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Hegel's Logic as the Exposition of God from the End of the World

Abstract *The article attempts to reconstruct the logical space within which, at the beginning of Hegel's* Logic, *"being" and "nothing" are entitled to emerge and receive their names. In German Idealism, the concept of "being" is linked to the form of a proposition; Fichte grounds a new truth-value on the absolute thesis of the "thetical judgement". And the article's first thesis claims that Hegel couldn't have placed "being" at the beginning of this great system, if the ground of its logical space had not been laid out by precisely those shifts of German Idealism that posited the ontological function of the judgement. At the same time, the abstract negation, the absence of a relation and sufficient reason between "being" and "nothing", reveals a structure of an irreducibly dual beginning. The logical background of this original duality could be constituted by the invention of the "transcendental inter-subjectivity" in German Idealism, manifested, for instance, in Hegel's life-and-death struggle of two self-consciousnesses. The second thesis therefore suggests that "being" and "nothing" are elements of the logical space, established* in concreto *in a social situation of (at least) two subjects one of whom poses an affirmative statement and the other negates it abstractly. From here, one could draw out the coordinates of a sphere by the name of "public" whose structure is defined by the invalidation of two basic laws of thought, the law of non-contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason. The article shows how only the statements capable of absorbing negation, of sustaining a co-existence of affirmation and its symmetrical, abstract negation, can climb the ladder of public perceptibility and social impact.*

Keywords: *Hegel, being, nothing, negation, intersubjectivity, public*

The history of philosophy could be interpreted as a series of attempts to secure the priority of being over nothing. At the beginning of Western ontology, Parmenides states that "there is Being, but nothing is not". (Parmenides 1965: 54; fragm. VI.) Plato is less rigid on the matter, but he nevertheless claims "both that *that which is not* somehow is, and then again that *that which is* somehow is not", (Plato 1997: 262; *Sophist* 241d) thereby reducing nonbeing to a forced admission. Spinoza begins his *Ethics* with the definition of the "self-caused" as "that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing". (Spinoza 2002: 217 ((E I., d 1)) And Leibniz poses arguably the most

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famous philosophical question of all: "*why is there something rather than nothing?* For nothing is simpler and easier than something". (Leibniz 1989: 210) But Hegel seems to stand out from this tradition. He opens his great system with a simple assertion: "Being, pure being", and "nothing, pure nothing". Thus, the issue might be raised: If philosophy had traditionally been regarded as some sort of "guardian of being", what changed with Hegel so that philosophy became just as much a "placeholder of nothing" as it is a "shepherd of being"? In what way the conditions of truth transformed in order for *both* being and nothing to start representing the entrance door to the kingdom of knowledge?

The categories of being and nothing have always hung suspended between symmetry and asymmetry, between logification and ontologization. Ontologically speaking, i.e., within the cosmic asymmetry of something vanquishing nothing, being seems to possess added value as compared to nothing. But logically speaking, being is still in need of the "question of being", the *Seinsfrage*, and thus evidently requires to be somehow justified in the face of nothingness. It is not at all clear whether there is (ontologically) more being than nothing in the world, or they are (logically) equilibrated. Are then being and nothing elements of the ontological structure of the world, or only hypostases of the two most prosaic grammatical operations, affirmation and negation?

The history of philosophy could also be recounted as an incessant interplay between almost literary sublimations on the one hand and sober logical disenchantments on the other. Philosophy, well aware of the discomforting logical parity of nothing, compensated and repaid the *credit* of the ontological priority of being with a number of philosophical myths, making use of dramatized, phantasmagorical narratives: in Parmenides, the epiphany of Being was introduced by mares carrying him to the goddess of truth, Plato invented the myth of *anamnesis*, Leibniz depicts God in the hall of spirits, Hegel conceives his *Logic* as "*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*" (Hegel 2010: 29) and even in Heidegger, the ontological difference is temporalized in a history of *Eregnis* and *Gestell*. However, the history of philosophy also offers a series of contrary diagnoses which dismiss this epic, theatrical manoeuvres to ground the "wonder of Being". Parmenides' Being was exposed by Aristotle as merely the first inkling of the logically still inarticulate principle of contradiction. Plato's ideas has time and again been read simply as hypostases of linguistic signs, of universal notions. Leibniz's theodicy, the "best of all worlds", could be explained

as a logical deduction of the principle of sufficient reason. And a similar "disillusioning" method can now be applied to Hegel's being and nothing at the beginning of his *Logic*. Let us finally venture to *reduce* Hegel's "God as he is before the creation of the world" to a formal, logical, perhaps ultimately even banal operation.

Anacoluthon, proposition, and being

The question this article aims to answer is: What *is* the logical space in which the concepts of "being" and "nothing" could presume to function as the beginning of the system as well as of the world, its creation? What guided the hand of the author to choose and write down these two notions precisely?

The opening of *The Science of Logic* should have been the most pure, modest, vacuous, abstract, nondescript beginning conceivable. And yet, it is not devoid of presuppositions. At this point, namely, we have already worked through and completed the path of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. We are now situated at the standpoint of the Spirit, and, as spiritual beings, we have internalized all the possible "mediations" of society, culture, history, inter-subjectivity, and, first and foremost, language. In language, the richness of Spirit has already performed its basic logification, or, as Hegel puts it in the preface to the second edition:

> The forms of thought are first set out and stored in human *language* [...]. In everything that the human being has interiorized, in everything that in some way or other has become for him a representation, in whatever he has made his own, there has language penetrated ... (Hegel 2010: 12)

Hence, the seemingly guileless, "immediate" beginning of Hegel's *Logic,* this "[p]ure knowledge, thus *withdrawn* into this *unity",* this "simple immediacy" (Hegel 2010: 47), is itself only a *pinnacle* and a *result* of the most massive and extensive process of "mediation". To this essentially produced, and not given, immediacy Hegel bestows the name: *pure being*. Hegel's being is thus not the grand, smooth, and homogenous sphere of Parmenides, but an *emergent* spiritual entity: it is the point at which the mediation at its highest reach *switches* to immediacy. And for this reason, this simple being does not come alone, but rather in a pair: "*Being, pure being*", is immediately, i.e., without any mediation whatsoever, followed by "*Nothing, pure nothingness*". (Hegel 2010: 59)

