

# The Positivity of Contradiction.

## Some Remarks on Hegel's and Fichte's Philosophical Method\*

Sebastian Schwenzfeuer

Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

**ABSTRACT:** Fichte and Hegel elaborate a comparable account of contradiction that has to be distinguished from the Aristotelian tradition. Other than in traditional philosophy, contradictions are not in every case conceived as an indicator for erroneous reasoning. Moreover, contradicting assertions are essential to their philosophical method. In his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte discusses the relation between absolute and finite subjectivity. In this context, his theory of synthesis and contradiction is worked out roughly. The unavoidable contradiction between the I and Not-I has to be resolved by introducing the term 'quantity'. In the *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Hegel gives a more detailed, but closely related account of contradiction. He demonstrates that oppositions as such contradict, because the opponents, the positive and the negative, are contradictory in themselves and have to be resolved into the ground. Thereby, contradictions become productive.

**Keywords:** principle of contradiction, synthesis, negativity, logic, method.

“*Alle Dinge sind an sich selbst widersprechend.*”<sup>1</sup> All objects are in themselves contradictory. This famous statement summarizes Hegel's considerations of the principle of contradiction in his *Wissenschaft der Logik* (in the third annotation in the chapter on contradiction). It expresses the concept of contradiction in Hegel's view. Clearly, it is quite different from what is generally known as the principle of (non-)contradiction, one of the basic logical laws in Aristotelian thought. At first sight, this statement seems to express quite the opposite of Aristotle's logical law. The ontological version of the principle of (non-)contradiction in Aristotle claims the impossibility for any object to have opposed properties.<sup>2</sup> Having opposed properties would mean that an object is contradictory. The principle seems to say that such contradictory objects cannot exist (this is the reason why this version of the principle is called 'ontological', it says something about what can be or cannot be). For example, one cannot think of a person that already has died and, at the same time and in the

---

\* Article received on 31/08/2016 and accepted for publication on 11/05/2017.

<sup>1</sup> HEGEL, G.W.F. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1: Die objektive Logik (1812/1813)**. Hogemann, F.; Jaeschke, W. (Eds.). Hamburg: Meiner, 1978, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> This has been formalized as follows:  $\neg\Diamond(\exists x)(Fx \wedge \neg Fx)$ ; cf. Wedin, M.V. Aristotle on the firmness of the principle of non-contradiction. *Phronesis*, n. 49, 2004, p. 234.



same sense, is still alive. Such person, being both dead and alive, cannot be. Hegel's statement seems to claim not only that there can be such contradictory objects, it says that all objects are in fact contradictory. Therefore, Hegel's statement on contradiction seems to be radical anti-Aristotelian, inasmuch as Hegel's ontological claim is that every object that exists is contradictory, while Aristotle claims that no object that exists is contradictory – or even stronger: that every object that exists must be contradictory, or on the Aristotelian side: no object that exists can be contradictory.

Against this backdrop, one easily understands why Hegel is said to violate the principle of (non-)contradiction, but without respecting the principle of (non-)contradiction no argumentation is possible. Making any assertion implies that the principle of (non-)contradiction must be accepted. If one does not, he seems to be a sophist. According to Aristotle, such a person is not a human but a vegetable. It would be ridiculous to get in conversation with him. Thereby, it would not make sense to talk about Hegel. Nevertheless, contradictory properties and contradictory assertions are not on the same level. Even though the principle of (non-)contradiction can be given in a logical version – opposite assertions cannot simultaneously be true – the ontological level seems to be more fundamental. One cannot imagine a person both dead and alive, but one can assert a person being dead and alive. Even if it is impossible that both assertions hold true at the same time, making such contradictory assertions is possible nevertheless. Assertions should not contradict, but in fact they can contradict.

