

Self-reference And Logical Memory in Hegel's Theory of the Concept

Elisa Magri*

Abstract: As Hegel often said, memory is essentially related to thinking. In this paper I will argue that memory plays a crucial role into the *Science of Logic* as well, although it does not stand for a psychological faculty. I will proceed as follows: first, I will briefly mention the relevance of memory in the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, then I will reconstruct the correspondence between the psychological transition from *Vorstellung* to *Denken* and the speculative *Übergang* from *Wesen* to *Begriff*. Lastly, I will hint at the difference between self-relation and self-consciousness, focusing on the importance of the first in the *Science of Logic*.

Keywords: Hegel, Logic, Memory, Subjective Spirit.

Resumo: Como Hegel disse muitas vezes, a memória está essencialmente relacionada com o pensamento. Neste artigo pretende-se argumentar que a memória tem um papel decisivo também na *Ciência da Lógica*, apesar de aqui ela não representar nenhuma faculdade psicológica. Procede-se nos seguintes passos: Primeiro, será brevemente lembrada a relevância da memória na *Filosofia do Espírito Subjetivo*. Depois, será reconstruída a correspondência entre a passagem psicológica da *representação* ao *pensamento* com a *passagem* especulativa da *essência* ao *conceito*. Finalmente será apontada a diferença entre auto-relação e auto-consciência, focalizando a importância da primeira na *Ciência da Lógica*.

Palavras-chave: Hegel, Lógica, Memória, Espírito subjetivo.

Introduction¹:

Hegelian scholars always stress the irreducibility of logic to subjective thought, as logic is the science of pure thought independent from concrete *Vorstellungen*. This is obviously true, as Hegel himself says very often. However, this is not sufficient in order

*Ph.D Student at Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa – Italy. I am thankful to Prof. Alfredo Ferrarin for his suggestions and helpful remarks, to Samuele Lo Piano and Graham Wetherall for kindly correcting a previous English translation of this paper and to Augusto Gerolin for graciously translating the title and the abstract into Portuguese. I also thank Dr. Tommaso Pierini for criticizing many aspects of my paper. Of course, all remaining errors are mine.

¹ List of abbreviations followed hereafter:

GW = Gesammelte Werke, Hamburg 1968 ff.

Enz. A = Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften 1817 (GW 13)

Enz. B = Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften 1827 (GW 19)

Enz. C = Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften 1830 (GW 20)

SL = Hegel's Science of Logic, transl. by A. V. Miller, New York 1969

to justify the structure of *Begriff* from a systematic point of view. As we know, concept² is never immediately given, as it must be rationally developed both in logic and in subjective spirit. This implies a complex process from *Vorstellung* to *Begriff* in order to overcome the limits of the former. In the context of psychology, Hegel underscores the function of recollection and memory in providing the transition to *Denken*, whereas substantial causality leads directly to *Begriff* in logic. In my view, a logical memory also lies at the core of the deduction of the Concept, as I will attempt to clarify without assuming either psychology as a model for logic, or logic as a presupposition of psychology. My aim is to give some lines of investigation in order to justify the deduction of concept as the proper *process* concerning both ontology and theoretical activity. I will keep logic and psychology distinct, but not to the extent of excluding their reciprocal correspondence. More precisely, I will focus on the passages concerning the deduction of Concept in the SL and I will explain how they correspond to the psychological movement from *Vorstellung* to *Denken*.

1. Hegel's psychology is neither a treatise on the human mind nor a theory of faculties from which one might deduce logical concepts. Instead, Hegelian psychology is concerned with intelligence's withdrawal into itself in order to achieve «the knowledge of substantial totality, neither subjective nor objective» (Enz. C, § 440). Thus, psychology explains, at the same time, how knowledge is possible and to what extent knowing is related to reality.