Here, at the beginning of all beginnings, there are two acts of positing without a noun to attach a predicate to a subject. As is generally known,

Hegel opens his *Logic* with an anacoluthon, a *Satzbruch*, a broken, unfinished sentence. The omission of predication is programmatic. In the first edition of *The Science of Logic* in 1812, in one of the notes which he abandons in the second edition, Hegel performs a subtraction of possible predicates of being. He begins with "Being is absolute", reduces it to the tautology "Being is being", takes away the predicate, "Being is", and finally cuts off even the copula. The "being" of the beginning, he insists, can only be *satzlos ohne Behauptung oder Prädikat*:

> *Pure being* or rather only *being*; propositionless without assertion or predicate. Or else, the assertion went back to intending [Meinen]. Being is only an exclamation which has its meaning solely in the subject. (Hegel 1812: 36; hereinafter translation mine)

And the question arises: What is the motive behind such vehement depredicatization of the beginning? Why being is trimmed down to a mere exclamation beyond assertion?

The easiest answer would be that any sentence is by definition predicative, that it instates a difference between the subject and the predicate and hence determines the subject; being, on the other hand, must remain pure and indeterminate. Already Plato claimed in *Parmenides* that the proposition "Being is One" contains two elements, being and One: "oneness always possesses being and being always possesses oneness. So, since it always proves to be two, it must never be one". (Plato 1997: 376; *Parmenides* 142e-143a) However, Hegel's anti-propositionality may have a deeper reason. Why then does Hegel begin his *Logic* with an anacoluthon? Why does it seem as if he needed to protect being from the sentence form? Why does his system begin with "being, pure being", without tolerating a copula and a predicate at its side, and why does this being then switch to "nothing, pure nothingness"?

The first triad of Hegel's *Logic*, "Being – Nothing – Becoming", is presumably the most interpreted part of the book, and many interpreters warn us against *reading too much into* this simple, utterly empty inception. With Hegel, so it is said, the opening never contains the matrix for the subsequent development of the system.[1] Rather, we have to be patient and wait until *die Sache selbst*, the thing itself, will unveil at the end, as a result. Perhaps the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* is precisely *uninterpretable*.

1 This, for instance, is the stance of Dieter Henrich in "Anfang und Methode der Logik". (Henrich 1967: 73–94) In Slovenia, the thesis that we should not overestimate the abstract beginning of the *Logic* was advocated by Zdravko Kobe in his article "Much Ado about Being and Nothing". (Kobe 2013: 83–131)

We will try to show, however, that this humble prelude *may not possess any immediate meaning* per se*, but that the two names of its meaninglessness are not chosen by coincidence*.

Our thesis claims that there are historical and logical reasons to place being and nothing at the origin of the system of philosophy: this beginning may be empty "metaphysically", but it is not devoid of systemic, structural, semantic, and metaphorical pre-determinations. With the concepts of Spirit, language, mediation, immediacy, exclamation, and propositionlessness, Hegel establishes a semantic coordinate system on the fertile ground of which the seeds of being and nothing will be able to sprout in the first place. There occurred a major shift in the conceptualization of truth, the status of the subject, the theory of judgment, perhaps even in the understanding of culture, in order for two most abstract, negatively related concepts to be able to actually *function as a beginning*.

First, let us detect an interesting "historical" coincidence. Hegel explicitly stresses that being is *satzlos*, as if this *Satz* was some kind of a traumatic kernel of being. And, what is more, he conceives of being as *satzlos* at the peak of the philosophical movement called German Idealism which originated precisely from the *essential insight into an equiprimordiality of being and the proposition form*. Kant famously states in his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

> *Being* is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves. In the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment. (Kant 1998: 567 (KrV A 598/B 626))

Being, *das Sein*, is now a mere position; for the real "existence" of a thing an entire context of experience is needed. With Kant's being as positing, one of the basic concepts of German Idealism is born, Fichte's positing, *Setzen*. "Positing" is an intermediary concept which connects being and proposition and provides the sentence with reality. Positing, *Setzen*, becomes the first impulse of being, and what is posited, *gesetzt*, is a sentence or proposition, *ein Satz*. In Fichte, the need for the Kantian divide between being as copula and being as existence becomes obsolete, since, after the thing-in-itself has been disposed of, being becomes a "real predicate", the copula becomes the *raison d'être*, so to speak, and the proposition is now the most original logical form of ontology. If German Idealism had its own gospel, it would probably start with: "In the beginning was the Proposition, and the Proposition was with the Being, and

the Being was the Proposition".[2] One could say without exaggeration that German philosophy between Fichte, if not Kant, and Hegel invented *the ontological function of the proposition*. And the proposition form brings to the scene *a new quantum of truth*: the punctual creation of judging, the emergence of new facts that were not there before.

In Fichte, all judgments, analytical and synthetic, are only possible on the ground of the first positing, *die absolute Thesis*, which is by no means *satzlos*, as in Hegel, but can only be preformed by the third judgment form, the *thetical judgment*:

> The thetical judgment is the one in which something does not equal something else and is not opposed to it, but is rather posed only as equal to itself [...]. The original highest judgment of this kind is *I am* in which nothing is being said about the I, but only the place of the predicate is infinitely left blank for the possible determination of the I. (Fichte 1845/1846: 117)

The original thetical judgment *I am* is not a reference to a fact, a description of an experience, but a *constitution* of the fact through the act of positing a proposition. Fichte thus discovers a proposition which, by its mere emergence, sets the conditions of its own truth value, a proposition which *makes itself true* by means of being stated. In a word, he discovers the truth dimension which, in the 20th century, will be called performative by Austin and an institutional fact by Searle.[3]

With a thetical judgment, Fichte came across an unusual phenomenon where, by saying something, one inadvertently creates a new world. Fichte may still have "burdened" every judgment with the "original substance" of the I, but he was nevertheless the first to point out the *essentially supplemental life of truth*: he detected the *absolute excess of every proposition over being*, the fact that the world never needed that surplus, so that, by judgments being uttered, new truth values actually emerge. And this is the point where the first thesis of this article can finally be articulated: the form of the thetical judgment *opened the new logical space of truth* without which it is impossible to understand Hegel's "being, pure being".

