

Zhengyu Sun

A Philosophical Critique of Thought

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An Introduction by Tom Rockmore

Since this is a long, detailed book, it will perhaps suffice to provide no more than a short introduction.

Who is Prof. Sun Zhengyu and what does he think? The answer to the first question is that Sun is a distinguished contemporary Chinese student of philosophy and the social sciences. The answer to the second question is that he holds an original Marxist view that plays a distinctive role within the broad series of views that currently constitute Chinese Marxism.

Sun Zhengyu (b. 1946) is a Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Social Sciences at Jilin University and the Director of Center for Fundamentals of Philosophy, which is one of the Key Centers of Humanities and Social Sciences under the Ministry of Education; member of the Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth CPPCC National Committee; member of the Advisory Committee of the National Philosophy and Social Sciences Experts; member of Social Sciences Commission of the Ministry of Education; and served as Director of the Education Committee of philosophy of the Ministry of Education, Chairman of the philosophy society of Jilin Province, and Director of the academic committee of Jilin University.

Representative works: *On Philosophy, Critique of Premises of Theory Thinking, Research on Marxist Fundamentals (2 Volumes), Times in Thoughts, A Lofty Position, Philosophical Essays of Sun Zhengyu (9 Volumes), Research on Marxist Dialectics, Monographic Studies on Contemporary Chinese Marxist Philosophy, Our Spiritual Home,* and *A Philosophical Critique of Thought, History of Contemporary Chinese Philosophy since Reform and Opening (1978–2009)*. He has published more than 300 papers in journals and newspapers, including *Social Sciences in China* and *Philosophical Researches* and 28 papers were reprinted by *Xinhua Digest*.

He was awarded the title of “National Advanced Worker,” the first award of “National Famous Teacher,” the first nomination award of “National Teaching Model,” Chinese National Book Award, China Outstanding Publication Award, and “Lifetime Achievement Award” of Jilin University (Livon). Sun Zhengyu’s academic and teaching achievements are successively reported by CCTV, *People’s*

Daily, Guangming Daily, China Education Newspaper, China Social Science Today, China University Education Newspaper, Philosophical Trends, and other press and media.

After these sparse comments on who Prof. Sun is, I come to a series of only slightly more developed comments on his philosophical commitments. Contemporary China arose and continues to build on the great Chinese revolution. China is officially Marxist and contemporary Chinese thought centers on working out the distinctive series of interrelated views that compose Chinese Marxism.

Marxism arose in the middle of the nineteenth century in the views of Marx and Engels. Marx and Engels influenced each other in the process of working out a series of views intended to bring about the transition from capitalism to communism. This view is set out in a number of texts they wrote individually as well as together, supposedly beginning with *The German Ideology*, a work whose origins are not clear, and perhaps most influentially in “*The Communist Manifesto*.”

Marx and Engels both clearly claim to hold the same view that arose through their interactions over more than 40 years. The view in question came increasingly to be called Marxism, in virtue of Engels’ celebration of what are often Marx’s views or his reading of Marx’s views.

Marxism differs in different times and places. Marx notoriously said on more than one occasion that he was not a Marxist. This claim suggests that there are differences, even significant differences between Marx and Engels’ views. In itself, this is not surprising since different writers routinely differ in working out even the most closely associated views.

Marxism favors a kind of historical contextualism. According to Hegel, theories arise within and depend on their surrounding context. Marxism, as Karl Korsch points out, is a product of and clearly dependent on its historical circumstances.¹ For contingent historical reasons, what is called Marxism today is largely, even mainly due to the influence of Engels in the continuing reception of Marx’s theories as well as his own contribution in working out and applying them.

Each of us is a child of a historical moment. Marxism routinely stresses a unified view of the views of Marx and Engels mainly for political reasons that it will be helpful to distinguish. For present purposes, it will be useful to distinguish briefly between Marx’s views, Engels’ views, the publication of Marx’s writings, Lenin’s reception of them and later, post-Leninist Marxism.

This fivefold distinction calls attention to the particular circumstances in which Marxism emerged. Marx wrote voluminously but, unlike Engels, only rarely published any of his writings. There are many different views of Marxism that depend for their meaning on the proverbial eye of the beholder. Though he did not often complete his texts, either because as Engels said Marx was more gifted, or for whatever other reason, Marx’s views are mainly known today under the routinely cited but obscure heading of Marxism. Marx’s views became known in his lifetime through two main ways. On the one hand, there is Engels’ unceasing effort to deflect attention from his own views in favor of calling attention to Marx’s ideas.

¹See [1].

On the other hand, there is the fact that when Lenin came to power he steadfastly promoted Marx's known views that included *Capital* I but not such crucial texts that, though Marx had in the meantime died, were still not published, such as the *Paris Manuscripts* and the *Grundrisse*, and so on. For these reasons, in the short period, when Lenin was in power before his early death Marxism that was in power after the October Revolution mainly arose in following Engels' understanding of Marx's views, for instance, in *Ludwig Feuerbach and Classical German Philosophy*, as well as his own contributions to it.

The Leninist interpretation of Marxism resulted in a turning toward Engels not only as Marx's literary executor, surely a crucial role when so many of Marx's texts did not appear during his lifetime, in any case as the main interpreter of Marxism. The turn toward Engels that arose during Lenin's period at the political helm was discussed and criticized but never later revoked.

Post-Leninist Marxism includes two main strands that are already clear in the struggle in the Soviet Union in the 1920s between the mechanists associated with Akselrod and the dialecticians who were clustered around Deborin. The mechanists, who included a number of natural scientists, relied on a causal interpretation of cognition in refuting a dialectical approach. The dialecticians distanced themselves from a causal interpretation of cognition in distantly following Hegel. Needless to say, like so many other Marxist disputes, the struggle between the Deborinists and the mechanists ended with the brief and hollow victory of the dialecticians. This victory was brief because it was proclaimed in 1929 and then quickly reversed in 1931 when Yudin and Mitin accused the dialecticians of idealism after which both sides were condemned.

The struggle between the mechanists and the dialecticians was, however, significant in at least two ways. One way was the influence it had on the rise of Chinese Marxism well before the victory of the Chinese Revolution. The other was the relation of Chinese Marxism to the Leninist variety of Marxism. In a famous reference in *Capital*, Marx suggested that he was a Hegelian, not an anti-Hegelian, and by implication, since Hegel was a philosopher, his own theory was, as he indicated in the "Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach," an effort to rely on philosophy in a new, in principle more fruitful way to change the world.