Whatever may be the reason Hegel is claiming objects to be contradictory in general, one cannot say that he is just writing nonsense.<sup>3</sup> There must be, for example, some reason for his statement on contradiction. Hegel is also respecting the Aristotelian principle, for he avoids logical contradictions. His ontological statement on contradiction does not imply the permission to speak whatever one wants, regardless of any contradictions or theoretical coherence. But how then can objects be contradictory? If one wants to make assertions of objects, one would have to make contradictory assertions, for the objects were – according to Hegel's view – contradictory. If an object A has contradictory properties (F and non-F), one would have to say both 'A is F' and 'A is non-F', which contradicts. Such contradictory assertions cannot be left without commentary. Hegel's method is to sublimate them (*aufheben*), that means both to avoid and to maintain them. Hegel is not the one who developed this

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. HOFFMANN, T.S. *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Eine Propädeutik*. Wiesbaden: marixverlag, 2015, p. 341-344.

method first. It was Fichte in his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* from 1794/95. The following deals with this method of sublating contradictions in Fichte and Hegel. The aim is only to sketch this method in some respect to show how it could be possible to deal with contradictory objects ('object' is taken in a wide sense, meaning 'subject matter'). Why and which objects may be hold as contradictory – a thesis imposed strongly by Hegel<sup>4</sup> – will not be examined in more detail.

### 1. Fichte's account of contradiction in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*

Fichte is facing the problem of contradiction in §3 of his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. There, he formulates the third principle of the doctrine of science.<sup>5</sup> Later, he calls this third principle the principle of (sufficient) reason (*Satz vom Grund*).<sup>6</sup> This principle itself is committed to the avoidance of a contradiction between the two other principles of the doctrine. It can be seen as the result of two contradicting assertions. But this result is not only an example of how to deal with contradicting assertions. Moreover, it shows the method how the doctrine of science deduces its categories. Thus, the third principle can be understood as a methodological principle. Its method is just to generate specific contradictions. Contradicting assertions should not be avoided, but should be generated at first sight. Fichte shows that a generated contradiction can only be avoided by introducing a new name or term. For example, the contradiction at issue in §3 is between the I and Not-I, the new term is quantity or divisibility. This new term exactly resolves the contradiction between the I and Not-I.<sup>7</sup> This operation is what Fichte calls ground (*Grund*). By the way, it is Hegel who picks up this kind of function and also the terminology Fichte introduces for it. In his

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SCHICK, S. *Contradictio est regula veri. Die Grundsätze des Denkens in der formalen, transzendentalen und spekulativen Logik*. Hamburg: Meiner, 2010, p. 251-256. Schick points out that Fichte does not impose this thesis himself. On the other hand, reason and the transcendental I seem to be contradictory, cf. METZ, W. *Kategorienduktion und produktive Einbildungskraft in der theoretischen Philosophie Kants und Fichtes*. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991, p. 231-237.

<sup>5</sup> One formulation of the third principle is: "*Ich sowohl als Nicht-Ich wird theilbar gesetzt.*" (FICHTE, J. G. *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Band I,2: 1793-1795*. Jacob, H.; Lauth, R. (Ed.). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1965, p. 270).

<sup>6</sup> "Wir haben nun drei logische Grundsätze; den der *Identität*, welcher alle übrigen begründet; und dann die beiden, welche sich selbst gegenseitig in jenem begründen, den des *Gegenseitens*, und den des *Grundes* aufgestellt." (FICHTE. *Band I,2: 1793-1795*, p. 283).

<sup>7</sup> "Es ist nicht zu erwarten, dass irgend jemand diese Frage anders beantworten werde, als folgendermaßen: sie werden sich gegenseitig *einschränken*. Mithin wäre, wenn diese Antwort richtig ist, die Handlung Y. ein *Einschränken* beider Entgegengesetzter durch einander; und X. bezeichnete die *Schranken*." (FICHTE. *Band I,2: 1793-1795*, p. 270). Cf. METZ. *Kategorienduktion*, p. 237-242.

*Wissenschaft der Logik*, Hegel calls the generated and resolved contradiction ground (*Grund*). Contradiction generates ground.

After the first two passages, Fichte deduces in §3 a task, namely to find the so-called ‘X’, which allows the contradictory assertions at stake to hold true.<sup>8</sup> This deduction consists in generating the contradiction, that is to show in which way different contradictions appear and under which conditions they appear. Following Fichte’s outline: If the I is posited, the Not-I is not, and the other way around. But, the Not-I is posited (if it is posited) within the I. Then, the I is not posited in the I. But, the Not-I is posited in absolute opposition to the I. Thus, the I must be posited within the I. In conclusion, the I must be posited and not posited. Clearly, one can be sceptic of each step of this argumentation, it is not that self-evident as it should have been in the eyes of Fichte. But the point interesting here is a formal one. Fichte wants to show that from the second principle follow two contradictory assertions. This is the reason why for Fichte the second principle is opposed in itself (*sich selbst entgegengesetzt*) and suspends itself (*hebt sich selbst auf*).<sup>9</sup>