Yet, psychology is the culmination of what Hegel calls “subjective spirit”, which includes the soul, consciousness and the free spirit, which latter is the subject matter of psychology. The transition from the soul to the psychological *Geist* is the same as the transition from spirit's relation to the world to spirit's relation to itself. In the form of anthropological soul and of consciousness, spirit experiences the world outside as an independent object. Only psychology reveals how spirit knows itself through its own determinations. Therefore, Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit is not so much a

²Hereafter I will prefer “Concept” as the proper translation of the German word “Begriff” contrary to Miller's translation, which makes use of “Notion”. Both “Concept” and “Begriff” mean “to catch”, “to comprehend”. It is not simply grasping, but knowing something in its whole extension and complexity. I shall also adopt the capital letter in order to mean by “Concept” “the concept of the concept”.

genetic description of knowledge³, but rather a rational analysis of the unifying structure of theoretical activity⁴. More precisely, hegelian psychology is divided into different theoretical activities moving from the most immediate to the most mediate, that is from intuition to the concept. For the sake of brevity, I will not recall the whole psychological path, in order to focus on the most difficult abilities which make *Denken* possible.

Thinking arises once intelligence has fully externalized itself into linguistic signs. Hegel speaks of it as if the name should be the connection between intuition and a universal meaning without any image sharing some characteristic with the object signified. The creation of signs is not clearly described, since Hegel himself recognizes that signs' creation is always misunderstood and confused with recollection, representation or imagination (Enz. C, § 459, Z). On the contrary, productive memory is always involved in signs. As Inwood remarks, productive memory is not mentioned elsewhere in Enz. C, but it appears in Hegel's *Philosophical Propedeutic*, the notes of his lectures to schoolboys between 1809 and 1811, published by Karl Rosenkranz in 1840: «(...) But in so far as a representation is made into its determination through productive memory, the reality essentially becomes the relation of representations to other representing beings [*vorstellende Wesen*] and it begins therein the theoretical communication of these beings with one another» (M. INWOOD, 2010, p. 496). Sign-creation differs from fantasy in so far as the former is engaged in *preserving* the connection between meaning and representation, whereas the latter deals with the association of pictorial images.

However, linguistic signs are merely external, because they are not chosen by us and they do not depend on what we see in the world. They are relations based on representations; therefore they stand for essential beings in so far as they mediate between intelligence and external content. Thus, memory plays the opposite role of imagination: whereas imagination universalizes representations by means of association and abstraction; memory, on the contrary, retains just the connection of particularity and

³I am referring to R. WINFIELD (2010), who takes seriously Hegel's development from soul to intelligence claiming that soul and consciousness should be conceived as pre-linguistic states. But, although language, as theoretical product, is fully analysed in psychology, it does not mean that spirit, taken as soul or consciousness, is not able to express itself linguistically. In my view, psychology represents a higher order of explanation of the same rationality, thus anthropology, phenomenology and psychology differ by form and not by degree.

⁴See Enz. C. § 442, Z.

universality devoid of any immediate content. Also, memory is not simply name-retention, since, as productive memory, it is concerned with the creation of signs as well. One could say, recalling the language of *Phenomenology*, that intelligence *alienates* itself into signs, which manifest spirit's activity.

Furthermore, since the linguistic connection of words and meanings is accidental, memory transforms accidentality in necessity by positing itself as the universal space of names as such (Enz. C, § 463). This means that, in so far as intelligence thinks, as it does in normal life, spirit uses language *automatically* according to its semantic and syntactical relations without taking into account any intuitive element. Memory is the proper *habit* of intelligence⁵, because «the mechanical feature in memory lies merely in the fact that certain signs, tones, etc. are apprehended in their purely external association, and then reproduced in this association, without attention being expressly directed to their meaning and inward association» (M. INWOOD, 2010, p. 511). When it is completely developed, memory is just a strong connection of signs devoid of any intuitive content and this represents the external mode of *thought's existence* (Enz. C, § 463, Z). Memory turns directly into thinking as intelligence habituates itself to reproducing its inner identity as concrete universality⁶.

This passage is one of the most important of the entire psychology, for it shows that thinking is not something different from memory, but it develops inside of memory itself. Once memory has turned every external and subjective content inward, thinking can freely relate to reality. In fact, reality is nothing but the stable communication between determined representations. Furthermore, since memory has removed every intuitive side, one can say that thinking acquires its own way of determination by simply referring to itself. Thanks to memory, thinking depends only on its own activity, so it does not act as a conscience toward an object. Of course, ordinary thinking (*denken*) is not immediately conceptual (*begreifen*): in order to have concepts intelligence must *decide* to think logically. Intelligence comes to logical reason when it wants to think, since the form of the concept removes the remaining externality between thinking and reality. Nevertheless, memory explains how thinking is necessarily connected to itself in order to develop as “substantial totality”.