Though, as noted, Marx and Engels, perhaps for political reasons, consistently claim to have the same view, in *Capital* Marx clearly claims to be a Hegelian, hence a philosopher. The situation is different for Engels, an anti-Hegelian, who never claims to be a philosopher and who was active in the middle of the nineteenth century during the post-Hegelian turn away from classical idealism that is away from pre-scientific philosophy and toward post-philosophical science. Engels, who was influenced by the turn from philosophy to science, has obvious positivist leanings. Like Comte, the creator of positivism, Engels inclines toward a reliance on science to solve social problems. A consistent commitment to science instead of philosophy runs throughout Engels' writings like a red thread throughout Engels' writings, including his early interest in Schelling's research on natural science, and his very late interest in Darwinism. This turn away from philosophy to science as the way to solve the problems of philosophy is pellucid in the infamous suggestion

later pilloried by Lukács, otherwise all too often confined to the then current view of Marxist political orthodoxy, that the thing in itself that he depicts as the central problem of philosophy can easily be disposed of through praxis and industry.²

Following Engels, the suggestion that the problems of philosophy can be solved or resolved through Marxism understood as science is a frequent Marxist theme. Engels, who left the Gymnasium without graduating to work in the family business, never studied philosophy formally. Though masked his grasp of the tradition through his graceful writing style, he was never more than distantly aware of even the main philosophical views. Sun, who is a Marxist in the Engelsian vein, differs from most other Marxists in the wide and confident breadth of his grasp, not only of Marxism, but also, which is unusual in Marxism, to a wide swath of the Western philosophical tradition.

In comparison, Marx's grasp of the Western philosophical tradition, especially German idealism, is strong. Marx took a Ph.D. in philosophy only 10 years after Hegel passed from the scene, when the latter was still an important presence in the philosophical debate. He forged his first philosophical arms in seeking, as Heidegger would say, to dialog with the German idealist thinker on his own level. Yet Engels and most other Marxists, with the obvious exception of Lukács, often do not know nearly enough about Hegel from whom they routinely turn away without attempting to come to grips with Hegel whom they mainly tend to ignore.

Hegel consistently sees the problems of philosophy as yielding to nothing other than philosophy. Hegel thinks Western philosophy begins in Parmenides' view of the identity of thought (or thinking) and being. In both the *Encyclopedia Logic* as well as in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel takes a typical philosophical route in contending that philosophy turns as he obscurely reports in sybilline language the Idea. "The Idea is what is true in and for itself, the absolute unity of Concept and objectivity."³ Sun, who takes a post-philosophical turn, suggests that the problem of the unity of thought and being is finally solved not by Hegel but, following Engels, by Marxism. "The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being."⁴

Sun is a Marxist, albeit of an unusual kind. In generalizing, one can say that most Marxists, including Chinese students of Marx and Marxism begin from an only rarely articulated assumption. They assume without proof that though Marx begins his intellectual journey in responding to Hegel, Marxists do not need to know more than the most minimal things about it since the former overcomes the latter. One consequence is that few Marxists, including Chinese Marxists, have more than a minimal grasp of Hegel, whose view they summarily reject, but with which they are not well acquainted. This practice results in significant distortion, such as Marxist claims to overcome Hegel based on an approach to Hegel through Marx. Thus, Zhang Shi-ying, clearly one of the few very best Chinese Hegel scholars, has no

²See [2].

³See [3].

⁴Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, in *Marx-Engels Collected Writings*, vol. 26, part 2: "Materialism".

hesitation in reading Hegel through Marxism.⁵ Sun, on the contrary, differs from most Marxists in his very good grasp of and respect for the main figures, concerns, and theories in the Western tradition.

In Sun's formulation, Western philosophy and Marxism do not run independently of one another but intersect in relation to the crucial theme of the relation of thought and being. Marxists, who have in mind distinctions relative to capitalism, routinely draw attention to a basic distinction between so-called bourgeois and proletarian thought. The problem is the Marxist form of the ancient philosophical theme of the relation between thought and being that runs throughout the entire Western tradition. This problem occurs for the first time in Parmenides, who claims that thought and being are the same in creating the initially recognizable form of what later became Western philosophy.

Orthodox Marxism, with exceptions, adopts and builds on Engels' reactions to Marx's views. We have already seen that Lukács was critical of Engels when he wrote *History and Class Consciousness*, where he defended an unorthodox form of Marxism. In that book, the Hungarian Marxist seeks to solve what he depicts as the central problem of philosophy through so-called proletarian thought. Sun, who is comparatively more orthodox, follows Engels' view that "The great basic question of all philosophy, especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being."⁶

Engels' statement of what he regards as the central problem of philosophy is neutral. He characterizes it as concerning the relation of thought and being but does not describe that relation. It remains, then, unclear if Sun, who refers often to Engels' view of the philosophy as turning on the relation of thought and being, is concerned with the relation of thought and being in general, their supposed identity to which Parmenides appeals, the a priori construction on which Kant in his Copernican revolution rests his case, or some form of the Hegelian construction of their identity.

Now Kant claims in the so-called Copernican revolution in philosophy, a term he never uses to refer to his own position but that has become routine in the debate, that we do not and cannot grasp a mind-independent object. He anticipates and clearly denies Engels' view that the problem of knowledge, especially the orthodox Marxist form of the view featured in the anti-Kantian reflection theory of knowledge, or the view that cognition is finally only possible through grasping the world as it is, in a word through materialism.

Engels is a materialist. His materialism is obvious in his commitment to the empiricist claim that cognition is based on a direct apprehension of the world as it is. Materialism takes many forms beginning in ancient philosophy in the philosophers of nature Marx discusses in his dissertation and continuing right up to the present. The supposed advantage of materialism lies in the suggestion that it goes beyond mere representations or other ideas to grasp the world. This view is problematic since, as Hegel points out, the suggestion that we grasp "matter" does

⁵See [4].

⁶Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy??*

not demonstrate the Marxist materialist claim to know something concrete. It rather indicates that we know something abstract, since, as Hegel points out, “matter is itself already something abstract which cannot be perceived as such.”⁷

Sun, following Engels, subscribes on behalf of Marxism to a form of the view that, for instance, Kant rejects. It is the considerable achievement of Sun’s book that, though firmly in the Marxist camp, he brings together his detailed reading of Marxism as well as Western philosophy in all its many forms in working out his position. It is now up to the readers of Sun’s treatise to make up their own mind as to whose view to follow in reading this book!

