete (apeiros) expression, to delimit it (ti perainei), and so to make of it a complete proposition, a logos.54 For Boethius and the scholastic tradition, as we have seen, negation separates while affirmation unites the terms that make up the proposition, and both are thus principally acts of semantic engagement, and only secondarily lexically expressed features of the spoken or inscribed proposition.55 The combination or separation of terms is always also an act of subsumption because the terms

---

54 Plato Sophist 262d4.
55 See Chapter 3.
themselves are already hierarchically structured (although this is less obvious in Plato, whose new horizontal semantics of delimitation in the *Sophist* both depends upon and departs from the vertical semantics of *participation* he is partial to elsewhere).

Though Hegel likewise regularly conflates judgment and proposition, often using the same German expression (*Satz*) for both, he does in fact distinguish between the two, just as he discriminates between content and form, while ultimately claiming that the latter is just the realization of the former.\(^{56}\) In the *Science of Logic*, for example, he draws a vivid distinction between judgment and proposition that highlights this very aspect of his conception of logic, namely that its primary concern is not the structure of subsuming instances under a concept, but with the *act* of so associating them:

...a *proposition* can indeed have a subject and predicate in a grammatical sense without however being a *judgment* for that. The latter requires that the predicate behave with respect to the subject in a relation of conceptual determination, hence as a universal with respect to a particular or singular. And if what is said of a singular subject is itself only something singular, as for instance, “Aristotle died at the age of 73 in the fourth year of the 115th Olympiad,” then this is a mere proposition, not a judgment. There would be in it an element of judgment only if one of the circumstances, say, the date of death or the age of the philosopher, came into doubt even though the stated figures were asserted on the strength of some ground or other. In that case, the figures would be taken as something universal, as a time that, even without the determinate content of Aristotle’s death, would still stand on its own filled with some other content or simply empty.\(^{57}\)

\(^{56}\) It is a standard complaint leveled against Hegel (as against Kant), that he failed to distinguish the cognitive act of judging from the logical content of such an act, i.e., the proposition expressed. The basis for this claim involves ignoring the possibility that treating the proposition as the residue of cognition represents an insight rather than an oversight.

\(^{57}\) *Science of Logic*, 12.56.
What would advance the propositional chronicle of Aristotle’s death to the status of judgment would, for example, be a universalized use of the expression “the fourth year of the 115th Olympiad” as a determination of Aristotle’s death, and, as we have repeatedly seen, such determination begins in difference, with the hypothesized negation of the determining concept, and its corresponding division from the subject to be determined, in this case Aristotle’s death. In other words, what would be required is overcoming the presumed negation of what is not specifically identical with that death is its time, place, significance, etc., although these are precisely the coordinates through which Aristotle’s death must be delineated. The judgment would, in effect, express the fact that Aristotle’s death is a fourth-year-of-the-115th-Olympiad kind of thing, or that it falls under the universal fourth-year-of-the-115th-Olympiad. However, it would do so not by citing the established subsumption of the former under the latter, but precisely through successively negating itself as identical to its time, place, significance, etc.

Yet the difference between the immobile proposition and the determining judgment is surely not simply a matter of how the terms of the proposition are formally construed. The “doubt” Hegel speaks of here, like the interrogative background Frege points to in bringing out the distinctive character of assertoric engagement, reflects a grounding not in skeptical unrest but in semantic indeterminacy. Judgment occurs by way of restoring or specifying the indeterminate content and truth of a given

---

proposition, or rather by way of employing a proposition to establish a determinate content. Whether the starting point is epistemic or semantic privation, it is clear that the interest and vantage of the speaking subject or consciousness is pivotal. It is also clear that how we formally construe the elements of the proposition is for Hegel a matter of their conscious, historical recruitment.

It is for this reason that Hegel, although he initially identifies the general form of the proposition as “The individual is the universal,” which reflects the paradox present in the basic order of cognition, insists that the elements of the judgment, which are jointly involved in the determination of the concept, are logically fluid. Thus initially “the subject is indeed an existent or the singular, while the predicate is the universal. But because the judgment connects the two, and the subject is determined as universal by the predicate, the subject is then the universal.” Indeed, as we learn later on, through the inferential movement of the syllogism, subject and predicate terms are each capable of assuming any of the three possible logical quantities – singular, particular and universal. What’s more, the full determination of the concept occurs precisely through the exchange of quantity that marks the transition from one syllogism to the next. The present point, however, is just that logical form, for Hegel, is an artifact of judgment. It is fundamentally a matter of cognitive, conceptual and inferential engagement, which is to say that is the product of both understanding and reason, in Kantian terms.

This way of distinguishing judgment from proposition is crucial to understanding both the form and the mobility of Hegel’s aphorism, the synoptic truth of *Observing Reason*. In particular, as regards its propositional form there is an apparent irregularity worth examining, namely, the clear absence of the formal signature of infinite judgment, the sign of negation. The standard form of such propositions is thus: \( X \text{ is not } Y \). Yet all of Hegel’s examples of infinite judgment in the two *Logics* as well, e.g., “the elephant is not a rose,” emphasize the incommensurability of subject and predicate, rather than the negative form of the predicate itself. What is infinite in this instance, for example, “rose,” is so by virtue of its relation to the subject, not by virtue of its logical form. This is demonstrably not, however, because Hegel is inattentive to the traditional form of such judgments. Rather, it is because he thinks the defining element of negation in a judgment consists in the constitution of the predicate as a *determination*, whether or not that element is an inscriptive feature of the term or not. From this perspective, the negative form of the infinite predicate is just the lexical record of its cognitive constitution.

Thus although "The spirit is a bone" (like “The elephant is not a rose”) lacks the standard form of an infinite judgment, it is nonetheless logically infinite, and its canonical rendering is attested in Hegel’s subsequent remarks on this judgment towards the end of the *Phenomenology*: 
And we saw Observing Reason at its peak express its specific character in the infinite judgment that the being of the 'I' is a Thing...That judgment, taken as it stands is non-spiritual or rather is the non-spiritual itself.\(^6\)

The logical form of “The Spirit is a bone” is thus made explicit in “The Spirit is a non-Spirit,” which exhibits the recognizable shape of the infinite judgment: \(X\ is\ non-X\). It nonetheless remains a question in what sense the predicate “bone” itself is to be regarded as \(\text{infinite}\), and in particular as the infinite predicate “non-Spirit.”

In the hyper-empirical context of Observing Reason in which this proposition is produced, a Spirit or consciousness is a \textit{non-spirit} in the precise sense that it is reducible to the material evidence available to direct observation, and so is not in fact a spiritual substance at all, but rather a \textit{thing}, albeit a thing determinately realized as the skull that serves as evidence for the spiritual substance it contains. That negation produces this specific content is thus a consequence of the broader discursive environment in which it operates, and from which it proceeds, in this case the preceding discourse of \textit{Self-consciousness}, and the narrow predicative structure to which it must conform. In other words, “bone” is the \textit{infima} species of \textit{thing} arrived at within the discourse of empirical reason, and as such is the determinate, defining content, within this discourse, of spirit. But as that determinate content, it is precisely what the negation of spirit, what \textit{non-spirit} amounts to in this discursive environment.

As I have argued in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, the contextual character of negation, in its original, determinative guise, is fundamental to its

\(^6\) \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §790.
operation. In the categorical hierarchy of Porphyrian predicables (i.e., that of genera and species) that Boethius bequeaths to scholastic philosophy,\textsuperscript{61} negation is an ordering principle, determining the taxonomy of genera and species, descending from \textit{being} to \textit{infima species}, and, to the extent that these are conceptually localizable, to individuals as well. Within the scholastic schema of the Porphyrian tree, \textit{man}, for example, is successively identifiable with, and differentiated from, \textit{animal}, \textit{rational}, and \textit{mortal}. We might say, albeit in a decidedly Hegelian idiom, that \textit{man} is in turn the \textit{non-man} that is identified with each of the successive determinations of its definition or essence.

In Hegel’s \textit{Phenomenology}, as in the two \textit{Logics}, the context of determination is no longer the regimented array of eternal categories and predicables (just as it is \textit{not yet} such a thing for Plato). Here negation operates from within the discourse that is contingently in play, and the results of its application are thus \textit{immanent}\textsuperscript{62} to that discourse.\textsuperscript{63} As Hegel puts this, applauding Heraclitus for recognizing so important a truth, “the moment of negativity is immanent, and that is what the concept of philosophy as such is concerned with.”\textsuperscript{64} It is this immanence of negation and concept

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{61}] See in particular Boethius’ \textit{De Divisione}, ed. John Magee, and Porphyre \textit{Isagoge}, ed. Alain de Libera.
\item[\textsuperscript{62}] The immanence of negation is of course related to the broader immanence of determination and thus dialectic itself. A useful discussion of the latter is to be found in Karin De Boer’s \textit{On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative} (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
\item[\textsuperscript{63}] In effect, negation runs through, and is governed by, the deductive machinery of syllogistic logic itself, removed from the unproven structures of categories and predicables. This part of the story is filled out in the next section of the present chapter.
\end{itemize}
alike that explains not only why “The Spirit is a bone” is itself infinite, but why it recurs under several guises before it finally emerges, at the end of the Phenomenology, in an absolute form, the accomplished self-identity of concept and consciousness in the Idea, as “′I′ = ‘I′.” What remains difficult to understand, and what I will attempt to explain briefly below, is that for Hegel the incoherent proposition with which we began and the seeming tautology with which the Phenomenology ends are not merely alternative engagements with the same infinite proposition, but that in some sense they are the same infinite judgment, expressing the same, albeit diversely determined, truth!

An initial explanation is to be found in the observation that the “progress of judgment into a diversity of judgments,” that is, the movement of the Phenomenology as a whole, is just the “progressive determination of the concept”65 from which the original judgment flows. The seeming tautology at the close of the Phenomenology, in other words, is the truth of the seeming barbarism in Observing Reason, owing to the conceptual limitations that define each stage of philosophical and cultural development through which Spirit is gradually determined, though it can only be recognized as such from the standpoint of absolute knowing to which the Phenomenology finally accedes. Indeed, the Calvary (Schädelstätte), literally the place of skulls (or bones), of absolute Spirit, with which the Phenomenology ends suggests not that the “Spirit is a bone” has been superseded, but that, in the context of Science (Wissenschaft), i.e., philosophy properly conceived, it is retained but elevated to the form of the pure, epistemically

\footnote{65 Science of Logic, 12.53.}
realized self-identity of Spirit or Consciousness. It remains true, in other words, that the Spirit is a bone, but here in the context of Hegelian Science, the infinite predicate bone, as non-Spirit, is the repository of the totality of determinations with which Spirit is individually non-identical, but collectively united.

The three forms of the “The Spirit is a Bone” are reformulated in the final pages of the Phenomenology as "The 'I' is a thing," "The thing is an 'I'," and "'I' = 'I'," and the passage from the first to the last demonstrates precisely the economy of negative predication as conceptual realization in Hegel. The identity of subject and thing in the first judgment yields an 'I' as a thing in the second, which in turn, in the philosophical transition from The Ethical Order to Morality negates itself as mere instrumentality. The negation of the subject as thing is therefore, within the discourse of Morality, the reestablishment of the 'I' or subject as “moral self-consciousness," as expressed in the judgment “The thing is an 'I.'” This morally self-conscious subject will in turn be negated, but in the context of philosophy proper, that is, in the context of Hegel’s own Wissenschaft, negation will yield the consummate philosophical subject, the Self as accomplished epistemic agent, or as Hegel puts it quite simply, the subject qua Absolute Knowing.68

---

66 Phenomenology of Spirit, §791.

67 Phenomenology of Spirit, §792.

68 This is obviously a drastically abbreviated account of the course of infinite judgment in the Phenomenology. A more complete account, presented in part in the next section, depends upon making clear the deductive structure traversed, which Hegel thinks has to be understood in syllogistic terms.
The emptying out or externalization (Entäußerung) and reconstitution of the subject (both as consciousness and as determinable concept) in its infinite predicate, exhibited in this epitome of Hegelian dialectic, demonstrates at once the philosophical role of infinite judgment and the nature of the predicative act as such for Hegel. The emptying and replenishment of the concept in its propositional expansion is the very essence of discursivity for Hegel, in that every philosophically relevant phenomenon, shape or form is precisely a static impression or representation of thought itself, realized within the interval between kenosis and plenitude. But then this is to say that semantic engagement, or, as we might put it more simply, the thinking of Spirit or consciousness, is both the "restless process of superseding itself, or negativity," the continuous provision of determinations, and the cessation of philosophical thought in the proposition through which thinking finds its moments of dead repose. Philosophical thinking is thus, strictly speaking, the exchange between concept and proposition, and as such, it is both Spirit and Bone.

