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The (Im)Possibility of Philosophical Critique: Confronting Kant, Jacobi, and Hegel

1. Introduction

The aim of paper is to show that Hegel's critique of the philosophies of his time fails in the case of Jacobi, because the former's idea of the standard of philosophical critique, namely its scientific and systematic character, is at odds with the very nature of Jacobi's unphilosophical philosophy. Whereas Hegel's use of this standard is legitimate in the case of the first two attitudes of thought to objectivity in the *Preliminary Notion* of the *Encyclopedic Logic*, it ricochets off the third one, viz. Jacobi's 'unphilosophical philosophy'. This negative result leads to a tentative answer to the intriguing question why Hegel spent so much attention to a philosophy with which he had so little in common.

2. Hegel's Idea of Philosophical Critique

Hegel is tributary to the general conviction, expressed by many modern philosophers, such as Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, and the early Schelling, that reason should be scientific and systematic. Thus, Hegel could refer to a common ground, which served as an objective foundation for the critique of the philosophies of his time. In order to demonstrate this, I will first analyze some texts from the Jena period, and then focus on the *Encyclopedic Logic*.

In a famous passage from the *Preface* of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel unambiguously declares that philosophy is scientific and that truth should be seen as a systematic whole: "The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science [...] – that is what I have set myself to do." (GW 9, 11) It has to be noted from the outset that he defines the scientific and systematic character of philosophy in a far more radical way than his contemporaries, e. g. Kant and Fichte. In the first, programmatic part of the so-called *Differenzschrift* (1801) Hegel summarizes his radical views on the nature of philosophy as follows: "In this self-production of Reason the Absolute shapes itself into an objective totality, which is a whole in itself held fast and complete, having no ground outside itself, but founded by itself in its beginning, middle and end." (GW 4, 30 f.) For obvious