2 This *a priori* "propositionalization" of reality was obviously traumatic enough for Hölderlin and Schelling having to meet it with the first heresy, which posited the absolute, pre-discursive being *before* the first proposition. For every judgment, *Ur-Theil*, is an ur-division, *Ur-Theilung*. This subsequent justification of being before the proposition might well be an expression of opposing the excessive power of judgment, bestowed upon it by Kant and Fichte.

3 The other Fichte's example of a thetical judgment is: "Man is free", whereby this statement is not a case of stating facts but a concealed imperative: "Man must infinitely approach to an in itself unattainable freedom." (Fichte 1845/1846: 118)

To return to Hegel's *Satzlosigkeit* of the beginning, he seems at first sight to have suspended the very tendency of the movement whose heir he was. As the first impulse of thought, "being" is pre-propositional. Hegel himself claims that we are not asserting, just meaning or intending.[4] But if we interpret this "being" as an *Ursachverhalt*, ur-state, we could all too easily be tempted to understand it as a positive image, an experience, *Erlebnis*, a self-evidence, or even as some sort of primal cosmic fact. However, the impetus of our reading will oppose precisely the danger of understanding Hegel's being as the first intuition, the primordial inner sense of oneself, or even the big-bang of the universe, the first case of everything. "Being, pure being" is *not* any of these hermeneutic, phenomenological, existential, or even metaphysical entities. It is, as we shall see, a purely logical product.

858 How, then, should we explain this sudden apparition of "pure being"? Let us count up again the conditions of its emergence. First, against interpreting being as an ur-fact or a pre-propositional intuition, Hegel points out that we are always already situated within the sphere of Spirit and that everything is already permeated with language. Second, Hegel begins his *Logic* at the point where the totality of mediations transforms into a new quality, a new immediacy; we have put the whole spiritual history behind us, now we produce something new. Third, in German Idealism the category of "being" enters a necessary relation with the act of positing, of making a proposition; in this union of being and propositionality, a new truth value is produced: every proposition generates a creative surplus over the given being. Fourth, Hegel states "being" by way of exclamation and without a predicate. Some recognize in this non-predicative anacoluthon a pre-propositional intuition, but perhaps the meaning of this *interjection* of "being" is exactly the opposite. Since being is a *product* of Spirit, it seems reasonable to assume that the beginning of the *Logic* does not perform a reconstruction of a pre-propositional simplicity, but rather evokes a form of recess, leap, or even event. Instead of representing a simple anteriority, it is far more plausible that being is originally a supplement. The "reason" of being does not consist in something

4 "Being" has often been interpreted as an analytically deduced fact before uttering, a surrogate for the intellectual intuition, a sort of *Ursachverhalt*, ur-state. According to Koch, "being" has a "form of a pre-propositional intuition" (Koch 2000: 145, hereinafter translation mine) and is a retroactively constructed "fact of the first thought": "In retrospect it turns out, on the basis of inserting nothing between pure being and becoming, that pure being is an imaginary vanishing point of pure thought." (Koch 2000: 153) Being and nothing are thus retroactive logical deductions of the fact that we make judgments about a certain existence.

below or behind the possible proposition but rather in the emancipating surface. Bernard Bourgeois, for instance, claims that the beginning of the *Logic* expresses the decision of pure thinking and demands a creative intervention of the philosophizing subject: "*Hegel's Reason is essentially 'decision,'*" he claims. (Bourgeois 1992: 132; translation mine). A system of German Idealism always commences by assuming a new dimension, by instating an event, a sudden impact of something unconditional and absolute.[5] *In philosophy, the world begins to begin with a bang*. And the only commonplace, trivial, non-metaphysical form that conforms to these conditions is a proposition. At the beginning, a bang occurs, a somersault, something undeducible; and this does not occur *before* the first proposition is uttered, but *through* the proposition and *with* it. At this point of a thorough "spiritualization", even "languaging" of being, the only "fact" which Hegel's system could detect at all is the mere thetical emergence of a proposition. The system now only "skims the cream" of the absolutely immediate, supplemental, eventful, and new surface of a proposition – and it names it "being". For, at the beginning, there is no other being than this mere excess.

What we are trying to point out is a crucial similarity of conditions for the emergence of two entities: Hegel's "being" and the "thetical factum", i.e., the fact of a proposition being uttered. Both of them are spiritual (even linguistic), absolutely immediate, creative, and novel. The "thetical factum" is the one and only form distinguished by being a pure positing, a coincidence of the conditional and the unconditional, an element of excess over the existent and given, an unnecessary addition of a new fact which presupposes the totality of mediations of Spirit in order to emerge, but at the same time functions as an unequivocal immediacy of a new event.

To resume and put it in more modest terms, *Hegel could not have conceived of this primary "being", if the basic mind shift, taking place in German Idealism, did not first open the logical space for the ontological function of a proposition*. Only within a mentality which finally recognized the propositional positing and discovered a supplemental emergence of being, of truth no longer being attached to facticity, experience, and the givenness of nature, is it possible to develop a sense for that surplus dimension of truth which Hegel names "being, pure being".

5 The general tendency of German Idealism is to presuppose a certain *creatio ex nihilo* at the beginning, a self-creation, a positing without ground or reason. The first act is precisely not deducible from the principle of sufficient reason but asserts itself against it.

