

From Transcendental Logic to the Analysis of Practice in the Tradition  
of  
Aristotle, Hegel, and Wittgenstein

*TransCoop-Projekt Conant, Stekeler*

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I. The Project

It is customary to contrast ‘the analytic’ or Anglo-Saxon and the ‘Continental’ or German and French traditions in philosophy. The analytic tradition originates with Frege, and this means, among other things, that it accords preeminent philosophical significance to formal logic. The Continental tradition has its roots in Kant. The title of the central part of Kant’s principal work is “Transcendental Logic”, while Hegel calls what is arguably his main work “Science of Logic”. This difference between the concepts of logic in the Fregean and Kantian traditions is often exploited as a ground for claiming that the analytic tradition has a comparatively narrower and the Continental tradition a comparatively broader conception of the “logical”. A closely related second difference that is also sometimes noted between these respective traditions is the following: in the analytical tradition logical and epistemological questions are relatively sharply distinguished from those questions thought to belong properly to moral or political philosophy, whereas in the Continental tradition these questions are more commonly regarded as springing from a common root.

We are inclined to think that these conceptions, here rather facilely attached to these supposedly distinct traditions, each have their claim to truth. We want to sort out what is right and what is wrong in these widespread contemporary views of the matter. In this way, we hope to shed light on the (possible) inner unity as well as the obvious differences between the analytic and the Continental traditions.

We believe that there are important current debates ongoing in the analytic as well as in the Continental tradition centering around the role of logic in philosophy and the corresponding conceptions of logic, and that these have potentially important consequences for particular fields of practical philosophy, such as philosophy action and the foundations of ethics. We intend to continue to advance these debates and to contribute to a clearer understanding of their objectives, only now by focusing on the often neglected *logical* dimension of practical thought and the logical presuppositions implicit in the representation of life-forms and practices. One reason for beginning our project with the recent concern with a renewed inheritance of Aristotle's practical philosophy is that that philosophy represents a common source of both the particular Continental neo-Hegelian and analytic neo-Wittgensteinian schools of thought that we especially seek to bring into dialogue with one another through this project.

Our project aims to effect a transition between traditional research programs in the logic of the proposition (including a logic of material and formal norms that govern inferences from sentences to sentences or propositions as generic utterances to propositions) to a logic of action (including a generalized logic of speech acts). The difficulty here is that it is not entirely clear wherein a proper logic of action (and speech acts) should be thought to consist. A first hint might be given by *Hegel's* recovering of *Aristotle's* distinction between the level of genericity (*Allgemeinheit*) and the level of singularity (*Einzelheit*). Generic sentences resp. generic forms of inferences correspond explicitly resp. implicitly to 'conceptual truths'. Any singular reference to the world presupposes such forms of inferences since they define a kind of default content of empirical statements. But any singular application of generic ('conceptual') knowledge is mediated by experienced judgment or the category of particularity. On this ground, we believe that a proper account of general logic ought to allow for its further determination into both a theoretical (explicit) and practical (implicit) form. In the course of developing our project, this consideration convinced us that we had to include Aristotle and Hegel among our polestars. For,

Hegel appears now to provide ways of forging connections between the two extreme terms of our project: Aristotle and Wittgenstein (but also between Frege and Kant, as we can add). He inherits from Aristotle the idea of a general logic of concepts that goes beyond a merely formal understanding of concept as arbitrarily defined classifications of given objects. And he inherits from Kant the idea of logical analysis as (part of) a pure science, reflecting on a system of categories and conceptual forms, while anticipating Wittgenstein's rejection of any merely external (for example psychological) conditions on thought or language. Wittgenstein also sees that traditional formal theories of logic should not be used as unfounded dogmatic presuppositions in conceptual analysis and that the assumption that clear understanding must be mathematical ('theoretical') in form is wrong.

In this sense, we take the task to adumbrating an adequate logic of action to be a criterion of adequacy on the general framework to which a proper logic of the proposition in then end also belongs. That there must be some such connection is already apparent from the fact that a proper account of the logic of discourse must take account of the logical constraints on asserted propositions; and such an account presupposes a theory of speech-acts – that is, a logic of action as applied to speech.

