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HEGEL'S

Phenomenology of Spirit

A Critical Guide

Edited by

Dean Moyar and
Michael Quante

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Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, first published in 1807, is a work with few equals in systematic integrity, philosophical originality, and historical influence. This collection of newly commissioned essays, contributed by leading Hegel scholars, examines all aspects of the work, from its argumentative strategies to its continuing relevance to philosophical debates today. The collection combines close analysis with wide-ranging coverage of the text, and also traces connections with debates extending beyond Hegel scholarship, including issues in the philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of action, ethics, and philosophy of religion. In showing clearly that we have not yet exhausted the *Phenomenology's* insights, it demonstrates the need for contemporary philosophers to engage with Hegel.

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Preface

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* has just turned two hundred years old. The first book that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel published has lost none of the inspirational force that it had not only in Hegel's lifetime but, above all, in the decades after his death. The Russian émigré author Alexander Herzen, writing about the intellectual scene in France in the 1840s, reports the following:

Proudhon often went there to listen to Reichel's Beethoven and Bakunin's Hegel: the philosophical discussions lasted longer than the symphonies. They reminded me of the famous all-night vigils of Bakunin and Khomyakov at Chaadayev's and at Madame Yelagin's, where Hegel was also discussed. In 1847 Karl Vogt, who also lived in the Rue de Bourgogne, and often visited Reichel and Bakunin, was bored one evening with listening to the endless discussions of the *Phenomenology*, and went home to bed. Next morning he went round for Reichel, for they were to go to the Jardin des Plantes together; he was surprised to hear conversation in Bakunin's study at that early hour. He opened the door – Proudhon and Bakunin were sitting in the same places before the burnt-out embers in the fireplace, and were with a few last words just finishing the dispute that had begun the day before.¹

The power of the *Phenomenology* to stimulate new thought and provoke philosophical innovation continues unbroken today. It has enjoyed the widest and most intense reception of all Hegel's work. There are many reasons that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has had such a wide impact and that, over such a long period, it has been the ever-renewed subject of intense discussion. In the nineteenth century the primary reasons were, of course, political, as in no other text does Hegel's dialectic hold out more

¹ Alexander Herzen (1982), 422. The people referred to in the Herzen quote are: Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), French utopian socialist – author of the famous quote that “property is theft”; Adolf Reichel (1817–1897), German composer; Michail Alexandrovitch Bakunin (1814–1876), Russian anarchist and antagonist of Karl Marx; Alexey Stepanovitch Khomyakov (1804–60), Russian poet; Pyotr Yakovlevitch Chaadayev (1794–1856), Russian philosopher and writer; Avdotya Petrovna Yelagin (1789–1877), famous through her literary salon in Moscow in the 1830s and 1840s; Karl Vogt (1817–1895), German scientist and materialist. Translation altered.

promise of demonstrating how political reality can be transformed. Yet the revolutionary ethos of the *Phenomenology* is only one among the many features that have contributed, and still contribute, to its legacy. In this brief introduction we would like to distinguish three features of the text that have contributed to its overall appeal, and three philosophical themes of the *Phenomenology* that remain very much alive today.

First, Hegel treats in this work an astounding wealth of material that one cannot find (at least, not in the primary text) in the *Science of Logic* or in the three editions of the *Encyclopedia* or in the *Philosophy of Right*. The sheer breadth of the spectrum of phenomena and “objects” is overwhelming, running from the semantics of deictic reference in sense perception to absolute knowledge, and from the ethical, religious, and aesthetic self-conceptions of the ancients to the “modern” natural sciences and their disenchanting view of the world. This wide-ranging “path” of the *Phenomenology* is no doubt responsible for the text having found an audience beyond Hegel experts and those engaged with traditional philosophical questions. The most famous and influential theme, the “struggle for recognition,” which attracted the early left-Hegelians as an analysis of social conflicts, remains a current theme for philosophers and political theorists, and has also provoked innovative interpretations by psychologists, literary critics, and sociologists.

Second, Hegel conceived of the *Phenomenology* as a text that could stand on its own, something which can otherwise be said only of his *Science of Logic*, since both the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Right* depict Hegel’s thoughts in outline and require explication through spoken lectures. In contrast to the “greater Logic” the *Phenomenology* appears less abstract, more accessible, and more open to the reader who does not want to go into the fine structure of speculative thinking. In addition, Hegel’s argumentation in the *Phenomenology* is not yet overloaded with the speculative philosophical conceptual apparatus that in the eyes of many critics suffocates the phenomena in the later work. For many readers, it is only in this early text that Hegel’s thinking is still close enough to the phenomena to illuminate their meaning.

The third general reason for the lasting success of the *Phenomenology* is that in this work Hegel brings together two seemingly countervailing tendencies of thought. On the one side is the incredible philosophical aspiration to give a phenomenological account of everything. Hegel’s aim of providing necessary connections between each and every shape of consciousness stirs the philosophically interested reader to reconstruct his argument or to find a gap in his reasoning. Hegel’s self-assurance in the

power of his arguments, and his unbroken trust in the capabilities of philosophical thinking to explain the world, must appear to us today highly provoking, or at least irritating. The fascination and the strangeness of the *Phenomenology* comes also from the difference between his time and our own with regard to both the cultural understanding of philosophy and the dominant view of the nature of the philosophical undertaking itself. For Hegel, the idea of philosophy as the highest and most important cultural form was grounded in the actual (high) culture of his time. So, too, his belief that the true philosophy had to be systematic and had to encompass everything was widely shared among philosophers. Our cultural and philosophical self-understandings have changed, and we are no longer so optimistic about the power or desirability of philosophic system-building. But, on the other side, the *Phenomenology* is also a deep engagement with the skeptical tendency that has accompanied Western philosophy from the beginning, and it therefore always seems one step ahead of the critics of idealism. The way in which Hegel develops his own answer to the skeptical demand, by co-opting it for his method and showing how it “completes,” and therefore overcomes, itself is highly original. The experience of consciousness is the pathway of despair that nevertheless leads to the “spiritual daylight” and the liberation of self-knowledge. From the interplay of these two sides Hegel’s argumentation radiates a spiritual energy that has retained its splendor; the dust of centuries has not been able to cloud the brilliance of the phenomenological “movement.”

The first of the three main philosophical reasons represented in this volume for the continued importance of the *Phenomenology* has to do with the particular kind of *holism* that Hegel attempts to establish. Although there are not many philosophers today who would endorse the grand system-building that Hegel thought necessary, holistic strategies of justification are quite popular and appear likely to become even more widely accepted. This tendency has much to do with the demise of foundationalist programs of tracing claims of knowledge back to one or more basic indubitable sources. Hegel’s alternative to foundationalism does not fit neatly into the mold of contemporary coherentism, and just what exactly his strategy amounts to turns largely on how one reads the *Phenomenology* and its goal of providing a “ladder” to speculative philosophy. One of the promises of the *Phenomenology* is that it can deliver an argument for why holism is the only sound metaphilosophical position, to do so as a sustained argument against every form of foundationalist claim to immediate knowledge, and yet to achieve a positive position that has overcome all forms of skepticism. Hegel thought that only an idealism of a very radical sort could

make this strategy work, and no doubt many present-day skeptics would say that Hegel's cure is much worse than the disease. Yet Hegel's systematic solution remains a promising epistemological approach that can deliver results at both the overall level and through the specific arguments in the "local" argumentative movements between shapes of consciousness and their claims to knowledge.

The second point concerns Hegel's ingenious response to the perennial problem of the relation of the natural and the normative. With the remarkable success of the natural sciences in the past two centuries, both the promises and the threats of various kinds of philosophical explanation oriented by the "hard sciences" have dramatically increased. Programs of reductive naturalism abound in Anglo-American philosophy today, and lively debates are taking place over the limits of such programs for understanding the mind and ethics (to name only two). Hegel's idealistic program was born out of the perceived insufficiencies of Kant's transcendental or critical idealism, which sought to restrict the realm of natural explanation to the domain of spatio-temporal appearances. The problems of Kant's peculiar kind of dualism are too vast even to summarize here, but the central issue that arose in the first two decades of reception and transformation of Kantian idealism was the issue of how to provide a unified account of nature and freedom while maintaining the relative independence of each. In the concept of Spirit, and in the overall architecture of his System, Hegel claimed to have achieved this result, providing a theory of the emergence of freedom from the natural that did not reduce freedom to nature. Just how he accomplished this feat, and whether he actually accomplished it, continues to be a central aspect of scholarly work on Hegel's texts. While not offering Hegel's full story on this question, the *Phenomenology* remains the best point of entry into his critique of certain kinds of naturalism and into his own answer to how freedom is possible beginning from within the natural processes of "life."

Finally, a great attraction of the *Phenomenology*, and a source of some puzzlement, is that within its method of experience it treats both theoretical and practical stances, both claims of knowledge (in a narrow sense) and claims of action. Philosophy of action has been among the most vibrant areas of philosophy in the past fifty years. This includes both questions of how we distinguish actions from mere events, and how practical reasoning undergirds ethical and political philosophy. So, too, a rebirth of pragmatism in a variety of forms has led to an interest in exploring the interconnections of action and knowledge. The famous Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology* is only the most obvious site where Hegel's epistemology

and his action theory intersect. At nearly every stage of the text, Hegel thematizes what consciousness *does* with its concepts, and the endpoint or endpoints of the account in one way or another all describe a practical process. The *Phenomenology* therefore offers not only a series of reflections on the practical nature of any knowledge claim, but also detailed accounts of the more explicit contexts of action.

The *Phenomenology* rewards persistent study, but it also makes serious, at times even outrageous demands on the reader (the literary scholar M. H. Abrams only exaggerated a little when he claimed that Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is an easy read by comparison). In addition to the fact that two hundred years have created both a language barrier (even for German scholars) and a formidable distance from the original philosophical context, other difficulties are the complicated Hegelian idiom, the wealth of the specific material, and, last but not least, the complex arrangement of the philosophical argumentation. Hegel not only operates with concepts and figures of thought that were familiar to the philosophical discourse of his time, but which today's reader can comprehend only with difficulty (and small steps), he also develops a self-sufficient and unprecedented philosophical method. His argumentative strategies work on different levels and constantly intermingle before coalescing in the end.

One result of all of these difficulties is that interpretations of both individual passages of the *Phenomenology* and of the work as a whole diverge greatly, and there is hardly any point where one could say that no fundamental conflicts exist among interpreters. It would be pointless to go into detail here about the various modes of reception and traditions of interpretation, since these have been discussed in many commentaries (one need only compare the comments in the contributions and in the bibliography of this volume). We should note that some differences in interpretation can be identified between distinct nationalities, testifying to the ability of the text to appeal across philosophical traditions. Among the ideas behind this volume was to bring together scholars from America and Germany to enact a productive dialogue between the often very different styles of interpretation in the two countries.

Our *primary* goal was to put together a volume about the *Phenomenology* that would highlight and clarify central passages and questions. The contributors were asked to accomplish two tasks. The first was to make the reader's confrontation with the Hegelian text easier by drawing out the arguments from the complex dialectical structure. The second aim was to bring out why Hegel's treatment of the question(s) is still of systematic interest from today's perspective (or why certain aspects are no longer

salvageable). The result of this program is a collection that focuses less on the origins of Hegel's project than on its systematic integrity and the viability of specific analyses for today's more specialized branches of philosophy.

We refrain here from summarizing the interpretive results of the individual contributions. Each contribution must – and, we think, can – speak for itself. As editors we are (painfully) aware that this volume could not come close to covering all that can be learned or systematically developed from the *Phenomenology* today. The breadth of Hegel's work and the complexity of his arguments are simply too great for an exhaustive treatment to be possible. Nevertheless we are confident that this collection will put the reader in a position to gain access to the entire wealth of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. For that we would like to thank the contributors, who in the midst of their many other commitments invested their energy in this volume. Finally, we would like to thank Cambridge University Press for incorporating this project into their new series.

Abbreviations and citations

All references to the text of the *Phenomenology* are given in parentheses in the main text. The notes give the page number of the German edition from the *Gesammelte Werke*, volume 9, followed by the paragraph number from the English translation of A. V. Miller: (18, ¶17), for example. We expect that Miller's translation will soon be superseded, and that subsequent translations will also employ paragraph numbers. Many of the translations have also been altered by the authors of the chapters: it proved too cumbersome to note all of these changes.

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Substance, subject, system: the justification of science in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit

Dietmar H. Heidemann

I INTRODUCTION

More than thirty years ago Dieter Henrich expressed the view that Hegel's philosophical intentions are still more or less obscure. This view has been very influential. Were it still true, then Robert Brandom's observation with regard to Hegel would be false, namely that "[t]raditions are lived forward but understood backward."¹ For in order to live or better to think the Hegelian tradition forward and to understand Hegel backward, it is necessary to make sense of his philosophical intentions. Fortunately, research has contributed a good deal of clarification to the situation so that nowadays Hegel is acknowledged as a contemporary interlocutor. The current appreciation of Hegel's thought goes especially for the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The "forward – backward" view might be regarded as the reason why discussion of the *Phenomenology* during past decades basically followed three lines of thought – a metaphysical, a transcendental, and a social one. Those following the metaphysical line mainly concentrated on the metaphysical conception of the *Phenomenology* as a systematic introduction to absolute idealism. Accordingly the work is seen as offering a new way of providing the possibility of metaphysics, which Hegel then develops in detail in the *Science of Logic*.² On the other side, those who advocated the transcendental line argued that Hegel's philosophical intentions in the *Phenomenology* should be understood from a broadly Kantian perspective, since the work furthers the Kantian program of criticizing human knowledge by going beyond the original Kantian scope. Crucial to the argument of the *Phenomenology* is the transcendental idea that reflection and self-consciousness fulfil the fundamental function of grounding

¹ Brandom (2002a), 45. Cf. Henrich (1971), 7.

² Taylor, for example, thinks the intention of the *Phenomenology* consists in "making the absolute 'apparent'." Cf. Taylor (1975), 128.

knowledge.³ Followers of the social line argue that the *Phenomenology* aims to demonstrate the social grounding of human rationality by focussing, e.g., on the idea of the education and cultivation (“*Bildung*”) of the modern European subject.⁴

It is not clear whether these alternatives of a metaphysical, transcendental, and social interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* necessarily exclude each other. Whatever the case, in current research a fourth possibility, of approaching the *Phenomenology* epistemologically, has been favored. Most recent books point out that though the work cannot be reduced to epistemological questions, the *Phenomenology* contains valuable discussions of fundamental epistemological problems. In this respect one of the most instructive treatises is Michael N. Forster’s comprehensive book *Hegel’s Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (1998).⁵ Forster distinguishes between three fundamental tasks of the *Phenomenology*: a pedagogical, an epistemological, and a metaphysical one. The pedagogical task of the work is to teach “modern individuals to understand and accept Hegel’s system.” By way of achieving its metaphysical task the *Phenomenology* develops the concept of absolute spirit in its different communal dimensions. The epistemological task, however, consists in (a) justifying Hegel’s system, (b) defending it against the skeptical problem of “equipollence,” (c) defending it against the skeptical problem of “concept-instantiation,” and (d) providing a proof preferring it to all non-Hegelian positions.⁶ In this chapter I take this epistemological approach to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will argue that the Preface as well as the Introduction of the *Phenomenology* provide a highly sophisticated analysis of fundamental epistemological problems, especially those concerning epistemic justification.

In order to understand the epistemological significance of the *Phenomenology*, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the general problem Hegel is dealing with. Thus in section 2 of this chapter I sketch the introductory function of the *Phenomenology* as an introduction to “true philosophical science.” The introductory function makes clear why, in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel sees himself confronted with the problem of epistemic justification and skepticism. In section 3 I analyze Hegel’s central claims in the

³ Cf. Claesges (1981), 11. For the transcendental line, see especially Pippin’s influential book, *Hegel’s Idealism: “The satisfactions of Self-Consciousness”* (Pippin 1989). Cf. also Hartmann (1976).

⁴ Cf. among others Pinkard (1994). For more recent research on the *Phenomenology*, see the helpful annotated bibliography in Yovel (2005), 204–211.

⁵ Cf. also Westphal (2003), Rockmore (1997), and others; earlier epistemological interpretations of the *Phenomenology* have already been proposed by Habermas (1973) and Solomon (1983).

⁶ Forster (1998), 11, 126 ff.

Preface to the *Phenomenology* against the backdrop of this original problem. His first claim is to have comprehended and expressed “the True not only as *Substance* but equally as *Subject*” (18, ¶17, all emphasis in the original). His second claim is that “knowledge” can be presented only as “Science or as system” (21, ¶24). The basic feature of these central claims is what can be called Hegel’s methodological anti-individualism, due to which the justification of knowledge cannot be accomplished by using the individual subject of epistemic certainty as a basic epistemic principle. Section 4 then discusses Hegel’s alternative arguments for a theory of epistemic justification in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. Since Hegel thinks that knowledge cannot be justified independent of an epistemic standard, he develops two general arguments to solve the problem: The first is an anti-skeptical argument from the self-creation of the epistemic standard; the second is a constructive argument from the history of self-consciousness, that makes up the methodological frame for the entire *Phenomenology*. My thesis is that though open questions remain, Hegel’s solution to the problem of epistemic justification is a systematic epistemological conception that can contribute to the current debates in theoretical philosophy.

2 HEGEL’S PROBLEM

2.1 *Introducing science*

In order to grasp Hegel’s intentions in the Preface it is necessary to make at least some general remarks about the status of the *Phenomenology* in the development of his philosophical thinking. First of all, in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel specifies his philosophical program in the following way: “To help to bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title “*love of knowing*” and be *actual knowing* – that is what I have set myself to do” (11, ¶5). This program of bringing philosophy closer to “the form of Science” is at first glance comparable to what in early modern philosophy Descartes, for example, undertakes in the *Meditations* when he attempts to renew philosophy’s foundations, or what Kant undertakes in the *Critique of Pure Reason* by trying to set philosophy on “the secure course of a science.”⁷ However, in contrast to Descartes’ project of a *prima philosophia* or Kant’s critique of knowledge, Hegel’s program in the *Phenomenology* must be understood primarily from within

⁷ Cf. Kant (*CPR*), B VII ff. (Preface).

the author's own intellectual development. Up to 1800 Hegel held a position according to which the finite human mind is not capable of acquiring knowledge of the absolute or God by philosophical reflection or reason, but only by means of religious faith. That is to say, philosophy itself is not the science of metaphysical knowledge in the proper sense of the word, for it is inferior to religion. Around 1800, Hegel's philosophical views changed fundamentally. He now came to replace the systematic status of religion by philosophical metaphysics and to accord the logic of finite human thought the function of a systematic introduction to philosophy or metaphysics. This logic is not formal logic, but rather a logic essentially composed of concepts or categories originating from the theories of Kant and Fichte. The purpose of this logic is to demonstrate the internal contradictions naturally arising from the limitations of finite human thinking, in order to overcome finite thinking and to achieve knowledge of the infinite or absolute. The method of this logic is the skeptical method of opposition by means of which contradictions are generated. Hegel takes the Kantian antinomies to be a paradigm case of such contradictions, because they allegedly demonstrate the finiteness of the human mind when trying to grasp the infinite by finite means. These contradictions are unsolvable to the human mind; they even destroy finite human thought and force us to relinquish it in favour of speculative knowledge of the absolute. So according to Hegel's modified conception, the logic of finite thinking functions as a systematic introduction to metaphysics by skeptically destroying and finally sublating the conceptual constituents of finite thought.⁸

Especially during his collaboration with Schelling in Jena, where he arrived in 1801, Hegel conceived the absolute as substance, following Spinoza's philosophy of the one substance. From approximately 1804, however, Hegel again dramatically modified his conception. This new change is due to his insight that to conceive of the absolute as substance is to leave it crucially underdetermined. Hegel realizes that the absolute is not a static object of thought – namely, substance – but rather comprises complex logical, self-referential relations that can be developed only in an independent discipline called speculative logic. Thus from this point on, Hegel no longer understands the absolute as substance, but rather as absolute subjectivity incorporating self-referential logical structures. So

⁸ It is obvious that this metaphysical conception makes a lot of presuppositions, for example that finite thinking is intrinsically contradictory and that the absolute exists. For details and the historical background, explaining the changes in Hegel's conception, see Düsing (1995), chapter 2.

he welds together logic and metaphysics into a new “science of the absolute.”⁹ This move leads to two problems: First, if logic is unified with metaphysics, a systematic introduction to metaphysics is seemingly rendered superfluous. Secondly, does the human mind have the capacity to acquire knowledge of the absolute? Hegel answers both questions in the affirmative: First, a systematic introduction to metaphysics is still necessary, as it is an intrinsic feature of his idealism that the absolute must be made an object of knowledge. This knowledge is not just there as it were immediately, but has to be developed by intellectual guidance, and it is precisely the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that now takes on the function of introducing metaphysics as the science of the absolute. Secondly, the human mind is capable of acquiring knowledge of the absolute and it is the task of the *Phenomenology* to show this by way of a theory of the gradual acquisition of knowledge that leads from finite human thinking to absolute knowing or metaphysics. But where does this theory of the gradual acquisition of knowledge itself come from? This question represents the basic problem for Hegel at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, and it can be spelled out by looking more closely at the twofold problem of epistemic justification on the one hand and skepticism on the other.

2.2 Epistemic justification and skepticism

In contemporary epistemology epistemic justification is usually construed as the truth-conduciveness of beliefs. That is to say, epistemic justification conduces beliefs to truth. A belief is justified if it is more likely to be true than false, i.e. if there are stronger supporting grounds or evidence for than against it.¹⁰ Though Hegel does not use this modern terminology, the starting point of the *Phenomenology* is precisely the problem of epistemic justification. In the Preface – as we have already seen – Hegel characterizes his aim as a demonstration of “actual knowing” (II, ¶5), as “insight into what knowing is” (25, ¶29). As we shall see later, the method he employs is not the analysis of the concept of knowledge, in order to identify the truth conditions of knowledge or belief, respectively. Hegel’s argument is based rather on the initial distinction between the “appearance of knowledge” and “true knowledge” (54–56, ¶¶76–77). The phrase “appearance of knowledge” is meant to indicate that in the beginning there are just beliefs or epistemic claims like those of “non-spiritual, i.e. *sense-consciousness*”

⁹ Cf. again Düsing (1995), chapter 3. For a brief overview of this development, see Siep (2000), 24–62.

¹⁰ For an overview of contemporary theories, see Fumerton (2002).

(24, ¶27), and that it is the project of the *Phenomenology* to examine step by step whether these epistemic claims satisfy the concept of “true knowledge” and to do so *without presupposing an external epistemological criterion*. So in principle Hegel conceives the *Phenomenology* as a theoretical transformation of beliefs or provisional knowledge into “true knowledge.” One of its central ideas is therefore to conduce epistemic claims to truth. In this sense the *Phenomenology* corresponds to the above-mentioned conception of epistemic justification, even though using highly specific methodological means (see below).

Now from a systematic point of view theories of epistemic justification are generally threatened by skepticism. By introducing a skeptical hypothesis like the demon- or dream-hypothesis, the skeptic argues that our beliefs cannot be justified. Hegel is well aware of this skeptical threat, and stresses that basing his own or any one else’s conception on a “mere assurance” of its truth is just not a philosophical option (55, ¶76). In fact, one must demonstrate its truth, since one “bare assurance is worth just as much as another” (55, ¶76). This equipollence of epistemic claims to which Hegel refers a couple of times in the Preface as well as in the Introduction is one of the basic techniques of skeptical argumentation.¹¹ Therefore it is Hegel’s core problem from the very beginning to show how his own theory of epistemic justification in the *Phenomenology* can be defended against skepticism. In the Preface he specifies two claims instrumental to his project.

3 HEGEL’S CLAIMS

Although in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel focuses on a variety of philosophical problems, he raises two claims that are central to his entire book. The first central claim concerns truth, the second concerns knowledge. I will first analyse them in turn, and then show how they are related.¹²

3.1 *From substance to subject*

At the end of section 16 of the Preface, Hegel announces that he is now going to present the “general,” though “rough idea” of his philosophical conception. What follows is the presentation of his first central claim: “In my view, which can be justified only by the system itself, everything turns

¹¹ Cf. Forster (1998), 129 ff., 152 f., Heidemann (2007), chapter 3.

¹² Another important issue in the Preface that I will not deal with in this chapter is what Hegel calls the “speculative proposition” (¶61 ff.). On the argumentative structure of the Preface, cf. Sallis (1998).

on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*" (18, ¶17). There are two important points about this claim that need to be made clear: First of all, the proposition "grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*" is primarily about truth – provided that the term "the True" is equivalent to "truth"; second, since there is a fundamental difference between the definition and the criterion of truth, this proposition clearly deals with the definition of truth.¹³ So in order to understand why Hegel claims to establish a conceptual conjunction between substance and subject one has to bear in mind that in his view both concepts define, or at least determine, what truth *is*.

The idea of conceiving "the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*" results from a basic criticism Hegel directs against some of his contemporaries. This criticism makes clear what the claim actually means. As mentioned above, when he arrived in Jena Hegel at first collaborated with Schelling on developing an absolute metaphysics. In regard to Spinoza's monistic substance, both agreed that the object of metaphysics was the absolute conceived as substance. Not long after, however, Hegel diverged from Schelling, arguing that the absolute or "God as the one Substance" (18, ¶17) cannot be just substance and nothing more. The concept of the true or absolute conceived as the one substance is underdetermined to the extent that it does not adequately incorporate thought and hence precludes self-determining subjectivity.¹⁴ There are two questions concerning this view: First, why is the determination of the true or absolute as substance insufficient? Secondly, even if an additional determination is necessary, why is it subject or subjectivity, and in what sense?

From the Hegelian point of view the first question can be answered in the following way: The absolute cannot be merely substance because, if it were, it would be a static principle of reality, even though it "embraces the universal, or the *immediacy of knowledge*" (18, ¶17) namely, thought. It is an essential feature of Hegel's philosophical position during the Jena period and later that the absolute can only be the true insofar as it is not distinguished from thought as it is in Spinoza's philosophy: Spinoza separates substance from thought and extension as its "attributes". For Hegel, by contrast, thought cannot be a predicate that is externally attributed to the first principle of a philosophical system; rather, it has to be its original determination. It is at

¹³ The difference consists between the definition or ontological status of truth, on the one hand, and how truth or the true can be cognized, on the other. Unlike the first, the second central claim on "knowledge as system" deals with the way of cognizing truth (see below).

¹⁴ Cf. Sallis (1998), 29 f.

least debateable whether this critique readily applies to Spinoza at all.¹⁵ In any case, the argument from underdeterminateness depends essentially on Hegel's own conception of the true or absolute as a non-static principle which (in contrast to Spinoza's one substance) unifies being and thought.

Hegel's answer to the second question sheds further light on why such a unity has to be established and why this unity finally leads to subjectivity: "In general, because, as we put it above, substance is in itself or implicitly Subject, all content is its own reflection into itself" (39, ¶54). Hegel's argument for this claim runs as follows: The necessary condition for the "subsistence or substance" of any existing thing is its "self-identity," since a non-identical existing entity implies a contradiction ("its dissolution"). However, self-identity is "pure abstraction" and "abstraction" is "*thinking*" (39, ¶54). Existence presupposes difference insofar as no entity can exist without being determined, i.e. without being qualitatively differentiated from every other existing thing. From this results its "simple oneness with itself": "But it is thereby essentially a thought" (39, ¶54). According to Hegel, this is the proper meaning of the identity of thought and being: "Being is Thought," the latter construed not as static subsistence but as a mediated process constituted by conceptual development in three stages from self-identity to difference and back to self-identity. The structure of this process essentially describes a self-referential movement and self-reference is characteristic of the thinking subject or subjectivity. This applies to substance in general, and it is what is behind Hegel's claim to conceive "the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*" (18, ¶17). Thus for the true to be substance means for it to determine itself as such, and consequently for it to conceive itself equally as thinking subject. Thus, according to Hegel, substantiality is also a characteristic of the thinking subject or of subjectivity.

It should be clear by now that Hegel holds an ontological concept of truth founded on the idealistic equation of being and thought.¹⁶ Now in principle this equation can be construed in different ways. In Hegel's time, Schelling understood it as if "thought does unite itself with the being of Substance, or apprehends immediacy or intuition as thinking" (18, ¶17). Hegel here implicitly alludes to Schelling's notion of intellectual intuition,

¹⁵ Earlier in the *Differenz-Schrift* (1801), Hegel had already criticized Spinoza for grounding philosophy dogmatically on a definition (cf. *Ethics*, I.1). On Hegel's critique of Spinoza, see Bartuschat (2007).

¹⁶ This equation is often taken as a definitional feature of idealism. Note that the concept of "idealism" in the Hegelian sense is different from representational idealism, the claim that the existence of the external world is somehow ideal. That there are still fundamental misinterpretations of Hegel's use of this term in contemporary philosophy has been stressed by Rockmore (2001), 342–353.

which he criticizes since it threatens to “fall back into inert simplicity, and . . . depicts actuality itself in a non-actual manner” (18, ¶17). According to Hegel, this conception offers no place for a self-determining development, though “the living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself” (18, ¶18). One has to concede that the Preface can delineate only the rough idea of this conception, and necessarily falls short of a thoroughgoing argument for it. Yet this idea forms the background and can illuminate the meaning of one of the most famous statements in Hegel’s philosophy: “The True is the whole” (19, ¶20). In contrast to Schelling or, in more contemporary terms, e.g. to Wittgenstein’s view in the *Tractatus* according to which the world just comprises the sum of all facts (“Die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen, nicht der Dinge,” 1.1.), Hegel thinks that “The True is the whole” only insofar as it comprises the whole development from substance to subject, not just the totality of facts.¹⁷ The core of Hegel’s first central claim is thus that substance cannot just make up the true, since the absolute is the “result” (19, ¶20) of a development within substance determining itself as subject.¹⁸ After having outlined what truth means, namely the entire development from substance to subject, the question then of course becomes whether and how truth in this developmental sense can be cognized. An answer to this question lies in the second central claim, which pertains to the method of cognizing truth.

3.2 Knowledge as system

The second central claim in the Preface reads as follows: “The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth” (11, ¶5). This claim is not about the ontological status of truth, rather it is about the “true shape” of truth, namely thought or knowledge (self-determining subjectivity). The claim therefore deals with the cognition of truth as Hegel emphasizes, “that knowledge is only actual, and can only be expounded, as Science or as *system*” (21, ¶24). One can summarize the second central claim in the following way: Since the “true shape” of truth is science or system and knowledge is actual only as science or system, therefore (actual or true)

¹⁷ I here assume that Wittgenstein would allow us to use “world” as equivalent to “the True” in the sense of “the totality of what can be or is true,” *Tractatus* (1981), 31.

¹⁸ Cf. ¶3: “nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about.” On “the whole,” see also ¶12.

knowledge is possible only as science or system. The key problem with this claim is the concept of system. There are two ways of understanding this concept in the present context: First of all, the term “system” stands for Hegel’s system around 1806, consisting, like the *Encyclopedia*, of three parts: logic–philosophy of nature–philosophy of spirit.¹⁹ Secondly, “system” is used by Hegel in the literal sense of “connectedness” (from the Greek *systema*), namely “connectedness” of concepts or propositions, respectively. Though it is reasonable to understand the term “system” in the first sense, in our context the second is ultimately to be preferred. There are two reasons for this: As we will see below, “system” as “connectedness” is the appropriate methodological concept to describe the transformation from substance to subject. Furthermore, Hegel links the second central claim with a fundamental critique of two methodological principles of philosophical knowledge formation, (a) intuitionism and (b) individualism. These principles or theories form the contrast to the idea of knowledge as system.

(a) In the broadest sense, intuitionism is the thesis that there is non-inferential intellectual insight into epistemic facts and that this kind of insight represents genuine philosophical knowledge. Though in contemporary epistemology²⁰ the use of “intuitionism” is restricted to “rational insight”, around 1800 this concept also applied to non-rational forms of knowledge such as feeling. In the Preface, Hegel attacks both, the rational as well as the non-rational form of intuitionism. According to Hegel these forms of intuitionism claim that “the True exists only in what, or better *as* what, is sometimes called intuition, sometimes immediate knowledge of the Absolute.” Since the true is the whole, that is to say the whole *development* of a justificatory process, his basic criticism is that in intuitionism “the absolute is not supposed to be comprehended, it is to be felt or intuited” (12, ¶6). This epistemic procedure essentially lacks conceptual development and subjectivity (12–13, ¶7). So, according to Hegel, intuition is an arbitrary epistemic principle, unable to do justice to his substance–subject-claim.²¹

¹⁹ The original frontispiece of the book reads: “System of Science” – “First Part the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.” “First Part” here refers to the introductory function of the *Phenomenology* to science and not to the three parts of the system itself. Cf. ¶27.

²⁰ Cf. DePaul and Ramsey (1998).

²¹ Cf. also ¶¶10–13, 16–20, 23, 27, 54, 68 f. In his critique of intuitionism Hegel mainly attacks the romantics, especially Schelling. See also *Encyclopedia* (1830), §§61 ff. On Hegel’s critique of the romantics, see Pöggeler (1998).

(b) In epistemology, individualism is the view that the individual epistemic subject functions as the ultimate principle of knowledge. According to individualism, the formation of knowledge presupposes an individual (self-conscious) subject who can be said to have justifying evidence for her knowledge if and only if that evidence is accessible to its own single consciousness based on self-certainty.²² In modern philosophy Descartes' *primo cognitio* and Fichte's principles ("*Grundsätze*") in the *Doctrine of Science* are paradigmatic examples of individualism. In several passages of the Preface, Hegel critically alludes to their theories. His general objection to epistemological individualism is "that a so-called basic proposition or principle of philosophy, if true, is also false, just because it is *only* a principle" (21, ¶24). Accordingly, the falsity of first philosophical principles such as Descartes' *ego cogito* or Fichte's self-positing I consists in their laying claim to the epistemic status of a "universal" philosophical "beginning" without having been developed and thus lacking any justification (21, ¶24). In the end, epistemological individualism turns out for Hegel to be "a dogmatism of assurance, or a dogmatism of self-certainty" (39, ¶54), wrongly assuming "that the true consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known" (31, ¶40).²³

From his rejection of epistemological individualism it should not be concluded that Hegel rejects the thinking subject or subjectivity in every respect. On the contrary, as we have already seen in connection with the substance–subject–claim (first central claim), subjectivity is for Hegel a crucial methodological concept. It does however start to become clear that, unlike Descartes or Fichte, Hegel does not ground subjectivity on individualism as a methodological principle. But what is his alternative? In regard to epistemic justification, Hegel argues for methodological anti-individualism. Methodological anti-individualism is the view that epistemic justification does not, or even can not, depend on the individual subject as justifying principle of knowledge formation. For Hegel, the conception of methodological anti-individualism is represented by the claim of knowledge as system, for according to that claim the individual subject is not the deductive principle at the top of a hierarchy of epistemic justification, as is the case for Descartes or Fichte. The individual subject cannot function as the basis of epistemic justification since each epistemic

²² In many respects, individualism resembles internalism in epistemology, though both cannot be identified, cf. Heidemann (2007), chapter 3.

²³ In the Introduction Hegel rigorously criticizes individualism as the epistemic principle of first-person-authority. See esp. 56, ¶78. For a convincing epistemological assessment of this critique cf. Forster (1998), 136 ff.

principle has to be developed in a justificatory process. There is thus no self-sufficient epistemic principle. Knowledge as system therefore represents the idea of non-foundational justification of knowledge.²⁴

According to Hegel, on the one hand the thinking subject or subjectivity as “self-recognition” is “the ground and soil of Science or *knowledge in general*” (22, ¶26) yet, on the other hand, as the foundation of science, it has to be the *result* of the process of epistemic justification. This process he describes as the “path of education” (*Bildung*) (46, ¶68), leading as its “goal” to “Spirit’s insight into what knowing is” (25, ¶29). However, from the epistemological perspective the process itself cannot be described as mere social development or educational process of the individual subject in the history of cultures, though the *Phenomenology* of course incorporates a historical dimension.²⁵ The process of education is rather to be understood as the epistemic process or “path of the natural consciousness which presses forward to true knowledge” (55, ¶77): “The Science of this pathway is the science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through” (¶36). In this sense, the *Phenomenology* presents the “coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge*” proceeding from basic forms of epistemic consciousness like sensory knowledge to “genuine knowledge” (24, ¶27). So the *Phenomenology* deals with abstract epistemic claims by consciousness and with the problem of justifying these claims. This procedure is not guided by first principles such as the epistemological primacy of the individual subject that might serve as ultimate grounds of appeal for deducing all other knowledge. Hegel’s method in the *Phenomenology* is an anti-individualist examination of knowledge claims as such by way of abstracting from the epistemic conditions of the individual subject. The goal of this method is justified true knowledge, namely knowledge as a system that does not rely on first principles, but instead develops the whole structure of knowledge by examining epistemic claims.²⁶ Of course, the question now becomes how both of the central claims can be met. With regard to the problem of epistemic justification in particular, Hegel has to show both how each of them can be proven and how both claims are connected. Hegel’s solution to the problem of justifying true knowledge rests on two arguments.

²⁴ Nowadays it is consequently concluded that Hegel argues for coherentism or holism (inferentialism) of truth and knowledge. Cf. esp. Brandom (2002b). Contrary to this interpretation, D. S. Stern argues that Hegel rejects both foundationalism and holism. Cf. Stern (1993).

²⁵ Cf. Forster’s “pedagogical tasks” as well as his analysis of the problem of history in the *Phenomenology*, Forster (1998), 17 ff., 291 ff.

²⁶ Note that I am not concerned here with the nature of knowledge as system itself but with the methodological problem of justifying knowledge as system. Cf. Sallis (1998), 34 ff.

4 HEGEL'S SOLUTION

4.1 *The argument from self-creation of the epistemic standard*

So far, I have argued that the *Phenomenology* deals with the problem of epistemic justification, of justifying true knowledge as science or system. As has been pointed out in section 2, epistemic justification faces skepticism. To be more precise, skeptical doubts concerning epistemic justification arise because the justification of knowledge presupposes a criterion by means of which it can be decided whether knowledge is justified; but for the skeptic, the criterion is itself questionable. Though theories of epistemic justification such as coherentism or contextualism claim to be able to do without a criterion, and thereby to dissolve skepticism Hegel, in the *Phenomenology* at least, explicitly affirms that a criterion of justification is indispensable. In what follows I shall first briefly outline the skeptical argument against the justifiability of the criterion. Then I will show that in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel takes up this problem precisely because it turns out to be decisive for the proof of his two central claims. The first step of Hegel's solution to the problem is the argument from self-creation of the standard within an epistemic self-examination of consciousness. This argument claims to provide an escape from the skeptical objection of non-justifiability of the criterion.

The problem of non-justifiability of the criterion originates in ancient skepticism. The Pyrrhonist Philosopher Agrippa models it as a skeptical trilemma. The general argument runs as follows: The logical "criterion of truth" serves as "the standard regulating belief in reality or unreality"; however, it is un-provable. For if the philosophical dispute on the existence of a criterion of truth is to be decided, a criterion is required to determine whether there is one or not. This criterion however

- (a) can only be proven *circularly* because the proof of a criterion already requires an accepted criterion by means of which it can be proven ("diallel"); or
- (b) it can only be a *dogmatic* "assumption" by just presupposing its existence; or
- (c) the reasoning for a criterion by another criterion forces us into an infinite regress.²⁷

In any of the three cases, the justification of the criterion necessarily fails.

²⁷ *PH* I.21 ff., *PH* II.18 ff. Quotations from Bury's edition of Sextus Empiricus: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (= *PH*).

Contemporary epistemologists like Fogelin have argued that this trilemma is unsolvable and therefore a serious threat to epistemic justification.²⁸ Hegel, however, well familiar with the Pyrrhonists' writings, claims in the *Phenomenology* to have found a solution to it. In particular, he thinks he has developed an epistemological procedure that justifies the criterion without making unjustified external presuppositions. According to Hegel the aporia of the criterion, or "standard" (*Maßstab*) as he most frequently calls it, arises because the "investigation and examination of the reality of cognition" cannot manage "without some presupposition which can serve as its underlying criterion" (58, ¶81). From this results a "contradiction" (58, ¶82) or an aporia:

For an examination consists in applying an accepted standard, and in determining whether something is right or wrong on the basis of the resulting agreement or disagreement of the thing examined; thus the standard as such (and Science likewise if it were the criterion) is accepted as the *essence* or as the *in-itself*. But here, where Science has just begun to come on the scene, neither Science nor anything else has yet justified itself as the essence or the in-itself; and without something of that sort it seems that no examination can take place. (58, ¶81)

In this passage, Hegel presents the skeptical aporia of the criterion as a methodological difficulty within the examination of cognition by means of a standard. Knowledge cannot be justified because there is no justified standard available. This version of the aporia essentially resembles Sextus' approach, even though Hegel does not explicitly mention the Pyrrhonian background here.²⁹ Hegel's solution to the problem is based on the analysis of epistemic consciousness. It can be outlined as follows: In order to prevent the unjustified presupposition of the criterion in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* Hegel introduces the concept of Science as it "comes on the scene" (55, ¶76). Science is characterized at this stage first as an "appearance," i.e. a form of knowledge emerging alongside other epistemic claims. Secondly, as an "emerging" science it is "not yet Science in its developed and unfolded truth." As this nascent Science competes with other concepts of cognition, and due to skeptical equipollence it cannot simply declare its superiority since this would be nothing but a dogmatic "assurance" (55, ¶76). Therefore Hegel's strategy is to show that the emerging Science reforms to truth by turning against the mere appearance

²⁸ Cf. Fogelin (1994), 194.

²⁹ In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (part I, ¶2) Hegel discusses Agrippa's trilemma at length. To my knowledge the first person to have drawn attention to the "aporia" was Claesges (1981), 68 ff., 77 ff. On the Pyrrhonian background of Hegel's discussion of the criterion see Westphal (1998), 81 ff.

of knowledge and thereby abandoning its provisional status in order to overcome untrue modes of knowledge and cognition.

However, to the extent that the “exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance” (55, ¶76) is nothing but the “*examination of the reality of cognition*” (58, ¶81), the *Phenomenology* obviously cannot avoid relapsing into the aporia, since that examination presupposes a “standard” of its own in turn. In other words, Science must provide the standard of truth although it is just about to emerge and is not yet true and real, i.e. justified. Hegel therefore argues: Since a standard of justification is indispensable, but cannot be dogmatically presupposed as an external criterion, it must fall into the sphere of consciousness itself. The standard is an internal factor of consciousness, for “truth” and “knowledge” prove to be “abstract determinations” that “occur in consciousness” itself (58, ¶82). Examination of the relation between these determinations yields the insight that “[c]onsciousness provides its own criterion from within itself” by performing nothing more but a “comparison” with itself (59, ¶84). Hegel conceives this as the self-creation of the standard for the distinction between knowledge and truth, between that which is *for* consciousness and that which is *in-itself* outside the relation, for that very distinction is one that is made within the epistemic structures of consciousness itself. Whenever consciousness “knows” an object, this object is both *for it* and at the same time *in itself* or true since consciousness regards the object as given outside of the cognitive relation. The *in itself*, however, is a determination that consciousness “affirms” within its knowledge. For Hegel, these epistemic structures generate the standard: “Thus in what consciousness affirms from within itself as *being-in-itself* or the *True* we have the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows” (59, ¶84). Thus according to Hegel’s solution to the skeptical trilemma the examination of knowledge consists in a comparison of consciousness with what it takes to be true. If consciousness corresponds to what it takes to be true, i.e. if it is in accordance with itself, then its knowledge meets the standard of true knowledge, produced by itself. In accordance with the substance–subject–claim, this stage is achieved by consciousness at the level of true self-consciousness or subjectivity, namely “absolute knowing.” In the course of its development toward full-fledged subjectivity, consciousness is already following the path of science and hence does not have to presuppose an external standard. – Hegel is well aware that this very abstract argument from the self-creation of the standard is not sufficient to solve the whole skeptical problem of justification. Three open questions remain: How exactly does consciousness manage to generate the standard?

What precisely does the standard look like? Does this conception amount to complete subjectivism? Hegel's answers to these questions are supplied by the argument from the history of self-consciousness.

4.2 *The argument from the history of self-consciousness*

The concept "history of self-consciousness" designates a methodological procedure in German idealism that goes back to Fichte's theory of subjectivity in the *Doctrine of Science* (1794) and that was further developed by Schelling in his *System of transcendental Idealism* (1800). Hegel takes up this conception in the *Phenomenology* and reshapes it under the title "history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science" (56, ¶78).³⁰ The purpose of the history of self-consciousness is not to describe the empirical coming into being of self-consciousness on the basis of the natural, cultural, or social development of mankind. Rather, the conception of the history of self-consciousness as it has been developed by Fichte and Schelling is about the ideal or systematic genesis of cognitive capacities in the human mind. The idea is to show how the human mind develops such capacities, starting with primitive forms of epistemic consciousness or knowledge which in the sequel are enriched by more complex forms until they finally culminate in the fully developed self-conscious cognitive subject. This developmental theory on the history or genesis of the human mind is of special systematic significance to German Idealism, and especially to Hegel, because it allows us to explain how the subject or subjectivity can function as a general philosophical basis without introducing it as a first principle, as in Descartes' epistemological foundationalism.

Though it forms the methodological framework of the entire *Phenomenology*, the systematic significance of the history of self-consciousness has been widely overlooked. This is very surprising, since the *Phenomenology* is clearly arranged as an interconnected "series of forms" of consciousness (57, ¶79), although Hegel does not conceive it as a development of cognitive capacities, like Fichte and Schelling, but of epistemic claims. A form of consciousness can be characterized as a idealized epistemic shape or structure of consciousness within a specific field like sense-certainty, perception, reason, or spirit. The exposition of forms of consciousness is not, however, about the way consciousness has sense impressions, perceptual representations, etc. Rather it deals with the

³⁰ I cannot discuss here the historical background and complicated lines of influence of this conception in German idealism. On these issues, cf. Düsing (1993); Breazeale (2001).

specific epistemic claims involved in sense-certainty, perception etc. and the question whether consciousness meets these claims so as to acquire *true* knowledge. According to this theory, each form of consciousness must have its own standard that makes it possible to decide whether an epistemic claim is satisfied. For example, the standard of sense-certainty as a form of consciousness is “*immediacy*” (63, ¶190 ff.), i.e. non-inferentiality is the standard that natural consciousness sets up as the criterion for the examination of the truth of its knowledge claims. So at the level of sense-certainty, consciousness examines whether its epistemic claim, i.e. beliefs based on sense impressions, meet the standard of immediacy. The examination of this form of consciousness then proves that sense-certainty does not meet its standard since it turns out to be inferential knowledge after all and hence according to its own standard one of “the forms of the unreal consciousness” (56, ¶179). Thus sense-certainty as the form or claim of immediate knowledge has to be given up, because all knowledge based on sense impressions is conceptually mediated.³¹

Now the standard as such is not just an external presupposition since it is intrinsic to each form of consciousness and set up by consciousness itself. To my mind this is – *prima facie* at least – a legitimate conception to the extent that it is possible to typify different classes of epistemic claims according to different criteria of epistemic justification. A problem does, however, arise regarding the systematic interconnection of these claims in the *Phenomenology*. According to Hegel, no shape of consciousness meets its standard except “absolute knowing” as the fully developed form of self-consciousness or self-knowledge. However the series of the “formative stages” (25, ¶28) of consciousness is not an arbitrary one but is said to be *complete* as well as *necessary* (25–26, ¶29; 55, ¶77 ff.). Hegel tries to guarantee this on the basis of the following argument: The non-satisfaction of a specific standard not only leads to a modification of the epistemic claim of consciousness but also “the criterion for testing is altered,” so that the examination of consciousness is also an examination of “the criterion of what knowledge is” (59, ¶85). From this alteration, Hegel claims, “*the new true object issues*” by a “*dialectical* movement which consciousness exercises” (60, ¶86). This new object is the new epistemic claim of consciousness, including its new standard. That is to say that with the exception of sense-certainty as the first form of consciousness, each of the ensuing forms of consciousness necessarily (logically) follows from the preceding one and hence always contains what consciousness has learned from its previous

³¹ I have reconstructed the argument in the chapter on “Sense-Certainty” in Heidemann (2002a).

shape. By this “historical” process natural consciousness continuously develops into true “absolute knowing” or completed subject, encompassing the entire experience consciousness made before.³²

Though subjectivity constitutes the unity of the entire development and is thus the thread of this process, from the beginning to end, the question still remains how the developing consciousness itself can have knowledge of the logical interconnection of the different stages and their epistemic features. Indeed, the developing consciousness has no such knowledge. This is due to the fact that the conception of a history of self-consciousness presupposes the methodological differentiation between the developing consciousness at the first level and the phenomenological philosopher who establishes the theoretical links between the forms of consciousness at the second level. The developing consciousness is ignorant of the logical relations between its different epistemic claims since the theoretical assessment takes place from the already fully developed philosophical standpoint: “It is this fact that guides the entire series of the patterns of consciousness in their necessary sequence” (61, ¶87). This is the reason why Hegel maintains that the *Phenomenology* as “the way to science is itself already *Science*” (61, ¶88) and therefore does not lay claim to unjustified external standards of epistemic examination.³³

The conception of the history of self-consciousness apparently shows, first, how the standard is generated by the self-examining consciousness; secondly, what the standard is in each particular case; and, thirdly, that Hegel’s solution does not come down to mere subjectivism since the philosophical evaluation of the “pathway” is “something contributed by *us*” (61, ¶87), by the knowing philosopher, and therefore made from an objective standpoint. Nevertheless, the conception as a whole can be reproached with circularity. An argument is circular if the conclusion shows up among the premises. This is the case in Hegel’s overall argument because the conclusion, the standpoint of philosophical truth, is a constitutive element needed to make sense of the premises, i.e. the history of self-consciousness. On the one hand, the history of self-consciousness is to justify true philosophical knowledge, while on the other the theory already makes use of it prior to completion of the whole developmental process,

³² That a form of consciousness continuously takes over what it has learned from the previous one is made possible by the principle of “*determinate negation*” (¶79), due to which negation not only annihilates its object, but also preserves it. Unfortunately, Hegel does not justify this principle in the Introduction.