The immanence of conceptual determination and of truth has regularly been remarked upon by recent commentators on Hegel, and is variously conceived in terms of communal consensus (Forster\textsuperscript{70}), discursive coherence (Longuenesse\textsuperscript{71}), or pragmatic

\textsuperscript{69} Phenomenology of Spirit, §805.

\textsuperscript{70} See M. Forster, The Idea of Hegel’s Phenomenology.

\textsuperscript{71} See B. Longuenesse, Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics, translated by Nicole J. Simek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
attunement (Brandom72). What I would point out, however, is that the fact of communal dependence, discursive immanence, etc., entails neither the pragmatism insisted on by Brandom nor the varieties of naturalism promoted by Forster, Pinkard, Pippin, et al. If the resources and contours of a given concept are given by the discourse in which it occurs, or its negative determination is arrived at through a community in which that discourse is articulated, this only shows how the truth of the concept is reached, not that its truth amounts to or is fundamentally grounded in the path it takes to reach it. Analogously, that a proof is required to make sense of a mathematical proposition, or to demonstrate its truth, does not thereby show that the truth or meaning of that proposition consists in its demonstration (though of course intuitionists and constructivists will insist otherwise).

I have thus far tried to show that for Hegel negation operates within the contingent array of concepts that defines the philosophical discourse of a given historical moment. Negation is in this sense historically immanent, and so generates conceptual and propositional determinations and truths that are similarly immanent. However, the fact that negation is not applied against the backdrop of an established conceptual firmament, whether this be the Aristotelian Decalogue,73 a Porphyrian tree


73 I introduce the expression “logical Decalogue” for Aristotle’s categories in discussing their legislative character in Chapter 2.
or the Kantian table of categories, should not be taken to indicate that truth itself is contingent or relative.

The progress of infinite judgment exhibits an internal necessity that I have tried to make out in the present section, and in the more universal progress of logic Hegel is at pains to demonstrate in his *Logic*, and which will occupy us in the following sections of this chapter. In my view, and as I hope the overall thrust of this dissertation serves to establish, this necessity suggests a semantic and epistemic Platonism that is quite at odds with most contemporary views of Hegel and perhaps with Hegel’s own avowed philosophical disposition. However, it is only in the light of the remarkable reconceiving of Aristotelian syllogistic undertaken in his *Logic* that this Platonism can properly be made out, and that Hegel’s achievement, in freeing logic and metaphysics from the constraints of its traditional categorical setting, can be adequately assessed.

**Section Five. Hegel versus Frege on Noetic and Semantic Engagement**

However, before turning to the syllogistic reconstitution of the concept, let me try to say something more about the relationship of negation to formalism and the invisible ground of predication and truth, by way of a comparison. The comparison is illuminating because Frege makes the issue of cognitive engagement the centerpiece of the logical enterprise, where this remains implicit in Hegel, although he thinks it is *assertion* rather than negation through which such engagement is undertaken. Frege is also committed, like Hegel, to isolating the formal and logical constraints on language without abandoning the notion that, as an expressive, not a productive, instrument,
language, whether logically pure or errant, is constrained by the things and circumstances it is intended to be about. Unlike the unapologetic formalists he contended with Frege thus thinks there are ontological constraints and implications associated with both formal and natural languages. In his *Begriffsschrift* and the two-tiered semantics he develops to support it we see what a more or less purely logical approach to negation looks like, but also what metaphysical issues nonetheless seem to remain, even when these are formally bracketed. If Frege dismisses negation in this context, he also shows us the importance and difficulties involved in expressing the very function Hegel identifies with it.

In his remarkable essay on negation, entitled simply "Negation," Frege argues that the content or *sense* (*Sinn*), i.e., the *thought*, of what he calls a "propositional" interrogative, i.e., one that questions the truth or falsity of a proposition and is thus amenable to a yes or no answer, can be either true or false, but that its falsity cannot consist in its not *being*, in its not in particular *being a thought*, since if false contents had no *being*, no questions containing false claims could meaningfully be asked, and thus no genuine inquiry could be undertaken, because only questions with known affirmative answers, i.e., those with *true senses*, would be considered well-formed, and thus no question would ever arise once a thought was entertained; the same would apply, and with perhaps more severe consequences for scientific endeavor, to counterfactuals, which presume the falsity of their antecedents. In fact, Frege maintains that *thoughts*

---

74 “Negation,” in *The Frege Reader*, 347.
are precisely what truth and falsity properly apply to, precisely that in declarative speech for which "the question of truth arises."\textsuperscript{75}

He also maintains that thoughts are objective and eternal, and that their truth values are equally so. It follows, according to Frege, that sentences involving indexicals such as "I," "now" or "here," etc., do not express thoughts, for example, because of the irreducibly specific and ephemeral access each speaker has to him- or herself, though it is puzzling they can be made to express thoughts by replacing the indexical element with rigidly referring expressions of time, place and person, and so on. This view finds a curious parallel in Hegel's argument in the \textit{Sense Certainty} section of the \textit{Phenomenology} that the immediacy of cognition we anticipate in restricting our epistemic claims to indexical ostension in fact yields nothing of the sort.

Yet aside from telling us that there are both true and false thoughts, that a false thought has as much \textit{being} as a true one, and, in the roughly contemporary essay "\textit{Thought}," that thoughts are not ideas or bound by the specific indices of demonstratives, pronouns and adverbs, that is by the subject, time and place of utterance, Frege tells us little about what kind of \textit{being} it is that they do have. What he is interested in establishing is that negation presents no special problem for his account of sentential \textit{sense} or his account of assertion and judgment. In particular, if he is right that negation, in its most common sentential use, simply switches the truth value of a given thought, then as long as falsehood is not a problem, neither is negation. On the

\textsuperscript{75} Frege's "\textit{Thought}," in \textit{The Frege Reader}, 328.
other hand, if we want to preserve the standard truth-functional operation of negation then we have to accept the unproblematic existence of *false thoughts*: whether they are the starting points or termini of a logical operation there can be no such operation without them.

It is perhaps surprising in the first place to find Frege concerned with what would appear to be metaphysical issues, but he follows Leibniz not only in his attempt to develop a *lingua characterica*, a universal language fashioned for scientific discourse, but in embracing the metaphysical implications of the semantic puzzles he is committed to solving in the service of constructing such a language. There must be senses (*Sinne*), for example, because the contentful character of identity statements requires that there be more to the terms that make up such statements than their reference. In this instance, there must be false senses/thoughts because counterfactuals, propositional questions incorporating false propositions, and the truth-functional use of negation are both commonplace and intelligible, and ought to remain so in any logic we hope to put to mathematical or scientific use. In the end, however, while we know that negation, truth and falsehood both belong to the level of thought, we never learn from Frege what kind of *being* thoughts have so as to be subject to such modification. Nonetheless we do see how the sense-reference distinction helps him out: falsehood exists at the level of the *thought*, which is to say it exists at the level *sense*, not reference. So we seem to have a way of avoiding the thorny problem of non-being by embracing an ontology of *thoughts or intensions*. A falsehood doesn't *represent* anything that is not
the case; it is simply a thought that isn't true. But rather than being a shortcoming of falsehood, this is just an indication of the inadequacy of *representation* as a semantic relation. A truth doesn't *represent* anything that *is* the case either; it is simply a thought that is true.

A few things are significant about Frege's account. First, it divorces questions of truth from questions of existence. Second, it places negation outside the domains of both judgment and being. Negation, here, as for much of the scholastic tradition, is a creature of intension or *thought*, an *ens rationis*. Finally, though this is only discussed in the companion essay "Thought," there are all sorts of sentential elements that have no effect on the identity of the thought expressed. For example, Frege tells us, "Alfred has still not come" expresses the same thought as "Alfred has not come," since the fact that no one is expecting Alfred would not render the former false, though the latter "hints *(deutet)*" at this expectation. Though I shall return to this at greater length below, the notion that sentential expressions are more fine grained than those of thought, seems deeply problematic. In particular, one might argue that the truth conditions and thus the implicative range of "Alfred has still not come" are importantly different from "Alfred has not come," since the first is in fact equivalent to "Alfred was expected to have already come and he has not come" and the second isn’t (though context might make it so). To say that expectation is not part of the truth conditions of either statement is to miss the thought expressed by the first, or at any rate to beg the question whether or not words like "still" affect the truth value of a proposition, and more generally the
question as to what grammatical, syntactical and lexical elements do and do not have their correlates in truth conditions. That we are so accustomed to conceiving of logic is not inevitable and indeed has a specific historical provenance: Frege's *Begriffsschrift*.

But what I hope to show in the second half of this paper is that the model of logic as an instrument of formal clarification and the model of logic Hegel attempts to develop, though radically different, derive from a common, if differently construed, insight, namely, that thought as such and logic as its more or less formal expression, insofar as they are concerned with truth, are necessarily concerned with the activity of attribution, i.e., with a species of cognitive engagement that is specific to *holding true*. Moreover, if we understand why this insight gives rise to the formalism Frege introduces but nonetheless resists developing to its final conclusion, we can better understand why it also gives rise to the more thoroughgoing conceptual logic Hegel will attempt to set forth. Moreover, Frege gives us an explicit and clear justification for the primacy of assertion that is nowhere articulated, though it is often implied, in Hegel.

But, as hinted at earlier, the more substantive reason for turning to Frege is this: While the puzzles of metaphysical, ethical and semantic access that take center stage in Kantian transcendentalism lie clearly in the background of much of Hegel's critical recapitulation of philosophy, the formalist consequences of the transcendental program are much more clearly seen in Frege, who is justifiably viewed as the culmination of Kantian formalism. Because Frege is focused precisely on the relationship of propositional form to truth, he sees explicitly, as Hegel does implicitly, that the
categorical form of the proposition and judgment has to be overcome although it remains the fundamental configuration of thought. However, Frege, as we shall discover, seems ultimately unable to dispense with the predicative model of judgment, even as he declares otherwise. Hegel, I want to argue, sees that the more profound problem with propositional logic is that it treats propositions as the static loci of truth, and attempts to show us why no such treatment is viable. Frege's masterwork on the logic of the concept, his Begriffsschrift, demonstrates this as well, although it is of course intended to demonstrate quite the opposite. In other words, it shows us what a purely formal accommodation of truth-directedness looks like, and in doing so it shows why, in principle, such a project is unworkable.

In the paper that takes its title from the formal language it describes, a Begriffsschrift, literally a concept-script, Frege sets out the rudiments of what he hoped would function as a lingua characterica, a language free from the logical and lexical ambiguities of ordinary language, and sufficiently rich to express any proposition of the mathematics of numbers (arithmetic and analysis, to begin with) and provide for the transparent deduction of its theorems. Like Hegel, Frege thinks one of the principal failings of traditional categorical logic lies in its treatment of the proposition as a concatenation, and thus first the decomposition, of subject and predicate terms, which leaves unexpressed and inexplicable the unity of the truth at which attributive judgment aims.
To address this shortcoming he recasts the proposition as the combination of an *unsaturated* concept and its correlative object, an object that *saturates* the gap in the concept so to speak. Frege supposes that so formulated the composite surface of the proposition exhibits the structural unity required to express truth (or falsity). Yet in addition to the concept/object reformulation, he includes amongst the logical symbols of his *concept-script*, along with those for quantification, conjunction, disjunction, concepts, etc., a right turnstile symbol "\(\vdash\)" which is intended to express the assertoric use of the proposition to which it is affixed. To assert P, in Frege's view, as we shall see, is to *employ* P in the service of truth, to posit it as a name of the True. What then is the relationship between these two distinct means of exhibiting semantic readiness, i.e., an aptness for expressing truth?

In its initial presentation this *assertion sign or judgment stroke* (*Urteilstrich*) is in fact treated syntactically as a "combination of signs," the horizontal stroke indicating the propositional unity of what followed, the vertical stroke expressing its "affirmation (*Bejahung*)". In subsequent discussions, Frege preferred to speak of the horizontal stroke as a kind of mapping relation from propositions to truth values. However, since the unity proper to the expression of truth was what the concept/object ligature was supposed to exhibit in the first place, anything that exhibits such a unity would seem to be already so *mapped*, in the sense that it is formally oriented towards truth, and it seems unlikely any more robust sense of mapping can be thought to be established formally. Thus whether it more directly confers the unity required for the expression of
truth or points an already suitably unified expression in the appropriate semantic
direction it would appear that this part of the assertion sign, at least, does what the
propositional notation already provides for.