⁵See Enz. C, § 410, Z. See also S. HOULGATE (1996).

⁶See also H. F. FULDA (1991).

Actually, the transition from representation to *Denken* corresponds to the transition from essence to the Concept, as I will now attempt to clarify. This correspondence is not intended to affirm an isomorphism between psychology and logic, as if psychology should underly logic or vice versa. On the contrary, my aim is to reconstruct ontology and theoretical activity as a proper unity. We would not have the logical succession from being to the Concept, if they did not mirror the theoretical transition from intuition to thinking. Therefore, the correspondence between memory and essence should not be understood as a rule, but rather it might suggest some reflections upon the systematic deduction of Hegelian *Begriff*.

2. As we well-know, SL has nothing to do neither with psychological faculties, nor with representations. Although Hegel admits in the preface to the second edition of SL that the forms of thought are exhibited by language, there is no way to suppose the SL in whatever connection to subjective thinking. Contrary to Burbidge (J. W. BURBIDGE, 2003), I will not argue that there should be a kind of isomorphism between logic and subjective spirit, for this kind of interpretation is not able to explain the reason of such common structure. In Burbidge's explanation, psychology and logic seem external patterns of thought, which have the same structure only considering the Idea. As the Idea is divided into the idea of truth and the idea of good, in the same way the philosophy of subjective spirit is divided into theoretical and practical spirit. In sum, we do not get any explanation of the reason why logic and psychology do share a common structure. On the contrary, I believe we should be able to compare logic and psychology as different *Gestalten* of the same movement, which becomes more complex as we discover new perspectives and explanations regarding the structure of movement itself. Here I will focus on the arising of the Concept, which establishes the distinction between objective and subjective logic. These passages focus on the transition from essence to the Concept and, in my view, they provide the logical structure of the transition from *Vorstellung* to *Begriff* as mediated by a logical memory.

Essence arises as the internal mediation of being, when «being recollects (*erinnert*) itself». Hegelian scholars do not stress so much this statement, although it occurs a few times at the beginning of the *Doctrine of essence*. Angelica Nuzzo gave a stimulating interpretation of it, claiming that «*Erinnerung* is one of the forms that

dialectic as method assumes in Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit; the proof of its legitimacy as method of thinking is provided by the logic» (A. NUZZO, 2006, p. 94). Although I generally agree with Nuzzo's interpretation, I wish to deepen how the structure of *Erinnerung* is integrated into essence. Also, I shall reconstruct the speculative transition from *Erinnerung* to *Gedächtnis* within essence.

By *Erinnerung* Hegel refers to a kind of self-intuition, that is, in the context of the SL, to a new logical form, whose reference does not belong to something external, but to itself. This is the first great evolutionary step since being. Unlike the transitive negation of being, reflective negativity consists in the internal division of being from itself. This means that categories are no longer external to each other and they do not disappear in their connection, as quality and quantity do, because essential relations arise from their self-division. The more categories turn back into and deepen themselves, the more they subsist by referring to themselves. This shift of reference allows a new kind of thought, which is analogous to the arising of *Vorstellung* described in the *Psychology* of the *Encyclopedia*: «Aber die andere Seite der Diremction ist, die Form als unendliche Reflexion in sich zu setzen, das Erwachen der Intelligenz zu sich selbst in diesem Stoff, *ihre Erinnerung in sich* in demselben; so ist er der *ihrige*, und sie hat dessen Unmittelbarkeit und Finden nicht mehr nöthig – das *Vorstellen*» (Enz. B, § 450)⁷.