According to our thesis, the word "being" does not refer to any thing, given fact, state of affairs, intuition, experience, or principle, but solely to the absolute immediacy of positing, a minimal event whose logical space was established by the theticity of a proposition. But why, then, can this "being" only be articulated with an anacoluthon? Why is it *satzlos* if it only expresses the gist of a proposition? Hegel's "being, pure being" must always be understood as *an answer to Fichte's I*, the true origin of the thetical judgment. In Fichte, the fact of theticity is immanently bound to the ur-substance of the I as a self-consciousness. Fichte's thetical judgment is still committed to a "worldview", a deductive ontology based on the first principle and caught up in the space of imperatives and infinite tasks. The self-creation of the I is "loaded" with subjective idealism, activism, tendentiousness, asymptotic approach, overcoming hurdles, infinite growth, i.e., with the typical imaginarium of Fichte's philosophy. The aim of Hegel's "being, pure being", however, was to liberate a certain emergent and supplemental truth production from any determinate substance and its necessary subtext. It could almost be said that, since Hegel aimed at capturing the very dimension of truth which emerges *by way* of a proposition, he could not condemn it to any particular proposition, to this or that utterance, for every specific, articulate judgment would already *name* a subject, thus inaugurating a substance from which the truth value would derive. If we read Hegel against Fichte, Hegel's "being" seems merely to skim the cream off the top of theticity, posed by the *I am*, without also scooping the substance of the I. Hegel's first "element" strips off the surface and separates it from the act whereby it came into existence in the first place.[6]

In other words, Fichte still founded a *Realontologie* on his thetical judgment, while Hegel seems to nurture the sensibility to capture some other, superficial effects which arise with *every* proposition. Hegel's system is not one to rest on the point of its origin and deduce everything from it but rather *pursues the eventfulness of truth*, i.e., the elements of pure immediacy which sprout up after the whole world has been converted to the mediation of Spirit. Hegel's "truth" consists in results rather

6 If we place the two great "beginnings" of German Idealism, Fichte's "*I am*" and Hegel's "being", in a fraction, we can see that it is "am" and "being" that cancel each other out, and it is the I that remains as an alien element. "Being" is thus not the substitute for the "I", as it has been, to Hegel's great regret, often implied, but the substitute for the verb "am". And this "being" is solely a transcript of the *emergent* dimension of the "am", the dimension of positing without possessing its own subject. It is a distillation of the pure theticity which occurs in a certain "am", but without this "am" being a predicate of a certain "I".

than in roots, in effects rather than in causes, in purposes rather than in motives, in ascents rather than in descents, in emergences rather than in reductions. And "being" is a name for the very X which, already at the beginning, designates the Hegelian inversion of the timeline, the fact that only the end will be able to set the conditions of possibility of the beginning. It is an *anti-origin* and it represents precisely this supplemental nature of being. Of course, our thesis is only plausible if we presume that Hegel himself was unable to comprehend the real scope of his operation and thus regrettably wrapped up the categories of his *Logic* in the pathos of God's thoughts before the creation of the world. But after the linguistic turn, we can finally recognize this enigmatic yet void and bland "being" as what it really is: being signifies the lack of the highest principle, the absence of a *word* from the meaning of which the world could be deduced. There is no substance made to measure the beginning, no Ego, God, Idea, or Element, for *the world begins with a surplus*. Hegel's *Logic* is, if anything, *the exposition of God as he is at the end of the world.*

Nothing, mere "no", and abstract negation

However, this beginning is most feeble and can only be kept alive by what comes next. "Being, pure being" is, on the one hand, void enough to be deemed to be something new, a supplement which is not deducible from a previous state of affairs, but, on the other hand, it is also too void to leave any trace in the given state. After all, a proposition dies away after some trepidation in the air and never comes back. In like manner, the absolute immediacy of being could not have caused any effect if there was no *logical resonance* which would detect it as an event. The next step Hegel takes is precisely to elaborate the logical space in which the effects of being could be captured, so that this being would not seep away like a shout in the woods, an utterance heard by no one.

Therefore being never comes alone; it necessarily comes in pairs with nothing. If being is a mere supplement, then a membrane of sensibility is needed to perceive it and to recognize the fact that beyond deduction, cause, effect, and sufficient reason *something is nevertheless taking place*. The immateriality of being must trigger an echo in order to be; being would be nothing if it weren't resounded by nothing. And if we claimed that Hegel's being could only have emerged in the logical space of theticity, now, the second great question arises: *What is the logical space of the emergence of nothing?*

The first thing to be considered is the fact that *there is no deduction between the elements*. Nothing is not derived from being, it only, so to speak, *dashes* at being. In the first edition, Hegel claims:

> Being as it is entirely for itself is the indeterminate; hence, it has no relation to the other; thus it seems that one cannot *proceed from this beginning*, namely from itself, and the proceeding can only occur when something foreign is related to it *from the outside*. The proceeding that being is the same as nothing appears as a second, absolute beginning... (Hegel 1812: 36)

From being nothing follows, and precisely for this reason, nothing is necessary. It represents the fact that being possesses no inside from where the progress could be possible. The basic function of nothing is to express the pure exteriority of its addition.

We shall never understand the opening of Hegel's *Logic* if we dive into the semantics of the words "being" and "nothing". Instead, we have to understand them as non-significant elements of an *irreducibly double beginning*. There is no beginning, if there are not *two* beginnings, and their duality is extrinsic, straightforward, and not deducible from a single principle. Duality is not a trivial quality of being and nothing, a fact of their addition. Rather, being and nothing are *essentially trivial elements of their original duality*. It is not the case that the entire universe rests upon the shoulders of primary elements, which, accidentally, are two by number, but rather the case that *the system needs to begin with an irreducible duality*, and, then, points out the only two elements which could carry and express it. It is the presupposed duality which retroactively selects the two factors as fulfilling the one condition: that they are indeterminate enough for the reflexion between them to be utterly void and abstract, so that they do not enter a relation, do not reflect, determine, and abolish each other, but rather only *switch over into one another*. And it seems that only being and nothing fulfil this systemic requirement to represent an absolute and abstract negation without any possibility of mediation. As Zdravko Kobe puts it: »Being is the indeterminate, and *nothing is neither the truth nor the negation and particularly not a sublation of being*.« (Kobe 2013: 126; translation mine)

The most authentic *meaning* of being and nothing should perhaps be translated into a slogan: *One beginning is already two beginnings*. And here, the famous dictum from Hegel's *Phenomenology* comes to mind: "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*." (Hegel 1977: 110) Or even: "A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*." (Hegel 1977: 110) The first appearance of the logical

space of this "irreducible duality" in Hegel is the master-slave dialectic, the two self-consciousnesses, the emergence of inter-subjectivity. But here Hegel is merely following a broader tendency of his period. One of the greatest achievements of German Idealism was the *discovery of the transcendental dimension of inter-subjectivity*. It was Fichte who maintained that, in order to become a rational being, one first needs to be treated as such by another of the same kind:

> the other was *compelled* already, in his original influence upon me, compelled as a rational being (i.e. *bound* by consistency) to treat me as a rational being; and indeed, that he was compelled to do so by *me*... [...] [O]*riginal* relation is already a reciprocal interaction. (Fichte 2000: 69)

Here, the interaction between two rational beings is prior to the rationality of any of the two. The relation precedes the existence of its parts – this might be called the "logical space of inter-subjectivity".