As for the affirmative component of the assertion sign, it at least seems to
express what no other symbol of the Begriffsschrift expresses. Yet it is with reference to
precisely this component that the assertion sign as such is regularly dismissed as doing
work that is already done without it, or doing something that nothing at the purely
formal level is capable of doing at all. But if it is true that the work it is designed to do is
already being done without it, then it must be true that there is some extra bit of work
being done, whatever it amounts to, and something that is already doing it. At worst
then, such a sign would then make explicit what is already implicitly under way, which
would at worst earn it the charge of redundancy.

Yet there are difficulties with the sign under any, including the most benign,
construals of its meaning. Firstly, although it is part of the logical formula used to
express a proposition to which it is attached, the assertion sign is not considered part of
that or any other proposition. It is instead a formal constituent of an expression that
does not enter into its meaning, or, in terms of the distinction between sense (Sinn) and
reference (Bedeutung) Frege is yet to develop, one that makes no contribution to the
thought or truth value, respectively, of the proposition it introduces. Presumably,
concept and object names, when properly combined, exhibit the contribution each
makes to the unit sense of the proposition they together constitute. Though meaning
(Bedeutung) receives no explicit discussion in the Begriffsschrift, Frege seems to have thought the sense/reference distinction and the two-tiered semantics it defines already latent there, as he makes clear in a passage from the Grundgesetze der Arithmetik in which he offers a summary of the expressive resources of his concept-script:

Thus it is shown that our eight primitive names have a Bedeutung, and hence that the same holds too for all names legitimately constructed from them. However, not only a Bedeutung, but also a sense (Sinn) belongs to all names legitimately formed from our signs. Every such name of a truth-value expresses a sense, a thought. That is, by our stipulations, it is determined under what conditions the name refers to [Bedeutet] the True. The sense of this name, the thought, is the thought that these conditions are fulfilled.76

He defines "name" a little earlier in §26 as "a sign [Zeichen], whether simple or complex, that is intended to refer to [bedeuten] an object, but not a sign that merely indicates [andeuten] an object;" the eight names he has in mind here are signs of first-, second- and third-order functions, with one or two argument places. He also defines a separate class of signs, namely "Marken" which seem to be names in which constituent object and function names have been replaced with appropriate variables. In this same section he remarks that the judgment stroke (assertion sign) is neither a name nor a Marke, but a "sign of its own special kind."

In other words, the judgment stroke/assertion sign is a significant, i.e., signifying, symbol that seems to say something without meaning anything, for if it did mean something it would either be a constituent of a second-order proposition or of a complex of symbols that fell short of amounting to such a thing, in which case it would

76 Gottlob Frege, Grundgesetze der Arithmetik, Band I, (Hildesheim; Zurich; New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998), §32.
serve to obstruct rather than facilitate judgment and so cease to function as an assertion sign. In either case, it would seem to work against the unification of the proposition Frege's notation is supposed to exhibit, if not establish.

The types of functions Frege is specifically interested in are concepts, which he defines as functions whose values are truth values. Though Frege is not consistent in his use of the term Satz, which is usually translated proposition, but is also the term used for sentence, if we understand by a sentence or proposition a saturated concept, i.e., a concept whose argument place has been filled by an appropriate object name, then a sentence/proposition is just the name of a truth value, either the True or the False, depending on whether or not the object referred to by the argument or object name falls under the concept. Frege also occasionally talks of a proposition as what is expressed, although more typically it is a thought that is expressed by a proposition.

Then again, in the Grundgesetze a proposition seems to be the result of adding an assertion sign (here "judgment stroke") to a possible content of judgment: "A sign that consists of a judgment stroke and a name of a truth-value prefixed by a horizontal I call a Begriffsschrift proposition (Satz) or, where there is no danger of confusion, a proposition." All the same, in whatever way we designate it, in addition to the expression to which the assertion sign is prefixed, there is also the expression that consists of this unasserted expression preceded by the assertion sign, and just what kind of sign that entire formula, i.e., \( \neg p \), is supposed to be, is not entirely clear.

Here, as elsewhere, Frege is at pains to save logic, and semantics in particular,
from the ills of psychologism, and so he insists on the purely logical character of the assertion sign, on the fact that it is indeed a symbol of his formal notation. As he tells us:

> It is rather the task ... to purify logic of all that is alien and hence of all that is psychological...Logic is concerned with the laws of truth, not with the laws of holding something to be true, nor with the question of how people think, but with the question of how they must think if they are not to miss the truth.  

The obvious problem, however, is that it is difficult to see how what such a symbol is designed to convey, precisely that the proposition that follows is in fact held true, can be intelligibly construed as logical in character on Frege's own view of logic, let alone on the standard more formal conception from which we might distinguish Frege's view. We can perhaps mute the appearance of flat-out contradiction by pointing out that though logic is not concerned with the laws governing holding something true, it is nonetheless essentially concerned with things that are or might be held true, namely propositions, and only insofar as they are held true.

This does in fact point to a way out for Frege and I will return to it below.

Nonetheless, it still seems that the sign in question, which is all the same a sign that belongs to the symbolic notation of the Begriffsschrift, does indeed stand for something very much like a psychological or propositional attitude, and is thus subject to the substitutivity constraints characteristic of other such attitudes, i.e., knowing, believing, wishing, etc. Just as in the case of knows that p or believes that p, from the truth value of p it is impossible to determine the truth value of ¬p for any p, and any given author/scribe, without first establishing whether or not p is in fact held true by its

---

77 See Frege's “Logic (1897),” in The Frege Reader, 250.
author/scribe. But surely, and herein lies the crux of the issue, that is a matter of empirical, psychological evaluation, not logical calculation: one cannot tell from the mere occurrence of the turnstile sign that its author means it, or to put it another way, that it properly represents his/her semantic commitment.

In addition to providing for what we might think of as the primary level of semantic engagement, i.e., truth-holding, Frege thinks it is only when preceded by the assertion sign that propositions can enter into inferential relations with one another, since it is only then that a judgment is expressed and inferential relations hold exclusively between propositions held true, i.e., judgments, not mere propositions, which are after all mere signs, in isolation:

An inference simply does not belong to the realm of signs; rather, it is the pronouncement of a judgement made in accordance with logical laws on the basis of previously passed judgments. Each of the premises is a determinate Thought recognized as true; and in the conclusion too, a determinate Thought is recognized as true.\(^78\)

It would seem that if the sign expressing such recognition is thereby psychological in nature, then inference itself is derivatively psychological. Yet it is generally held to be of the essence of inference rules that they apply to propositions regardless of whether or not those propositions are held true, or even held under consideration, by anyone.

*Modus ponens*, for example, the single inference rule Frege introduces in the

Begriffsschrift, would seem to apply on the basis of the logical, i.e., truth-functional, properties of the conditional, and independently of the content of the propositions to which it is applied, let alone of the actual or potential author of those propositions. In this regard, it is also instructive to note that Frege does not think arguments with false premises valid, that, in other words, he seems to conflate validity with soundness, or to put it more charitably, that he regards soundness alone as the relevant evaluative measure of proofs. Yet it is likely, and not merely charitably granted, that Frege takes such a position because he does not think it possible to logically acknowledge as true what is not.

Given all of this, one might be inclined to conclude instead that 〉p ought not to be subject to semantic evaluation in the first place, because "¬" is not merely semantically vacuous, but not in any important sense a part of the statement under evaluation at all. Indeed, beginning with Wittgenstein, who may be taken as the spokesman for the traditional position on the matter, it has generally been maintained that Frege's symbol, or anything like it, has no legitimate role to play in logic, nor in the languages logic is designed to replace in contexts requiring more rigorous standards of expression and inference. As Wittgenstein brashly puts it, "Frege's assertion sign '¬' is logically altogether meaningless; in Frege (and Russell) it only shows that these authors hold as true the propositions (Sätze) marked in this way." (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 4.442). This is more emphatically the attitude of those who nonetheless acknowledge the substantial advance beyond Aristotelian categorical logic the
quantificational features of Frege's *propositional Begriffsschrift* amount to. From this perspective, the assertion sign represents a lamentable but negligible lapse in the logician's otherwise considerable logical acumen. A result, it might be further conjectured, of his adherence to the old Kantian conception of judgment and thus to a vestige of epistemological psychologism he is not disposed to recognize.

However, that his commitment to the assertion sign does not represent a lapse of any kind is made clear from the frequency with which he confirms its necessity, and from the central role he seems to assign assertion, or assertoric force, in the logical enterprise. Frege's concept-script is first described in his paper of 1879, but in a paper dating from 1915, entitled "My Basic Logical insights," in which he reflects back on the significance of his script and its use, Frege writes,

the word 'true' has a sense that contributes nothing to the sense of the whole sentence in which it occurs as a predicate... But it is precisely for this reason that this word seems fitted to indicate the essence of logic...So the word 'true' seems to make the impossible possible: it allows what corresponds to the assertoric force to assume the form of a contribution to the thought. And although this attempt miscarries, or rather through the very fact that it miscarries, it indicates what is characteristic of logic...For there is no doubt that the word 'beautiful' actually does indicate the essence of aesthetics, as does 'good' that of ethics, whereas 'true' only makes an abortive attempt to indicate the essence of logic, since what logic is really concerned with is not contained in the word 'true' at all but in the assertoric force with which a sentence is uttered...but no word or part of a sentence corresponds to this.\(^79\)

This is not to say that truth is not the proper object of logic; just that the behavior of the predicate "true" cannot tell us much about it. Whatever it *can* tell us, however, Frege

---

thinks the formal language set out in his *Begriffsschrift* provides a notation for expressing. To be more exact, what *shows* us in the *concept-script* that which "no word" can linguistically express is what I have persisted in calling the assertion sign, for reasons I hope have been made clear, but which Frege here refers to as the *turnstile sign*:

A judgment is always to be expressed by means of the turnstile sign. This stands to the left of the sign or complex of signs in which the content of the judgment is given. If we omit the little vertical stroke at the left end of the horizontal stroke, the judgment is to be transformed into a mere complex of ideas; the author is not expressing his recognition or non-recognition of the truth of this.\(^80\)

The recognition or acknowledgement of the truth of a proposition simply *is* what judgment consists in for Frege. To the extent that this is true, the assertion sign would constitute the only strictly predicative element left in his notation, the traditional subject-predicate structures having been replaced by functions and arguments, or, more specifically, concepts and objects. Though again since it does *not* actually occur as a predicate but merely stands in for one, it persists only as a formal remnant of predicative function. The assertion sign, then, is the logical representation of a formally inexpressible predicate, one that were it capable of doing so would directly express the speaker's/author's commitment to the truth of the relevant proposition. Indeed, in his introductory remarks to the *Begriffsschrift*, Frege explicitly suggests a predicative construal along these lines:

> We can imagine a language in which the proposition "Archimedes perished at the capture of Syracuse" would be expressed thus: "The violent death of Archimedes at the capture of Syracuse is a fact." To be sure one can distinguish between subject

---

\(^80\) "My Basic Logical Insights," in *Posthumous Writings*, 252.
and predicate here, too, if one wishes to do so but the subject contains the whole content, and the predicate serves only to turn the content into a judgment. Such a language would have only a single predicate for all judgments, namely, 'is a fact'...Our ideography is a language of this sort, and in it, the sign $\vdash$ is the common predicate for all judgments.\(^{81}\)

We see here an attempt to grapple with the same issue of inexpressibility faced in dealing with the predicate "is true." Having recognized the redundancy of "is true" Frege here suggests "is a fact" as an approximation of the expressive force of the assertion sign. But again, if the sign does in fact function as a kind of predicate, and a predicate with this specific content, it necessarily fails to do the work it is designed to do, i.e., to establish the fact that the proposition is held true by its author. Once again, we would need to know that the predicate itself is asserted rather than simply entertained. To see this we need only construct an opaque context for the formula "P is a fact." For example: It is understood that P is a fact (where "P" has been recast as a nominal phrase designating the content of the original sentential expression).

What goes for explicit truth attributions would seem to apply to any device that operates in their stead. As Frege himself recognizes, saying "P is true", adds nothing to, and has the same truth conditions as, just saying "P." On the other hand, saying either is consistent with asserting neither, which argues more for the vacuousness than the redundancy of "is true," and this is precisely why Frege thinks the word "true" fails to capture the "essence" of logic. We might make out a difference by observing that the truth conditions of "I assert P" and "P" do indeed diverge, since the former would be

\(^{81}\) Frege, Begriffsschrift, §3, in The Frege Reader, 52.
true regardless of the truth value of \( P \), provided it is asserted by the indexically relevant "I." But this would be to express a different proposition, say \( Q \), which simply contains \( P \) as an object, which is not how the assertion sign is supposed to operate: the assertion sign is not part of any propositional content at all; it is just a formal indication of the assertoric force with which that content is uttered or written.