Erinnerung corresponds to *Reflexion in sich*, it is spirit's awakening, since intelligence recognizes the content of intuitions as its own, thereby spirit's activity does not consist in *finding* the object, but rather in distinguishing objectivity from its inner constitution. Similarly, logical *Erinnerung* is the way by which being splits up into opposite sides *of its own*, its self-identity and its other. This is, at the same time, the transition from immediateness to *Vorstellung*. Essential categories, such as whole-and-parts, force-and-its-expression, inner-and-outer, reproduces the form of representation, which posits determinations according to the rule of identity and contradiction.

Nevertheless, this development does not lead directly to the Concept, for the structure of reason is not reducible to *Vorstellung*. What is then the novelty that gives essence its proper organization, so that it does not rely on external relationships, but

⁷The passage deals with the arising of representation from intuition, when intelligence is totally externalized in its concrete content. Enz. C, § 450 is slightly modified, but the meaning is the same. This

rather on an *absolute* connection?

In the middle of essence another movement occurs, which is not a mere externalization, but rather it is the *manifestation of absolute* [*Manifestation*]: «The actual is therefore *manifestation*; it is not drawn into the sphere of *alteration* by its externality, nor is it the *reflecting* of itself in *an other*, but it manifests itself; that is, in its externality it is *itself* and is *itself* in that alone, namely only as a self-distinguishing and self-determining movement» (SL, p. 542). The manifestation of absolute is different from the alteration of being as well as from the reflection of essence, for it is no more based on the form of *reference* to whatever else, but on the movement of self-distinguishing. This is a novelty, as it implies a more complex dynamics corresponding to what Kant would have explained under the category of modality. Whereas *Erinnerung* means that the logical form has been divided from itself and confronted by its other, absolute actuality shows how the form becomes active toward itself⁸. It is possible now to understand why essential relationships, such as whole-and-parts, force-and-its-expression, inner-and-outer, are still incomplete and do not achieve the level of the Concept. The problem lies in the fact that, until logical determination is confronted by its other, externality remains as the necessary distance implied in every relation. In order to get the logical form which explains how thought *is* the unity with its other, we need to overcome *relation* as such. This is the reason why Hegel uses a different word for absolute relation, which is *Verhältnis* instead of the more common *Beziehung*. Whereas *Beziehung* refers to an external connection, *Verhältnis* points out an inner relation:

«It is relation [*Verhältnis*]⁹ because it is a distinguishing whose moments are themselves its whole totality, and therefore absolutely *subsist*, but in such a manner that there is only *one* subsistence and the difference is only the illusory being, the reflective movement, of the expository process, and this *illusory being* [*Schein*], the *reflective movement*, of the expository process, and this illusory

statement did not occur in *Enz. A*.

⁸SL, p. 546: «Real actuality as such is in the first instance the thing of many properties, the existent world; but it is not the Existence that resolves itself into Appearance, but, as actuality, it is at the same time the in-itself and reflection-into-self; it preserves itself in the manifoldness of mere Existence; its externality is an inner relationship to itself alone. What is actual can act; something manifests its actuality through what which it produces».

⁹It is difficult to translate the difference between *Beziehung* and *Verhältnis* into English, as Miller himself does not make any distinction (both are intended as “relation”). Hereafter I will keep the German words whenever it is necessary to highlight the difference between them.

being is the absolute itself» (SL, p. 554).

Subsistence [*bestehen*] contrasts the disappearing of being in otherness as well as the reflection of essence. Furthermore, subsistence includes appearance as its own difference, that is, as its own way to manifest itself in the same way in which light «is neither something nor a thing, but its being is only its showing or shining» (id.ibid.). In this sense, absolute relation is substance «as *Verhältnis* to itself» (SL, p. 553). The metaphor of light is not accidental, since it highlights the difference between substantiality and the previous logical determinations. Contrary to being and essence, substance explains the dynamic movement of the logical form without introducing further divisions. This is possible since substance itself is the totality of being, which has integrated reflection into itself. This corresponds equally to the sublation of *Vorstellung* by means of a logical memory. In fact, if we focus on substance's activity, we can notice that the original analogy to *Erinnerung* is replaced by an implicit analogy to *Gedächtnis*.