At this point, Fichte’s analysis becomes quite remarkable. Suspending itself does not mean for Fichte that the second principle (or its formulation) is false in any respect. On the contrary, it is for him absolutely true and necessary. Thereby, the second principle suspends itself only under the condition of its validity.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the first contradiction (the I as posited and not posited) produces another contradiction (the second principle is valid and is not). This is not the end of Fichte’s analysis yet. In consequence, the first principle is valid and not valid as well. Fichte’s argumentation goes like this: The I posits itself, so everything that is within the I must be posited. Now, the Not-I (second principle) is posited and not posited (because it is valid and not valid). For Fichte, this implies that the I is not an I anymore, but a Not-I (because the I in Fichte’s view is something that absolutely posits itself).<sup>11</sup> This last consequence is in a way not very surprising, even if the evidence of his argumentation is not obvious in every respect. Since Fichte deals at this point with contradictory assertions, the

---

<sup>8</sup> “Hierdurch nun wird unsere Aufgabe bestimmt. Es soll nemlich irgend ein X. gefunden werden, mittelst dessen alle jene Folgerungen richtig seyn können, ohne dass die Identität des Bewußtseyns aufgehoben werde.” (FICHTE. **Band I,2: 1793-1795**, p. 269).

<sup>9</sup> “Beide Schlußfolgen sind sich entgegengesetzt: beide sind aus dem zweiten Grundsatz durch eine Analyse entwickelt, und mithin liegen beide in ihm. Also ist der zweite Grundsatz sich selbst entgegengesetzt, und hebt sich selbst auf.” (FICHTE. **Band I,2: 1793-1795**, p. 268).

<sup>10</sup> “Aber er hebt sich selbst nur insofern auf, inwiefern das gesetzte durch das entgegengesetzte aufgehoben wird, mithin, in wiefern er selbst Gültigkeit hat.” (FICHTE. **Band I,2: 1793-1795**, p. 268).

<sup>11</sup> “Mithin ist Ich nicht = Ich, sondern Ich = Nicht-Ich, und Nicht-Ich = Ich.” (Fichte. **Band I,2: 1793-1795**, p. 269).

consequence is a total loss of semantics (if the I is the Not-I and the Not-I is the I, one cannot distinguish between them). The terms used in his analysis lose their specific significance. Sound reasoning does not seem to be possible anymore, since without clear significance of terms one cannot assert anything.

Fichte wants to show that these tremendous consequences are all necessary. If this is the case, then it is clear that he does not infer the falseness of his assumptions or put the clarity of his terminology in question. Instead, he recognizes the problematic consequences to be a new task. Fichte denotes this task with the letter X. As mentioned above, X is quantity or divisibility. X should, according to Fichte, guarantee all the contradictory consequences can be true.<sup>12</sup> Highly interesting is that the solution cannot be formal solely. The solution is just – quantity, that means: the significance of ‘quantity’, its subject matter. There can, according to Fichte, only be a substantial but no formal solution. This is, by the way, the reason why the third principle is unconditioned in respect of matter, and conditioned in respect of form.

In general, it is not that difficult to understand why quantity allows Fichte to posit the I and the Not-I at once. A quantified or finite I makes the I and Not-I compatible because they are not taken absolute anymore. There can be the I to some extent, on the other side there can be the Not-I. Put in more logical terms of quantity: The I can be conceived as a unity, and as something particular, an element of a plurality at once (this seems to be the usual way of imaging the I, which on the other side reflects the problems we have to imagine the I as absolute in the Fichtean sense). Imaging the I as finite makes one assumption invalid: That if the I is posited, the Not-I is not posited. Without this assumption, the contradictory consequences mentioned above do not follow at all.

But this reasoning does not show that the I cannot be conceived as something absolute. Quite the contrary is the case. It shows that the finite I can be ‘deduced’ from the absolute I. This means in the Fichtean context: The concept of a finite (i.e. quantified) I is a necessary result of the absolute I. If one talks about an absolute I, at some point you have to talk about a finite I. Hence, there is some order of terms here, and this is what the deduction in the doctrine of science is about: giving systematic order to terms as I, Not-I, subject, object, etc. The concepts of an absolute I and Not-I (or assertions formulated with these concepts) are in Fichte’s view not false, even if there are contradictory consequences arising from them.