³³ On the methodological differentiation between the standpoint of consciousness in process and the standpoint of the philosopher, cf. Marx (1981), 124 ff.; Düsing (1993).

before it is justified. The history of self-consciousness is forced to make the external presupposition of philosophical knowledge that explains what is going on within the process of justifying the sequence of epistemic claims consciousness raises. The presupposition is external because Hegel is not in fact entitled (though he thinks he is) to make use of true philosophical knowledge as an integral element of the justifying process. So what is required is an original justification of the philosophical standpoint itself so that it can be legitimately used at the level of the evaluation of developing consciousness. Consequently, if my argument is correct, the *Phenomenology* fails as a theory of epistemic justification.

5 CONCLUSION

The fact that the *Phenomenology* fails as a theory of epistemic justification does not mean that the work does not contain successful arguments within a specific shape of consciousness.³⁴ However, is it possible in principle to escape the aforementioned difficulty? In conclusion I would like only to point to some hypothetical alternatives. As we have seen, one of the most difficult problems of the *Phenomenology* is the proof of the truth of the standard. It is not clear to me how a mere generative description of subjective capacities could contribute to a solution here since such a description cannot yield truth. One might therefore – like Sellars – consider a naturalistic approach according to which consciousness develops from manifest forms of knowledge into a true scientific one. However, this solution fails on grounds similar to those which vitiate Hegel’s theory, since it presupposes an external standpoint of evaluation.³⁵ Another alternative might be to interpret the *Phenomenology* in terms of normativity. As far as I understand him, Brandom, for instance, seems to reconstruct Hegel’s notion of truth as being essentially normative in nature. According to this approach, normativity has a social basis constituted by self-conscious subjects. It consists of inferential relations between linguistic or epistemic claims and commitments in a holistic system of such relations. Yet in order to do justice to the developmental character of normativity besides the social and the inferential we must also assume a historical dimension of normativity. Accordingly, Hegel argues for a “process of experience” and for the idea

³⁴ The argument in the chapter on “Sense-Certainty” (n. 31 above) is a good example. Cf. Heidemann (2002b).

³⁵ What I have in mind is Sellars’ developmental conception of the manifest and scientific image of man in the world. There are striking similarities between Hegel and Sellars. Cf. Heidemann (2005).

“which looms large, for instance, in the Preface of the *Phenomenology* – that Spirit as a whole should be understood as a *self*.”³⁶ This “process of *development*” represents a “reciprocal cognitive structure within which Spirit as a whole comes to self-consciousness . . . Making that structure explicit is achieving the form of self-consciousness Hegel calls ‘Absolute Knowledge’.”³⁷ It seems to me that Brandom has to develop a theory similar to Hegel’s history of self-consciousness in order to show how that knowledge can be justified. To rely on holism would just dogmatically presuppose the truth of holism. The discovery of an acceptable solution to these problems is a task still confronting philosophical discussion today.³⁸

³⁶ In this passage, Brandom alludes to what in this chapter has been called the substance–subject–claim. Cf. Brandom (2002c), 226 f.

³⁷ Brandom (2002c), 234.

³⁸ I am very grateful to Brady Bowman (Penn State) for checking this chapter linguistically and for critically discussing some of its central arguments.

“Science of the phenomenology of spirit”: *Hegel’s program and its implementation*

Hans-Friedrich Fulda

I

Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, now turning 200, has ceased to be an odd stumbling block in the historical memory of present-day philosophy. In recent years, significant work has contributed to the exploration and appropriation of Hegel’s text. Someone who started studying this work more than half a century ago, as I did, can only envy those approaching the text today. Thanks to a discussion among experts that has increased in intensity and international scope over the past thirty-five years, beginners can now turn to excellent collections of essays.¹ Sustained unitary interpretations² have illuminated the whole extent of the enterprise. An encompassing and erudite essay³ has clarified the full complexity of its underlying idea. Invigoratingly controversial and easily accessible studies have illuminated various parts of the work in more detail, and the context of these individual topics within the Hegelian oeuvre, life, and influence has been revealed in comprehensive accounts that in many respects mutually complement and correct each other.⁴

The tendency towards crudely one-sided interpretations, such as those that dominated the scene in the middle of the twentieth century, is hardly visible today. Someone who sets out now to discover a substantial truth or to find himself in the *Phenomenology* does not run the risk of falling prey to the misinterpretations that were at one time very pervasive. Well informed as we are about the prehistory that the *Phenomenology* had in Hegel’s thought, and familiar as we are with the contractual conditions under which the work had to be completed, we are even less prone to

Translated by David P. Schweikard.

¹ E.g. Pöggeler and Köhler (1998); Stewart (1998).

² Scheier (1986); Pinkard (1994); Siep (2000). ³ Forster (1998).

⁴ For instance, Pippin (1989, 1997); Pinkard (2000); Fulda (2003); Jaeschke (2003); Hoffmann (2004).

believe in the tale that Theodor Haering invented about its genesis.⁵ Even if one admits that there is evidence that the *Phenomenology* as it was published still carries traits of radical changes in its composition, no one who reads it alongside more recent secondary literature will find plausible that it is nothing but a congenial product of distress that fundamentally lacks coherence. The declared program and the idea of this magnum opus, the starting point and aim, method and makeup, train of thought, inner structure, and process of presentation, are too subtly interweaved to infer the inconsistency of the whole simply by applying a few external criteria.⁶ Those who take Hegel seriously as a thinker and want to interpret his *Phenomenology* as a systematic work are no longer completely isolated.⁷ The first imperative for further interpretation is to pay close attention to the text, for only then does thinking about the *Phenomenology* become productive.

The way in which Hegel has assimilated the basic concepts of the *Phenomenology* into his *Encyclopedia* doctrine of Subjective Spirit has by now been studied in detail. Even the possibility of connecting the later more complex content of the *Phenomenology* with the systematic philosophy of Objective and Absolute Spirit now appears much more plausible. Contemporary interest is not limited to the first four chapters, but also extends to the latter four of the eight chapters numbered in Roman numerals. There is now interest in the topics dealt with in those chapters: “The actualization of reason”, “The ethical order,” and “Religion,” including their interconnections and the partial identity of religious representing and absolute knowing. There is even interest in studying the implications of the fact that the epistemological questions involved in these topics become more and more concrete from chapter to chapter.

The different dimensions advanced by distinct national cultures of reception in recent decades have also enriched the appropriation and study of the *Phenomenology*. In *Germany*, the interpretation that reduced the work to anthropological aspects has been left behind and the genesis of the *Phenomenology* reconstructed. Colleagues in *France* have integrated the important motifs of reduction into a careful exegesis of the entire work and

⁵ See Haering (1934).

⁶ In a letter to Schelling (of May 1, 1807), to which especially those refer who doubt the homogeneity of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel mentions the “wretched confusion” which – along with the “process of publishing and printing” – “partly dominates even the composition itself.” That does not exclude a coherent and internally consistent *result* – in spite of the admitted “shapelessness of the final parts,” the editing of which was, according to this testimony, finished “at midnight before the battle of Jena” (*Briefe*, vol. 1), 16. *Letters*, 79–80.

⁷ But see Henrich (1971), 7.

(thanks to a new translation)⁸ have developed a sensitive understanding of the literary qualities of the philosophical idiom that Hegel invented with the *Phenomenology*. From *English-speaking countries* there have been not only perspicacious analyses of the argumentative potential contained in Hegel's work, but also new directions of research that have grown out of the similarities between Hegel and specific priorities of Anglo-American philosophy, such as pragmatism, the critique of the myth of the given, contextualist epistemology, and the inferential semantics of making explicit. Above all, this climate of reception has opened the debate on the reassessment of Hegel's entire philosophy and sharpened the debate with respect to the crucial questions: Is Hegel's place one before the threshold to modern society and the modern intellectual world?⁹ Or does he, after early modern philosophy and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and by bringing Kant's revolution of metaphysics to an end, take the last step towards a self-knowledge in which modernity can enlighten itself about its own presuppositions? If the latter, can he accomplish this task without forfeiting its deepest conceptual content, including its effectiveness for irrational "life" (with the self-destructive consequences, originating from Germany, that this has had for Europe)? In order to be able to take a stand on these questions, one has to give precise formulations of the program of the *Phenomenology* and its implementation. Such an interpretation should also be epistemological in nature. Great progress has been made in this field in recent decades. What can be said about my topic in a short chapter must, under these conditions, take only the shape of a corrective.

2

To what kind of epistemological question did Hegel dedicate his introductory Phenomenology? It seems to me that a good answer to this question, one that clarifies the *program* of the work, requires a more complex approach than those that have been pursued so far. It is clear that a more adequate approach cannot be focused on the most universal alternatives of "epistemology," such as, for instance, the alternative between epistemological idealism and epistemological realism, though Hegel does also contribute to this.¹⁰ Furthermore, it is clear that in the Hegelian *Phenomenology*

⁸ Trans. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, published in the Bibliothèque philosophique, Paris (1991–92).

⁹ Cf. Taylor (1975, 1979). ¹⁰ See Westphal (1989); Fulda (2004).

epistemic problems of the specific sciences can be treated only through the specific shapes of “observed” consciousness and not in terms of the justification of claims to knowledge made by the philosophizing phenomenologist. It should also be uncontroversial that the epistemic *horizon* of this phenomenologist includes not only those alleged or actual insights of specific sciences or of prescientific common sense (or the critique of common sense), and not only *theoretical* insights. This horizon equally includes the *practical* and such insights (alleged or actual) as those found in religious or normative-aesthetical knowledge, insights that cannot be subsumed under the theoretical or the practical, though they contain both kinds of knowledge. Likewise, the cognition and knowledge claimed by the phenomenologist should not be understood in the sense of the old textbook definition, i.e. as a pure taking-to-be-true that is true and justified by reasons which are sufficient although they are abstracted from all social and temporal context of appearance. Finally, the subject of such knowledge should not be seen throughout as an entirely indeterminate, isolated “taker” of such taking-to-be-true, but must be seen both in connection with increasingly concrete capacities, attitudes, and activities, and in increasingly complex interconnection with other subjects and with institutions or other collective, cultural forms. In short, in connection with a “Spirit” whose content is increasingly determinate.

More important in this regard (since it has not received as much attention) is to guard against presupposing that the cognition sought by the philosophizing phenomenologist must be theoretical. It should not be presupposed that this cognition has to ground theories about (and be verified in view of) objects and facts which are the case independent of the existence or non-existence of a theory about them. In contrast to this widespread assumption, which places the *Phenomenology* in a tradition in which epistemology is limited to *philosophical* cognizing, it could indeed turn out for the phenomenologist that the assumptions of this reduction must be abandoned. The same holds for the view that philosophical cognition refers to an “object” which is entirely independent of this thought and according to which thought must be adjusted and (if necessary) corrected. The corrective could instead be the most inner reality of thought itself.

Closely connected with the abandonment of these dogmatic presuppositions, there are three more considerations and corresponding Hegelian expressions that belong to the *basic elements of the program of the Phenomenology*:

1. Not only can that which is to be cognized be something other than a theoretical object, it need not even be an "object" in the sense of something finitely real or something possible *in the world*, and indeed it need not even be the *world itself*. Rather, the cognizing can be about something that is both real in the broadest sense and yet distinguishable from the world and its objects. This is why Hegel, right at the beginning of the "Introduction," writes only in a very indefinite way about an "actual cognition of what truly is" (53, ¶73). There could be something that belongs to all that truly is, that is effective in the one who cognizes, that is not external to him though it is distinguished from him, but that is nevertheless neither in the world nor the world itself.
2. If this is the case, what "truly is" need not be nature or belong to nature, even as *natura naturans*. It could be the content of a *metaphysical* insight, perhaps even one of world-transcendent and "supernatural" objects. It might also, though, turn out that such objects do not belong to that which truly is, or that the content of the knowledge developed in a phenomenology of spirit cannot be the content of metaphysics. Likewise, it is for the moment completely open whether metaphysics can be a philosophical discipline that provides knowledge, and whether, if metaphysics is possible, it need be (for example) a metaphysics of cognition-independent objects. Above all, it is open whether the objects of a possible metaphysics subdivide (as in Kant), into (a) the (appearing or supernatural) world, (b) the final subjects of knowledge acquired in the world but not locatable in the world, and (c) a world-transcendent God (or more than one) or an immanent cause of the world.

The most urgent task of the enterprise of a phenomenology of spirit is to understand how an epistemology of philosophical cognition gradually develops. The reconstruction of this insight is crucial to the understanding of Hegel's philosophy as a whole and of the role played in it by an introductory doctrine of appearing spirit. For only through the phenomenological self-cognition of spirit, only through realizing that the sociality and historicity of reason is constitutive of such a science, can the *fundamental alternatives* for the overall assessment of Hegel's philosophy be decided. (1) Does this self-cognition work towards a metaphysics of Spirit? Or does it reject all metaphysics of objective entities, even if they are conceived as *the Nature*, *the Spirit* or *the One Absolute*? (2) Does affirmation of the latter part of the alternative entail rejecting all metaphysics? Or does this rather make room for a new metaphysics that is not conceived as onto-theological? (3) Does the *Phenomenology* of 1807 successfully lead to this sort of metaphysics, namely to the Science of Logic as the only "actual"

metaphysics? Or does Hegel's work of 1807 in fact fail to satisfy these demands? (4) Does the absolute knowing that the *Phenomenology* is supposed to produce and justify discharge the representational finitude of religious knowing? Or does knowledge, without losing the content of true religious knowledge, acquire in absolute knowing a specific finitude that belongs to speculative cognition and that it lacks as pure religious knowledge? I want to plead emphatically for interpreting Hegel as affirming the latter parts of these alternatives.

For the moment, precisely this interpretation has to be postponed. It should not be anticipated by the usual reference to passages of the Preface to the *Phenomenology*. For this was actually a preface to the planned "system of science" in which the *Phenomenology* would be the first, introductory part. As a preliminary explanation of the system, the Preface had to mention and anticipate topics in a way that could not actually be part of a scientific introduction to such a system, and especially not part of an initial exposition of the program of this introduction. Such an introduction could take place only in the implementation of the introductory program itself. This means that the project of an introduction itself only becomes fully clear in the process of the implementation of the *Phenomenology*. This fact often remains unnoticed by interpreters of the *Phenomenology*, so it shall have my full attention in what follows.

3. The phenomenological procedure of initially bracketing metaphysical assumptions, followed by a critical examination of the partial validity of these assumptions or by their conclusive dismissal, makes it seem especially natural that prior to all true cognition of that which truly is, one has to come to an understanding "about cognition" (53, ¶173). It seems that with regard to potential metaphysical claims of knowledge one has to pursue a "prolegomenon" to a future systematic redemption of such claims like the one Kant offered in his first Critique. The connection to Kant's "*Revolution der Denkungsart*" that Hegel draws in his *Logic*¹¹ and the later characterization of this Logic as "metaphysics proper"¹² suggests that the *Phenomenology* should not only be taken in analogy to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a vestibule to this metaphysics, but also as a "treatise of the method" of metaphysics. On closer inspection this interpretation proves to be mistaken, for a work written on this basis does not contain anything decisive to set it apart from its diametrical opposite (which is to dart headfirst into the cognition of absolute truth), apart from some prejudices that decrease rather than

¹¹ Cf. *Wissenschaft der Logik* (WL). Nürnberg 1812. Preface, first sentence. ¹² WL, 7th para.

increase the chances of cognition. In any case, in such a work there are presuppositions that must first be examined (54, ¶74 ff.). Thus, both beginnings of systematic philosophy are to be rejected for easily appreciated epistemological reasons. One can avoid having to choose between them only by undertaking the task of “expounding” (55, ¶71) knowledge as it appears in the broadest possible way. This means not only to judge it as true or false, insight or error, but to “comprehend” what in it has “substance and solid worth” (11, ¶3), even if this turns out to be very little.

Note how sparingly Hegel expresses the program of a phenomenology of spirit, even in comparison with the modest linguistic effort that is needed to justify it! The formula “exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance” (55, ¶76) does not even distinguish between the appearing philosophical knowledge aimed at systematic science and other appearing knowledge, although this distinction already belongs to the context of justification and although the *Phenomenology* aims to be an account of both kinds of appearing knowledge. The programmatic formula remains even more sparse with regard to the relationship between its concepts and the heavy metaphysical concepts in the Preface, such as the concept of truth conceived not only as substance, but at the same time as subject (18, ¶18). By conceptualizing its program through an “Introduction” to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel does not, in contrast to Kant, want to “design” the “Idea” and with it the whole contour or plan of a metaphysical discipline that follows the prolegomenon “architectonically, i.e. from principles.”¹³ He does not even outline a full idea of the philosophical science that the *Phenomenology* is supposed to become, nor a concept of its relationship to philosophy similar to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Could it really be that this simply represents the crudity of Hegel’s plan for the work, or is it not a rather precise concept of the task of an introduction to the program of an exposition of appearing knowledge? The plausibility of both the program and its composition would only be corrupted if conceptual presuppositions were invoked at the outset, for these would require a further vestibule or create the suspicion that the projected enterprise is persuasive only together with dogmatic presuppositions. It is completely appropriate for Hegel to formulate the program of his *Phenomenology* on the minimal basis of the “exposition of appearing knowledge” (18, ¶18) and to develop the program through a number of steps to that of a “Science of the Experience of Consciousness” (61, ¶88), and then further down a much longer path,

¹³ Kant (*CPR*), B XXII, B 27.

that comprises the whole *Phenomenology*, to the “science of appearing knowledge” (434, ¶808), and ultimately to a “Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit.”¹⁴ The program of this work and its implementation thus seem to be deeply intertwined. For the sake of its explication even the program itself needs an implementation in the course of its introduction. But its actual implementation, *for* which it is the program, also further develops the concept of the program. Only viewed from its end is the title of the work fully comprehensible.

3

Much more could be said about this than space here will allow. But we are concerned with the *introductory explication* of the program, which is not intended to give the idea of the whole of a *Phenomenology* that opens the philosophical “system of science.” It suffices to sketch the succession and the interconnection of its steps. Even when looked at cursorily, these steps confirm the proposed work-in-progress strategy in three respects.

First, the cognitive *horizon* of the exposition of appearing knowledge encompasses the *whole range* of consciousness, and “completeness of the forms of the unreal consciousness” of the truth will result only from a cognitive process, “through the necessity of the progression,” from particular forms to other forms (56, ¶79). The *goal* set for this progression can be stated only very formally because the procedure itself needs to be defined. From the perspective of the self-conception of the “natural” consciousness that is to be examined, the goal will lie at a stage where this consciousness does not have to “go beyond itself” anymore, and where “Concept corresponds to object and object to concept.” For it is “for itself the *Concept* of itself” and therefore it is immediately “something that goes beyond limits” (57, ¶80). Anyone can make this evident to himself with respect to his *moral* consciousness and its incessant unease under a self-conception that is higher than, but intrinsic to, himself. Only from a discussion of the *procedure of the exposition* of appearing knowledge can one expect to learn more about the forms of unreal consciousness, their completeness, their succession from one to another, and about the goal to which the succession is directed.

Second, we should be led by the “*method of carrying out the inquiry*” (58, ¶81). This characterizes, within the horizon of appearing knowledge,

¹⁴ This heading on the subsequently inserted title page of the *Phenomenology* is not rendered in the English edition.

not the “idea of the whole” but the *way* to this idea. It is the way through which the natural consciousness has to pass to true knowledge, not on its own, but together with philosophizing knowledge. The basic epistemologically relevant characteristics of this path can be delineated in five moments:

1. In the justification of claims to knowledge and in the examination of whether the concept corresponds to the object and vice versa, the presentation can be successful only if the appearing philosophical cognition, the “we” perspective, restrains itself in its observation of the natural consciousness and its claims to knowledge. The natural consciousness can and must give itself its own standard for the examination, for it is “for itself the *Concept* of itself” (57, ¶80), and it must examine itself according to this standard. As one can make plausible to oneself with the case of moral knowledge, the natural consciousness can achieve this if it is not deluded from the outside or distracted from its path by sophistications. This is why – at least initially – the accompanying philosophical knowledge should observe carefully how, on the assumption of its particular standard, consciousness searches skeptically for the truth in its (at least alleged) knowledge and how it gains experience through the examination of specific claims to knowledge. This can happen in that the readers of the presentation concentrate on the role which the natural consciousness plays and as they practice skepticism regarding its object and its alleged knowledge, while those same readers, in the role of incipient scientific–philosophical cognition and knowledge, restrict themselves to “looking on” (59, ¶84) or calling the natural consciousness’s attention to the obvious.
2. On the part of the philosophical knowledge that initially only looks on, there may be a strong suspicion, stemming from moral knowledge and conscience, that the observed consciousness will undergo a negative experience at every single stage of its examination. But this suspicion should not serve as an anticipation of the result of the examination. Even if the experience of the examination is necessarily negative, the natural consciousness must still discover for itself that this is so. Though distinct from it, the accompanying philosophical knowledge is itself only an appearing knowledge.
3. The more continuous the progress of natural consciousness is along its path, the more convincing will the account of appearing knowledge be. This account will be most convincing as a “detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself” – namely, if all goes well – “to the standpoint of Science” (56, ¶78). If the philosophical knowledge (as

accompanying the natural consciousness and, if necessary, correcting itself through its own skepticism) is also included in this continuous progress, then it will be a kind of skepticism that is directed at the entire range of the knowledge appearing in consciousness and that will “render the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is” (56, ¶78). This by no means results in a merely narrative history, but “brings about a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions” (56, ¶78). If, in addition, all non-philosophical kinds of appearing knowledge (and even the non-scientific philosophical kinds of appearing knowledge) do not ultimately stand up to the examination, but the philosophical knowledge stands up to its self-examination in one of its guises, then the goal is attained at least for one part of the presentation, namely that of philosophical knowledge. But the goal has been fully attained, and the presentation of appearing knowledge has become a “self-completing skepticism,” only when the natural consciousness itself has been brought to a decisive insight. It must realize that it cannot end in skeptical knowledge of its ignorance, but that there is at least one point in its appearing knowledge through which it can pass over without alternative to that philosophical knowledge (to knowledge that is no longer merely appearing, but rather actual knowledge). Whether the implementation of this program will get to that point admittedly remains unstated right to the end. But in any case, the program is aimed at the possibility of such an ending. Two further moments that are closely connected with this must not be left open, but must be integrated into the procedure right from the beginning.

4. The skepticism of the procedure of examination cannot be the *ancient* one that was directed exclusively at objects that putatively exist. It must rather integrate into the procedure specific ways of knowing and standpoints of consciousness from which something can count as the true that corresponds to the standard. That means not only examining its object, but examining just as thoroughly its specific (putative or actual) knowledge, so that it will have to give up its standard and itself. Skepticism is specifically modern if it is also directed at consciousness’s capacity for truth and knowledge and not exclusively at objects of putative knowledge. The experience that leads to examination is an experience of consciousness. If its exposition were to obtain a scientific character through the procedure, and if a systematicity of experience were established thereby, then it would be the *science* of the experience of consciousness.
5. But such systematicity could not arise solely from the natural consciousness, which works on its self-examination and is observed only in this

regard. Insofar as systematicity is constitutive of the scientific character of philosophy (as Kant had believed), philosophical knowledge and its presentation (i.e. the presentation of non-philosophical knowledge and of itself as appearing knowledge) would not take on a scientific character on the basis of merely observing non-philosophical knowledge. It would not even achieve the character of an incipient science (one that would still stand in need of improvement in many respects). But the profile of the procedure that is taking shape up to this point contains a further element to which we now must attend. Regarding this element, one could even refer to the conception of an exposition [*Darstellung*], provided that “exposition” stands not only for the claim to judge (and to be judged), but at the same time for the claim that what has “substance and solid worth” is “grasped” in what is judged, and therefore at least approximately included in the scientific “Concept.” Therefore one must reflect on what this means for the (up until now) silent interplay of the observed, self-examining natural consciousness with the philosophical knowledge that has only watched the examination. In a shape of consciousness there is a specific form of objectivity and there are objects that appear in this form, as well as a corresponding way of knowing (putatively or actually). It is possible through the communication between philosophical knowledge and natural consciousness for a philosophical skepticism about consciousness to consider the descriptively accessible phenomenal inventory of each shape with the purpose of understanding both what lesson can be drawn from its negation and what can be formulated as a *positive* content of the conscious experience that corresponds to the negation. This content serves to extract the motifs and constitutive features for a new standpoint of consciousness with a new form of objectivity and knowledge. The step from negative to positive experiential content, the “*reversal of consciousness*” (61, ¶87) from the knowledge of a certain failure of knowing towards a new object, is indeed “contributed by us” (61 ¶87). But if we take it accurately, it contains nothing more than the experience that was undergone by the previous form, so it must also be accepted by the natural consciousness that is pursuing its path. This is how “we,” in the role of philosophical knowledge, conceive (more or less well) the emergence of a new shape of consciousness and the “*origination*” (61, ¶87) of its object and its concept of knowledge. The “grasp” of this progression from one form to the next may take place for an appearing philosophical knowledge, only with a certain (hopefully increasing) degree of stringency and clarity¹⁵ in

¹⁵ See e.g. ¶¶III, 168.

each case. It can lead to scientific systematicity, for it already belongs to the “*method of carrying out*” the program. Perhaps one could even say the following. In the experience of the consciousness that is observed by philosophical knowing there thus looms “for us” (i.e. for the author and his readers in the role of knowing that is becoming scientific) a necessary progression from one particular form of consciousness to another. Further, in traversing the complete range of the forms of the unreal consciousness, there is the justified prospect of a methodically developed systematic whole of conscious experience. Insofar as the implementation must function in this way, and insofar as the systematicity of philosophical knowledge that is achieved through this methodical path just *is* its scientificity, the program can now be characterized, with richer content than before, as that of a “Science of the *experience of consciousness*” (61, ¶88). It would, however, be illusory to believe that, on the basis of this information about its method and its scientificity, the program could be operationalized and implemented without further introductory reflections.

Thirdly, the concluding remarks of the “Introduction” do not specify the course to be taken by the “Science of the *experience of consciousness*” (61, ¶88) more precisely than anything Hegel has said up to that point. Thus they do not reveal much new information about the content of this experience and its arrangement. As Hegel notes in passing at the beginning, the path which the natural consciousness has to pursue can be taken as one of the soul, which journeys (*qua* such consciousness) “through the series of its own configurations . . . , so that it may purify itself for the life of Spirit” (55, ¶77). So one could expect that the figures of consciousness will pass over or merge into figures of Spirit. This is now affirmed. The experience that consciousness will undergo on the indicated path can, according to its concept, comprise nothing less than “the entire realm of the truth of Spirit” (61, ¶89). At first it was not clear whether the talk about the purification of the soul already marked the end of the trajectory or was just an important stage. But now it becomes clear that only the latter could be meant. Consciousness will reach a point where “appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit” (62, ¶89). But only later on its path will consciousness grasp its essence and (presumably even later) will it “signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself” (62, ¶89). These suggestions are obviously insufficient to make further findings about the structure unnecessary. Thus, as proposed, the program of the *Phenomenology* has been further determined in the course of its implementation, without this

being attributable to rhetorical clumsiness, indecision, or even confused thinking. It can be taken as well-considered dramaturgy.

4

The *implementation* of the program confirms the vague anticipations that are made at the end of its Introduction and further specifies some of the Introduction's formulations.¹⁶ It makes sense for the implementation to begin before the program has been fully explicated, and before all stages of its realization have been neatly sketched, as long as the program is explicit enough to orient and initiate the upcoming steps of the implementation in each case, and later addenda to the explication of the program do not contradict the steps that have been taken up to that point. But the interweaving of the implementation and presentation of the program does entail that during the course of the implementation many more structural distinctions must be considered than were indicated in the prior presentation of the program. The successive *parts* of the implementation distinguish themselves by formulating, tracing, and assessing the experience of consciousness. They also contain a preceding section that introduces the distinctive aspect of implementation by applying the general characterization of the program to a specific form of consciousness, and in turn assessing the concrete result of the directly preceding part of the implementation. But also, in the introductory discussion of these particular parts, more general reflections are made from case to case in order to gradually fill in the initially incomplete overview of the aim of the whole. Thus, the general "Introduction" continues in the special introductions to the particular parts of the implementation.¹⁷ In this continuation Hegel provides recapitulations that often lead much further back than just to the immediately preceding part, as well as anticipations (which are for the most part possible only from "our" perspective) that reach further forward than to the immediately following stage. Both directions take into account aspects that were not addressed by the general "introductory" information about the goal of the exposition and the method of its implementation. These aspects and the remarks made in their contexts belong just as much to our "contribution"¹⁸ as the comprehension of a particular form of consciousness on the basis of a conceptual elaboration of a previous

¹⁶ Cf. 61–62, ¶¶87–89 and 238–240, ¶¶438–443; 62, ¶89 and 367–368, ¶¶681–668 *et passim*.

¹⁷ Reasonably, those introductions as well as these passages were written and printed with specific titles.

¹⁸ For the differentiation of different kinds of "contributions" see Siep (2000), 78.

conscious experience. But these additions do more than repeat the structural features of the method that were given in the Introduction and that lay out the basics of an exposition of appearing knowledge and of a Science of the experience of consciousness. More is now unveiled of the conceptual depth of these features and of the contents of appearing knowledge that has become manifest. It is much less easy to say how much of this depth is present to the natural consciousness in contrast to what has been added merely from “our” perspective.

It is in fact possible to distinguish four kinds of progression in the text. (1) The most obvious, which is the passing over from the object of consciousness to its knowledge. (2) The repeated passing over to the object as well as a passing to and fro from that which is for the observing consciousness and that which is present only to us. (3) Something similar to this last movement, which one already finds in the introductory phase of the respective part of implementation. Even within this phase, which first and foremost prepares the exposition as well as the inspection (and the later elaboration) of the forthcoming actual “*dialectical* movement” (60, ¶86), some claims are clearly only “for us,” but others have disclosed themselves to the observed consciousness on the basis of its phenomenal reservoir. (4) The third back and forth is intertwined with a fourth, which Hegel has left most unclear of all. There is a passing over from philosophical knowledge that at first appears (and hence contains something untrue) to the already scientific and real knowledge of the form of consciousness which is at issue, and from this a return to further (for the moment) merely appearing philosophical knowledge. Precisely because it is often difficult here to mark off what is (scientifically or prescientifically) merely “for us” and what is also “for it,” the difference and the back and forth from one to the other has to be taken into account.

There is yet a further aspect to Hegel’s presentation. In contrast to the various “movements,” the introductory passages of the sections offer “resting-points of reflection”¹⁹ that contribute to the “so-called intelligibility,”²⁰ so that the recapitulation and the anticipation can proceed based on “what has been vigorously deduced.”²¹ Much is thereby illuminated which pertains to the development of the conceptual content of consciousness, not only for us, but also, though mostly with a different content, for the observed consciousness (and not infrequently for us and for consciousness

¹⁹ Cf. Hegel’s letter to H. F. W. Hinrichs, whose treatise on religion is deeply inspired by the *Phenomenology*. Hegel criticizes Hinrichs for not providing these resting-points and offers detailed comments on what they should consist in (*Briefe*), vol. 21, 254–255. *Letters*, 480–481.

²⁰ *Briefe*, vol. 2, 254. *Letters*, 480. ²¹ *Briefe*, vol. 2, 254–255. *Letters*, 480.

at once). Such resting-points are therefore not only required so that the reader can keep track and make sense of the exposition. Without them and the possibility they open up for inferring according to reasonable consequence and for keeping the consequential relations stable, the “dialectical movement” would overly complicate the conceptual determinations. It would “water down” their contents so much that everything that is supposed to be “expounded,” i.e. clarified, would end up in a single meaningless joke, or become pointless, especially for the natural consciousness pursuing its path. The possible transition to true knowledge – without which there can be no justification of the claims to knowledge in the *Phenomenology* – can only be granted to this natural consciousness through the fact that it develops potentials of inferring according to reasonable consequences, and finds in itself arrangements and definitional correlations that constitute the content of its own conceptual determinations.²² Of exemplary interest for this movement is the gradually developed *structure* of the work, which is indicated by bracketed capital letters in the table of contents of the *Phenomenology*. I would now like to go into the details and merits of this *structure*.

This topic concerns the “architectonic” of the *Phenomenology*, so to speak. After the previous analysis, one should not expect that under this title one could offer a preconceived construction plan followed by the author that adequately informed readers could also follow. Even “we,” the author and the readers Hegel intends to address, have to discover during the course of its development the structure of a science of the experience of consciousness, and we have to explore how natural consciousness becomes conscious of this science.

This task is not so difficult with respect to the *first three stages of the structure*, with whose capital letters (A), (B), and (C) the first four stages of consciousness (I–IV) are contrasted with the next stage and all stages that may follow it afterwards (V, . . .). From a resting-point of reflection at the beginning of the fourth stage of consciousness, one can easily see in retrospect that in the previous three stages the object was for consciousness that which is in itself, while consciousness was that which is added, or accidental, whereas now by contrast self-consciousness has posited its object in immediate identity with itself. There is, as far as I can see, no

²² The fundamentals regarding the dynamics of the Concept that are in effect behind the back of consciousness, and regarding the connection between “reasonable” [*Verständigem*] and “speculative” [*Spekulativem*] in the determinations of the concept are explained, as will be obvious, only in the later *Science of Logic*; cf. *Science of Logic*, Second volume, first section, first chapter.

reason to believe that the difference from the previous standpoints of consciousness is concealed from the natural consciousness that has reached this standpoint as self-consciousness for itself, once its concept as that of appearing knowledge is “completed” (108, ¶176). The point “for us” is, of course, that this result of reflection is not located only in the concept that self-consciousness is for itself, but in the fact that self-consciousness has resulted from the dialectics of preceding experiences of consciousness. Something similar should apply to the phase of construction (C) that is reached by the subsequent stage of consciousness (V.). At this stage consciousness knows its object as something that is in-and-for-itself and thus at the same time the certainty of itself. The basic determinations of consciousness of the first two stages (A) and (B) are no longer opposed to one another, but united, and a third phase of construction is reached. Now, given the preceding path and the dialectics contained therein, we should not take it as settled that this stage needs to be identified once and for all with a consciousness that “has” reason (= V).

That this is not the case, but that the initially obvious identification must be revised, is shown by the further experience of this rational consciousness. It is at first a cognition based on observation, and it then progresses to the rational self-consciousness and its self-actualization. For us, this demand for revision should arise right after the first link in the chain of experiences and with the assessment of its result, i.e. at the beginning of section V.B. From this point onwards it becomes necessary to differentiate within the third phase of construction between the conceptual content of the consciousness that belongs to it in general, i.e. (C), and a specification of it, namely (C) (AA) and the others. The “actualization of reason” exists only for a consciousness or for a self-consciousness that has not yet reached the substance of its rationality or has lost it in the course of earlier history and is now striving to regain it (cf. 194, ¶¶349 ff.); thus, it exists for a consciousness that is distinct from the consciousness of this substance and its objective reason, i.e. distinct from (C)(BB). On the other hand, at the beginning of stage V.B. all this may not be all that clear to the natural consciousness, but may be seen as the result only in retrospect. There are no decisive obstacles, however, to thinking that the following misidentifications are also corrected by the natural consciousness, so that the fifth and sixth stages of consciousness can be identified with two successive steps of the third phase of construction. The same holds for the identification of a further, third step (C) (CC) with a seventh stage of consciousness. Though things are complicated in each particular case, through further resting-points of reflection one can develop a concept

of the third phase of construction that is more determinate in content and internally more structured. This content, which is differentiated into moments of consciousness and self-consciousness, can be ascribed not only to "us," but also, from recognizable aspects of its path, to the natural consciousness. But an exposition of appearing knowledge cannot claim completeness for this subdivision of (C) into (C) (AA), (BB), and (CC).

In preparation for such a claim, right at the beginning of stage VI. Hegel reports that for us all forms of consciousness and elements of the structure treated up to that point are collected in the form of the last of these moments (i.e. Spirit) and are abstractions from it (cf. 239–240, ¶¶439–440). At the next main resting-point (at the beginning of VII) we can see that what is now to be considered, namely religion, has also occurred in earlier forms of consciousness, even if it was not as conscious of itself as from the current standpoint (of religious self-consciousness). The more detailed configurations of all previous moments of the structure now differentiate themselves into such that belong to the self-consciousness of Spirit in a particular form of religion. In light of the experience of religious self-consciousness in (C) (CC) and of the parallel history of the secular Spirit in (C) (BB), a relatively concise historical place can be assigned to all the configurations of consciousness that are treated in those chapters, or were considered earlier. And this can be done in accord with reflection, hence as something that can be taken into the natural consciousness, although the reflection is possible only thanks to the previous dialectical movement and the speculative pursuit thereof. The implementation of this program thus explains at least the main parts of its division, and explains it also for the natural consciousness following its path in all stages of consciousness up to the very last.

5

But how much is prepared in the development of religious Spirit for the cognition of a necessary progression to such an *absolute knowledge*? How much insight is gained that this knowledge will constitute an appropriate final part in the third phase of construction of a Science of the experience of consciousness? The table of contents affirms the assumption that the last part belongs as (C) (DD) to the third phase of construction. The last resting-point of reflection says more than what has been mentioned so far about the program of the *Phenomenology* and the task of its further determination. Although this is connected to problems that would need to be treated in detail, I can only outline them in what follows. I must postpone further treatment of these issues to another essay.

I. Before we approach the questions that are more difficult to answer, a few observations can be made from the perspective of the last two resting-points of reflection (in VII and VIII). Apart from the form of philosophical knowledge, the forms of consciousness and of Spirit that precede the last stage comprise the entire horizon of cognition. The last stage reconsiders the whole inventory of differentiated forms of unreal consciousness of what is true via the systematics created in those forms. By way of the self-examination of the natural consciousness, it shows what part of the content of these forms has gained the potential to become actual cognition. The objection possible up to that point, that there is an impending *progressus ad indefinitum* into as yet unknown forms of consciousness, is thus swept away, and with it a main obstacle against the idea that the natural consciousness can complete its skepticism. In anticipation of the possible completion Hegel provides an inventory of forms at the beginning of the seventh stage of consciousness (cf. 364–368, ¶¶675–679). To reach this goal, not only the knowledge appearing in religion, but also the knowledge of morality will have to be surpassed. In view of this, the whole of Spirit, which has become present to itself in appearing knowledge (including that of religion) up to this point, will have to reorganize itself under a new concept. According to the last resting-point of reflection (at the beginning of VIII), this reorganization can take place only in a philosophical self-knowledge of Spirit in which all the appearing knowledge that has been presented is systematized. Given that the preconditions of such self-knowledge have been fulfilled, all external barriers against its possible passage to the true knowledge of what is true are eliminated for the natural consciousness (cf. 422–427, ¶¶788–796). If the Spirit had developed further in appearing knowledge than was the case before the appearance of the *Phenomenology* in 1807, then this passage would “have yielded itself . . . in the form of a *shape of consciousness*” (427, ¶797).²³

The arrangement of VIII does not pose fundamental problems. In a charitable reading, this chapter can be divided (as with the previous ones) into (a) an introductory part which ends with the concept of the new form as well as with its knowledge and the content of this knowledge (422–428, ¶¶788–798), (b) the part that portrays the appearance and (implicitly) the self-examination of the new consciousness (428–31, ¶¶799–803), and (c) the concluding part which registers the result of the

²³ The use of this temporal *conjunctivus irrealis* in the contexts of Hegel’s systematic–philosophical sentences is as sensational as it is singular.

self-examination for us (430–34, ¶¶803–808). If one registers attentively what constitutes the concept of the whole form and what is meant to constitute the experiential content of this movement of consciousness, then there can no longer be a question which side of the alternative interpretations presented above²⁴ one should opt for. The decision can only be in favour of the second alternative in each case, as it can only be in favour of the interpretation that emphasizes Hegel's modernity.²⁵

2. Nevertheless, the *problems* Hegel's *Phenomenology* creates with the implementation of its program for contemplative readers do not begin just in (VIII). Instead of trying to examine them in a few words or claiming that they are irresolvable, I can here only set out the questions in an orderly fashion:
 - (a) Even *before the beginning of VIII* one would like to know the following: Do Hegel's remarks in the seventh (and at the end of the sixth) chapter suffice as a preparation of the concept which consciousness becomes for itself in VIII? There is reason to doubt this, for already at the end of VI, but especially in VII, the elaboration of specific experiences of consciousness and self-consciousness is badly neglected. This makes it unclear why, for the natural consciousness of revealed religion, its appearing knowledge is not thoroughly real and true. It remains undecided whether this self-consciousness must proceed to a skeptically determinate knowledge of its ignorance (with regard to issues that cannot be left open for its aspiration to knowledge) or not. It is therefore also unclear how our treatment of the result of VII is to be connected with a renewed and deeper treatment of the result of VI. It is hard to make out how to integrate both results in the kind of coherent position Hegel describes at the beginning of VIII. It is even less clear what the chances are for a philosophizing consciousness in VIII to transfer this result to the new concept. Finally, there is the question of whether any factual reasons render the absence of conscious experience in the chapter on religion uncontroversial for what follows. These questions would probably become superfluous on the basis of a merely clarifying greater elaboration of the pertinent parts of the work. But in VIII the problematic traits are exacerbated.
 - (b) Is the above-mentioned back and forth of reflection fully considered *in VIII*, including especially the fourth dimension? Is its claim and are the claims regarding the other dimensions at least implicitly

²⁴ Cf. section 3.2. ²⁵ This concerns especially the question mentioned at the end of section 2.

accounted for?²⁶ This formal point is not the only one that gives rise to doubts. Is not the elaboration or re-elaboration of the results of the seventh and sixth chapters too narrow a basis for our reflection if we want to attain a concept to reorganize all previous forms of consciousness, a concept which is for itself the consciousness of a last form of Spirit? Would not all previous results of the experiences of consciousness (together with experience to be presented in VII) have to be explicitly re-elaborated? In this respect, is the opening thesis of VIII – that only the suspension of the mere form of representing consciousness is at issue – perhaps even a severe abridgement of the task confronting Hegel in this chapter? What ray of truth is nevertheless contained in the opening thesis? Where does its questionableness begin, or is it overcome?

- (c) The *opening reflections*, which are meant to serve not only to attain the new concept, but also to show that the thesis implied by the claim is at least basically and for us redeemable, raise a series of more specific questions in addition to the questions already mentioned. I shall confine myself here to the most salient of these questions: Would the programmed overcoming of the religious standpoint not have to be explicitly linked to the overcoming of mere morality in a modern ethical life? Would the appearing knowledge that is now made the subject of investigation (and that performs this double overcoming in its self-examination) not at the same time become cognizable as the knowledge of a specifically *philosophical* consciousness? This consciousness would let absolute knowledge *appear* from the beginning, though it would not be *actual* in the way it at first appears, but in the course of numerous experiences would become an actually absolute knowledge. It would follow the passage of modern philosophy up to that point and end in a form that corresponds to the concept developed, namely the form of the *Phenomenology* available at that stage. It appears to me that this would be the orientation of an adequate final resting-point of reflection.
- (d) Since this orientation is missing, the *experiential part* of chapter VIII awakens the suspicion that it fails to fulfill the task set by the

²⁶ Hegel himself formed a very self-critical judgment about this. See his letter to Schelling of May 1, 1807 and the letter to Niethammer of January 16, 1807, in which he aspires to a second edition of the *Phenomenology* (*Briefe*, vol. 1), 136, 161. *Letters*, 119–120, 79–80. As late as August 1829, when the second edition was eventually due, Hegel does not seem to have given up the plan to revise the work (see *Briefe*, vol. 4), 30. *Letters*, 121. It was only shortly before his death that he decided against such a revision, as an autographic note probably from Fall 1831 indicates (see, for instance, *PLG*, 552).

program, and even that it makes the problems of this fulfillment unsolvable. Does Hegel here not confound the aspects decisive for this task with a point that is only peripherally relevant, namely with the question of philosophy's history, of when the philosophical science appears "in Time and in the actual world" (428, ¶800)? This is the question of the determinate being of absolute knowledge in its appearing, of whether it appears only at that moment in which the conditions specifying the "when" are fulfilled. Given the dominance of this question, where does the topic of the self-examination of appearing absolute knowledge and of the experiences made therewith come in? How would its self-examination progress to the point at which the norm that belongs to its concept is established in experience? Is the exposition of the dialectical movement that leads to this experience of consciousness not suppressed here by something negligible and insufficient? It is suppressed first by an answer to the question of why Spirit appears earlier in time in the content of religion, but nevertheless only science can bring Spirit to true knowledge of itself. It is then further suppressed (cf. 430–431, ¶803) by an extremely dense, concentrated, and external sketch of the history of modern intellectuality and philosophy up to Fichte and Schelling that ends with Hegel's critique of them. Does this sketch not provide far too vague a justification of the fact that Hegel opposes both Fichte's account of the philosophy of subjectivity and Schelling's philosophy of the Absolute? Does the cognitive perspective become increasingly focused on the most abstract questions of principles internal to philosophy, without considering the previously defined goal and everything that has substance and solid worth in the whole knowledge that has appeared? Even if it were possible in this way to find a conclusion of the procedure that is for us adequate to the program, how could it be one that is also adequate for the natural consciousness that is pursuing its path and is distinguished from us? How could we vindicate ourselves in the exposition of appearing knowledge through that which has removed us from it?

- (e) It is no longer surprising that considering all these open questions, the *concluding part* (431–434, ¶¶803–808) takes on a problematic appearance. Does the exposition of the result, as postulated by the program, remain within the horizon of the science of the experience of consciousness, or does it leave this horizon in favor of a first statement about the "system of philosophy" and its structure? If the

latter is the case, can the *Phenomenology* in the end be convincingly designated as the “Science of appearing knowledge” (434, ¶1808), and can the final intertitle “Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit” be introduced? Does not the claim marked by this title (through the addition of “I”), that it figures as the first science, work against the implementation of its program, since it could be justified only on the basis of a “system of science,” and as the first part of this system, while the knowledge of this system and everything pertaining to it needs to be substantiated by the introductory science?

3. I am in no way willing to assume that the *Phenomenology* in its published version allows us to arrive at satisfactory answers to all these questions. In those parts to which the questions are addressed, an improved edition would be required. But judging from the essentials of the program and the concept of its implementation, this reworking could, it seems to me, be successful, and the title of a “Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit” could be justified. As a work that, according to its own aspiration, has to account for the Spiritual situation at the time of its appearance, the improved version would, if it were to be written nowadays, have to take into account the historical changes that have occurred since 1807 in the consciousness that has reason, in the history of ethical life that is reason, in the field of religious self-consciousness, and through the experience with posthegelian and postmodern philosophy. Such a continuation of the *Phenomenology* would be the worthiest gift for the 200th anniversary of this work. This is what I hereby request of the thinking experts of a younger generation.