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⁷See Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, §38, p. 79.

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An Introduction by Zhengyu Sun

⁸What manner of civilization should modern humans forge? On what developmental path should a nation embark? What lifestyle should each individual choose? These are the most fundamental issues of our time. Profoundly implicit in the choices outlined above is a deeper question: What are the criteria of choice? An examination of these criteria is a reflection on the premises constituting⁹ thought, or a critique of the premises underlying thought. Using a ‘critique of the premises underlying thought’ as the basic idea and hermeneutic principle in philosophy¹⁰ will open a wider theoretical space for contemporary philosophy so as to avoid the predicament of being ‘pseudo-scientific’ or ‘pseudo-artistic.’ It will also present contemporary philosophy with a realistic path of development for the task of reflecting on the criteria of choice.

This book, *A Philosophical Critique of Thought*, is mainly concerned with elaborating an account of the unique theoretical essence and activities of philosophy. It seeks to formulate concrete philosophical arguments for a critique of the basic beliefs, logic, modes, concepts, and philosophical ideas which constitute thought, with the aim of demonstrating the vigorous self-critique and inexhaustible theoretical space found in philosophical development. This book will provide a new principle of interpretation for understanding philosophy, and, in turn, will use this principle to develop a critique of the premises underlying thought, thereby furthering the contemporary development of philosophy.

⁸We would like to thank Editage (<https://www.editage.cn>) for English language editing of this book. We would like to thank Dr. Eleanor Ryan-Saha’s proofreading of the manuscript.

⁹‘Constituting,’ synonymous with ‘forming,’ is employed here as a translation that is faithful to the author’s original term.

¹⁰‘Philosophy’ in this work is not understood in the morphological sense, and therefore is not conceived with recourse to categories such as Chinese Philosophy, European Philosophy and the Philosophy of India. Rather, philosophy is taken to mean the basic rules of things. As such philosophy is fundamentally different from other disciplines, such as literature and science. Based on Hegel’s discussion of the relation between thought and being, the author further proposes that philosophy is a critique of the premises underlying the identity of thought and being.

This book encompasses a critique of the premises underlying thought, which mainly includes the basic beliefs, logic, modes, concepts, and philosophical ideas constituting thought. Such a critique should comprise five aspects: first, the basic beliefs constituting thought propose a critique of the identity of thought and being; second, the basic logic constituting thought refers to a critique of the formal, intensional, and practical logic of thought; third, the basic modes constituting thought denote a critique of the basic modes by which humans comprehend the world, including commonsense, religion, art, and science; fourth, the basic concepts constituting thought entail a critique centering on being, the world, history, truth, value, and other basic concepts; and finally, the philosophical ideas constituting thought indicate a critique of philosophy itself. A critique aligned on these five aspects will provide a general philosophical overview of the premise critique of thought.

A Critique of the Basic Beliefs Underlying Thought

The assertion that “our subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws”¹¹ is the basic belief constituting thought. Therefore, a critique of these ‘basic beliefs’ is a direct critique of the “unconscious and unconditional premise for our theoretical thought,”¹² as well as a critique of the basic question of philosophy itself—the question of the relation between thought and being. A critique of the underlying premises of the basic modes, ideas, and logic of thought constructed by philosophy itself implicitly contains the critique of the basic beliefs of the thought so constructed. This implies that the question of the relation of thought and being is the cardinal and fundamental question of philosophy itself. Therefore, a critique of the underlying premises of thought should first involve a critique of the basic beliefs that constitute thought, in other words, a critique of the identity of thought and being.

In understanding the relation between thought and being, it is necessary to critically reflect on two basic ideas: first, on abstract identity, and second, on the abstract opposition of thought and being. These two ideas are polar opposites, but are also connected. The abstract opposition of thought and being is implicit in the abstract identity of thought and being. Its concrete manifestations are as follows: On a sensory level, the abstract identity of image and object implicitly contains the abstract opposition between the image that arises in different subjects and the object. On a rational level, the abstract identity of representation and thought implicitly contains the abstract opposition between representations in different subjects and thought. On the level of value, the abstract identity of ‘is’ and ‘ought’ implicitly contains the abstract opposition of value judgments in different subjects. On the level of laws, the abstract identity of thought and being implicitly contains the abstract opposition between the laws of thought and being. Abstract identity and opposition are the opposing ‘thesis’ and ‘antithesis’ of thought. A critique starting

¹¹Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. (1987). *Collected Works, Volume 25: Engels: Dialectics of Nature*. (Clemens Dutt Trans.). New York: International Publishers, p. 544.

¹²*Ibid.*

from the thesis and progressing to the antithesis is then a critique that begins from the abstract identity of thought and being and progresses to a critique centering on the abstract opposition of thought and being. It is precisely a critique of the abstract identity and opposition of thought and being that has shaped the historical progression from the logical to the historical identity of thought and being, thus continually deepening the critique of the basic beliefs that constitute thought.

A Critique of the Basic Logic Underlying Thought

Fundamentally speaking, the question of the relation between thought and being is a question of the relation between the laws of thought and the laws of being; in other words, it seeks to determine whether thought and being 'are subject to the same laws.' Therefore, a philosophical critique of the premises underlying thought not only points toward a critique focused on the basic beliefs of the identity of thought and being, but also toward a critique of the basic logic constituting thought, i.e. the laws of thought. This concretely manifests itself as a critique of the premises of the extensional, as well as the intensional logic and the practical basis of thought. To be specific, in the thought activities of humans, concepts are not merely the 'cells' that constitute these activities. Rather, as Lenin put it, they are the 'ladder' and 'scaffolding' of understanding. The basic logic that constitutes thought includes the extensional or formal logic, which is constructed by the extension of concepts; the intensional logic or dialectic, constructed by the intension of concepts; and the practical or life logic, constructed by the practical basis of concepts. Hence, a critique focused on the basic logic that constitutes thought should mainly consist of a critique of formal, dialectical, and practical logic.