---

<sup>12</sup> “Es soll nemlich irgend ein X. gefunden werden, vermittelt dessen alle jene Folgerungen richtig seyn können.” (FICHTE. **Band I,2: 1793-1795**, p. 269).

Thereby, Fichte has developed a specific method of dealing with contradictions in §3, which is different to classical (Aristotelian) dealing with contradictions.

The third principle of the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* is what Fichte calls a *Grundsynthese* (basic synthesis).<sup>13</sup> Synthetic is the third principle insofar as it synthesises contradictory assertions (I and Not-I), that means: takes them together in one concept (quantity). Basic is this synthesis in two respects. First of all, as Fichte himself points out, it is the fundament for all other synthesis in the theoretical and practical philosophy of the doctrine of science.<sup>14</sup> The only task is to find other contradictory concepts within the synthesis of the third principle, that is to analyse this synthesis. Second, and this is not pointed out by Fichte very clearly, this synthesis is basic because quantity is not only the result of the synthesis in §3, but also the possibility of synthesis in general. Synthesis means in the Fichtean context unification; its result is some unity. But unity is a type of quantity. Fichte is clearly thinking of Kant when he is introducing the category of quantity. This shows where Fichte is talking about three types of judgements (antithetical, synthetical, thetical). According to Kant's first critique, the term 'quantity' is the title for a group of categories (unity, plurality, singularity). In consequence, the synthesis in §3 is one that makes synthesis possible because without quantity there is no synthesis. And this is the reason why this synthesis is basic or fundamental.

## 2. Hegel's account of contradiction in the *Wissenschaft der Logik*

Hegel adopts Fichte's outline of synthesis as developed in §3 of the *Grundlage* in different respects, but beyond the context of a theory of absolute subjectivity. Therefore, Hegel describes his account of contradiction not in terms of the I and Not-I, but immediately in logical terms, while talking about contradiction itself (but with similar vocabulary, such as the verb 'to posit', '*setzen*' in German). His theory of contradiction often has been read as the centre of his *Wissenschaft der Logik*.<sup>15</sup> The reason for this is that particularly in his

---

<sup>13</sup> "Eben so ist in der ersten synthetischen Handlung, der Grundsynthese (der des Ich und Nicht-Ich), ein Gehalt für alle mögliche künftige Synthesen aufgestellt, und wir bedürfen auch von dieser Seite nichts weiter." (FICHTE. **Band I,2: 1793-1795**, p. 283).

<sup>14</sup> "Aus jener Grundsynthese muss alles sich entwickeln lassen, was in das Gebiet der Wissenschaftslehre gehören soll." (FICHTE. **Band I,2: 1793-1795**, p. 283).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. FRANK, M. **Der unendliche Mangel an Sein. Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik**. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975, p. 35: Frank talks about logic of reflection as the "Herz der *Logik*," also cf. SCHICK. *Contradictio*, p. 298-362, where different older and newer approaches to Hegel's concept of contradiction are described.

philosophy of nature and his philosophy of subjective and objective spirit shows the productivity of contradiction. The speculative method can be described as working out contradictions in all these topics, that is to work out their negativity. Other than Fichte, Hegel's treatment of contradictions seems to be less schematic. While Fichte himself puts out the threefold scheme of thesis, antithesis and synthesis as the basis of his deduction, which corresponds exactly to the three principles in the *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, Hegel's account of dialectics is somewhat open and flexible (e.g. the beginning of the science of being cannot be analysed thoroughly with this scheme).

In the chapter on contradiction in the *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Hegel demonstrates the transition from opposition to contradiction and ground (*Grund*). He shows that opposition in itself is contradiction, and contradiction in itself is ground. That order of terms is just the same as we have it in Fichte's *Grundlage*, there applying to the I and Not-I. In Fichte, the relation between opposition, contradiction, and ground shows incidentally while talking about absolute and finite subjectivity. In Hegel, the categories (or essentialities) like difference, opposition, contradiction, and ground are conceived directly.

Hegel's argumentation goes (briefly and a little simplified) like this: If there is a difference (whatever it may be that is different), we have two sides, A and B. Both A and B are moments of the difference, that is without them one cannot think about a difference at all.<sup>16</sup> In the case of an opposition, A and Non-A are determining each other.<sup>17</sup> Non-A is negatively determined, mediated by A. A is determined in itself, at first sight. But in the opposition relation, it is also negatively determined, insofar A is not Non-A. Also for Non-A: At first sight, it is only negatively determined, but in the opposition relation A can be seen as the negative moment. Then Non-A would be the positive moment. So A and Non-A can both be seen as the negative or positive moment. However one wants to put this, the opposition can be conceived as the difference between the negative and the positive.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> "Der *Unterschied* überhaupt enthält seine beyden Seiten als *Momente*." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 279).