The Phenomenology of Spirit as a “transcendentalistic” argument for a monistic ontology

Rolf-Peter Horstmann

It is well known that at one point in his life Hegel was of the opinion that the *Phenomenology* could be seen as an introduction to his System of philosophy. Yet even today no one knows what exactly might have led Hegel to this opinion.¹ Since Hegel developed the *Phenomenology* as a “Science of the Experience of Consciousness” that runs through the various ways that subjects relate to objects, the idea does not seem *prima facie* misguided that Hegel wanted to justify his fundamental metaphysical assumption, his monism of reason, through a theory of types of objects and their epistemic conditions. I believe that this idea can take us a long way towards understanding the function that Hegel himself ascribed to his phenomenological introductory project. For Hegel appears to have provided both a theory of the conditions of object constitution as well as a procedure for making the conditions plausible. Even if one does not find his theory and his procedure convincing, one can still see clearly in his presentation why the question of understanding objects is philosophically meaningful. This is in my eyes a sufficient reason to investigate this question in the context of Hegel’s phenomenological analysis.

I will divide the argument into four sections. The first (1) will sketch the epistemological situation to which Hegel reacted in his *Phenomenology*. The second (2) attempts to depict the essential outlines of this reaction and how it relates to the justification of the monistic metaphysics that Hegel defends. The third (3) presents the theory that Hegel lays out in the *Phenomenology* of the constitution of object-types, and the fourth (4) indicates in conclusion briefly some of the merits of this theory.

A short version of section 1 and section 2 has already appeared under the title: “Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit as an Argument for a Monistic Ontology” (Horstmann, 2006), 103–118.

¹ To stand in for the many thorough investigations of the introductory role of the *Phenomenology*, I mention only the still illuminating study from Fulda (1965).

I

The world in which we find ourselves presents itself to us as a relatively complex and complicated tangle of objects – including things, facts, and events – with which we interact in various ways. If one brackets our various ways of interacting practically with objects, facts, and events, and attends primarily to our more theoretical attitudes to these objects – namely, expressions of opinion, assertions of belief, and claims to knowledge – then two things become almost immediately apparent: (1) it appears to be simpler to form a correct opinion about some of these objects, facts, and events, than about others; some appear easier to grasp cognitively or easier to access epistemically than others. This seems to point to the fact that some objects and facts are more cognitively or epistemically evasive than others. If we call the totality of such theoretical activities as identifying, determining, discriminating, and specifying “knowing” or “cognizing” [*Erkennen*], then this observation actually makes the point that it appears easier for us to know or cognize (something as) an apple or (as) a streetcar than, for example, a State (in contrast to a civil society), or a work of art (in contrast to a functional object), not to mention cognizing something such as love or labor. Questions like “Is this an apple here?” normally allow a correct answer more readily than the question “Is this a work of art?” or even “Is this (a case of) love?” When one admits that this apparent difference is real, that it is grounded *in re*, then the question soon arises of how to account for this difference in theory.

(2) If one reviews the totality of the objects that appear for us as objects of theoretical attitudes, one sees that they form an incredibly extensive repertoire of the most different types of objects. These objects are characterized through groups of features that partly overlap with each other and stand in conflict with each other, and that therefore obviously make completely different epistemic demands. This diversity of types is mirrored in the customary talk of different worlds, which we think of as constituted through the totality of the objects belonging to them: we know the world of physics, of mathematics, of music; we know the social, the moral, and the spiritual world, the world of right, of feelings, and of thoughts; we know a dreamworld and a lifeworld, etc. In short, we know just as many worlds as object-types. But we know not only that. In addition, we know that objects often tend to appear not only as representatives of just one object-type, but rather to exemplify several object-types, i.e. many objects belong simultaneously and with equal justification to “different worlds.” Living and non-living objects, although they belong, on the one hand, to incompatible

types are, on the other hand, both physical things. Pains and some other mental states are admittedly not physical objects, but they have thoroughly spatio-temporal characteristics (one has pain always at a certain place at a certain point in time), and the State and other institutional objects present themselves sometimes as very abstract entities, though they can at other times (through their so-called “organs”) act in extremely concrete ways.

Both observations have in common that they rightly presuppose that knowing is to be viewed as a specific mode of relating to a given content that forms the object of knowledge. For knowing, therefore, objects of knowledge and the possibility of relating to them are constitutive. What we can consider as something to which we can refer (such as an ordinary object, an event or a state of affairs) with any intention whatsoever – be it in order to experience (or to assert, to grant or to deny, to recognize) something about it or to change (or to adapt, to strive for, to reach) it – depends on which possibilities of reference we have at our disposal or think we have at our disposal. Something that we can in no way refer to is for us not any kind of fact or, if one follows traditional terminology, no object.² We can refer to objects in very different ways and with very different means. Next to action, the standard ways of reference are sense perception in all its different modes (seeing, hearing, etc.) and what one is ready to accept as non-sensuous modes of representing something – what we can just call “thinking.” The standard means of reference include abilities and capacities, sensations and impressions, as well as language and concepts. They all, the ways and means, constitute what one can count as the subjective conditions of reference.

From these “normal” or “empirical” subjective conditions we have to distinguish – for a reason that will be mentioned later – those we may designate “philosophical” or “transcendental” subjective conditions. These are, by contrast, more formal or conceptual, and designate what must be the case in order for us to speak of a subject at all. To the subjective conditions of reference, taken in this philosophical or transcendental sense, belong those which determine what is required to qualify as an epistemic subject. In the slogans of the philosophical tradition, such conditions include activity, reflexivity, and identity. They depict conceptual requirements bound up with the very concept of a subject – in this case, with the concept of the epistemic subject – and must therefore be distinguished from empirical subjective conditions for logical reasons.

² I will in the following use the terms “fact” and “object” as synonymous concepts.

Next to the two kinds of subjective conditions of reference there are also those that can be viewed as objective. The objective conditions are normally thought of as those which must be fulfilled from the side of the object, of the fact, in order for it to qualify as a possible object of reference. Also here one must again distinguish between normal, or empirical, and philosophical, or transcendental conditions. The empirical objective conditions probably do not admit of anything like a complete exposition, because each type of object and perhaps every object may be described through a bundle of such conditions that are particular to it and dependent on the context. Thus an object of perception, such as a house, must fulfill different conditions in order to be accepted as an object than, for instance, abstract mathematical objects such as numbers.

The philosophical objective conditions must hold again for all objects or facts to which one may in some way epistemically refer, because they determine the concept of an object: if they are not fulfilled, then talk of an object has no meaning. One can, again referring to the tradition, mention a whole series of candidates for the role of transcendental objective conditions. Here I will mention only three. One of these conditions, and admittedly the most fundamental, sounds rather trivial. One can call it the "unity condition." It states that an object must be able to appear as a unity of features that is sufficiently stable so that it can be distinguished definitively from other objects. A second condition can be called the "compatibility condition." This means that everything that is to serve as the object of epistemic reference must be distinguished through features that somehow can all coexist, that "fit together." As a third condition one could mention something like a "composition condition": objects must not only be totalities of compatible features distinguishable from one another, but they must also be differentiated in themselves, so that they can be comprehended as composed out of parts or elements, and so that each part or element can itself appear as an object. Other such philosophical or transcendental conditions are also conceivable and have been suggested. How one answers the questions of just what they accomplish individually, how they hang together, and whether they all must be fulfilled, will depend largely on what one is inclined to understand by an object.

According to the preceding sketch, whether something is for us and what something is for us depends on a multitude of mutually influencing empirically subjective and objective conditions, which themselves are transcendently supported in some way. One can content oneself with this not terribly surprising, and certainly correct, assessment, and be satisfied with

setting forth for any given object or type of object a list of conditions, subjective and objective. Nevertheless such a procedure has its dangers, and may also for various reasons be considered unsatisfying. I will give three such reasons.

1. First, one can doubt whether (within such a procedure) the distinction between subjective and objective conditions can in general be made stable enough to have an explicative worth. This is the case because in many cases it appears rather arbitrary whether one views a condition as subjective or objective.
2. Secondly, such a procedure assumes rather unquestioned that there is something like a natural manifold of different object-types, which just have different (subjective and objective) conditions of reference.
3. Finally, this explanatory approach is also problematic in so far as it appears to view the entire spectrum of reference conditions as exhausted through only two types and their interplay – namely, through subjective and objective conditions – and then to interpret these conditions as rooted “in” the subject or “in” the object.

One can perhaps get more out of these doubts when one prepares them with a little material from the history of philosophy. Without too much partiality one can view Kant as someone who set forth his critical theory of knowledge in the space of an analysis of subjective and objective conditions of object reference. For Kant, the question famously stands in the foreground for epistemology of how subjective conditions of thinking can have objective validity.³ With this question (no matter what else may have been bound up with it) he also meant (1) that we must distinguish between subjective ingredients of knowledge of objects and a component ascribed to the object, and (2) that this distinction suffices to deliver a theory of necessary and sufficient conditions for the knowledge of something as an object. Even if we (counterfactually) affirmed that there would be no internal difficulties with the Kantian theory, we could still ask whether the concepts of object and of knowledge proposed by this theory are sufficiently differentiated to do justice to our very specific ways of experiencing objects. This appears not to be the case when one considers what for Kant can only with difficulty (or not at all) be integrated into the class of epistemically accessible objects according to his standards. The first (and most prominent) problem case is that of living objects, that is, organized entities or organisms. The entire *Critique of Judgment* (or at least its second

³ Kant (*CPR*), B 122.

part) is a treatise about Kant's difficulties with these objects, and how such difficulties can be avoided.

In order to make this clear, let us recall Kant's general epistemological thesis. It says that only those entities are epistemically accessible for us – that is, cognizable (identifiable, determinable, discriminable, and specifiable) – that can be categorically determined and that correspond to the universal conditions of intuitability. This thesis restricts the class of cognizable objects to mathematical facts on the one side (since they are according to Kant ideal products of construction, and must be seen not as given but as made and not subject to the law of causality), and to physical objects and psychological occurrences insofar as these stand under the law of causality (as, for instance, pains or drug-induced hallucinations) on the other side. Kant certainly wanted to restrict what is accessible to us to these types of objects. A problem results from this in that among the physical objects there are some, namely organisms, whose inner constitution and form require us to assume a kind of causality different from the “normal” causality in nature. This is so because the form and constitution of an organism cannot be explained according to mechanical causal laws – this at least was Kant's belief. Kant viewed this other particular kind of causality as one that must be thought “according to an analogy with causality of a purpose,”⁴ and he based on this conception of causality his theory of teleological explanations in nature. We need not get into the details of that theory here. Except for one point: Kant asserts, namely, that while the conception of causality according to purposes is unavoidable for us if we want to cognize something as an organism, this conception is grounded not in the object, in the organism, but rather depicts a subjective condition of the knowledge of organisms.

It is not only organisms that become strangely opaque within Kant's project when we inquire into their object status for us; something similar holds for other object-types. If one asked Kant in what sense and to what extent historical processes (revolutions, among others), social and political institutions (the state or the market) or cultural events (Love-Parade) are cognizable objects, his answer would always be the following: not at all, unless we imagine some kind of subjective perspective that first makes them into objects. The question also naturally arises here: How can we ever develop a perspective on something that does not even count as an object without this perspective? Without going further into the details, it should be clear by now that an analysis of the possibility of object reference

⁴ Kant *Critique of Judgment*, A 266.

oriented by central Kantian distinctions appears to lack the conceptual resources necessary to provide a convincing comprehensive theory. Not only does the distinction itself tend to become empty, but beyond that it also seems to account for the multiplicity of types of objects only at the price of giving up their objective status. Finally, it does not indicate why we have to conceive of subjective and objective reference conditions along Kantian lines and thereby exclude other kinds of reference conditions.

2

If one views Kant as the paradigmatic exponent of an epistemological program determined through the procedure I sketched in Section 1 of this chapter, then one can affirm that in the *Phenomenology* Hegel is pursuing in the space of this procedure (that is, starting from the very same conception of knowledge as a product of certain subjective and objective capacities) a new paradigm in epistemology.⁵ Hegel is not interested in this issue for its own sake, but rather primarily because he sees it – at least as he proceeds in the *Phenomenology* – as a fitting means for demonstrating a metaphysical thesis that stands at the center of his entire systematic effort. In other words: the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* is interested in the epistemological problem of object reference because of its potential for justifying his favored metaphysical position. One is therefore required to embed his reflections on object reference in the context of this basic metaphysical idea, because only in this way can we make clear the distinctive character, consequences, and originality of his analysis.

I will designate as Hegel’s basic metaphysical idea that only a monistic theory of reality, i.e. a monistic ontology, is in a position to deliver a consistent total world view that neither takes off from un-demonstrable assumptions (some kind of so-called “facts”) nor leads in the end to unacceptable reductionist consequences (by privileging some kind of one-sided perspective, as is the case in the demand for a naturalistic model of the world). In the brevity demanded here, Hegelian monistic ontology can be summarized with the (sufficiently obscure) thesis that the entirety of reality must be seen as a single all-comprehending self-developing rational entity,

⁵ The view that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* charts a thoroughly new and unconventional path in epistemology is shared by many. Thus Siep (2000), for instance, affirms that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* “incorporates into the ‘transcendental’ question of the relation of knowing to object-conceptions, themes and contents which cannot be found in any traditional, and in hardly any contemporary, epistemology” (2000, 97). And Pinkard (1994, 15) maintains that Hegel has historicized epistemology.

which achieves knowledge of itself in a spatio-temporal process of realizing its distinctive conceptual determinations. More precisely, this thesis claims that we may not view the entirety of reality, understood as totality, as constituted through the multitude of its elements – i.e. of all objects, facts, and events – or as an additive collective unity. Rather, we have to think of this real totality as a whole that is prior to its elements. The elements must be comprehended as products in a process of internal differentiation of that totality. Whatever this thesis – which I will refer to below as “the monistic thesis” – is supposed to mean in particular, for Hegel it is not meant as a mere sharing of a personal perspective, a private preference. Rather, it is supposed to count as an assertion for which indisputable reasons can be adduced. This of course leads directly to the question: How can such a thesis not only prove its plausibility, but also prove compelling? How can one not only make more or less comprehensible such a thesis by taking account of certain conditions or various presuppositions – as one makes many things comprehensible in sufficiently explaining them to someone – but rather how can one equip the thesis with such a persuasive force that it must be seen and accepted as without alternatives? If one views the Hegelian exposition of the metaphysical (according to its content: ontological) thesis as the Hegelian System – or, in other words, if one agrees that the Hegelian System is the attempt to develop the explanatory potential of this thesis – then one must distinguish from the Hegelian System another undertaking, namely the undertaking whose task it is to prove this metaphysical thesis itself. This undertaking, distinguished from the exposition of the System, was conceived by Hegel as an introduction to his System, and he conceived of it differently at different times in his career. One of these conceptions is set out in the Jena *Phenomenology*.

Before I can go into the details of the conception worked out in the *Phenomenology*, we must first recall in outline what is involved with the proof or grounding strategy of such an introductory undertaking. The point for Hegel is to completely justify the monistic thesis, to justify the claim that reality is a rational totality, a self-developing organic whole. A complete justification is taken to be one which does not rely on an unjustified condition. In order to accomplish this goal, one must secure this thesis against at least two kinds of objections. One kind of objection insists that any justification is tied to conditions which themselves cannot be justified, so that in the end only a conditional justification is ever possible. This would mean that the project of a complete or “conditionless” justification is for methodological reasons a fruitless undertaking. If one elaborates concerns of this methodological kind, they lead to rather general

skeptical reservations against the possibility of complete justification. If one wants to escape this type of skeptical methodological objection, then in a complete justification one can claim nothing as established through an unsecured presupposition, be it a postulate (Schelling’s suggestion at the end of the *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus der Wissenschaftslehre*) or a self-evident fact (Reinhold’s principle of consciousness). The second kind of objection exploits an epistemological point. It shows that any assertion that refers to the entirety of reality – and Hegel’s monistic thesis belongs to such assertions – can never be completely justified because it attempts to grasp something conceptually which for us is simply not conceivable in any way. Reality in its entirety just does not allow us to say anything meaningful about it. In order to withstand objections such as this, one must be in a position to specify what talk of “reality as a totality” means such that it can be made clear under which conditions and for whom the reality as totality can be an object of epistemic reference at all.

How can one proceed, then, if one wants to justify the monistic thesis? One possibility, which Hegel not only considered, but actually practiced in his pre-*Phenomenology* attempts at an introduction, consists in discrediting the pluralistic alternatives as contradictory or inconsistent. (The project of the destruction of the so-called “thinking of the understanding” [*Verstandesdenken*] is the expression of the attempt to realize this possibility, which Hegel used as an introduction under the title of “Logic” in various versions during his Jena years.) It does not, however, lead very far, because even if one accepts the discrediting as successful, various things must be presupposed that are not at all immediately self-evident. For instance, one has to take for granted that the distinction between monism and pluralism depicts a complete disjunction (which advocates of a Leibnizean monadism could dispute), or that the Kantian model chosen by Hegel as the paradigm of a pluralistic position is the best available representative of a pluralistic conception.

Another possibility is to offer something like a so-called “transcendental argument” for the monistic thesis. I will understand a transcendental argument here as an argument that leads to necessary conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Such an argument, understood in this (in light of various recent ways of using this term) somewhat restricted sense, thus attempts to prove some thesis – here, the monistic thesis – through demonstrating that it is a necessary condition for some other assertion of knowledge that is uncontroversial.⁶ Such an argument presents fairly

⁶ Whether or not this sense of the term “transcendental argument” has its roots in Kant – Kant uses the term occasionally in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, without, however, explicitly introducing it as a

effective means for establishing a thesis, because it makes no sense to contest something whose existence is a necessary condition for something that one does not contest.⁷ It is, however, difficult to see how Hegel, in light of the demands that he has placed on what counts as “justification,” can accept a transcendental argument in the description given here as a legitimate means for justification. As indicated above, for Hegel the recourse to some presupposition is forbidden, so the opening move of a transcendental argument is not available to him. He cannot operate with an assertion whose truth is uncontroversial, meaning that he cannot infer the truth of another assertion which can be demonstrated as a necessary condition for the uncontroversial one.

A third possibility to consider is what one could designate as a reverse or negative transcendental argument: It consists in justifying the monistic thesis indirectly by proving that only under its presupposition can the concepts of subject and object be conceived in a way that allows one to speak meaningfully of “knowledge of the object through the subject.” This proof is carried out by starting with some kind of non-monistic conception of what an object is “really” or “in truth,” and of a subject who entertains this conception, and then showing that on the basis of this conception one can formulate a consistent concept neither of the object nor of a subject corresponding to it, but rather that it presupposes another conception of subject and object, which itself is equally inconsistent for other reasons, in the end leading to a monistic conception as the only consistent option. Such a strategy aims at proving that if there is to be knowledge of something *in sensu stricto*, the conceptions of subject and object that belong to the monistic thesis must be accepted. This argument would be transcendental in so far as it formulates a necessary condition for the possibility of knowledge of objects, and “negative” because it claims that this necessary condition is fulfilled only by a single subject and object pair, namely that which is brought into play through the monistic thesis of self-knowing reality. In order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and confusing associations with Kant and others, I will give this third kind of strategy

technical term, cf. (*CPR*, B 617 and B 655) – somehow over the course of time it has happened that the characteristic argumentative figure of transcendental argument is often closely associated with Kant’s name.

⁷ In the Anglo-American Hegel literature, the view has often been espoused that one can best understand the argumentation strategy of the *Phenomenology* as amounting to a transcendental argument. In the English-speaking context this view goes back to Taylor (1972), and is also held, for instance, by Neuhauser (1986) and more recently by Stewart (2000). Since this claim by these authors is anchored in very different passages of the work, there is little agreement on what exactly the *Phenomenology* understood as a transcendental argument argues for in its entirety.

another name, and designate it rather artificially as a “transcendentalistic” argument.⁸

There is good evidence for thinking that Hegel in the *Phenomenology* is testing this third possibility for grounding his metaphysical thesis. (1) Hegel did not understand the *Phenomenology* as a systematic explication of the monistic thesis itself. He insists too clearly and too often on its introductory function, its purpose of leading to the standpoint of what he calls “science,” by which he means just the systematic development of his monistic concept of reason. If not given the task of a systematic exposition, then the *Phenomenology*’s function in establishing the System (as the first part of the System of science) can only be that of persuasively grounding the System’s basic thesis.⁹ (2) In addition, one has to notice the fact that Hegel presents his *Phenomenology* as a treatise, in a manner closely competing with Kant, about the possibility and the presuppositions of knowledge of objects. If one holds the so-called “transcendental method” (vaguely expressed, working with transcendental arguments) to be a distinctive feature of Kant’s undertaking, then it is not inappropriate when it comes to presenting an alternative epistemological model to make use of a method that can be brought into the vicinity of Kant’s transcendental method. This proximity can certainly be ascribed to a transcendentalistic procedure. (3) It is striking that Hegel appears to place particular weight on extolling the *Phenomenology* as an anti-skeptical treatise (keyword: self-completing skepticism). Since Kant’s “Refutation of Idealism” through a “transcendental” argument, this type of argument has enjoyed particular popularity in dealing with skeptics. We therefore have some reason to suspect that Hegel, simply because of his anti-skeptical intention, had an interest in working with arguments that can be seen as following the same strategy as a transcendental argument.¹⁰

⁸ The exposition of the method and goal of the *Phenomenology* by Forster (1998), 186 f., seems to me to go in a similar direction. An obvious objection against such a “transcendentalistic” argument would be that it does not fulfill the demand that it be without presuppositions, since it already assumes the possibility of knowledge. But this objection overlooks the conditional form of this argument. It starts out not from the possibility of knowledge as a fact, but rather takes up the possibility of knowledge as an hypothesis. It thus claims that, if knowledge is to be possible, it and its conditions – in our case: the monistic thesis – must be fulfilled. *That* knowledge is indeed possible has to be demonstrated by the “system.”

⁹ As confirmation of this assessment one can read the rather cryptic notice for the – never carried out – revision of the first edition, in which the *Phenomenology* is described: “first part [–] actually a) Before, of science [–] to bring consciousness to this standpoint” (*GW* 9, 448).

¹⁰ The proximity to Kant’s project of a transcendental deduction and the related anti-skeptical intention of the *Phenomenology* has been very convincingly argued by Pippin (1989), 94 ff. Almost

Still, this external evidence is not decisive. Yet if one reviews the procedure presented by Hegel in the Preface and the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* for reaching the so called “standpoint of science,” it is not difficult to notice the “transcendentalistic” claim of his procedure. We can see this if we ask how Hegel, through the procedure given there, thinks to reach his goal, the “standpoint of science.” If one recalls the scenario that Hegel sets out in these passages, the guiding idea is apparently (1) that one can reach this standpoint of science through an analysis of the experience that a subject has with what is an object to him, and (2) that this standpoint is to be reached when the monistic thesis is demonstrated to be indisputable. This leading idea is supposed to be realized in proving that the possibility of cognitive reference to objects presupposes the monistic thesis. This is the case, so Hegel asserts, because any conception of objects available to us is parasitical on the conception that is established by the monistic thesis about the constitution of reality. If one expresses the whole conditionally, one can grasp the goal of Hegel’s phenomenological reflection thus: If knowledge of objects is to be possible at all, then it is possible only under monistic conditions (because actually only the monistic object, or reality conceived as totality, can be known – even if not necessarily by subjects like us).

In the *Phenomenology* the starting point of Hegel’s justification of the monistic thesis is a characterization of what he understands as cognition – or, what is the same for him, knowledge. Knowledge is for Hegel a relation that is present when a subject can correctly claim to grasp a fact as it is “in truth.” A knowing subject who stands in this relation is to be distinguished through a certain number of assumptions – named by Hegel “experiences” – which establish his concept of what is to be understood by a fact as it is “in truth.” A knowing subject should thus not be a purely receptive relatum in the knowing relation, simply taking up passively some kind of data, but rather the subject should already have available a conception of what it actually means to be something “in truth.” The fact to be understood, the object, which forms the other relatum of the knowing relation, is conceived as the intentional object of the knowing subject. This object is conceived as that to which the knowing subject refers with a certain attitude, namely the attitude that the object corresponds to the subject’s representation of what it “in truth” is. The object that is to play a role in the cognitive relation is thus not some kind of merely present, uninterpreted data, something that

all interpreters comment on Hegel’s anti-skeptical interests as a motive for the method of the *Phenomenology*, though with very different emphases. Cf. more recently, Siep (2000), 15 f., 75 f., 100 ff. and Fulda (2003).

is simply and immediately given, but is rather an object of reference already loaded with conceptual expectations of its "real" constitution. Knowledge is thus according to Hegel the result of a relatively complex interplay of conceptually structured subjective expectations and the objective conditions of their fulfillment. This interplay can be successful or not: it is successful when the conceptual expectations defined by the subject can be brought into agreement with what the intended object demands for it to be grasped as object, as a consistent entity. This interplay is unsuccessful when the subject does not manage to describe his intended object with the means at his disposal. The assertion that a subject knows an object says nothing other than that with his concept the subject correctly claims to grasp the object "in its truth."

Taking off from this concept of knowledge, Hegel tries to make clear that there is actually only a single constellation in which the subject and object can be interpreted such that they realize this cognitive relation. In other words, he shows that it is only possible in a single case to speak of knowledge *in sensu stricto*. This constellation is the extremely extravagant one in which the subject views his object as identical with himself. Knowledge is always only possible as self-knowledge. This is Hegel's epistemological credo, uncongenial to everyday knowledge, stretching like a bright thread from his Jena beginnings throughout his entire philosophical life. The phenomenological process is supposed to help us reach this insight. As we should expect, Hegel depicts this as a procession of different object-conceptions, each of which is correlated to a corresponding subject. Each of these conceptions is examined according to the assumptions with which its favored characterization must work, assumptions regarding what it actually is, what the subject cognitively refers to, and which demands must be made on the subject that is designated through these assumptions. Crudely stated, this examination proceeds in three steps.

In the *first step* in examining any object concept, Hegel shows two things: (1) first he details precisely the assumptions that are constitutive for a specific conception of an object of cognition, and (2) he demonstrates that these assumptions actually imply an entirely different, in general much more complex conception of what characterizes an object if it is to be known (and not merely represented, intuited, opined, etc.). The *second step* concerns the subject that entertains a specific conception of what an object is. This step also must accomplish two things: it (1) has the task of showing how the subject must describe itself (with the conceptual resources of that specific conception) if it wants to maintain the claim that this conception of what the object is "in truth" is on the mark. (2) it demonstrates that this

self-description is always incomplete in the sense that it includes elements that can be accounted for only through other, richer object descriptions. The *third step*, finally, correlates the results of the first and second steps and allows a new object-conception and a corresponding subject description to appear, which again will be subject to the three-step examination. Each of these examinations is, according to Hegel's demand, a necessary consequence of the one preceding it (except for the first). They have their "natural" endpoint in an object-conception that meets the demand of being the only object of cognition (and not the object of belief, opinion, or representation) in which the subject finds its own concept realized.

This rather formal characterization of the procedure and goal of the phenomenological process – conceived as the science of the experience of consciousness with itself and its objects – raises expectations with regard to content that Hegel does in fact rigorously fulfill. Above all, one thinks that Hegel needs to show, as he in fact does, that each of the object-conceptions he presents (and whose claim to truth is destroyed) is distinguished from the preceding conception in that very specific new conceptual elements enter the picture. These elements must serve the function of requiring the subject who holds the following conception to interpret himself, or what Hegel calls his own concept, in a structurally different way. If there were only a progressive conceptual differentiation on the side of the object-conception, it would be difficult to see how at some point in the process Hegel could assert something like an identity of object and subject in the sense relevant to his concept of knowledge. The experience in which the subject conceives of itself as dependent on its current object-conception must, in addition, be of the sort that the subject increasingly recognizes itself *in the object*. This leads one to assume that Hegel is intent on distinguishing various ways in which something can be identical with something else. And it is actually not hard to see that he takes into account a whole spectrum of identity relations, ranging from qualitative to numerical identity, in the various characterizations of the subject – object relation.¹¹

3

The concrete exposition of the phenomenological process should be distinguished from the function of the *Phenomenology* within the Hegelian

¹¹ Hegel already employed with great skill this praxis of differentiating kinds of identity as a means of methodological production of "monistic constellations" in the "Metaphysics" of the second *Jena Systementwurf*. Cf. Horstmann (1984), 92 ff.

System and the strategy of its exposition. It is the former process that leads back to the opening question of reference to objects and to Hegel’s contribution to epistemology. Hegel construes this process as an ordered succession of object-conception and subject-conception pairs. Resulting from the process is both a theory of object-types available for knowledge and also the conditions under which they are epistemically available. The side of this process that deals with these object-types and their conditions of availability is roughly the following: (1) We can distinguish from each other various ways in which subjects conceive of objects as the matter [*Gegenstand*] of cognition. (2) Each of these ways is specified through the mode of presence of an object-type for a knowing subject, and there is no object-type which cannot be characterized in one or more of these ways. (3) The thesis further holds that each of the object-conceptions must arise with the claim of grasping what, according to the object-type intended as an object of knowledge, the object “actually” or “in truth” is. This is the case because knowledge is supposed to imply truth. (4) Agreement counts as the criterion for truth. An object-type is only known “in truth” when it agrees with the conception of it. According to Hegel this agreement is reached when the object is identical with its conception – or, in Hegelian terms, with its concept. (5) If a conception of an object corresponds with its intended object-type, so that the object-type is recognized as what it “in truth” is, then this conception defines a new object-type. (6) To this new object-type there is also an object-conception which agrees with the type, which grasps it “in its truth” and defines a further object-type. (7) The series of object-types and of the object-conceptions is completed when an object-type has resulted that recognizes itself as the producer of its own conception.

Equipped with these guidelines, Hegel thinks he can show two things: (1) that even the simplest object-conception – meaning the one whose concept is the poorest in terms of the conceptual elements involved – already points implicitly to the concept of a more complex object-conception, i.e. to one whose concept is conceptually richer, and (2) that there is a direct dependence relation between the conceptual resources of the knowing subject and the object-types accessible to him as an object of knowledge (and not merely as an object of perception, opinion, representation, etc.). According to this sketch, one must describe Hegel’s theory of the knowing relation to objects as based on the assumption of an intricate interaction of object-conceptions and the object-types defined through them.¹²

¹² On the subject side, Hegel also distinguishes between subject-conceptions and types of subject and sets up an interaction between them, perhaps even more clearly than on the object side. The division

Now the history of the generation of object-conceptions is to be distinguished from the generations of object-types. For the object-conceptions (and the corresponding subjects), Hegel appears to distinguish as many such conceptions as there are sections in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For Hegel the simplest object-conception is that which grasps an object as a “pure this,” and a given here and now, and thus conceives of it as something whose essence – in Hegelese, “truth” – consists in its immediate givenness, meaning in the merely spatio-temporally specified presence. This object-conception is maintained by the conceptually poorest subject, which thus also conceives of itself as a “pure this,” grasping nothing but the here-and-now data, and claims in the epistemic mode of so-called sense-certainty to grasp what an object “actually” is. The *Phenomenology* begins with this simplest or poorest epistemic constellation.

Hegel employs a conceptual procedure of critique that analyzes the conceptual guidelines bound up with the subject- and object-conceptions of sense-certainty. This process shows that from the concept of an object as an immediately given This, the subject who entertains this conception of an object must already have recourse to conceptual resources that imply an entirely other description, and that means an entirely other conception, of both the object and of the subject himself. Thus Hegel demonstrates in this case that the here-now-this-description is meaningful only when one can make such distinctions as, among others, between universality and singularity, and between what is essential and what is inessential. Hegel claims that this means that the supposedly poorest object description, supposedly with the fewest presuppositions, already points to a richer object-conception and already implicitly employs that conception. In order for the subject to be able to ascribe to itself this richer object-conception, it must interpret itself in a much more differentiated way than the self-interpretation connected with the poorer object description required. For Hegel, of course, the first richer object-conception is that of the perceived spatio-temporal individual thing, which is individuated by its characteristics and by its relation to the characteristics of other individual things. He describes the subject-conception assigned to the concept of this object as perceiving consciousness, which is conceptually richer than the subject of sense-certainty in that (among other things) it must have access to the concepts of error and

added by Hegel exclusively for the table of contents of the *Phenomenology* is informative at least for the first three types of objects and the corresponding subject-conceptions. Inside the subject-type “Consciousness” we can distinguish the subject-conceptions of “sense-certainty,” “perception,” and “understanding,” inside the subject-type “Self-Consciousness” the subject-conceptions that Hegel treats under IV.A and B, and inside of the subject-type “Reason” again various subject-conceptions.

deception as well as to the concepts of substance and accident. Hegel names the knowledge-relation that holds between these richer conceptions of subject and object “perception.”

This is not the place to follow out the path of the phenomenological process in detail. More important here is the rough structure and the epistemological message resulting from the entire process. The rough structure can be summarized quickly. On the side of the object-conception, Hegel first moves from the perceivable individual thing to the conception of the object defined through natural laws and causal roles. This then leads to the conception of the living thing as a content that exemplifies the species – genus difference, which makes possible and demands the concept of a self-conscious object, from which results object-types which must be interpreted as social, cultural, and religious facts. On the side of the subject-conceptions an interesting hierarchy results, very quickly leading to subjects that one can view only as supra-individual constructs, as forms of what Hegel calls “Spirit.”¹³ In light of the guidelines discussed above for the entire process and the systematic task that it is supposed to serve – namely, to justify the monistic thesis – it is not surprising that the series of conceptions of objects and subjects finally converge where one can no longer distinguish between the conceptions of the object and of the subject. This conclusion should also be expected because it depicts an ingenious exemplification of the central monistic intuition of the primacy of the whole over its parts, which also means here the primacy of the maximally complex over the elementary simples. Finally it also makes clear that without the super-complex whole the elementary parts – in this case the various object- and subject-conceptions – cannot be understood at all.

4

So much for the possible role of the phenomenological process of object-constitution for the justification of a monistic metaphysics. If one now puts aside this monistic background of Hegel’s investigation, then one sees that Hegel certainly also conceived of this process as a theory of the conditions of object reference.¹⁴ As already noted at the outset, this theory of object

¹³ That these hierarchies are supposed to be constructed, on the subject and the object side, so that the higher stage is a conceptual presupposition of the lower stage, is an Hegelian claim that I mention here but whose justification I cannot, however, discuss.

¹⁴ Hegel’s reference to the *Phenomenology* as the doctrine of appearing knowledge also points to this claim. This language, which replaces the original characterization of the phenomenological undertaking (as the science of the experience of consciousness), has an often-mentioned double meaning.

relations and the accompanying theory of object constitution was certainly not Hegel's primary goal in the conception of the *Phenomenology*. The primary goal is and remains the proof of the alternative-lessness of the monistic metaphysical thesis. But the epistemological aspect has a prominent place. I would like to point out two attractive aspects of this theory. First, the theory's basic idea of our epistemic situation is not without a basis in our everyday beliefs about knowledge. Its lesson can be summarized in the maxim that not everyone can know everything about what he relates to as an object in a cognitive way, and that for us and for other creatures there are individual and also collective limits, which – given a concrete individual or a collective situation – simply cannot be overcome. If that is so, then one must grant to Hegel's approach that he provides an explanatory potential for questions which, even if seldom or never posed by traditional theories of knowledge, nevertheless require genuinely epistemological answers. When it comes to the individual case, it is a common experience, painfully learned in many areas, that we very often end up in situations in which we can thoroughly grasp the concept of the object to which we relate with a claim to knowledge, but we nevertheless can know nothing in a real sense (that is, with claim to truth). The almost regular failure at weather or stock market prognosis is a sufficient indication of this point. The collective case may be less easy to substantiate and may already presuppose a certain measure of Hegelian metaphysics. In at least a metaphorical sense we are very ready to say that governments or states are aware of facts – for instance, as problems or irregularities – for which they can find no solutions or remedies. In both cases there is a noticeable discrepancy between how one can relate in the mode of knowing to an object, and what one can assert of these objects with a claim to truth. But if this is the case, then one will have to concede to Hegel's approach that he provided a model that made available a potential explanation for such discrepancies. The discrepancies have often been thematized by traditional theories of knowledge (one need think back only to the beginning of Greek philosophy and the discussions

It indicates, on the one hand, that in the *Phenomenology* modes of the appearance of knowledge (i.e. subject constellations) arise that pretend to the successful realization of the cognitive relation, or "true" knowledge but also, on the other hand, that these modes of appearance (until the last, absolute knowledge) are only illusory or "false" knowledge because they are not in a position to redeem this pretension structurally and conceptually. It is noteworthy that this double meaning comes about only when one admits the concept of false knowledge as a meaningful concept, which Hegel explicitly does (30, ¶39), and one does not from the beginning view it as contradictory and therefore meaningless. If one follows Hegel, then a doctrine of appearing knowledge, a phenomenology, is always also an epistemological treatise.

of the relation of opinion, belief, and knowledge), but they nevertheless have seldom received genuine epistemological answers.

Second, we should bear in mind that Hegel’s phenomenological venture, compared to the theory oriented by Kantian presuppositions that I sketched and criticized at the beginning, can claim to be much better equipped along several dimensions. I would like to indicate three of these dimensions:

1. Hegel can claim that his theory allows for possible cognitive reference to many more and very different types of objects that are exemplified through “genuine” objects actually present in the world. For its Kantian rival, the only types of objects that count as genuinely real are those which fit into the procrustean bed of spatio-temporal conditions and judgment-conforming categorical ordering functions. Hegel’s theory, by contrast, makes it possible to specify the meaning that is bound up with the talk of “spiritual” objects in the widest sense – that is, psychological, social, and cultural phenomena.
2. In addition, Hegel’s phenomenological theory of the conditions of epistemic object reference succeeds in giving an attractive explanation for why we can refer epistemically to an object even though we cannot know it in a strict sense. For Hegel, the limitation of our claims to knowledge follows for a reason lying purely in the conditions of knowledge, namely that any constellation of subjective conditions (characteristic for the accessibility of a type of object) can be depicted as a certain number of merely necessary conditions which are not in themselves sufficient for knowing the intended object. Expressed in Hegel’s language: The subjective conditions may be sufficient in order to know [*wissen*] something, but they are not adequate to comprehend [*begreifen*] something.
3. Finally we cannot overlook that the theory of various subject-types developed in the *Phenomenology* allows in principle an answer to the question of how we can represent to ourselves the fact that things which remain and must remain epistemically opaque to us need not remain inaccessible in every perspective. Creatures like us may never precisely know what belongs to the relevant conditions for the adequate understanding of what we, for example, call “the market,” or “love,” or “art,” but there may be other types of subjects for whom those things are all much more transparent. We can even, if we follow Hegel, make intelligible the conceptual equipment that these types of subjects must display. Such an assertion might seem arrogant at first glance. But one can also view it as the Hegelian diagnosis of the philosophical price one

must be ready to pay if one wants to maintain that facts such as historical processes, social institutions, aesthetic products, and religious intuitions depict not only contingent or conventional – and that means anthropomorphic – fictions, but rather are for us just as real, objective elements of reality as trees, cars, and people. Further, it is the price for the assumption that these less epistemically accessible objects form lasting parts of an organized world determined by some set of rules. That subjects like us understand these rules, if they in fact exist, in only a very limited way, does not speak against their reality in so far as there are also other types of subjects who are better equipped for the knowledge of these rules.

In conclusion, one should keep in mind that Hegel certainly viewed his phenomenological undertaking as the attempt to go an entirely new way in epistemology. This is demonstrated tellingly in his description in the published announcement of the *Phenomenology*: “The *Phenomenology of Spirit* should replace the psychological explanations and the abstract discussions concerning the foundations of knowledge. It regards the preparation for science from a perspective which makes it a new, interesting and first science of philosophy.”¹⁵ My reflections in this chapter are meant to confirm – if they are not completely mistaken – that Hegel’s self-evaluation goes to the heart of the phenomenological project. This, however, does not change anything about the correctness of Hegel’s last explicit self-assessment of this work: The *Phenomenology* is and remains a “Peculiar early work” (*GW*9, 448), so peculiar that Hegel himself no longer trusted himself to revise it.¹⁶

¹⁵ *GW*9, 446.

¹⁶ The leading idea of this chapter goes back to reflections caused by the critical remarks of James Kreines (2004) about other texts of mine. To him I owe the first thanks. Section 1 attempts to take into account productively some critical comments that Wolfgang Carl gave me on an earlier version, while the sections 2 and 4 have profited (in my eyes) from incorporating points of view that Rüdiger Bubner and James Kreines brought to my attention. Eckart Förster saved me from a rather embarrassing error regarding Kant. Section 3 was written largely in Brazil where I spent some time as a visitor at the Department of Philosophy of the Federal University at Florianopolis/Santa Catarina participating in a research program led by Maria Borges. To the critical attention of Susan Hahn I owe some clarifications. I thank them all sincerely. My special thanks go to Dina Emundts, who accompanied the entire project very competently. I am also indebted to Dean Moyar for translating this text.

Sense-certainty and the “this-such”

Willem A. deVries

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is knowledge’s voyage of self-discovery. It begins with the mere appearance of knowledge – that is, what knowledge at first *seems* to be. But what knowledge at first seems to be is not congruent with its reality, even in its first appearance.¹ The incongruence creates an instability that pushes knowledge on to other ways to take itself, stopping only when a conception of knowledge has been developed on which knowledge seems to be exactly what it is. My concern here is an examination of one of the opening arguments in the “Sense-Certainty” chapter of the *Phenomenology*, showing how the moves Hegel tracks in the “Sense-Certainty” chapter provide an important supplement to the analysis of perceptual knowledge provided by Wilfrid Sellars (1967).

I

To begin the story of knowledge’s self-discovery, we need to be able to fix the beginning point: How does knowledge first appear? Hegel’s answer assumes – an assumption to be justified in the course of his story – that knowledge is some form of relatedness between mind and world, and then asserts that knowledge first appears as an *immediate and simple relation* between mind and world. Given the direction of fit implicit in our pretheoretic concept of knowledge, this seems to require that the object must be simply what is and the subject must be receptive, the knowledge neither transforming the object nor adding anything new or additional. Immediacy, simplicity, and receptivity are familiar themes in classical attempts to grasp the most basic cognitive confrontation between mind and world, and Hegel invites us to be fellow travelers along a path that

¹ The “at first” here is not *temporal*; the *Phenomenology* is not a history, but a kind of rational reconstruction, though one that is far more conscious of the dynamic nature of the conceptual than most. The “at first” means *in its simplest construal*.

starts with the naïvest of conceptions of knowledge and reconstructs both metaphysics and epistemology from the ground up.

How are we, then, to understand our most immediate and most basic cognitive confrontation with the world? That there is (must be?) some point at which mind and world stand in most immediate contact, where the relation between them, even if not simple, is at least at its most direct or immediate, seems unavoidable. Today, in the wake of Kant, Hegel, and Sellars, we recognize the need to distinguish between causal immediacy and epistemic immediacy, and to recognize that the two need not go hand-in-hand. Too often, the point of immediate *causal* contact has also been taken to be the point of immediate *epistemic* contact and, not only that, but to provide a *firm foundation* on which a hierarchical structure of further knowledge rests. This notion of a hierarchical structure of knowledge built on a firm foundation is not entailed by the notion of a point of most immediate contact between mind and world, however, and, interestingly, Hegel never bothers to address this popular contention directly. The naïve conception of knowledge with which we begin the *Phenomenology* does not even have this level of sophistication.

2

A noticeable peculiarity of Hegel's "Sense-Certainty" chapter in the *Phenomenology* is Hegel's emphasis on the word "this" and other indexical terms, such as "I," "here," and "now." Metaphysical or epistemological arguments that rely so explicitly and heavily on a distinctively *linguistic* form like indexical reference are not common among early modern philosophers. Concern with language at that level of detail is unusual before the development of modern logic and linguistics. It is not surprising that such arguments put one in mind of Bertrand Russell and his treatment of indexicals a hundred years after the *Phenomenology* appeared.² Interestingly, although arguments based on linguistic forms are rampant in analytic philosophy, analytic philosophers have not been fond of the opening chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. When they have paid it attention, too often they have misunderstood it completely.³ It took over half a century

² See, for instance, Bertrand Russell's argument that one can name only what one is acquainted with and therefore only indexicals are names in the "proper strict logical sense of the word" Russell (1956), 200–202.

³ I address one such clear misinterpretation shared by D. W. Hamlyn, Ivan Soll, and others in deVries (1988a). See also Hamlyn (1961), 140–146; Soll (1969), 91–110; Plumer (1980), 71–94; Inwood (1983), 311–317.

before analytic philosophy began to make sense of the chapter.⁴ Now that analysts no longer just assume that Hegel is up to no good, we have begun not only to take Hegel’s arguments seriously, but also to look for ways in which his interpretations can enrich our understanding of other philosophers.

Hegel’s discussion of “this” in “Sense-Certainty” recalls not only Russell or Kaplan⁵ but, perhaps more fittingly, Sellars’ discussion in *Science and Metaphysics* (1967) of Kant’s conception of intuition. Putting Hegel into dialog with Kant and Sellars is, to many, very probably, a scary prospect. All three are notoriously difficult, so there is a risk of explaining *obscurum per obscurius*, but all three are also philosophers of profound insight. The potential reward outweighs the risk.

3

Let me first draw the connection to Sellars, for it is present right on the surface, though it remains to be seen how deep it really goes. As the Sellars connection becomes clear, the Kant connection will follow. In the opening chapter of *Science and Metaphysics*, titled “Sensibility and Understanding,” Sellars examines Kant’s views on the nature and the relation of those two faculties. In particular, Sellars suggests using linguistic expressions of the form “this-such” to model Kant’s conception of intuition. Sellars’ motives for proposing this model, and the lesson he wants readers to draw from it, provide a useful beginning point.

The distinction between sensibility and understanding is vital to Kant. It is almost overwhelmingly tempting to treat Kant’s distinction between the representations of the understanding and the representations of sensibility as a distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual representations.⁶ And there is, Sellars admits, *something* to this interpretation: Intuition is often contrasted by Kant to conception. But, Sellars claims, even Kant himself was not entirely clear about the distinctions towards which he was struggling. According to Sellars, Kant’s primary notion of a concept is of something *general*, something that is a predicate of a possible judgment,⁷ capable of subsuming a manifold of intuitions. There remains room to think of intuitions, a class nominally contrasted to concepts, as still

⁴ Among the early positive interpretations of these parts of the *Phenomenology* are Bernstein (1971) and Taylor (1972).

⁵ Kaplan (1979, 1989). ⁶ Sellars (1967), I, §4: 2. ⁷ Kant (*CPR*), A69/B94.

conceptual in a broader sense, namely as a class of conceptual items aimed at the *individual* rather than the general as such.

From Sellars' point of view, this is a very important point, because describing something as "conceptual" in this broader sense is a placing of it in the logical space of reasons. In this broad sense, conceptual items are all things – representations – that are subject to standards of correctness. Conceptual states, but not non-conceptual states, can be *right* or *wrong*; they are things we may be called upon to justify, and (most important in the case of intuitions) things that can justify other representations; they are inferentially potent. In this sense, then, it is absolutely crucial that intuitions be conceptual, that it is germane to raise questions about the correctness of an intuition or of its rational consequences for other representations.

It is no less important to Hegel that not all conceptuality is purely *general*. For we can see in the idea that there is a kind of conceptuality that is, as such, aimed at the individual rather than the general the core notion of Hegel's conception of the concrete universal.

Sellars' suggestion certainly reflects some important themes in Kant's treatment of intuition.⁸ Kant is pretty clear that intuitions are representations of *individuals*, and therefore are not general. But, of course, being a conceptual representation of an individual is not a sufficient condition for being an intuition. It is possible to represent a unique individual by means of thoroughly general concepts, and this is reflected in the structure of some singular referential devices, such as the definite description:

A plausible suggestion is that "intuitions" differ from other conceptual representations of individuals by not being mediated by general concepts in the way in which, for example, "the individual which is perfectly round" is mediated by the general concept of being perfectly round.⁹

This negative characterization of intuition is complemented by Kant's positive assertion that intuitive representations relate *immediately* to their objects. There are, of course, a variety of ways to understand such immediacy, but Sellars thinks we need not, at this point, choose among them. He proposes construing intuitions on the model of the demonstrative "this," which contrasts with the definite article "the" in its logic and especially in the implication of immediate presence it carries. We need not have in hand

⁸ In discussing intuitions, Kant most frequently emphasizes that they are products of receptivity and stand in immediate relation to their object, but he also says that intuitions are "single" (*CPR*, A320/B377). The immediate relation an intuition bears to its object is to its particular object itself, as an individual, not as possessing some "mark" also shared by other objects.