A Critique of the Basic Modes Underlying Thought

The thought activities of humans are not only subject to the laws of thought, but also comprise our thoughts about the world constructed through the various modes on the basis of which we comprehend the world. Common sense, religion, art, science, and philosophy mediate the real relations with the world that are formed based on the practical activities of humans. In other words, they are the basic methods by which humans 'grasp' the world. All human thoughts are constructed through the various modes by which humans comprehend the world. Therefore, a philosophical critique of the underlying premises of thought should necessarily include a critique of the basic modes that constitute thought.

The basic modes by which we comprehend the world immediately provide us with a variety of rich worldviews, for they are themselves the different modes by which we comprehend the world. These basic modes not only provide humans with a variety of worldviews, but can also determine our ways of thinking and the values and norms of our thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, as the fundamental ways of comprehending the world, the three-fold intensions of worldview, mode of thinking and value norms constitute the object of the reflective and philosophical thinking. Regarding the implications for the premise critique of thought, it is especially important that a philosophical critique of the underlying premises of the basic modes by which humans comprehend the world involves a critique of the premises

of this conceptual framework and its three levels: commonsense, science, and philosophy. In the critique of this three-level conceptual framework, new ladders and scaffolding will be constructed concerning the history of human civilization, and, further, the historical transformation of the human worldview, modes of thought, and value norms will be realized.

A Critique of the Basic Concepts Underlying Thought

The premises constituting thought not only encompass the basic beliefs, logic, and modes constituting thought, but are also more universally presented as the basic concepts that constitute thought. They include the basic concepts of being, the world, history, truth, and value, that humans require to construct thought. The critique of the basic concepts that constitute thought will reveal the openness and breadth of the ideological space uncovered by a philosophical critique of the underlying premises of thought.

Within the theoretical space of the critique of thought, the premises of thought with their immediate fecundity and historicity are precisely the basic concepts that constitute thought. However, the critique of the basic concepts constituting thought in this book has three constraints. The first is selectivity, which signifies a constraint on the critique of the specific basic concepts constituting thought; the second is historicity, which denotes a constraint on the critique of the basic concepts achieved in our time; and the third is ‘opinionated-ness’, which refers to a constraint on the critique of the basic concepts that the author comprehends in our time. Collectively, these demonstrate that the critique of the premises underlying thought is an ongoing philosophical activity that is still in progress, rather than an established philosophical theory.

A Critique of the Philosophical Ideas Underlying Thought

Hidden within the thoughts of each age are the basic ideas that compose them, and which resonate deeply as the philosophical ideas of the age. Therefore, a philosophical critique of the underlying premises of thought is not merely a critique of the basic beliefs, logic, modes, and concepts constituting thought; rather, it also points toward a critique of its deeper philosophical ideas.

A critique of the philosophical ideas that constitute thought points directly to a premise, or a critique of philosophy itself. This mainly encompasses reflections on several key questions such as the basic questions of philosophy, metaphysics, the history of philosophy, and the spirit of the time (*Zeitgeist*). This means that the critique of the basic philosophical ideas that constitute thought should include an examination of the premises of basic beliefs about life, an exploration of the basis of empirical knowledge, a reflection on the scale of historical progress, and an inquiry into the criteria for evaluating truth, goodness, and beauty. This will enable the transformation of our worldviews, modes of thought, value concepts, aesthetic tastes, and our entire way of life, thus shaping and guiding a new *Zeitgeist*. A critique of the underlying premises of philosophy is a critique of the bases and principles constituting thought itself. Hence, it necessarily points toward the core ideas that regulate human thoughts and behaviors, i.e., a critique of our worldviews.

That is the most direct and appropriate entry point into the theoretical essence of philosophy, and therefore into the development of a critique of the premises of philosophy.

The crux of this book is to propose a principle of interpretation for the comprehension of philosophy, that is, in positing philosophy as a critique of the underlying premises of thought. This will reveal the special theoretical essence and unique social functions of philosophy, while also demonstrating the vigorous, infinite theoretical space inherent in the self-critique of philosophical development. The critique of the underlying premises of thought has been divided here into five categories, which have been endowed with new connotations to provide relevant scaffolds for our discussion: worldview, ontology, reflective thinking, representation, and critique. The conceptual framework constructed through the interdependence of these categories forms the totality of the interpretative principle and the narrative logic of this book. In concrete terms, ‘worldview’ refers to the thoughts concerning the entire world formed by individuals, that is, not from a perspective external to the world, but through the eyes of individuals in their lives and on their paths. ‘Ontology’ does not refer to the ‘noumena’ that constitute the world, but to the basis, criteria, and standards of human thought and behavior; hence, it is the soul of worldview theory. ‘Reflective thinking’ does not refer to the general meaning of repeated deliberation, but instead reveals the ontology composed of the various premises of thought and behavior; hence, it is the mode of thought for analytical thinking or thought-analysis in philosophy. ‘Representation’ does not refer to statements of empirical facts, or the expression of emotions and will, but rather to the manifestation of the *Zeitgeist* and the living soul of civilization; hence, it reflects a mode of existence of philosophy in which the theories of being, truth, and value are consistent. A critique is neither a vain refutation, nor a speculative introspection, but rather a reflection on the history of human civilization through conceptual critique and terminological revolution; hence, it is the mode of operation by which a philosophical inquiry into the constitution of thought is accomplished. The ontological reflection and representation performed through critique encompasses the perspective of individuals in their lives and on their paths—their worldviews.

It should be emphasized that the critique of thought presented in this book is a form of reflective thinking that regards thought itself as the object of thought. However, defining ‘reflective thinking’ in philosophical terms as a critique of the underlying premises of thought does not refer to the general meaning of ‘thinking about thinking’; rather, it means to regard the bases constituting thought as the object of critique. Since reflective thinking in philosophy has been defined as a critique of the underlying premises of thought, philosophy should not simply be differentiated from the different modes by which humans comprehend the world in terms of its theoretical essence, research object, and social functions. Rather, it should fundamentally transform the philosophical meaning of worldview, ontology, and the other basic concepts. Ontology in philosophy is not the origin, essence, or primal nature that underlies all things; nor is it the idea or logic that determines them; it is the basis, criteria, and standards that govern human thoughts and behaviors. Ontology, which is determined by histories and epochs, also has infinite and ultimate directivity.