The beginning of such a turn to a broader inquiry into the logic of action has already been initiated in the work of each of the two applicants. James Conant has argued that an adequate account of Wittgenstein's account of language presupposes an account of how practical context contributes to meaning, and that this in turn presupposes an adequate account of what a specifically linguistic practice is and how it bears on the constitution of meaning.

In his book *Sinnkriterien*, Pirmin Stekeler interprets Kant's synthetic principles a priori as principles which must hold if the deductive order discovered by general logic (as an inferential structure for sentences) is to apply to judgments that relate to sensory intuition. On the one hand, this seems to constitute a break with Frege's idea of a purely formal logic, for it implies that its inferential order is not self-standing, but depends on conditions that lie outside the purview of purely formal general logic. On the other hand, it reads Kant's approach to transcendental logic as a kind of addition to formal logic. I.e. Stekeler follows Frege in this book by presupposing that the deductive order of sentences constitutes the formal nature of thought. The principles in virtue

of which this order applies to intuition hold a priori, Stekeler claims, because without them the words (names and predicates) would only refer to abstract objects (like in pure mathematics and set theory, which can *only* by thought), not to real, empirical, objects that *also* can be perceived. In this way, Stekeler in his earlier work (the book was finished 1986, but a new version of the idea is presented in his 2005 book with F. Kambartel, *Sprachphilosophie*) pins transcendental logic on a presupposed form of general logic, and claims that this is exactly what Kant had done. The fact that this procedure was criticized severely by Hegel and the importance of this criticism was made clear in Stekeler's later work (*Hegels Analytische Philosophie* 1992 and *Philosophie des Selbstbewusstseins* 2005), and in the work of Sebastian Rödl *Kategorien des Zeitlichen* (2003). According to Rödl, Kant is claiming that the relation of transcendental and general logic is the converse. Therefore, we shall need to confront Stekeler's reading of Kant with Rödl's, since this may also shed light on the difference between Kant's transcendental analytic and Hegel's science of logic on the one side, Frege's idea of logic and Wittgenstein's conceptual analysis on the other. The central task is overcoming the basic problems of empiricism and logicism: Hegel's critical analysis of empiricism leads to an early form of pragmatism in the following sense: Any epistemic relation to the world is already 'infected' by conceptual and pragmatic aspects, such that we do not have a pure logic of 'Konstatierungen' as a foundation of human knowledge. (The important role of particular forms governing singular speech acts on the background of generic inferential norms in any concrete understanding was made clear in Stekeler's short book "Was heißt denken"?) which shows that we find much more logic in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger than the usual 'existential' readings realize.)

Our envisioned project is now animated by the following two assumptions: (1) the analytic tradition must reflect on the ways in which it is *defined and limited by a Fregean conception of logic*; and one promising way of doing this is to confront Frege's conception of logic both with a *critique from without* through that which preceded it and is presupposed in Kant's and Hegel's titles, and with a *critique from within* through confronting it with the criticisms thereof developed first in the works of Wittgenstein and subsequently in those some of his followers in the analytic tradition (this has been a central topic of Conant's work for quite some time, but also of Friedrich Kambartel's work on the basic problems of formal (Fregean) logic as a merely mathematical and not as a 'general' logic (the results are presented in Stekeler's

comprehensive *Grundprobleme der Logik* from 1986), and (2) the Continental tradition must become clear about the sense in which it is *properly to be understood as a logical tradition*, as both applicants, Conant and Stekeler, are convinced, which requires recovering and developing the peculiar Hegelian development of Kant's conception of a transcendental logic – and the successor conception thereof found in the works of Wittgenstein – and employing these to achieve a critical perspective on contemporary conceptions of both theoretical and practical thought.