Now, our thesis claims the following. Inter-subjectivity forms the logical background against which the duality of being and nothing must inadvertently be interpreted. If we derived being from the logical space of the *thetical factum*, being and nothing can now be derived from the logical space constituted by two subjects, i.e., by inter-subjectivity.

The parallels do not end there. At the beginning of the *Logic*, there are being, nothing, abstract negation, and irreducible duality. In the *Phenomenology's* formation of self-consciousness, there are life, death, sacrifice, and two self-consciousnesses (i.e. master and slave). The immediate passage from life to death in the notorious "staking one's life" (Hegel 1977: 114) is thus not an expression of biological facticity, but a product of the external negation of struggle in which one's life can be put at stake *solely for the eyes of another subject*. The winner in this game is the one *capable of assuming the logical form of abstract negation*: here, "death" does not mean "acceptance of one's mortality", "reconciliation with the entropy of matter", "enduring fate", etc., but an experience of the logical equivalence of life and death. And for this experience of sacrificing life and risking death, essentially *two* subjects are needed. Viewed in this light, the master is the first figure of abstract negation in Hegel's philosophy. Similarly, in the *Logic*, being cannot be converted to nothing without the presupposition of exteriority and non-reflexivity of two irreducible positions:

> But the issue first of all is not the form of opposition, which is at the same time the form of *reference,* but the abstract, immediate negation, the nothing purely for itself, negation devoid of reference – and this can also be expressed, if one so wishes, simply by saying "nothing". (Hegel 2010: 60)

The original is more unequivocal: "die beziehungslose Verneinung, – was man, wenn man will, auch durch das bloße: *Nicht* ausdrücken könnte." (Hegel 1990: 73) The relation between being and nothing is not a "nothing", a substance of nothingness, but even less, *das bloße Nicht*, "the mere *not*". If we take into account the logical space of irreducibly two subjects and implement between the two the abstract relation of "not", then it is not going too far to picture this situation figuratively: as the one subject saying "yes" and the other "no", or, more precisely, the one stating an affirmative proposition and the other negating it by merely adding a "not". The only possible *relation* to carry, to perform, to stage the exteriority, unrelatedness, non-mediability, and abstractness of the negation is a situation of two subjects, the one passing an affirmative judgment and the other saying "no" merely by virtue of the irreducibility of his logical position.

Perhaps the crucial entrance exam, a rite of passage of a sort, at the door of inter-subjectivity consists in the test whether one is capable of thinking and enduring "nothing in itself", the immediate negation, the mere "not" coming from the outside, just so, for no reason, and without being deducible from the affirmative stance. Are we capable of facing Goethe's Mephistopheles saying: "I am the spirit that negates"? (Goethe 1990: 161) And, in a way, the touchstone of achieving self-consciousness is structurally similar to that of entering logical thinking: the consciousness had to risk death in order to become self-conscious, and the subject of logical thinking

> ought to raise his mind to this abstract universality in which it is in fact indifferent to him whether the hundred dollars, whatever the quantitative relation that they might have to his financial state, are or are not; just as it would be indifferent to him whether he himself is or is not, that is, whether he is or is not in finite life … (Hegel 2010: 65)

Thus, the grand opening of the *Logic* may be interpreted merely as a discourse of two stances which have already dissociated from their finite necessities and concerns of life and risked their "semantic death". In this view, Hegel's *Logic* is a discourse of the master, a discourse of the uninterested, pure thought, but with an essential addition: the master is a logically unstable position in need of another master, standing opposite to him as the *subject of the abstract negation*. Therefore, the *Logic* is *a discourse of two masters*.

The logical space of a new truth form

If we count up a few conditions, the function of the proposition form in German Idealism, the invention of inter-subjectivity in that period, the necessary duality of two elements at the beginning of the *Logic*, the relation

of the external, unmediated, abstract negation between the two, the first appearance of this kind of irreducible duality in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, then, it seems, *being and nothing can be interpreted as elements of the logical space which unfolds within a social situation where a proposition is posited while automatically provoking its own negation*. Our thesis can be expressed in more modest terms: only an inter-subjective situation in which an affirmation appears simultaneously with the negation and is logically equiprimordial with it, corresponds to the same conditions to which Hegel's being and nothing must abide. These conditions are, above all, three: first, the concomitance of mediation and immediacy (a proposition presupposes a comprehensive adoption of the sphere of Spirit), second, the relation of abstract negation (expressed most paradigmatically by the "mere not" of the propositional negation), and, third, the irreducible duality (since affirmation and negation demand two subjects to be uttered by).

