Hegel’s Monarch, the Concept and the Limits of Syllogistic Reasoning

Sebastian Stein

Klaus Vieweg’s seminal new book Das Denken der Freiheit, on Hegel’s political philosophy, is an immensely rich and rewarding book that develops complex arguments in a manner adequate to Hegel’s standards of argumentation.

My aim in what follows is to show that there is room for debate about the nature of philosophical method within the community of scholars who aspire to live up to Hegel’s standards of rational argument but are unhappy with his conclusions. Put as a question: What does it mean to argue with Hegel rather than against him or, as Klaus Vieweg does, to argue with Hegel against Hegel? In so doing, I will focus on Vieweg’s argument against Hegel’s notion of hereditary monarchy, as presented in the Philosophy of Right §§275–86.

I. The issue of monarchy

In his discussion of the inner constitution of Hegel’s state, Vieweg confidently rejects Hegel’s claims in favour of hereditary monarchy and argues that by the standards of Hegel’s own syllogistic logic, monarchy ought not to be part of a just social order. However, on what grounds does Vieweg make these claims?

In the first chapters of his book, Vieweg decidedly and humorously rejects what he takes to be methodologically naïve criticisms (Vieweg 23ff) of Hegel and is careful in his own argument not to appeal to his or ‘our’ own contemporary intuitions, customs, traditions, etc. He aspires not to assume any other methodological perspective but Hegel’s own in order to live up to Hegel’s own standards of philosophical argument, i.e., to the requirements of his speculative logic and its task of explicating what Hegel calls the ‘actuality of the rational’ (Vieweg 30).

For Vieweg, this means engaging in speculative syllogising (Vieweg 234 ff), which requires the thinker first to identify what Hegel calls the concept’s (Hegel’s alias for conceptual truth) three (onto)logical elements, i.e., the universal (U), the particular (P), and the individual (I), and their determined form in the specific context under scrutiny (in this case, political philosophy). Following the example
given by Hegel, Vieweg then identifies the individual with the individual citizen (I), the particular with a person’s specific physical and spiritual requirements (P), and the universal with society, right, law and government (U) (Vieweg 373, Enz §198). Once defined, these elements can then be related by means of a speculative syllogism that shows that and how they logically imply each other, i.e., that they inherently refer to (in Hegel’s terminology ‘unite’, zusammenschliessen) and thus identify with each other. For example the syllogism might state that the state (U) requires civil society (P) to enable individual (I) self-realization, that civil society requires the state to protect the individual (e.g., from poverty), that the state needs the individual (and its particular interests) for its own existence and to enable civil society, etc., (Vieweg 366).⁴

Since the concept and the mutual, syllogistic implication of its elements constitutes the beating heart of Hegel’s entire system, so for Vieweg it also provides the criterion by which to judge his account of the structure of rational political life (Vieweg 366). So Vieweg appeals to insights generated by the application of syllogistic reasoning when he criticises Hegel’s claim that hereditary monarchy forms a necessary element of a state’s internal constitution.⁵

In preparation of his argument against hereditary monarchy, Vieweg identifies three different kinds of syllogism (all to be found in Hegel’s Science of Logic). Each of these expresses the identity of the three conceptual elements’ external realities (U, P, I) to a different degree. The more explicit the identity of the differentiated realities becomes, the more successful, i.e., rational, the syllogism is. The least rational and thus most difference-oriented syllogism is that of Dasein. It follows the general form: I(ndividual)—P(articular)—U(niversal). Because it assumes, i.e., presupposes, the difference and thus the mutual exclusion of the three elements’ external realities, the syllogism of Dasein fails adequately to express their identity. For example, according to the practically applied syllogism of Dasein, the realities of the state (U), the system of needs (P) and individual citizen (I) remain differentiated and each is merely a means for the realization of the respective others (Vieweg 373). For example, ‘the individual citizen (I) requires the system of needs (P) to support and enable the universal state (U)’.