Hence, it is neither absolutely absolute, nor absolutely relative, but is relatively absolute: the relativity of historical significance and absoluteness of epochal significance. A worldview with ontological concepts at its heart is not a naturally occurring and unconstrained non-human perspective, but rather the perspective of humans in their lives and on their chosen paths. In this sense, a critique of the underlying premises of thought is a critical reflection on such a perspective—a critique of the underlying premises of a worldview.

The critique of the underlying premises of thought presented in this book stems directly from the interpretation of a thesis propounded by Engels, which is as follows: “The fact that our subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws, and hence, too, that in the final analysis they cannot contradict each other in their results, but must coincide, governs absolutely our whole theoretical thought. It is the unconscious and unconditional premise for our theoretical thought.”¹³ In all human activities beyond philosophy, the entirety of thought about the world is constructed based on the commitment to this premise, whereas the mission of philosophy is to reflect on this premise and critically examine the entirety of thoughts about the world. Marx uses this ‘revolutionary and critical’ dialectic to present a dual critique of abstract reason and existence, and, further, a ‘ruthless criticism of everything existing.’ Therefore, Marxist philosophy has truly become “the intellectual quintessence of its time” and “the living soul of culture.”¹⁴ In this sense, Marxist philosophy is a model for a critique of the underlying premises of thought, and also a theoretical source for deepening our critique thereof; and, in what follows, this book will present a specific in-depth elaboration of the critique of thought by Marxist philosophy.

The critique of the underlying premises of thought presented by this book is a philosophical activity that is still in progress, and not a completed philosophical theory. As such, it endeavours to accomplish three tasks: first, to demonstrate why philosophical activity is a critique of thought; second, to elucidate the theoretical space found in the philosophical critique of the underlying premises of thought; and, finally, to conduct a selective, case-by-case critique of the basic beliefs that constitutes thought. Specifically, the primary question that will be explored and discussed in this book is, ‘why is philosophical activity a critique of the premises of thought?’, or conversely, ‘why is the critique of the premises of thought a truly philosophical activity?’ The reason for exploring and discussing this primary question is rather simple: The ways of understanding philosophy have differed dramatically throughout history. Understanding philosophy as the critique of thought requires systematic and in-depth elaboration and discussion. I hope to persuasively and insightfully discuss a possible mode of activity in philosophy, thereby clearing a fascinating and exploratory theoretical space for contemporary philosophical activity. This is my greatest expectation for this work, and also my greatest comfort in life.

¹³Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 544.

¹⁴Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. (1975). *Collected Works, Volume 1: Marx: The Leading Article in No. 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung* (Clemens Dutt Trans.). London: Lawrence & Wishart, p. 195.

Chapter 1

A Critique of the Basic Beliefs Underlying Thought



The premises underlying thought principally include the basic beliefs, modes, logic, concepts, and philosophical ideas that constitute thought. A critique of the underlying premises of the basic beliefs that constitute thought is our primary task in critiquing the premises underlying thought.

Basic beliefs bolster our confidence that “our subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws.”¹ They are the “unconscious and unconditional premise for our theoretical thought”;² and it is precisely by holding these basic beliefs that humans are able to dynamically understand and transform the world, and to strive to convert reality into their ideal world. Nevertheless, the manner by which to view these basic beliefs and unconscious and unconditional premises is a fundamental problem that humans have always faced in their cognitive and practical activities; it is implicit in the basic modes, logic, concepts, and philosophical ideas that constitute thought, and is the unconscious and unconditional premise found at the deepest level of thought. Therefore, a critique of the underlying premises of thought should first involve a critique of the basic beliefs constituting thought, that is, a critique of the identity of thought and being.

In the history of philosophy, the basic beliefs constituting thought, i.e., the identity of thought and being, can be summarized as the intermingling between diachronic and synchronic identities in the forms of the abstract, logical, and historical identities of thought and being. Therefore, I will perform a critique of the underlying premises of the basic beliefs constituting thought based on these three forms.

¹Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 544.

²Ibid.

1 The Abstract Identity of Thought and Being

The most universal and naive unconscious premise that humans hold concerning their basic beliefs is the unconscious assumption of a direct connection between thought and being, i.e., the assumption of the abstract identity of thought and being. Therefore, a critique of the basic beliefs constituting thought should first involve a critique of the abstract identity of thought and being.

The abstract identity of thought and being is the non-reflective view of the relation between thought and being, which directly commits us to the identity of thought and being. This concretely manifests as two basic modes of thought: representational thought, which considers an object in an objective or intuitive mode of thought, and constitutes the so-called intuitive reflection theory; and formal thought, which considers the relation of thought and existence in a pure form that is detached from content, and which constitutes so-called formal reasoning. I will critique the premises underlying these two abstract identities in turn.

1.1 *Representational Thought: The Intuitive Reflection of Abstract Identity*

Concerning the identity of thought and being, the most universal and frequent manner by which humans raise questions is by asking ‘is it or is it not?’ That is to say, if I am certain of the existence of an object in my mind, that is, the existence of a specific object, and if this object does exist in reality and is indeed the specific object, then we can confirm the identity of thought and being. The identity of ‘is’ and ‘it is,’ like the identity of ‘image’ and ‘object’ on a sensory level, are the “sense-certainty”³ described by Hegel. Therefore, we will base our critique of the identity of thought and being on intuitive reflection s on Hegel’s reflective thoughts regarding sense-certainty.

The first chapter of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a reflection on sense-certainty. In the very beginning, he raises the following question in a direct and straightforward manner: “The knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or what simply *is*. Our approach to the object must also be *immediate* or *receptive*; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In *apprehending* it, we must refrain from trying to *comprehend* it.”⁴ This statement has two levels of meaning: Firstly, our knowledge is concerned with knowledge of immediate or existing objects. Secondly, we adopt an immediate or receptive stance regarding the object and knowledge of the object without allowing conceptual

³Hegel [2], p. 58.

⁴Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 58.

comprehension into our apprehension. Hegel posited that this knowledge, which is there at the start or is immediately formed by our object, is sense-certainty.

Hegel uses the word ‘appear’ twice to summarize our understanding of sense-certainty. First, he writes that “sense-certainty immediately appears as the *richest* kind of knowledge, indeed a knowledge of infinite wealth”⁵; then, “sense-certainty appears to be the *truest* knowledge; for it has not as yet omitted anything from the object, but has the object before it in its perfect entirety.”⁶ However, precisely because it ‘appears to be’ and is not ‘certain,’ Hegel changes course, pointing out that, “in the event, this very *certainty* proves itself to be the most abstract and poorest *truth*.”⁷ Therefore, why is sense-certainty, which ‘appears to be’ the richest and truest, actually the most abstract and poorest truth?