<sup>17</sup> "[I]m *Gegensatze* als solchem sind sie Seiten des Unterschiedes, eines nur durchs andere bestimmt, somit nur *Momente*." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 279).

<sup>18</sup> "Die eine ist das *Positive*, die andere das *Negative*, aber jene als das an ihm selbst *Positive*, diese als das an ihm selbst *Negative*." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 279).

Hegel's analysis points out two steps. First, he shows that the negative and the positive both are in itself contradictory.<sup>19</sup> Second, he shows that this contradiction sublates itself. The sublated contradiction is called ground.<sup>20</sup>

a. First step: Both the positive and the negative imply each other and exclude each other. Hegel's interest is to show that they imply and exclude each other in the same respect.<sup>21</sup> If this is the case, then the negative and the positive are each contradictory (if they would include and exclude each other in different respects, there would be no contradiction). The positive for example is not relating to something else, that is the reason why it is called positive. In the same respect, it is negatively determined, insofar it is excluding the relation to something else. Being negatively determined means being negative. Thus, the reason for being positive is being negative. The same holds true for the negative. The negative is relating to something else, that is the reason why it is called negative. In the same respect, it is positively determined, insofar relating to something else makes a thing positive. Thereby, the positive is in itself negative and the negative is in itself positive. 'In itself' denotes in this case the answer to the question what the positive (or negative) is. In the case of the positive the answer is: not relating to something else. In the case of the negative the answer is: relating to something else. But as one can easily see, these answers do not only explain why the positive is positive and why the negative is negative. Quite on the contrary, they also explain why the positive is negative and why the negative is positive. In conclusion, they contradict themselves. Nevertheless, for Hegel only the self-contradictory negative is the explicit contradiction, "der *gesetzte* Widerspruch."<sup>22</sup> The reason for this is that the negative is explicitly the exclusion of the positive. If the negative is positive, the negative is excluded from its exclusion, that is: excluded from itself. The negative is itself and not itself, just

---

<sup>19</sup> "Das Positive und Negative aber sind der *gesetzte* Widerspruch, weil sie als negative Einheiten selbst das Setzen ihrer, und darin jedes das Aufheben seiner und das Setzen seines Gegentheils ist." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 279).

<sup>20</sup> "Der aufgelöste Widerspruch ist also der Grund." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 282).

<sup>21</sup> "Indem die selbständige Reflexionsbestimmung in derselben Rücksicht, als sie die andere enthält, und dadurch selbständig ist, die andere ausschließt, so schließt sie in ihrer Selbständigkeit ihre eigene Selbständigkeit aus sich aus." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 279).

<sup>22</sup> "Aber das Positive ist nur *an sich* dieser Widerspruch; das Negative dagegen der *gesetzte* Widerspruch." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 280). Hegel gives also a somewhat different account: "Das Positive und Negative aber sind der *gesetzte* Widerspruch." (HEGEL. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1**, p. 279). Similar in the *Enzyklopädie*, where both the positive and the negative are conceived as the explicit contradiction. "Beide sind somit der *gesetzte* Widerspruch, beide sind *an sich* dasselbe." (HEGEL, G.W.F. **Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)**. Bonsiepen, W.; Lucas, H.-C. (Eds.). Hamburg: Meiner, 1992, p. 151, §120).

because of itself. This makes the contradiction explicit (while the positive is only implicitly contradictory).

b. Second step: As the positive and the negative are contradictory in themselves, they sublata themselves. Clearly, this is at first sight the ordinary sense of being contradictory: What contradicts itself (an assertion, a concept, etc.) cannot be valid or cannot exist. It sublata itself, just because it contradicts. This is the negative aspect of contradiction.<sup>23</sup> If, for example, a theory is contradictory in itself, it fails. Altogether, a contradictory theory is nothing, is null. According to Hegel, this is only one aspect of contradiction. The other aspect is its positive side, its positivity and productivity.<sup>24</sup> Contradictions are also positive and productive, in so far as they generate new concepts. The reason Hegel gives is quite simple: The opposition entails not only the negative, but also the positive. Thus, a contradiction is in one respect positive. That is the positivity of contradiction.