In the next section, we say roughly and provisionally how we conceive of the relation between our three central authors – Aristotle, Hegel, and Wittgenstein, in front of the background of our general view on a systematic understanding of the development of philosophical arguments. We then move on to consider some actual systematic questions that will guide our inquiry. Then we briefly discuss our qualifications to undertake such an inquiry. The last section is our budget plan.

## II. Aristotle, Hegel, Wittgenstein

The aim of the project is now to investigate how the three authors who figure in the title of our proposal conceive of logic and its philosophical significance and how their respective conceptions of it admit of an understanding thereof that brings questions often relegated to the (allegedly independent) domain of practical philosophy within the ambit of the logical. We take this to be of interest given that, on the one hand, in the analytic tradition the dominant naturalist cast of mind often assigns logic little more than the role of an auxiliary tool in philosophical investigation, while on the other hand, in the Continental tradition a hermeneutic historicism often claims to have discredited the very idea of logical inquiry as such. By contrast, our authors, their many differences notwithstanding, all evince sympathy for some version of the thought that the nature of logic is the most fundamental of philosophical topics, on the shared ground that a philosophical treatment of any topic is a fortiori a logical one, whether it be concerned in the first instance with what we can know or with what we should do.

It is also interesting to note in this connection that our three authors move more and more into the focus of modern research in analytical philosophy: Authors most widely credited in the

analytic tradition with having opened up avenues for a *Wittgensteinian* conception of ethics are at the same time authors who are equally widely credited with having contributed significantly to a substantial re-birth of interest in *Aristotelian* ethics. We are thinking in this connection, above all, of the work of Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, John McDowell, and Michael Thompson. These are, we believe not coincidentally, also the very authors in the analytic tradition who a number of leading *neo-Hegelian* thinkers (such as Robert Pippin, Robert Brandom, Terry Pinkard, Christoph Menke as well as the two authors of this proposal) have found to be among the most interesting representatives of a line of thought that can be traced to Hegel (and, often enough, through him to Aristotle). Part of our aim is to explore the sources of this striking intellectual convergence. Our project will seek to explore the connections between work that is presently being done along these lines on either side of the Atlantic by leading scholars on each of these three thinkers. We hope thereby to bring these two communities of scholars into more intensive intellectual dialogue with one another.

### III. Systematic Questions

There are, in fact, two questions that we wish to tie together to form the central topic of our project. The first of these—which we shall call *the question of history*—concerns the role of history and historical development in an account of reason, knowledge and conceptual understanding (not to speak of freedom of actions). The second of these—which we shall call *the question of systematicity*—concerns the proper place of a systematic inquiry (i.e., one that encompasses both theoretical and practical questions) in the attainment of genuine philosophical knowledge or understanding; or, alternatively: the question whether such an aspiration to systematicity should itself be taken to belong to just those features of our philosophical tradition that we ought now to regard with suspicion (as later Wittgenstein has often—in our view mistakenly—been taken to suggest).

*The question of history* has surfaced somewhat peripherally in recent discussion in interesting ways, for example, in recent exchanges about the work of Wittgenstein in contemporary philosophical discussions, on the one hand, and in recent work by leading scholars on both Aristotle's *Ethics* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, on the other. One side of the debate, some commentators have been concerned to praise Aristotle, Hegel and Wittgenstein respectively

for the manner in which they link their conceptions of cognition with a historical development of social orders and correlative modes of thought internal to them, while other scholars seem happy to suggest that it is incidental to the integral philosophical achievement of the work of any of these authors that they be thus historicized. This helps to raise and focus the question of interest to us: what is the proper place of an appeal to historically contingent developments in the framing of a fully philosophically satisfying account of our practical life? Is such an account to be the product of pure reflection, one which any self-conscious subject must realize in the course of her thought, if she is engaged in sufficiently full reflection on her concept of cognition? Or is the account of a sort which is ineluctably historically embedded in ways that such a “purely reflective” account must fail to appreciate. Although the discussion of this particular topic remains at a fairly preliminary stage in current work on Aristotle, Hegel and Wittgenstein, there is reason to think that many of the contributing scholars may be in systematic disagreement on this point.