The primary objective of this article is to prove that being and nothing are not simply elements of a given universe, but necessarily fundamentals of a new logical space, outlined and contrived by the form of inter-subjectivity. There are a number of hints, perhaps even of small argumentative lapses, occurring to Hegel somewhat underhandedly, which suggest that being and nothing should *not* be read as elements of a physical, cosmological ontology. Of course, even Hegel cannot refrain, in the third and fourth remark, from reducing these two "qualities" within the framework of the physics of quantities. "There *is* nothing", he says, "which is not an *intermediary state between being and nothing*". (Hegel 2010: 80) And yet, in his definition of "becoming", Hegel stresses the essentially *perfect tense* of this relation:

> *Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same.* The truth is neither being nor nothing, but rather that being has passed over into nothing and nothing into being – "has passed over", not passes over. (Hegel 2010: 59–60)

Here, Hegel seems to oppose Fichte's third category of limitation as "positing of a quantity". Hence, he makes explicit that the relation of being and nothing should not be thought of in terms of quantitative dilutions of one part within the other, but, first and foremost, as the *logical form of pure leaping over*, of the contraposition of two elements which provoke each other without allowing any continuous, gradual intermediate states, of persisting at the extreme ends without any possibility of meeting halfway. Being and nothing are anything but the first elements of pre-Socratic cosmologies; there is no relation of conditioning, originating, germinating, merging, and compounding between them:

> Thus it is inadmissible to say: nothing is the ground of being, or being is the ground of nothing; nothing is the *cause* of being, and so forth; or, the transition into nothing can have occurred only *under the condition* that something is, or the transition into being only *under the condition* of non-being. (Hegel 2010: 78)

In order to truly grasp the two elements, we must presuppose a sphere of being converting into nothing *fully and without reason*. An entirely new logical space is opened, suspending the two central logical principles of classical logic, law of non-contradiction and principle of sufficient reason.

We are entering here *a new range of truth*, no longer based upon any "real ontology" of causes and effects, foundations and deductions, reasons and consents, a range grounded solely on its own imminent emergence. This is where truth becomes *speculative* instead of argumentative, representational, adequational, corresponding to a given reality etc. For it is precisely the speculative judgment which bears the "scarlet letter" of irreducible duality:

> In this connection, we must observe right at the beginning that the proposition, in the form of *a judgment,* is not adept to express speculative truths ...
>
> For the purpose of expressing the speculative truth, the defect is first remedied by adding the contrary proposition, namely "being *and nothing are not the same",* which we also stated above. [...] This proposition is then undeniably asserted; but *the statement is just as false as it is correct,* for once one proposition is taken out of its speculative context, the other also must be given at least as much attention and articulation. (Hegel 2010: 66–67)

Here, we witness a coincidence of great logical beauty: not only does every speculative judgment display an *a priori* duality of affirmation and negation, but being and nothing exhibit the very same structure of the abstract negation*: they seem to be the elementary embodiments of the copulas of two consecutive judgments forming a speculative truth*. Hegel often played with the possibility of the subject becoming a predicate (as in the case of Julius Caesar), but here something even more spectacular occurs: the subjects, being and nothing, are shifted to the place of the copulas "are" and "are not". Being and nothing of the entrance to the *Logic* thus in a way anticipate the insight that *truth is originally and essentially bi-propositional*.

And we claim, of course, that only the *transcendental dimension of intersubjectivity* transcends the constraints of non-contradiction and sufficient reason and allows this new conceptualization of logic. It is the

logical space of inter-subjectivity alone that has the structural capacity of trimming down the phenomenology of being and nothing to the minimum of pure and void extremization, where there is no determinate, content-related, relative, but only immediate, saltational, discreet, abstract transition between the two.

Let us now summarize the qualities of this new logical space. First, the relation between being and nothing is one of perfective, not of imperfective transition. Second, between the two there is no relation of causality, conditioning, justification, or sufficient reason; the "leaping over" is automatic and absolute. Third, the speculative judgment demands two propositions concurrently. In order to "dramatize" this entirely logical situation, one could stage it as a speech process extending between a position and an opposition. In short, to bestow some flesh and blood to this abstract form, one could imagine being as an instance of position, expressed in the fact of making an utterance, and nothing as an instance of opposition, appending "the mere not" to the affirmative stance. The logical space, within which being and nothing can make any sense at all, is thus *the inter-subjective situation where an assertion and its negation appear simultaneously*.

Our last thesis now claims that the only "environment" in which both affirmation and negation can live side by side equiprimordially and irreducibly, the only environment able to detect and realize the absolute theticity of a proposition by means of perverting it into its abstract negation, is *the public sphere*. As we shall see, only propositions capable of co-existing with their own negations can climb the ladder of public perceptibility and, from there, determine the new consistence of reality. It is the public sphere that transforms the abstract negation into an ontological principle.

Being and nothing as elements of the theory of the public sphere

The true logical invention of the theory of propositions is the fact that no one really *interpellated* a proposition to enter the world; reality has no need of being redoubled in the sphere of the verbal. Propositions have no sufficient reason, rather they appear as supplements, creations, decisions. However, it is the "spontaneous ideology" of propositions to believe in their deducibility from reality: they usually consider the facticity to which they refer or the pragmatic intent of the speaker to be the sufficient reason for their own emergence. A proposition given in its singularity

is by default attached to a certain *extra-discursive substance*: to empirical knowledge, practical interest, information transfer, communicative purpose, position of power, etc. This is why the first operation of theticity must be joined by the second operation of abstract negation. It is not until a proposition is faced with the negative version of its sense, until an "other" appears before me and merely negates what I have just said, that the emergent and eventful nature of *every* proposition comes to light. If we claim "We support public health system!", our stance may still be suspected of advocating our private ends in the matter. However, when we expose ourselves to the possible negation which claims "We, however, support the privatization of the health system!", an opposition whose momentary unabolishable possibility we must concede to, the bond of our particular interests is finally broken. Only by admitting the logical parity of negation, an "opinion" can become a "thought".

A proposition must be negated in order for its original theticity to become manifest. The propositions that cannot bear their negations are merely empirical and pragmatic statements; they are like hundred dollars about which it is *not* indifferent whether they are or are not. The moment a proposition expresses a speculative truth, however, a complex subjective structure is established: the thetical statement is redoubled in its external negation, and this redoubling demands two subjects, constituting an antagonism. Or, in other words, Hegel's form of speculative truth, the concomitance of affirmation and negation, is not an extravagance from the ivory tower of German metaphysics, but demonstrates a specific, concrete, even highly normal functioning of the public sphere.