⁹ Sellars (1967), I, §7: 3.

an exhaustive theory of demonstratives in order to be able to use them as a model, for demonstratives are a familiar kind of linguistic term the functioning of which we understand generally quite well, even if not completely and explicitly. In the linguistic function of singular demonstrative terms, we recognize an expression of one’s immediate relation to a singular object:

On this model, which I take to be, on the whole, the correct interpretation, intuitions would be representations of *thises* and would be conceptual in that peculiar way in which to represent something as a *this* is conceptual.¹⁰

Sellars does not here pause to tell us what the peculiar way is in which representing something as a *this* is conceptual. That is an important fact for my story here.

But Sellars does not rest with the idea that intuitions are representations of *thises*. Other considerations in Kant push him to complicate his model of intuitions significantly. An intuition is not just a representation of a *this*, it is a representation of a *this-such*. Typically, Sellars does not pause to discuss the importance of this supplementation of the model, but it is not trivial. “*This*” is a transcendental term, in the medieval sense, in that it ranges across categories – anything and everything can be a *this*, if one is only clever enough in establishing the speech context. Being a *this*, or representing a *this*, tells us *nothing* about the relevant object. The pure *this* tells us only that whatever the object is, it is something with which one stands somehow or other in immediate relation. A *this-such*, however, is not a bare *this*: It has a predicative qualification built into it and locates the object within some classificatory scheme. A *this-such* is obviously conceptual in a way that a pure *this* may not be, for the “such” takes as substituends the kinds of terms we readily see to express concepts (e.g. this *cube*, this *man*, even this *thing*). If Kantian intuitions are not representations of mere *thises*, but representations of *this-suches*, then it is obvious that they are conceptual episodes, even if they may also contain (in some sense) a non-conceptual content as well.

What considerations motivate Sellars to enrich his proposed model of Kantian intuitions? His appeal is to the fact that, according to Kant, at least some intuitions involve synthesis. Kant provides the material for a distinction between intuitions that do and intuitions that do not involve anything over and above sheer receptivity. Furthermore, Kant also tells us that it is intuitions that involve synthesis which the understanding subsumes under general concepts.¹¹ Since “the same function which gives

¹⁰ Sellars (1967), I, §7: 3. ¹¹ Kant (*CPR*), A78/B104.

unity to the various representations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*¹² (which function Kant calls the “productive imagination”), it makes sense to think of the synthesis of an intuition as a unifying of a manifold under what we can think of as an *individual concept, a this-such*:

For of intuitions those, at least, which are synthesized by the productive imagination would seem to have a form illustrated by “this-cube,” which, though not a judgment, is obviously closely connected with the judgment “This is a cube.”¹³

Intuitions that are not synthesized by the productive imagination are mere sensations, the manifold of intuition, not yet combined into an intuition of a manifold. Sellars thinks Kant was not perfectly clear about the need to distinguish sensation from intuition proper.¹⁴ Insisting on that distinction is one of the ways that Sellars hopes to improve on, or clean up, Kant’s philosophy.

What is important here, however, is the fact that the motivation Sellars gives for extending the model of intuition from a simple “this” to the more complex “this-such” is quite internal to Kant’s own system. Someone who accepted the idea that the immediacy of intuition can be captured by modeling intuition with demonstratives but was not inclined to accept the other parts of Kant’s system (in particular Kant’s difficult notion of synthesis), would have no reason to accept the richer model of intuition that Sellars proposes. Thinking of our immediate cognitive contact with the world as best expressed in a pure “this” remains on the table and, with it, the idea that our immediate cognitive contact with the world is non- or pre-conceptual. Here is where it is significant that Sellars gives us no story about “that peculiar way in which to represent something as a *this* is conceptual.”¹⁵

In section 4 I argue that in the “Sense-Certainty” chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel gives us an argument to show that we cannot avoid the *this-such*. Every *this* is, in fact, already (if only implicitly) a *this-such*. And thus every *this* is conceptual in a fairly straightforward way. We do not need to establish some special form of conceptuality reserved for *theses* – although that, too, could be done. Since there is a great deal of plausibility to the idea that our most immediate cognitive contact with objects in the world is expressed in (or modeled by) demonstrative phrases, our most immediate cognitive contact with objects in the world is conceptual.

¹² Kant (*CPR*), A79/B104–105. ¹³ Sellars (1967), I, §11: 5.

¹⁴ See Sellars (1967), I, §18: 7. ¹⁵ Sellars (1967), I, §7: 3.

4

Our central question is: How are we to understand our most immediate and basic cognitive confrontation with the world? Hegel thinks that this question about immediate knowledge is a natural beginning point for the general inquiry into knowledge:

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 of what simply *is*. (63, ¶90)

A seeming peculiarity of Hegel’s methodology is that as a *beginning* point for the inquiry into knowledge, sense-certainty is not apparently *chosen* from among competing alternative views of knowledge by someone who already has a complex, self-aware conception of knowledge and its kinds. The inquiry into knowing seems to begin where many think all knowledge begins, i.e. at the immediate presence of the world to mind, accepted at face value, or rather apotheosized into the ideal of knowledge. At the beginning of the inquiry into knowledge, there is no sophistication about knowledge, no distinctions internal to the view of knowledge adopted. The immediate presence of world to mind exhausts the concept of knowledge available at this point. Thus, immediate knowledge is thought of not as an element in a complex structure of knowledge, but as the very essence, indeed the exhaustive essence, of knowledge. Knowledge at its best – true knowledge – *is* immediate knowledge.¹⁶ Furthermore, because the cognitive relatedness in sense-certainty is supposed to be pure immediacy, sense-certainty must be a relatedness between *individuals*. Relations to universals or among universals cannot have the requisite immediacy (for relations to or among universals are always mediated by relations to or among the particulars that realize the universals).

Hegel expresses the elements of this simple and immediate conception of knowledge as simple and immediate by the use of indexicals, e.g. “this” and “I.” Or rather, since Hegel would deny that he is foisting on sense-certainty

¹⁶ “I, *this* particular 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; 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. Neither of these has anything to do with the truth of sense-certainty: here neither I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation; the ‘I’ does not have the significance of a manifold imagining or thinking; nor does the ‘thing’ signify something that has a host of qualities . . . Similarly, certainty as a *connection* is an *immediate* pure connection: consciousness is ‘I,’ nothing more, a pure ‘This’; the singular consciousness knows a pure ‘This,’ or a single item” (63, ¶91).

an expressive form it would not take as its own, we should better say that the expressive form most suited to capturing sense-certainty's meaning is the indexical. Singular indexicals also express the individuality of the elements in sense-certainty.

But, despite the intention to express individuality and immediacy via the use of the indexicals, *our* reflection as readers of the *Phenomenology* and consciousness's own experience both reveal that, whatever it takes its elements to be, sense-certainty cannot grasp the immediate and individual *as such*. It can grasp only something universal.¹⁷ What sense-certainty *means* to express is not what it, in fact, expresses. For, Hegel argues, it turns out that "this" and "I" do not express immediate individuality; they turn out to be universals in their own right, intrinsically mediated by relations to numerous otherwise disparate individuals.

Hegel's argument for the universality of such indexicals is not a straightforward affair. He asks "*What is the This?*" (64, ¶95) and immediately distinguishes two forms of "this," namely "here" and "now." By what right does he make this distinction? It is common and familiar enough, but doesn't his dialectic purport to be more rigorous than that? I think Hegel does indeed discharge this burden a bit later in the argument (68, ¶107 f.) by arguing that it is indeed *necessary* that the "this" have distinguishable moments, that "this" makes sense only in the context of a system of classificatory predicates. That is the argument towards which we are heading, for in the context I provide here, it can be seen as an argument that a "this" *must* be a "this-such" and never a *pure* "this." But the understanding of the "this" elaborated in the Sense-Certainty chapter grows stage-wise, and we are not yet ready for that argument.

Hegel here (64, ¶95) asks: "*What is Now?*" and answers: "*Now is night.*" These two questions: "*What is the This?*" and "*What is Now?*," are treated superficially as genus and species, but that appearance is deceptive. The actual relation seems to be that of meta- and object-level questions. The question about the *this* is surely not a question about what is before the author or the reader of the *Phenomenology*, but a question about what the particular significance or burden of "this"-representations is – a metarepresentational question. The question about the now, as treated here, is a different kind of question given a straightforward object-level answer: now is night.

Hegel proposes a "simple experiment" to test whether this sense-certainty, now is night, is *true*. "We write down this truth; a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our preserving

¹⁷ For *our* realization of this, see 64, ¶92. For consciousness' experience of it, see 64, ¶¶93–99.

it” (64, ¶195). But if Hegel means by “truth” the semantic property that qualifies (among other things) those sentences that correctly describe the empirical world, it is most certainly the case that writing a sentence down can destroy its truth. If I *say* “I am speaking out loud,” what I say is true and pragmatically self-supporting; if I write it down, the sentence is then false or at best accidentally true, because I just “happen” to be saying something at the time. Hegel’s notion of truth, of course, is notoriously *not* the same as the semantic property of those sentences that correctly describe the empirical world – *that* property he calls “correctness.” At the very least, what Hegel means by “truth” has to be something enduring. Hegel describes it as something that *is*.

The Now that is *night is preserved*, i.e. it is treated as what it professes to be, as something that *is*; but it proves itself to be, on the contrary, something that *is not*. (65, ¶196)

Why what *is* could not be evanescent – why preservability or durability is a good test of truth and being – is simply not argued here. Hegel has arguments elsewhere concerning such things, but here it is treated as an assumption common to both the “natural consciousness” with which the *Phenomenology* begins and the philosophical consciousness that observes it.

Though the now that is night is not preserved, *is not*, the *now* itself *is* preserved, but not as night, for it is now day. The now itself, therefore, meets the standard for being, namely, permanence and self-preservation, but only as a “*negative* in general.” Neither day nor night *is* the now:

A simple thing of this kind which *is* through negation, which is neither This nor That, a *not-This*, and is with equal indifference This as well as that – such a thing we call a *universal*. So it is in fact the universal that is the true [content] of sense-certainty. (65, ¶196)

This is an important conclusion. Sense-certainty identifies knowledge as *immediate presence* and as a *relation between individuals*. But such immediate presence can at best be a merely subjective possession; it is evanescent and absolutely resists capture in any durable form or expression. Insofar as there is a substantial relation between the individuals even in so-called immediate knowledge, it is mediated by universality, and this shows up even in the attempt to express the immediacy, the “this.” The evanescence and subjectivity of such immediacy are linked in this case. What seemed to be the most fundamental form of objectivity, the very structure in which objects first come to be for consciousness, turns out to be, itself, subjective and *merely* ideal. Absent the mediation of the universal, it turns out that immediacy is like Gertrude Stein’s Oakland: There is no “there” there.

The important conclusion that “this” and its specific forms are universals is not yet the conclusion of the “Sense-Certainty” chapter itself. Arguments that “I” and the subject of knowledge are also essentially mediated by the universal follow the passages I have so far highlighted. But these lessons or experiences are not yet enough to force sense-certainty out beyond itself. Quite the contrary, it now contracts fully into the moment, refusing to consider anything outside the immediacy on which it is so focused:

Thus we reach the stage where we have to posit the *whole* of sense-certainty itself as its *essence*, and no longer only one of its moments, as happened in the two cases where first the object confronting the “I,” and then the “I,” were supposed to be its reality. Thus it is only sense-certainty as a *whole* which stands firm within itself as *immediacy* and by so doing excludes from itself all the opposition which has hitherto obtained. (67, ¶103)

Sense-certainty seeks to escape the mediation of the universal by simply ignoring it, by refusing to acknowledge that there are other nows and heres different from the particular immediacy of the moment. Hegel asserts that we have to inhabit the point of view of such sense-certainty to uncover the lessons it learns, its experience.

When we make the move to inhabiting this point of view, we discover, Hegel tells us, that

The “Now,” and pointing out the “Now,” are thus so constituted that neither the one nor the other is something immediate and simple, but a movement which contains various moments. (68, ¶107)

The movement implicit in such pointing-out is given an abstract description at the beginning of this paragraph, but the more concrete illustration given towards the end of the paragraph is much easier to follow:

a Now which is an absolute plurality of Nows. And this is the true, the genuine Now, the Now as a simple day which contains within it many Nows – hours. A Now of this sort, an hour, similarly is many minutes, and this Now is likewise many Nows, and so on. The pointing-out of the Now is thus itself the movement which expresses what the Now is in truth, viz. a result, or a plurality of Nows all taken together. (68, ¶107)

The point of central concern to us here stands out even more clearly in what Hegel says about the Here:

The *Here pointed out*, to which I hold fast, is similarly a *this* Here which, in fact is *not* this Here, but a Before and Behind, an Above and Below, a Right and Left. The Above is itself similarly this manifold otherness of above, below, etc. (68, ¶108)

In reading these passages, we have to keep in mind that Hegel’s emphasis on the *process* involved in demonstrations forces us to take a double lesson here. Not only is the *object* of the demonstration, the Now or the Here, a determinate object only to the extent that it is located in a whole system of like objects, but also the demonstration *itself* is the determinate demonstration it is only because it is located in a system of other possible demonstrations. The pointing-out of concern makes sense – indeed, is *possible* – only to the extent that it is one element or occurrence in a whole set of actual and possible such pointings-out. The crucial fact is that a pointing-out is a pointing-out, and especially the particular pointing-out that it is only because it occurs within and against a background of demonstrative *practices* that determine a complex *space* of possible demonstrations. This background of demonstrative practices is normatively constituted and accounts for the normative (read: conceptual) force of any particular act of demonstration.

If, then, every demonstration is essentially dependent on a complex system that includes other possible demonstrations, both similar and contrasting, no demonstration is a “pure this.” Every demonstration possesses its determinacy in virtue of its place in a complex system of possibilities, a complex classificatory system. The implicit but complex classificatory system against the background of which any act of demonstration must emerge has some categorial structure, whether it is the relatively abstract/formal categorial structure of space (this *place*), or time (this *moment*), or the categorial structure of the sensory (this *color* or this *smell*), the physical (this *physical object*), or something else (this *thought*). A “pure this” would be an act of demonstration the determinate character of which is independent of any classificatory system or categorial structure. We have just seen that no demonstrative act has a determinate character independent of all schemes of demonstrative practices. Every demonstration is, therefore, already a this-such, and necessarily so. Hegel fills in what Sellars, at least in the opening chapter of *Science and Metaphysics*, left blank. Hegel tells us what is “that peculiar way in which to represent something as a *this* is conceptual.”¹⁸ It is to represent something immediately and as in direct relation to one but within a presupposed background scheme of classification that itself must be considered conceptual and general. That background scheme of classification provides a normative standard by which demonstrations can be assessed as correct or incorrect, as justifying some further representations but not others.

¹⁸ Sellars (1967), I, §7: 3.

6

Kant believed that his predecessors had all either intellectualized appearances or sensationalized concepts.¹⁹ Interpreters like Sellars and McDowell, however, point out that simply deintellectualizing appearances and desensationalizing concepts is not really an option, for, split asunder, there would be no possibility of explaining the ultimate unity of sensibility and understanding in experience. According to Sellars, Kant never did settle on a way to leave enough intellect in appearances or sufficient sensory content in concepts to make the joint activity of receptivity and spontaneity perfectly clear.

Sellars proposes his “this-such” model of Kantian intuition, in part, because it provides a way for him to clarify how intuition can be conceptual and the corresponding appearances intellectual while keeping them sufficiently distinct from the conceptual, strictly so-called. What I have argued here is that in the “Sense-Certainty” chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel provides us with a much more detailed argument than is provided by either Kant or Sellars to establish how and why intuition construed on the model of demonstratives must necessarily be regarded as conceptual in the broad sense required by Kant and his contemporary interpreters like Sellars and McDowell. Hegel’s argument brings to the fore the fact that there are no lone isolated demonstrative acts, and therefore no lone isolated intuitions. Every demonstration, and therefore every intuition, is the determinate act it is because it occurs within and against a background of demonstrative practices that license and indeed ultimately demand the normative assessment of the individual demonstrative acts.

Sellars also proposes his “this-such” model of Kantian intuitions because it enables him to hold on to the idea that a distinction can sensibly be drawn within Kant’s scheme between synthesized intuition and the deliverances of “sheer receptivity.” This is where Sellars and McDowell (as I understand him) part company, for McDowell thinks that we cannot make sense of the notion of sheer receptivity. It is tempting to think that Sellars’ “this-such” model accommodates the notion of sheer receptivity by associating it with the “this,” leaving the “such” to be associated with the conceptual element in intuition. But I think that is not Sellars’ intention, and careful consideration of Hegel’s argument helps us see why: there is no pure “this.” The manifold of sheer receptivity, according to Sellars, is not

¹⁹ Kant (*CPR*), A271/B327.

yet a “this” in its being-for-consciousness. A non-conceptual aspect to a “this-such” need not reduce to a non-conceptual *part* of a “this-such.”

The argument we have found in “Sense-Certainty” to reinforce the idea that our most immediate cognitive contact with objects in the world is conceptual is itself still compatible with this Sellarsian idea. There is still room for the concept of sensation, even given the lessons, the experience, of sense-certainty. Whether Hegel made use of that room and what use he may have made of it is a story for another time.

*From desire to recognition: Hegel's account
of human sociality*

Axel Honneth

Hardly any other of Hegel's works has attracted so much attention as the "Self-Consciousness" chapter in the *Phenomenology*. As difficult and inaccessible as the book may be on the whole, this chapter, in which consciousness exits "the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present" (109, ¶177) finally seems to give our understanding something to hold on to. All of a sudden, Hegel's account of the mind's self-experience takes on more striking colors, the lonely self-consciousness unsuspectingly meets with other subjects, and what was previously a merely cognitive happening is transformed into a social drama consisting of a "struggle for life and death." In short, this chapter brings together all the elements capable of supplying post-idealistic philosophy's hunger for reality with material for concretion and elaboration. Hegel's first students took the opportunity offered by this chapter in order to take his speculative philosophy out of the ethereal sphere of ideas and notions and pull it back down to the earth of social reality. And ever since, authors ranging from Lukács and Brecht to Kojève have unceasingly sought to uncover in the succession of desire, recognition, and struggle the outlines of a historically situatable, political course of events.

However, sharpening Hegel's considerations into concrete and tangible concepts has always meant running the risk of losing sight of this chapter's argumentative core in the face of all this conflictual interaction. After all, Hegel intended to do much more than merely prove that subjects necessarily enter into a struggle with one another as soon as they have realized their mutual dependency. By employing his phenomenological method, he sought to demonstrate that a subject can arrive at a "consciousness" of its own "self" only if it enters into a relationship of "recognition" with another subject. Hegel's aims were of a much more fundamental sort than the historicizing or sociological interpretation cared to realize. He was not primarily interested in elucidating an historical event or instance of conflict, but a transcendental fact which should prove to be a prerequisite of all

human sociality. If a description of a historical–social event is to be found at all in the “Self-Consciousness” chapter, then only after the event that Hegel is truly interested in has already occurred: When the subject has emerged from the self-referentiality of mere desire enough to become aware of its dependence on its fellow human subjects. Hegel thus seeks to do no less than explain the transition from a natural to a spiritual being, from the human animal to the rational subject. The social conflicts that follow in this chapter are meant only as a processual articulation of the implications of this spirituality for human beings.

In what follows I will attempt to reconstruct the decisive step in Hegel’s line of argumentation: The transition from “desire” to “recognition.” That this endeavor is anything but simple can be seen clearly in the long series of interpretations that have arrived at quite willful and even absurd understandings of this text by failing to pay any real attention to Hegel’s own formulations.¹ One cause for this tendency might lie in the quantitative imbalance between the central line of argumentation in the “Self-Consciousness” chapter and its remaining part. Of the nearly forty pages it takes up, Hegel dedicates only one-and-a-half pages to the thesis that the consciousness of one’s self requires the recognition of another self. I want to place these few lines at the center of my reconstruction by (1) clarifying Hegel’s concept of desire, in order to then (2) elucidate his internal transition to the concept of recognition. My interpretation, which focuses strongly on Hegel’s precise wording, will demonstrate that Hegel provides us with more than one argument as to why intersubjective recognition constitutes a necessary prerequisite for attaining self-consciousness.

I

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel describes the process by which we arrive at an understanding of the presuppositions of all our knowledge from the perspective of both an observing philosopher and the subjects involved. He seeks to portray every step in the consummation of this understanding in a way that ensures that the steps are understandable not only for the super-ordinate observer, but also for the agents involved in the process. The chapter begins with the observation that both parties have already learned

¹ This tendency can even be found in the otherwise impressive interpretation offered by Terry Pinkard (1994). My impression is that in his interpretation of this central point in the *Phenomenology*, the transition from “Desire” to “Recognition,” he resorts to trains of thought found in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* as a kind of interpretive crutch.

in connection with the steps previously described to grasp the dependence of the object of their cognition on their own actions. The world of objects no longer faces them externally as a mere “given” that they must make certain to themselves; rather, this world proves to be a “mode” of their own relation to it:

But now there has arisen what did not emerge in these previous relationships [of sense certainty, perception, and understanding], viz. a certainty which is identical with its truth; for the certainty is to itself its own object, and consciousness is to itself the truth. (103, ¶166)

Hegel means by this that the subject can now be aware of itself as an authoritative source of its own knowledge about the world. Whatever “truth” about reality it is capable of calling to mind is due not to its passive registering of reality, but to an active act of consciousness that has antecedently constituted the alleged “object.” In a certain sense, both the observer and the observed subject have thus advanced to an epistemological standpoint already characterized by Kant in his transcendental philosophy. As a result, both parties are faced with the question as to the nature of the knowledge that subjects can have of themselves as creators of true claims. The “self,” whose awareness of itself forms the object of Hegel’s subsequent considerations, is therefore the rational individual, who is already abstractly aware of its constitutive, world-creating cognitive acts.

Hegel then seeks to solve this problem by first having the phenomenological observer anticipate the steps of experience that the involved subject will then take. From the perspective of the observer, it is easy to see the kind of difficulty or insufficiency that marks the beginning of each new stage, such that the observed subject sees itself compelled to proceed to the subsequent process of experience. The conception that this subject would need to have of itself in order to truly possess self-consciousness consists in its own active role as a creator of reality. Yet as long as it is only aware of itself as the “consciousness” that, according to Kant, must be able to accompany all “ideas,” it does not experience itself in its own activity of constituting objects. My awareness of the fact that all of reality is ultimately the content of my mental states is not sufficient to assure myself of my synthesizing and determining activity, rather I conceive of my consciousness just as selectively (*punktuell*) and passively as I do the mental attention that I pay to it in that moment.² For this reason Hegel explicitly criticizes Kant and Fichte in speaking of a mere duplication of consciousness:

² Hans-Georg Gadamer offers a very plausible and clear interpretation of this issue in his essay, “The Dialectic of Self-Consciousness,” in Gadamer (1976).

but since what it [self-consciousness] distinguishes from itself is *only itself as itself*, the difference, as an otherness, is *immediately superseded* for it; the difference *is not*, and *it* [self-consciousness] is only the motionless tautology of: "I am I"; but since for it the difference does not have the form of *being*, it is *not* self-consciousness. (104, ¶167)

There must be a difference between the type of consciousness that I have of my mental activities and these activities themselves that is not yet present in the initial stage of self-consciousness, for I lack the experience that would make me aware of the fact that, unlike my accompanying and floating attention, the activities of my consciousness possess an active and reality-modifying character. The philosophical observer, who is aware of this insufficiency at the first stage of self-consciousness, thus sketches in advance the type of experience that would be necessary in order to become conscious of this difference. At this very early point, to describe this second stage, Hegel surprisingly uses the notion of "Desire." He thus chooses a term that refers not to a mental but to a corporeal activity. However, before the involved subject can take up such a stance, one that Robert Brandom terms "erotic,"³ it must first learn to grasp reality as something that it can aim at with the purpose of satisfying elementary needs. Hegel uses the notion of "Life" to elucidate this intermediate step, which is meant to explain why observing subjects are motivated to take up a stance of "Desire." This notion consequently occupies a key position in its argumentation, for otherwise we would not be capable of understanding the transition that compels individuals to continue the process of exploring their self-consciousness.

Hegel had already spoken of "Life" in the [preceding chapter](#), in which he introduces the "Understanding" (*Verstand*) as a form of knowledge of objects that is superior to "perception." To understand reality in its totality with the help of understanding as "Life" not only means to ascribe the disassociated elements of perception a unified principle in the form of "Force" (*Kraft*), but also, and more importantly, to learn how to grasp the synthesizing capacity of one's own consciousness in relation to this sort of knowledge. The creation of the category of "Life" therefore represents the turning point that provides the prerequisites for the chapter on self-consciousness, because the subject here starts to interpret the world as being dependent on its own cognition, thereby beginning to develop "self-consciousness." But, surprisingly, the same category of "Life" reappears in this new context at the very point at which the transition is to take place from the initial, empty, or merely duplicated form of self-consciousness

³ Brandom (2004).

toward a second, superior form. After the observer has finished his act of anticipation (*Vorausschau*), which means that it is only through the stance of “Desire” that the subject can arrive at a better consciousness of its “self,” Hegel provides an account of all the implications of the notion of life, an account that is clearly marked as an act of reflection on the part of the involved subject:

What self-consciousness distinguishes from itself as having *being*, also has within itself, in so far as it is posited as being, not merely the character of sense-certainty and perception, but rather it is being that is reflected into itself, and the object of immediate desire is a *living being*. (104, ¶168)

We can conclude from this sentence that Hegel has begun to demonstrate how the observing subject begins to draw consequences from the previously developed notion of “life” for its own self-understanding. While previously it could conceive only of this “self” according to the pattern provided to it by the passive observation of its mental activities, thereby envisioning this “self” as a worldless, non-corporeal and non-situated “I,” it now begins to understand itself from the perspective of the opposition to the concept of the “living thing,” a concept of which it is already in cognitive possession. What the observer already knows – that the subject must take up a stance of desire in order to arrive at a better and more complete self-consciousness – is something that this subject only gradually calls to mind by applying the notion of life reflexively to its own stance toward the world. It learns that its self is not a placeless, selective consciousness, but that it instead relates to organic reality in active praxis, for it can no longer behave actively, i.e. as a naturally self-reproducing being, towards a world that is full of liveliness. In this sense, we could follow Fred Neuhouser’s thought and say that the subject has had a transcendental experience, because it recalls that it was only capable of conceiving of the notion of “Life” because it encountered this object in the practical stance of active access.⁴

Of course, before Hegel can ascribe this kind of experience to his subject, he must develop categorically the concept of “life” up to the point at which its consequences for the individual’s relation-to-world arise automatically. After all, it is not merely the external determination of the observer that is to change in the subject’s reflection of the notion of life, but an internal conclusion drawn by the observed subject itself. In reflecting on what it is facing in the unity of reality that it has created with the help of the category of “life,” the individual cannot avoid having two simultaneous realizations. It observes that the world it has constructed is a totality, which is preserved

⁴ Neuhouser (1986).

through permanent transformation, i.e. a totality of genii whose generic qualities are constantly reproduced through the life cycle of its individual members. "It is the whole round of this activity that constitutes Life . . . the self-developing whole which dissolves its development and in this movement simply preserves itself" (107, ¶171). Yet because only the individual consciousness can be aware of this particularity of the living being, of its genus character, the subject must realize at the same time that it is partially excluded from this life process. As a bearer of consciousness, it seems to belong to a different category from the quality it is aware of as a living genus: "in this *result*, Life points to something other than itself, viz. to consciousness, for which Life exists as this unity, or as genus" (107, ¶172). At this point, where we see the preliminary result of the involved subject's self-application of the notion of life, Hegel's text is especially difficult to understand. The well-known difficulty of not being able to determine precisely whether the determinations he chooses are merely characterizations of the observer or rather results of the observed subject's experiences becomes even more intense here. Hegel formulates the issue as follows:

This other life, however, for which the *genus* as such exists, and which is genus on its own account, viz. self-consciousness, exists in the first instance for self-consciousness only as this simple essence, and has itself as pure "I" for object. In the course of its experience which we are now to consider, this abstract object will enrich itself for the "I" and undergo the unfolding which we have seen in the sphere of life. (107, ¶173)

I take the first part of the first sentence of this compact statement as anticipating the desired result of the observed subject's experience, while the second part of the sentence, which begins with "exists in the first instance," points out the momentary state of its self-consciousness. The involved individual still conceives of its own "self" as pure, non-situated consciousness, but from the perspective of the observer it must understand itself as an individual member of a living genus. Hegel means here that the subject is compelled to make such a transition from pure self-consciousness to "living" self-consciousness in the sense that it must recognize its own liveliness in the liveliness of the reality it constitutes. In a certain sense, it cannot help but discover retrospectively in its own self, through the reflection of its own notion of the organic life process, the natural features which it shares with the reality that is dependent on it. Yet, Hegel skips this step – upon which the subject's own naturalness is discovered in the liveliness of the self-created object – and immediately moves to the stance in which the observed subject reaffirms its newly gained understanding. In the attitude of "desire," the individual assures itself of itself as a living consciousness

which, although it shares the features of life with all of reality, is still superior to reality in that the latter remains dependent on it as consciousness. Desire is therefore a corporeal form of expression in which the subject assures itself that it, as consciousness, possesses living, natural features: “and self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is *desire*” (107, ¶174).

Hegel clearly also intends his notion of “desire,” which outlines the second stage of self-consciousness, as a far-reaching critique of the philosophy of consciousness of his time. He points out that when Kant or Fichte conceives of self-consciousness as the activity by which that consciousness merely observes itself, then we lose sight of more than just consciousness’ active, synthesizing side. Or, in other words, not only is the subject robbed of the chance to recall its own activity of guaranteeing truth, (*wahrheitsverbürgende Aktivität*), rather this conception also suggests that the rational self, of which the subject is seen as possessing knowledge, is free of all natural determinations and thus lacks any kind of organic liveliness. Hegel appears to claim that the philosophy of consciousness denies that the subject has any kind of direct, unmediated experience of its own corporeality. Not least for the purpose of countering the anti-naturalism of his contemporaries, Hegel builds a second stage of “desire” into the process of acquiring self-consciousness. In this stance the subject assures itself of its own biological nature in such a way as to express its superiority over all other beings. By virtue of its capacity to differentiate between what is good or bad for it, it is always certain of the element of its consciousness that separates it from the rest. For Hegel, the confirmation of desires, i.e. the satisfaction of elementary, organic needs, plays a double role with regard to self-consciousness. The subject experiences itself both as a part of nature, because it is involved in the determining and heteronomous “movement of Life,” and as the active organizing center of this life, because it can make essential differentiations in life by virtue of its consciousness. We might even say that Hegel intends his conception of desire to demonstrate just how much humans are always antecedently aware of their “excentric position” (H. Plessner). As long as humans view themselves as need-fulfilling beings and are active in the framework of their desires, they have unmediated knowledge of their double nature, which allows them to stand both inside and outside nature at the same time.

It is important that we attain some clarity as to the role played by “Desire,” because the literature on Hegel often has a tendency to dismiss this stage merely as something negative, as something to be overcome. By

contrast, Hegel appears to me to insist that the experience associated with the satisfaction of our most basic drives gives rise to a kind of self-consciousness that goes far beyond the first form of self-consciousness in terms of content and complexity. Instead of having the subject merely experience itself as selective (*punktuell*) consciousness, which always remains present in all its mental activities, the satisfaction of its desires provides it with the unmediated certainty of a self that is placed excentrically, along with its mental activity, into nature. Because this self-consciousness does justice to humans' biological nature, Hegel is also convinced that we cannot give up the fundamental achievement of this stage of self-consciousness. Whatever other prerequisites are necessary in order to allow the subject to attain a proper awareness of its self, these prerequisites must be contained in a consciousness of being involved as a "living member" in nature. However, the stronger we emphasize what is achieved by "desire," the more urgently we must answer the question as to what causes Hegel to regard this stage of "self-consciousness" as insufficient. He needs but a single brief passage in order to demonstrate the necessity of a further transition. This passage constitutes the next step of our reconstruction.

2

Hardly does Hegel describe the essential importance of desires for self-consciousness before he outlines the reasons for the failure of the associated kind of experience. Unlike his elucidation of the transition from the first stage of self-consciousness to desire, Hegel does not make a clear distinction between the perspective of the observer and that of the participant. He doesn't take up the philosophical standpoint and sketch in advance the aim of the next step of experience in order to then subsequently have the subject itself go through this learning process, rather both processes appear to somehow collapse into one. The starting point for this accelerated, almost rushed description is a summary of desire's accomplishments. In this stance the subject is certain of the "nothingness" or "nullity" of living reality; it views itself in its excentric position as superior to the rest of nature. As a human animal, the appropriate way to express this superiority is to consume the objects of nature in the satisfaction of its desires. Hegel thus remarks that in its desires, the subject "gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself *in an objective manner*" (107, ¶174). The transition follows immediately in the next sentence, in which Hegel remarks laconically: "In this satisfaction, however, experience makes it aware that the object has its own

independence” (107, ¶175). A few lines further on, Hegel asserts even more explicitly that self-consciousness is unable to “supersede” its object “by its negative relation” to this object, rather “it produces the object again, and the desire as well” (107, ¶175). It is clear, therefore, that Hegel is convinced of having uncovered an element of self-deception in the stance of desire. The subject deceives itself about itself; one could say that it operates with false conceptions about its relation to the world in believing itself capable of destroying its object through the satisfaction of its needs, through the fulfillment of its desires. However, it is much more difficult to answer the question as to why this sort of self-deception should motivate a transition to a new stage of self-consciousness. It is unclear why the disappointment over the independence of the object should lead to an encounter with the other and to recognition. Nearly all the interpretations of this point in the text that I have seen resort either to metaphorical bridges over this divide or to additional constructions not found in the text itself.⁵

First of all, we need to clarify more precisely just what Hegel takes to be the deficit of desire in relation to self-consciousness. The reference to self-deception can only be seen as a first indication of the direction we must go and not as the solution itself. As readers who follow the directions of the philosophical observer, we already know what kind of self the observed subject is to attain consciousness of after having gone through the previously analyzed stages: this subject must truly realize that it itself is the rational, reality-constructing actor of which it is only abstractly and generally aware at the beginning of our chapter. We could also say that the “I” must arrive at a point where it understands itself in the constructive activity through which it produces an objective world. In the wake of this process of experience, however, a new demand has been made on self-consciousness, one which the subject could not at all have been aware of at the first stage. By placing itself, as a “transcendental” consequence of its own notion of living reality, into nature as a consuming being, the subject must realize that its reality-creating activity is not merely a particularity of its own self, but a fundamental property of human beings in general. By recognizing the genus-character of life, that is, the fact that natural reality exists independent of the continued existence of its individual specimens, the subject is compelled to grasp its own self as an instantiation of an entire genus – the human genus. At the first stage of self-consciousness, self-accompanying

⁵ The interpretation offered by Frederick Neuhouser (1986), which I also followed in an essential point in my first step, is the exception.

observant consciousness, the subject was still very far from this form of self-consciousness. By contrast, at the second stage, rationally compelled by the implications of its own notion of "Life," it at least attained the threshold at which it views itself and its consciousness as being placed into nature as a superior being. Here it conceives of itself as a natural, organic self that has acquired the certainty of being able to destroy the rest of nature by consuming its objects in the process of satisfying desires. Hegel now abruptly claims that this ontological assumption is bound to fail, because natural reality continues to exist despite humans' consumptive acts. However restlessly the subject satisfies its desires, the "process of life" as a whole continues despite the destruction of its individual members. As a result, nature's objects retain their "independence." Thus, strictly speaking, the insufficiency of the experience of "desire" is twofold. First of all, this experience provides the subject with a delusion of allmightiness, leading it to believe that all of reality is but a product of its own individual conscious activity. Second, this prevents the subject from conceiving of itself as a member of a genus. So despite all the advantages that this stage bears for self-consciousness, it must fail due to the fact that it creates a false conception of an omnipotent self. Within the framework of desire, the subject can grasp neither its reality-producing activity nor its own genus-character, because reality in its living totality remains untouched by the activity through which the subject merely satisfies its individual needs.

I have chosen the expressions "almightiness" and "omnipotence" with caution in order to enable comparison with ontogenesis, a comparison that could be helpful at this point. The ingenious psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott has described the infant's world of experience as a state in which an infant follows a nearly ontological need to prove to itself the dependence of its environment upon its own intentions. All the acts of destruction by which it mauls the objects it possesses are to prove that reality obeys its all-encompassing power.⁶ What is important for our purposes is not the empirical correctness of these observations, but their possible applicability in elucidating what Hegel actually intends to claim. Hegel seems to want to say the same thing as Winnicott – not in relation to ontogenesis, but certainly with regard to the observed subject's experiences. Both seem to claim that this subject strives, through the need-driven consumption of its environment, to acquire the individual certainty that the reality it faces is on the whole a product of its own mental activity. In the

⁶ Winnicott (1965).

course of this striving, however, it is confronted with the fact that, as Hegel puts it, the world retains its “independence” (*Selbstständigkeit*), since its existence is not dependent on the survival of its individual elements. According to Winnicott, the infant exits its omnipotent stage by learning to discover in the form of its mother or other figure of attachment a being that reacts to her destructive acts in different ways. Depending on the situation and on how she is feeling, the mother will react to her child’s attacks sometimes by showing understanding and sometimes disapproval, such that the child eventually learns to accept another source of intentionality besides its own, one to which it must subordinate its grasp of the world. Winnicott’s train of thought can serve as a key for understanding the considerations with which Hegel attempts to motivate a transition from the second to the third stage of self-consciousness.

The sentence immediately following Hegel’s description of the failure of “Desire” is quite possibly the most difficult sentence in the Self-Consciousness chapter. Without any warning from the knowing observer, Hegel claims that in order for the subject to consummate its self-consciousness, it requires another subject that carries out the same negation “within itself” (*an ihm*) that the former had performed only upon natural reality:

On account of the independence of the object, therefore, it can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself (*an ihm*); and it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is *in itself* the negative, and must be for the other what it *is*. (108, ¶175)

Perhaps it would be wise to ask what need Hegel is referring to here – a need that Hegel claims can be satisfied only under the conditions of a mutual negation. He cannot have in mind the organic drive previously expressed in the notion of “Desire” since, after all, this need has already attained fulfillment in the consumption of the natural world. Despite all the disappointment the subject brought upon itself in this stage, it was nevertheless successful in appropriating from reality, according to its own discriminations, the materials that could satisfy its animal or “erotic” needs. So the need that Hegel has in mind must lie deeper and be likewise contained in “Desire,” a need we could call “ontological” due to the fact that it seeks the confirmation of a certain specific conception of the ontological character of reality. In the destructive activity meant to satisfy its desires, the subject sought to confirm its own certainty about the “nothingness” or “nullity” of the world, of its character as a mere product of its own mental activity. Hegel now claims that this previously unfulfilled ontological need can be fulfilled only under the two following conditions: First, the subject must encounter an element of reality that performs this

same act of negation on it; second, the subject must perform the same kind of negation on itself.⁷

It is not difficult to ascertain in this complex thought a reference to the necessity that the observed subject encounter another subject, a second consciousness, for the only “object” itself capable of carrying out a negation is a being that likewise possesses consciousness. In this sense the sentence with which Hegel begins his characterization of the third stage of self-consciousness clearly opens up a new sphere in the subject’s process of experience. The subject not only sees itself confronted with living reality, but encounters in reality an actor that is likewise capable of conscious negation. What is more difficult to understand, however, is Hegel’s remark that this second subject must apparently be capable of performing a negation *an ihm*, i.e. upon the first, observed subject, in order that the desired satisfaction of the ontological need can come about – at least, this is the customary interpretation of the formulation according to which the new “object” carries out a “negation within itself (*an ihm*).” We should not, however, take this thought literally as indicating an act of destruction or need-driven consumption. Instead we should take this “*an ihm*” to mean “*an sich selbst*,” such that Hegel’s formulation would be interpreted as ascribing the second subject a type of negation that it directed at itself, a type of self-negation. This would mean that the first subject encounters the second subject as a being that in the face of the first subject performs a negation upon itself. In any case, this interpretation secures our understanding of why the observed subject’s ontological need can be satisfied only in an encounter with the other: If this second subject carries out a self-negation, a decentering, only because it becomes aware of the first subject, then the first subject is thereby confronted with an element of reality that can change its own state only on the basis of the first subject’s presence. If we refer back to our comparison with Winnicott’s thesis, we could say that the subject encounters in the other a being which, through an act of self-restriction, makes it aware of its own “ontological” dependency.

Hegel, however, does not content himself with a mere mention of this first movement of negation, but accompanies it with a complementary

⁷ It is thus false to speak of a “need for recognition” at this point, as is often done in the works of Kojève and his disciples. The need that Hegel really does seem to assume here by speaking of its “satisfaction” through the subsequently described reciprocal negation is instead the demand of the observed subject to be able to change reality through the activity of its consciousness. In my words, this would be an “ontological” need. For a critique of Kojève’s interpretation, see Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976). For Hegel, “recognition” is thus not the intentional content of a desire or need, but the (social) means by which a subject’s desire that its own reality-modifying activity be capable of being experienced is satisfied.

movement of negation on the part of the observed subject. Not only does the alter ego carry out a kind of self-negation, but also the ego whose experiences are described here. Yet, with this second step, Hegel merely draws the conclusions from what he has already expressed, for if the second subject performs a negation on itself only because it encounters in the form of the first subject a being of the same type, then the first subject must also carry out the same kind of self-negation as soon as it comes into contact with this fellow human being. Hegel, therefore, claims that this type of intersubjective encounter, which he asserts here as a necessary condition of self-consciousness, is strictly reciprocal, for in the moment in which these two subjects encounter one another, both must perform a negation upon themselves, which consists in distancing themselves from what is their own. If we add to this thought Kant's definition of "respect" (*Achtung*), in which he views a demolition (*Abbruch*) or negation of self-love,⁸ then we see clearly for the first time what Hegel sought to claim with his introduction of the intersubjective relation. In the encounter between two subjects, a new sphere of action is opened in the sense that both sides are compelled to restrict their self-seeking drives as soon as they come into contact with one another.⁹ Unlike the act of satisfying needs, in which living reality ultimately remains unchanged, in interaction a spontaneous change of situation occurs within both parties to the event. Ego and alter ego react to each other by restricting or negating their own respective, egocentric desires in such a way that they can encounter each other without the purpose of mere consumption. If we assume further that Hegel was thoroughly aware of the relatedness of his idea of self-negation to Kant's definition of respect, we might even ascribe to him a more far-reaching intention at this point. It appears that he intends to say that the observed subject can attain self-consciousness only with the aid of an experience that already possesses moral content in an elementary sense. It is thus not only in the chapter on "Spirit," in which Hegel explicitly deals with "morality," that Hegel introduces in the form of self-restriction a necessary condition of all morality, but already here in connection with the conditions of self-consciousness. However, this step in Hegel's description takes on a peculiarly automatic, even mechanical character, for it is not the case that both subjects limit their respective desires on the basis of a free decision, rather the act of decentering appears to occur almost as a reflex to the perception of the other. Hegel apparently intends to say that the specific morality of human intersubjectivity already gets underway at this early stage, if only

⁸ Kant (*Groundwork*), 69. ⁹ Hegel (*Encyclopedia III*), §408.

in the form of reciprocal, reactive behavior. Ego and alter ego react to each other at the same time by limiting their egocentric needs, through which they make their further actions dependent on each other's comportment. It is only a small step from this point to an understanding of why Hegel regards this kind of proto-morality as a condition of self-consciousness.

We have already seen that Hegel sees the observed subject's ontological need as being satisfied in the intersubjective encounter. As soon as this subject encounters another human being, it can see in the latter's act of self-negation that a relevant element of reality reacts to its mere presence. The observed subject is capable of ascertaining its own dependence on its own consciousness in the quasi-moral reaction of the other. But Hegel intends self-consciousness to mean more than the ontological insight that reality is a product of one's own conscious self. The observed subject should furthermore be able to perceive itself in the activity in which it produces reality. At this point, Hegel makes use of the reciprocal character of the situation of interaction he has introduced in order to explain the possibility of the perceptibility of one's own activity. It is the self-restricting act of alter ego in which ego can observe first hand the type of activity through which it itself at that very moment effects a real change in the other subject. Both subjects perceive in the other the negative activity through which they produce a reality that they can grasp as their own product. Therefore, we can conclude along with Hegel that the possibility of self-consciousness requires a kind of proto-morality, for only in the moral self-restriction of the other can we recognize the activity in which our own self instantaneously effects a permanent change in the world and even produces a new reality.

For Hegel, however, this consummation of the process of self-consciousness does not lead immediately to a world of commonly shared reason. The creation of this kind of "space of reasons" is something he instead saves up for the result of the struggle that subjects must subsequently engage in due to their realization of their mutual dependency. What, according to Hegel, our subject has learned is something that he formulates almost naturalistically in the sense of the notion of Life so decisive for the stage of "Desire." After the subject has attained self-consciousness due to moral reciprocity, the individual is capable of understanding itself as a living member of the human genus. This subject has become "for itself a genus" (108, ¶176). Thus at this point all three demands Hegel had made of self-consciousness in the course of his reconstruction can be regarded as fulfilled. The subject perceives in one and the same moment in the self-restriction of the other the activity through which it produces (social) reality, and it thereby

understands itself as a member of a genus whose existence is maintained by precisely this type of reciprocity. So it cannot surprise us that Hegel ultimately reserves a single expression for the particularity of this genus: “recognition” – the reciprocal limitation of one’s own, egocentric desires for the benefit of the other.

*“Reason . . . apprehended irrationally”: Hegel’s
critique of Observing Reason*

Michael Quante

Die Frage könnte eigentlich so gestellt werden: Wie hängt, was uns wichtig ist, von dem ab, was physisch möglich ist? (Ludwig Wittgenstein)

“Observing Reason” is one of the longest sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is, for instance, twice as long as the much-noted part dedicated to self-consciousness. Yet it is one of the least commented, interpreted, and productively appropriated passages of this seminal work. There are two clusters of reasons that can explain this relative disregard: *First*, in the section on “Observing Reason” Hegel deals with scientific theories and accounts in the philosophy of nature of his times.¹ These are, at least at first sight, remote from both the actual overarching topic of the *Phenomenology* and from the model of a socially and historically oriented theory of the mental that is attractive from today’s perspective. The problems Hegel deals with here not only lie outside the interests of most interpreters of the *Phenomenology*. They refer to questions and theories that are unfamiliar to us. It would seem that in this section Hegel’s general philosophical program in the *Phenomenology* can find only sparse anchorage in the subject matter being investigated. Interpreters interested in the systematic sustainability of the entire work tend to look to other parts of the book for arguments in favor of Hegel’s attempt to prove the necessity of the sequence of all our epistemic projects on the route to Absolute Knowing.

Secondly, in dealing with the scientific views and conceptions in the philosophy of nature of his time, Hegel is discussing a subject matter that many of today’s readers regard as outdated. This suspicion concerns not only specific disciplines such as physiognomy and phrenology, to which Hegel pays detailed attention. The whole idea of a philosophy of nature has

Translated by David P. Schweikard.

¹ A detailed exposition of the historical background of the topos of “Observing Reason” can be found in Moravia (1973).

become discredited over the last 200 years.² Whoever turns to the *Phenomenology* in order to profit from Hegel's discussion of specific phenomena (and not from the overall composition of the work) has *prima facie* good reasons not to turn to "Observing Reason" to look for systematically accessible insights in Hegel.