But then what about "is a fact"? Once again, if I can write "\( P \)" without asserting it, then I can write "\( R \)" without asserting it, where "\( R \)" stands for "\( P \) is a fact." The trouble with the assertion sign is that \textit{prima facie} it does no better at establishing semantic commitment unless it is already itself established as semantically engaged. So again, if I can utter \( P \) without asserting it, if I can refrain from meaning what I say (to put things in Cavellian terms, though of course to a venture a rather un-Cavellian thesis), then I can do the same with turnstile-\( P \), I can refrain from meaning what I say even in saying that I mean what I say. On the assumption that propositional inscription is formally uncoupled from assertion, nothing at the level of the former can adequately vouchsafe the latter. And the symbolization of assertoric commitment itself now appears to be the culprit, since it makes of assertion a second-order or metasentential syntagm, which while intended to accomplish what no first-order (truth) predicate can, entrusts assertoric success to another mute notational signature, about which the same question of assertion can be asked. Paradoxically then, the assertion sign, to the extent that it is predicatively parsed, would seem to be as much an obstacle to as an instrument of semantic engagement.
The introduction of the assertion sign is supposed to be motivated by an observation concerning truth and *true*, namely that the latter is not a predicate, the former not a property. What Frege does not quite say, though he comes close to doing so, but what his and the analytic tradition's grappling with its appropriate designation and status also demonstrates, is that this sign, the turnstile, cannot be a logical symbol in the formal sense because only semantically engaged entities, not engagement itself, are so formalizable. More specifically it cannot be formalized as a predicate, since it does not say anything at all in the discursive language it is supposed to be part of. In fact the point may be put more strongly: It does not say anything at all in any language, but rather expresses the *saying* of anything that is said. To this extent, and more visibly and obviously than Hegel's infinite judgment, it is written both inside and outside the network of signs and symbols it allegedly belongs to (i.e., in this case, the concept-script). Moreover, it is necessarily so written.

This need not amount to admitting, however, that the assertion sign has no role to play, nor in particular the role Frege intended it to play, for it *is* the visible inscription of what the attribution of truth cannot express, namely the semantic engagement of the inscription that follows. Its designation and pictographic form - a horizontal content line bisecting a vertical line - transparently identify it as a gateway to inscription and utterance. Yet, while it is what distinguishes judgments and propositions from mere arrays of marks or signs, it is more pictogram than grapheme, and so an incongruous hieroglyph in the otherwise orderly array of logical insigniae.
But to say it is a hieroglyph is still to identify it as an expressive *mark* of some sort, though it is indeed very difficult to say precisely what kind of *mark* it is, and therefore what kind of symbol it makes of any expression it is attached to. I mean by this to capture, in part, the sense in which it can now be said that the assertion sign is indeed non-symbolic or extra-symbolic, that it *shows* how and *where* truth enters into the deployment of signs, without itself being deployed as one. The further argument to be made is that such a sign can *never* be so deployed, cannot be understood as operating at the same symbolic level as the formulae it mobilizes. The reason for this, as mentioned above, is that it says something that cannot be *meant*, and to this extent exhibits something about the very character of formal inscription, namely, that it cannot on its own ever tell us that it is to be treated, understood, responded to, etc., in any particular way. More generally and to the point, that any given form, logical or otherwise, is semantically engaged, rather than depleted or dead, cannot be established by the form itself, even by a symbol formally introduced to establish just that. To return to our original focus on the proposition, nothing at the propositional level makes it possible to distinguish propositions from judgments.

But perhaps there is still a way of avoiding the charge of redundancy or emptiness. Consider the word "Exit" on an exit sign on the wall of a theater, for example. We might ask what it is about how it occurs that tells us it is pointing beyond

---

82 This is a point that Wittgenstein makes repeatedly in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and it is also a point that Hegel makes in distinguishing between propositions and judgments: a judgment, in essence, is simply a *meant* proposition.
itself, indicating a direction of egress, rather than functioning imperatively, or merely decoratively. Presumably we rule out an imperatival construal because its so operating would seem inconsistent with the expectation of remaining in place for a while that is an intrinsic part of the enterprise of attending a theater in the first place, or because no one attending theaters tends, of his/her own accord or prompted by others, to immediately exit upon seeing the word "Exit." But though the sign itself is of course incapable of telling us anything of the sort about the word that appears on it, we would still be inclined to say that that word's having the significance it has is at least in part a function of the fact that it occurs, as a matter of convention, in illuminated letters on a sign, in a theater, etc.

The sign itself, and the architectural and cultural environments in which it appears, are not themselves without significance. Indeed though there is not one, particular expression for the relevant context, one might argue that several features of that context together indicate that the word "Exit," in this case, signifies a direction of egress. Similarly, one might then say that the turnstile sign has this kind of significance: it tells us that the context of inscription is that of a deductive system, i.e., one governed by the demands of truth and validity.

To treat the assertion sign in this way, to take up a point argued for by Peter Geach, is to admit that Frege's concept-script, unlike the formal languages derived

---

from it, incorporates a distinction between *saying* and *showing*, although it seems to me that the character of the assertion sign as a logical sign would suggest that saying and showing, from Frege’s perspective, both lie on the formal side of things. The claim that Frege's logic is not formal in the sense that it is purely syntactically defined, independently of semantic interpretation, is not a new one, and has perhaps been most succinctly made by Von Heijenoort in terms of a distinction he is famous for drawing between logic as calculus and logic as language. But it is not enough, or is perhaps too much, I think, to place Frege in the logic-as-language camp. Given the rather restricted domain of Frege's concerns, one might argue that he is not concerned with natural language or ordinary communicative acts, philosophical or otherwise, and that thus the seeming artificiality of his treatment of assertion, for example, is just the result of our being unaccustomed to attending to logical structure insofar as this relates to so limited a field of expression.\footnote{Cora Diamond has something like this to say in her "What does a Concept-Script do?" in *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 115-144.}

But Frege *does* think his *Begriffsschrift*, as a whole, *shows* what ordinary language cannot, that is, it shows how truth finds its constituent expression in the parts of the proposition that is its proper domain, and he does not think there is more than one kind or domain of truth. He thought that his *concept-script* showed in a *graphic* manner the contours of inference and concepts which ordinary spoken language, or its alphabetic expression, obscures:
Speech often only indicates by inessential marks or by imagery what a concept-script should spell out in full. At a more external level, the latter is distinguished from verbal language in being laid out for the eye, rather than for the ear. This is something he believed continuous with the Leibnizean project of developing a

lingua characterica, which Leibniz apparently thought should "peindre non pas les paroles, mais les pensées." Yet what this script is ultimately designed to make visible and representable, to show, is how truth is obliquely expressed in truth claims in the face of its own inexpressibility. Frege's concept-script is thus conceived as the kind of demonstrative notation Wittgenstein thought impossible, i.e., one that both says and shows how what is said is to be understood.

Frege is thought to have introduced, along with Peano and Russell, a more or less purely formal treatment of logic, and in so doing to have made possible, at least in principle, a universal deductive instrument, i.e., a symbolic language into which every relevant proposition and method of inference for a given science might be readily translated. Yet it is also known from Frege's essays and correspondence that he vehemently rejected the pure, or what might more usefully be called the arbitrary or arbirtrarian formalism of Hilbert et al (what in discussing Hegel I earlier identified as abstract formalism). In an article on Boole's logical calculus he says as much:

In contrast we may now set out the aim of my concept-script. Right from the start I had in mind the expression of a content. What I am striving after is ... not a calculus

---

85 Gottlob Frege, "Boole's logical Calculus and the Concept-script," Posthumous Writings, 13.

86 In the Tractatus, Wittgenstein directs this line of critique to the assertion sign, or "judgment stroke," as he refers to is, claiming that it is "logically meaningless" (4.442).
restricted to pure logic. But the content is to be rendered more exactly than is done by verbal language.\textsuperscript{87}

More to the point, it is not merely the emphasis placed on the role of assertion, but the use of alternative sign sets for bound and unbound variables, a pictorial representation of syntactic and inferential relations, etc.,\textsuperscript{88} all suggest a conception of logic as formal primarily in the sense that it exhibits in its very form those and only those features of a statement or thought that are relevant to its truth and its inferential employment in deductive proof. Such a conception is, for Frege, not merely consistent with but indeed directly motivates his denying the arbitrariness of form. If we give up the conception of Frege's \textit{concept-script} as a formal calculus, we can begin to make sense of the assertion sign, along with other features of his notation.

On the face of it, his inclusion of the assertion sign as a constituent of his formal language represents an insistence on the determinative role assertion or semantic engagement as the foundation of logical form. We should recall that Frege characterizes part of the function of the assertion sign initially in terms of its establishing the \textit{unity}, that is to say the propositionality, of a following formula, and then as directing such unified formulae towards (mapping them with) truth. Object and concept terms, sentences and propositions all hang together in terms of the extensional contribution they make towards determining a truth value. For Frege, all such expressions are

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Tractatus}, 12.

\textsuperscript{88} On this point see Danielle Macbeth's \textit{Frege's Logic} (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2005).
semantically of a piece, in that they all function as *names*, and in particular sentences or propositions are complex names of truth values, namely the True or the False.

We can thus begin to see the motivation for the assertion sign, especially as he introduces it as a way of making sense of its absence in quotation, and in opaque contexts more generally. The sign enables us to tell by simply looking at a formula of the *Begriffsschrift* whether or not it is being used truth functionally, i.e., to express a truth, which in turn enables us to determine its inferential value. Or, from the perspective I think more properly Frege's, and which would certainly be Hegel's, it is intended to make visible the fact that what follows is directed towards truth, and thus instructs us to evaluate each constituent concept, object and logical term as an elucidation of the True. The insistence that such a sign be formal is just the insistence that it be graphically transparent.

As Frege more or less tells us, the significance of such a sign can best be seen in the effect produced by its omission, just as the keystone of an arch might reveal its function in the structural collapse that follows its removal. We can presumably see by looking at "\( \neg (A \text{ believes that } P) \)" that whatever proposition P names it is inferentially inert, and would consider "\( \neg (A \text{ believes that } \neg P) \)" ill-formed. The unasserted inscription of a proposition is semantically opaque in the sense that it makes no claim to truth (or falsity, for that matter), though knowing what truth it *would* lay claim to remains essential to determining its meaning. The claim would be that even if P implies Q, this
does not license us to attribute belief in Q to A, even though, on a Brandomian view, Q furnishes us with important information about what A believes.

It is in principle impossible to determine from the isolated fact of someone's uttering or writing out a sequence of names (in the fully general sense of referring expressions) whether he is simply listing the objects or persons named, calling upon them, practicing a particular language, inventing a new one, trying to memorize or savor the sound or shape of a set of propositions, etc. But if what is missing from the environment of utterance is an assertion sign or its equivalent, then because its contribution to the truth-value of an utterance is what the ultimate meaning, i.e., reference, of any meaningful expression amounts to, it is impossible in principle to fully determine what, if anything, any such linguistic display ultimately means.

In discussing this issue, in a commentary on Frege that may be considered canonical, Michael Dummett likens the use of language, let us say the language of the Begriffsschrift, to the game of chess. He raises the question how anyone might understand what one is doing in playing the game if all he has at his disposal is a "formal description of chess...describing the initial position of the pieces, and giving rules for what constituted a legitimate move from any given position."\(^89\) He maintains that from such a description it would be "impossible to tell what, in playing chess, a player is trying to do," namely to win. An analogue of the assertion sign for chess, on Dummett's view,

---

would be something that addressed such a deficit, something that told us that \textit{winning} was, so to speak, the name of the game.

Dummett's analogy and the analysis that follows help to make clear why Frege's extralogical sign simply extends the problem of expressiveness from the level of logical to that of metalogical or metalinguistic form. While it might be true that no one who did not know what the players were trying to accomplish could know what precisely they were doing in playing chess, the addition of a gesture or extra chess piece designed to make clear that purpose could hardly succeed unless the use of that gesture or extra pieces were understood to have been truthfully, honestly or game-specifically employed. One might easily imagine a form of the game in which expressing one's \textit{intent} in playing the rest of the game was considered part of the game, and thus a game in which one might express one's intent to play to win, while in fact playing to draw or achieve a desired disposition of chess pieces. For someone who did not already have the appropriate concept of what the point of game playing is, the intention piece, as we might call it, would again offer no clarity of intent. But even for someone who \textit{did} have the notion of winning as a starting point, it would be impossible for him to tell that \textit{that} is what a particular player was trying to do in playing a particular game of chess.