According to Hegel, “All that it says about what it knows is just that it *is*; and its truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing [*Sache*].”⁸ On the other hand, “consciousness, for its part, is in this certainty only as a pure ‘I’.”⁹ Therefore, “I am in it only as a pure ‘This’, and the object similarly only as a pure ‘This’.”¹⁰ The above indicates that the identity of thought and being in sense-certainty is merely the identity of the two ‘Thises,’ which is also the identity of the pure ‘This’ as ‘I’ and the other ‘This’ as object.¹¹ In this regard, Hegel makes the profound point that the identity of the pure ‘Thises’ excludes the richest and truest content in two aspects: First, “I am certain of *this* particular thing, not because I, *qua* consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways.”¹² Thus, this particular ‘I’ in sense-certainty is not the richest and truest, but the most abstract and poorest. Second, “I, *qua* consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways; and also not because *the thing* of which I am certain, in virtue of a host of distinct qualities, would be in its own self a rich complex of connections, or related in various ways to other things.”¹³ Thus, this particular ‘thing’ in sense-certainty is, similarly, not the richest and truest, but the most abstract and poorest, precisely because the ‘I’ and ‘the thing’—and thought and being in sense-certainty—are the most abstract and poorest. Therefore, the truth in sense-certainty, composed of this pure immediacy, can only ‘appear to be’ the richest and truest, while, in essence, it is the most abstract and poorest. Profoundly thinking and experiencing the contradictions of rich and poor and concrete and abstract in sense-certainty is instructive for our cognition of the essence of representational thought and intuitive reflection theory, and useful for the dialectical thinking of the analysis of contradictory negation at the beginning of our philosophical thought.

⁵Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 58.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 59.

¹²Ibid., p. 58.

¹³Ibid.

It is worth pondering the fact that Hegel's analysis of sense-certainty is not only limited to its essence of being the most abstract and poorest; it also reveals the inherent contradictions of sense-certainty, and serves as a solid starting point for his entire contradictory analysis with regard to cognition. Hegel states that sense-certainty splits the two "Thises, one 'This' as 'I,' and the other 'This' as object. When we reflect on this difference, we find that neither one nor the other is only *immediately* present in sense-certainty, but each is at the same time *mediated*: I have this certainty *through* something else, viz. the thing; and it, similarly, is in sense-certainty *through* something else, viz. through the 'I'."¹⁴

Sense-certainty is established based on the relation between the 'I' and the 'thing'. Thus, the thing cannot be comprehended apart from the I, while the I cannot be comprehended separately from the thing. Therefore, Hegel proposes that "To this end, we have not to reflect on [the object] and ponder what it might be in truth, but only to consider the way in which it is present in sense-certainty."¹⁵ In this way, Hegel transforms the discussion from thinking simply about existence outside of the consciousness to reflective-thinking about existence inside of the consciousness. Furthermore, he highlights the inherent contradictions of cognition, thereby approaching human cognition from the contradictory relation between thought and being, instead of intuitively from the relation between object and image. In so doing, Hegel reveals the essence of representational thought: "That habit should be called material thinking, a contingent consciousness that is absorbed only in material stuff, and therefore finds it hard work to lift the [thinking] self clear of such matter, and to be with itself alone."¹⁶

It is precisely by revealing the most abstract and poorest aspects of the richest and truest sense-certainty that Hegel uncovers the inherent contradictions of cognition and knowledge, thereby also exposing the abstract identity of thought and being found in the essence of representational thought. This implies that, at the start of his philosophical thinking, Hegel had already formed a theoretical self-consciousness with consistent views of dialectic, epistemology, and logic, thence also providing future generations with a dialectical epistemology concerned with the analysis of contradictory negation. This suggests that Lenin's statement that "Dialectics is the theory of knowledge of (Hegel and) Marxism,"¹⁷ is not only been asserted by Hegel in his *Science of Logic*, but is also discussed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* when the inherent contradictions of sense-certainty are presented at the beginning of his discourse.

Hegel's critique of representational thought, in philosophical terms, is directed at the old materialist way of thinking. Representational thought is not merely the simple way people think, but the entire mode of thought in materialist thinking. In other words, it is precisely the mode of thought in the old materialism, which theoretically represents people's simple ways of thinking. As stated by Marx, "The chief

¹⁴Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 59.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁷Lenin [3], p. 360.

defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object*, or of *contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively.”¹⁸ Here, ‘conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation’ refers to the intuitive reflection theory of the old materialism, which has representational thought as its essence. Marx’s emphasis that it is not conceived ‘as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively’ indicates his practical reflection on representational thought and intuitive reflection theory, which has representational thought as its essence. Marx adopts a mode of thought with a practical viewpoint in his criticism of the old materialism, profoundly demonstrating the true line of inheritance, not to mention the revolutionary relationship, between Marxism and classical German philosophy.

Regarding the intuitive reflection theory of old materialism, Engels points to the unconscious and unconditional premise of theoretical thought when he writes, “Eighteenth century materialism, owing to its essentially metaphysical character, investigated this premise only as regards content. It restricted itself to the proof that the content of all thought and knowledge must derive from sensuous experience, and revived the principle: *nihil est in intellectu, quod non prius fuerit in sensu* [nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the sense].”¹⁹ Engels’s argument clearly reveals the limitations of the old materialism in addressing the question concerning the relation of thought and being: that is, in only approaching the relation of thought and being in terms of content and not form, and only recognizing that content originates from sensuous experience. By failing to approach the unconscious and unconditional premise underlying theoretical thought from the contradictory negation of content and form, **it** does not critically reflect the premise from the relation of thought and being. Therefore, the intuitive reflection theory of thought can only provide the abstract identity of thought and being conceived by representational thought. This demonstrates that in both the critique of old materialism and the inherited critique of classical German philosophy, Marx and Engels are extremely consistent.

2 Formal Thought: The Abstract Identity of Formal Reasoning

In his reflections on representational thought, Hegel also reflects critically on another thought, namely formal reasoning. He clearly indicates that its essence is the “freedom from all content, and a sense of vanity toward it.”²⁰ This is the abstract identity of thought and being, which results from the ‘pure’ mode of thought due to the ‘detachment from content.’