The second kind of syllogism is the existential syllogism. It follows the general form U-I-P (Vieweg 411). For example: There is a system of needs (P) because there are individual citizens (I) that constitute the state (U). Since it places the individual at the centre of its argument, this syllogism fails to show that the conclusion—here, that there is a system of needs—follows necessarily. There could always be an unobserved or obstructing individual that undermines the conclusion, i.e., if one or more individuals did not participate in the state, then the system of needs would not exist.

The final and thus most successful at articulating the elements’ difference-accommodating identity is the necessary syllogism (Vieweg 375). It is able to
render the identity of the differentiated elements more explicit than any previous syllogism because it places the universal at the centre of the argument. It thereby shows that the particular and the individual are also aspects of the universal, i.e., that the universal incorporates them. Its general form is P-U-I, for example: there are individual citizens that define and satisfy their particular needs because the universal state, which incorporates citizens and the system of needs, uses the system of needs to enable the satisfaction of individual needs.

Amongst the necessary syllogisms, the disjunctive syllogism is the most advanced, i.e., difference-and-identity-explicating, as it places the universal at the centre and implies that each element in the argument implies the respective others. For example: there are individual citizens that participate in the system of needs and the rational state because there is a rational state that incorporates the system of needs and the individual citizens and uses the system of needs that is part of the state and contains individual citizens to achieve individual desire-satisfaction in the context of the system of needs within the rational state. On Vieweg’s reading, the profound degree of identity that the disjunctive syllogism establishes between the logical elements’ external realities is the mark of its superiority to the other syllogisms and qualifies it as the standard for critical engagement with the Philosophy of Right’s claims (Vieweg 377).

II. Vieweg’s syllogism-based argument against Hegel’s monarch

In light of the association of the structure of the syllogism with the logical elements that define right in general, Vieweg thus argues that a very similar association can be made with regards to the structure of the state’s internal constitution, i.e., the section of the Philosophy of Right where Hegel argues that the rational state consists of: 1. The final decider (the Individual, for Hegel: the monarch), 2. The legislature (the Universal), and 3. The government (the Particular) (Vieweg 411).

Again, each of these elements can take the place of the middle term in a syllogism: If the particular element, i.e., the executive, becomes the middle term, one has the syllogism of Dasein: I-P-U: The legislative exists because there is a monarch deciding on the government’s action. If the individual element, i.e., the monarch, becomes the middle term, one has the syllogism of existence: U-I-P: There is rational government because the parliament has its legislation approved by the monarch. Only once the universal element, the legislative, becomes the middle term, has one achieved the necessary syllogism, P-U-I: i.e., the final decider can enable governmental action because the legislative has passed laws that the government needs to enact. The disjunctive version of this syllogism would be: The final decider that cooperates with parliament and executive can
enable parliament-based governmental action that relies on the final decider’s decision because the legislative that supplies both government and final decider with universally oriented laws has passed laws that the government needs to enact in line with the demands of the legislative and final decider.

For Vieweg, applying the structure of the necessary syllogism to the elements of the state’s inner constitution identifies the parliament (U) as the true foundation of political sovereignty (and thus the state’s normativity) by making it the all-important, all-mediating middle term (Vieweg 411). This entails that the other elements—the government (P) and the final decider (I)—derive their own participation in the state’s sovereignty from this democratically elected parliament (Vieweg 429). This conceptual dependence ought to translate into an institutional arrangement that sees both executive and final decider as elected, appointed or confirmed by either the parliament itself or by the overarching universal moment that in turn legitimizes the elected parliament, i.e., the multitude of individual citizens:

The application of the disjunctive syllogism to the structure of the state’s internal constitution leads to a most surprising result in contrast to what the Outlines (of the Philosophy of Right) claims: it effects the theoretical legitimisation of a republican, democratic constitution and reveals the fundamental importance of the legislative assembly as an expression of a representative-democratic structure. (Vieweg 429)

This conclusion plainly contradicts Hegel’s notion of a monarch who inherits the office by birth, acts as a final decider and stands legally above the rest of the citizens. Since Hegel’s monarch is not a citizen, as Vieweg seems to suggest, his sovereignty is independent from the people and the legislative body and he cannot be identified with either legislative or executive in the way that the disjunctive syllogism requires (Vieweg 412). Consequently, Hegel’s monarch should be replaced by a democratically elected or nominated primus inter pares, i.e., a president or chancellor (430/431).9