This still need not mean, however, that the assertion sign is either hopeless or redundant. Indeed it can still be maintained that if nothing like the force of an assertion sign can be detected, then no sense can be made of any string of symbols that follow or are otherwise framed by such a sign. To put it this way is to come close to saying that
such a sign functions more or less as a kind of diacritic expressing something like a principle of charity of the sort Donald Davidson argues for. Just as for Davidson we cannot get off the ground in determining the meaning of another's speech if we do not assume that the commitment to uttering truths holds for the most part, so without the assumption that a name of a truth value is being asserted it is impossible to tell what one is doing in writing or pronouncing that name or its component parts. Frege thus thought it necessary to make this presumption manifest, though, as we seem to be compelled to admit, the task of doing so appears beyond the notational device introduced to accomplish it.

Frege had sought to deliver logic from very the riddle of predication I claimed Hegel's infinite judgment seems to embody, from its vacillation between tautology and contradiction, but succeeds only in concentrating that riddle in a single, covert predicate that when applied identifies every proposition with its truth value, and thus depletes each of its specific content. What is revealed by this, strangely enough, is that the content of any proposition is in some sense unrepresentable in any formal language, even an interpreted one, since if it were representable, it would immediately identify itself as true (or false), without having to be directed to do so by a sign that by definition can add nothing to its meaning or sense (Sinn).\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{90} This problem of extensional descent lies at the heart of Russell's critique of Frege's distinction between sense and reference in "On Denoting" in \textit{Mind} 14 (1905): 479-493.
Section Six. Frege and Hegel on Logical Form

The philosophical upshot of Frege's *Begriffsschrift* is thus that *semantic* engagement, understood as affirmation and ultimately the intended meaning, if not quite the extension, of the assertion sign, is the one intentional relation we can properly bear towards truth. The Hegelian amendment to this would be that semantic engagement must instead be understood in terms of *negation*, and that though it is in and through such engagement that the concepts we use are determined, it is not as they are *in truth*, but as they are provisionally, or *mediately*, as finite, if rational, impressions of an infinite truth, which, as Hegel will put it, are capable of being correct, but never true. Properly understood, that is from the philosophical standpoint of *absolute knowing*, our determinations, in other words, would at the same time be *acknowledgments* that the Truth eludes our truths. It is some such amendment that infinite judgment allows us to comprehend even as we submit to the passing *verisimilitudes* of the *Phenomenology*. Here is one of several ways in which Hegel puts the matter:

It is one of the most fundamental logical prejudices that qualitative judgments such as: "The rose is red," or: "is not red," can contain truth. Correct they may be, but only in the restricted confines of perception, finite representation, and thinking; this depends on the content which is just as finite, and untrue on its own account. But the truth rests only on the form, i.e., on the posited Concept and the reality that corresponds to it; truth of this kind is not present in the qualitative judgment, however.\(^{91}\)

---

\(^{91}\) *Encyclopedia Logic*, §172.
Hegel will later identify the "deeper" variety of truth that is the proper concern of philosophy, namely, that exemplified in the coincidence of objectivity and concept.

What Hegel seems to be getting at here is the roughly Anselmian conception of truth as ontological rectitude: something is true just in case it conforms to what it is to be the sort of thing that it is. Such truth corresponds to the concept or essence of things and is thus removed from the finitude and contingency of the objects of experience. This represents one sense in which truth, or rather Truth, is infinite, that is to say, beyond determination.

Let me try to make this a little more clear before concluding. The undisclosed philosophical backdrop of both Hegel's and Frege's work remains, I want to claim, the medieval one, which is to say the Augustinian one, of a more or less impassable boundary between the verbum mentis and the verbum carnis, between the unicity of the nondiscursive, i.e., the pure, intelligible word of Truth, and the multiplicity of the discursive, diffracted word of human language, of what Augustine calls the mos locutionis humanae. Within this framework, Frege's avenue of approach is also roughly Hegel's in the Phenomenology, i.e., the systematic elucidation and refinement of the verbum carnis, the language of finitude and contingency, so as to make it suitable for the expression of what is both true and necessary: "The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the

---

92 Hegel puts things as follows: "It is this deeper sense of truth which as at issue when we speak, for instance, of a 'true' State, or a 'true' work of art. These objects are 'true when they are what they ought to be, i.e., when their reality corresponds to their concept." Encyclopedia Logic, §213 Addition.
form of science...that is what I have set myself to do." For both, the traditional vehicle of discursive expression, inference and thought, the predicate, is also the principal locus of logical and metaphysical error, and thus it is only a language or notation that dispenses with predicates in the strict sense that can lay any claim to the universality, transparency and veridicality of a language like Leibniz's lingua characterica.

Frege, however, believed that a language that showed the proper inferential relationship between singular terms, logical connectives and propositions would enable us to separate out the truth-functional dimensions of a given proposition and thus ultimately to forge an evaluable link between truths and the Truth. He also believed that his concept-script was just such a language. We have seen, however, that in the end what ultimately forges that link in Frege's concept-script is a diacritical sign at odds with this very script, in part because it captures something at the heart of predication that persists despite the eradication of the predicate as a formal structure: an invisible agent of reason and assertion. And thus the concept-script itself, intended as the inscriptional notation of the True, for all its hieroglyphic charm and expressiveness, constitutes a kind of visible geometry not of Truth but of inferential relations, however numerous, that at best picture validity. As such it is a system of dead, if potentially infinite, circuitry, a transparent labyrinth in the classical sense of an open prison, whose captive resident, in this case, is, as it were, this invisible agent, or what in the end amounts to the same thing for Hegel, self-conscious, or absolute Spirit.

---

93 Phenomenology of Spirit, §5.
And here lies the key to understanding Hegel's discovery. Hegel, in essence, shows that anything that occurs as a finite determination, whether it be a predicate in the narrow, logical sense, or a shape in the broader sense of philosophical, aesthetic, political or religious formation, bears the discursive trace of dissoeverance, not simply because it is accomplished in the idiom of negation proper to the rational activity of consciousness, but because it is removed from the infinite by the finitude of every such act of determination. Hegel's phenomenological logic demonstrates the irreducible negativity, diversity and finitude of the meant proposition, of the proposition held true, i.e., of judgment. The crucial implication here is that no truth survives its utterance or assertion, and it is only cumulatively that the True is approximated, but not in the imaginary totality of truths, inferentially consolidated, as Frege would have it, that is, through the serial, or let us call it the discursive infinity of inferential association, an instance of what Hegel calls the bad, or "finitized" infinity. For Hegel, the resumption of the historical and necessarily finite record of judgment, of holding true, simply makes visible the infinite source of knowledge and its correlative Truth that nonetheless exceeds the resources of such judgment.

What then of the infinite of infinite judgment? While the Phenomenology presents no clear discussion of the distinction between "spurious" and true infinity, the latter seems clearly identifiable with the absolute, which in turn is identifiable with self-

---

94 See, for example, Science of Logic, 21.124.
reflexive identity, with, for example the ""I'=I"" of Absolute Knowing. A more or less clear statement of what this amounts to is be found in the Encyclopedia Logic:

In its relationship to an other, something is already an other itself vis-a-vis the latter; and therefore, since what it passes into is entirely the same as what passes into it – neither having any further determination than this identical one of being an other – in its passing into another, something only comes together with itself; and this relation to itself in the passing and in the other is genuine Infinity.95

To understand this, it is helpful to recall our earlier discussion of Boethius' Latin oratio infinita, his translation of Aristotle's aoristos logos as it is presented in De Interpretatione, and almost certainly the source of the expression in Kant and Hegel.

What is infinitus, in this context, is in-definite or in-determinate, and more specifically indeterminate as to truth or falsity. But since the Latin "in" expresses either privation or negation, what is indeterminate may be thought of either as what is lacking in truth value or what is not determined, i.e., bounded, by such valuation, which might roughly be identified as bad and good infinities, respectively. While an adequate account of the two will have to be postponed for another occasion, it is sufficient here to point out that infinite judgment would seem to be infinite according to both senses of indeterminacy, though not simultaneously, i.e., as what is firstly the simple negation of finitude, and thus neither true nor false, and finally as what lies beyond determinacy, or rather beyond determination, and thus the True as such.

In Observing Reason, it is the infinite form of finite judgment that prevents it from formally expressing any truth and thus anything True in the proper sense, i.e.,

95 Encyclopedia Logic, §95.
infinitely, and precisely because as long as it retains its categorical form, the
incommensurability of the predicate with its subject persists. And yet, when it
reappears, finally, in Absolute Knowing, still more concretely than Frege's hapless
diacritic, it does indeed tell us that and how the True is aimed at, but only, I would
suggest, by somehow disavowing the categorical or propositional form in which it
nonetheless continues to appear.

Indeed if we look more closely at the original instance of the infinite judgment, it
seems to disavow its form from the outset. "The spirit is a bone" is anything but formal,
in the abstract sense, and, absent the predicative negation that logically identifies such
judgments, hardly seems an infinite judgment at all. A more characteristic formulation
can, however, be extrapolated from Hegel's later gloss on the original instance: "And we
saw Observing Reason at its peak express its specific character in the infinite judgment
that the being of the 'I' is a Thing...That judgment, taken as it stands is non-spiritual or
rather is the non-spiritual itself" (§790). The judgment is non-spiritual inasmuch as the
bone, a thing is a non-Spirit, which suggests "The (being of) Spirit is a non-spirit" as a
canonical reformulation.

Still, even if translatable into canonical form, this is merely to say that it is an
instance of that form, not the form itself. It is hardly possible in the present context to
detail the richness of content Hegel finds in this first instance of the infinite judgment,
as well as in its second and third moments, glossed as "The thing is an 'I'" and finally "'I'
= 'I'," respectively, since it is fairly clear that concentrated in this confounding
proposition is more or less the full passage to self-consciousness the *Phenomenology* as a whole undertakes to chronicle. Yet what is perhaps more difficult to see is that the conceptual plenitude, the replete self-identity of the concept, to which the original form of the proposition eventually gives way (in *absolute knowing*) is in fact formal, according to the only conception of *form* that Hegel can countenance, i.e., the Aristotelian one of *actualization*. For as remarked earlier, Hegel thinks the notion of abstract form unintelligible. He writes: "form is so far from being indifferent with respect to content, however, that, on the contrary, it is the content itself" (*Encyclopedia Logic*, 202-3).

One might, on the other hand, think that the three distinct propositions Hegel's infinite judgment comes to express (as the three critical *moments* of the *Phenomenology*) reveal a syntactically formal character. Yet if it admits of diverse interpretations this is as much a function of semantic indeterminacy as the irresistible drive of rational determination of which such indeterminacy is the paradoxical consequence. The "The 'I' is a thing" gives way to "The thing is an 'I'," (*PS §791*) and eventually to ","precisely through the "emptying out" (*Entäußerung*) and reconstitution of the subject (both as consciousness and as determinable concept) in its *infinite* predicate, and it is the determinative activity of spirit or consciousness that performs these operations.

The language of emptying returns us to Hegel's description of the speculative proposition, and, by contrast, to Frege's talk of the saturated and unsaturated elements of the logical proposition, i.e., concept and object, non-predicatively conceived. As we
saw earlier, what is a structural gap in the Fregean concept is a more thoroughgoing feature of the speculative proposition, which is marked by a corresponding lacuna in the subject position as well, rather than a space or occasion for potential supplement: "Thus no content occurs which functions as an underlying subject, nor receives its meaning as a predicate; the predicate as it stands is merely an empty form." For Frege, as long as the concept remains unsaturated, it can play no semantic role in either a proposition or a judgment, and so can bear no determinate relation to truth. On the other hand, once that gap is appropriately filled, a proposition materializes, as does progress towards truth. For Hegel, on the other hand, such saturation is what brings about the dead proposition. If there is any unity to be found in the proposition it lies in the achievement of self-consciousness and will thus depend upon the overcoming of predicative structure.

But Hegel's proposal is not a Parmenidean philosophy of silence, nor one of monistic or monastic incantation. The rich historicism of the Phenomenology represents as well its profound commitment to expression in the fullest sense:

It is thus that consciousness, as the middle term between universal Spirit and its individuality or sense-consciousness, has for [its?] middle term the system of structured shapes assumed by consciousness as a self-systematizing whole of the life of Spirit - the system that we are considering here, and which has its objective existence as world-history. 