*The question of systematicity* surfaces most immediately in the form of the question whether philosophical knowledge must form a system. Many thinkers who take themselves to be inspired by Wittgenstein might well evince a worry regarding any such emphasis on the idea that philosophical/logical knowledge *must form a system*. They might wish to invoke later Wittgenstein’s idea that in philosophy we ought not to impose a limit in advance on the variety of logical/grammatical forms of thought that we are willing to countenance. Other thinkers might wish to counter by invoking the Kantian/Hegelian idea that the very notion of a form of thought represents any such form as containable in the “I think”, that is, as constitutive of thought as such. Here, too, it is unclear just how deep the disagreement in question goes. Grammar might be thought to be without principle for any of a number of reasons. In this connection, a number of recent Hegel scholars have suggested that the categories of Logic must be understood as the result of historical developments, and that their validity depends on social conditions that provide them with application. In this case, the worry arises that logic must lack a principle altogether in as much as history does. On the other hand, on more Wittgensteinian grounds, grammatical forms might be thought to be of an infinite variety on account of the intrinsically therapeutic nature of grammatical investigations. If grammatical analysis is only locally valid as a means of dissolving confusions, then there is no principle of grammar, at least if one grants (with later Wittgenstein

and against early Wittgenstein) that there is no overarching principle under which all possible confusions can be brought. But this leaves open the possibility of a peaceful resolution of this debate: for there may be a principle of forms of thought as such, which at the same time allows for a range within which unlimited specification can be tolerated—a range for, say, the representation of contingent and local social forms.

These two questions combine in the *question of practice* which asks for the role played by human practice and its form(s) in the very constitution of human knowledge, science, and truth. We want to further focus on these three questions by exploring them in the narrower context of how they specifically re-emerge in the domain of *practical philosophy*. Leading sub-questions are: To what extent can we make sense of the idea of a ‘*practical a priori*’ for conceptual understanding? To what extent can we make sense of the idea of an *a priori* or purely *logical moment* in the representation of *practical thought* (in ethics and philosophical reflections on moral philosophy)? To what extent do contemporary philosophical contributions to this topic, especially those drawing on Aristotelian, Hegelian and Wittgensteinian ideas, justify positive or negative answers to these questions? It is this that we shall seek to determine.

It is widely held in the Continental debate that Kant’s transcendental logic must be historicized. This idea seems to presuppose that allegedly transcendental forms of thought are *au fond* merely historical developments. It is true that Hegel teaches that an individual subject only thinks and judges in virtue of participating in a tradition of reason and that Wittgenstein teaches that to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life. However, in order to understand the notion of a tradition of reason or a linguistic practice, it is necessary to investigate *the forms of thought that define reason or enable the possibility of discourse*. At least, this seems clearly to be the view implicit in Hegel’s system whose first part is the *Science of Logic*. Whether some such line of thought can be found in Wittgenstein’s later work is a matter of greater controversy. (Two authors who are otherwise largely in philosophical sympathy with one another, John McDowell and Michael Thompson, seem to be crucially divided on just this issue, both in their respective readings of Wittgenstein and in their own systematic work.) Given the parallel nature of these debates, we think that the above considerations show that our project is capable not only of enhancing the mutual understanding of Anglo-American and Continental approaches and positions on the nature of logic and the forms of human thought and experience, but of advancing a shared



understanding of the interconnections between theoretical and practical philosophy as such.