III. The limits of syllogistic argument

For those who reject Hegel’s method and/or system in general or in part, Vieweg’s criticism might be too close to Hegel to be convincing. However, for those who are mostly sympathetic to Hegel’s project, the virtues of Vieweg’s criticism appear obvious. Since Vieweg relies on the same method and broadly the same logical elements identified by Hegel himself, he is able to avoid the charge of criticising Hegel externally or of simply assuming the superiority of his own implied method and/or ontological stance. And yet, one might still wonder:
How Hegelian is Vieweg’s critique? Is he as close to Hegel’s method as he thinks when he champions the disjunctive syllogism as a criterion for evaluating the relationship and the content of the elements that comprise the state’s inner constitution?

To answer this question, it helps to distinguish two issues. Firstly, while it is true that Hegel considers the necessary (disjunctive) syllogism to be the most adequate syllogism, the determination of the elements with which the syllogism works and which it must therefore presuppose stems from the concept, and so the standard by which to define the determination of the elements is thus not the syllogism but the concept. Secondly, although the syllogism is the most concrete form that the subjective concept takes, it lacks the idea’s objectivity and, according to the Science of Logic, the syllogism therefore falls short of articulating the immediacy of the concept’s positedness, i.e., the unified aspect of the true structure of rational actuality. While Vieweg is clearly aware of the inadequacies of the syllogisms of Dasein and existence, one might thus argue that he does not sufficiently consider the origin and the inadequacy of syllogisms as such.

This is supported by the fact that instead of appealing to syllogistic concepts, Hegel’s discussion of the state repeatedly invokes the metaphor of an organism and mentions the concept and the idea (e.g., PR: §279) as origins and expressions of truth. The concept furnishes the content in form of the determinate elements and the idea describes their relation and external reality as a negatively unified whole.

IV. An alternative to the syllogism: idea and concept as Hegel’s standard of truth

First, it will help to consider the status of the idea in contrast to the syllogism. The supreme status of the idea as standard of truth is explicated in the Science of Logic’s section on the idea, and the kind of objectively real or organic unity of the inner constitution’s conceptually determined elements invokes a notion of objectivity that no syllogistic structure is able to articulate. Why should this be so?

According to the Science of Logic and the Encyclopedia, even the disjunctive syllogism, with its explication of the simultaneous difference and identity of the concept’s elements’ externalities, fails to articulate the notion of their objective unity (e.g., SL: 351, Enz §§182, 190, 191). This is due to the syllogism’s being restricted to the identification of the concept’s internally differentiated and judgementally externalized moments as initially differentiated and then identified externalities.

The syllogism-effected identity of the concept’s moments’ externality is thus not the one single and simultaneously differentiated externality of objectivity, but
rather the identity that is established after the elements’ external realities (see, e.g., \textit{SL}: Suhrkamp 350ff) have been differentiated. Since the syllogism must presuppose the elements’ different external realities handed down from judgement, it cannot conceptualize their externalities as one single and simultaneously differentiated external reality. For instance, in a syllogistic description of the state’s constitution, the government, the legislative and the final decider are differentiated and externally manifest before they are identified. While it might be the conclusion of the disjunctive syllogism that the elements’ external realities are identical, this conclusion can only be reached with reference to the presupposed difference of these realities.

In contrast, the idea’s ‘procedural’ (\textit{Enz}: 215) nature implies that all of the concept’s different moments are speculatively unified (and thus self-identical, i.e., subjective), externally identical and differentiated (i.e., objective). According to the idea, the universal always already is the particular and always already is the individual, and their external realities are a single and yet differentiated objective reality. This unified aspect of the objective dimension is not accessible to the syllogism as it remains indebted in its identity claims to the judgement-inspired differences between the elements’ external realities.

So from the Idea’s perspective (and thus that of truth), there is no need for a syllogism to unite the different externalities of the elements because these are always already united and differentiated. In the idea of the rational state, the government, the legislative and the final decider are what they are as aspects of the same concept whilst their differentiated and unified external reality is articulated as objective reality. The idea’s union of the internally differentiated inwardness and differentiated and unified externality thus trumps the disjunctive syllogism’s identity of the elements’ externalities, insofar as the idea incorporates the notion of the moment’s objective reality and the syllogism thus falls short of the idea’s insight into conceptual actuality.