---

96 Phenomenology of Spirit, §66.

97 Phenomenology of Spirit, §295.
The "shapes" (*Gestaltungen*) alluded to here are the institutions and regimens of philosophical, cultural and political life which comprise the topics of each successive section of the *Phenomenology*. Where a pronouncement, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic or otherwise, comes up for consideration, it is always within the context of these broader environments that they are analyzed. As I hope to have made clear, the relevant unit of analysis, in other words, is not ultimately the individual proposition or judgment, but the patterns and habits of naming and judgment, along with the practices such judgments entail, within those framing environments, which Hegel broadly identifies as syllogistically deployed.

Yet if what is expressed, the "content", is always beyond the specific judgment, the act of assertion, or rather negation, of articulation itself, is always utterly specific. When Antigone speaks and acts on behalf of a divine law, of Gods "that are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting" her utterance, though an expression of something else, a traditional ethico-religious configuration, that speaks beyond her, is singularly hers. It is precisely Hegel's point that this "beyond," in its temporal and semantic priority, in its vital historicity, nonetheless becomes a lifeless edifice, and one through which, therefore, anything determinately meant succumbs to evanescence, and ultimately to petrification. This point is made repeatedly and perhaps most graphically in the section on *Revealed Religion*, where Hegel speaks of the historical depletion of the religion of art:
The statues are now only stones from which belief has gone. The tables of the gods provide no spiritual food and drink, and in his games and festivals man no longer recovers the joyful consciousness of his unity with the divine.\textsuperscript{98}

One task of the \textit{Phenomenology} is to recover for Spirit and consciousness the meaning and truth discarded in their development.

I spoke earlier of a \textit{dead} repose to mark a contrast with the "pure" repose of the True, of the "Bacchanalian revel" Hegel identifies with Truth in the \textit{Preface} to the \textit{Phenomenology}. The former is the stillness of finitude exhausted by the discursive infinitude of "restless" consciousness. The latter is the immutable tranquility of the "genuine" infinite, the repose of eternal Truth, the truth of the \textit{verbum mentis}, if not the \textit{verbum dei}, to which consciousness aspires. If Hegel's infinite judgment, and the phenomenological logic it represents, miscarries in its attempt to coordinate truths with the True, it does so by foregrounding, by making visible the incongruous demands of thought and Truth that structure the proposition, and paves the way for a substantive logic of the concept without predicative remainder, of Truth without truths, though perhaps not without incongruity. For Frege, whose semantic Platonism is as strong as Hegel's,\textsuperscript{99} but who ultimately resists giving up the propositional structures his Platonism requires him to, logic remains an instrument of formal representation, whether what is so represented are the finite lines of attribution or the \textit{finitized} relations of inference.

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, §753.

\textsuperscript{99} This point, of course, has been the subject of some debate, one I'll have to join on another occasion.
Section Seven. Conclusion: Syllogistic, Division and the Economy of Determination

For Hegel, logic is properly speaking an instrument of determination, not representation. It is how things are discursively thought, not the residue of what has been thought, and so cannot be captured in the static formulae of a logical notation. What’s more Hegel is quite explicit about this, acknowledging the possibility of a purely formal language, such as that developed by Gottfried Ploucquet, and says of it that “it makes of the syllogistic inference a totally empty and tautological construal of propositions.”100 It is also irreducibly conceptual, although it is via the inferential movement mapped by the syllogism that the concept logically enters and exits the discursive fray, so to speak. To this extent the syllogism, which Hegel somewhat cryptically identifies here with "the reasonable," is the abstract form of understanding, identified in the Phenomenology with "reasonableness" (Preface §55). Inasmuch as the syllogism is the movement of the concept, or determination, it is also properly speaking an instrument of negation, as a brief examination of Hegel’s discussion in the last section of his Logic makes clear.

There is much overlap between the two logics, but I quote here from the Greater Logic, which contains the more expansive discussion. It begins, with characteristic paradox, as follows:

100 In an article that is otherwise full of useful observations, “The Role of Logic “commonly so-called” in Hegel’s Science of Logic,” British Journal for the History of Philosophy 22 (2014): 281-301, Paul Redding argues that despite the evident horror with which Hegel regards the mechanization of logic as calculus, it is important for Hegel that logic pass through such a phase, which he compares to the ossification of spirit expressed by our aphorism from Observing Reason.
The syllogism is the result of the restoration (Wiederherstellung) of the concept in the judgment, and consequently the unity and the truth of the two. The concept as such holds its moments sublated (aufgehoben) in this unity; in judgment, the unity is an internal or, what amounts to the same, an external one, and although the moments are connected, they are posited as self-subsisting extremes. In the syllogism, the determinations of the concept are like the extremes of the judgment, and at the same time their determinate unity is posited. Thus the syllogism is the completely posited concept; it is, therefore, the rational.¹⁰¹

In identifying the syllogism as the rationalization of the concept, Hegel identifies it as a conceptual logic whose propositional formulae represent the constituents of inference, no longer as its structural elements but as transitional moments in the inferential differentiation and unification of the concept. The syllogism so formulated is the formal discursus of the concept, its actualization, though not quite yet its actuality; judgment is identified both with its categorical structure, and with the rational mobility it affords the concept, as a conduit between its indeterminate and determinate "extremes," the terminal poles of its categorical representation. The seemingly paradoxical equivalence of its internal and external unity in judgment expresses this double status of the judgment as the expressive instrument of both identity and attribution, of concentration and diffraction, and of mobility and immobility. It expresses as well the dual character of the concept as exemplar and as the embodiment, or rather the actuality, of thought. The syllogism thus has the paradoxical role of expressing the movement of the concept by parsing it into the signal moments of its logical (as distinct from its historical) constitution.

¹⁰¹ Science of Logic, 12.90.
So understood, the syllogistic represents at once the exterior or explicit logic of discursive rationality and the interior or implicit logic of the concept, though not simultaneously. For it is only in passing from the qualitative, immediate syllogism to the syllogism of necessity that exterior and interior rationality converge, or, from the perspective of absolute knowing, it is only in overcoming the contingency of attribution that the concept eventually realizes its absolute, universal (or infinite) extension via the circuit of discursive engagement. Hegel summarizes the conclusion of this circuit as follows:

Thus it [i.e., the concept] is still the internality of this its externality; and so in the course of the syllogism this externality is equalized with the internal unity. The various determinations return into this unity through the mediation which, while it unites them, is still a third term...But that determination of the Concept which had been considered as reality is, conversely, equally a positedness. For in this result the truth of the Concept has turned out to be the identity of its internality and externality; and not only this: already the moments of the Concept, in the Judgment, remain, in their indifference to each other, determinations which have their significance only in their relation. The Syllogism is mediation - the complete Concept in its positedness. Its movement is the transcendence of this mediation.102

In passing beyond mere qualitative or categorical attribution to (potentially) exhaustive disjunction, the final form of the syllogism of necessity, the concept that fuels the syllogism overcomes mediation as such, along with the breach between rational form and content, and achieves an (approximate) totality of determinations proper to a given concept. But if mediation is overcome, if only approximately, so is the propositional structure that permitted its expression.

What does this amount to? The mediation expressed through judgment, and in

102 *Science of Logic*, 12.126.
the form of a proposition, i.e., its presentation of a subject through its predicate, is here found to have unfolded through the mechanism of the syllogism. This happens through the mediation of the middle term that forges and maintains the predicative relation between the extremes, i.e., the major and minor terms, of the conclusion. The middle term, however, is lost, technically sublated, in that conclusion, even though it “as the totality of the concept itself contains the two extremes in their complete determinateness.” It is through the syllogism that, for example, the singularity of the subject term and the universality of the predicate term are connected through the particularity of the middle term. Put more generally, since in the dynamics of categorical identity each term successively assumes each quantity, the quantities of the extremes are each exchanged and mediated through the quantity of the middle term. The syllogism, to this extent, as the very embodiment of rationality, is also thus the formal expression of Aufhebung (sublation) itself, of the process through which the concept is elevated through the negated middle term through which each of the subject/predicate terms acquires its determination. Every judgment, it then turns out, is a judgment insofar as it concludes a syllogism, just as every concept is a concept just insofar as it is discursively extrapolated and determined through the divided unity of the proposition.

However, upon deriving the apodictic form of judgment in which subject and predicate terms are mutually and fully determined, according to the limits of judgment,

---

103 Science of Logic, 12.124.
i.e., through the “repletion of the copula,”\textsuperscript{104} judgment is made \textit{analytic}, and therefore tautological, just as happens inferentially in the case of the \textit{apodictic syllogism}, with the “repletion” of the middle term. In both instances, the formal instruments of predicative and inferential determination, respectively, are dissolved. In the former case, this is because “subject and predicate are in themselves the same content.”\textsuperscript{105} In the latter case, it is because “the syllogism, which consisted in the difference of the middle term as against its extremes, has thereby sublated itself.”\textsuperscript{106}

Once arrived at, judgment is immediately transformed into mere proposition, just as the syllogism itself succumbs, at each of its stages, to its merely formal adequacy. Similarly, just as judgment, in reaching the limits of expression, gives way to the syllogism, so the propositional logic of the syllogism, in reaching its own limits of determination, gives way to the logic of \textit{division}. However, it is not merely that \textit{division} emerges out of the exhausted formalism of the syllogistic, but that the syllogistic has indeed \textit{repleted} the terms relevant to division, i.e., the relevant genus, or universal, its \textit{differentiae}, and the genera, species and individuals subordinate to and defined by these. The syllogistic, in other words, is what supplies, through its inferential sorting of contingent and essential or necessary determinations, the plenitude and structure of the genus and its lineage, even if it is then through \textit{division} that this lineage must be

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Science of Logic}, 12.89.

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Science of Logic}, 12.89.

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Science of Logic}, 12.125.
thought through. It is thus that the threatening arbitrariness of diairetic taxonomy, whether we think of this in the limited terms of a Porphyrian tree, or a less hierarchical table of categories, or ultimate concepts, achieves its rational, yet immanent, justification in the context of a specific historical moment of philosophical or historical discourse.

The economy of determination, whether expressed in the interplay between judgment and proposition, between syllogism and judgment, or finally between the concept and the idea, is thus a movement from the vital, plastic operations of determining to the moribund artifacts of the instruments of determination. Yet if one is inclined to attribute the moments of petrification to negation, e.g., the aphorism from the discussion of observing reason in the Phenomenology of Spirit with which we began, or the Calvary of absolute knowing with which the Phenomenology ends, etc., it should be clear by now that it is in the belated affirmation of the work of negation that thought is brought to the standstill of its formal expression. It should be noted, by way of conclusion, that the immobilization of thought Hegel documents throughout his work is only part, albeit half, of the picture. Hegel’s Logic, therefore, demonstrates not, as Paul Redding has put it, that one must pass through “the ‘ossification’ of thought as it reduces the life of thought to the operations of a dead mechanism,” i.e., formal logic, in order to redeem the vitality of the concept. Rather, Hegel’s Logic is an expression of the inevitable oscillation, within the logical apprehension of Being and beings, between

---

107 Paul Redding, “The Role of Logic ‘commonly so called’ in Hegel’s Science of Logic,” 298.
the vitality of thought in its ceaseless renunciation, i.e., negation, of form and the instruments of expression summoned to exhibit it.
CONCLUSION

NEGATION, PHILOSOPHY AND THE LIMITS OF EXPERIENCE

Within the tradition I have been trying to trace, unity, since there is no such thing without multiplicity, is accomplished on the basis of a succession of divisions, of rational interruptions, so to speak, for the reason in question is discursive, its primary mode that of negation. What reason uncovers for both Plato and Hegel, paradigmatically, are the contiguous boundaries that hierarchically articulate and separate the kinds of things there are, and the individuals that instantiate those kinds. The unity of a given concept or corresponding object will derive from the system of concepts or universals under which it is subsumed, and ultimately from the philosophical articulation of that system.

The rational character of such concepts therefore depends on their being thought through the hierarchy of divisions they derive from. For Hegel, for example, the non-identity of subject and predicate is primary, and not merely as a first moment of differentiation to be overwritten in the succeeding self-identity of the Absolute: non-identity is the fundamental form of predication, thought and ontological specification, which is why infinite judgment plays so crucial a role in Hegel’s Phenomenology and Logic. Negation governs not just the drive of predication, but its eventual completion through the syllogism, which returns a given predicative series to its originating concept,
and thus, consecutively, to the logic of division and finally to the Idea. In this return through syllogistic inference to the concept Hegel also reveals the false dichotomy between reason and understanding, between thinking through the implications and obligations of a given judgment and applying a concept to a given object or phenomenon: “just as little as the concept is to be regarded merely as a determination of the understanding, so, too, the syllogism is to be regarded without further ado as rational.”

