

Elena Ficara  
**The Form of Truth**

# **Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie**



Herausgegeben von  
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**Band 145**

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# The Form of Truth



Hegel's Philosophical Logic

**DE GRUYTER**

Work on this book was supported by a Feodor Lynen Fellowship (2018–2019)  
provided by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

ISBN 978-3-11-070365-8

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-070371-9

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-070381-8

ISSN 0344-8142

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2020943165**

**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2021 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston

Print and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

# Introduction

## The present research and extant works on Hegel's logic

This book is a consideration of Hegel's view on logic and basic logical concepts (such as truth, form, validity, contradiction) aiming to assess this view's relevance for contemporary philosophical logic. The literature on Hegel's logic is fairly rich. The subject is dealt with in different perspectives and for different aims, in philosophical or historical approaches, with exegetic or theoretical concern, and using formal or informal methods. The attention to contemporary philosophical logic places the present research closer to those works interested in the link between Hegel's thought and analytical philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the first particularity of this book consists in focusing on something that has been generally underrated in the literature: the idea that, for Hegel as well as for Aristotle and many other authors (including Frege), "logic" is the study of *the forms of truth*, i.e. the forms that our thought can (or ought to) assume in searching for truth.<sup>2</sup> As I will explain in this introduction, and elaborate further in the book, the idea of logic as the study of the forms of truth is useful for clarifying some controversial aspects of Hegel's views on logic, and for illustrating the sense in which a reappraisal of Hegel's dialectical logic

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1 An account of the literature will be given in the book. In 1976, 75 Gadamer stressed that the works traditionally engaged in reading Hegel from a contemporary point of view normally consider the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and are interested in examining the meaning of Hegel for epistemology and philosophy of mind, while assessing the relevance of Hegel's logic and metaphysics for contemporary philosophy is traditionally held as thorny. This judgement can now be partially revised. Today there are different works engaged in reading Hegel's logic and metaphysics from an analytical perspective. Among the most recent ones see: Stekeler-Weithofer 1992, Bencivenga 2000, Burbidge 2004, 131–176, Berto 2005, Rockmore 2005, Ameriks/Stolzenberg 2005 (eds.), Redding 2007, Hammer 2007, Nuzzo 2010a (ed.), Butler 2012, Brandom 2014, 1–15, Bordignon 2014, Pippin 2016, Chapter II, Pippin 2019. See also the essays collected in Emundts/Sedgwick 2017, Moyar 2017, Quante/Mooren 2018.

2 In *Der Gedanke* (English translation Frege 1956, 290) Frege writes: "I assign to logic the task of discovering the laws of truth, not of assertion or thought". In 1897 (now in Frege 1979, 3) Frege defines logic as "the science of the most general laws of truth". He writes "the laws of logic are nothing else than an unfolding of the content of the word 'true' [...] Anyone who has failed to grasp the meaning of this word [...] cannot attain to any clear idea of what the task of logic is". On the continuity between Hegelian, Aristotelian and modern logic see also in more detail Chapters 2 and 3. For clarifying insights on the link between logic and truth see d'Agostini 2011, 115–127 and the unpublished paper "Logic: the alethic account".

may be fruitful for contemporary philosophical debates. More specifically, in this light it becomes possible:

- To understand the precise meaning of Hegel’s thoughts on logic and metaphysics, dismissing the dominant view according to which, in Hegel’s writings, there would be a confusion between the two disciplines. The concept of truth, commonly intended, is what positively joins logic and metaphysics.<sup>3</sup>
- To highlight the non-psychologicistic nature of Hegel’s view on logic. The concept of truth is not an exclusively epistemic or mental affair.<sup>4</sup>
- To underline that Hegel’s logic, although non-formalised and non-formalistic in principle, is not anti-formal (insofar as it is concerned with the forms of truth).<sup>5</sup>
- To stress that Hegel’s view on logic is perfectly in line with the logical tradition and with Frege himself.<sup>6</sup>
- To point out that Hegel’s logic, more specifically, corresponds to what today is called *philosophical logic*.<sup>7</sup> As such, it is not incompatible, in principle, with the mathematical appraisal of logic, though including an attention for truth that is not peculiar for mathematical logic.<sup>8</sup>

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**3** See Part I, Chapter 2. below. Hegel’s supposed identification of logic and metaphysics seems to preclude any treatment in terms of modern logic, which is informed by the idea of ontological neutrality. See Peckhaus’ reconstruction of the debate in Germany in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when “logic reform meant overcoming the Hegelian identification of logic and metaphysics”, Peckhaus 1999, 447. Against the postulate of logic’s ontological neutrality see Varzi 2014, 53–80.