¹⁸Marx and Engels [4], p. 3.

¹⁹Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp. 544–545.

²⁰Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 35.

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's criticisms of formal reasoning are mentioned under the 'Demands of the Study of Philosophy,' and unfold in comparison with philosophical thought, i.e., speculative thought. Hence, they have specific purposes and connotations. Hegel makes the point that:

Philosophy is frequently taken to be a purely formal kind of knowledge, void of content, and the insight is sadly lacking that, whatever truth there may be in the content of any discipline or science, it can only deserve the name if such truth has been engendered by philosophy. Let the other sciences try to argue as much as they like without philosophy—without it they can have in them neither life, Spirit, nor truth.²¹

In other words, Hegel's criticism of formal reasoning is formulated in response to the view that philosophy is held to be "a purely formal kind of knowledge, void of content."²² His aim was for others to understand the 'demands of the study of philosophy,' and to alter "formalistic thinking that argues back and forth in thoughts that have no actuality."²³

Using his criticisms of formal thought as a foothold, Hegel suggests in *Science of Logic* that "this *thinking study of things* may serve, in a general way, as a description of philosophy... a mode in which thinking becomes knowledge, and knowledge through notions."²⁴ Such reflective thinking in philosophy deals with thoughts as thoughts, and strives to bring thoughts into consciousness. Precisely due to this highest aim of philosophical thinking, Hegel refutes the abstract identity of thought and being in formal reasoning, and proposes the concrete identity of thought and being, thus establishing the identity of thought and being as a law.

What are the real laws of thought? This is the starting point of Hegel's critique of formal reasoning. On the basis of the distinction between abstract and concrete identity, Hegel points out that the maxim of identity in formal logic merely points to the laws of abstract reason, and not the true laws of thought. He states that the maxim of identity is expressed as: "Everything is identical with itself, or 'A = A'." However, "the propositional form itself contradicts it: for a proposition always promises a distinction between subject and predicate; while the present one does not fulfill what its form requires."²⁵ Unlike abstract identity, concrete identity encompasses differences and possesses inherent negation. Hegel held that the identity of thought and being includes the intrinsic, existent difference in thought and being. The logic behind this thought process, which is based on the intrinsic differences in the identity of thought and being, is the renunciation in the self-negation of a notion. In this way, Hegel's criticism of formal reasoning points specifically to the premises of theoretical thought, i.e., the identity of thought and being.

Hegel's critique of formal reasoning is not only directed at its detachment from content, but is simultaneously a critique of the underlying premises of formal logic as 'known judgment.' This is the transition point from formal logic to intensional logic,

²¹Ibid., p. 41.

²²Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 41.

²³Ibid., p. 35.

²⁴Hegel [5], pp. 103–104.

²⁵Ibid., p. 267.

and in understanding the distinction between the essence of formal and dialectical logic. Hegel states that, “The notion...is certainly a form, but an infinite and creative form which includes, but at the same time releases from itself, the fullness of all content.”²⁶ He posits that the concepts or notions that constitute judgment do not have a solid or rigid existence, but represent a self-initiated development process. This is because any notion can be simultaneously affirmed and refuted, and all exist as links and mediations. The self-negation of a notion is both a negation of its nullity (such that it receives a fuller affirmation), and of its validity (such that it is then re-affirmed on a higher level of logic). Therefore, as a known judgment, formal reasoning has various premises that are not notions of abstract identity, but are notions that are constantly produced through self-negation. In Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, the self-development of notions manifests itself as the progression from being the mutual transition of notions in the immediacy of thought (theory of Being), to the mutual reflection of notions in the mediation of thought (theory of Essence), and then to the unification of the immediacy and mediation of thought in a concrete notion (theory of Notion). Hegel uses a mystical form of idealism to provide the general logic of thought activities—the logic of conceptual development. According to this, all premises of known judgment encompass negative understanding in its affirmative understanding, thereby transcending the abstract identity of thought and being, and forming the concrete identity thereof.

A critique of the abstract identity of thought and being in Marxist philosophy also points toward the law of identity in formal reasoning. Engels states:

The law of identity in the old metaphysical sense is the fundamental law of the old outlook: $a = a$. Each thing is equal to itself. Everything was permanent, the solar system, stars, organisms. This law has been refuted by natural science bit by bit in each separate case, but theoretically it still prevails... Abstract identity, like all metaphysical categories, suffices for everyday use... For natural science in its comprehensive role, however, even in each single branch, abstract identity is totally inadequate....²⁷

Clearly, Engels’s criticism of the law of identity is also a critique of the fundamental law of the old outlook; in other words, it is a demand for worldview theory to transcend abstract identity and to form a dialectical worldview theory. Lenin also points out that, “In the old logic, there is no transition, [nor] development (of concept and thought), there is not [an] ‘inner necessary connection’ of all the parts, and ‘transition’ of some parts into others.”²⁸ Based on this criticism, Lenin wholeheartedly approves of Hegel’s demand for a unified logic of content and form, and proposes that, “Logic is the science [.] not of external forms of thought, but of the laws of development ‘of all material, natural, and spiritual things’, i.e., of the development of the entire concrete content of the world and of its cognition, i.e., the sum-total, the conclusion of the *History* of knowledge of the world.”²⁹

²⁶Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, p. 324.

²⁷Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 496.

²⁸Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 38, p. 97.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

It is especially noteworthy that in comparison Lenin more clearly sublimates the critique of the old logic to a critical reflection on the relation of thought and being, and to a critical reflection on the premises of theoretical thought. Lenin asks, “If *everything* develops, does not that apply also to the most general *concepts* and *categories* of thought? If not, it means that thinking is not connected with being. If it does, it means that there is a dialectics of concepts and a dialectics of cognition which has objective significance.”³⁰ Here, Lenin connects the dialectics of the theory of the worldview with the basic question of philosophy, i.e., the premises of theoretical thought. There is no transition and development in the old logic, and dialectic is concerned with the development of logic. It is about a unified logic of thought and being, which is also a dialectic of concepts and of cognition with objective significance. For this reason, dialectic, epistemology, and logic are, as identified by Lenin, the same thing—a worldview theory regarding the question of the relation of thought and being, based on the critique of the underlying premises of theoretical thought.