The intrinsic connection between negation and conceptual determination finds expression in a great variety of philosophical theories of meaning, knowledge, mind, etc., that lie outside the limited focus of genealogy undertaken in this dissertation. The discourse of negation continues, for example, in medieval accounts of individuation, from the more obvious cases that directly invoke negation, such as Henry of Ghent’s use of double negation as a principle of individuation, to those that explain individuation in terms of matter (Aquinas et al) or accidental properties (Avicenna et al), in the negative epistemologies and metaphysics of, for example, Eriugena, Bonaventura, Maimonides and Meister Eckhart, in Saussurian structuralism, and in the diverse post-structuralist philosophies of Heidegger, Sartre, Adorno, Levinas and Derrida. It also lies at the heart of Robert Brandom’s new Hegelian synthesis of Fregean and pragmatist semantics.

---

1 Encyclopedia Logic, §182
On the other hand, Hegel’s recognition of the discursive rationality of the concept is most obviously anticipated by Leibniz. Two of the general theses that define the discourse of negation, i.e., (9) and (10) in my Introduction, are easily recognizable as two of Leibniz’ fundamental axioms, axioms that, amongst other things, provide the grounds for his principium rationis (the principle of reason, or more familiarly, the principle of sufficient reason), a principle he states in two forms: (1) nihil est sine ratione (there is nothing without reason) and (2) nullum effectum est absque causa (there is no effect apart from a cause). The two formulations converge because, for Leibniz, the rational character (ratio) of a thing is just its having a reason for existing, which reason is its intelligible cause (causa). Things exist and are rational to the extent that they express truth, and they are capable of expressing truth only to the extent that they are logically representable as identity statements (or propositions).

Leibniz is relevant here because his axioms (as I have designated them) capture the internal relation between conceptual and propositional expression, or between the rationality of concepts and their propositional or discursive deployment. While this conception of the proposition, as Leibniz acknowledges, is already present in Aristotle, it is a centerpiece of Leibnizean metaphysics and is more clearly elaborated here than in any other previous or subsequent philosophical system. According to the first axiom, “the predicate or consequent is always in the subject or antecedent, and the nature of truth, or the connection between the terms of the statement (enuntiationis) consists in this very thing, as Aristotle also observed.” The second axiom states that the “inclusion
of the predicate in the subject” is true not only for formal identity statements but for
“every affirmative truth, universal or particular, necessary or contingent.” The third
axiom, perhaps the best known and most notorious of them, states that “Every
individual substance contains (involvit) in its complete notion (in perfecte notione sua)
the entire universe.”

The picture of individual substances (monads) and their concepts these axioms
define is admittedly rather different from what we find in the tradition I have been
looking at. Yet Leibniz’s axioms make transparent the consequences of an appetitive
conception of propositions, namely that all true propositions are analytic, even those
involving contingent facts/predicates, and because they point to conceptual analysis
(analysis notionum) as a central focus of logic, a focus we see both in Plato and again in
Hegel, though it is implicit as well in the attention scholastic philosophers pay to the
method of division, and particularly to its role in generating definitions and, what
amounts to the same thing, in parsing the essential features of the substances to which
those definitions apply. Still more important for our purposes are the points of
divergence with the tradition upon which I have been focusing. In particular, Leibniz’s
axioms account for the unity of the proposition on the basis of the plenitude of the
concept and its corresponding substance (monad), and do so in terms of identity, and
the intrinsic cohesion and unity of the predicates of a given individual substance or

---

translation is based on that by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber: “Primary Truths” in Leibniz’s Philosophical
Essays (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 30-34.
concept, provided for by divine reason. Yet Leibniz pays little philosophical attention to negation, and this primarily because there is no real discursivity in the logic of a *monadology*, just as there are no real relations in its metaphysics, for all determinations are already globally and instantaneously determined by God. The unfolding of monadic life is thus the metaphysical equivalent of the purely computational logic Leibniz envisioned, i.e., one in which inference plays no vital logical role.

While for Leibniz all this is taken to imply what is systematically captured in his *Monadology*, namely, that things (*monads*) are predicatively predetermined, for Plato and Hegel the relationship between things, or beings, and the propositions that represent them is best put conversely: propositions and ontological relations are categorically predetermined. This way of putting things stands at odds with Heidegger’s claim that Leibniz’s logic represents the culmination of a philosophical tendency initiated by Plato.³ Plato, according to Heidegger, cedes the place of truth to propositions and representation, and thus loses sight of its original ontological ground, of its original sense as revelation or unconcealment. Though this is hardly the place to argue the point at length, I hope to have provided the basis for arguing that both the ontological and revelatory character of truth are in fact preserved in the model Plato bequeaths to the tradition. That both conceptions are indeed necessary is part of what is expressed in Hegel’s much-cited dictum that “everything hangs on apprehending and

---

expressing the truth not merely as *substance* but also equally as *subject*.” Amongst other things, we should discern here an expression of the fact that the *ontological or de re* truth of the *designatum* of a given term has to be understood in terms of its logical deployment within the categorical propositions that are true of it, that the *ontological* truth of *substance* is only discoverable through the propositional, or *de dicto*, truths of the *subject* that is its ground/essence, even if those propositions and their logic are, in the end, to be suspended.

However, even if Heidegger is wrong in this regard about Plato and Leibniz, his own philosophical predilections bring him remarkably close to what is right, or at least important in them, in my view. While discussing the defining relationship between *Dasein*, i.e., the kind of being that is specific to human beings, and *negativity* in *Being and Time*, Heidegger asks: “Has anyone ever made a problem of the ontological source of notness, or prior to that, even sought the mere conditions on the basis of which the problem of the ‘not’ and its notness and the possibility of that notness can be raised?”

Though Heidegger does not attempt to fill this philosophical lacuna here, he does tell us something about how such a project ought to be conceived, namely, that it lies at the heart of metaphysics, or rather of the phenomenology of *Dasein* he thinks must replace

---

traditional ontology. He suggests, in particular, that the analysis of notness is inseparable from the thematic examination of “the meaning of Being in general.”

Heidegger will argue elsewhere that the experience and the problem of nothingness are prior to the “problem of the ‘not’,” the problem, that is, of negation. This is, in part, because his critique of metaphysics, which nonetheless remains profoundly bound to the questions of metaphysics, is in the first place concerned with ontological difference, i.e., the difference between Being (Sein) and beings (Seiendes).

This difference consists in the fact that Being is not a being, although beings are beings only insofar as they bear some relation to Being. I have tried to motivate a broader use of the expression ontological difference to indicate the difference between any more general kind and its more determinate forms, including the difference between a genus and its species. Briefly, the considerations for the broader use are that the expression would seem most aptly to apply to any difference in ontological grade or status, and, on the other hand, that the ground or Abgrund of such differences would be better portrayed as Plato portrays the Good, as lying outside of or beyond ontology, rather than a difference within it. Moreover, even if the gap between Being and beings is granted metaphysical prominence, and is not simply a difference amongst other equivalent differences, one way of explaining its prominence is to think of it as spanning

5 *Being and Time,* 9.

the entire ontological spectrum, where other ontological differences apply merely to a single segment of that spectrum.

But to return to Heidegger, while ontological difference, in his more narrow sense, is the primary concern of metaphysics, according to Heidegger it is one specific kind of being that is of particular importance: *Dasein*. For *Dasein*, and *Dasein* alone, its own *Being*, and the divide between that *Being* and the *beings* over which it exercises care (*Sorge*), i.e., the ontological difference, are abiding and defining concerns. It is the exclusive capacity of *Dasein* to uncover the ontological difference as an essential project of its specific *Being*, which it does in terms of its own possibilities and (more importantly) temporal limitation, i.e., its nothingness, or death. Heidegger maintains, very roughly, that the specific meaning of our being is indeed death, and that it is this that grounds the meaning of negation. As he puts it, “*Dasein* means: being held out into the nothing,” where “the nothing is the ‘not’ of beings, and is thus being, experienced from the perspective of beings.” The experience of nothing proper to *Dasein* is the experience of its being “towards,” and so bounded by, death. Importantly, for Heidegger, death properly speaking only occurs for *Dasein* insofar as it is capable of conceiving of it as such a limit, as its own negation. For those incapable of conceiving their own death as a kind of limit, that is, as a form of negation, death is merely an occurrence (*ein Vorkommen*), not a possible experience (*Erfahrung*).

---

7 “What is metaphysics?” in *Pathmarks*, 91.

8 “On the essence of the ground,” in *Pathmarks*, 97.
In his late essay “The Thing,” Heidegger approaches the matter according to the metaphysical regulations of scholastic taxonomy, which designates mortality the final (infima) differentia of man. Though it may strike us as odd that mortality occur below, i.e., as a differentia of, rational animal, since certainly irrational animals are finite as well, that is, all are subject to death and are thus mortal, this is indeed how the standard taxonomy represents matters. Heidegger gives us a way of understanding why. Though he makes no reference to its provenance, he clearly relies on the scholastic definition of man. On his view, mortality is part of this definition because being mortal is fundamental and exclusive to the meaning of man’s being: “to die means: to be capable of death as death. Only man dies (stirbt). The animal perishes (verendet). It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it.” (TT, p. 176) The implication is that the death of human beings, as opposed to that of animals, is indeed something they have before them, as the anticipated limit of their possibilities. Again, though Heidegger makes no reference to Epicurus, his argument surely alludes to Epicurus’ equally brief: “whenever we are present, death is not present; but whenever death is present we are not (hēmeis ouk esmen).”

However, though the argument is similar, Heidegger’s claim appears to be a direct rebuttal of the proposition Epicurus argues for, namely the metaphysico-therapeutic principle that death is nothing to us (ho thanatos ouden pros hēmās). For

---

Heidegger the principle applies merely to *irrational* animals, who presumably, and unfortunately, cannot make use of it. Yet there is another way of construing the Epicurean principle that aligns it directly with Heidegger’s claim. On this construal, the principle tells us not that death isn’t anything to us, but rather that it is precisely, *for us*, *ouden*, nothing.

However, I want to suggest an alternative argument, one stemming from the character of scholastic taxonomy itself, and one that perhaps helps make sense of the distinction between *sterben* and *verenden* Heidegger relies on. The verb *sterben* in German is cognate with *to starve* in English, and thus suggests a conception of death as privation. But the privation of what? Animals too are deprived of life in death, and so if death is just the privation of life, and mortality is just the property of being subject to this privation, then it would seem that the differentia ought to occur higher up in the genealogical tree, dividing mortal animals from immortal ones. But this is not how the genealogy goes, and this is because the relevant contrariety is not between death and life, but between mortality and immortality. While *mortals*, like all other animals, lose their lives in death, what they are *deprived* of, as a matter of their essential determination, is immortality, not life, which though on the face of it a counterintuitive claim, holds precisely according to the logic of privation: privation (*sterēsis*), in its strict Aristotelian sense, is attributable to that which “though it would naturally have the
[negated] attribute... has it not. Relative to that which properly possesses the attribute of immortality, mortality is therefore a privation, and as such it secures for man his essential relation to *immortality*. Whether we see this in theological terms as a relation to a lost paradisiac past, in more strictly Christological terms as the possibility of resurrection, or according to the Platonic doctrine of the soul’s immortality as against the perishability of the body, mortality is thereby established both as a fundamental constituent and of the taxonomy and definition of man and of his essential privation.

One implication of the present dissertation is that Heidegger has the grounding relation reversed, that the *experience* of nothingness has its basis in the expression of negation. To this extent, I take my cue from Freud, who did indeed, before Heidegger, broach the question of the origins of negation directly, albeit from the standpoint of psychoanalysis or neurology rather than philosophy. While death and finitude might well be thought the limiting and defining conditions of life, and the apprehension of these a condition of consciousness, and thus of negation and symbolic life more generally, the considerations brought forth in this dissertation suggest the converse proposition, an extrapolation of the epigraph from Freud with which the Introduction begins, that it is negation that makes possible symbolic life and with this the *apprehension* of death and finitude. According to the tradition under examination, negation grounds the experience of being human, in the specific sense that it is

---

fundamental to the capacity for discursive thought, which has been accounted a
distinctive feature of human beings since Plato and Aristotle.

On the other hand, Heidegger’s correlation of the problem of the “not” with that
of being is a necessary starting point for the philosophical treatment of negation, as I
have tried to show, and it is this correlation and the threat it poses that explain the
philosophical neglect of negation Heidegger points to. If speech, and thus true speech, is
always bound to the here and now, it also succeeds as speech only to the extent that it
preemptively revokes or negates its indexical anchors. And this is not merely a matter of
language: the tode ti, i.e., the individual or primary substance (prōtē ousia) of traditional
Aristotelian metaphysics, cannot be identified with any or all of its spatio-temporal
instances. Rather, it is precisely not any of these, individually or in their totality. So much
is revealed in the Greek expression itself, which, in the concatenation of a
demonstrative and an indefinite pronoun, draws into a single denomination a this and a
something, an individual limit, that is, and a kind to which that individual belongs.