Hegel's point in the chapter of contradiction is that the positivity of contradiction generates some specific type of concept, the so-called ground. What may function as a ground in the philosophy of nature or spirit depends on the particular subject matter (as in Fichte, for example, quantity functions as a ground against the backdrop of the contradiction between the absolute I and Not-I). That means, concepts are ground only in specific conceptual relations. A ground is exactly a concept that suspends a contradiction. Hegel's argumentation goes like this: The positive and the negative are in opposition. The positive is something, the negative is something else, they are independent. Now, their self-contradiction shows that they are not independent. They are in themselves different, since the negative is positive, and vice versa. So, they are not only opposed to something else, but they are opposed in themselves (because the negative is not the positive, then the negative, which is positive, is opposed to itself). Hegel's point is that the contradiction suspends not the opposition between the positive and the negative, but their independency,<sup>25</sup> with the result that both depend on each other. The opposition is not the difference between independent opponents, but their identity. Identity is the difference to difference (because it is, at first sight, not difference), the difference in itself (because different to difference), that is negativity. This identity is a result of difference in

---

<sup>23</sup> "Diß rastlose Verschwinden der Entgegengesetzten in ihnen selbst ist die *nächste Einheit*, welche durch den Widerspruch zustande kommt; sie ist die *Null*." (HEGEL. *Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1*, p. 280).

<sup>24</sup> "Der Widerspruch enthält aber nicht bloß das *Negative*, sondern auch das *Positive*; oder die sich selbst ausschliessende Reflexion ist zugleich *setzende* Reflexion." (HEGEL. *Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1*, p. 281).

<sup>25</sup> "Das Positive und Negative machen das *Gesetzseyn* der Selbständigkeit aus; die Negation ihrer durch sie selbst hebt das *Gesetzseyn* der Selbständigkeit auf. Diß ist es, was in Wahrheit im Widerspruche zu Grund geht." (HEGEL. *Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1*, p. 281).

itself, it is mediated by the opponents (the negative and the positive). Such mediated identity Hegel calls ground. Ground (its logic cannot be analysed here in more detail) conceives all objects double: as immediate and mediate, as existing object and as the reason of an object. This double-side of objects relates to the intrinsic relation between the negative and the positive, it is a way to grasp and resolve the contradiction between the negative and the positive.

Certainly, the brief presentation given above cannot reconstruct all the evidence in Hegel's argumentation or dispel all possible and obvious doubts one can have. At first sight, Hegel's account seems to be very puzzling. One reason for this is that his account of contradiction is not exposed as a theory of contradiction.<sup>26</sup> Hegel rather generates one contradiction, the contradiction between the positive and the negative. But this is more than just an example, since it is not about an opposition between 'something' positive and 'something' negative, but moreover, the opposition of 'the' negative and 'the' positive. Nevertheless, puzzling is that Hegel does not seem to justify his account, but to simply presume it. Maybe it does only seem so, since Hegel tries to analysis something that usually is just presumed: to explicitly say what a contradiction is (for example, if one simply states that the phrase 'A and non-A' is a contradiction, then one just defines a terminology, but this does not say what makes the relation between A and non-A contradictory<sup>27</sup>).

### 3. *Two kinds of dealing with contradiction*

Fichte's account of contradiction is structurally akin to Hegel's. Hegel demonstrates explicitly the positivity of contradiction, while in Fichte's *Grundlage* this positivity is more or less incidental to the theory of subjectivity. Compared to Aristotelian thought, their dealing with contradictions is striking. A contradiction usually entails giving up assertions, theories, concepts, etc. Thereby, philosophical reasoning must try to avoid contradictions from the very beginning. Assertions that lead to contradictions have to be refused.<sup>28</sup> In Fichte and Hegel, reasoning is very different. They explicitly try to generate specific contradictions by reflecting

<sup>26</sup> Cf. HENRICH, D. Hegels Logik der Reflexion. In: Henrich, D. (Ed.). **Die Wissenschaft der Logik und die Logik der Reflexion**. Bonn: Bouvier, 1978, p. 226.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. WOLFF, M. **Der Begriff des Widerspruchs. Eine Studie zur Dialektik Kants und Hegels**. Königsstein/Ts.: Hain, 1981, p. 153, also cf. ARNDT, A. **Dialektik und Reflexion. Zur Rekonstruktion des Vernunftbegriffs**. Hamburg: Meiner, 1994, p. 217-220.