**4** Hegel explicitly criticises the subjectivistic and epistemicistic account of logic typical of the logic of his times, openly praising, in this respect, the ancient conception (see Parts I and III below).

**5** See 4.3. and 5.2.

**6** Hegel’s critique of traditional logic does not entail a rejection of logic as theory of valid inference. It rather brings Hegel to the discovery of dialectic as the *genuine theory of valid inference* (see Parts II and IV). Even if Hegel criticises the propositional form and emphasises the conceptual nature of dialectical logic, which seems to suggest a major difference between his and the modern view of logic, he also points out, in a way reminiscent of Frege’s insights on the same subject, that the “sentence is where truth begins” and that the study of concepts, sentences and inferences should be developed showing their organic unity (see Part III below). On the continuity between Hegelian, Aristotelian and modern logic see also in more detail Chapters 2 and 3, as well as Redding 2007 and 2014, 281–301 and Brandom 2014, 1–15. On the Hegelian assumptions at the basis of Frege’s view on logic see Käufer 2005, 259–280. On the influence of Trendelenburg’s interpretation of Leibniz on Frege see Gabriel 2008, 115–131.

**7** Even if the expression “philosophical logic” is not always used univocally today, I show in Chapter 3. the continuity between Hegel’s use and one specific, but fundamental, meaning of the term, i.e. Russell’s idea and definition of “philosophical logic”.

**8** See Part I, Chapter 3.

The second peculiarity of the present research is methodological. I tried to reconstruct Hegel's theses on "logic", "form", "truth" etc. not only in his published writings, but with major attention to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, looking at what Hegel writes on ancient and modern authors' conceptions of "logic", "logical form", "dialectical inferences" etc. In so doing, I share a view that is well known among authors belonging to the European tradition of Hegel studies, namely that these *Lectures* are fundamental for understanding the specifically logical meaning of Hegel's thought. They were conceived and held for the first time in Jena in 1805–06, then re-proposed with little to no changes in Heidelberg in 1816–17, before being given regularly in Berlin between 1819 and 1830. They are, as Gadamer highlights in 1976, a true laboratory for Hegel himself, who articulated his conception of dialectic through the interpretation of both classical and modern authors. Moreover, they were evidently addressed to students, and hence their text is exemplarily clear, in contrast to the notoriously obscure published logical writings.

The thesis according to which the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* are fundamental for understanding the genesis and meaning of Hegel's logical concepts has been explicitly underlined and/or adopted methodologically by several authors in different works.<sup>9</sup> Yet these works do not deal with the significance of Hegel's logic for contemporary philosophical logic. In contrast, the works that do address the question about the relevance of Hegel's logic for contemporary logic do not consider the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.<sup>10</sup> In this panorama, my book is motivated by the conviction that Hegel's analysis of the history of philosophy presents fundamental insights for locating Hegel's logic within the history of logic, explaining its link to ancient (Aristotelian and Stoic) and transcendental (Kantian) logic, and so making an assessment of its meaning for contemporary philosophical logic genuinely possible.

Accordingly, I also adhere to a methodological device introduced by Dilthey and adopted by many Hegel scholars,<sup>11</sup> who underline the importance of Hegel's early writings for understanding the motivations and genesis of Hegel's thoughts

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<sup>9</sup> See Gadamer 1976, Düsing 1976, Id. 1990, 169–191 and Id. 2012, Pöggeler 1990, 42–64, Riedel (ed.) 1990a, Schäfer 2001 among others.

<sup>10</sup> See the essays collected in Marconi (ed.) 1979a, Priest 1989, 388–415, Steckeler-Weithofer 1992, Bencivenga 2000, Berto 2005 among others. Exceptions are d'Agostini 2011b, 121–140, Butler 2012 and Redding 2014, 281–301. However, these authors do not develop a systematic analysis of the logical importance of Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, such as the one I aim at. I deepen these methodological considerations in Part IV.