Dialectical theory is the science concerned with the unification and development of thought and being. It does not regard the premises that are the known judgments of formal logic as solid, but as developing. All concepts, categories, and propositions are merely “stages of cognizing the world, focal points in the web, which assist in cognising and mastering it.”³¹ All such stages and knots in the web implicitly contain the contradictions between thought and being, and possess inherent self-negation. Hence, they constitute the logic of development of human cognition.

It should also be noted that in Engels’s and Lenin’s critiques of the abstract identity of thought and being, they place particular emphasis on the critical reflection of dialectic on the relation between the universal and particular, and between the general and specific. Engels states, “The fact that identity contains difference within itself is expressed in *every sentence*, where the predicate is necessarily different from the subject; the *lily* is a *plant*, the *rose* is *red*, where, either in the subject or in the predicate, there is something that is not covered by the predicate or the subject.”³² Lenin puts it this way:

To begin with what is the simplest, most ordinary, common, etc., with **any proposition**: the leaves of a tree are green; John is a man; Fido is a dog, etc. Here already we have *dialectics* (as Hegel’s genius recognised): the **individual** is the *universal*...the individual exists only in the connection that leads to the universal. The universal exists only in the individual and through the individual.

Thus in *any* proposition we can (and must) disclose as in a “nucleus” (“cell”) the germs of *all* the elements of dialectics, and thereby show that dialectics is a property of all human knowledge in general.³³

Through the critique of the abstract identity of thought and being in formal reasoning, we will deepen our understanding of the epistemology of contradictions, and the concrete identity of thought and being.

³⁰Ibid., p. 254.

³¹Lenin, *Lenin: Collected Works*, Vol. 38, p. 93.

³²Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 495.

³³Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 38, pp. 359–360.

3 The Logical Identity of Thought and Being

The abstract identity and abstract opposition of thought and being are two opposing poles that are also connected. That is to say, the abstract opposition of thought and being is implicit in the abstract identity of thought and being. On a sensory level, the abstract identity of image and object implicitly contains the abstract opposition between the image of different subjects and the object. On a rational level, the abstract identity of representation and thought implicitly contains the abstract opposition between the representation of different subjects and thought. On the level of value, the abstract identity of is and ought implicitly contains the abstract opposition of value judgments of different subjects. On the level of laws, the abstract identity of thought and being implicitly contains the abstract opposition between the laws of thought and of being. Abstract identity and opposition are thus the opposing thesis and antithesis of thought.

Hegel and Marx each constructed a synthesis regarding the relation of thought and being to address this question: Hegel constructed the logical identity of thought and being, which is the dialectic of idealism; while Marx constructed the historical identity of thought and being, which is his materialist dialectic and an illustration of historical materialism.

3.1 *Reflective Thinking and the Identity of Thought and Being*

Reflective thinking is ‘thinking about thinking,’ which means regarding thought itself as the object of thinking. This is Hegel’s fundamental explanation of his own reflections on speculative philosophy, the basis of which Hegel believed originates from a principle of modern philosophy—namely, that thought is not natural. This principle refers to the self-consciousness of thought concerning its non-identity with being, and the self-awareness that it does not naturally and directly follow being. It is precisely this self-consciousness of the contradiction between thought and being that highlights the cardinal and fundamental question of philosophy itself—the question of the relation of thought and being. This arises when thought regards the relation of thought and being as a question, which indicates that it is only in the reflection of thought on itself that philosophy is made aware of the question of the relation of thought and being. This implies awareness, or self-consciousness, that thinking about this question is not general but reflective thinking.

Reflective thinking exposes the secret of philosophy; it does not consist of thoughts about the world (being), but is a critique (examination) of thought about the world (being). Thought is the object of reflective thinking as well as of philosophy. With thought as its object, philosophy involves examining whether thought coincides with being. However, this type of philosophical examination is not an investigation of whether a particular concrete thought coincides with being, but of the basis for the

consistency of thought and being. This is Hegel's version: a reflection on the question of the relation between thought and being in order to provide a basis for its identity. In Hegel's view, reflecting on this question to provide a basis for the identity of thought and being is the foundation for the objectivity of all thought. For this reason, he defined philosophy as the science of truth.

In terms of its relationship with other sciences, philosophy is undoubtedly a science of science. However, Hegel explicitly regarded philosophy as the science of truth; this is not the science above all sciences criticized by later generations, but rather a science that lays the foundation for all sciences. This science of truth is not above science, but beneath it—providing a foundation on which to construct science. In this sense Hegel was not refuting, but instead was furthering Kant's philosophy, proceeding from the understanding that the work of philosophy is to lay the foundation for science, and to constantly tend to this foundation.

Regarding philosophy as the exercise of tending to the foundation of science, or as a reflection on thought, relates it directly with the ideological state of the times (that is, the scientific spirit of the times). According to Engels's summary, from the latter half of the fifteenth century to the early nineteenth century, modern natural science in Europe can, on the whole, be divided into two major stages: first, the science of collecting materials, which then developed into the science of classifying materials. During this process, mathematics was widely applied in all fields of natural science, experimental methods were generally established, and theoretical thought became increasingly important. Thus, the question about the relation of thought and being became ever more prominent, prompting such questions as, 'Is there an identity of thought and being?'; 'Does Thought possess objectivity?'; and 'How can we ensure the truth of thought?' The crux of the matter is a question that goes back at least to Kant: Are the laws of thought merely the laws by which thought comprehends being, or are thought and being subject to the same laws? If it is the former, then how can we ensure the objectivity of natural science? In concrete terms, what is the basis of mathematical axioms? What is the basis for experimental methods to distinguish the general from the particular? What is the basis for the universal laws that are comprehended by theoretical thought? How can thought ensure the leap from phenomena to essence, from particulars to universals, from contingency to inevitability? Such musings indicate that the question of the relation of thought and being is not an experiential but a transcendental (law) question. The relation between the laws of thought and of being is the true question regarding their relation, as it is the true question for the unconscious and unconditional premise of theoretical thought.

Responding to the question of the relation of thought and being in terms of laws implies that it cannot be limited to representational thought and formal reasoning, but has to involve speculative thought. This is Hegel's fundamental view of philosophical thought, because representational thought only approaches the relation of thought and being from phenomena, not from laws. Hence, Hegel argues that representational thought is not appropriate for philosophical thought. On the other hand, formal reasoning only adopts a formal approach toward the laws of thought and being. Hence it is unable to explain the laws of thought and being through their content.