In his discussion of this expression in Language and Death, Giorgio Agamben
remarks that “primary substance, inasmuch as it signifies a tode ti (that is, both the ‘this’
and the ‘that’), is the point of enactment for the movement from indication to
signification, from showing to saying.” (LD, p. 17) But translating the two elements as
“this” and “that” diverts us from the true gap traversed within this formula. While the
indexical tode names the this of an immediate instance, the indefinite ti specifies the
universal kind that makes it one. A tode ti is thus both many and one itself, both
particular and universal, indeed it is, in Agamben’s useful formulation, “the most concrete and immediate thing” and simultaneously “the most generic and universal.” However, it thereby charts the movement not from “showing to saying” but from *naming to saying*, or from the rudiments of the name to the divided identity of the proposition, for it gives us all we need to proceed from the mere *this* (*tode*) to the proposition, *this is something* (*tode esti ti*). What resides within this ligature, then, as a condition of its coherence, is the *ontological difference* that divides and connects the *tode* to its *ti*, and it is negation that marks this difference, as the most basic form of *indication*, even if it is here expressed merely internally in the structure of the ligature. Such *internal negation* is ultimately what we have tried to give an account of.

To extrapolate from the formal structure of *primary substance* (*prōtē ousia*) we might say that any substance, whether individual or generic, is limited by the kind that defines it, the kind with which it is necessarily non-identical. If this is ontological difference in the primary sense, then there is a secondary sense as well, and similarly a second level of negation to be accounted for in the notion of substance. This secondary sense consists in the fact that substance is precisely the negation of each of its contingent appearances, since if it were simply identifiable with any of its instances it would be non-identical to every other (or a different substance in each of its instances), and so non-identical to itself, whereas if it were identifiable with the totality of its contingent appearances it would be constituted according to accident rather than
essence. Yet the uniqueness of every substance is also given by the series of its instances, which can only belong to it – nothing else could be non-identical to these instances in this precise respect. However, if substance is defined by the exclusion or negation of its immediate time and place, it is thereby defined by what is not, and, as Plato regularly observed, what both is and is not is not being (to on) but becoming (genesis), the proper object of opinion (doxa) rather than scientia (epistēmē). In other words, if negation and substance are so bound to one another, then there would appear to be no possibility of metaphysics, that is, of a science of being qua being.

It is hardly surprising then that it is with the paradox of the indexical that Hegel begins the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for it is here that the interrelatedness of substance and negation is most immediately encountered. What he demonstrates in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, an essential contiguity between ostension and negation, will be presented in the *Logics*, to begin with, as an identity between being and non-being. What emerges here is the grounding of logic and metaphysics in the divided unity of conceptual form, a joining of contraries - assertion and negation, being and nothingness, the former signaled by the this of an ontology of unmediated particulars, the latter by the not of an elusive transcendence (or transcendent ontology) of universals. This is also, I believe, what Hegel is getting at in telling us that “If we take the ‘this’ in the

---

11 Admittedly such a position regarding substance has been defended in Buddhism, for example, but what the doctrine of instantaneous existence (kshanika bhava) defends is not an account of substance at all. The doctrine is instead a denial that there is anything like substance to serve as the basis of any positive metaphysics or epistemology.
doubled shape (der gedoppelten Gestalt) of its being, as ‘now’ and as ‘here,’ the
dialectic will receive a form as intelligible as the “This” itself is.” This dialectic, in turn,
shows us that this “this” is a non-entity... neither this nor that, a not-this,” that is, a
“universal (Allgemeines).”¹² The generality or abstractness of language, without which it
makes little sense to speak of language at all, bears witness to the originating interplay
of negation and affirmation, of non-being and being.

It is this interplay that Freud will return to precisely in relation to the
development of the capacity for judgment, specifically in relation to biological drives
that establish the possibility of psychological life while standing against the specific
demands of thought. Thought is possible only to the extent that the barrage of sensory
and affective input is moderated and thus only under the condition of exclusion. Yet
what is excluded is, for all that, registered as an exclusion, which is precisely how to
understand the logic of repression and its instrument or field of expression, the
unconscious. To Freud’s riveting claim that the unconscious knows no negation one has
to add the observation that the unconscious itself is the domain of the negated that
makes possible the logically richer language of consciousness. We might further point
out that consciousness bears the fundamental structural relationship of negation to the
unconscious. To this extent, the unconscious is the infinite apprehension with which
consciousness is both identical and non-identical. When Freud assures us of the
analysand’s confession, “You can be certain it is not my mother,” that the dream figure

¹² Phenomenology of Spirit, §95.
in question is indeed his mother, it is important to understand both the contradiction involved and its resolution. I want to suggest that if we read this not in terms of pathogenic organization but in terms of the structure of symbolic assent/engagement what we have here is a local picture of Hegelian dialectic.

If Freud offers us a more precise elaboration of, and a contrast with, the Hegelian picture of the essential negativity of consciousness, it is Frege who brings into similarly precise focus the irreducibly inferential setting of the concept, which Hegel so richly, if diffusely, explores. Although in some sense Hegel’s Logic is a more thoroughgoing Begriffsschrift than Frege’s, he shares with Frege the philosophical ambition of overcoming the illusion of the autonomy of names, predicates and the objects and properties they designate. On the other hand, Hegel’s is more a logic of Gedanke than Schrift, and so aspires to a formalism of rational constitution rather than orthographic clarity. Paradoxically, Hegel’s concept logic is also ultimately more attuned to the propositional framework of thinking and saying than Frege’s logic, which in the end returns logic to its archaic ground, i.e., to the Adamic ground of naming, despite Frege’s valiant effort to confer upon assertion the status of logical form. This is so because sentences, on Frege’s account, turn out to be complex names, though what they name, i.e., truth values, remains a little obscure. What seems quite clear is that in

---

13 I contrast Frege’s and Hegel’s conceptions of formalism in Chapter 3. On Frege’s interest in the orthography of propositional and inferential structure see Cora Diamond’s “What does a Concept-Script do?” and Daniele Macbeth’s Frege’s Logic.
this aspect of his semantics Frege is as much a Platonist as I believe I have shown Hegel to be.

That Platonism and one or another form of nominalism can develop side by side is already shown by Plato himself, but it is perhaps Boethius who provides the most vivid example of their compatibility, precisely insofar as he looks back to the high metaphysics of Platonism and forward to the high logicism of late medieval philosophy. Logicism in this context is to be understood not as the technical program of reducing mathematics to logic, but as the programmatic attempt to assimilate metaphysics to logic. It nonetheless shares with Fregean and post-Fregean logicism the view that the formal language of logic grants us a more unobstructed view of the shape and function of concepts and inference, and so also tells us something about the character of objects over which such concepts can range.

The possibility of logic telling us something about particular individuals or instances of a given concept, or least telling us something of philosophical interest, is hardly obvious and takes us to the heart of the matter concerning negation. If logic tells us nothing about the character of particulars, that is, if it is indifferent to the instances over which concepts range, and thus truths about those instances, then it is pretty clearly irrelevant to the assessment of ordinary speech about particulars and their eventualities. This raises far more serious questions for nominalists than for realists, but for both it divides philosophical from quotidian discourse in principle. Yet it raises more serious questions about how we determine what level of generality or universality is
relevant, as a matter of principle, to philosophical discourse. If individual men are of no philosophical consequence, what is it that makes the species *man* of interest, given the greater generality of *animal*, or *substance*?

If it is claimed that only what can be defined is of relevance to philosophy, and only what is essential *sub species aeternitatis* can be defined, we have to insist that individuals don’t *have* the relevant sorts of essences, which seems to beg the question, since the relevant sort of essence is simply one that is possessed universally by things of a given kind. Ultimately, the implication is that we cannot know anything of individuals because nothing said of them *qua* individuals follows from their identity as individuals, because nothing can be read off the expression designating that individual. Otherwise put, there are no concepts of individuals. But why not? Leibniz certainly thought there were, and if concepts are the determinate results of *deductions* that proceed through the descending exclusion, i.e., the determinate negation, of features of higher concepts, why not consider the *ideas* of individuals derivable through an extension of this same procedure (of division) concepts as well?

In a much remarked upon footnote from the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel reports having been challenged by Herr Krug to deduce his (Herr Krug’s) pen. His response is not that the challenge is itself absurd, but that there are likely more significant matters one might attend to first. In a wonderful work on metaphysics, Jose Benardete offers the deduction Hegel had deemed too inconsequential. It runs roughly as follows: For all $x$, $x$ is identical to $x$, therefore Herr Krug’s pen is identical to Herr Krug’s pen (by universal
instantiation); therefore, there is something with which Herr Krug’s pen is identical (by existential generalization). The sleight of hand detectable here, a hallmark of the fallacy of *petitio principii*, derives from drawing out the existence presupposition of the identity statement, but it is for this reason instructive.

At the level of identity at which what Hegel calls “general diversity” may be asserted, there is indeed no difference between identity and existence: “A is A” is simply a discursive expansion of the empty enumerability of a thing, its indeterminate diversity that is the correlate of its indeterminate identity. So what Herr Benardete deduces is the mere existence of Herr Krug’s pen, which, despite its descriptor, remains, perhaps, a bare particular. What is required, at the very least, is the deduction of the actuality, and beyond that the individuality of Herr Krug’s pen, and that would require the complete resources of the *Logic*. Of course we have in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a ready example of what such a deduction would look like, in this case the deduction of *Spirit* or consciousness, and with this the constituent deductions of the individual contingencies of Greek Tragedy, Stoicism, etc. If, in short, Herr Krug’s pen is to be properly deduced, it would require, at the very least, something like or something that includes a phenomenology of the technology of writing (Derrida?), a genealogy of Herr Krug’s profession, of his social and familial circumstances, etc.; hence Hegel’s reticence. All this suggests that diverse contingencies and individuals are indeed deducible, and so conceptualizable, even if they are also necessarily inexhaustible in number, and it is
through negation that the otherwise indeterminate terrain of contingencies is navigated.

It comes as no surprise, then, that in the recent resumption of interest in Hegel, Robert Brandom, for example, explores a variety of Fregean inferentialism that leads him to defend a version of determinate negation he calls “material incompatibility,”14 that Jacques Derrida’s program of conceptual deconstruction depends upon recovering a notion of difference, what he calls différance, that is wedded to negation, determinatively understood, and that Deleuze’s attempt to establish an alternative model of difference freed from the constraints of combination and any symbolic or representational system devotes so much space to a critique of this same conception of negation. Frege’s context principle might be thought a counterexample to the connection between division and determinate negation, but it should be recalled that the context of Frege’s context principle is not the distribution of other concepts but the propositional setting in which a concept is deployed.

Deleuze in his magisterial Difference and Repetition challenges the determinative use of negation precisely on the grounds that, like hypothetical propositions, it has no independent expressive power. The proper rejoinder to this, the ultimate message of this dissertation, is that while this is superficially true because negation itself has no autonomous, non-contextual content, it is more profoundly true because negation is

party to the determination of *all* content, inasmuch as it is the very instrument of the
discursive extrapolation involved in demarcating our concepts. In this sense, negation is
semantically inexpressible in much the way that Derrida’s *différance* is phonetically so,
or in the way that the unconscious is cognitively so. In other words, it is lexically
inexpressible because its proper role is expressed in everything that *is* expressible.


______. *On Aristotle On Interpretation 4-6.* Translated by Andrew Smith. Bristol Classical Press, 2011


Turnbull, Robert G. *The Parmenides and Plato's Late Philosophy: Translation of and Commentary on the Parmenides with Interpretative Chapters on the Timaeus, the Theaetetus, the Sophist, and the Philebus*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998.


VITA

Russell Newstadt was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. He studied philosophy and classics at the University of California, Berkeley, where he received a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy. He did graduate work in ancient philosophy at the University of Chicago before coming to the Philosophy Department at Loyola University Chicago, from which he earned a Master of Arts in 2011.

Mr. Newstadt received a 4-year Teaching Assistantship at Loyola, and was subsequently awarded an Advanced Doctoral Fellowship and an Arthur J. Schmitt Dissertation Fellowship. He has coauthored two published essays on Hegel with Dr. Andrew Cutrofello, and has given papers at several conferences on Augustine, Boethius, Hegel and Heidegger.