<sup>11</sup> See Dilthey 1921, Marcuse 1941, Lukács 1973. See also Gadamer 1976, Düsing 1976, Henrich 1965/66, Verra 2007, Berti 2015 and Vieweg 1999 among others.

about logic. Again, these authors' primary task is not a consideration of Hegel's thoughts from the point of view of contemporary philosophical logic. In contrast I stress that the early writings,<sup>12</sup> in particular the Frankfurt's fragments on *Ver-einigung*, as well as the Jena's writings: *Differenzschrift* and the *Skeptizismusauf-satz* (writings that are either not translated into English or only partially translated into English) are a crucial reference point for understanding the originality of Hegel's approach with respect to contemporary debates in philosophical logic.

## Hegel within the history of logic

In contemporary accounts of the history of logic, Hegel's theses on logic and basic logical notions (such as negation, contradiction, form, truth among others) are the origin of general embarrassment. They are either held to be so incompatible with the tradition of modern formal logic that they are simply not mentioned, or only hinted at as "curious" (Kneale/Kneale 1962, 355), a "mixture of metaphysics and epistemology" (Kneale/Kneale 1962, 355) as involving a "complete rejection of formal logic" and "its substitution with a dialectic which is the product of speculative metaphysics" (Ritter/Gründer/Gabriel (eds.) 1971 ff., vol. 5., 358) and thus soon dismissed. A further sign of the embarrassment is, on occasion, the duplication of logical entries in philosophical dictionaries ("logic" and "speculative/dialectical logic"; "negation" and "negation/negativity: Hegel").<sup>13</sup>

Standardly, Hegel's position does not belong to the canon: It is simply not considered, or it is held to belong to a period of logical decadence. For example, according to Bochenski 1978 the period between the 16th and the 19th century is a dead period in the history of logic. Similarly, Boyer distinguishes between three periods in the history of logic: "The history of logic may be divided, with some slight degree of oversimplification, into three stages: (1) Greek logic, (2) Scholastic logic, and (3) mathematical logic" (Boyer 1968, 633). These and similar reconstructions are criticised or revised in more recent accounts. Peckhaus (1999, 434–435) suggests that Boyer's "slight degree of oversimplification [...] enabled him to skip 400 years of logical development and ignore the fact that Kant's transcen-

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<sup>12</sup> See Hegel Werke 1 and 2.

<sup>13</sup> See the two entries on "logic" and "speculative/dialectical logic" in Ritter/Gründer/Gabriel (eds.) 1971 ff., vol. 5., 357 ff. and 389 ff. as well as Ritter/Gründer/Gabriel (eds.) 1971 ff., vol. 6., 666 ff. and 671 ff. on "Negation" (in logic) and "Negation/Negativity" (in general in philosophy, and Hegel).



dental logic, Hegel's metaphysics and Mill's inductive logic were called 'logic' too".<sup>14</sup> Thiel 1965, Peckhaus 1997 (as well as Peckhaus 1999), and Gabriel 2008 are explicitly engaged in revising this canon, showing the roots of symbolic logic in the philosophical and logical tradition from Leibniz to Trendelenburg. Expression of a new tendency in the history of logic, also influenced by the arising and development of paraconsistent logics (see Priest and Routley 1984) is the *Handbook of the History of Logic* (Gabbay/Woods (eds.) 2004) in which the authors devote one chapter to Hegel's logic.<sup>15</sup> Also in *The Development of Modern Logic* (Haaparanta 2009), the chapter on the "logical question" (Vikko 2009, 203–221) contains an assessment of Hegel's role in the complex movement of logic reform in the 19th Century known as *die logische Frage* ("the logical question").<sup>16</sup> A complete integration of Hegel into the canon of the history of logic remains, however, a desideratum. More generally, that "the standard presentations of the history of logic ignore the relationship between the philosophical and the mathematical side of its development" is stressed by Peckhaus (1999, 434). I have oriented my research by taking this very relation into account.

Perplexities, omissions and duplications are not completely unjustified. Yet I suggest that, although "logic" in Hegel does denote a wide enterprise, its *core* is perfectly consistent with what we may intend by "logic" nowadays.<sup>17</sup> The methodological line of this book is inspired by the idea that Hegel's contribution to – and his critique of – formal logic can be understood only if we give for granted that, when Hegel spoke of "logic" and mentioned logical concepts, he technically meant something that is not so far from what contemporary logicians mean.