In order to inquire into the systematic relevance of Hegel's discussion of psychology, physiognomy, and phrenology in the present, the difficulties mentioned have to be dispelled. In this attempt, I will not go into Hegel's altercation with the various conceptions of the "observation of nature" (139, ¶244), but confine myself to his discussion of those "sciences" that deal with the mental. Since my focus in the following is on the import of Hegel's objections against "Observing reason" with respect to the mental, I will not try to reconstruct the conceptual–logical structure employed by Hegel to integrate the different models into a developmental sequence, nor will I question their factual plausibility. This chapter is dedicated not to the argumentative goal of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, but to Hegel's critique of psychology, physiognomy, and phrenology. My aim is to inquire into the systematic efficacy of Hegel's analysis of the types of argument and explanatory strategies of these "sciences."

Even such a limited examination cannot forgo gaining clarity about the systematic significance of the section under scrutiny within the overall framework of the *Phenomenology*. For this reason, I will analyze the passages with which Hegel opens the part on "The Certainty and Truth of Reason" (132, ¶231) and the section on "Observing Reason" (137, ¶240), so as to determine the premises of his argumentation relevant to the subsequent remarks (section 1). The following sections will then deal with Hegel's treatment of psychology (section 2) and physiognomy and phrenology (section 3), respectively. Finally, I will formulate some further questions that emerge from our findings for the study of Hegel's philosophy of the mind (section 4).

I THE PLACE OF "OBSERVING REASON" IN THE *PHENOMENOLOGY*

"Observing Reason" is the first section of the fifth chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's analysis of self-consciousness as both a philosophical principle and an empirical phenomenon in the fourth part yielded "the truth of self-certainty" (103, ¶166). This truth consists in the fact that the

² Cf. Quante (2006).

unhappy consciousness makes the basic structure of first-personal self-reference the object of an epistemic attitude. Achieved thereby is the basic structure of Reason which, according to Hegel, consists in the fact that self-consciousness “is certain that it is itself reality” (132, ¶232). Reason assumes “that everything actual is none other than itself” (132, ¶232). The basic ontological stance of Reason is, according to Hegel, “idealism” (132, ¶232). It would be better to identify this position as rationalism, since the basic ontological thesis of Reason claims the structural identity of thought and being. This refers neither to a merely epistemic or subjective idealism that presupposes a duality of thought and being, nor to a mentalism that determines the basic ontological substance as mental (e.g. sense data or the like).³ This certainty involves a fundamental change in the attitude of self-consciousness towards reality. In the previous shapes it was concerned with its self-assertion and “concerned to save and maintain itself for itself at the expense of the *world*, or of its own actuality” (132, ¶232). Now “its hitherto negative relation to otherness turns into a positive relation” (132, ¶232). As Reason, self-consciousness can “endure” (132, ¶232) the independence of reality and it can turn to it with a cognitive attitude of theoretical curiosity: Reason “discovers the world as *its* new real world, which in its permanence holds an interest for it” (133, ¶232).

The rationalist conception of theoretical curiosity thereby inscribed into Reason is initially available only as certainty, but not in its truth. This is because Reason, at the beginning of its development as a new shape of consciousness, has its own “path behind it and has forgotten it” (133, ¶233). What is lacking is the experience of consciousness that could alone provide a justification of the ontological and epistemological premises of Reason. Since this new shape, in the form of Observing Reason, “comes on the scene *immediately* as Reason” (133, ¶233), it is only “the *certainty* of that truth” (133, ¶233). The entire path through the three shapes of Reason will be needed for this certainty to become the “truth of Reason” (132, ¶231). While Reason does indeed participate in the ontological and epistemological basis of Reason in its mode as “observer,” it does so only in the form of an evident prerequisite that it cannot itself thematize (cf. 137, ¶240). Within the Hegelian model of self-explicating subjectivity, such an immediate certainty constitutes a lack of mediation and thereby, on the one hand, grounds for Reason being opposed to a world that is assumed to be an independent reality. On the other hand, this lack compels Reason to

³ Cf. Brandom (2002a), Halbig (2002), Quante (2002a), and Jaeschke (2004).

ensure its own certitude and verify its assumption of the structural identity of thought and world.

1.1 *Two kinds of difficulties*

In contrast to the other two shapes of Reason dealt with by Hegel in the second and third section, “Observing Reason” remains on the epistemic level of certainty and maintains a purely passive methodological stance. There are various reasons that the argumentation deployed by Hegel in the “Observing Reason” section is not easily comprehensible. Hegel himself gives the following short overview: “This *action* of Reason in its observational role we have to consider in the moments of its movement: how it takes up Nature, Spirit and the relationship of the two in the form of sensuous being, and how it seeks itself as existing [seiende] actuality” (138, ¶243). This delineates the three sections: “Observation of nature” (139, ¶244), “Observation of self-consciousness in its purity and in its relation to external activity. Logical and psychological laws” (167, ¶298), and “Observation of the relation of self-consciousness to its immediate actuality. Physiognomy and Phrenology” (171, ¶309). Moreover, with the remark that Observing Reason seeks its object “as actuality in the form of immediate being” (138, ¶243), Hegel notes an important structural element by which Observing Reason distinguishes itself from the other two shapes of Reason.

There are two kinds of difficulties that complicate the interpretation of Hegel’s text. On the one hand, we must always, given our cognitive interests, separate the following three dimensions of Hegel’s argumentation. First, the compositional aspects of his train of thought, indebted as they are to the overall aim of the *Phenomenology*, should be distinguished from the arguments that relate to the mental. Secondly, we must separate Hegel’s analysis of the self-conception of Observing Reason and his comments on this self-conception. And, thirdly, we must differentiate between Hegel’s specification of the mental, as it is presented to Observing Reason itself (within its own requirements), and his own assumptions about the nature of the mental. For it is obvious that Hegel’s specification of the limits and scope of the analysis of the mental provided by Observing Reason is dependent on his own premises regarding the nature of the mental.

The argumentative structure of Hegel’s analysis of Observing Reason contains a second kind of difficulty. One problem is that in the introduction to the section on “Observing Reason” (137–138, ¶¶240–243), Hegel

indicates the basic structure of "Observing Reason," though he explicates essential elements of the basic structure only in the context of his discussion of theories of the "Observation of nature" (139, ¶244). Since I do not wish to go into Hegel's treatment of these conceptions, I will integrate the remarks he makes there into the following reconstruction of the basic structure of "Observing Reason." Another problem I would like to address in advance is that Hegel, due to the overall intention of the *Phenomenology*, depicts the conceptions discussed in the second and third sections of "Observing Reason" as a kind of decline.

Within the entire course of argumentation of the *Phenomenology*, the chapter on Reason is an advance compared to the shapes of consciousness and self-consciousness. At the beginning, however, the ontologically higher principle of rationalism involves two deficits: its epistemological immediacy, on the one hand, and its methodological stance of pure passivity, on the other. Both deficits are overcome in the second and third sections of the chapter on Reason in the *Phenomenology*. But Observing Reason remains continuously afflicted with these two deficiencies.

There is a conceptual–logical advancement in the section on "Observing Reason," as well. On the one hand, Hegel structures this section according to the subject matter of nature, the mental, and their mutual relation; on the other hand, the chapters that interest us present a fine-grained sequence of conceptions. These do not mark progress, but decline. Hegel wants to show that within its own requirements, Observing Reason departs more and more from the nature of the mental until eventually a conception of the mental emerges that forces a fundamental conversion. As Hegel writes in referring to phrenology:

But Reason, in its role of observer, having reached thus far, seems also to have reached its peak, at which point it must do an about turn; for only what is wholly bad is implicitly charged with the immediate necessity of changing into its opposite. (188, ¶340)

Hegel claims that the failure of the attempt of Observing Reason to develop a satisfactory conception of the mental leads to the abandonment of passive methodology, so that "The actualization of rational self-consciousness through its own activity" (193, ¶347) can follow as the next conceptual formation.

The conceptual–logical deep structure underlying Hegel's analysis of Observing Reason will not figure in the following analysis. While I am going to deal with psychology, physiognomy, and phrenology in the order in which Hegel discusses them, I will not address the question of whether

an illuminating conceptual development can be detected between these conceptions.

1.2 *The basic structure of Observing Reason*

Hegel emphasizes two characteristic features of Observing Reason. *First*, it makes its own observations in a controlled fashion by proceeding methodologically and by systematizing experiences (cf. 137, ¶240). Observing Reason thus demands from its data that they “at least have the significance of a *universal*, not of a *sensuous particular*” (139, ¶244). This universal is assumed by Observing Reason to be an independent being to be discovered or found (cf. 138, ¶240). As a theoretical attitude, it remains passive in this fundamental sense, for it ascribes to itself a merely receptive role. According to Hegel it is indeed active, since by understanding things it transforms “their sensuous being into *Concepts*” (138, ¶242), or distinguishes between “what is essential and what is inessential” (140, ¶246). Since Observing Reason aims at conceiving the rationality of things as an objective being, in Hegel’s view it not only misconceives their active, constitutive function, but also misses out on the fact that the structure it discovers in reality is in fact its own structure (cf. 138, ¶242).⁴

The aim of Reason, to discover its own essential structure in things as merely being, leads it to transform this being into a universality whose elements are necessarily related to one another. Observing Reason seeks – and this is the *second* characteristic feature – “the *law* and the *Concept*” (142, ¶248) of reality. It attempts on the basis of their presuppositions to comprehend them “as an actuality in the form of *being*” (142, ¶248). In the conception of lawlike correlations, Observing Reason therefore purports “to obtain something alien” (142, ¶250). Hence, laws are supposed to be the universal, rational structure that organizes appearances. They are universal, for it is not the particular event that is relevant, but the kind of event. Laws correlate universal properties and not particular individual things. As Hegel puts it: Reason “free[s] the predicates from their subjects” (144, ¶251). At the same time, these correlations must be necessary if they are to be correctly referred to as laws (cf. 146, ¶255). Thus, the concept of law that is also shared by Observing Reason contains an internal tension. On the one hand, the constituent parts of the laws are supposed to be

⁴ Hegel traces this misconception to the “hesitation” (150, ¶264) of Observing Reason concerning the ontological status of modal terms.

independently existing entities. On the other hand, they are supposed to be necessarily related to one another even though this partially negates their independence.⁵ In Hegel's system, this internal deficit grounds the limitation of the concept of law and therewith the limitation of the range of nomological explanations.⁶ Furthermore, there are two inadequacies of this explanatory strategy that are due to the specific presuppositions of Observing Reason: "To the Observing consciousness, the *truth of the law* is found in *experience*, in the same way that sensuous being is [an object] for consciousness" (142, ¶249). It is for this reason that on the one hand, laws are hypostatized as objects whose necessity is derived from things rather than being traced back to the conceptual nature of Reason. This leads to the problem of induction since, in the end, no amount of observed instances is sufficient to substantiate the intended universality of the law (cf. 143, ¶250). The validity of the law is thus reduced to "probability" (143, ¶250), so that the appeal to universality and necessity connected with the claim that these laws represent "truth" (143, ¶250) must inevitably fail.⁷ On the other hand, laws are always abstractions, as they cater to the universal that lies behind the appearance. Hence, Observing Reason is eager "to find the *pure conditions* of the law" (143, ¶250). Since it cannot conceive its own activity in so doing, but takes itself to be purely receptive, a gap emerges between the concrete event in its particularity and the universal expressible in laws:

In its experiments the instinct of Reason sets out to find what happens in such and such circumstances. The result is that the law seems only to be all the more immersed in sensuous being; but this is rather what gets lost therein. (143, ¶250)⁸

In relation to the epistemological and ontological premises of "Observing Reason," this leads to the question of whether such laws can be interpreted

⁵ Hegel's concept of law is not restricted to causal laws; the latter are in fact introduced only as a specific presupposition at a certain stage of the internal development of Observing Reason. Hegel also mentions modal relations between properties (or universals) whose modality entails neither causal nor analytic necessity (cf. 145–146, ¶255).

⁶ While I refer to the limitations of nomological explanation, it should be kept in mind that Hegel regards teleological explanations as proper explanations and as explanations of higher philosophical value, for the concept of purpose is internally more complex than the concepts of cause or law which are used by Observing Reason; for Hegel's concept of law, see Bogdandy (1989). Those aspects of Hegel's discussion of the concept of law that are critical of scientism in the section on "Force and the Understanding" (¶¶132–165) are discussed in Redding (1996), 88–98.

⁷ In this passage, Hegel also criticizes the idea that increasing the probability could serve to approximate truth; between these two there is, in Hegel's view, a categorical difference (cf. 143, ¶250).

⁸ The last part of this passage, which reads " ; allein diß geht darin vielmehr verloren" in the original, is not rendered in the Miller translation.

realistically or whether, to take up a formulation of Nancy Cartwright's, these laws "lie."⁹

Altogether, Reason arrives at the opinion that reality as something external to be observed "is merely the *expression* of the inner" (150, ¶263). It grasps the concept of law itself, which according to Hegel means the essential "inner" correlation of appearances (of the "outer"). At the same time, following the demand of Observing Reason, the inner and the outer must, although they are necessarily interrelated, remain independent from one another and "have an outer being and a shape" (150, ¶264), for Observing Reason posits even the inner as "an object, or it is posited in the form of being, and as present for observation" (150, ¶264). With this, the general prerequisites on the basis of which Observing Reason approaches the mental are made explicit.

2 OBSERVATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND HEGEL'S CONCEPTION OF THE MENTAL

Hegel begins his discussion of the treatment of the mental by Observing Reason with the remark that only self-consciousness can be an appropriate object fitting the cognitive targets of Observing Reason, since it "finds this free Concept, whose universality contains just as absolutely within it developed individuality, only in the Concept which itself *exists* [as] Concept" (167, ¶298). In accordance with its methodological requirements, Observing Reason searches for laws of the mental: On the one hand, it seeks to deal with self-consciousness "in its purity" (167, ¶298) and searches for logical laws. On the other hand, in order to formulate psychological laws it is directed at the relationship between self-consciousness and environment. In contrast to Hegel's discussion of physiognomy and phrenology, his treatment of these two epistemological projects of Observing Reason is relatively short, but it is especially important, because his critique reveals several of his own crucial premises with respect to the mental.

2.1 *Logical laws?*

Hegel does not deal in detail with the concrete attempt of Observing Reason to discover laws of thought or of logic with its own resources. It seeks, for one thing, to oppose these laws as a "*quiescent being* of relations"

⁹ Cf. Cartwright (1983).

(167, ¶300) to thought as the active implementation of these laws. But it thereby misconceives the active constitution of self-consciousness:

In their truth, as vanishing moments in the unity of thought, they would have to be taken as a knowing, or as a movement of thought, but not as *Laws* of being, (168, ¶300)

With this, Hegel objects to the reification of those laws and to the mistake of conceiving self-consciousness as a thing. Knowledge and thought are, according to his portrayal, to be understood as practical performances, not as observable, static being.¹⁰ Moreover, Hegel criticizes Observing Reason for its conception of laws that makes it postulate the basic elements of thought, i.e. “a multitude of detached necessities which, as in and for themselves a *fixed* content, are supposed to have truth in their *determinateness*” (167, ¶300). This move overlooks the holistic constitution of self-consciousness which, according to Hegel, consists in the fact that the distinguishable elements or aspects of the mental are constituted through their interconnection. The content, meaning, or function of such mental units can be grasped only if they are understood as moments of self-consciousness. Such an interconnection can be disclosed only hermeneutically and thus rules out the methodological and ontological presuppositions of Observing Reason. Hegel's objection against the possibility of logical laws is, like Donald Davidson's argument against psycho-physical laws,¹¹ of a “general nature” (168, ¶300). Therefore, in Hegel's view it is unnecessary to undertake a detailed analysis of the various models of Observing Reason, since they are based on a category error that is manifested in an epistemological–methodological incommensurability.¹²

2.2 Psychological laws?

As self-consciousness is, according to Hegel's premise, “the principle of individuality” (168, ¶301), the explanatory target of Observing Reason must be an individual self-consciousness in its specifically individuated constitution (cf. 169, ¶304). And since, according to Hegel's second

¹⁰ This fundamental objection is also a crucial element of Hegel's later critique of insufficient theories of the mental in his theory of Subjective Spirit in his *Encyclopedia* of 1830 (especially in §389); cf. Wolff (1992), Halbig (2002), and Quante (2002a, 2004a).

¹¹ Cf. Davidson (1980), esp. essay 11.

¹² Siep (2000), 135, has suggested understanding Hegel's critique in terms of anti-psychologism in logic as it was later formulated by Frege or Husserl. My analysis is compatible with that suggestion, but it has the advantage of not having to clarify the ontological status of the entities postulated by anti-psychologism.

premise, “in its actuality [it] is *active consciousness*” (168, ¶301), its active constitution must be explained. Observing Reason, which cannot by its own means grasp self-consciousness in its purity, tries to explain it with respect to the interaction between self-consciousness and its environment. Here, the psychological laws formulate two contrary directions of influence: On the one hand, self-consciousness is taken to be passive, receiving influences from its environment “into itself” and “conforming to” its environment (168, ¶302). On the other hand, self-consciousness is taken to be active, seeking to make its environment “conform to it” (169, ¶302).¹³ In accordance with its methodological requirements, the “Observational psychology” (169, ¶303) depends on modularizing self-consciousness by discovering “all sorts of faculties, inclinations, and passions” (169, ¶303). Due to its effort to explain individual self-consciousnesses in their activity, observational psychology does not realize, even “while recounting the details of this collection” (169, ¶303), that the unity of self-consciousness cannot be grasped sufficiently this way. Apart from this, it encounters the discrepancy that these modules of the mental are conceived as “dead, inert things” (169, ¶303), while at the same time they appear as “restless movements” (169, ¶303).

2.3 *Hegel's conception of the mental*

Hegel's objection against the possibility of psychological laws is also fundamental in nature so that, once again, he does not have to get into the details of observational psychology:

Therefore, *what* is to have an influence on the individuality, and what *kind* of influence it is to have – which really mean the same thing – depend solely on the individuality itself. (170, ¶306)

On the one hand, the determinate individual in its individual constitution is conceived as a product of the influences of its environment; on the other hand, it is active, interpreting and rearranging its environment. Hegel's objection is that in this activity the specific individuality of self-consciousness is already effective. The concrete impact of the environment on an individual self-consciousness results from the specific constitution of the individual self-consciousness, so that it is impossible to explain the

¹³ By “environment” Hegel understands the social world of “habits, costumes and way of thinking already to hand” (168–169, ¶302). His objections can be transferred to the attempts of teleosemantics which tries to explain the mental as an adaptation and formation of an environment captured in biological–evolutionary terms; cf. Millikan (1984).

individual characteristics of self-consciousness by appeal to the influence of its environment. Thus, and this is the upshot of Hegel's discussion, observational psychology does not reach beyond general statements that cannot grasp a concrete self-consciousness in "*this specific individuality*" (170, ¶306); it can express only "the indeterminate nature of the individuality" (170, ¶306).¹⁴ From this result Hegel draws the following methodologically important consequence: The specific individuality of a self-consciousness can be "comprehended only from the individual himself" (171, ¶307). What is required of an adequate explanatory strategy, then, is a comprehensive, context-sensitive interpretation that takes into account the active and holistic constitution of self-consciousness and its "freedom" (171, ¶307).¹⁵ Furthermore, Hegel's objections are of importance for his own conception of the mental, for he recognizes the function of the social environment as a constitutive element of the individual self-consciousness:

If these circumstances, way of thinking, customs, in general the state of the world, had not been, then of course the individual would not have become what he is; for all those elements present in this "state of the world" *are* this universal substance. (170, ¶306)¹⁶

Looking at the context in which Hegel develops his conception of the mental helps to avoid two obvious misunderstandings. First, Hegel's claim that the individual self-consciousness can be grasped "only from the individual himself" (171, ¶307) cannot be evaluated as a suggestion that the mental be conceived through singular first-person access. The methodological–solipsistic conception of introspective psychology only extends the deficits of observational psychology, since it neglects the social constitution of the mental and thus adopts essential prerequisites of Observing Reason without further examination. Second, Hegel's critique of the methodological solipsism of introspective psychology cannot be interpreted as behaviorism, since Hegel criticizes and rejects even those methodological and epistemological premises of Observing Reason shared

¹⁴ The fate of the attempt within causalistic action theory to formulate causal laws of action can be taken as a contemporary example for this difficulty.

¹⁵ In this context, it is crucial to keep in mind that Hegel's concept of freedom is not meant in the sense of agent causality, but as openness to the rational structures of the (social) environment; cf. Pippin (1999, 2004a).

¹⁶ Pinkard's discussion of these sections primarily highlights this aspect of the social constitution of the mind (Pinkard 1994, 89). A more detailed account of Hegel's thesis that the mind is socially constituted, – though with respect to Hegel's later theory of Objective Spirit – can be found in Quante and Schweikard (2005).

by behaviorism and introspective psychology.¹⁷ In contrast, our analysis renders visible Hegel's own conception of a social – externalist conception of the mental.¹⁸

3 PHYSIOGNOMY AND PHRENOLOGY

Observational psychology must, consequently, fail for categorical reasons, so that Observing Reason, in its attempt to explain the mental, is thrown back to the psychic immediacy of individual self-consciousness as a possible basis of explanation. This immediacy “contains the antithesis of being *for itself* and being *in itself* effaced within its own absolute mediation” (171, ¶1309). Hegel's discussion of physiognomy and phrenology treats two research projects current at his time. Although, from a present-day point of view, both must count as obsolete in many respects, Hegel's objections against them continue to be systematically relevant, since his critique aims at the fundamental presuppositions that have remained effective to the present day. In his treatment of physiognomy, Hegel tries to arrange the different variants of this conception into a conceptually developmental sequence that necessarily ends with phrenology. Since I do not intend to track this dimension of Hegel's argumentation, which stems from the overall aim of the *Phenomenology*, I will briefly place the five main stages of the development side by side. I will then analyze Hegel's critique of physiognomy, which he takes to be essentially the action theory of Observing Reason. Here, I will collect the elements of Hegel's own action theory which can be extracted from his critique of physiognomy in order to complete the picture of Hegel's social – externalist conception of the mental. Finally, I will round off the picture by analyzing Hegel's critique of phrenology.

¹⁷ On this point, there is a deep affinity between Hegel's and Wittgenstein's conception of the mental; for the latter see ter Hark (1995).

¹⁸ For the understanding of my argumentation, three clarifications or explanations are important: First, in what follows it is not claimed that Hegel's social–externalist conception of the mental is presupposed as an argument against scientism. There are, on the one hand, objections that are independent of this conception and, on the other hand, Hegel's social–externalist conception assumes its full contour only in the course of his work. Secondly, Hegel's social externalism about the mental should not be identified with a model of the mental that is ultimately bound to behaviorist demands, as the one conceptualized by Donald Davidson. Hegel's social externalism is rather genuinely social in the sense that it is developed from the participant perspective of the *We* (or *Spirit*); cf. Quante and Schweikard (2005). And, thirdly, along with social externalism Hegel defends an ontological externalism about mental states which rejects the dualism of thought and world; see Halbig (2002) and Quante (2002a). It is for this reason that Hegel's conception is not exposed to the danger of becoming a “frictionless spinning in the void” in which thinking circulates only within itself or within social spheres and cannot connect with the world.

3.1 Variations about "inner" and "outer": five antitheses

The basic idea of law, and according to Hegel even the concept of law as such, consists in the notion that a sequence of something outer acquires its meaning through something inner that appears therein. Due to the methodological and epistemological requirements of Observing Reason, the inner and the outer not only have to be independent from one another and, at the same time, necessarily interrelated, they must both be conceived merely as being. Against this background, Hegel distinguishes five antitheses between inner and outer that are formulated in physiognomy. Each of these pairs of antitheses aims to explain self-consciousness in its concrete individuality from the perspective of an observable outer. In the first four approaches to physiognomy, the position of the inner is assumed by the activity of the subject by means of an organ (paradigmatically, a hand or the mouth). The outer, however, is modified respectively because of the insufficiencies of the previous stages.¹⁹

In the case of the *first antithesis*, the outer is specified as "the action as a reality separated from the individual" (173, ¶312). This conception of the inner, which expresses itself through action, appears in the result of the action that is distinct from the individual. Hegel criticizes this explanatory model for twice violating the prerequisites of physiognomy. On the one hand, the inner that is objectified in the outer through the result of the deed acquires an independence against which the individual can no longer assert itself (in this respect, the inner loses the required independence from the outer). But, on the other hand, it is precisely this deficit that allows the individual to reflect critically on the deed by retreating to her intention and distancing herself from the meaning of the deed:

The action, then, as a completed work, has the double and opposite meaning of being either the *inner* individuality and *not* its *expression*, or, *qua* external, a reality *free from* the inner, a reality which is something quite different from the inner. (173, ¶312)

To eliminate this deficit, an inner has to be found "as it still is within the individual himself, but in a visible or external shape" (173, ¶312). Now – and this is the *second antithesis* – if one tries to replace the deed by the outer

¹⁹ Hegel's exposition of this development of the models of physiognomy (173–176, ¶¶312–318) is, despite its complexity, simplified. The inner and the outer are, on Hegel's account, terms of reflection; so a shift in the meaning of one always entails a shift in the meaning of the other. If I am right, Hegel does not make this development of the inner a subject of discussion with respect to the first four antitheses, but confines himself to the outer.

shape of the individual qua “*passive whole*” (173, ¶313), the result is too weak a relation between inner and outer – the relation of a merely conventional “*sign*” (174, ¶313) that is not anchored in the thing itself. However, such an “*arbitrary combination*” (174, ¶314) yields “*no law*” (174, ¶314), according to the requirements of physiognomy itself, and therefore Hegel infers that the claim to the status of science cannot be met in this way (cf. 172, ¶311). Prognosticating the fate of the individual by the state of her hand remains an equally arbitrary combination, and physiognomy remains one of the “*other questionable arts and pernicious studies*” (174, ¶314). This is also why the construction of the *third antithesis*, in which the outer constitution of the organ of action in question is declared to be an appearance of the inner, i.e. of the particular individuality, is unsatisfactory. Neither the traits of the hand, nor “*the timbre and compass of the voice*” (175, ¶316), nor the “*style of handwriting*” (175, ¶316) can be taken to be expressions of individuality, for the individual can take a reflexive stance towards these features and employ them deliberately. This capacity for self-interpretation, which Hegel calls the “*reflection on the actual expression*” (175, ¶317), explains why the external features invoked by physiognomy cannot adequately be accounted for from that perspective. As expressions of intentional agency, they are accessible only to a comprehensive interpretation, but not from a perspective of Observing Reason.²⁰ The capacity for “*inner*” reflexive annotation of one’s own doings and deeds reveals a characteristic of intentional agency that is used in the *fourth antithesis*. The inner reflection on one’s own deed as “*the actual expression*” (175, ¶317) must itself have an observable, outer aspect. The facial expression is supposed to show whether an assertion is being made seriously or not (this is Hegel’s example for this phenomenon). But under the premises of Observing Reason this is again inadequate, for two reasons: Since the facial expression must be “*degraded to the level of [mere] being*” (176, ¶318), it stands in a purely conventional relation to the determinate individuality and can be deployed at will: Therefore, this expression of the inner is, for the determinate individuality, “*as much its countenance as its mask which it can lay aside*” (176, ¶318). This possibility presupposes the difference between intention and will on the one hand and deed on the other (cf. 176, ¶311). As Hegel argues in the following, by generating the *fifth antithesis* from this, physiognomy becomes action theory.

²⁰ This is the systematic benefit which MacIntyre (1998) gains from his interpretation of these passages.

3.2 The "inverted relationship" of physiognomy

According to Hegel, the following consequence is to be drawn from this fourth antithesis: "Individuality gives up that *reflectedness-into-self* which is expressed in the *lines* and *lineaments*, and *places its essence in the work it has done*" (176, ¶319). The refinements of the models of physiognomy reveal that this "science" has met the fundamental problem of action theory:

The antithesis which this observation encounters has the form of the antithesis of the practical and the theoretical, both falling within the practical aspect itself – the antithesis of individuality making itself actual in its "doing" ("doing" in its most general sense), and individuality as being at the same time reflected out of this "doing" into itself and making this its object. (176–177, ¶319)

But the solution hinted at by Hegel is incompatible with the presuppositions of Observing Reason. In fact,

it contradicts the relationship established by the instinct of Reason, which is engaged in Observing the self-conscious individuality, ascertaining what its *inner* and *outer* are supposed to be. (176, ¶319)

While Hegel can accept this consequence on the basis of *his* theoretical framework, Observing Reason must take up the basic structure of intentional agency it has discovered "in the same inverted relationship which characterizes it in the sphere of appearance" (177, ¶319). Thus, the claim is that an action theory that remains within the paradigm of Observing Reason takes over the structure of appearance and is incapable of accounting for it in a conceptually adequate way. Hegel then sketches this "inverted" action theory as follows:

It regards as the *unessential outer* the *deed* itself and the performance, whether it be that of speech or a more durable reality; but it is the being-within-itself of the individuality which is for it the *essential inner*. Of the two aspects possessed by the practical consciousness, intention and deed (what is "meant" or intended by the deed and the deed itself), observation selects the former as the true inner. (177, ¶319)

On the basis of its own premises, this action theory can in fact see only the outer, from which it then infers the essential inner that first renders the observable event as an action. The presupposed irrevocability of the difference between inner intention and outer action event leads to the feature of intentionality that marks off an action from mere physical events being conceived as a separate factor, which can and must be inferred in the observation of an event: According to Hegel, actions are objects in intersubjectively accessible space and in this sense they are external to the

individual's private internality. But Observing Reason takes this "visible present as visibility of the invisible" (177, ¶320). And since it regards the inner as the essential that finds its expression in the outer, the agent's intention becomes the essential feature. Because the intention – separated as it is from the realized action – does not necessarily match up with the deed determined by the social context, the intention plays the role of a theoretical item which is epistemologically inaccessible and in this sense "being that is 'meant'" (177, ¶320). Thus, action also becomes "an existence which is only 'meant'" (177, ¶319), for on this account it is constituted by the self-understanding of the individual and not by the interpretive social space. For this reason, there can be no laws in which intentions and the actions that are essentially constituted by these intentions stand in the appropriate relation of dependence required by laws.²¹ Since intentions presuppose epistemically inadmissible inferences to something that is in principle unobservable, they are not meaningfully conceivable within the framework of Observing Reason, but are merely arbitrary constructs. And because the action is constituted by these constructs in the first place – in contrast to the interpretation of the deed in the social space – these constructs are also unobservable entities. An action theory according to which actions are observable events does not comprehend the constitutive interpretive capabilities through which events become actions in the first place. Such a theory also does not understand that it is precisely this presumed conception of inner and outer that makes intentions only an inferable, in principle private kind of entity.

Hegel leaves no doubt that, in his view, the deed that is part of social space is "[t]he *true being* of man" in which "individual[ity] is *actual*," for in this way the acting individual "does away with both aspects of what is [merely] 'meant' to be" (178, ¶322). In contrast to attempts by physiognomy to infer the underlying intention of the acting subject from the observed action event, Hegel holds the view that an individual can err about the true meaning of his action and that only the realization in social space reveals "the character of the deed" (179, ¶322). Contrary to the conception of inner and outer presupposed by Observing Reason, the objectification of the intention in the deed does not constitute an insurmountable gap: "the objectivity does not alter the deed itself, but only shows what it is" (179, ¶322). The conditions of identity for actions are determined by social standards and contexts and not by the private

²¹ This excludes only a relation between types that would be necessary for laws. But the question of how concrete mental episodes relate to observable events is not yet settled.

perspective that an acting subject has on her own doing. Hence the proper locus of action theory is Objective Spirit, since only within ethical and legal practices can the rules be identified that frame the descriptions under which deeds can be ascribed to subjects, and under which they are held responsible or can claim exculpation or excuse by virtue of their own subjective perspective.²² However, owing to its premises Observing Reason is blind to this social dimension of reality and hence does not attain its target of explaining the determinate individuality of a subject through the explanation of actions.

3.3 Phrenology

Since Observing Reason cannot grasp the determinate individuality by reference to action, Hegel has no further option but to examine the thesis “that the individuality expresses its essence in its immediate, firmly established, and purely existent actuality” (179, ¶323). Now it is no longer the outer aspect of activity that is supposed to indicate the constitution of an individual subject, but rather the subject’s immediate physical existence. Phrenology, the “science” Hegel has in mind here, is a topic of discussion that is *prima facie* obsolete, as it stands for the attempt to infer specific mental properties of the subject from the properties of a skull. But Hegel’s discussion is interesting inasmuch as in criticizing phrenology he brings out fundamental presuppositions of this conception that are effective in present-day philosophy of mind.

Because of its presuppositions, phrenology has to conceive the relation between the mental and the physical “as a *causal connection*” (180, ¶324) and “[mental] individuality . . . must, *qua* cause, itself be corporeal” (180, ¶325). Observing Reason finds in the brain and in the spinal cord the corporeal seat of mental individuality. Therefore, phrenology finds the sought-for relation in the causal connection between brain and spinal cord, together conceived as the “corporeal *being-for-itself* of [the Mental]” (181, ¶328), as well as skull and vertebral column which count as “the solid, inert Thing” (181, ¶328).²³

At this stage – and this is one of the most significant points about Hegel’s critique of phrenology – he calls attention to the fact that the brain is ascribed a dual role in phrenology such that a fundamental ambivalence arises. On the one hand, the brain is thought of as a mere object: “a

²² Cf. Pippin (2004b) and Quante (2004b).

²³ Hegel confines himself, as I do in this reconstruction, to the role of the brain.

being-for-another, i.e. an outer existence” (181, ¶327). As such a “dead thing” it can no longer be “the presence of self-consciousness” (181, ¶327) that it is supposed to be. Hegel points to the fact that we have to distinguish between the functional activities of the brain and the brain as a physical body. In the former reading, the active character of the mental is captured, but the difference from observational psychology gets lost, while in the latter, phrenology forms a proper alternative to the psychological account of the mental. But, as Hegel emphasizes, it is inconceivable how the brain as a “dead thing” could be connected with the determinate individuality in any explanatorily illuminating way. In this ambivalence, the conflict between phrenology’s goals becomes manifest, for it seeks “a being, though not, strictly speaking, an objective being” (180, ¶325) of the mental.

In his critique of causal laws between brain and skull, Hegel points to another ambivalence of this conception, which becomes manifest in a second dual role of the brain as “a *physical part*” and as “the *being of the self-conscious individuality*” (183, ¶331). This dual role leads to a misattribution of properties or accomplishments to the brain by means of mental predicates that are in fact used only figuratively. The danger then is that one cannot debunk this metaphorical use and is led to the false conclusion that biological and mental properties are being ascribed to one and the same object. This can subsequently fuel speculation that one is dealing with two kinds of description of one subject matter (be it activities, properties, or states of the brain). Once one has spelled out this ambivalence of the role of the brain in this context, these assumptions lose their plausibility.²⁴

Detecting the first ambivalence is important, because Hegel’s objections now have to be read not just as a critique of causal connections between brain and skull, but can also be transferred to conceptions that claim a causal connection between functional and physical states of the brain, where the former are identified with the mental. Thus Hegel’s analysis turns out to be relevant for contemporary philosophy of mind which belabors the mind–brain relationship. Because of the internal tension Hegel considers it impossible to draw informative connections between the functional level that captures the mental and the physical level of the brain. What is lacking in the latter is the dimension of intentional meaning that characterizes the mental; the physical constitution does not have “the value even of a *sign*” (184, ¶333). Ultimately, “what remains and is necessary

²⁴ Hegel himself points to such a misuse of predicates with regard to the skull (cf. 184, ¶333).

to form" (185, ¶335) is therefore just a "concept-less [*begrifflose*], free, pre-established harmony" (185, ¶335) that can no longer explain anything.²⁵

In this context, Hegel indicates a connection that also plays an important role in present-day philosophy of mind. Since the brain must reflect the internal structure of the mental in its dual role, the idea of a functional modularization of the brain (*qua* functional unit) suggests a "being structuring [*seiende Gegliederung*]" (181, ¶327). On the level of the brain (*qua* physical object), this corresponds to the idea of localizing specific kinds of mental processes in specific brain areas (cf. 184–185, ¶334). The kind of modularization – and this is another important suggestion for current debates – will depend on theory development in psychology. The semblance of a successful explanation of the mental within the framework of Observing Reason, as Hegel's remark (cf. 185, ¶335) can be understood, is created by the interplay of observational psychology and phrenology, since these are two inadequate conceptions of the mind which interlock and mutually enforce each other.

A true explanation of the essential features of the mental is, according to Hegel's conclusion, not attainable within the framework of Observing Reason.²⁶ The bottom line is that the account of phrenology results in an uninformative identity claim for the mental and the physical which even "[t]he crude instinct of self-conscious Reason" (188, ¶340) must regard as unsatisfactory. Therefore, Reason leaves behind the paradigm of Observing Reason and tries other ways of conceiving the nature of the mental, and thereby of itself.

4 THE TOPICALITY OF HEGEL'S DISCUSSION OF OBSERVING REASON

The scientific – philosophical theories of the mental that Hegel discusses in the *Phenomenology* are doubtlessly outdated. But it has been shown that Hegel's critique of those theories is still systematically relevant, since crucial presuppositions of Observing Reason are effective in scientifically oriented philosophies of mind right up to the present day. Moreover, this

²⁵ Hegel's characterization applies to the relation of global supervenience that claims a necessary, but explanatorily not illuminating dependence relation between the totality of mental entities and the totality of physical entities.

²⁶ It is, however, important to note that Hegel excludes neither a localization theory (cf. 184–185, ¶334) nor the existence of causal relations between the mental and the physical for *conceptual* reasons (cf. 185–186, ¶335). But he is of the opinion that in this way neither secured insights can be obtained (cf. 185–186, ¶335), nor can the essential aspects of the mental come into view. I discuss the question of how mental causation can be integrated into Hegel's action theory in Quante (2004b), 177–185.

critique reveals fundamental traits of Hegel's own conception of the mental as later developed in his theory of Subjective and Objective Spirit. The scientific ("Observing") investigation of the mental being carried out today by cognitive science and brain research cannot, if Hegel is right, capture the essence of the mental, even if this perspective is adequate for several aspects of our existence as subjects of mental episodes. Above all, Hegel's critique must be understood as a refusal of the self-imposed constraint of philosophy of mind to adopt or imitate the ontology, epistemology, or methodology that is inscribed in Observing Reason. Such an imitation of scientific theories of the mental not only does not lead to a higher degree of scientificity, but it also misses the social – externalist character of the mental as an activity or as a life form that is revealed only in the understanding participant's perspective. Concerning this matter, Hegel's reconstruction of the relationship between the mental and the physical in terms of the logic of reflection has the potential to unravel intricate problems well beyond the metaphors of the "space of laws" or the "space of reasons" (an opposition that remains too close to the concepts of Observing Reason).²⁷

Hegel decidedly rejects the idea that philosophy in general, and philosophy of mind in particular, have to be subordinated to the requirements of the sciences. He thereby insists on the independence and higher dignity of a philosophical analysis of the mental.²⁸ However, he dealt unremittingly with scientific theories and empirical findings, and related his own theory of the mental to them. So the question now is how one must interpret the relationship between everyday, scientific, and philosophical views in Hegel's system. Without doubt, Hegel's own conception of the mental in the later system is much more stringently elaborated than his presentation in the *Phenomenology*. In one respect, however, the basic intention of the *Phenomenology* seems to me more suitable for developing an answer to this question. In the later system "Nature" and "Spirit" are indeed introduced as terms of reflection, but the semantic interplay takes place only between the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit.²⁹ Since the relation of the empirical sciences to these two parts of the system is unsettled, we can gain there only very few insights relevant to our question, whereas in the *Phenomenology* all epistemological projects have to contribute to the path of consciousness towards Absolute Knowing. Hence, the experiences

²⁷ Cf. Quante (2002b).

²⁸ For a general discussion of the relation between everyday, scientific, and philosophical interpretations of the mental, see also Quante (2000).

²⁹ Cf. Quante (2004b).

we gather about ourselves in the scientific analysis of the mental are a constitutive element of a philosophically adequate conception of ourselves as mental subjects. Pursuing this question entails detecting the traces left by Observing Reason in a conceptually adequate philosophy of mind. Ferreting out these traces would, however, be the topic of a different chapter.

What is a “shape of spirit”?

Terry Pinkard

Spirit is the *ethical life* of a *people* insofar as it is the *immediate truth*: The individual who is a world. It must advance to a consciousness about what it immediately is, must sublimate that beautiful ethical life, and, by passing through of a series of shapes, attain a knowledge of itself. These distinguish themselves, however, from the preceding in that they are real spirits, genuine actualities, and, instead of being shapes only of consciousness, they are shapes of a world. (239, ¶440)

The term itself, “shape of spirit,” occurs rarely in Hegel’s pre-*Phenomenology* writings, where he instead preferred to speak of a “form of life.” It was in fact in the development of his ideas in Jena that the phrase “shapes of spirit” came to replace “forms of life,” even if the latter phrase never fully disappeared from his writings.¹ The dominant distinction in the *Phenomenology*, though, is that between “shapes of consciousness” and “shapes of spirit.”

In one sense a “shape of consciousness” is relatively easy to characterize. It involves the way in which an individual is conscious of the natural world around him, how he represents that world to himself, how he represents himself to himself and to others and how he represents others to himself. As such, the language in which every “shape of consciousness” articulates itself tends to suggest a “subject – object” structure for normative authority: An agent who is aware of an independent item (a physical object, another person, a good, a duty, etc.), and who underwrites his claims to know about that item by some account of how the item makes those claims true and

¹ In “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,” Hegel even more or less equated a “shape of life” with a “form of life” (*Lebensform*) in saying “und die Liebe mußte immer die Form der Liebe, des Glaubens an Gott behalten ohne lebendig zu werden und in *Gestalten des Lebens* sich darzustellen, weil jede *Gestalt des Lebens* entgegengesetzbar vom Verstand als sein Objekt, als eine Wirklichkeit, gefaßt werden kann; und das Verhältnis gegen die Welt mußte zu einer Ängstlichkeit vor ihren Berührungen werden, eine Furcht vor jeder *Lebensform*, weil in jeder sich, da sie Gestalt hat und nur *eine* Seite ist, ihr Mangel aufzeigen läßt und dies Mangelnde ein Anteil an der Welt ist.” Hegel (*Werke*), vol. I, 403–404 (emphasis mine). That he did not abandon this idea of spirit being a “form of life” is shown, for example, in his preface to his 1820 *Philosophy of Right*, where he spoke of a form of life (*Gestalt des Lebens*) as growing old and of philosophy as expressing what is basic to such a form of life.

how the subject relates itself to that item. However, what interests Hegel the most in the Reason chapter of the *Phenomenology* is the way in which the "shape of consciousness" typical of modernity has articulated that subject – object picture: In such a picture, the basic unit of normative authority is the *reflective individual*, ready to assess critically whether one or more of his representations really matches up with reality, or ready to bind himself to a maxim as the moral law provided that it passes the test of something like Kantian universalizability or that of maximizing utility.

Modern shapes of consciousness differ from each other depending on how that picture is more determinately specified. Thus, in one "shape of consciousness," the individual agent is pictured as confronting an immediate, singular sensuous given and basing his inferences and other claims on that immediate piece of self-sufficient knowledge; on that picture, both the most unlettered observer and the most sophisticated scientist begin with the same thing (this immediate awareness of singular, simple things) even though they draw different conclusions from that common basis. In a modification of that picture, the individual is pictured as explaining the flux and contradictions found within his representations of individual perceptible things by appealing to various non-perceptible background forces that explain the perceptible regularities and why they sometimes fail to occur or occur in what look at first like contradictory patterns. (This "shape" is covered in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, "Consciousness.")

Shapes of consciousness, however, need not be confined to such perceptual encounters or to the more highly mediated connections between perceptual encounters and theoretical explanation in terms of imperceptible forces. From the "standpoint of consciousness," one can also view various social and political institutions as being built up out of the kinds of negotiations and conflicts among individuals who represent themselves to each other as having certain interests or as possessing certain kinds of authority.

I SHAPES OF SPIRIT AS SHAPES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In the crucial passage where his philosophical narrative moves from "shapes of consciousness" to "shapes of spirit," Hegel notes that such "shapes of spirit" are "instead of being shapes only of consciousness . . . are shapes of a world" (239, ¶440),² and he begins his new chapter with a discussion of what

² "Der Geist . . . muß . . . durch eine Reihe von Gestalten zum Wissen seiner selbst gelangen. Diese unterscheiden sich aber von den vorhergehenden dadurch, daß sie die realen Geister sind, eigentliche Wirklichkeiten, und statt Gestalten nur des Bewußtseins, Gestalten einer Welt."

he labels in the *Phenomenology* as “true spirit,” namely, the form of life of Greek antiquity.

But to see what is allegedly “true” about that form of life, it is first necessary to note, however briefly, two general features of any such “shape of spirit” for Hegel. First, a shape of spirit, or form of life, should not be thought of as an intellectual, conceptual scheme imposed on some neutral content; as the “shape of a world,” it is composed of the common attunements in our practices and our use of language which, although sometimes explicit, more often function as tacit knowledge; such knowledge involves a fluency which, as Hegel points out, “consists in having the particular knowledge or kind of activities immediately to mind in any case that occurs, even, we may say, *immediately in our very limbs*, in an activity directed outwards.”³ To be trained into a form of life means that one acquires various skills which enable one to maneuver within that social world, and those kind of skills resist formalization.

Second, any shape of spirit embeds within itself a joint conception both of what the *norms* are within that form of life and what it is about the *world* that makes those norms *realizable*, what in the world *resists* their realization or tends to make their realization *rare*, and what in the world is thus to be *expected*. As embodying a tacit grasp of a unity of the “is” and the “ought” within which agents live, a shape of spirit thus forms the overall contours of the ways in which those people, individually and collectively, *imagine* how their lives, individually and collectively, ought to go and how they reasonably expect them really to go.⁴

As the “shape of a world,” a “shape of spirit” is thus more fundamental than a “shape of consciousness.” First, as shaping the very terms in which we articulate a “shape of consciousness,” it is more basic than the kind of subject–object split that is fundamental to each shape of consciousness; instead, a shape of spirit forms the attunements in terms of which those distinctions between subject and object are drawn in the first place. Second, as a “shape of a world,” it is also more basic than an intersubjective unity among different agents; it includes such intersubjective agreements within

³ Hegel (*Werke*), vol. 8, §66 (emphasis mine). In the passage cited, Hegel goes on to add, “In all these cases, immediacy of knowledge not only does not exclude mediation, but the two are so bound together that immediate knowledge is even the product and result of mediated knowledge.” [In allen diesen Fällen schließt die Unmittelbarkeit des Wissens nicht nur die Vermittlung desselben nicht aus, sondern sie sind so verknüpft, daß das unmittelbare Wissen sogar Produkt und Resultat des vermittelten Wissens ist.]

⁴ Heinrich Heine reported that Hegel once casually remarked to him that “if one were to write down all the dreams that people in a particular period had, then there would arise out of a reading of these collected dreams a wholly accurate picture of the spirit of that period.” Heine (2001), part 2, 376.

itself, but it also includes a conception of the world as something to which those agreements are in tune or not. (To appropriate Heidegger’s term for this: A “shape of spirit” is a form of being-in-the-world and not just a marker of intersubjective agreement about our judgments about that world; indeed, it is part of Hegel’s deeper thesis that we answer to the world because we answer to each other, but answering to the world cannot be reduced simply to intersubjective agreement, that is, to answering to each other.)

The “shape of spirit” with which Hegel begins his discussion of *Geist* in general is, as we noted, labeled “true spirit,” which he identifies with the spirit of Greek antiquity, particularly that of Athens in its high period. What makes it first of all an instance of *true* spirit is that within such a form of life, the difference between a shape of spirit and a shape of consciousness is invisible to the participants. Each agent within such a form of life resembles a Leibnizian monad who mirrors the whole and in whom the whole is mirrored, such that there is, in Hegel’s words, “the individual who is a world” (239, ¶440). However, the harmony of the whole is not pre-established by anything external to the unity – as Leibniz has God do – but itself *spontaneously* arises out of the diverse activities of the members themselves. In it, each individual agent *represents* himself to others with an authority that is itself derivative from the whole – that is, individuals carry authority within themselves only insofar as they can *represent* the whole within themselves.⁵ For the idealized *polis*, therefore, there is a way of living a human life that is fully self-conscious, even free in the sense of being self-directing without there having to be the potentially alienating aspect that would come with any kind of hyper-self-conscious detachment from the whole. As mirroring the whole within himself, each citizen can both be a law unto himself while remaining at the same time subject to the demands of the whole; the result is neither anarchy nor the war of all against all but spontaneously produced *beauty*. (The Kantian overtones of beauty as “spontaneously produced harmony” are both obvious and, on Hegel’s part, surely intended.) Of course, no individual embodies all of the whole of a form of life; each individual instead is taken up with and absorbed with his or her own limited place and set of commitments within the whole. The beauty of the spontaneous harmony produced by Greek life, however, meant that no individual had to be self-consciously concerned with the way the whole harmonizes itself but only with the specific

⁵ This is a distinction that Stanley Cavell trades much on. It comes to the fore particularly in Cavell (2004).

commitments that he or she knows will, if carried out, themselves spontaneously harmonize with different specific commitments carried out by others. Each mirrors the whole, but nobody has to have the whole in mind.