<sup>28</sup> This method can be formalized as follows:  $(S^* \rightarrow S \wedge \neg S) \Rightarrow \neg S^*$ , cf. STEKELER-WEITHOFER, P. Satz vom (ausgeschlossenen) Widerspruch. In: Ritter, J.; Gründer, K.; Gabriel, G. (Eds.). **Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Band 8**. Basel: Schwabe, 1992, p. 1204.

on the features of their particular subject matters. For Fichte, the contradiction between the absolute I and the Not-I does not entail refusing the concepts of an absolute I. Fichte sticks to the absolute I despite of this contradiction, because of a specific evidence that is connected with this concept (which is not to be explored here). Traditionally, one would infer that the contradiction of the I and Not-I indicates an erroneous reasoning or improper description of subjectivity. Likewise, in Hegel: If his analysis of opposition shows that opposition in itself is contradictory, one might think that either the concept of opposition (or identity, difference, etc.) applied here is senseless or his analysis is defective at some point.

Both of them conceive the positivity of contradiction as an element of philosophical method. But that alone does not entail any inconsistency in Fichte's and Hegel's theories. These contradictions are not contradictions of their theories, they are contradictions of their particular subject matters. It is the object that is contradictory, not the theory. Thus, the positivity of contradiction is not a licence for nonsense. Nevertheless, one should acknowledge that a theory of contradictory objects contains necessarily contradicting assertions. Furthermore, contradictions have to be resolved. This main idea both Aristotelian tradition on the one side and Fichte and Hegel on the other side have in common. Thus, one cannot blame Fichte and Hegel for simple ignorance of the principle of (non-)contradiction. The ways, however, to resolve contradictions are quite different. Traditionally, contradictions should be kept out of theories (this is at least the ideal). As demonstrated above, Hegel and Fichte allow contradictory assertions within their theories. They are resolved by introducing particular names for contradictions (such as 'quantity' or 'ground'). Since every contradiction has to be resolved, this method establishes a structure of ordered terms.

*Sebastian Schwenzfeuer  
Ethisch-Philosophisches Grundlagenstudium  
Bismarckallee 22 / 6. OG  
79085 Freiburg*

*sebastian.schwenzfeuer@philosophie.uni-freiburg.de*

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

ARNDT, Andreas. **Dialektik und Reflexion. Zur Rekonstruktion des Vernunftbegriffs.** Hamburg: Meiner, 1994.

FICHTE, Johann Gottlieb. **Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Band I,2: 1793-1795.** Jacob, H.; Lauth, R. (Eds.). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1965.

FRANK, Manfred. **Der unendliche Mangel an Sein. Schellings Hegelkritik und die Anfänge der Marxschen Dialektik.** Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975.

HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. **Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830).** Bonsiepen, W.; Lucas, H.-C. (Eds.). Hamburg: Meiner, 1992.

HEGEL, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. **Wissenschaft der Logik. Band 1: Die objektive Logik (1812/13).** Hogemann, F.; Jaeschke, W. (Eds.). Hamburg: Meiner, 1978.

HENRICH, Dieter. Hegels Logik der Reflexion. In: Henrich, D. (Ed.). **Die Wissenschaft der Logik und die Logik der Reflexion.** Bonn: Bouvier, 1978, p. 203-324.

HOFFMANN, Thomas S. **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Eine Propädeutik.** Wiesbaden: marixverlag, 2015.

METZ, Wilhelm. **Kategorienduktion und produktive Einbildungskraft in der theoretischen Philosophie Kants und Fichtes.** Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991.

SCHICK, Stefan. **Contradictio est regula veri. Die Grundsätze des Denkens in der formalen, transzendentalen und spekulativen Logik.** Hamburg: Meiner, 2010.

STEKELER-WEITHOFER, Pirmin. Satz vom (ausgeschlossenen) Widerspruch. In: Ritter, J.; Gründer, K.; Gabriel, G. (Eds.). **Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Band 8.** Basel: Schwabe, 1992, p. 1202-1205.

WEDIN, Michael V. Aristotle on the firmness of the principle of non-contradiction. **Phronesis**, n. 49, 2004, p. 226-265.

WOLFF, Michael. **Der Begriff des Widerspruchs. Eine Studie zur Dialektik Kants und Hegels.** Königsstein/Ts.: Hain, 1981.