We are reading Hegel's *Logic* as "an exposition of God from the end of the world", as "a discourse of two masters" who can already afford to state propositions in their pure excessive surplus, arranged only by the form of abstract negation. A very similar structure can be found in one of the most influential (and, needless to say, strikingly beautiful) theories of society, in Luhmann's sociology. Just like Hegel defined the relation between being and nothing to be without cause, ground, or reason, Luhmann defines the "code" as a "rule of duplication" which ascribes a *Nein-Fassung*, "no-version", to every *Ja-Fassung,* "yes-version". And this ascription is performed in a precisely Hegelian manner: it is spontaneous, immediate, and has no reason. In one of the brilliant passages of his work, Luhmann speaks of

> the system's "disclosure" through linguistic coding, which means for us the doubling of expressive possibilities by a yes/no difference.

> Thereby the system also creates *a negative version of meaning for itself, to which nothing in the environment corresponds* [italics mine] and which the system can control only by self-computation. [...]
>
> The closure of a meaning system can thus be understood as the control of its own possibilities for negation while producing its own elements. Every transition implies a no (however indeterminate) and can be conditioned by conditioning its use. (Luhmann 1995: 444–445)

Luhmann shows an emergent causality of a proposition being uttered, whereby in the latency of the system, only by way of its self-computation, a negative version of meaning springs up, even though the real "state of affairs" never gave any reason for it. There is thus an utterly definite and even "normal" occurrence within a social system which, at a single stroke, invalidates both the law of non-contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason.

Let us invent a specific example of Luhmann's *Nein-Fassung* and imagine being in a relationship with a beautiful woman who believes that her beauty is an infinite credit which others must not cease to repay. Perhaps, in a period of her life she rejoiced in a few compliments, which usually take the form of an affirmative proposition: "You are beautiful!" But then the time comes when these flatteries run dry for no particular reason; perhaps one is weary of repeating the same statements over and over again. But within the system, *the first affirmation automatically produces a latent negation,* which may lack a sufficient reason, but it nevertheless subsists as a mere potentiality. It can happen that every time a compliment fails to appear, the beautiful woman starts asking herself if the opposite is now true, if she, in fact, has become ugly. The mere privation is already presumed to be a negation. In this *emergent world* situated beyond the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason, the first affirmation creates a vacuum of possible negation, and a woman, having been flattered a few times in the past, now hovers over the abyss, which only hypochondria, jealousy, and self-praise can fill.

Luhmann, of course, preferred less self-indulgent cases of this spontaneous redoubling of the code and applied it rather to political systems. He divided the political code upon the dichotomy of progressive/conservative:

> This double paradigm [...] assigns a counterpart to every political topic. [...] The code induces a downright forced duplication of the political reality; it belongs to the structure of political topics and is a condition of their politization. The moment a topic breaks out, the progressive and conservative forces appear ... (Luhmann 2011: 67; translation mine)

Luhmann thus draws the abscissa and the ordinate of the "public sphere" in the fundamental opposition to its usual coordinates in the theories of communication and consensus. In the latter, every dissent has its purpose in the final consent, and every concurrency of affirmation and negation is "sublated" within the higher affirmation; naturally, the consensus is conceived in a way that it abides to the law of non-contradiction and is established by means of the best of sufficient reasons. Habermas's universal pragmatics, together with other theories of communication, seems only to translate the principles of non-contradiction and sufficient reason from the area of empirical reality, scientific facticity, and everyday practices to the domain of inter-subjectivity. Our objective, however, was to outline an entirely different landscape of the public discourse, following the principle of Hegel's abstract, void negation, his "mere not", and Luhmann's self-computation of the system, his "however indeterminate no". Here, affirmation and negation persist in the symmetry of equivalence, while their split takes place without any reason, without rational justification and argumentation.

Perhaps, there exists no public stance without also presupposing the position of the irreducible other whose place is in advance channelled by the matrix of abstract negation. And only within this "logical space" does inter-subjectivity become a *concept* and not merely a representation of manifold social phenomena. Its formal definition does not include the rich, particular realms of education, family, recognition, community, tradition, i.e., all the positive transfers of social customs and mores. Thus, the minimal "formal" definition goes as follows: *the logical structure of inter-subjectivity is established where the mere negation, i.e., the cancellation of the law of non-contradiction, figures as sufficient reason to invalidate of the principle of sufficient reason*. This means that within the space of inter-subjectivity, within the public sphere, no reason is ever needed to attach the "mere not" to any possible statement – and it is precisely by the force of this "not" that the affirmative statement will become truly "universal", that is, of no other interest than public.

The public sphere is a complex logical space with its own regularities: only the propositions capable of simultaneously occupying both extremes, position and opposition, affirmation and symmetric negation, will reach the highest level of the hierarchy of public perceptibility. Society is constantly witnessing an emergence of a number of "positivities", expressed in affirmative judgments: a train derailed, a new law was adopted, elections took place. However, to become the subject of public debate, a

topic must undergo a process of rigorous selection: *only a matter about which it is possible to disagree within the form of symmetrical opposition can become publicly exploitable*. The public sphere is not necessarily a neutral reservoir of all the issues relevant for some sort of "common good" or "general interest". It is rather an articulate field of hierarchies organized by the selection which lets pass through the bottleneck only the elements that can be formalized in a symmetrically opposite way, i.e., the statements that allow the concomitance of affirmation and negation without becoming contradictory and thus logically abolishable. Perhaps, the general interest is not defined by what is best for all, but by what there is disagreement about.

Inter-subjectivity as an ontological principle

At first sight it may seem that we have only extrapolated one of the basic forms of Hegel's *Logic*, the abstract negation,[7] to the specific area of public discourse. And yet, we insist that there is something necessary and reciprocal about this extrapolation. The functioning of the public sphere is not only a heuristic illustration of Hegel's being and nothing, but represents the opening of the space in which being an nothing become established as corner stones of a new universe.