But maybe the syllogism is able to differentiate the elements, i.e., to determine their difference in a way that the Idea cannot? Vieweg’s emphasis on the syllogism can also be read as suggesting that the syllogism can function as a criterion for the specific determinateness of the elements. After all, Vieweg questions the very determination of the constitution’s individual element of the final decider by appealing to the disjunctive syllogism. However, both the \textit{Encyclopedia} and the \textit{Science of Logic} seem to suggest that the determination of the elements is not effected by the syllogism but only by the concept itself.

The syllogism does not determine the elements or their externality, it presupposes their determination by the concept and their externalization by the judgement in order to have anything to work with. Without the concept’s self-differentiation into different, determined elements, the syllogism would have no elements nor any external existences to identify. The point of this is to show
that the syllogism cannot do the work Vieweg wants it to do: it can neither express objectivity’s identity and simultaneous difference of the conceptual elements’ external realities nor determine what the elements specifically are. Given this, it is unclear how it could function as a suitable criterion for truth in general or for the description of the elements of the state’s constitution specifically.

The syllogism can only work with determinations that originate in the concept; it cannot tell us anything new about the actual determinateness of the elements apart from what the concept has furnished it with. Applying the syllogistic structure to elements determined by the concept might show how and that they relate but it will not tell us what they are, i.e., what they are determined as. So if the task is to challenge the determination of one of the elements that Hegel describes as part of the idea of the state’s constitution, and this seems to be Vieweg’s task, it would be the concept that has to be considered. Using Vieweg’s own example, this entails that if it is possible to formulate a disjunctive syllogism that includes Hegel’s monarch, disjunctive syllogising by itself is discredited as a standard by which the determination of hereditary monarchy can be criticized. And it seems such a syllogism can quite easily be formulated: The monarch as final decider on the policies that the government realizes on the basis of parliament’s laws exists because the government- and monarch-informing parliament enables the parliament-informed and monarch-requiring government to realize universally oriented legislation. This disjunctive syllogism meets all of Vieweg’s logical requirements (the universal element constitutes the middle term and all steps of the argument include all elements) whilst leaving the precise nature of the monarch as final decider untouched.

So even if the disjunctive syllogism can only establish that all the elements of the state’s inner constitution are identical in their commitment to the state’s universal interest, i.e., that they are part of a universality-articulating idea of inner constitution, it is not clear why a monarch who inherited the position cannot participate in this rational union (PR: §278 Remark: 266). If this reasoning is sound, then the grounds that both Hegel but also Vieweg would have to furnish in their attempt to define the determination of the final decider have to be found beyond—or better, before—the syllogistic explication of the elements’ externalities’ mutual implication and identification. This seems to be in line with Hegel’s claims that the determinations of the elements in general and of the monarch specifically originate in the concept, find their most concrete expression in the Idea, and are as such beyond ratiocination (PR: §279 Remark: 274).16

In other words, a more suitable question than whether the monarch is compatible with the requirements of the syllogism might be: ‘What concept-related (rather than syllogistic) reasons does Hegel provide us with in defence of
hereditary monarchy? According to Hegel, hereditary monarchy (e.g., *PR*: §279 remark) articulates the notion that the final decider ought to be immune to particular interests, popular demands and issues of succession. It also guarantees the final decider’s position above politics in virtue of the natural and thus immediate origin of his birthright-based sovereignty (*PR*: §271). His supposedly ‘unmovable’ (*PR*: §281) status originates in his being the most immediate possible expression of the same concept of the will that stands behind all elements of the Idea of right.