This means, however, that the distinction itself between “shapes of consciousness” and “shapes of spirit” is *invisible* for the participants in this form of life. What they see as the goods and duties embedded in their respective positions in that way of life are simply objective affairs, and they have something like an *absolute* duty to fulfill the requirements of their role, secure in the knowledge that carrying out what they are required to do plays its indispensable part in the spontaneous production of the beautiful harmony of this way of life.

However, when that basic distinction is invisible in that way, then each agent necessarily has a certain type of blindness associated with the requirements of his or her role. If pushed to articulate what it is that they are supposed to do and why they take themselves to be required to do it, they cannot offer any reason other than something like Luther’s, “Here I stand, I can do no other,” or they seem to be exemplary forms of Wittgenstein’s often-cited remark: “All the steps are really already taken’ means: I no longer have any choice. The rule, once stamped with a particular meaning, traces the lines along which it is to be followed through the whole of space. – But if something of this sort really were the case, how would it help?/ No; my description only made sense if it was to be understood symbolically. – I should have said: *This is how it strikes me.* /When I obey a rule, I do not choose./ I obey the rule *blindly.*”⁶ However, where *reasons* in fact run out, what holds such a view together is the experience of the *beauty* of the whole, which sustains an allegiance to itself; the achieved *freedom* each individual experiences within that form of life only further cements his own identification with it.

But, as Hegel’s narrative goes, what disturbs this spontaneous, beautiful harmony is the great contradiction at the heart of Greek antiquity, namely, the way in which it necessarily provoked the development of the reflective individual while at the same time having no place for such an individual and even being driven to condemn it. This dual provocation and condemnation makes the distinction between a “shape of consciousness” and a “shape of spirit” *visible* for those agents and, once it becomes visible, the

⁶ Wittgenstein (1953), ¶219. Compare also Wittgenstein’s equally well known remarks in ¶217: “If I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do.’”

fact of its own blindness becomes visible, even though that does not translate into any better vision on the part of the agents involved.

Famously, Hegel interpreted Sophocles' *Antigone* as making that contradiction and that blindness visible to Greek audiences. In Sophocles' play, both Antigone and Creon assume that in speaking for the requirements of their own delimited spheres, *he* or *she* (and not the other) speaks for the whole, and that he or she (and not the other) embodies the authority of the whole within himself or herself; the resistance they encounter from the other thus cannot but appear to each of them as lacking any authority at all. Put in more concrete terms, Antigone speaks for the whole in defending her brother's entitlement to the required funeral rites as something underwritten by whatever authority the life of the *polis* possesses in the first place, and Creon speaks for the whole in defending the right of the community to see its decrees upheld and traitors punished, something that he can understand only as an absolute duty prescribed by the very life of the *polis* itself. Indeed, Antigone herself, rather than merely *feeling* herself to be deeply required to perform the required burial rites, is provoked into seeing what is required of her as a kind of self-conscious *position* she has to take toward the *polis* as a whole *in the name of* the whole, which puts her in contradiction to an even more deeply animating power of the *polis*, namely, that *nobody* is to take a position on what needs to be done to keep the whole in harmony and that people need and should deliberate about how best to satisfy the demands of their own station in life only within that order. Since there is no reflective position outside of the demands of the *polis* – the demand for such reflection is, in effect, the demand that Socrates makes which, as Hegel repeatedly notes, puts him squarely at odds with the ethos of the *polis*⁷ – Antigone puts herself in a similarly contradictory stance to the *polis* by having *in effect* put herself in the position of being "above" the contradictory sides where she has to make up her *own* mind about what the whole, the community, *truly* requires.

Since, as Hegel puts it, this Greek spirit "is the unshakable and undissolved *ground* and *point of origin* for what each and everyone does – it is their *purpose* and *goal* as the *in-itself* in thought of all self-consciousnesses," both Antigone and Creon are each provoked into a kind of *ethical fanaticism* about their own roles, since each takes his or her own role not just to be

⁷ See Hegel (*PH*), 269: "Socrates is celebrated as a Teacher of Morality, but we should rather call him the *Inventor of Morality*. The Greeks had a *customary* morality; but Socrates undertook to teach them what moral virtues, duties, etc. were. The moral man is not he who merely wills and does that which is right – not the merely innocent – but he who has the consciousness of what he is doing."

their *role* but to have its authority in the nature of the world itself. Antigone and Creon embody in a fashion what it mean to translate the ethos of a Greek hero depicted in the poetry of Homer into real life. Such a Greek hero who, as a purely aesthetic figure, acts only out of his own passion, out of a sense of what he *must* do given who he is, also serves to bring about the founding of Greek life or the establishment of laws. When carried out in the realm of existing human sociality, a Greek hero is either a psychopath or an isolated figure of delusion; and a non-delusional character acting out of the ethos of a Greek hero is not epic but at best tragic. Both Antigone and Creon are each *claiming* to be carrying out only what they are *required* to carry out while being necessarily *blind* to any rightness on the part of the other's claims. Antigone takes this one step further: She is in effect operating under the idea of being a law unto herself and her blindness means that she necessarily fails to acknowledge that that is what she is doing. *Tragedy* is the reality of these aesthetic solutions when they attempt to give themselves reality.

Tragedy makes visible the contradiction between norm and what is really at work in the world, and once the contradiction has become so visible the beauty of the whole collapses since the assumption of a spontaneously produced harmony vanishes under the force of the contraction. After that blindness is lifted, the beauty then lies at best only in the play performed about it and not in the social reality it portrays. Since such tragedy in effect shows that those aesthetic justifications themselves fail, these plays provoke a different type of reflection to take up the slack where the aesthetic reasons have run out. Greek tragedy provokes philosophical reflection, which further undoes the immediate beauty that is supposed to underpin the authority of the whole. When such reflection has entered the scene, the beauty of the whole comes to seem more like Kant's example of being enchanted with the song of a nightingale until one learns that it is only the voice of a man imitating the nightingale: The spontaneity of the bird's song has been lost and reflection has destroyed what had been a purely aesthetic apprehension.

2 FROM EMPIRE TO *SITTlichkeit*

The intrinsic failure of the *polis* to prevent this kind of fanaticism from forming and taking root eventually leads its members to come to view it not as "beautiful nature" but merely as a set of positive laws subject to correction and modification in light of something like philosophical reflection. It is, to use Hegel's own colorful way of characterizing it, the

passage from Greek ethical life to Roman legality.⁸ What the breakdown of the ancient world made visible, so Hegel thinks, is the normative issue about how we can authoritatively *represent* ourselves to each other and what it could possibly mean for an individual or group to speak for the whole. The breakdown of the ancient *polis* lie in its inherent failure to achieve an institutional structure with any place within itself for the kind of Socratic individuals it itself provoked into existence. The very idea, however, of a community that does so spontaneously harmonize with itself, such that there is no need for any kind of prosaic ruler to organize it and to monitor its functions nonetheless as a kind of ideal, even if submerged, for all forms of life. Hegel notes this himself, saying of the achievement of such a harmonious whole in ancient Greece:

However, from this happy fortune of having reached its destiny and living within it, self-consciousness, which at first is *spirit* only *immediately* (and in terms of the *concept*), has stepped out and away from it; or else – it has not yet attained it, for both can be said in the same way. (195, ¶353)

That issue constitutes Hegel’s worry about the possibility of a modern *Sittlichkeit* – that is, about whether there can be an ethos of the modern world that can sustain a kind of harmonious unity with itself in light of the self-conscious awareness of the deep tensions at work in modern life and the lack of any purely *aesthetic* solutions to such problems. Clearly, such a form of *Sittlichkeit* cannot rely on there being a spontaneous harmony among all of its members; within any large modern community, the pluralism of goods in it makes that impossible, and the post-Reformation insistence on the right for individuals to follow their own religious conscience only intensifies that problem and the fragmentation inherent in it.

The determinate result of the failure of the *polis* was thus the growth of *empire* as the appropriate mode of political organization to provide the kind of order for the fragmented *individuals* that the *polis* had created. Indeed, from the standpoint of the *polis*, such individuality can only be seen as an instance of corruption, as the growth of self-interest replacing the otherwise “natural” devotion to the thickly articulated “ethical substance” of the *polis* itself. From the standpoint of empire, however, such self-interested individuals are not only not examples of corruption; they are instead the fundamental unit of social reality out of which the mores and political institutions of the polity are to be constructed. Empire thus

⁸ See 238, ¶438.

inevitably rules out the possibility of recreating such a “beautiful” community. As Hegel notes:

The whole *Polis* of the Athenians is united in the one city of Athens . . . Only in such cities can the interests of all be similar; in large empires, on the contrary, diverse and conflicting interests are sure to present themselves. The living together in one city, the fact that the inhabitants see each other daily, render a common culture and a *living* democratic polity possible. In Democracy, the main point is that the character of the citizen be plastic, all “of a piece” . . . In a large empire a general inquiry might be made, votes might be gathered in the several communities, and the results reckoned up – as was done by the French Convention. But a political existence of this kind is destitute of life, and the World is *ipso facto* broken into fragments and dissipated into a mere Paper-world.⁹

Empire is coextensive with fragmentation itself; the empire squabbles with others and then itself breaks apart as contending factions within it compete for power; nobody speaks with any true authority for the whole, since that whole has either vanished or has thinned out to the point of no longer being actual (in Hegel’s sense of *wirklich*), *at work* in everyday life, no longer necessarily part of the motivational set of individuals. The very way in which people *represent* themselves to each other now becomes problematic and subject to ever new, seemingly endless contestation. Social life becomes a mélange of mores, moral claims, power grabs, and religious withdrawal.

The temptation is of course to view all of this not as a matter of historical development but as something more like a comparison of, say, “thickly” constituted social goods (in the paradigmatic Greek *polis*) versus some other mode of historical organization (such as industrial, pluralistic, liberal democracy) in which the social goods are “thin.” It is, however, part of Hegel’s point that such comparisons, while important, also miss the real point.

Hegel describes what follows the collapse of Greek antiquity as an *Entäußerung*, an “relinquishing” and “forsaking” of the once rich content of this form of life. The term itself, *Entäußerung*, is chosen by Hegel for its religious overtones. It is the term Luther used to render the Greek “*kenosis*” in his translation of the Bible into German; God is said to have become flesh by virtue of *renouncing* large parts of his own divinity. More recent English translations have rendered the Greek as his “emptying” himself of his divine attributes. (The King James version has him “humbling” himself.) Hegel takes this idea of “emptying” and shifts it out of its purely

⁹ Hegel (*PH*), 252, 255.

theological context to speak of the way in which the succeeding European forms of life under the influence of the idea of empire "emptied" themselves of all "thick" content, thinning themselves out until by the time of the early eighteenth century, the idea of what it meant to *represent* oneself as having the *authority* to speak of what counts and does not count to another agent, or what it meant for anyone to speak for the whole had become so completely abstract that it found its expression in views to the effect that, for example, only individual "consent" could ever *confer* authority on another or, to take another example, that "utility" was the only way to imagine the social whole.

The confluence of the raw power inherent in the idea of empire and that of speaking for the whole found one of its last expressions in the French absolutist idea that the monarch alone spoke for the nation of France, so nicely encapsulated in the statement attributed to Louis XIV that "*L'Etat, c'est Moi.*" The French Revolution, beginning with the idea that it was not the monarch but the "third estate" who spoke for the whole, quickly experienced its own solution to be as abstract as what it replaced; it devolved into a war among individual factions, each of whom claimed to speak for the whole and many of whom used the language of utilitarianism to justify sacrificing "enemies" of the whole for the greater good. Only when the Christian idea of equality in the eyes of God was secularized into Kant's conception of the "kingdom of ends," and when that was combined with the political results of the Napoleonic institutionalization of the ideals of the Revolution, was the groundwork laid for a form of life in which spontaneity (as acting without prior reason, "blindly," but in a way that nonetheless conformed to principle) could be at peace with modern life. That is, only then could there be the possibility of a fully modern *Sittlichkeit*, a way in which once again the individual could speak for the whole. However, that was not to come about in politics itself, in which the idea of speaking with the authority of the whole was fraught with danger; instead, "speaking for the whole" came to be embodied in art, religion, and philosophy – the institutionalized forms of "absolute knowledge" – each of which assumes the task of articulating spirit's own self-consciousness in the modern world.

3 THE VIOLENCE CONSCIOUSNESS SUFFERS AT ITS OWN HANDS

The achievement of a form of modern individualism comes at a price. Whatever the nobility of a modern free life may amount to, it cannot

achieve the beauty of the classical ideal. But it does achieve something else: The achievement of genuine self-sufficiency in terms of what Hegel calls *realized freedom*, a freedom that is achieved only through the fragile social recognition that “I” can be a modern individual only if the world around me is also populated by modern individuals.¹⁰

In interpreting what Hegel says about this, there are two temptations to avoid. First, one must avoid the temptation to see the type of historical procession outlined here of “shapes of spirit” – admittedly characterized here only with the broadest brush – as some type of relativistic interpretation of the idea of a “form of life,” and there are to be sure passages that suggest that such a relativistic view is indeed held by Hegel himself, such as the celebrated part in the “Preface” to his 1820 *Philosophy of Right*, where he says:

As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case a *child of his time*; thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time or leap over Rhodes.¹¹

Yet early in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel also notes that:

Consciousness, however, is for itself its *concept*, and, as a result, it immediately goes beyond the restriction, and since this restriction belongs to itself, it goes beyond itself; with the positing of the singular individual, the other-worldly beyond is, in its eyes, posited at the same time even if it is still only posited as residing in spatial intuition, as existing only *alongside* the restriction. Consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands, bringing to ruin its own restricted satisfaction. (57, ¶180)

If the first passage cited seems to suggest that we are always completely absorbed in the mores and attunements of our own time and thus will always be acting blindly in terms of certain demands made on us by our form of life, the second seems to argue that such absorption and attunement will always be broken up by something about our own activities themselves.

The second temptation to avoid has to do with overstating Hegel’s case for the moderns. Hegel held that Greeks fundamentally justified their form of life aesthetically and thus had equally fundamental elements of blindness about what it meant to “carry on” as a Greek, and it is tempting to see him as saying that moderns have no such blindness. To be sure, there are

¹⁰ See Hegel (*PR*); (*Werke*), vol. 7, §260: “The principle of the modern state has enormous strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to attain fulfillment in the *self-sufficient extreme* of personal particularity, while at the same *bringing it back to substantial unity* and so preserving this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself.”

¹¹ Hegel (*PR*), “Preface,” 21–22.

passages that tempt one to say that; for example, Hegel says of Christianity as a revealed religion that:

God is therefore here *revealed as he is*; he *exists there* in the way that he exists *in itself*; he exists there as spirit. God is solely attainable in pure speculative knowledge, he only is within that knowledge, and he is only that knowledge itself, for he is spirit; and this speculative knowledge is revealed religion’s knowledge. (406–407, ¶761)

However, even where there has been a full revelation of what divinity is, and we now know that “the divine nature is the same as the human nature, and it is this unity that is intuited [*angeschaut*],” nonetheless *because* we are all “children of our time,” there remains blindness at the edges of our articulations of what counts as carrying on as we do. Moreover, the difficulty of conceptually comprehending what is really at work living a free life in modern times makes the tensions in those forms of life – tensions which threaten to make us unintelligible to ourselves and to others – tempt us again to carve out an aesthetic solution to those real problems.

Those kinds of aesthetic solutions, however, are not repetitions of the Greek failures. Instead, they take the form of a kind of hyper-individualism as a rejection of sociality, an assertion of the “standpoint of consciousness,” now interpreted completely in individualist terms, as absolute. Neither Antigone nor Creon’s *ethical* fanaticism involved a rejection of sociality; it involved instead what we might characterize as a *blind* insistence on what that sociality seemed to require. Both Antigone and Creon – each absolutely certain of what they had to do, each thoroughly blind to the reasons driving the other’s actions – seem to echo Wittgenstein’s formula: “If that means ‘Have I reasons?’ the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons.”¹²

The modern counterpart is a *moral* fanaticism. In an *aesthetic* approach to representing myself to others, I must act, as Kant put it, in a way, so it seems, that I cannot justify by appeal to a rule (a “concept”) but by appeal to the idea that anybody else with taste ought to see this *as I see it* (that is, as beautiful) – that is, that my grasp of this is not of merely private significance but is something universally communicable, of universal interest; others with taste, as it were, will be in a position to see that they ought to experience this as beautiful. Where the ethical is based on the aesthetic, ethical fanaticism is always waiting in the wings, especially when the

¹² Wittgenstein (1953), ¶211.

demands it makes are also seen as divinely authored. In morality, on the other hand, I am supposed to find that there is a universal rule or principle that, as it were, binds me to it but that I nonetheless legislate for myself (or, at least, subject myself to the rule legislated by the divine). The self-assertion of one's moral status is not supposed to be a *self*-assertion but an expression of one's impartial adherence to a universal standard, or at least a standard acceptable to the other rational agents involved. However, one never deals with a rational agent in general; one achieves recognition from real agents, each with their own point of view. The moral agent acts in a public realm, claiming universal validity for his actions but knowing full well that his deeds can be given a different meaning by others. Clearly, one can sometimes be in the right while everybody around one is wrong; moreover, the prophets were not simply mistaken or were committing some kind of conceptual blunder when they challenged the mores of their day. But also equally clearly, action involves the possibility of disharmony in the moral life. One can mean one thing but have it end up meaning something else, one can disguise one's motives from oneself, and one can continue to insist that what one did was beneficial when it is clear to all around that it was harmful.

It is this very precariousness of the moral life itself which suggests that there is a kind of "inner" beauty that can be untouched by the blindness of the world around oneself, that one can rigorously hew to the moral line and represent oneself as the universal voice of morality even when others do not listen. But this brings its own, different aesthetic temptation, the temptation to see the beauty of the moral life as a self-sufficient life unto itself, a way of being a law unto oneself that does not implicate oneself in the messiness of life but keeps one free and pure of it. Action brings with it the possibility of disharmony between act and intention, which tempts one into thinking that the way to maintain the harmony is to turn the focus inward, to the sphere where, although one may be mistaken about everything else, one cannot be mistaken that one has tried to submit one's maxims to testing by the universal standard of duty. That is, the world may be a messy place, but one can always have a beautiful soul.

The problem with beautiful souls, of course, is that they, too, substitute an aesthetic solution for a real one, and they end up in various forms of moral fanaticism. At one end of the spectrum, they are people so intent on keeping their hands clean that they never do anything; the demands of the moral life leads them to a life, paradoxically enough, of inaction. Or they can become fierce moralistic judges, ready to condemn, never ready to act themselves; or moralists who are willing to admit they make mistakes but

never willing to compromise on the purity of their motives. The *beauty* of their actions is an internal harmony that in principle cannot be tested by the world; like Wittgenstein's "private language," the various meanings existing in harmony in a beautiful soul are thus private affairs that in principle cannot be expressed, since any expression automatically disrupts that harmony. The "beautiful soul" cannot even tell others about its own internal harmony since doing even that would disrupt the harmony (since even *saying* something opens oneself up to possible misunderstanding). Powerless to express this supposedly basic interiority, the "beautiful soul," as Hegel says:

[evaporates] into abstractions that no longer have any stability, any substance for this consciousness itself . . . Refined into this purity, consciousness exists in its poorest shape, and this poverty, constituting its single possession, is itself a disappearing; this absolute *certainty*, in which substance has dissolved, is the absolute *untruth*, which collapses back upon itself. (354, ¶657)

The "beautiful soul's" basic inability to express itself outwardly is the counterpart of its fear of disrupting its harmony through action, of having no power over what it means, and both fantasies are supposedly resolved by the beautiful soul in its full retreat from sociality, a retreat made all the more plausible for itself by the modern individualistic "standpoint of consciousness" which takes itself to be an "absolute" explanation.¹³

However, if "beautiful souls" are not to remain mute and simply "evaporate," they must act, which means that their internal *beauty* and the *prosaic* nature of the world around them (including their own embedded selves) exists in an ineliminable tension with each other. Inevitably one form this takes is that of the *judgmental* moral fanatic, quick to condemn while being glacially slow to act, so worried about dirtying his hands that he can never bring them into contact with anything in the world but equally quick to point out and denounce what he sees as the stain on others' hands. The other form it can take is that of the hyper-ironic actor, the man behind the mask, who can never be pinned down to any particular identity or action, the "free spirit" who is never to be identified with any action. Each is a version of maintaining the internal harmony of beauty of soul, since each is a version of the fantasy of denying sociality by holding subjectivity intact against all its "objective" expressions;

¹³ Hegel's treatment of the "beautiful soul" thus not only has affinities with Wittgenstein's arguments about private languages but also with Stanley Cavell's interpretation of Wittgenstein's argument. Going into a comparison with Cavell's views would, however, take us far afield. For a general comparison, see Eldridge (1997).

moreover, each of these fantasies understands itself not as a version of a single “shape of consciousness” but as rival and opposed ways of life; each sees the other as what Kant called “radical evil,” the perpetual temptation to substitute one’s own self-love for the messiness of trying to sort out the moral law in the real world, with the judgmental moralist seeing the ironist as an attempt to flee responsibility, and the ironist seeing the judgmental moralist as somebody trying to impose his own contingent set of values on others under the pretext of claiming universal validity for them.

In Hegel’s own dialectic, he imagines one of these actors – the ironist, the “free spirit” – coming to see that in fact all of his actions really do constitute *who* he is and that rather than preserving his moral conscience intact throughout his refusal to identify himself with any particular plan or action, he has in fact come to be more like an instance of “radical evil” itself. In Hegel’s narrative, he confesses this to the judgmental moralist since he, in Hegel’s words, *intuits* (has an “*Anschauung*” of) himself in the other, and both finally end up confessing their one-sidedness to each other in acts of forgiveness and reconciliation, which constitute, as Hegel puts it, “a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute spirit*” (361, ¶670).¹⁴

It is, of course, striking that Hegel several times characterizes this as an “intuition” (or a “seeing” or “beholding,” depending on how one renders “*anschauen*”) of oneself in an other. It is not, that is, a judgment whose validity would rest on some other judgment having already been made. As with so many things in Hegel’s painstakingly systematic approach to things, this refers to something else in the system which we can only mention here. In the works preceding the *Phenomenology*, Hegel repeatedly stressed that the relation between intuition and judgment should not be understood in the way he accused Kant of taking the relations, that is, which he characterized with the metaphor of the “mechanical,” but rather in terms of the metaphor of the “organic.” “Mechanical accounts” claim that the whole can be explained in terms of the parts, and that the parts can be independently identified independently from the whole of which they are the parts; down that path lies Kant’s psychological model of our imposing a conceptual – categorical scheme on otherwise uncategorized intuitions. Rather, they should be seen as standing in an “organic” unity with each other; concepts and intuitions play their respective cognitive *roles* (which, so Hegel agrees with Kant, are very different) only within the

¹⁴ See also 361, ¶669: “it is enticed into a confessional existence through the intuition of itself in an other” [hervorgelockt in das bekennende Dasein durch die Anschauung seiner selbst im Anderen].

whole of self-conscious *life*; one cannot identify them as either "concepts" or "intuitions" without at least implicitly taking into account how they successfully play their respective roles within a larger whole, just as one cannot identify an organ as an "eye" unless one takes into account the role it plays in the organism. It is, of course, a long story about how one gets to Hegel's own conclusions, but Hegel diagnoses many of the typical see-saws in modern philosophy (such as the ongoing oscillations between meta-physical realism and subjective idealism) as preceding out of the failure to treat concepts and intuitions "organically," and he thinks that once one has comprehended that, one is no longer tempted to think that our experience of objects is in any way only an experience of our *representations* of objects (which is not to deny that we do in fact make representations of objects).

Here Hegel once again finds himself on the same side of the street as Wittgenstein. Our ordinary experience is *informed* by our conceptual capacities, but it is not generally an *exercise* of those capacities. Our abilities, for example, to identify and re-identify things (such as a hummingbird or a neoclassical style house) are themselves capacities that we have by virtue of having acquired conceptual capacities, but they are not themselves exercises of those capacities; the perception of an object does not necessarily, or even generally, involve our making a *judgment* about that object.

The basic distinction at work here is that between an activity which is *informed* by our conceptual capacities and which functions as a kind of "second nature" and our explicit *use* of the conceptual capacities themselves.¹⁵ Our explicit use of conceptual capacities enters the picture when

¹⁵ Hegel (*Werke*), vol. 10, §387, *Zusatz*, Hegel notes: "We must thus begin with spirit still hemmed in by nature, related to its corporeality, not yet existing in its own sphere, not yet free . . . In this part of the science of subjective spirit the concept of spirit (as it has been thought) lies only in us, the examiners, and not in the object itself; the object of our examination is formed by the, at first, merely existent concept of spirit, spirit which has not yet grasped its concept, the spirit which is still external to itself." It is obvious that the issues at stake could use more elaboration, but that would itself require a full commentary on Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit. Hegel's aim in that section of his *Encyclopedia* is to show how "spiritual," *geistige*, life grows out of our natural makeup without itself being reducible to that natural makeup. Thus, from one point of view, our conceptual capacities (which are normative and social) emerge quite naturally out of our organic capacities as the kinds of creatures we are (as the way in which children, for example, become language users); on the other hand, from the standpoint of intelligibility within the "philosophical system," the standpoint of agency is what takes pride of place. Thus, in *Enzyklopädie*, ¶388, Hegel speaks of this move as the equivalent of nature subsuming itself: "Spirit, as the truth of nature, has come to be. In addition, since within the Idea in general, this result signifies the truth and is in fact (with regards to what preceded it) what is prior, the coming to be, that is, the transition into the concept, bears the more determinate significance of free judgment. Spirit that has come to be hence signifies *nature as having in itself sublated itself* as what is untrue, such that spirit no longer presupposes itself as this universality existing externally to itself in its bodily individuality; rather, it exists as this simple universality in its concretion and totality, within which it is the soul and not yet spirit" (emphasis mine).

we use them to criticize and correct our experiential capacities to identify and re-identify things. A person may, for example, have the capacity to recognize hummingbirds and quite reliably do so; he may then misidentify a hummingbird moth as a hummingbird, but on reflection come to think that what he saw could not have been a hummingbird; it is in submitting his experience to thought that his explicit conceptual capacities come into play as the *use* of concepts. It is obviously a long story, but the Hegelian narrative has to do with the way in which our use of concepts has historically become more critical, less embedded in aesthetic and religious ways of seeing such that there is a more free capacity for conceptual thought in modern life, and this has resulted in a “reflective” attitude to experience in which appearances are not to be taken at face value but instead in terms of something lying, as it were, behind them that explains them (or is their “truth” in Hegel’s preferred way of talking). That in turn calls out for a “scientific,” *wissenschaftlich*, approach to these matters, instead of our remaining embedded in a purely aesthetic or religiously informed form of life. (So Hegel thinks, this would be a mystery only to those who dogmatically cling to a Kantian model of imposing conceptual form on independent sensuous content or who maintain that there must be an absolute, rock-bottom distinction between conceptual scheme and experiential content; and it is these conceptual capacities which have a history and which may detach themselves gradually from natural determination.)

Thus, in Hegel’s narrative, the two beautiful souls “intuit” themselves in each other, *see* that they are different versions of the same attitude, and thus prepare themselves for the more explicit acts of forgiveness and reconciliation, for a reaffirmation of the sociality that binds them together rather than clinging to the fantasy of self-sufficiency and the moral fanaticism attendant on it. That capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness, which cannot be understood except as the secularization of a religious practice that itself has its own developmental and dialectical history, means that the kind of ever recurrent moral fanaticism of the modern period need not bring down the house with itself. The blindness inherent in any form of life is tempered by the development of a modern way of “seeing” that is itself an open invitation to think and reflect on what it is that we are doing, which in turn means that the “violence consciousness suffers at its own hands” becomes institutionalized in modern life as part of the way that life renews itself. That itself means that philosophy takes its relation to its own time differently: if the form of life of modernity is to work, to be *wirklich*, the “reflection” which finds its expression in *Wissenschaft* must be harmonious with that way of acting and “seeing” in daily life that is informed by our

conceptual capacities but is not itself an exercise of them. Being so "reflective," modern life cannot ultimately justify itself aesthetically, even if its reflections always originate out of the immediacy of life as being-in-time, an immediacy which is most effectively captured aesthetically; not philosophical *argument* but sight, *Anschauung*, informed by concepts brings the two beautiful souls together, so that:

the reconciling *yes*, in which both I's let go of their opposed *existence*, is the existence of the *I* expanded into two-ness, which therein remains in parity with itself and which has the certainty of itself in its complete self-emptying and its opposite. (362, ¶671)¹⁶

¹⁶ Hegel goes on to add immediately after this sentence: "It is God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge." The status of this language of God's appearance and the nature of religious thought in Hegel would require more space than this chapter has.

*Ethical life, morality, and the role of spirit
in the Phenomenology of Spirit*

Will Dudley

The Spirit chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology* poses two important and related interpretive challenges. The first is to account for the fact that the chapter opens with a discussion of ethical life and concludes with a discussion of morality, a reversal of the order in which Hegel treats these themes in the *Philosophy of Right*. The second is to account for the fact that the *Phenomenology* includes a Spirit chapter at all, given that it has often been judged to make no contribution to the central project of the work. The two challenges are related because any interpretation of the relationship between ethical life and morality will be constrained by the role accorded to the Spirit chapter in the *Phenomenology* as a whole.

Several prominent readings of the *Phenomenology* conclude that the central project of the work is complete before the Spirit chapter even begins. Robert Pippin argues that the primary task of overcoming skepticism is accomplished at the end of the Self-Consciousness chapter, that the Reason chapter explains and refines but does not substantively extend this accomplishment, and that the remainder of the book presents forms of spirit failing to recognize and enjoy the fact that skepticism has been overcome.¹ Michael Forster argues that the project of the *Phenomenology* continues through the end of the Reason chapter, and that the Spirit chapter is appended to give a provisional presentation of aspects of the system that Hegel went on to develop in the *Encyclopedia*.² Forster's interpretation deepens the mystery regarding the order in which ethical life and morality are treated, because the system departs from the "provisional presentation" in this regard. The most plausible explanation for this departure, on this view, is that Hegel changed his mind between 1807 and 1817 about the relation between ethical life and morality. If this were true, however, then either the *Phenomenology* or the *Encyclopedia* must have

¹ Pippin (1989), 143, 159, 166–167. ² Forster (1998), 123–124.

gotten this relationship wrong, which would imply that the transitions in one or both works, which Hegel claims to be dialectically necessary, are in fact merely contingent.

The aim of this chapter is to articulate and defend an alternative solution to these interpretive challenges. I will argue that the reversal of ethical life and morality between the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia* reflects not a change of mind regarding which of the two has systematic priority, but rather the fact that these two works execute fundamentally different projects. The *Phenomenology* attempts to make explicit everything that is contained in certain assumptions about knowing (those with which the Consciousness chapter begins), whereas the *Philosophy of Right* (and the corresponding sections of the *Encyclopedia*) attempt to make explicit everything that free willing involves. Both of these accounts include discussions of moral and ethical practices, but these practices play different roles in the different accounts that serve different projects. The reversal of ethical life and morality between the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia* thus need not indicate a flaw in either dialectic, but may in fact be necessary to getting both of them right.

The interpretation offered in this chapter will concur with those of Ludwig Siep and Stephen Houlgate, both of whom read the *Phenomenology* as a coherent whole that executes a single project.³ The first advantage of such a reading is that it accords an integral role to the Spirit chapter, rather than regarding it as a mysterious appendage, the presence of which begs for explanation. The second advantage is that the interpretation preserves the possibility that the transitions between ethical life and morality in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia* have the necessity that Hegel attributes to them.

Section 1 of this chapter briefly sketches the salient differences between the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* with respect to the ordering of ethical life, morality, and their constitutive moments. Section 2 critically assesses three important interpretations of these differences and the role of the Spirit chapter in the *Phenomenology*. Section 3 offers a reading of the transition from Reason to Spirit, and of the key transitions in the subsequent development from ethical life to morality. This reading serves as the basis for my own interpretation of the role of the Spirit chapter within the *Phenomenology*, and of the ordering of the constitutive moments of that chapter, which is presented in section 4, the final section of the chapter.

³ Siep (2000); Houlgate (2005).

I ETHICAL LIFE AND MORALITY IN THE
PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE *PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT*

The *Phenomenology* contains three main sections: Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and Reason. The Reason section contains four chapters. The first of these chapters is also called Reason, and the others are Spirit, Religion, and Absolute Knowing. The Spirit chapter contains three subsections: Ethical Life (*die Sittlichkeit*), Culture (*die Bildung*), and Morality (*die Moralität*). The subsection on Ethical Life includes discussions of the nation (*das Volk*), the family, and the legal person. The subsection on Morality includes discussions of duty, conscience, and the beautiful soul.

The *Philosophy of Right* also contains three main sections: Abstract Right, Morality, and Ethical Life. Abstract Right discusses the legal person, Morality discusses duty and conscience, and Ethical Life discusses the family, civil society, and the state.

The most obvious difference between the treatments of the overlapping issues in the two books is the fact that ethical life precedes morality in the *Phenomenology* but follows it in the *Philosophy of Right*. Also important, however, is the change in the scope of ethical life. First, whereas the *Phenomenology* treats legal personhood as a moment of ethical life, the *Philosophy of Right* treats the person as a moment of Abstract Right. Moreover, although the family is treated as a moment of ethical life in both works, civil society and the state appear as moments of ethical life only in the *Philosophy of Right*. These are the differences that must be accounted for by any interpretation of the shifting relationship between ethical life and morality in the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*.

2 THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF ETHICAL LIFE,
 MORALITY, AND THE SPIRIT CHAPTER

The most important interpretations of ethical life, morality, and the Spirit chapter can be sorted into four classes: (1) interpretations claiming that Hegel changed his mind, between writing the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia*, about the substantive issues at stake, and therefore rearranged and reworked the relevant sections; (2) interpretations claiming that Hegel changed his mind, in the course of writing the *Phenomenology*, about its purpose and scope, and that the role of the Spirit chapter and the ordering of its contents reflect this “patchwork” character of the book; (3) interpretations claiming that Hegel changed the way he referred to the issues at stake, so that the differences between the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia*

are primarily terminological rather than substantive; (4) interpretations claiming that the *Phenomenology* executes a single task, from start to finish, and that it is the differences between this task and the task of the *Philosophy of Right* that account for the differences between the two treatments of ethical life and morality.

The remainder of this section examines representative and historically influential examples of each of the first three classes of interpretation. My own interpretation, which is an instance of the fourth class, will be developed in the subsequent two sections.

2.1 Hegel changed his mind about substantive issues

In 1920, one hundred years after Hegel completed the *Philosophy of Right*, Franz Rosenzweig suggested that its differences with the *Phenomenology* reflect Hegel's shifting views concerning the state.⁴ According to Rosenzweig, the fact that the *Phenomenology* treats the nation before treating morality and religion indicates that in 1807 Hegel regarded the state as subordinate to moral conscience and religious fellowship. By the time the *Encyclopedia* (1817) and the *Philosophy of Right* (1821) were published, Rosenzweig argues, Hegel had changed his mind and given political association and the obligations of citizenship primacy of place, as evidenced by the fact that the treatment of the state now follows and supersedes that of morality. Rosenzweig concludes that the *Phenomenology* represents a brief, shining moment – sandwiched between Hegel's earlier and later writings – in which the state is properly assigned to a position beneath both morality and religion.

Twenty-five years later, in his seminal commentary on the *Phenomenology*, Jean Hyppolite rejected Rosenzweig's position, which he summarizes in the following way: "According to this view, [Hegel's early] ideal of the *human city*, expounded in the 'System der Sittlichkeit' and in the 'Naturrecht', is abandoned in favor of a *City of God*. Later, the argument continues, Hegel returned to his divinization of the state."⁵ Pointing out that this argument "is supported only by the order of the chapters of the *Phenomenology*," Hyppolite contends that Rosenzweig misinterprets the significance of this ordering:

Religion does not succeed objective spirit in the way that one historical event follows another . . . If in the [last chapter](#) of the section on spirit Hegel does not

⁴ Rosenzweig (1920). ⁵ Hyppolite (1974), 327.

actually speak of the state, it is not because the state has disappeared as the supreme form of world spirit and yielded its position to a moral subject or a contemplative soul, but because in that chapter Hegel considers only the novel aspect that spirit takes on when it grasps itself as subject.⁶

Hyppolite is correct that the later shapes of consciousness presented in the *Phenomenology* do not efface the earlier ones, so Rosenzweig is mistaken to assume that Hegel anticipates political consciousness disappearing in the transition from the nation to morality and religion. Moreover, it is equally important to emphasize that religion does not disappear in the *Encyclopedia*, and in fact enjoys a later and higher position in the philosophy of spirit than does the state. Thus in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia* the ordering of the political and the religious is the same, which undermines the only basis for Rosenzweig's claim that Hegel changed his mind about their relation. Consequently, this purported change of mind cannot suffice as an explanation for the shuffling of the sections that do in fact alter between the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*.

2.2 Hegel changed his mind about the purpose and scope of the *Phenomenology*

In 1929, Theodor Haering introduced the "patchwork thesis," which claims that the *Phenomenology* was not conceived as a unified work, and that the Spirit chapter is an appendage that does not contribute to the original project.⁷ The patchwork thesis received significant support in the 1960s from the philological investigations conducted by Otto Pöggeler.⁸ Although Pöggeler rejects many of the details of Haering's interpretation, he agrees with the general thesis that the *Phenomenology* is not a unified book. Pöggeler bases his case in large part upon the differences between the ways that Hegel characterizes the work in the Introduction (which was written before the book) and in the Preface (which was written afterward).

According to the patchwork thesis, the ordering of the contents of the Spirit chapter is not governed by the initial conception of the *Phenomenology* that structures the unfolding of the dialectic from Consciousness through Self-Consciousness and Reason. Proponents of this thesis therefore have the opportunity and the responsibility to give an account of the role that the Spirit chapter plays in the *Phenomenology*, to identify the principle that governs the ordering of its contents, and thereby to explain

⁶ Hyppolite, 327–329. ⁷ Haering (1929), 477 ff. ⁸ Pöggeler, (1973), 329–390.

the discrepancies between it and the overlapping sections of the *Philosophy of Right*. Species of the patchwork thesis can be distinguished in virtue of the particular role and ordering principle that they ascribe to the Spirit chapter.⁹

One of the first and most important species of the patchwork thesis claims that the Spirit chapter provides a history of the shapes of consciousness it presents, and that the ordering of these shapes in the book therefore corresponds to the chronology of their appearance in the world. George Lukács advanced this view, declaring that in the Spirit chapter we “find ourselves in the midst of history as it *actually* happened.”¹⁰ Charles Taylor later concurred, asserting in his comprehensive and influential study of Hegel’s system, that “Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology* is a summary version of the philosophy of history.”¹¹ Taylor acknowledges that “the *Phenomenology* has different aims than the philosophy of history,” and that there are discrepancies between the contents of the Spirit chapter and the corresponding sections of the *Encyclopedia*, but he nonetheless maintains that the former summarizes the latter.¹² Lukács’ view, in contrast, allows the discrepancies to be explained in virtue of the *Encyclopedia* providing an ideal reconstruction of the contents that the Spirit chapter presents in chronological order.

More recently, Michael Forster has introduced a complex variation on the historical species of the patchwork thesis. According to Forster, the *Phenomenology* presents not one but three distinct chronologies: the chapters from Consciousness through Reason trace the history of consciousness, the Spirit chapter traces the history of the social contexts within which the various shapes of consciousness have arisen, and the Religion and Absolute Knowing chapters trace the history of the attempts to express the nature of God that have emerged within these social contexts.¹³ Only the first of these chronologies, according to Forster, is essential to completing the official task of the *Phenomenology*, which is to serve as an introduction to the science of systematic philosophy.¹⁴ Hegel’s own scientific standpoint is achieved, according to Forster, at the end of the Reason chapter, which means that the chronologies presented in the Spirit through Absolute Knowing chapters make no contribution to the central project of the *Phenomenology*. In Forster’s view, the function of these chapters is to provide a “provisional presentation” of the corresponding sections of

⁹ The ongoing currency of the patchwork thesis is emphasized by Weisser-Lohmann (1998).

¹⁰ Lukács (1975), 486. ¹¹ Taylor (1975), 365. ¹² Taylor (1975), 172, 187.

¹³ Forster (1998), 299, 447. ¹⁴ Forster (1998), 11–12.

Hegel's *Encyclopedia*.¹⁵ Forster grants that there are discrepancies between the three chronologies that he discerns within the *Phenomenology*, as well as discrepancies between the Spirit chapter and the corresponding sections of the *Encyclopedia*, but he attributes these to lapses in Hegel's execution of the plan of the *Phenomenology*, and therefore does not regard them as undermining his interpretation.¹⁶

Discrepancies such as those acknowledged by Taylor and Forster do, however, pose a serious challenge to the historical species of the patchwork thesis. If the stages of the Spirit chapter of the *Phenomenology* are intended to parallel those of world history, and to provide a summary or provisional presentation of the corresponding sections of the *Encyclopedia*, then the fact that neither the parallel nor the correspondence is exact weakens the thesis. It is possible, as Forster suggests, that the thesis accurately characterizes intentions Hegel realized only imperfectly. But a more plausible explanation is that Hegel simply did not intend to organize the Spirit chapter chronologically.

George Kelly argued against the historical thesis shortly after the publication of Taylor's *Hegel*. Pointing out that "although the *Phenomenology* must necessarily use history to illustrate forms of consciousness, it is not to be inferred that the two genealogies are necessarily parallel," Kelly contends that "Hegel's conscious avoidance of proper names is the best clue to his design."¹⁷ Philip Kain rightly adds that the burden of proof rests upon those who advocate the chronological thesis to explain why Hegel uses the historical examples he does, in the order that he does, and omits other examples entirely. Rejecting the thesis, he reads Hegel as drawing freely upon historical examples to illustrate the shapes of consciousness that arise in the course of the *Phenomenology*. Kain notes that this is consistent with Hegel's practice in the *Philosophy of Right*, which is full of historical examples without being chronologically organized.¹⁸ These considerations suggest that the patchwork thesis will remain viable only if it can be separated from the claim that the organizing principle of the Spirit chapter is historical.

Robert Pippin has advocated the most important species of the patchwork thesis not explicitly committed to the view that the contents of the Spirit chapter are chronologically ordered. Pippin argues that the central task of the *Phenomenology* is completed by the end of the Self-Consciousness chapter, and that the Spirit chapter presents a series of forms of "unhappy consciousness," dissatisfied because they are unable to recognize the

¹⁵ Forster (1998), 123–4.

¹⁶ Forster (1998), 451–2.

¹⁷ Kelly (1978), 38.

¹⁸ Kain (2005), 192 ff.

rationality of the reality that confronts them.¹⁹ Pippin does not identify an ordering principle for the forms that appear in this series, and therefore his interpretation is not subject to being undermined by discrepancies between the order that it predicts (since it makes no prediction) and the order that actually obtains. This also means, however, that Pippin's interpretation does not offer an explanation of the differences between the ordering of the contents of the Spirit chapter and the ordering of the corresponding contents of the *Encyclopedia*.

Pippin's interpretation avoids the problems faced by the historical thesis, but it is still challenged by evidence and arguments that suggest the *Phenomenology* is not a patchwork at all. Merold Westphal, responding primarily to Pöggeler, points out that "even if Hegel did not have the entire plan for his book in mind when he began to write, it does not follow that the final product is a piece of patchwork."²⁰ Noting that many versions of the patchwork thesis regard the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* as emphasizing an epistemological project that is completed by the end of the Reason chapter, and the Preface as emphasizing a cultural project that begins with the Spirit chapter, Westphal contends that "Hegel himself rejects this interpretation, since the Preface clearly reaffirms the noetic concerns of the Introduction and develops many of them as well."²¹ Ludwig Siep also highlights the fact that the Preface, written after the *Phenomenology* was complete, refers to the entirety of the work as the science of the experience of consciousness, which suggests Hegel's considered view was that the Spirit chapter is of a piece with the rest of the book and does not initiate a fundamentally new project.²²

Stephen Houlgate adds that the *Science of Logic*, the first volume of which appeared five years after the *Phenomenology*, characterizes the earlier work as undertaking a single task that is not fulfilled until the dialectic is completed at the end of the book.²³ Hegel writes: "In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have exhibited consciousness in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object to absolute knowing. The path of this movement goes through every form of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and has the concept of science for its result."²⁴ Forster attempts to interpret passages like this one as being consistent with the patchwork thesis by claiming that "absolute knowing" emerges in the Reason chapter, and thus that the task Hegel describes is complete at that point in the text.²⁵ But Houlgate rightly insists that Forster's case for this

¹⁹ Pippin (1989), 166–167. ²⁰ Westphal (1998), 37. ²¹ Westphal (1998). ²² Siep (2000), 174.

²³ Houlgate (2005), 51. ²⁴ Hegel (WL), 42; (SL), 48. ²⁵ Forster (1998), 532.

interpretation is weak. It rests largely upon a fragment from an early draft of the *Phenomenology*, written in 1805, which states that “absolute knowing first emerges as lawgiving reason.”²⁶ As Houlgate points out, however:

Hegel’s claim in this fragment is quite compatible with his final position in the text as we know it. Absolute knowing may well *first* emerge as lawgiving reason, but it emerges *fully* only as philosophy, after spirit and religion have been discussed. In other words, absolute knowing makes its appearance gradually in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* . . . Hegel’s 1805 fragment provides no grounds for departing from the idea that Hegel originally intended his *Phenomenology* to have the very structure with which it ended up and to include chapters on consciousness, self-consciousness, reason, spirit, religion, *and* absolute knowing (or philosophy).²⁷

The patchwork thesis is also incompatible with Hegel’s insistence, in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, that the work not only leads to the standpoint of philosophical science, but is itself a scientific undertaking. Hegel describes the *Phenomenology* as “the *first* part of science,” and explains that science is characterized by the “necessary expansion of [a] content into an organic whole” (28–29, ¶34–35). This means, as Houlgate emphasizes, that “throughout the *Phenomenology*, even when – as in chapter 6 on ‘spirit’ – shapes do follow one another in roughly chronological order, the connection between the shapes is always one of logical necessity, rather than historical causality.”²⁸

Hegel’s own understanding, which is clearly and consistently expressed not only in the Introduction and Preface to the *Phenomenology*, but also in the *Science of Logic*, is thus that the *Phenomenology* executes a single scientific task, which begins with Consciousness and does not end until the chapter on Absolute Knowing. Of course, Hegel’s explicit understanding of the work may not accurately characterize what it accomplishes. Without further evidence to the contrary, however, we should regard the *Phenomenology* as a unified whole. The discrepancies between the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* on ethical life and morality must therefore be explained without resorting to the patchwork thesis.

2.3 Hegel changed his mind about terminology

Quentin Lauer rejects both the patchwork thesis and the view that Hegel changed his mind about the substance of ethical life and morality between

²⁶ Hoffmeister (1974), 353. Forster (1998), 532, 611. ²⁷ Houlgate (2005), 284, n. 155.