It was our intention to reconstruct the logical space in which Fichte could discover his "thetical judgment" and Hegel could inaugurate negation as the basic logical category. German Idealism was a period that elevated social facts to the status of principles: first, the transcendental dimension of morality was invented (Kant), than that of language (Herder, Hammann, and Humboldt), of *Sittlichkeit*, ethical life, and law (Fichte and Hegel), and, finally, even of history (Schelling and Hegel). A new range of truth values was introduced which contaminated the immediate reality with the forms of social bonds, language structures, inter-subjective antagonisms, and historical processes, and this new "truth" was no longer ascertainable by the principles of identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, or sufficient reason. Suddenly, the phenomena rose to the surface at which the reductionist methods of rationalism and empiricism found themselves to be at the loss of words. From this historical perspective, Hegel's beginning the *Logic* with being and nothing also represents a radical rupture with the Parmenidean and Aristotelian ontology of identity and non-contradiction, as well as with the Cartesian and Leibnizian ontology of

7 Abstract negation is, however, not a model for all other negations, such as dialectical, concrete, determinate negation, negation of negation etc.

the cause having at least as much reality as the effect. In the realm of Spirit, history, culture, law, there is no less nothing than there is being and an effect can have a greater amount of reality than its cause. The price to be paid for this "inter-subjectivization of reality" is thus the sacrifice of the great cosmic priority of being: when two people face each other, nothing turns out to be just as primary and fundamental as being, and the abstract, excessive negation proves to be even *truer* than any material causality. It is only in this new world that the pure emergence of being and nothing, their absolute surplus and abstract immediacy, can figure as its beginning.

However, by interpreting being and nothing as two "fundamentals" of the "logical space of inter-subjectivity", as abstractions of two subject-positions, we do not thereby propose a thesis on the entire structure and progress of *The Science of Logic*. The following categories of "Being", such as existence, something and an other, restriction and the ought, one and many, repulsion and attraction, quantitative relations of direct, inverse ratio, and ratio of powers, chemical elective affinities, etc., will recapitulate some sort of inventory of the then existing scientific knowledge: the initially simple and abstract elements will differentiate in the increasingly complex physical, chemical, arithmetic, and algebraic entities. Thus, in our reading, being and nothing do not constitute a matrix for the subsequent development of pure thought. At the utmost, they represent the introductory "bottleneck", a narrowing of the conditions for the admission of forms that could henceforth be deemed "logical".

In this view, being and nothing embody the abstract negation, the most rudimentary of all negations, the *zero point of Hegel's logical operations*. In its first appearance, "negation" means nothing more than the need for the *other* subject to say "no", so that our own proposition could be detached from the usual descriptive, intentional, communicative purposes of speech, thereby risking the "semantic death" and establishing itself as a pure positing of being. At the most elemental level, being and nothing stand for *the decision to think pure thought*. Traditionally, the subject of philosophy has always been conceived as a subject of biographical eternity, a subject of continually growing knowledge, of asymptotic approach to reality, of infinite moral tasks, of conquering new lands. Hegel, on the other hand, erected a stage where the new logic of being and nothing drives a wedge into these stretches of "bad infinities": the two subjects meet face to face, eyeball to eyeball, and behind their backs the solid lines of their biographies crumble into dust. Only within this "inter-subjective

closure" will the abstract negation break off and suspend the positive continuity of subjective interests and reasons, and the pure thought of logic will become possible.

Finally, let us conclude with pointing out that Hegel's "mere not" was not some esoteric peculiarity of his, but, at the time, this contradictory and unreasonable logical form became almost a matter of style. Arguably the most famous scene of the entire Romantic literature is the first conversation between Faust and Mephistopheles in Goethe's monumental play. The same status that Hamlet's dictum "To be or not to be, that is the question" enjoys in the Renaissance literature, the already cited Mephistopheles's adage "*Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint"* occupies in Romanticism. The Renaissance monologue was replaced by the Romantic dialogue, but the interlocutor, Mephistopheles, has nothing of substance to say except to embody the void, formal, abstract negativity, the mere *Verneinung* of whatever Faust has stated. It is this most abstract dialogical structure which may provide us with the shortest definition of Romanticism: it is the period of included contradiction without any reason. And it appears that Hegel opened his *Logic* precisely with this knot in which contradiction coincides with the lack of reason by virtue of being and nothing relating to each other solely in the form of the "mere not".

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Jure Simoniti

Hegelova Logika kao prikaz Boga sa kraja sveta

Rezime

U članku se pokušava rekonstruisati logički prostor u kojem je na početku Hegelove *Logike* bila moguća pojava i imenovanje „bića" i „ničega". U nemačkom idealizmu se sa Kantom i Fihteom pojam „bića" počinje vezivati za formu rečenice. Fihte osniva novu istinitosnu vrednost na apsolutnoj tezi „tetične presude". Prva teza je da Hegel „biće" ne bi mogao postaviti na početak nekog sistema, a da njegov logički prostor nisu pre toga formirali upravo oni misaoni pokreti nemačkog idealizma, koji su znali misliti ontološku funkciju presude. Istovremeno, apstraktna negacija, odsustvo odnosa između „bića" i „ničega", prikazuje strukturu ireduktibilnog dvojnog početka. Logičku pozadinu ove izvorne dvojnosti čini teorijski pronalazak transcendentalne intersubjektivnosti u nemačkom idealizmu, koji se na primer manifestuje u Hegelovoj borbi za život i smrt između dve samosvesti. Druga teza stoga tvrdi, da su „biće" i „ništa" dva trenutka logičkog prostora, koji se svojoj konkretnosti lansira kroz socijalnu situaciju (barem) dva subjekta, od kojih jedan nudi afirmativnu presudu, dok drugi istu samo apstraktno negira. Iz toga se mogu ocrtati koordinate sfere koja nosi ime javnost, a čija struktura predviđa ukidanje dva najvažnija misaona zakona logičkog mišljenja: princip neprotivrečnosti i princip dovoljnog razloga. Time dokazujemo kako se na vrh hijerarhije javne percepcije i na taj način stvarnoga društvenog uticaja popnu samo izjave koje u svom sadržaju apsorbuju apstraktnu rečeničnu negaciju, dakle izjave koje su u stanju da preuzmu istovremenu koegzistenciju afirmacije i simetrične, apstraktne negacije svog sadržaja.

Ključne reči: Hegel, biće, ništa, negacija, Luman, intersubjektivnost, javnost