However, apart from Hegel’s monarch being a potential instance of conceptual overdetermination,¹⁷ Hegel’s worries that the institution of an elected monarch (and by extension of a president, chancellor, etc.) necessarily leads to the state’s privatization, loss of sovereignty, disintegration and destruction from without (§281) have failed to be manifest historically for a number of what Hegel would consider today’s most rational states, e.g., Finland, France, Germany. More crucially, these worries seem conceptually unwarranted given that the final decider is by definition an aspect of the universality- (not particularity-) oriented state. If conceptual membership in the state did not define an institution as being universality-oriented, then the same charge of particularist bias could be made against parliament and government, which are also comprised of particular individuals with specific interests and ‘caprices’.¹⁸

To conclude, while there might be room for debate about the validity of Vieweg’s appeal to the structure of the disjunctive syllogism in his critique of Hegel’s notion of the state’s constitution, Vieweg’s intentions are beyond reproach. His book substantially raises the bar for anyone wanting to engage with Hegel’s argument at methodological eye level. In so doing, Vieweg reveals his own preference for truth over literalism and impressively illustrates the difference between philosophy and dogmatism.

Sebastian Stein
University of Heidelberg, Germany
sebastian.stein@ps.uni-heidelberg.de

Notes

¹ Due to spatial constraints, the commentary only engages with the one argument that represents Vieweg’s furthest departure from Hegel’s own point of view. It is located in *Das Denken der Freiheit*’s sections VIII.3 (366) to VIII.3.4.2.C. (432) and forms part of Vieweg’s engagement with Hegel’s idea of the state.

² While Vieweg is neither the only nor the first commentator on the *Philosophy of Right* to do so (see, e.g., Hartmann 1976, Wolff 1985, Siep 1992), his constructive criticism stands out in
virtue of its profound roots in Hegel’s logical enterprise and its ability to furnish immanent, systematic and methodological reasons for its reformulation of Hegel’s account. According to Vieweg, the question of the monarch is the only aspect of Hegel’s political philosophy where Hegel truly ‘reasons erroneously’ (409), and Vieweg argues that even seeming error might ultimately be a ‘Notlüge’ (as Vieweg quotes Anton Friedrich Koch), i.e., a purposefully placed and highlighted false argument that Hegel left—not unlike an Easter egg—for his readers to find and thereby outwit the Prussian censors (409).

3 This is not to be confused with standard ways of formal syllogising that do not establish the inner unity of the employed terms; see, e.g., Enz §181R.

4 The most adequate syllogism (the necessary syllogism) places the universal centre at the centre, i.e., it makes it the middle term that logically connects the other two: The individual citizen and the system of needs are enabled and logically united by the state—“The state/government enables individuals to define, pursue and fulfil their particular needs in a rational way.’

5 Whether Hegel and Vieweg might hold different notions of what it means to apply syllogistic standards to the institutions of the Philosophy of Right will be discussed later.

6 Hegel’s ultimate standard of (onto)logical rationality is the idea, i.e., the ontological structure that preserves the difference of its moments within a speculative, difference-accommodating identity.

7 This enables it to approximate the Science of Logic’s next highest standard of rationality with its simultaneity of the elements’ realities’ difference and identity, i.e., objectivity.

8 This also makes it the syllogism closest to circularity.

9 According to Vieweg, political arrangements such as the one he prefers to Hegel’s can be found in various modern states such as France, Germany and the United States, where all citizens are considered equal, no individual stands above the universally oriented law and the institutions of government derive their authority solely from the parliament or the demos, i.e., the people, directly, rather than from nature or the (pseudo-)right of birth. Vieweg argues that Hegel had something similar in mind but had to hide this from the Prussian censors, leading him to hide the right conclusion (democratically legitimized head of state) within the right method (the necessary syllogism) behind the wrong conclusion (hereditary monarchy).

10 ‘The syllogism is the result of the restoration of the concept in the judgment, and consequently the unity and the truth of the two. The concept as such holds its moments sublated in this unity; in judgment, the unity is an internal or, what amounts to the same, an external one, and although the moments are connected, they are posited as self-subsisting extremes. In the syllogism, the determinations of the concept are like the extremes of the judgment, and at the same time their determinate unity is posited’ (Hegel, Science of Logic, trans. di Giovanni, 588).

11 ‘The syllogism is mediation, the complete concept in its positedness. Its movement is the sublation of this mediation in which nothing is in and for itself, but each thing is only through the meditation of an other. The result is therefore an immediacy that has emerged through the sublation of the mediation, a being which is equally identical with mediation and is the concept that has restored itself out of, and in, its otherness. This being is therefore a fact which is in and for itself—objectivity’ (Hegel, Science of Logic, trans. di Giovanni, 624).