For the sake of brevity, I will refer just to essence's final movement, which is concerned with the absolute relation and, more precisely, with the category of causality. By causality substance determines itself, because cause and effect are intrinsically connected by their reciprocal presupposition. Hegel proceeds by arguing the mechanical character of causality through the category of action-reaction¹⁰. This relation lies in the opposition between an active against a passive substance. It implies that the substance which is acted upon also becomes cause, running into infinite progress, that is, into an infinite reciprocal action. Therefore, action-reaction relation turns into reciprocity, where «mechanism is sublated; for it contains first the *vanishing* of that original *persistence* of the *immediate* substantiality, and secondly the *coming-to-be* of the *cause*, and hence *originativeness* as *self-mediating* through its *negation*» (SL, p. 569). This means that substance does not simply act on itself, but its movement has become independent even from a first cause. It *reproduces* itself spontaneously, turning difference into free actuality in such a manner that causality *is* the Concept. Causality

¹⁰SL, p. 503: «Mechanism consists in this externality of causality, where the reflection of the cause into itself in its effect is at the same time a repelling being, or where, in the self-identity which the causal substance has in its effect, the cause equally remains something immediately external to it, and the effect has passed over into another substance».

leads into the concept because the mechanical action-reaction relation becomes the *manifestation* of thinking's inner identity. Only in this way does necessity become the unity of being with itself that has itself as ground.

It should be noted that memory's activity is described by Hegel in the same way of substance's causality. Memory is causally active upon intelligence, because it forces thinking to leave aside intuitions and subjective representations in order to turn itself into an object, that is, into linguistic signs. Without language, intelligence cannot achieve thinking, because spirit sublates itself through language into universal meanings. However, thinking cannot be reduced to language, for intelligence is also the power to determine logical concepts. Memory provides intelligence with the capacity to think and it does not explain the structure of the will necessary to achieve logical concepts. Nonetheless, by habituating itself to using language, spirit recognizes itself in its linguistic production and thereby is able to think logically. Similarly, the logical development of substantiality mirrors the transition from *Vorstellung* to *Denken* as substance's habit to refer to itself.

Note that this does not mean that *every* mechanism should lead to the Concept, but that the concept of mechanism opens up the way to the Concept¹¹. Going through the logical form of mechanism, substance loses its immediacy and the same distinction between passive and active disappears. Whereas *Erinnerung* points out spirit's awakening to itself, mechanical memory provides rationality with its own *beisichsein*, that is, with its own organized and self-determined structure.

3. As a conclusion I wish to explain further why the notion of self-reference is relevant in Hegel's philosophy, especially when talking about conceptual thinking. The mnemonic structure I find out both in psychology and logic aims to deduce a stable form of self-reference, because this is the only way for thinking to determine itself. It is important to notice that self-reference is not a mere tautology, but a fully developed relation. Substance's self-reference is the way by which reflection is integrated into

¹¹*It is important to distinguish between the mechanical character of action-reaction relation and the mechanism described in the Subjective Logic as a specific moment of Objectivity. Whereas the latter regards the emergence of Concept into existence, the former deals with the arise of Concept itself. One could say that a mechanical feature always lies in the structure of conceptual activity and Hegel himself introduces mechanism as a general character. See SL, p. 711.*

being, so that categories do not correspond to *Vorstellung* anymore, but provide the structure of thinking. In addition, since Hegel does not conceive of memory as a mere deposit of past experiences and representations, the causal element in logic is very noticeable. Causality explains why memory could not be reduced to retention, because, in order to make thinking possible, memory must produce a constraint on rationality, and this constraint is exactly the mechanical *nexus* between the self and its own being. Once this connection is firmly and dynamically established, thinking can freely explicate itself.

Yet, self-reference should not be confused with self-consciousness or self-awareness, otherwise it would not be logic at all, but it would revert back to phenomenology. The difference between these two concepts lies in the fact that to be self-aware means to be acquainted with an experience in its first-person mode of givenness, that is, from “within”¹². On the contrary, self-reference does not refer to a first-person experience at all, but it points out just the relation, the logical form that is necessary in order to establish a connection between the self and its otherness. The aim of self-reference is not to disclose an *act* of self-perception, rather to give thinking its proper openness, that is, to make thinking *oriented* toward its alterity and self-differentiation.

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¹²See also: D. ZAHAVI (1999).

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