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14 The *Oxford Handbook of German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* devotes one chapter to Nineteenth-Century German logic (Priest 2015, 398–415). In it, Priest does consider Hegel's logic (402ff.), but he also claims that the dialectical cycle "has absolutely nothing to do with inference, and so with the sense of logic in this chapter".

15 It is the chapter written by Burbidge (Burbidge 2004, 131–176).

16 On Hegel and the "logical question" see also Ficara 2015, 39–55.

17 Stekeler-Weithofer 1992, 23 emphasizes that Hegel's logic, in spite of its apparent effusiveness, does correspond to what we mean by "logic" today. On common prejudices against Hegel and his idea of logic see also Stekeler-Weithofer 2016, 3–16. On the breath of topics that Hegel seems to accord to the domain of logic see Siep 2018, 651–798 and Tolley 2019, 73–100. Siep 2018, 790 underlines that Hegel's logic is an all-encompassing systematic inquiry that mediates between different cultural and scientific spheres. For him, such conception of logic is difficult to digest today. However, for Siep it is also beyond doubt that Hegel's logic, so conceived, corresponds to a philosophical account of logic and has, as such, a critical potential against scientific and cultural dogmatisms. For Tolley 2019, 73 f. Hegel's view of logic is characterized by two commitments (which he calls the "over-enrichment" of logic and the "divinization" of its subject matter) that seem to push Hegel away from most contemporary notions of logic.

Accordingly, the general aim of this work is to set the conditions for a genuine integration of Hegel's view on logic and basic logical notions – especially: truth, contradiction, negation, validity, and 'logic' itself – into the canon of contemporary philosophical logic. Such integration is highly fruitful, for many reasons.

First, it is important for exegetical reasons. Many of Hegel's views, if read from the perspective of their postulated "eccentricity" with respect to the tradition of formal logic, do not make any sense, while they gain a clear meaning once the eccentricity assumption is dismissed. Oddly enough, the idea of Hegel's extraneousness to the most canonical development of modern logic plays a certain role in the choice of non-literal translations. For example, a common translation of the passage on Aristotle's logic in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* is "Aristotle's *philosophy* is not by any means founded on this relationship of the understanding [the syllogistic forms]" (Hegel Werke 19, 241/Hegel 1892ff., vol. 2, 223). However, in the German text we have "Aristoteles' Logik" and not "Philosophie". It is reasonable to suppose that this shift is due to the conviction, on the part of the interpreter, that when Hegel writes "logic" he does not mean what "logic" is for us, but something else, whereby the more general term "philosophy" is preferable. In the first part of the book I show that Hegel's use of "logic" is perfectly adaptable to our use. More precisely, what he intends by this term corresponds to what we would call *philosophical logic*.

Second, the "normalisation" of Hegel's view on logic is *philosophically* important. Hegel repeatedly stressed that logic is fundamental for theoretical, but also for practical and even political reasons: it is helpful for pursuing what is universally and also personally good, it concerns what intimately interests us. If we accept that what he was talking about was indeed related to logic as we can intend it nowadays, these considerations become more insightful and interesting. They are not simply the result of using "logic" in a loose and vague acceptance, but rather express the positive idea of the usefulness of logic, as formal study of validity, for the shared and personal life of human beings (an idea that is not so far from what Leibniz, or Russell himself, used to think). In this sense, Hegel's work may reveal to be a genuine operation of "logic-empowerment". Yet, if the dominant view is that what Hegel was talking about was not *logic* in the technical meaning of the word, but something else, theses and arguments that, for someone who is interested in logic, are precious, get lost.

Finally, considering Hegel as a genuine interlocutor (perhaps not at the level of Aristotle, or Leibniz, or Frege, but still as an important one) is fruitful for scientific reasons. For example, a consideration of paraconsistentism that ignores Hegel's acquisitions about contradictions would be lacking, in many ways. Gen-

erally, paraconsistentists do not ignore Hegel's dialectical approach, even if they do not always take open note of it.

