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LOGIC AS THE ORGANON OF KNOWING FROM A FORMAL POINT OF VIEW IN JOHANN FRIEDRICH HERBART'S PHILOSOPHY

Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) was an eminent post-Kantian thinker, who taught in Königsberg (1809–1833) and Göttingen (1802–1808; 1833–1841). On his view, philosophy's task is to leverage conceptual analysis in order to identify the relations that hold among the fundamental concepts in the different sciences. Logic, as a normative discipline, proves central to the task. On the one hand, logic aims at defining the connections between basic principles and their consequences into organised systems. In this, Herbart's logic is fundamentally distinct both from psychology and metaphysics: logic investigates the contents of thought, not its acts; it studies relations among concepts, not among things. Herbart's position is thus at once anti-psychologistic and anti-idealistic.

On Herbart's account, just like on Kant's, while general logic defines valid inferential structures in general and posits the formal conditions of knowledge, applied logic bears directly on the methodology of the particular sciences: it identifies the principles and fundamental elements of knowledge in each specific domain, i.e. in metaphysics, natural science, psychology, etc. In this respect, logic, methodology, and the special sciences entertain a tight connection.

The aim of the paper is, firstly, to reconstruct the nature of logic as a formal, normative discipline within Herbart's system and, secondly, to question the extent to which Herbart could consistently define logic as the "organon of knowing from a formal point of view". This discussion should not only contribute to the problematic historiography 19th-century logic, but also explore the relevance of formalistic stances and challenge the received distinction of form and matter.

In secondary literature, the features of logic in the first half of the 19th century have been reconstructed with the aim of proving their the importance to the imminent reform of logic. Discussions about the foundations of logic independently of psychology and the issue of the applications and methodological implications of logic are primary aspects of the efforts of reform ([1], 439). Herbart is concerned with them. However, with the exception of few valuable contributions [2; 3; 4], Herbart's positions on logic are not often scrutinised. Herbart's defence of the autonomy, formality, and normative character of logic will be reconstructed in this chapter, focusing on his theory of concepts, the hypothetical understanding of categorical judgments, the predicative or existential import of the copula, and methodological issues at the borderline between logic, metaphysics, and psychology.

Herbart developed a philosophical system of realism within the context of German post-Kantian philosophy. Emphasis on the formal character of logic is a major aspect of Herbart's commitment to Kantianism against the stances of German idealists such as Fichte and Schelling. Herbart's metaphysical and psychological views are grounded in Kantian logical and epistemological assumptions in a way that implies a sharp opposition to *Naturphilosophie*. Herbartian views became widespread especially in the second half of the 19th century. Discussing Kant meant then to question the role of philosophy relative to the pursuit of knowledge and the constitution of human experience at large. Specifically, distinguishing sharply between the formal status of general logic and the epistemological import of transcendental logic involved particular views of the task of philosophy, which is, for Herbart, the reworking of concepts. In this way, philosophy stresses conceptual relationships (and relationships between qualities) and marks clear disciplinary boundaries.

Herbart did not compile any textbook of logic. His focus is rather on what he deems "necessary to improve in hitherto logic – and actually touches on each meaningful point of the

science” ([5], vol. XVI, p. 295). Herbart systematically dealt with logic in his early *Hauptpunkte der Logik*, the *Lehrbuch zur Einleitung in die Philosophie*, and the *Kurze Encyclopädie der Philosophie*. He considered his treatment of polysyllogisms to be his own original contribution to logic ([6], p. 355). Herbart’s treatment of logic is both propaedeutic and essential to his project. Logic as a prescriptive, normative discipline (the “morals of thought”) is concerned with form, not with content. As such, it promotes conceptual clarity through analysis, but it is not sufficient to validate knowledge, which always depends also upon contents.

Herbart’s logic regulates the way thought ought to proceed. It is formal to the extent that it disregards conceptual content and is existentially neutral, it treats concepts as to their mutual relations (subordination), whereas pure logic even disregards the objects which fall under concepts (‘extension’ in modern logic) and the specific kind of relations (e.g. dependence and inherence), which can be determined only within ontology or the special sciences. All marks included in a concept are equally essential to it and they belong together perfectly. All this is not the case in “psychological” concepts ([5], vol. VI, p. 122). In fact, Herbart’s logic is anti-psychologistic *ante litteram*, insofar as it excludes any psychological or genetic component.

These premises are required in order to analyse Herbart’s thesis of the priority of judgments relative to the formation of concepts, which holds true both on the logical and psychological level. Psychologically, representations are mutually connected and co-determined, but tend to be left imperfect: hence, concepts in their completion remain a task (*Aufgabe*) which has to be fulfilled. It derives that concepts are never thought in their ideal logical purity.

The relational character of Herbart’s logic especially emerges from his hypothetical theory of categorical judgments. Contrary to traditional logic and Kant, Herbart claims that judgments are originally hypothetical. This conception has a bearing on the fact that logic in Herbart is existence-free ([2], 157) and opens up new options for the relationships between logic and ontology. This is an instance of how logic can be applied to other sciences. However, applied logic impacts merely on the form of other sciences, not on their specific content, it helps clarify conceptual relations and pursue completeness. Strictly within the boundaries of formality, applied logic could even serve as a heuristic tool, which points to the possible use of logic towards the clarification and formal reworking of knowledge in specific domains. In this sense logic can be defined as an “organon of knowing from a formal point of view”.

References

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