#### IV. Qualifications

Both applicants are exceedingly well qualified for carrying out the described project. James Conant is the author of a number of articles on Frege, Wittgenstein, and Kant. Along with John Haugeland and John McDowell, he has pioneered a new interpretation of Kant's *First Critique*; and, along with Cora Diamond, he is one of the originators of an influential new interpretation of Wittgenstein, sometimes termed "The New Wittgenstein". Of particular significance for the proposed project, he has written on the ostensibly paradoxical notion of logical form in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and its significance for a proper understanding of the concept of a grammatical investigation in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. He has also traced the inheritance of the concept in question through the work of Carnap, Quine, Sellars and others, and contributed to contemporary debates about its nature and significance, in exchanges with Robert Brandom, Stanley Cavell, John McDowell, and Hilary Putnam, among others. Stekeler's first book, *Grundprobleme der Logik*, shows that the usual reading of Frege's logic as a mere logic of formal inference much too narrow to grasp the philosophical impact of Frege's legacy. Even though Frege's formal analysis of *domains* of object mainly refers to mathematics, there is a *general* insight into the constitution of such domains: the constitution of whole domains of objects decides about the form of logical (quantificational) inference, as Robert Brandom has shown, too. On this ground, the logical content of Kant's transcendental logic, Hegel's logic of being, essence, and concept, and Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations gets much clearer than in traditional analytic philosophy. This is shown in numerous articles on Kant, Hegel, Frege, and Wittgenstein, in which the *pragmatic* form of domains bridges the 'Humean' grasp between 'theoretical' knowledge and 'practical' competence. In other words, the basic claim is that philosophical logic is not a theoretical investigation but a practical endeavour – a method to make implicit logic forms not only of inferences but of judgments and actions explicit.

We now want to pursue our project in two forms which we think will complement one another. On the one hand, we want to advance our project by having a continuous exchange between the two applicants. This will involve two- to three-month research stays at the university of the corresponding partner for the purpose of discussing each other's work, organizing joint

symposia and producing joint writing on the subject. Over a three year period, we plan on at the very least one such stay for each partner each year. On the other hand, we wish to establish an ongoing conversation among scholars working on the systematic debates described above both in Germany and in the United States. It seems to us that the format of an ongoing three-year lecture series is best suited to achieve this objective. One such lecture series will be conducted at the University of Chicago, another at the Universität Leipzig. We conceive of this format as very flexible. We intend it to include not only individual lectures, but also what we propose to call mini-seminars. These are short courses that may be held by more than one person and may comprise three to five sessions over a period of one to two weeks. We shall also hold three international workshops, one per year, inviting a small circle of top experts from both the United States and Germany on Aristotle, Hegel and Wittgenstein. (The workshops will be funded entirely out of the matching funds and thus are not mentioned in the budget plan below. The mini seminars will be partially funded out of matching funds.) We intend to publish select contributions to the lecture series and the conferences in the form of one or more volumes.

## V. Budget Plan

### *Estimated Costs*

Research stays of the applicants: Pirmin Stekeler in Chicago: Spring 2009, 2011; James Conant in Leipzig: Summer 2008, Summer 2010. **4500 €** per stay. (Average duration: two and a half months, plane ticket: 1000 €, lodging: 1200 € per month, additional expenses for board, etc.: 200€ per month.)

Lecture Series: 4 visiting lecturers per year for lectures or mini seminars funded by TransCoop (another 6 lecturers will be funded by matching funds). Average costs per lecturer for travel, lodging, additional expenses: **750 €**.

Printing volumes of selected papers: **2 000 €**. Books and copies / overhead: **5000 €**. Research assistance: **3 000 €** (40 hours per month, 10 € per hour).

*Summary:*

Lecture series:	9 000 €
Short term research stays at the partner's institute:	14 000 €
Travel expenses:	4 000 €
Printing:	2 000 €
Research assistance:	3 000 €
Material and equipment/Verwaltungspauschale:	5 000 €
Total:	<b>37 000 €</b>

*Matching Funds:*

University of Chicago, *Wittgenstein Workshop*: \$11,000 per year, for a total of \$33,000.  
 University of Chicago, *Department of Philosophy*: \$1,000 per year, for a total of \$3,000  
 University of Chicago, *Center for Interdisciplinary Studies*: \$1,200 per year, for a total of \$3,600  
 University of Chicago, *Franke Center for the Humanities*: \$1,500 per year, for a total of \$4,500  
 University of Chicago, *Committee for Social Thought*: \$400 per year for a total of \$1,200.

Total:	<b>\$45,300</b>
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