## The title

The subtitle of the book refers to the expression “philosophische Logik”, coined by Hegel in the *Grundlinien zur Philosophie der Rechts* with reference to the logic of philosophical inquiry, the logic presented by Hegel himself in his logical writings. As I explain in more detail in the first part of the book, contemporary philosophers (Sainsbury 2001, 1 and Lowe 2013, 1) use the same expression in recognition of Bertrand Russell, who, in *Our Knowledge of the External World*, wrote:

[S]ome kind of knowledge of logical forms, though with most people it is not explicit, is involved in all understanding of discourse. It is the business of philosophical logic to extract this knowledge from its concrete integuments, and to render it explicit and pure. (Russell 2009, 35)

Hegel intends the business of his *philosophische Logik* in very similar terms. For Hegel as well as for Russell, the forms are “facts” deposited in our thought, language and life. Both philosophers also contend that the task of philosophical logic is to “extract the forms” from their “concrete integuments”. Hegel writes:

The forms of thought are [...] displayed and stored in human language [...] [They] permeate every [human] sensation, intuition, desire, need, instinct [...] [They are] the natural element in which human beings [live], indeed [their] own peculiar nature [...] the activity of thought which is at work in all our ideas, purposes, interests and actions is [...] unconsciously busy (natural logic) [...] To focus attention on this logical nature [...] this is the task. (Hegel Werke 5, 20 ff./Hegel 1969, 31 ff.)

In this sense the expression “philosophical logic” is well suited to answer the question “what kind of logic is Hegel's logic?” from a contemporary perspective.

More specifically, as I hinted, the distinctive character of philosophical logic in Hegel's view (as well as in other authors' view) is that logic is strictly, even inextricably, connected to truth. The idea of philosophical logic as a logic of truth is still plausible today.<sup>18</sup> In this sense the expression “the form of truth” is useful to address different aspects of the Hegelian conception of logic.

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<sup>18</sup> The link between logic and truth is addressed in different ways by many classical and contemporary authors. See among others Frege 1979, and Tugendhat 1970. It is the specific subject of d'Agostini 2011, part II.

First, Hegel's logic is informed by the idea according to which a fundamental assumption of the logical work is the realist meaning of truth, and the correspondence of thought with reality. Hegel writes:

One can appeal to the conception of ordinary logic itself, for it is assumed that, [...] if from given determinations others are inferred, [...] what is inferred is not something external and alien to the object, but rather that it belongs to the object itself, that to the thought there is a correspondent being. (Hegel Werke 5, 45/Hegel 1969, 50f.)

Here Hegel does not want to say that the inferential forms isolated and considered in logic, for example *modus ponens*, are always and in each case expression of reality (of how things stand), and that an argument such as “If Hillary Clinton is a woman, then she is not reliable. Hillary Clinton is a woman, hence she is not reliable” is expression of how things stand. What Hegel claims is rather that, in individuating the different forms as forms of valid inference, we implicitly assume that they reveal that there is something that corresponds to our thought. According to Hegel, in doing logic we *raise the claim* that the forms we find (extract from the natural logic of language) are forms of truth, the forms that our thought assumes as soon as it is validly engaged in the search for truth.<sup>19</sup>

Second, the expression “the form of truth” refers to a further important aspect of Hegel's idea of logic. Hegel claims that there is a crucial question “no one thinks of investigating”, namely “whether these forms [individuated by the logicians] are [in themselves] forms of truth” (Hegel Werke 6, 268/Hegel 1969, 594f.). The question about the truth of the forms must be asked, for Hegel, and this means that “it is necessary to subject [the forms] to criticism” to determine if they are factually able to express truth, i.e. to give an account of *thought thinking reality*, to genuinely be *forms of thought thinking reality*. So stated, the idea also introduces the possibility (and the need) for a revision of logic, and a criticism of established classical rules.

Finally, the title “The Form of Truth” is to be traced back to what is, for Hegel, the most general form of true thought. For Hegel the forms (and the laws) dealt with in the logic of his times *are not forms and laws of truth*. Contradiction is the only genuine form of truth. Hegel notoriously claims: *contradictio est regula veri* (contradiction is the *norm* of truth), a formulation that fits well with the normative conception of forms Hegel inherits from Kant.<sup>20</sup> In perhaps less well-known passages, Hegel also stresses that contradiction is the *formal character* of truth (Hegel Werke 2, 39). As I show in the last part of the book,

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<sup>19</sup> This means that, in Hegel, the notion of logic as study of the “forms of thought” is preserved.