²⁸ Houlgate (2005), 61.

writing the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*. Instead, Lauer argues, the differences between the two works are primarily terminological:

Some confusion is introduced by the fact that in the *Phenomenology*, *Sittlichkeit* (ethical norms grounded in immemorial custom) is presented as preparatory to *Moralität* (ethical norms grounded in authentic moral reason), whereas in the *Philosophy of Right*, *Moralität* is presented as preparatory to *Sittlichkeit*. The meaning is simply not the same; there is an antecedent *Sittlichkeit* grounded in the not-thoroughly-rational customs of a people, and a consequent *Sittlichkeit* grounded in the integral, rational system of the state (however much one might want to dispute the “rationality” of Hegel’s “state”).²⁹

Lauer goes on to describe the *Sittlichkeit* treated in the *Philosophy of Right* as being of a “higher level” than that treated in the *Phenomenology*. What the two forms of *Sittlichkeit* have in common is their concern with “behavior based on norms provided by the general consciousness of the community.”³⁰ In the lower form of *Sittlichkeit*, treated in the *Phenomenology*, these norms are “simply ‘given’ – not questioned, disputed, rationally examined – whether as ‘divine law’, whose origins no one can trace, or as ‘human law’, which the community, so to speak, gives itself without reflection on its rational grounds, which are present only incognito.”³¹ *Moralität*, in both works, involves “a more sophisticated attitude of rational reflection either on traditional norms or on the demands of reason as such.”³² The higher form of *Sittlichkeit* treated in the *Philosophy of Right* is characterized by Lauer as a synthesis of lower *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*, which is “found in the rational laws of the truly rational community, the state.”³³

Lauer thus concludes that the apparent reordering of ethical life and morality between the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* is in fact merely apparent. Although the term “*Moralität*” has the same reference in both works, the term “*Sittlichkeit*” shifts its meaning in a way that produces the illusion of a substantive change in Hegel’s views. The truth, according to Lauer, is that Hegel never wavered from the view that immediate or unreflective ethical life is succeeded by moral reflection, which is in turn succeeded by reflective reconciliation with the ethical norms of the state.³⁴

Although Lauer is correct that the state is not treated in the *Phenomenology*, and that the term “*Sittlichkeit*” therefore has a wider extension in

²⁹ Lauer (1976), 15, 28. ³⁰ Lauer (1976), 180. ³¹ Lauer (1976).

³² Lauer (1976). ³³ Lauer (1976).

³⁴ Gabriel Amargual Coll has joined Lauer in arguing that Hegel’s use of the term “*Sittlichkeit*” changes significantly between 1807 and 1817, and that in the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Right* the term includes moral reflection, which is absent from the immediate form of ethical life discussed in the *Phenomenology*. Coll (2001), 197–203.

the *Philosophy of Right*, a more detailed examination of the constitutive moments of ethical life shows that this shift in terminology cannot account for all of the salient differences between the two works. Most importantly, the discussion of the family precedes the discussions of legal personhood and morality in the *Phenomenology*, but follows them in the *Philosophy of Right*. The family is a component of what Lauer refers to as the lower form of *Sittlichkeit*, and thus the two works differ on the crucial substantive issue of whether lower *Sittlichkeit* precedes or follows legal personhood and *Moralität*. Because Lauer nowhere suggests that Hegel modifies his usage of the terms “*Familie*,” “*Person*,” and “*Moralität*,” this difference cannot be accounted for by his terminological thesis and therefore requires an alternative explanation. An adequate interpretation of the Spirit chapter of the *Phenomenology* must explain, that is, why it begins with the immediate form of ethical life, rather than beginning with legal personhood or morality.

3 FROM REASON TO SPIRIT, ETHICAL LIFE, AND MORALITY

If the *Phenomenology* is, as Hegel claims it to be, a unified and logically necessary exposition of the whole truth implicit in the shape of consciousness with which it begins, then the explanation for the initial configuration of Spirit must be sought in the transition to it from the Reason chapter. This transition must lead to ethical life, rather than to legal personhood or morality, because ethical life proves to be the shape of consciousness immediately implicit in the shape of consciousness that Hegel calls “Reason.”

Consciousness in the shape of Reason is characterized, according to Hegel, by the “certainty that, in its particular individuality, it has being absolutely *in itself*, or is all reality” (131, ¶230). Put another way: “Reason . . . is certain that . . . its thinking is itself actuality, and thus its relationship to the latter is that of idealism” (132, ¶232). At the outset of the Reason chapter, however, consciousness “appears only as the *certainty* of that truth. Thus it merely *asserts* that it is all reality, but does not itself comprehend this” (133, ¶233).

Hegel regards this shape of consciousness as fundamentally Kantian. He describes its certainty of the identity between itself and actuality as the conviction that the categories that structure its thinking are the same categories that structure the world of its experience. Such consciousness also regards the application of these categories to be strictly limited,

however, to the world of its experience, which it distinguishes sharply from the world in-itself. “Consequently,” Hegel reasons, “reality directly comes to be for it a reality that is just as much *not* that of reason, while reason is at the same time supposed to be all reality” (137, ¶239). Hegel thus concludes: “the pure reason of this idealism . . . is involved in a direct contradiction” (137, ¶238).

The contradiction that defines reason is not fully resolved until Absolute Knowing, when consciousness finally learns, according to Hegel, that the distinction between the categories constitutive of thinking and the categories constitutive of actuality cannot justifiably be maintained. The first major step toward the resolution of this contradiction, however, is taken with the transition from reason to spirit.

“Reason is spirit,” Hegel says, “when its certainty of being all reality has been raised to truth, and it is conscious of itself as its own world, and of the world as itself” (238, ¶438). This awareness begins to emerge when:

the object, to which [self-consciousness] is positively related, is a self-consciousness. It is in the form of thinghood, i.e., it is *independent*; but it is certain that this independent object is for it not something alien, and thus knows that it is *in principle* recognized by the object. It is spirit which, in the duplication of its self-consciousness and in the independence of both, has the certainty of its unity with itself. (193, ¶347)

Spirit is thus distinguished from reason in virtue of recognizing its own rationality in the object that confronts it, which it is able to do when that object is another self-conscious and rational agent that reciprocally recognizes it. This is consistent with the famous anticipatory characterization of spirit provided by Hegel just prior to his discussion of lordship and bondage in the Self-Consciousness chapter: “Spirit is – this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (108, ¶177).

Consciousness in the form of spirit is thus, in contrast to consciousness in the form of reason, necessarily communal. This is to say that spiritual consciousness exists in and through ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*): “For this is nothing else than the absolute *unity* of the essence of individuals in their independent *actual existence* . . . This ethical *substance*, taken in its abstract universality, is only law in the form of *thought*; but it is no less immediately actual *self-consciousness*, or it is *custom* (*Sitte*)” (194, ¶349).

The immediate form of spirit is ethical life, therefore, because spiritual consciousness is subjectivity that is aware of its own essence as the universal substance it shares with other subjects, and this substance exists in the laws

and customary practices that constitute their community. The ethical life it enjoys with other members of the community thus enables the conscious subject to recognize its own reason in the world, which is what enables it to begin to overcome the contradiction that plagued merely rational consciousness: “When this reason which spirit *has* is instituted by spirit as reason that *exists*, or as reason that is *actual* in spirit and is its world, the spirit exists in its truth; it is spirit, the *ethical* essence that has an *actual* existence” (239, ¶440).

The remainder of the Spirit chapter articulates the implicit truth of the immediate form of ethical consciousness with which it begins. The account leads from ethical life, through culture, to morality, which provides the transition from Spirit to Religion. The details of this account are copious and complex, and in what follows I sketch only those that are essential to understanding the ordering of ethical life, legal personhood, and morality within the Spirit chapter.

In the first form of ethical life, according to Hegel, the individual consciousness locates its substance in the family and the nation to which it belongs, and therefore experiences its obligations to those communities as unquestionable duties. This unquestioning allegiance to both the family and the nation generates the contradiction endemic to this immediate form of ethical life. When conflicts between the obligations of family membership (which Hegel refers to as “divine”) and the obligations of citizenship (which Hegel refers to as “human”) arise:

[Self-consciousness] spontaneously splits itself into two. By this act it gives up the specific quality of ethical life, of being the simple certainty of immediate truth, and initiates the division of itself into itself as the active principle, and into the reality over against it, a reality which, for it, is negative . . . For as simple, ethical consciousness, it has turned towards one law, but turned its back on the other and violates the latter by its own deed. (254, ¶468)

The initial form of ethical consciousness thus cannot survive the inevitable conflicts between the two communities with which it immediately identifies. In response to such conflicts, the individual consciousness reflectively separates itself from these communities, establishing its own identity in distinction from them. The family and the nation no longer function, therefore, as the substance that unites their members: “The universal being thus split up into a mere multiplicity of individuals, this lifeless spirit is an equality, in which all count the same, i.e., as *persons*” (260, ¶477).

Because “personality . . . has stepped out of the life of the ethical substance” (261, ¶479), the individual consciousness now experiences the

commands issued by the family and the nation as the dictates of external authorities: “For what counts as absolute, essential being is self-consciousness as the sheer *empty unit* of the person. In contrast to this empty universality, substance has the form of *fullness* and *content*” (262, ¶480). “Legal personality thus learns,” Hegel concludes, “that it is without substance, since the alien content makes itself authoritative in it” (263, ¶482). With this development ethical life gives way to what Hegel calls “culture” or “self-alienated spirit.” For our purposes, it is the conclusion of the subsection on culture, which provides the transition to morality, that is relevant.

The final moment of culture is “Absolute Freedom and Terror,” in which the individual self-consciousness insists upon the destruction of every vestige of substantial authority that it experiences as the source of its alienation. At the end of this destructive process, “the sole object that will still exist . . . is the freedom and individuality of actual self-consciousness itself . . . an object that no longer has any content, possession, existence or outer extension, but is merely this knowledge of itself as an absolutely pure and free individual self” (319–320, ¶590). Such an individual is no longer alienated, because it no longer recognizes anything external to itself as having any substance or authority. The only source of authority it recognizes is *internal*, and with this transformation of consciousness “absolute freedom has . . . removed the antithesis between the universal and the individual will . . . [and] there has arisen the new shape of spirit, that of the moral spirit” (323, ¶595).

The moral individual, Hegel writes, “no longer places its *world* and its *ground* outside of itself, but lets everything fade into itself, and, as *conscience*, is spirit that is certain of itself” (240, ¶442). Because the subject locates objectivity within itself, “knowledge appears at last to have become completely identical with its truth” (323, ¶596). That Hegel mentions the continuing quest to establish this identity, which has defined the *Phenomenology* from its outset, is further evidence that the Spirit chapter is not an incidental appendage to the book but rather makes an essential contribution to its central project. Indeed, if the identity of the knowing subject and the objective truth were in fact established at the outset of morality, the *Phenomenology* would now be complete. But, Hegel continues, this apparent identity proves to be merely apparent, “because self-consciousness is essentially a mediation and negativity, [and] its concept [therefore] implies relation to an *otherness*” (325, ¶599). Moral consciousness, that is, defines itself in opposition to the world that it is *not*, which therefore continues to confront it as an independent and objective realm: “From this determination is developed a moral view of the world which

consists in the relation between the absoluteness of morality and the absoluteness of nature” (325, ¶600).

The identity of subject and object thus remains incomplete, and its completion is the practical project and obligation of the moral individual. This form of consciousness is again recognizably Kantian. Moral striving confronts the individual as an infinite task, which it can neither complete nor renounce: “The unity of duty and reality . . . becomes . . . a *beyond* of its reality, yet a beyond that ought to be actual” (331, ¶614).

Because the individual consciousness locates its morality in its rejection of alien authority, it locates its moral imperfection in its continuing susceptibility to external determination. The primary source of such externality is its own natural inclinations, and it therefore holds “that an essential moment in morality is that it should have a *negative*, and *only* a negative, relation to them” (338, ¶628). The injunction to ignore its own inclinations does not, however, provide the moral individual with a positive specification of its duties. The moral individual must generate such a specification for itself, without reference to either external norms or its own nature. It is therefore entirely reliant upon its own conscience to determine its duties: “It is as conscience that [self-consciousness] first has, in its *self-certainty*, a *content* for the previously empty duty . . . The *form* of that content is just . . . [the individual’s] knowing or his *own conviction*” (342, ¶633; 343, ¶637).

The individual consciousness expressly committed to the rectitude of its own conviction is recognizably Fichtean, reflecting Hegel’s belief that Fichte’s position is logically implicit in that of Kant. This form of consciousness proves to be contradictory in virtue of the fact that it claims to determine universally obligatory duties but does so by insisting on the absolute validity of its own particularity.

By collapsing the distinction between universality and particularity, between duty and its own conviction regarding duty, the moral individual makes itself capable of evil. The moral individual recognizes this capacity in others, just as they recognize this capacity in it: “Others . . . must take it to be evil. For just as *it* is free from the *specificity* of duty, and from duty as possessing an *intrinsic* being, so likewise are they” (350, ¶649).

The only reassurance these mutually suspicious individuals can offer each other is the public declaration of their sincere moral convictions (351–352, ¶653). Such public declarations of conviction cannot be questioned, because “to ask whether the assurance is true would presuppose that . . . what the individual self wills can be separated from duty . . . But this distinction between the universal consciousness and the individual self

is just what has been superseded, and the supersession of it *is* conscience” (352, ¶654).

Conscience thus proves to be, in Hegel’s view, a form of self-worship, in which the individual regards its own conviction as an infallible arbiter of truth, and therefore as divine. The individuals who publicly declare their shared moral convictions worship each other as members of a divine community (353, ¶656). These conscientious individuals who declare their morality in public are necessarily reluctant to act upon their convictions, however, for the imperfection of action contradicts their assertions of purity. Conscience thus “lives in dread of besmirching the splendor of its inner being by action and an existence,” and becomes what Hegel famously refers to as a “beautiful soul” (355, ¶658).

Morality is now expressly a matter of words, which stands in direct contradiction to the definitive obligation to actualize duty through action. The resolution of this contradiction demands forgiving those who act for the inevitable imperfection of their actions. But such forgiveness amounts to the renunciation of the moral individual’s insistence on the absolute right of its own conscience, in favor of a reconciliation with others that locates the truth in their union rather than in any one individual. With this transformation of consciousness morality gives way to religion and the Spirit chapter comes to an end.

4 A FOURTH INTERPRETATION OF ETHICAL LIFE, MORALITY, AND THE SPIRIT CHAPTER

The differences between the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* with respect to ethical life, legal personhood, and morality are best explained by the fact that both works are scientific and each work presents a science distinct from that presented by the other. Hegel describes the *Phenomenology*, in its Preface, as “the science of the experience which consciousness goes through” in coming to comprehend the true nature of knowing (29, ¶36). He describes the *Philosophy of Right*, in the opening sentence of its Introduction, as “*the philosophical science of right*,” the subject matter of which is “the *Idea of right* – the concept of right and its actualization.”³⁵ Hegel explains that “the precise location and point of departure” of this science is “the *will*,” and adds that “the will is *free*, so that freedom constitutes its substance and destiny and the system of right is the realm of actualized freedom.”³⁶ The *Philosophy of Right* thus presents an

³⁵ Hegel (*PR*), §1. ³⁶ Hegel (*PR*), §4.

ontology of free will: it develops an account of what objective freedom *is*, and this account is scientific in virtue of articulating all and only those determinations that are immanent in the concept of free will itself. The *Phenomenology*, in contrast, presents a phenomenology of consciousness: it develops an account of how consciousness *appears* to itself, and this account is scientific in virtue of articulating all and only those determinations that are immanent in the assumptions that consciousness initially makes. Ethical life, legal personhood, and morality appear in both of these accounts because these elements are essential to both objective freedom and the self-understanding of consciousness. The ordering and details of these elements differ in the two accounts, however, because what they *are* (as determined by the *Philosophy of Right*) is not identical to how they *appear* to consciousness (as determined by the *Phenomenology*).

Martin Busse offered the first important interpretation of this type in 1931, two years after Haering introduced the patchwork thesis. Busse attributes the different order of ethical life and morality in the two works to the fact that the *Philosophy of Right* achieves “speculative cognition” of these contents, whereas the *Phenomenology* presents only their “appearance.”³⁷ Busse emphasizes, in response to Rosenzweig, that this means that the differences between the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* need not indicate that Hegel changed his mind about any of the substantive issues at stake.³⁸

Stephen Houlgate has more recently characterized the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* as offering, respectively, phenomenological and philosophical accounts of the overlapping subject matter they treat.³⁹ The *Phenomenology* “is rigorously phenomenological,” according to Houlgate, “because it starts from the object as it is initially taken to be by consciousness itself – the object as it first *appears* to consciousness – and considers the transformation that this object undergoes in the further experience of it.”⁴⁰ The *Encyclopedia* is philosophical because it proceeds from the standpoint of “‘absolute knowing’ or philosophy,” reached only at the end of the *Phenomenology*, which recognizes that “no fundamental distinction can be

³⁷ Busse (1931), 100.

³⁸ Busse (1931), 101. Dean Moyar argues that the phenomenological and ontological accounts are not only compatible but also complementary, with each developing distinctive insights that must be combined to arrive at Hegel’s complete position on ethical theory. My own view is that because the *Phenomenology* presents the perspective of *consciousness*, none of the substantive positions it unfolds may be regarded as endorsed by Hegel, except to the extent that they are confirmed in the philosophical system with which he claims to articulate the absolute truth. Moyar (2004), 209–253.

³⁹ Houlgate (2005), 283, n. 109. ⁴⁰ Houlgate (2005), 55.

drawn in a genuinely presuppositionless logic between the determinations of thought and the determinations of being.”⁴¹ This means, Houlgate points out, that “the categories in the *Logic* must be ontological.”⁴² Furthermore, because Hegel holds that “the whole of philosophy genuinely forms one science,”⁴³ the philosophical accounts developed in the *Encyclopedia* must be understood to comprise a single, extended ontology: the *Logic* determines what it is to be; the *Philosophy of Nature* determines what it is to be natural; and the *Philosophy of Spirit* determines what it is to be spiritual. The *Philosophy of Right* contributes to the philosophy of spirit by determining in detail what it is to will freely.

The accounts offered in the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* differ not only with respect to their perspectives, but also with respect to their starting points. The *Philosophy of Right*, as the ontology of objective spirit, picks up where the ontology of subjective spirit leaves off, with the minimal conception of free will as the capacity to choose. It then attempts to make explicit all and only those determinations that are implicit in this conception, arguing that to will freely is to be a legal person, a moral subject, and an ethical member of various communities. The order in which legality, morality, and ethicality appear in the *Philosophy of Right* is determined by the specific limitations to the freedom of the will that are identified at each successive stage. Morality emerges as the resolution to the limit identified at the end of abstract right: the freedom of the legal person depends upon its rights being upheld, but this can be guaranteed only if persons are committed to willing right for its own sake, even when it conflicts with their particular interests; the upholding of rights depends, that is, upon legal persons also being moral subjects. Ethical life then emerges as the resolution to the limit identified at the end of morality: the moral agent is committed to willing universal right and well-being, but ultimately proves to have no resources for determining what these require other than the particular dictates of its own conscience; the commitment to universality depends, that is, upon moral agents also being ethical community members.

The *Phenomenology* begins with the minimal assumptions that consciousness makes about itself as a knowing subject. It then attempts to make explicit all and only those determinations that are implicit in these assumptions, articulating the truth about how knowing *appears* to consciousness. Ludwig Siep characterizes the *Phenomenology* as providing a “negative proof” that these assumptions, which Hegel explores but does

⁴¹ Houlgate (2005), 45. ⁴² Houlgate (2005), 45. ⁴³ Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §16, Remark.

not himself hold, are ultimately unsustainable.⁴⁴ The proof proceeds by revealing the precise way in which the assumptions that define each shape of consciousness are self-contradictory.⁴⁵ The need to overcome the revealed contradictions generates the specific revisions to the prevailing assumptions that then define the subsequent shape of consciousness.

The basic assumption with which the *Phenomenology* begins is that knowing is a relation between a conscious subject and the object of its knowledge. This relationship is initially characterized as one of “sense-certainty.” The development of the *Phenomenology* is driven by the realization that sense-certainty cannot in fact provide the knowledge that consciousness claims for itself. The relation is therefore incrementally recharacterized in order to remove the identified impediments to knowledge. This process leads consciousness to transform its self-understanding, so that it gradually comes to understand itself as being not merely conscious, but also self-conscious, rational, spiritual, religious, and philosophical. Hegel’s claim, then, is that implicit in the initial assumptions of consciousness itself is the view that knowing is a spiritual relation, which involves ethical, legal, and moral forms of selfhood. The order in which ethicality, legality, and morality appear in the *Phenomenology* is determined, as we observed in section 3, by the contradictions that become explicit at the end of the Reason chapter, the resolution of which depends upon the revised assumptions about itself that consciousness makes in the course of Spirit. Ethical life overcomes the limitation to knowing identified at the end of Reason, legal personhood overcomes the limitation to knowing identified in ethical life, and morality overcomes the limitation to knowing identified in culture.

It is now evident that the common assumption that ethical life and morality should bear the same relation to each other in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* rests upon an unwarranted abstraction from the different contexts in which the two works treat these themes. The different orderings of ethical life and morality are best explained by the fact that the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right* execute different projects. These projects develop different types of accounts (one phenomenological, the other ontological) of their subject matter, and commence from different starting points (the appearance of consciousness as sense-certainty in the one case, the concept of free will as the capacity to choose in the other). These differences between the two projects are sufficient to explain the altered ordering of ethical life and morality, which therefore need not

⁴⁴ Siep (2000), 75. ⁴⁵ Siep (2000), 77.

be explained by recourse to changes in Hegel's terminology, substantive views, or conception of the *Phenomenology*. Because these alternative interpretations are unnecessary to explain the facts in question, and are also subject to the challenges posed above, we should instead attribute the different treatments of ethical life and morality not to any inconsistency or failure on Hegel's part, but rather to his success in executing the two very different projects that are presented in the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*.

*Self-completing alienation: Hegel's argument
for transparent conditions of free agency*

Dean Moyar

Most people have a sense of what it is like to feel alienated. Yet alienation remains among the most elusive concepts in social and political theory. The range of the term in ordinary usage extends from simply referring to a vague feeling of discontent all the way to implying a Marxist conception of capitalist false consciousness. To be a philosophically productive concept, alienation cannot just refer to a merely subjective inner state over which the individual has sole authority. But “objective” theories are also problematic, for they assume a view of human nature, or full human potential, that any person can be alienated *from* (that would define true rather than false consciousness). An advantage of such an objective theory would be its ability to give quasi-verifiable criteria for predicating the “alienation” of an individual, given that individual’s activities, desires, etc. Yet the phenomenon of alienation is ineliminably first-personal. Even if an objective theory could arrive at a “correct” view of human nature, it could not account for an essential dimension of alienation. What we need is a framework for thinking of alienation that avoids the pitfalls of purely internal and purely external conceptions. We need a view that treats individuals as bearers of propositional attitudes and as discrete persons standing in determinate relations to public norms. Such a framework is provided by the concept of intentional action. Actions take place in contexts common to many individuals and, *qua intentional*, they cannot be reduced to mere behavior. An account of successful action and its social conditions can secure a contrasting account of alienation. The benefit of Hegel’s peculiar dialectical mode of argumentation, in which he builds up an account of action by depicting a process of overcoming alienation, is that he achieves a normative transparency that is grounded in practice and is thus justified within and for the agent perspective.

The section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* titled “Self-Alienated Spirit; Culture,” describes a set of historically specific social worlds in which individuals interact with each other in a series of conflicted normative

landscapes. The culture that Hegel portrays through the figure of Rameau's nephew from Diderot's famous dialogue gives way to the conflict of the Enlightenment with religion. This conflict ends with the triumph of the Enlightenment and is followed, finally, by the Absolute Freedom of the French Revolution. Understanding why this historical progression as a whole falls under the rubric of alienation can contribute to a deeper appreciation of the preconditions of contemporary political life and theory. While most liberal theories of political rationality are clear descendants of the victory of the Enlightenment, few of their adherents take the problem of alienation as seriously as Hegel does in the *Phenomenology*.¹ Contractarians, utilitarians, and rational choice theorists seldom deal with alienation. When they do, it is often just as a phenomenon to be avoided or ameliorated with the proper distribution of basic goods or the maximization of preference-satisfaction. But much of the experienced "depth" of political life – the sources of motivation for thinking that the pursuit of justice is indispensable to a good life – depends on the specter of alienation hovering over the individual in modern society. Hegel is, of course, well known as a theorist of reconciliation, and one should never ignore this positive goal of his thought. However, there is no *final* reconciliation for Hegel of the sort that would put an end to all difference and conflict. We can only think of ourselves as accomplishing the activity of reconciliation in so far as there is a possibility that we could fail, that we could become alienated. One of Hegel's points is that we know the value of successful rational norms only if we know the experiences of failure from which they were born. The harder point is that a society can be free only if the conditions for alienation remain present, for only under such conditions can we actively achieve and sustain freedom by incorporating the causes of conflict into our norms.

I proceed in five stages. First (section 1), I explain why alienation is such a central issue in the *Phenomenology* by examining some pivotal formulations in the Preface and Introduction. Second (section 2), I unfold a concept of alienation through a contrasting series of conditions of successful action. I thus present my conclusions first in order to provide a clear outline for reading the progression of Hegel's conceptual forms in the remaining three sections. Third (section 3), I turn to "Self-Alienated Spirit;

¹ Hegel does not dwell on alienation in the *Philosophy of Right*, though there is good reason to think from the student transcripts of his lecture courses that it remained an important issue for him. The Enlightenment theory that did take alienation seriously was, of course, Marxism. Marx's early inspiration came from the *Phenomenology*, and he cites Hegel's Rameau as the prototype for the alienated worker.

Culture,” where Hegel establishes the transparent social conditions for successful action by viewing the individual caught up in, and overcoming, normative conflict. Fourth (section 4), I read the Enlightenment’s conflict with religion as establishing a further form of transparency. Fifth and finally (section 5), I show how the move from the shape of utility to Absolute Freedom generates an explicitly political condition for non-alienated agency.

I

The importance of alienation for Hegel’s project comes out in the Preface,² where he inveighs against the “mere edification, and even dullness” of a philosophy of the mere “in-itself,” in which “otherness and alienation [*Entfremdung*], and the overcoming of alienation [*Entfremdung*], are not serious matters” (18, ¶19).³ Hegel writes in this passage that the essence becomes “for-itself” through the “self-movement of the form,” and that the essence can only be expressed as actual, as “subject,” in “the whole wealth of the developed form” (19, ¶19). With “self-movement of form,” Hegel is referring to a dialectical process in which self-consciousness undermines in a determinate manner its own claims to objectivity, thereby “producing” the further conditions of an increasingly comprehensive knowledge of the world. When Hegel invokes “the whole wealth of the developed form” as necessary for his project, he commits himself to showing not only that theoretical access to objectivity is grounded in self-consciousness (Chapters I–III), but also that this objectivity is realized in the actual world shaped through the concrete manifestations of self-consciousness (a process including not only Chapter IV, but also the accounts of Reason and Spirit in Chapters V and VI).⁴ Hegel sums up his alternative to foundationalist programs of grounding with the famous claim that the “The True is the whole” (19, ¶20). Only

² There is good reason to think that alienation became a primary concern only in the course of writing the *Phenomenology*, since the Introduction, written first, makes no mention of alienation. I cannot in this chapter address this complicated issue of a shift in plan, except to say that I would insist that even with such a shift the work retains its integrity. Alienation is a natural mode of the method of experience described in the Introduction.

³ In this chapter, I translate both *Entfremdung* and *Entäußerung* as “alienation.” Even though there are many places in the text where one should distinguish the two, for our purposes Hegel’s frequent interchangeable uses of the two terms are the only ones that matter. In quotations I will indicate in brackets which term is being translated.

⁴ There are many possible divisions of the *Phenomenology*, including the many different divisions that Hegel himself made. For my own division here, into two main sections followed by “Religion” and “Absolute Knowing,” I take my cue from Hegel’s recapitulation in the first eleven paragraphs of “Absolute Knowing.”

in the totality of the “developed form” reached at the end of the process is the truth of any of the parts secured. This process includes the basic desires and drives, the “science” of phrenology that allegedly measures one’s self-conscious activity in one’s skull, and extends to the ethical and political configurations of Roman right, French culture, and the morality of conscience. The goal is to redeem immediacy or substantiality by showing how self-conscious activity makes explicit what is contained in immediate claims to knowledge.

In the dialectical process of experience, alienation can be viewed as the moment of opposition to each new presumed shape of self-conscious unity. In the *Phenomenology*, the unity takes the shape of various forms of immediacy, including (at the outset of the Spirit chapter) the immediate ethical substance of the ancient Greeks. Alienation thus goes to the heart of the *Phenomenology*’s project of the development of substance into subject, of what is *in-itself* into what is *for-itself*. For clarity’s sake I will hazard definitions of these operators (and of *for-another*) up front. In unpacking these terms, I am advocating an inferentialist interpretation of Hegel’s method and logic that interprets his *holism* as defining content through broadly inferential relations between all the moments of the developed system.⁵

In-itself: An entity or a property X is in-itself in so far as X is conceived as having content or meaning apart from relations to other entities or characteristics.⁶

For-another: An entity or a property X is for-another in so far as X is conceived as having content or meaning through its relation to what is different from it.

⁵ This kind of interpretation has been brought to the fore by the work of Brandom (1994, 2000, 2002a, 2004). Though Brandom’s work has drawn renewed attention to Hegel from a broader philosophical audience, it has been received less favorably by Hegel scholars due to doubts about the actual fit of Brandom’s reading with Hegel’s texts and hesitancy about getting embroiled in the thickets of Brandom’s own semantics. I give here three main aspects that I endorse and that can serve to define such an inferentialist interpretation without getting into the most controversial theses and obscure details. Each is identifiable by contrast with a familiar philosophical approach: (1) Contrasted with representationalism, we can call the inferential approach *judgment-functional*. Content according to this view is first and foremost secured through the functional role of a term in possible judgments, or more generally through its role in reasoning. (2) Contrasted with formalism, there is a *pragmatic-expressive* dimension, which sets out from practice, from what we do with concepts, and views logic as making explicit the formal rules implicit in the ground-level inferences. (3) Contrasted with atomism and foundationalism, a commitment to *holism*, to a self-generated and (at least provisionally) complete system of relations in which terms are individuated through the relations in which they stand to other terms. For a sympathetic critique of Brandom’s interpretation, see Pippin (2005).

⁶ This formulation works least well when Hegel uses “in-itself” adverbially, as in his frequent comments that a transition has occurred “in-itself or for-us.” In that use (which Miller sets apart by translating it with “implicitly”) the contrast is simply with the transition occurring *for* the consciousness that “we” are observing.

The concepts of in-itself and for-another are direct opposites in that to be conceived purely as “in-itself” is to be conceived as excluding all “for-another” characterization.⁷ Hegel often uses “for-another” to indicate that the object can stand as a *relatum* but not what it is related to, since to be “for-another” does not necessarily mean that we know what that other is. In the case of “utility” things are for-another in so far as they are there to be used, but the questions “by whom?” and “for what?” have no fixed answers.

In the process of overcoming alienation, and in the *Phenomenology* as a whole, the dominant operator is “for-itself,” for this operator most directly expresses the subjectivity that Hegel aims to unite with substance. In an instructive discussion in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel writes that “for-itself” characterizes both consciousness and self-consciousness, but in different ways. Consciousness is a kind of “appearing,” or a “dualism” of “knowing external objects, on the one hand, and being-for-itself, on the other.” This for-itself of consciousness can be rendered in Kantian terms: the determinations of a manifold can be “taken up” by the subject, or unified in judgments in which all representations can be accompanied by “I think.” Hegel writes that “for-itself” also expresses self-consciousness, which is being for-itself “as *completed* and *posited*,”⁸ meaning that all its dimensions have become explicit. The following definition gives four aspects of the for-itself, all of which belong to this completed shape, though not all are included in each and every use of the term.

For-itself: An entity or a property X is for-itself in so far as X is conceived as possessing determinate content or meaning (1) through its relation to itself, (2) through relating itself to what is different from it, (3) in so far as what is different from it has become one of its own “moments,” and (4) in that it has made itself into a moment.⁹

“For-itself” can also be the opposite of “for-another,” because “for-another” lacks the aspect of self-relation. More specifically, it lacks the aspect of relation or difference that is “inner difference.”¹⁰

⁷ These are the two main moments of what Hegel calls *Dasein*. I will leave this term untranslated in this text, though the cumbersome “determinate being” does convey the basic meaning of an entity or a property that is defined in part by contrast with other entities or properties. See Quante (2004b), 39, n. 29.

⁸ Hegel (*Werke*), vol. 5, 175; (*SL*), 158.

⁹ The last, trickiest aspect, is essential to what distinguishes Hegelian self-consciousness from Fichtean self-consciousness. Fichte’s absolute principle of $I = I$ is self-consciousness as an absolute in-itself, whereas for Hegel such an abstraction is itself a moment. See the *Phenomenology*, 99–100, ¶162.

¹⁰ Hegel’s target for the “truth” is of course what he calls the *in-and-for-itself*. I cannot defend my interpretation of this terminology in this chapter, but I would claim that it requires only adding to the above definition of the “for-itself” the following: “and in so far as the relations to others that it

We are now in a position to understand how these terms are related to Hegel's more familiar epistemological description of the *Phenomenology* as a self-completing skepticism. This skepticism is directed against various versions of the "in-itself" as an authority resistant to the power of self-conscious activity, of the "for-itself." Such a skepticism is completed when every obstacle to such activity has disappeared. Of course, skepticism as traditionally understood raises issues about belief, not about action. Hegel's innovation with alienation is to make it the *operative figure of skepticism at the level of action*. The alienated self does act and yet is not committed to the rationality of the action. Such agents need not be skeptics about the justification of beliefs about the world, but in Hegel's telling they often are: the most alienated individual, Rameau, is a thorough skeptic about any intrinsic ethical value, and the Enlightenment takes a skeptical stand against religion.¹¹ In what follows, I emphasize the progressive dimension of this practical skepticism. A self-completing process of alienation would completely expose the normative field of action to self-consciousness, such that there remains no authority beyond what can stand in relations of reason-giving between individual agents. Something objective in-itself (e.g. the good, the noble, God, etc.) would be meaningful only in so far as it successfully functioned in reasons that free subjects could identify with and give to each other in a satisfying (i.e. mutual) manner.

In the method of experience that Hegel sets out in the Introduction, alienation can be seen as playing a distinctive role in the process that Hegel calls *determinate negation*. Such negation takes place in the breakdown of the authority of the in-itself, in a distinct kind of failure of truth that can serve as the positive basis for a new conceptual shape. The failed shape, before the transition to the new shape has occurred, is a state of alienation (in the first real stage of action in the *Phenomenology*, this is Faust's subjection to "the law of necessity") in which one has discovered that one is not who one took oneself to be. One's object, even oneself, has become only for-another, part of a relation over which one does not have authority.¹² What is different about "Self-Alienated Spirit; Culture," is that

contains as moments *exhaust* its determinations." The way to know whether the moments do "exhaust" the determinations is by situating X within a totality of relations, a whole in which nothing is left outside of the relations to count as a mere other to X.

¹¹ When Hegel introduces the Enlightenment, he actually mentions that skepticism is a "subordinate shape" compared to the Enlightenment as the cultural movement in which skepticism has penetrated the culture's self-understanding (293, ¶541).

¹² My claim is that this process of determinate negation begins with Reason B to have the explicit character of alienation in the sense that we use the term in social and political discourse. I am also claiming, though, that when Hegel uses the term in the Preface to refer to the process of the book as a

alienation is the norm, so each in-itself already comes with an opposing moment from the beginning (e.g. State power with wealth, faith with “pure insight”). Each moment of alienation from a purportedly natural or essential determination (of value, of social identity, etc.) sets the stage for a more ideal, more rational conception of action. These conditions become explicit one by one because alienation has been “taken seriously” as a determinate practical failure.

2

G. E. M. Anscombe’s account of action in *Intention* is a useful starting point for thinking about Hegel on alienation, for her goal is to shift the weight of what is “intentional” in action from describing some inner state of the agent to the performance of the action itself.¹³ Anscombe’s basic condition for an action counting as intentional is that a certain sense of the question “Why?” is applicable. In her account, the answer to the question will give one’s reasons for action, which will refer to one’s main purpose and those aspects of the purpose that make the action worth accomplishing. One might think that alienation is the condition in which Anscombe’s “certain sense” of the question “Why?” is denied application, but that would be wrong. With alienation the question “Why?” is not denied application, but the answers are unavailable or unsatisfying. Alienation is not like the cases of individuals knowing what they are doing only by observation that Anscombe discusses as denials of application.¹⁴ Alienation is in some sense always self-alienation, for one must be invested in one’s activity to be alienated from it, and that means that the question “Why?” is applicable.¹⁵ To put the point most generally, one is alienated when one recognizes the need to give reasons for one’s action, yet those reasons are either unavailable or fail to count as reasons.¹⁶ I can thus give a first, provisional formulation of alienation:

whole, he is inviting us to think of the breakdown of even the most basic forms of knowing (e.g. “sense-certainty”) as a kind of alienation. In the more basic cases of knowledge, this alienation takes the form, for instance, of not being able to say what one means (Hegel’s example at the end of “Sense-Certainty” is “this piece of paper,” which is already more “universal” than the speaker meant it to be).

¹³ Anscombe (2000), 9. For a systematic account of Hegel’s philosophy of action as presented in the *Philosophy of Right*, see Quante (2004b).

¹⁴ She writes of “the knowledge that one denies having if when asked e.g. ‘Why are you ringing that bell?’ one replies ‘Good heavens! I didn’t know *I* was ringing it!’” (2000), 51.

¹⁵ One can think of Marx’s conception of alienated labor as typical in this respect. For an excellent discussion of Hegel and Marx on action and alienation, see Bernstein (1971), Part I.

¹⁶ Though I consistently talk about reasons throughout this account, I do not mean to deny that alienation can often be described in terms of desires.

AI: An individual is alienated when he fails to be able to answer satisfactorily the question “Why” about his action, though the question is applicable.

With the generic “satisfactorily” I leave intentionally vague the success conditions of such an answer, of such reason-giving. The basic idea, which is what the subsequent conditions are in part working out, is that the agent must achieve an equilibrium of rationality with the other agents to whom the answers are given. The telos of action is thus what Hegel calls “mutual recognition.” Such recognition is not directed primarily to isolated attempts at reason-giving, but to the patterns of reason-giving that one gives across various contexts. One could still fail in reason-giving if one successfully answers the question in very different ways in different contexts, such that one regularly succeeds, but one fails “on the whole” because one is trying to maintain incompatible sets of reasons.

In identifying the further conditions of rational action from the dynamics of alienation, my account builds from the idea of merely intentional action towards the idea of autonomous action. In terms of Hegel’s narrative of shapes of Spirit, the space of *Bildung* lies between the realm of abstract Roman right and the post-revolutionary German moral worldview. It makes sense to think of the basic intentional action in **AI** as equivalent to abstract right. Such action is appropriate to the level of the “person,” the individual who can own property and who is competent to enter into contracts with others. What I am calling the transparent conditions of free agency are those conditions generated on the assumed basis of personhood, in which the arbitrariness of the cultural and political landscape created by merely formal right is progressively eliminated. These conditions achieve publicity and transparency through the process of determinate failure, an instance of Hegel’s overall pragmatic strategy in the *Phenomenology* of moving from concrete use to formal requirements. The process of self-alienation is the historical story of late medieval and early modern Europe as it progresses to the point at which the autonomous moral subject could become the basis for political citizenship. The conclusion of Hegel’s story, his account of the moral worldview and the action of conscience, is beyond the scope of this chapter, though in retrospect (at the conclusion of “Spirit”) it is revealed as the telos towards which the early stages have been working.¹⁷

In Hegel’s treatment of alienation, there is always a definite someone who asks the question “Why?,” and there is always a potential struggle over

¹⁷ I examine this telos in my *Hegel’s Conscience*, forthcoming.

whose (kinds of) reasons will win out. Hegel does not assume any fixed conception of “giving reasons” or of the “healthy human understanding” that would make one individual’s reasons automatically into reasons for another. The failure in being able to answer the question “Why?” can be a failure on the part of the speaker, but it can also be a failure on the part of the questioner. The questioner can fail to recognize the agent as free, not in the sense of incompatibilist positions in debates over free will, but in the sense of the capacity to be the source of reasons. In Hegel’s view this self-conscious agency did not exist for most of human history, and alienation could therefore not have been an issue. But in the early modern period that is Hegel’s focus in thematizing alienation, one’s judgment comes to count as decisive for establishing the meaning of one’s action. We can therefore add a certain condition **I1** to the scenario:

I1: The answer and the question presuppose that the agent affirms the reasons for action as dependent upon his own free judgment.

One may be able, for instance, to give reasons for the action, but if one is just reciting them, and is not *avowing* them, one would count as alienated.¹⁸

With this addition to our concept of alienation, the problem arises that we seem to have just pushed the “interiority” of alienation back one step, such that one’s “free judgment” is an ineffable addition to the stated reasons that one gives. It seems that the reasons given could be exactly the same in the cases of two different agents, yet one agent would be and one would not be alienated solely based on a quality that others cannot assess. The condition must be made explicit. We need to know how communication about the content of actions has authority as expressing free judgment. Ascriptive language must have acquired a certain publicly binding character such that one’s declared intention determines (provisionally) what an action is and expresses one’s self-imposed commitment to it. Anscombe made the point that only under certain descriptions of our actions are they done intentionally. Accepting this claim, we should stress that in the moral and political sphere the proper description of an action is often highly contested. We need a conception of language such that when one expresses one’s reasons in that language, there is an assumption that one knows that the language expresses the nature of the action for oneself and, presumptively, for other agents. This condition can be given in terms of transparency – nothing is held back in giving one’s reasons. The language just says what I meant in doing the deed, and others can assume

¹⁸ For a discussion linking avowal and intentional action, see Moran (2001), especially chapter Four.

that there is no gap between my declarations (the reasons I give to others as justifying) and my motivations (the reasons on which I actually act). This produces:

I2: The answer and the question presuppose that his language expresses his commitment to the transparency of those reasons in determining the action.

It is important to stress that just “what I intended” is not fixed once and for all by the agent’s initial formulation. The responses of others may alter the very nature of my action, but for the process of communication to succeed, for my reasons to be satisfying in Hegel’s sense of mutuality, **I2** must hold. Problems with language can come from systematic hypocrisy or from deficiencies in the moral grammar of the society (indeterminacy, ambiguity, insufficient complexity). Problems can also arise from misunderstanding the expressive character of language itself, which does not merely describe a certain set of events. In many cases (especially in the case of religion, as we shall see) the meaning of those events *as actions* is inseparable from the expressive language.

The account of alienation that I have given thus far is bound to strike many readers as terribly formal, and so it is. Something needs to be said about the content of one’s answers, about the kinds of reasons that one will give for one’s actions. When we act we typically have a purpose, an objective, that we are aiming to accomplish. The scope of alienation as a social problem stems from the many ways in which what one finds oneself doing and what one takes to be important to one’s life can come apart. We might give another success condition, then, for intentional action:

I3: The answer and the question presuppose that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent’s conception of a fulfilling life.

This addition remains rather formal, though it does exclude reasons of the sort that Hegel describes with the language of the mere “in-itself,” reasons that are beyond the potentially transformative capacities of self-conscious individuals. But the condition thus formulated is incomplete, for it allows success even in cases in which one is not fully in command of the rationality of the means, i.e. the specific actions that actually accomplish one’s ends. Thus, a few years ago in the USA one might have found someone in the mall buying some luxury cooking implements, who, when asked: “Why are you buying those?,” could have sincerely answered: “To support the war effort.” Being a good citizen is a central purpose in his life, yet one could claim that this reason-giving failed because he could not

tell a convincing story connecting the specific action to the final purpose that generated the decisive reason. A further deficiency of I_3 is that it is too subjective, for it does not place any objective constraint on what counts as a fulfilling life. We should leave the nature of a fulfilling life open, but not completely open, for a purpose must have some social standing for a claim of alienation to be warranted. We should therefore give I_3^* :

I_3^* : The answer and the question presuppose that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life, and the agent can provide a story connecting his specific actions in recognized social space to those core purposes.

Of course there are many such stories one could tell, and we should not be too quick to call someone alienated whose stopping-point in his reasoning is different from our own. We do not need to fully comprehend the significance of another's core purposes, but these purposes need to be comprehensible enough that actions in public space can be viewed as transparent to (i.e. as fulfilling) those purposes.

Taking all the previous conditions together with A_1 , we have:

A_2 : An individual is alienated when he fails to be able to answer satisfactorily the warranted question "Why" about his actions, where the answer and the question presuppose that he affirms the reasons for action as dependent upon his own free judgment, that his language expresses his commitment to the transparency of those reasons in determining the action, that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life, and the agent can provide a story connecting his specific actions in recognized social space to those core purposes.

Failure to meet any of the conditions (I_1 , I_2 , I_3^*) is sufficient for one to count as alienated. There are some puzzles that arise here, mostly having to do with first-person/third-person asymmetries, for alienation can be predicated of oneself and predicated of others. It seems that one could satisfy I_2 and I_3^* , for instance, yet not satisfy I_1 , and not even be aware that one is failing to satisfy I_1 . From the outside we might want to say that someone is alienated even though that agent himself feels no dissatisfaction.

Hegel's account of alienation does not begin as one might expect by taking as given something natural, or even rational, and then describing agents who diverge from that stable basis. Rather, he locates the social world's basic oppositional concepts as alienated from each other. Hegel writes that

the substance has developed moments that stand in opposition to one another, and that “Thinking fixes this difference in the most universal way through the absolute opposition of *good* and *bad*, which, shunning each other, cannot in any way become one and the same” (269, ¶491).¹⁹ Hegel claims that these concepts themselves are alienated, for their meaning can be secured only by reference to what they exclude, despite the fact that the opposites are supposed to “shun each other.” His overall point in tracing the fate of the original opposition of “good” and “bad” is that self-alienated individuals can arise only from within a culture whose moral grammar has already become problematic. Of course, subjects will become alienated in a more familiar sense through these concepts, as the value terms in their descriptions of their actions become unstable.

The first, naïve consciousness, identifies the good with the in-itself or unchangeable and the bad with the for-itself or transitory. The good is initially identified with State power, with selfless devotion to the State as the “absolute foundation and existence” (270, ¶494) of the deeds of the individuals. The bad is identified as wealth, which initially seems to be the principle of acting only for self-interest. The eventual result of Hegel’s analysis of the shapes of State power and wealth is that they each contain both moments, of being in-itself and being for-itself, and therefore can be taken as good or bad. Their status as *essentially* one or the other is doubtful, which creates the need for a new way to secure the proper descriptions of the social space and individual actions. The opposed value terms do not neatly inhere in institutional reality, so the individual is left to judge for himself which is good and which is bad. Hegel is describing here a kind of space of individual rationality that opened up in late medieval and early modern culture in which the individual came detached from a specific inherited set of social roles.²⁰ As such, “self-consciousness is the relation of its pure consciousness to its actuality, the thought essence to the objective essence; it is essentially *judgment*” (271, ¶495). We can think of this transition as granting a new authority to individual self-consciousness, thereby changing the character of intentional action and making what we call alienation possible. This transition, effected through the indeterminacy of how value terms identify features of social space, introduces what I called condition **II**.

¹⁹ Valuable commentaries on this section as a whole can be found in Pinkard (1994), Harris (1997), and Siep (2000).

²⁰ See Pinkard (1994), 154.

While the initial forms of judgment try to hold the line on identifying the State and wealth with the good and the bad, respectively, the result of introducing the figure of judgment is that two further oppositional categories arise, the noble and the ignoble. The characteristic action of the noble consciousness leaves an unredeemed particularity/interiority in the intention that leads to the next stage of alienation. While the noble individual should stand in a transparent relation to State power, he retains a “*particular for-itself*” (275, ¶506)²¹ that disrupts his relationship to State power. The problem is that although the “counsel” of the nobles seems to be for the “universal best,” there is always the suspicion that a “particular willing” (275, ¶506) is behind this advice. In terms of our concept of alienation, the individual’s language does not express a commitment to the transparency of the reasons he would give for his counsel.