See *PR*: §8: ‘In spirit as it is in and for itself [*wie er an und für sich ist*], in which its determinacy is true and simply its *own*, the relation of consciousness constitutes only the *appearance* of the will, which is not considered *separately* [*für sich*] any further here.’

Hegel’s preference for the idea’s identity over the syllogistically related elements’ difference finds expression in his repeated rejection of the notion of a strict, understanding-based separation (i.e., difference) of the state’s inner constitution’s elements (‘checks and balances’). For Hegel, understanding the elements as fundamentally different brings with it mutual distrust, competition and limitation instead of cooperation and harmony. For example: ‘That is to say, the principle of the division of powers contains the essential moment of *difference*, of rationality *realized*. But when the abstract understanding handles it, it reads into it the false doctrine of the *absolute self-subsistence* of each of the powers against the others, and then one-sidedly interprets their relation to each other as negative, as a mutual *restriction*. This view implies that the attitude adopted by each power to the others is hostile and apprehensive, as if the others were evils, and that their function is to oppose one another and as a result of this counterpoise to bring about a general equilibrium, but not a living unity’ (*PR*: §272R).

For example, *PR*: §279R: ‘If the “people” is represented neither as a patriarchal clan, nor as living under the undeveloped conditions which make democracy or aristocracy possible as forms of government (see Remark to §273), nor as living under some other unorganized and haphazard conditions, but instead as an inwardly developed, genuinely organic, totality, then sovereignty is there as the personality of the whole, and this personality is there, in the reality adequate to its concept, as the *person of the monarch*’. ‘The constitution is rational insofar as the state inwardly differentiates and determines its activity in accordance with the *nature of the concept* … The result of this is that each of these powers is in itself the *totality*, because each contains the other moments and has them effective in itself, and because the moments, being expressions of the differentiation of the concept, remain utterly within its ideality and constitute nothing but a *single individual whole*’ (*PR*: §272). And in the addition to *PR*: §272: ‘The truth is that the powers are to be distinguished only as moments of the concept’. And *PR*: §273R: ‘The history of this inner deepening of the spirit of the world—or in other words this free development in the course of which the Idea, realizing rationality [in the external], releases its moments (and they are only its moments) from itself as totalities, and in so doing retains them in the ideal unity of the concept’.

In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel distinguishes between what he calls *Räsonnement* (ratiocination) and the philosophical description of the Idea. Any attempt to derive the determination of the elements of the Idea by appealing to other considerations such as usefulness, stability, etc., amounts to a betrayal of the philosophical enterprise and its concern with the unconditioned. For example: ‘In the organization of the state—which here means in constitutional monarchy—we must have nothing before our minds except the inherent necessity of the Idea. All other points of view must vanish. The state must be treated as a great architectonic structure, as a hieroglyph of the reason which reveals itself in actuality’ (*PR*: §270 Addition). It seems that that Vieweg rejects Hegel’s notion of the idea of the state’s inner
constitution and wants to use the disjunctive syllogism to discover the idea’s true nature. However, doing so would violate the logical order that assigns priority to the idea. According to the *Science of Logic*, the idea cannot be deduced from the syllogism but the syllogism must articulate and illustrate the relationship of the idea’s moments. Accounts of the idea can only be constructively criticized by appeal to a superior, alternative account of the idea, not with reference to syllogisms.

17 Hegel rejects this suggestion, arguing that a separation between the immediate and nature and the institution of monarchy is due to the consciousness of the understanding’s failure to acknowledge the unity of concept and existence (*PR*: §280R). However, it seems that this unity can equally be expressed in form of a final decider whose natural and immediate dimension consists in his or her very ability to make universality-oriented decisions. Being a rational final decider requires certain nature-given talents that appropriate recruitment procedures recognize and reward (e.g., with the bestowal of the office of being a final decider).

18 Hegel rejects this suggestion as symptomatic of ‘superficial thinking’ (*PR*: §281).

**Bibliography**