<sup>20</sup> I examine the normative meaning of logic in Hegel in the second part of the book.

this conception, which may seem counterintuitive, is a cornerstone of Hegel's dialectical logic. It turns out to be perfectly plausible from the point of view of dialectical and speculative logic as *philosophical logic*. Hegel writes:

There is a general failure to perceive that, in the case of any knowledge, and any science, what is taken for truth, even as regards content, can only deserve the name of 'truth' when philosophy has had a hand in its production. (Hegel Werke 3, 63/Hegel 1977, 41)

Hegel hints here at philosophical thought as the only condition for the search of (and knowledge of) truth. In stating this, he has in mind an idea of philosophy as sceptical, self-reflexive and critical thought, guided by the ancient sceptical principle that “for every valid argument there is an opposite one that is equally valid”.<sup>21</sup> Critically reflecting on (and questioning) every assumption is the condition (the norm) for attaining truth. Hegel derives this view from ancient philosophy – from the Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian dialectic, as well as from ancient scepticism. In this sense, the expression “the form of truth” refers to *contradiction as norm for attaining truth*. Moreover, the expression implies that *contradiction as form* is the *essential characteristic* of the very concept of truth. If we want to fix the process of our critical, self-reflexive search for (and knowledge of) truth sententially and linguistically, using a finite expression, than this expression will be the contradiction.<sup>22</sup>

## The content

The book has five parts, devoted respectively to logic, form, truth, validity and contradiction. At the end of each part and after a consideration of the relation between Hegel's view and contemporary theories, I extensively summarize the contents of each chapter. Here I therefore limit myself to sketching the general themes addressed in the five parts of the book.

The first part (*I: Logic*) is devoted to exploring Hegel's use of the concept of “logic” and his basic views about the nature, reason and aims of logic. I present three Hegelian theses about logic: the distinctions between *das Logische* and *die Logik*, the interplay between intellectual and rational logic, and the connection

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<sup>21</sup> Sextus Empiricus 1985, 140 and Hegel Werke 2, 230. On scepticism and philosophy in Hegel see, first of all, Vieweg 1999, Id. 2007 and Heidemann 2007. See also Gadamer 1976, Düsing 1976, and the essays collected in Riedel (ed.) 1990a.

<sup>22</sup> In part IV and part V I argue that what Hegel means by “contradiction” can be best grasped formally in terms of  $a \leftrightarrow \neg a$ .

between logic and metaphysics. The focus is on more or less explicitly shared views about Hegel's logic and its supposed non-governability by means of contemporary logic. Views such as: "Hegel's logic is conceptual and not propositional" or "Hegel's logic is metaphysical and thus has nothing to do with logic commonly intended, which is ontologically neutral", are examined and discussed. The main aim is to discard these views, opening the field for a genuine integration of the Hegelian reflections into the canon of the history of logic and philosophical logic.

The second part (*II: Form*) explores Hegel's view on logical forms and formalisms. Questions such as "is Hegel's logic formal or not?", "is Hegel's view on the formality of logic compatible with both modern and contemporary conceptions?" and finally "is a formal consideration and even a formalisation of Hegel's dialectics completely pointless?" are considered.

In the third part (*III: Truth*) I present Hegel's conception of truth, focusing on two standard questions at the basis of every truth theory in contemporary philosophical logic: "What are the truth-bearers, for Hegel?" and "What does the word "true" mean, for him?". The part closes with a consideration of Hegel's view on truth from the perspective of the link between logic and truth.

The fourth part (*IV: Validity*) is about Hegel's view on "what follows from what" and is motivated by the insight that to assess Hegel's possible contribution to both the history and our actual comprehension of the concept of validity (or logical consequence), it is necessary to understand the exact meaning of dialectical inferences, distinguishing them from other kinds of inferences. In other words, to understand Hegel's notion of validity we have to reflect on Hegel's notion of dialectic.

The last part (*V: Contradiction*) is on the meaning of dialectical contradictions and Hegel's possible contribution to contemporary conceptions of inconsistency. Here I give a closer look at the connectives and correspondent logical laws (Double Negation Elimination, Law of Non Contradiction, Law of Excluded Middle) involved in (or questioned by) contradictions.