The required alienation, the “true sacrificing of *being-for-self*,”²² occurs only in the language exemplified in the court of Louis XIV. Here, language comes on the scene in its “distinctive meaning,” and with it condition I2. Contrasting this new decisive shape of language with its earlier appearances, Hegel writes:

But here it has for its content the form itself, the form which language itself is, and is authoritative as *language*. For it is the *Dasein* of the pure self as self; in language, self-consciousness as *singularity being-for-itself*, comes as such into existence, so that it is *for others*. (276, ¶508)

The self-consciousness that became authoritative in judging good and bad now takes on *Dasein*, a determinacy that other subjects can assess directly, without the need to look behind what I am saying. The main initial point here is that my authority as a self-conscious judge is exhausted by what I can say, what moves I can make in our language game. This development is both a gain in the articulacy of our relation to others as well as a source of possible loss in the individual’s sense of self-sufficiency. Hegel continues:

Otherwise the “I,” this *pure* “I,” is not *there*; in every other expression it is sunken in an actuality, and is in a shape from which it can withdraw itself; it [the pure self] is reflected back into itself from its action, as well as from its physiognomic expression, and dissociates itself from such an insufficient existence, in which there is always at once too much as too little, letting such incomplete *Dasein* remain lifeless behind. Language, however, contains the self in its purity, language

²¹ This renders the unusual “*besonderes Fürsich*.” Miller translates this as “self-interest,” which captures the spirit of the claim but obscures its logical import.

²² In this remark Hegel is using “for-itself” in the sense of a kind of interiority that must be alienated in order that the individual “for-itself” can take on a certain public authority, as it does in the figure of Rameau (of who Hegel explicitly writes that he represents success in bringing State power under the control of the “for-itself”).

alone expresses the “I,” the “I” itself. This *Dasein* of the “I” is, as *Dasein*, an objectivity which has within it the true nature of the “I.” The “I” is *this* [particular] “I” – but equally the *universal* “I”; its appearance is also immediately the alienation [*Entäußerung*] and vanishing of *this* [particular] “I,” and as a result the “I” remains in its universality. (276, ¶508)

The “I,” the self-determining source of reasons, is inadequately expressed in any form other than language. Only in language is there a network of functional relations to match the self’s powers of inference. When Hegel writes that the objectivity of language has “the true nature of the ‘I,’” he is making a point about the I as an essential indexical, standing for me as an individual and as the universal I of any subject. Hegel extends the point about the use of “I” to the subject’s language in general. I speak in the first person, but what I say cannot simply represent my private opinion, my immediate particular intended meaning. My particularity is alienated, and the particularity vanishes, for what I say now exists in the common network of signification. Hegel concludes by describing language’s uptake:

The “I” that expresses itself is *perceived*; it is a contagion which has immediately passed over into unity with those for whom it is there, and is a universal self-consciousness. That it is *perceived* means that its *Dasein dies away*; this its otherness has been taken back into itself; and its *Dasein* is just this: that as a self-conscious *Now*, as it is there, *not* to be there, and through this vanishing to be there. This vanishing is thus itself immediately its abiding; it is its own knowing of itself, and its knowing itself as a self that has passed over into another self that has been perceived and is universal. (276, ¶508)

This language has the power of a “contagion” that makes a certain demand on its listeners, for they interpret themselves through the same language, and cannot help but take up new uses of words into their webs of meaning. Hegel’s description here also highlights the self’s dependence on those who are “infected,” who hear the words spoken. I know what I have said only through the mediation of my audience. My words are “taken back” by universal self-consciousness in the sense that we know what I have said as putatively counting as universal, as a reason. This is the transparency in condition I₂, the condition that establishes the connection between my actions and what I can say about them.

Language is a form of interaction that is especially suited to Hegel’s goal of achieving symmetrical relations between subjects,²³ but that also opens up new possibilities of alienation. The “heroism of flattery” (278, ¶511), as

²³ The language of action is only completed as mutual recognition in the course of “Conscience, the Beautiful Soul, Evil and its Forgiveness.”

Hegel calls the French court culture, sets the stage for the discussion of Rameau, who is *the* representative figure of the world of culture.²⁴ He might seem to illustrate the deficiencies of language rather than language's importance, for Rameau's chief characteristics are his witty speech and his lack of commitment to anything. But we must keep in mind Hegel's method. He is showing how the concept of language takes over the normative field, becomes the only thing that matters. In that move to an extreme the concept breaks down and the next condition is born.

The unlikely agreement of Hegel's method with Rameau's madness comes out in Hegel's advocacy of Rameau against the philosopher in Diderot's dialogue. This contrast reads very much like the contrast in the Preface between Hegel's method and the Schellingean idealism that he compares to the night in which all cows are black, the form as in-itself or absolute intuition that has not taken alienation seriously. Here, though, the comparison is expressed in terms of language. The honest consciousness is *monosyllabic*, always referring to the simple noble and good (i.e. to the in-itself). In his honesty, he is a foundationalist who would assert his "basic beliefs" as the ground of ethics. Though Rameau only has his personality at the table of the rich, he manages to be "for himself" even in this humiliated position, for he has mastered all the different moves in the language (all the different moments) and is aware that he can recombine them almost at will. In his hilarious and shocking speech he takes to the extreme the insight that mastery of the language includes the ability to formulate novel sentences. Against the monosyllabic view, Hegel writes that one cannot demand of Rameau that "reason that has reached the spiritual cultured consciousness should give up the widespread wealth of its moments" (285, ¶524). It is striking that Hegel refers to Rameau as reason, and as spiritual, while Diderot's philosopher is without spirit, *geistlos* (Hegel also remarks that "the Concept is the ruling element" (283, ¶521) in Rameau by contrast with the merely honest consciousness). This claim makes sense only on an inferential interpretation of Hegel's project. If content is secured through the functional relations of the "moments" that consciousness commands, it follows that the agent who has maximum mastery of the possible moves in social space comes closest to the concretely rational, and that the agent who has only a limited vocabulary hardly has any meaning at all.²⁵ Rameau is fully aware of his power and his alienation, for he is "confusion transparent

²⁴ For fuller discussions of this section, see Price (1998) and Speight (2001).

²⁵ This also makes sense of the odd claim that Rameau "knows better than each what each is, no matter what its specific nature is [es weiß besser, was jedes ist, als es ist, es sei bestimmt wie es wolle]" (286, ¶526).

to itself" (284, ¶523). He represents a completed form of the "for-itself," expressing all four of the features I outlined in section 1. In his self-transparency, and in his recognition that all is vain, even (or especially) himself, he makes his own subjectivity into a moment and implicitly accomplishes the transition to the next stage.

4

Though Rameau has a wealth of material at his disposal, his activity remains in a certain sense merely formal, for there is no stable content that could anchor the truth of anything he says or does. He has the purposes of pursuing power and wealth, yet he is aware that these are vain pursuits and he borders on the sheer nihilism of valuelessness. The subsequent shapes of "pure insight" and faith arrive as a pair of forms of pure thought, a retreat from the contingencies of culture to the truth of standards beyond money and power. These two shapes both attempt to re-establish stability in the objective world (in terms of I₃, of what could underwrite a fulfilling life), though they are initially opposed to, alienated from, each other.²⁶ In portraying the confrontation of the Enlightenment with religious faith, Hegel accomplishes three main conceptual shifts. He (1) corrects the initially one-sided view of Enlightenment rationalism that the language of action is theoretical or observational, rather than practical or expressive, he (2) overcomes any further imagined "pure in-itself," and he (3) derives a conception of utility that establishes a new standard for non-alienated action.

The dominant theme of the Enlightenment attack on faith is that a class of priests has intentionally deceived the mass of people into accepting false beliefs in God, the afterlife, etc. One of the most striking aspects of this text is that Hegel objects to the kind of alienation that the Enlightenment attributes to the people.

The Enlightenment talks about this as if by some hocus-pocus of conjuring priests, something absolutely *alien* and "*other*" to consciousness had been foisted on it as its own essence . . . How are delusion and deception to take place where consciousness in its truth has directly the *certainty of itself*; where in its object it possesses *its own self*, since it just as much finds as produces itself in it? . . . in the knowledge of

²⁶ Jon Stewart (2000), 332 ff., claims that the structure of "Lordship and Bondage" is replayed in the conflict of Faith and the Enlightenment. I do not see any evidence for this claim, though I do see evidence for such a replay in the relation of Rameau to the rich.

the essence in which consciousness has the immediate *certainty of itself*, the idea of delusion is quite out of the question. (298–299, ¶1550)

Hegel criticizes here a certain use of the concept of alienation that he himself had employed in some of his earliest writings.²⁷ He calls the Enlightenment “completely foolish” in this regard because it admits that all the possible criteria for truly identifying with something as one’s essence are met in the case of religion, yet it claims that the people are alienated nonetheless.²⁸ Hegel is not saying that anything one believes with certainty is immune to error. He stresses that in religion consciousness finds itself *and produces* itself through action.²⁹ The faithful’s relation to the religious essence (i.e. God) is not that of a knower making an ordinary theoretical claim about what exists. It is more like a practical claim about the description under which my action is intentional. Such a description, affirmed by a religious community, expresses (less sympathetically, “projects”) the divine object that the faithful take to be the essence. How would one, from the outside, assess the success conditions of religious action? If I eat a certain piece of bread and take a sip of wine, and you ask me “Why?,” the answers I might give (e.g. “to save my soul”) are hardly assessable with the concepts of, say, natural science.

Hegel specifies this problem, and gives an indication of how religion itself can be complicit in this falsely ascribed alienation, in discussing the “ground” of religious belief. The Enlightenment argues for the absurdity of religion by “scientifically” examining the sources of religious revelation. It “falsely charges religious belief with basing its certainty on some *particular historical evidences*,” claiming “that its certainty rests on the accidental *preservation* of these evidences” (300–301, ¶1554). In religious practice, relying on evidence that can be evaluated from a theoretical, observational point of view would mean abstracting one’s devotional practice from its

²⁷ Hegel’s “The Positivity of the Christian Religion” from 1795–6 reads much like the Enlightenment attack on faith that he describes here. In the 1800 text that is supposed to be a reworking of the original, Hegel begins by criticizing his own rationalist conception of positivity as too simplistic. Between these texts Hegel underwent one of his most decisive shifts in thought through his interactions with Hölderlin in Frankfurt.

²⁸ Recent work in political theory has returned to Hegel’s theme here, pointing out the limitations and overly satisfied self-image of Enlightenment secularism. See Connolly (1999).

²⁹ Summarizing his own, peculiarly Protestant conception of what religion truly is, Hegel writes: “But the absolute essence of faith is essentially not the *abstract* essence that would exist beyond the consciousness of the believer; on the contrary, it is the Spirit of the community, the unity of the abstract essence and self-consciousness” (298, ¶1549). I cannot discuss here the very difficult question of how Hegel thought he could preserve a religion (as a shape of “Absolute Spirit”) that is reconciled with a political order that does not invoke religion in its justifications. It is this latter limitation, and not the elimination of religion altogether, that is Hegel’s aim in “Self-Alienated Spirit; Culture.”

distinctive character as a kind of action. The interpretation of religion by the Enlightenment can produce a kind of self-alienation by corrupting the “unsophisticated relation” of faith to the “absolute object.” Hegel thus considers the attitude of faith that “seriously thinks and acts as if those evidences were a matter of importance,” and he asserts that such a faith would merely demonstrate that “it has already let itself be seduced by the Enlightenment” (301, ¶554). The whole appeal to evidence is a misunderstanding of faith. The Enlightenment assumes that its question “Why?” must be answered in a certain way, a way that faith cannot answer and remain the distinctive practice that it is.

The victory of the Enlightenment over faith brings out the difference of I_3 and I_3^* , of one’s ultimate purposes and the specific actions taken to reach them. Hegel claims that the downfall of Christianity as the dominant cultural form results from its attempt to have a “separate housekeeping” (310, ¶572) for the divine and the profane. Faith is alienated, and must fall to the Enlightenment, because it cannot avoid answering the question “Why?” from two different perspectives in mutually incompatible ways. Even if one grants religion the use of ordinary objects (bread, wine) for sacraments, and grants the traditional stories that connect these rituals to the “absolute essence,” there remains a way that the justification of action breaks down. One’s worldly actions will have their set of ends (e.g. accumulating property) and devotional practice will have a different set of ends (e.g. getting closer to God). The Enlightenment merely brings these two sides together, showing their inconsistency. The shape of faith can satisfy I_3 , but not I_3^* , for at some point the mutually incompatible ends disrupt the stories one must be able to tell about how one’s specific actions contribute to one’s overall ends.

Following the defeat of faith, the kingdom of heaven will have been “ransacked” (310, ¶573), its goods brought down to earth in the victory of Enlightenment rationality. Hegel interprets the Enlightenment as a kind of radical empiricism that returns to the level of “Sense-Certainty” with the conviction that the immediate individual consciousness and the sensible world are absolute (303, ¶558). The initial overcoming of alienation is effected through the Enlightenment’s mode of relating individual consciousness to the “absolute essence,” which it conceives as that which has no predicates (as the vacuum of the materialists). Because there is no determinacy to the absolute essence, the value of things in this world is simply up to the self-conscious individual. Things can be taken as we “need,” either as in-itself or for-others. To be both of these simultaneously, to be an immediate determination with value and yet to be so only in relation to

others, is to be something *useful*. Hegel sums up the attitude of this Enlightenment in writing that: “As he immediately is, as a natural consciousness *per se*, man is *good*, as an individual he is *absolute* and all else exists for him.” The individual can think of himself “as one who has come from the hand of God, walking the earth as in a garden planted for him” (304, ¶560). This is a kind of naturalism in which material objects are defined through their uses for us, and in which we ourselves are “universally useful members of the group” (305, ¶560) in which we use others and are used in turn.

But in this first conception of utility, the Enlightenment remains alienated in a familiar sense that Hegel associates with early romanticism. The Enlightenment wins the contest with religion but it is not yet satisfied, for it is “only individual,” and “what speaks to Spirit is only a reality without any substance, and a finitude forsaken by Spirit” (310, ¶573). The rationality characteristic of this phase of the Enlightenment is atomistic, both because the individual knower is the basic bearer of truth, and because individual representations are taken as basic building blocks of knowledge. But in that “its truth is only an empty beyond” (310, ¶573) there arises a longing for something more, for a genuine core purpose to give meaning to its particular acts. The Enlightenment thus has what we might call a romantic reflex, a longing for what it has overcome. The only “*fulfilled object*,” the only object with determinate content, is the “*lack of selfhood of the useful*” (311, ¶573). In principle, everything objective now stands as a possible means to accomplish my purpose, so in answering questions about my purposes I describe the world only as it presents itself for my use. What is missing here are those characteristics that make the purposes worth pursuing in the first place, that give my objectives meaning beyond my mere enjoyment.

5

The Enlightenment decisively overcomes alienation when it realizes that the very idea of purposes beyond the ordinary is unnecessary. If there is no “absolute emptiness” with which to contrast the finite sensible world, there is no cause for alienation, no reason for the useful to remain lacking in selfhood. Hegel writes:

This distinguishing of the moments leaves their unmoved [unity] behind as the empty husk of pure *being*, which is no longer actual thought, no longer has any life within it; for this process of differentiation is, *qua* difference, all the content. This

process, however, which posits itself *outside* of that *unity*, is an alternation – an alternation which *does not return into itself*, of being-*in-itself*, of being-*for-an-other*, and of being-*for-itself* – it is actuality as object for the actual consciousness of pure insight – *Utility*. (314, ¶579)

The realization is that pure being is a superfluous “empty husk” that no longer has any life within it. To say that the process as difference is “all the content” is to realize that no transcendent purposes actually contribute anything to our reasons, and that our core purpose can be utility itself. In terms of I_3^* , this version of utility is the realization that there is no fulfillment outside of the ordinary purposes themselves, so there is no cause for disparity between one’s purposes and the available stock of reasons. In terms of the achieved objectivity that Hegel will summarize in Absolute Knowing, utility is such an important stage because “self-consciousness sees right into the object, and this insight contains the *true* essence of the object (which is to be seen through or to be *for another*)” (316, ¶518). This claim occurs in a summary in which Hegel describes utility as uniting the being-*for-itself* of Rameau and the being-*in-itself* of faith. It is a conclusion that is both momentous and deflationary. He writes, “*truth* as well as presence and *actuality* are united. The two worlds are reconciled and heaven is transplanted to earth below” (316, ¶518). Being-*in-itself* becomes being-*for-another* through a conceptual move that ultimately plays out in the transition to Absolute Freedom: the in-itself is converted to intersubjective validity, to what others accept as transparent reasons.

In the transition to Absolute Freedom, Hegel notes that this conversion has already implicitly happened, for self-consciousness itself has become the essence of the objects, so that there is no objectivity besides other self-consciousnesses. What remains of objectivity is only an “empty semblance,” since the being-*in-itself* of the objective world has already become a passive being-*for-another*. Hegel indicates the radical intersubjective implication of utility in writing that pure insight is now “the pure concept, the looking of the self into the self, the absolute seeing *of itself* doubled; the certainty of itself is the universal subject and its knowing concept [*wissender Begriff*] the essence of all actuality” (317, ¶583). Because self-consciousness is now all of reality, it is not stuck at the level of “mere intention” or representation, with a separate objectivity over against itself. The payoff of utility’s radical secularizing of the world is that agency is compelled to become political. It becomes the “universal self,” the “real universal willing” (317, ¶584) in which the individuals act as the whole and the whole acts through the individuals.

Hegel’s move to Absolute Freedom shows that a concept of alienation needs to include an explicit political dimension. The conditions in **A2** do

not require one's actions to go beyond the level of instrumental rationality, and do not say how we are to consider other agents beyond ascribing to them a capacity for free choice, language use, and the ability to set and pursue ends. All of this is consonant with the worldview that Hegel describes under the rubric of utility. The result of overcoming "the form of objectivity of the useful" (316, ¶582) is a substantive claim of freedom, such that alienation is overcome only in a polity governed by the general will. If one reads the conditions in A2 in a strong enough manner, one could be led to this conclusion, for the heart of A2 is a certain relation of mutual dependence between the agents giving reasons to one another. One could argue that reason-giving functions symmetrically only if we all depend on a general will that bars inequalities in power relations. That is, one could be led to Rousseau's attack on the bourgeois as alienated and to his proposed moral-political solution. We could then add a new condition:

I4: The question and the answer presuppose a polity in which the general will is the dominant normative principle, such that an agent's reasons refer to purposes that are the purposes of every agent.

As it stands, and as Hegel's portrayal of the logic of the Reign of Terror makes clear, this condition is much too strong. The primary problem is that I4 takes the relationship of mutual dependence too simplistically. In Hegel's terminology, the general will works only with the categories of individuality and universality, which it attempts to get into an immediately symmetrical relation. There can be no positive action under this condition, which purchases lack of alienation only at the price of all "deeds and work of *willing freedom*" (318–319, ¶588).³⁰ The State and the citizen could have the abstract intention of acting according to the general will, but this objective is carried out, becomes a realized intention, only when specific means are taken to accomplish it, and the particularity of those specific means will contradict the desired purity. Can we read Hegel as advocating a different condition for overcoming alienation?

A more moderate version of overcoming dependence is suggested by Hegel's remarks on how freedom could regain embodiment (318–319, ¶588). The goal would be an institutional rationality in which particular individuals are like "branches" of the universal whole. Hegel's organic

³⁰ 388, ¶588. Alienation is one of the main motivating foils in the account of social freedom given by Frederick Neuhauser (2000). One of Neuhauser's most remarkable claims is that Rousseau, properly understood, offers resources consistent with Hegel's own theory of freedom.

metaphor need not be read as a top-down endorsement of an absolutist State. It could become:

I4*: The answer and the question presupposes that the individual is a citizen of a sovereign State governed by constitutional law and containing many intermediate institutions, such that an agent's reasons refer to purposes that can be nested within more and more inclusive institutional purposes.

The notion of nested purposes is a version of the issue separating **I3** and **I3***, since nesting one's actions is to tell a story connecting your specific actions to larger purposes. The point in this formulation is that such nesting relations can be embodied in institutional structures in a transparent manner. We can think of these structures as defined through overall purposes, each of which is characterized by certain patterns of inference that are themselves related to each other in various complicated ways.³¹ Adding this condition to **A2**, we arrive at a final formulation of the concept of alienation with the four conditions:

A3: An individual is alienated when he fails to be able to answer satisfactorily the warranted question "Why" about his actions, where the answer and the question presuppose (1) that he affirms the reasons for action as dependent upon his own free judgment, (2) that his language expresses his commitment to the transparency of those reasons in determining the action, (3) that the authority of the reasons depends on their referring to the core purposes of the agent's conception of a fulfilling life and the agent can provide a story connecting his specific actions in recognized social space to those core purposes, and (4) that the individual is a citizen of a sovereign State governed by constitutional law and containing many intermediate institutions, such that an agent's reasons refer to purposes that can be nested within broader, more inclusive institutional purposes.

Hegel has thus delivered a workable general concept of alienation. The fine structure of alienation, which would give the ways in which reasoning actually breaks down, can be worked out only within the specific contexts of action. The criteria for alienation are necessarily loose, for much of the question of failing to answer "satisfactorily" will depend upon how specific social conditions are actually experienced by the individuals acting under them.

My final condition (**I4***) suggests that some individuals, by the very fact of living under certain political conditions, will count as alienated. I think

³¹ To make a long story short, I read the final stage of "Spirit," what Hegel calls "Spirit that is Certain of itself. Morality," as developing the conception of moral agency that can underwrite such an institutional structure. That is, only as agents fulfilling the concept of conscience can we sustain a political order defined by freedom and yet (unlike the failed revolutionary governments) articulated into separate and mutually reinforcing parts.

that suggestion is right, for we need some basic “external” criteria for freedom and alienation, and some objective sense of alienation that we can attribute to others. What should give us pause is that Hegel’s political condition is one which encourages people to develop their own interests and views. This is the nature of modern Civil Society, the realm of rational ethical life (presented in the *Philosophy of Right*) that corresponds most closely with the *Phenomenology*’s realm of *Bildung*. Hegel did not imagine a tranquil society in which everyone agrees on what counts as a reason and as a fulfilling life. Such issues are inevitably contested in many areas, and in a pluralistic society many questions will not have a unitary answer. Does that mean that everyone fails at reason-giving, and that we are all alienated? No, the lesson is rather that a rational social order must be able to incorporate the differences between individuals and groups that make alienation an ongoing possibility. What Hegel’s reconstructed historical account has established are the terms under which alienation is not a corrosive force that undermines the very principles of freedom. Rameau embodied a certain kind of failure of French aristocratic society, for his alienation reflected the basic injustice and irrationality of the economic and political institutions. The French Revolution, too, however, was a failure, namely a failure to understand that alienation is not simply an enemy to be stamped out, but rather the very background tension that maintains modern societies in their imperfect freedom. There is cause today to believe that only in a society that has stopped asking for reasons could the possibility of alienation disappear.

*Practical reason and spirit in Hegel's
Phenomenology of Spirit*

Ludwig Siep

I THE CONCEPT OF SPIRIT AND ITS HISTORICAL ORIGIN

The characteristic concept which distinguishes Hegel from the rest of modern age philosophy is that of "spirit." Modern philosophy since Descartes and Hobbes has been a philosophy of reason and subjectivity. Of course, there have been tendencies to radically criticize reason and subjectivity in modern philosophy as well: From Nietzsche to existentialism, critical theory in its early phase and the so-called "post-modern" philosophy. But in general "Reason" and "Rationality" are approved of as crucial and positive concepts and values in the science and philosophy, politics, and economics of modern times.

Hegel does not belong to the camp of the critics of reason. He even defends "understanding" (*Verstand*) against the philosophy, literature, and theology of immediacy, feeling, and faith. But understanding and reason are steps on a scale with reason on top. It is Hegel's message to the age of reason and enlightenment that reason must be transformed into spirit. It is the task of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to prove that it is a fundamental misjudgment to take reason as the highest human faculty, the fundament of moral and legal action, and the goal of history.

The *Phenomenology* attributes the concept of spirit to the "modern age and its religion" (22, ¶25). As often in Hegel's writings, "modern age" is here used in the sense of the "*querelle des anciens et des modernes*" as following the Greco-Roman era. The religion of this era is, of course, Christianity, and the philosophy which underlies its development is Neo-platonism. This had been Hegel's view since the Frankfurt writings. But Hegel understands the Neo-platonic concept of "*nous*" in a rather Aristotelian way as "thinking of thinking" (*Denken des Denkens*) beyond the difference of subject and object.¹

For corrections of my English I am grateful to Franziska Quabeck and Dean Mojar.

¹ Cf. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (*Werke* 19, 463). Regarding Hegel's reception of Neo-Platonism cf. Halfwassen (1999).

However, not only Christian theology and its Hellenistic background belong to the sources of Hegel's concept of spirit. Among them are his interpretation of Greek ethical life and Herder's concept of the "spirit of a people" (*Volksgeist*), as becomes apparent particularly in the *Phenomenology*. It is true that even at the height of his enthusiasm for Greek culture in the mid-1790s Hegel is convinced that the harmonic unity of individual and polis, humans and gods characterizing the "beautiful ethical life," has vanished beyond return.² And in the second part of the Jena period it is one of his basic convictions that the "modern" – now in the sense of both Christian and modern age – principles of the "absolute being-in-itself" of the human individual or the "knowing itself to be absolute" of the singular being are higher than the Greek self-understanding.³ "Higher," however, does not mean more complete or inclusive since it is precisely the one-sidedness of the modern principle which is responsible for the self-alienation and the divisions of the present era. The overcoming of these divisions is, according to the well-known programme of the "*Differenzschrift*," the task of philosophy.

The highest expression of the modern principle is according to Hegel the Kantian philosophy, since Fichte, Schelling, and romanticism are in his view only further developments of the same. Kantianism, however, is a philosophy of reason, of theoretical as well as practical reason. Overcoming the one-sidedness of this philosophy and culture demands a transformed appropriation of the Greek concept of ethical life. Thus it is not in a discussion of Greek and Kantian philosophy that the *Phenomenology* tries to prove that "spirit" is the higher synthesis of Greek ethical life, of art and religion on the one side and the modern concepts of self-consciousness on the other. Instead, it is the process of experience within the forms [*Gestalten*] of ethical life, morality, cultural formation [*Bildung*], and religion that serves this purpose.

Hegel's discussion of Kant's moral philosophy takes place in the second part of the Reason chapter. Practical reason lacks "actuality," because the moral law, according to Hegel, is not self-differentiating and self-realizing in action. The third section of the Spirit chapter returns to Kant's moral philosophy and discusses his moral theology. In Hegel's interpretation, reason according to this doctrine postulates the correspondence between nature and morality guaranteed by absolute subjectivity (the moral idea of God). For Hegel, however, the postulates contain contradictions on various levels: on the epistemic level of postulating, on the level of motivation

² Cf. the Bern elaboration of the fragments on "Volksreligion und Christentum" (1795–7), *Werke* I, 204 ff.

³ Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (1805–6), *GW*, 8: 263.

(a purely moral motivation based on the highest good's reference to happiness), and within the idea of moral self-formation as a perpetual approach to an unattainable end. Fichte had already tried to overcome these difficulties with his concept of an immediate reality of moral action within the divine moral order, on the one hand and his conception of conscience as self-concretization of morality on the other.⁴ The latter is, according to Hegel, further developed in Jacobi's, Novalis', and Schlegel's concept of conscience.⁵ In these conceptions the modern principle of the individual's "being-in-itself" (*Insichsein*) reaches its highest peak. But the primacy of conscience is unable to guarantee a balance between the claims of the moral judgment of the "sovereign" individual and the requirements of a justifiable common morality. Surprisingly, with the reconciliation of these two claims at the end of the Spirit chapter we already reach a level of mutual recognition which according to Hegel corresponds to the structure of absolute spirit. As such, it must contain the renewable components of the Greek ethical life. Such a synthesis of morality and ethical life is beyond reason; it is what Hegel understands as spirit.

To understand this synthesis and thereby the arguments for reason's transformation into spirit, we must take a somewhat closer look at the beginning and the end of the Spirit chapter.

2 ETHICAL SPIRIT IN THE *PHENOMENOLOGY*

The chapter on "Spirit" in the *Phenomenology* contains all the forms and levels of "Objective Spirit" that Hegel discussed in his Jena writings and that he later published under this heading in the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Right*: "Abstract Right" is dealt with in the section "Legal status," "Morality" in "Spirit certain of itself." Systematic remarks on forms of "Ethical life" especially family and civil society can already be found in the section "The ethical world." The ethical form of the family, however, is more central in the discussion of Greek tragedy in the section on "Ethical action"; and civil society is dealt with both in this section and in the passages on the medieval and early modern bourgeois self-understanding in the section on the "Alienated world." To be sure, these forms appear in the reverse order compared with Hegel's later writings because starting with this chapter the shapes of spirit are shapes of historical worlds or epochs. This does not mean that they are presented merely in the form of a

⁴ Cf. Siep (1992a), 123 ff.

⁵ Cf. Pinkard (1994); Siep (1995); Gram (1998). Cf. also D. Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*, forthcoming.

philosophy of history. They still figure in a process of systematic examinations of conceptions of truth, knowledge, objectivity, and reality.⁶

In the *Spirit* chapter Hegel tries to prove that reality consists of norms, customs, and institutions that are objective in that they are independent of individual deliberations, wishes, and volitions, but also subjective in two different respects: First of all, as a self-articulating and systematically developing process producing forms of objective knowledge such as codifications, doctrines, reliable jurisdictions, etc. Such a self-differentiating process is for Hegel a form of subjectivity. Secondly, this process is actual through and within the life and actions of individual, self-conscious or subjective human beings.

The development of these forms of spirit extends from the completely undisputed customs and norms of the early Greek tragedy to the sovereign decisions of consciousness in modern morality. The following question seems to me to be of actual and systematic interest regarding this process: Is it possible to conceive of norms and customs that are beyond question and explicit justification, but that can at the same time be examined and criticized by the individual? In modern discussions these two possibilities usually exclude each other. According to one side of the debate, only an unchangeable law of nature can guarantee the necessary stability of law and morals. Dependence on the unstable judgment of the individual would lead to relativism. The opposite position maintains that morals and law are subject to historical processes of changing convictions, either because these norms are social conventions (or, as Mackie puts it, because they are “invented”),⁷ or because they result from individual or collective experiences. These norms may not be completely arbitrary, but they are at least not grounded in a permanent natural or metaphysical truth.

Hegel’s concept of spirit aims at overcoming this alternative. It is meant to include both the unconditionally valid moral and legal laws, on the one hand, and the individual’s right of examining every claim to truth and every norm according to its own reason and conscience, on the other. Consequently Hegel’s concept encompasses the levels that modern moral philosophers such as R. M. Hare tend to distinguish, namely naïve moral consciousness and the reflective standpoint of the philosophical critic.⁸

In the *Spirit* chapter Hegel begins unfolding such a conception of an encompassing ethical spirit through a recollection of Greek ethical life. It

⁶ Regarding the method of the *Phenomenology* before the *Spirit* chapter and afterwards, cf. Weisser-Lohmann (1998); Siep (2000), 174 sq.

⁷ Cf. Mackie (1977). ⁸ Cf. Hare (1981).

contains the results of the whole preceding phenomenological process as “sublated moments.” From consciousness it preserves the character of objective actuality [“*gegenständliche, seiende Wirklichkeit*”] and from self-consciousness that this reality is its own being-for-itself (“*ihre eigenes Fürsichsein*”). Finally, ethical life conserves the character of reason, the unity of both sides, namely that the objective world is in itself characterized as rational (“*an sich vernünftig bestimmt*”).

Such a spiritual reality is the ethical life of a people or “the individual which is a world” (240, ¶441). This claim should be taken in a double sense: First of all, the ethical world of the Greek polis is an individual. It is complete in itself and embraces everything of importance for itself and its citizens.⁹ Secondly, the individual living in the polis is herself “a world.” Her self-understanding is that of an executor and conservator of the customs, religion, and interests of her people or community. Her objective world has lost “the meaning for the self of something alien to it, just as the self has completely lost the meaning of a being-for-self separated from the world, whether dependent on it or not” (238–239, ¶439). This self identifies with the community, which is neither alien nor dominant, nor the subject of criticism for the individual. Today, such cases of identification may be imaginable only with regard to churches or clubs.

However, since spirit is a process of self-differentiation and self-understanding as an integration of “inner” distinctions, this immediate spiritual unity must undergo a new process of division. Hegel exhibits such a process in the “shapes” of Greek tragedy and of the history of the Greek, particularly Athenian, polis. He pursues the process in subsequent discussions of Roman law and history, the medieval societies of noblemen and burghers, and the opposition between enlightenment and religious belief in the eighteenth century. In this process of moral, legal, economic, and aesthetical culture all the divisions reappear that seemed to have been overcome already: those of singularity and universality, of the self and an alien, even “impenetrable” reality, and of the sensible world and the “beyond.” The dialectic of mutual negation and “sublation” of these oppositions results in a new immediate unity, this time on the side of the moral self-consciousness. Paradigmatically in the Kantian postulate of the highest good, self-consciousness generates all laws of the moral world and its objects out of itself. This return of the ethical world in the moral self-consciousness finally results in “the actual self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit” (240, ¶443).

⁹ Cf. Aristotle’s conception of the polis as the highest, all-encompassing community (*Politics* I, 1252 a 5, b 28).

Since I am primarily interested in the synthesis of immediately valid ethical norms and the morality of conscience, I will concentrate on the beginning and the end of the process. Through the drama of *Antigone*, Hegel discusses the forms of traditional and legal morality, to use Max Weber's terminology,¹⁰ in the section on the ethical world and its opposites, the human and the divine law. At the same time Hegel's argumentation concerns the modern questions about a secular or divine foundation of law and the State.¹¹ Antigone's duty to bury her brother is an immediate and indisputable divine command with regard to blood-relations. In contrast, Creon represents human law, which is formulated in universal rules and known to the public. Since both sides are forms of immediate ethical life no justification of such laws comes into play at this point. Human law is valid because it is enacted and because an authority demands and enforces it. Hegel's characterization of human law or the community goes far beyond the early Greek world: it articulates itself into the "systems of personal independence and property, of laws relating to persons and things" as well as "special and independent associations" (246, ¶455).

Thus Hegel anticipates under the heading of "human law" the whole order of ethical life that is developed and discussed later in the *Philosophy of Right* with regard to modern society and the State. This State maintains the right and the duty which Hegel attributes in the *Phenomenology* to the Greek State, namely to confront the "inviolable independence and security of the person" with the power of negation and death in times of war "in order not to let them become rooted and set in this isolation, thereby breaking up the whole and letting the [communal] spirit evaporate" (246, ¶455). This right, however, connects human law with its opposite, divine law. For both laws the existence and security of the individual is not the highest good. The individual has to subordinate his life to an unconditioned duty, in the case of human law not the duty of blood-relation, but of the preservation of the community.

The result of this section's development is that the "insubstantial commandments" of practical reason – for instance, the categorical imperative – are replaced in the ethical spirit by specific and systematically connected commitments to family and state. These provide the individual with an "intrinsically determinate standard" (249, ¶461) for his actions.

¹⁰ Weber (1960), §7.

¹¹ Consider the European discussion in the late 1990s about the necessity of mentioning God in the preamble of a European constitution.

The determinate action of the individual, however, dissolves once again the harmony between family and State, traditional and statutory ethical life, the secular and divine foundation of morals and law that existed in principle in immediate ethical life. This is demonstrated by Hegel in the next section on "Ethical action," which deals mainly with the crucial conflict in Greek tragedy. It is not a conflict of personal guilt but of the necessary and one-sided execution of one of the orders to which the human being belongs: "As simple ethical consciousness it has turned towards one law but turned its back to the other and violates the latter by its deed" (254, ¶468).

This conflict between, on the one side, the ethical life of the family, in which blood-relations and the well-being of the natural individual dominate over the interests of a broader community, and on the other side the interests and laws of the state, is not limited to Greek ethical life. It continues with every attempt to use the state as an instrument of the power or fame or wealth of families or similar groups, and conversely with those attempts of the State to suppress loyalties not directed to itself.

In addition, the necessary division produced by every action pursuing unconditional duty proves that any specific system of customs, values, and norms contains conflicting claims and goods. But whoever tries to balance them by weighing goods or making compromises between norms is, even up to the present day, exposed to the suspicion of relativism. Within a form of ethical life such as the early Greek one, based on the specific traditions of the cities and the common Greek myth of the Homeric epic, there may even be more room for such balancing procedures than in periods of a dominance of natural right or laws of practical reason. Such forms of rationalism, however, offer no means to cope with conflicts between norms or to develop normative systems. According to Hegel, a concept of ethical spirit enabling such procedures and developments must contain at least three elements, corresponding to the "moments" of the concept: the universality of rationally justifiable laws, the particularity of customs and traditions of a community based on common historical experiences, and the singularity of a conscience that interprets the laws and applies them appropriately in a specific situation.

Immediate Greek ethical life leaves both too much and too little room for the principle of singularity in Hegel's view. It leaves too much room, because the single city-states rely on their great leaders and the "big families," especially in periods of struggle for self-maintenance. Thereby they also become dependent on nature and coincidence. On the other hand, Greek ethical life provides too little room for singularity, because

individual self-reflection – for instance, the Socratic demand for justification and approval by conscience – collides with the laws and interest of the State. These conflicts lead both in the history of ideas and in real history to the self-dissolution of the Greek world into a universal empire integrating the universality of the law and the singularity of the person on a higher level: the Roman empire. Of course, this synthesis of universality and singularity is again exposed to internal conflicts, leading to its dissolution and then to still higher levels of integration of ethical spirit's internal moments. Instead of pursuing the sequence of these levels in the *Phenomenology* I will summarize the requirements for ethical spirit or simply for ethics resulting from the first part of the Spirit chapter:

1. Moral and ethical duties must be specific and unambiguous. They must refer to a differentiated organization of society, its social system and institutions. This organization must be based on and understandable by reference to a single system of principles.
2. In morality and ethical life the individual must be able to understand itself as “executor” of a living order which is not alien to it but which embodies its own “strong evaluations” and gives meaning to its life.
3. This order, the community realizing it, and the individuals living according to it, must be able to balance conflicting values and norms. And this must happen in a way which meets, first, the requirements of universal justification, second, the approval of specific traditions by historical experiences and, third, the test of individual conscience.

Immediate ethical life based on assumed traditions or on unquestioned statutes does not meet these requirements sufficiently. It has to pass through not only a process of transformation into universal legal rules, but also through a process of cultural formation (“*Bildung*”) that includes the development of opposite perspectives on the social and cultural world. This development of the cultural self-understanding of communities and individuals in the European history from the Middle Ages to the time of the Enlightenment and the revolution also leads to the increasing recognition of the individual's claims regarding his theoretical and moral judgments. This recognition of conscience is the subject of the last part of the Spirit chapter in the *Phenomenology*.

3 THE COMPLETION OF MORAL SPIRIT IN THE *PHENOMENOLOGY*

As is well known, the first sections of the chapter on the “self-assured” moral spirit deal with Kant's doctrine of the postulates and their

transformation by Fichte. These versions of a rational moral theology are interpreted by Hegel as conceptions of reality in which both the moral and the natural world are governed by practical reason. This reality is, on the one hand, completely present in individual moral consciousness, as practical reason in Kant or as moral world-order in Fichte.¹² On the other hand, the individual is, especially in Fichte's concept of conscience, aware of its absolute "being-in-itself" (*Insichsein*). But the claims of this conscience can come into conflict with the universally accepted moral and legal rules. The last section of the Spirit chapter discusses this conflict between the decision of conscience as sovereign regarding the existing moral and legal rules, on the one hand, and the common moral consciousness articulated in laws and accepted moral judgments, on the other. The relation between both sides is further complicated by a distinction and conflict within conscience itself, namely between the acting and the merely judging conscience. While Kant understands conscience as a judgment about the conformity of actions with the moral law, Fichte maintains that conscience decides about the concrete way of executing the moral law in actions.¹³ In discussing literary figures and characters, including the moral genius and the beautiful soul, Hegel further differentiates and enriches this conflict.¹⁴ Moreover, he stages it as a modern drama analogous to Greek tragedy. In it, the "judging" and the "acting" conscience confront each other, reject and condemn each other, but finally come to a reconciliation.

More important for our question than all these complicated and dialectical moves is their result: A conception of spirit reconciling the comprehensive ethical life and activity of a people with modern subjective morality. This morality is oriented by universal principles but at the same time recognizes the sovereignty of the individual actor, his inner "divine" voice of conscience.

The problems contained in this conception are still current in today's moral philosophy and they seem even less solvable than in Hegel's times. This can be indicated as follows:

1. The modern concept of autonomy implies that an action is of moral value only if executed on the basis of personally considered convictions in conformity with the most important reflective valuations of the actor.

¹² Siep (1992a), 123 ff.

¹³ In some instances, Kant restricts the competence of conscience even more: "Conscience does not pass judgment upon actions as cases which fall under the law; for this is what reason does . . . Rather, reason here judges itself as to whether it has really undertaken this appraisal of actions (as to whether they are right or wrong) with all diligence" (*Religion*), 174. Fichte's more active role of conscience is developed in his *System of Ethics* (*SE*), *SW IV*, III. Hauptstück, §15, sections IV and V.

¹⁴ Cf. Köhler (1998), 209–225.

2. The modern concept of rationality requires that the truth of judgments and the morality of actions can be universally approved according to justifiable rules and reasons. The claim of a conscientious actor does not meet these requirements – especially since the subjective intentions are inaccessible from the outside and therefore dissemblance and hypocrisy are always possible.
3. The modern concept of ethics requires decisions that are the same for all real and – in some versions – even potential kinds of rational beings. But at the same time morally acceptable or “good” decisions have to take into account all the relevant aspects of a situation, including the moods, sensibilities, and expectations of the participants. At least in some versions of consequentialism this includes all consequences of an action from different perspectives of assessment.¹⁵

Hegel accepts these opposing conditions of a morally correct action. Two of them he even radicalizes:

- (a) The sovereign conscience maintains that the subjective imperative of an action commands beyond doubt. Modern morality transposes the unquestioned divine commands of traditional ethics into conscience itself.
- (b) The universality of practical reason includes the external objectivity of institutions and customs, which may not be followed out of merely legal consideration, but must be understood as a common ethical achievement. However, this universality must not be understood in the sense of mere conventions but as being valid beyond inventions or productions.

It is possible to discuss and explain the synthesis which the history of morality has prepared and which the *Phenomenology* interprets as “spirit” on different levels: First of all (1) that of mutual recognition, secondly (2) that of self-consciousness, and thirdly (3) on the logical level of the concept in Hegel’s sense of a self-concretizing and self-individualizing universal.

I. At the end of the Moral Spirit chapter (“self-assured spirit”) Hegel thematizes the figure of mutual recognition first presented at the beginning of the Self-Consciousness chapter and then presented as a series of forms and experiences of self-consciousness (partly failing and partly progressing). The structure of mutual recognition¹⁶ is marked by two characteristics that are important for our question of the moral spirit’s synthesis:

¹⁵ Here I subsume under the modern concept of ethics both deontological and consequentialist positions. In many fields of modern ethics, especially applied ethics, attempts at a synthesis or reconciliation of both traditions are visible.

¹⁶ Regarding the structure of mutual recognition in the *Phenomenology*, cf. Brandom (2004); also Siep (1998).

- A. Mutual recognition takes place between individuals but also between individual and community, the “I” and the “We.”
- B. Mutual recognition has a complex structure of reciprocity which Hegel calls “*Doppelsinnigkeit*.” Again, this contains two main aspects:
 - B1. The change on one side of the relation immediately entails a change on the other as well. A friend cannot change in his friendship without his partner changing as well, in relation both to his friend and to himself.
 - B2. The relation of mutual recognition demands that one individual sees itself in the other or as “identical” with the other, while at the same time denying this identity and its own “otherness.”

What are the consequences of this structure on the level of the moral spirit? *First*, that the universal conscience claiming to be supported by universal rules and applying them in every single action has to experience its identity and difference with its “opponent,” namely with the conscience acting by a moral certainty concerning the particular situation. In this experience of mutual recognition both change their character, a process taking place both on the level of the individual and on the level of the relation between individual and community. For the moral spirit, this entails an awareness of the fact that conscientious action deviating from universal laws and public customs belongs to the common spirit of a moral community and has to be recognized as such. This is what Hegel calls forgiving and reconciliation at the end of this chapter. It contains different levels or scales, reaching from moral forgiveness to legal pardon and historical oblivion – the spirit’s actions leave no scars, as Hegel formulates it. This spirit knows that universal rules and applications of laws as well as particular actions of conscience necessarily belong to the common ethical spirit. The reason is that the rules and institutions have to be interpreted, concretized, and developed in particular situations of moral conflict.

Second, the individual acting according to its conscience has to recognize that its decisions must be intended and understandable as such interpretations of common rules, values, and institutions. The agent has to place himself within a recognized and therefore comprehensible pattern of actions. This presupposes a sufficient understanding of the logic and history of a moral culture.¹⁷ Above all, the individual must concede that he may have been wrong in his decisions (“erroneous

¹⁷ This is lacking in the sentimental and “virtuous” revolutionaries which Hegel criticizes in the second part of the Reason chapter.

conscience”)¹⁸ – and thereby agree to some form of common “formation of conscience.” According to the different forms of error the agent must accept forms of legal punishment or moral condemnation as a condition of his re-integration into the ethical community. It is well known that Hegel has understood punishment since his Frankfurt writings on the basis of his interpretation of Greek tragedy, namely as a form of return to the community from which the culprit excluded himself. This, of course, presupposes the actor’s recognition of his guilt. However, a crime representing the conscious replacement of the common law by the personal “law” of the actor is only the most radical form of evil. Every action is evil in the sense of self-isolation from the community insofar as the action results from a withdrawal into one’s own inner sphere of convictions and personal scrutiny.

- II. Formulated in terms of a theory of self-consciousness this means the following. One and the same spirit contains, on the one side, self-consciousness embodied in laws, court decisions, jurisprudence and ethics, common sense moral judgments, and customary moral behavior, and on the other the radically individualized self of personal conscience. Even the individual acting from personal conviction against the public laws belongs to this spirit – from moral hero to criminal. To be sure, they belong to spirit in a different way: The criminal has to experience and understand this belonging only in an accepted punishment.

The philosophically enlightened person acting from conscience knows instead that he has to act both according to public rules and from inner convictions. In tragic situations of corrupted ethical life he has to preserve the spirit of the whole in his own integral person – like Socrates and Jesus. The progress of reason in history renders these forms of total inner emigration more and more unnecessary in Hegel’s view. However, forms of civil disobedience or other forms of resistance may still be justified, provided that all ways of understanding the logic of the development of institutions, laws, and customs have been exhausted. In the end, the “Last Judgment” of world-history decides whether such resistance was justified or the deed of an erroneous conscience. The justifications are thus mediated by the test of time and the philosophical reflection of later generations.

¹⁸ This concept is sharply criticized by Fichte (*SE*), *SW IV*, III. Hauptstück, §15, section V, Corrolaria. However, Fichte affirms that moral philosophy can discover *a priori* criteria for the decisions of conscience which are the content of a system of duties.

Ethical action and its spiritual self-consciousness correspond to the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit that reigns in a fraternal community of forgiving and understanding. Apparently this is why Hegel affirms the identical structure of moral spirit and the religious spirit of Christianity as the absolute religion. In view of Hegel's criticism regarding the separation between human and divine spirit, between this world and the beyond, between the historical progress of reason and the infinitely remote eschatological salvation, it is only a form of enlightened Protestantism which counts as this spirit of absolute religion. The *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopedia* will later clarify that the ethical life of the family, civil society, and the rational state are the immanent realization of the Absolute in the social world.¹⁹ But without the individualizing activity of conscience, the norms and institutions of rational ethical life would become mere customary and lifeless mechanisms. And without conscience affirming the correspondence between the triads of ethical life and the idea of the divine trinity, the social and political institutions would lack their reconciliation with religious self-consciousness.

III. Ethical spirit contains the universality of laws, the particularity of ethical traditions, and the individuality of conscience. In its structure, it corresponds to the logical structure of the concept as self-concretizing universal. Thus the ultimate basis of legitimacy for the synthesis of moral and ethical spirit lies in the logic of the concept. For Hegel "the concept" is the systematic mutual generation and explication of meanings as determinations of a single thought or principle.

What is the consequence of this correspondence for particular ethical norms and decisions of conscience? It seems that the norms, institutions, estates, and other parts of an ethical and political culture and "constitution"²⁰ have to be understandable as one system articulated according to its own principle. This need not be valid for one momentary cross-section of a moral culture, but rather in a diachronic historical perspective embracing the members of one "cultural family." Hegel's historical "empires" contain a manifold of states during long periods of history.²¹ Especially in the epochs of European history since the Greeks, the formation of legal institutions and estates with necessary social functions can be understood as the realization of a

¹⁹ Cf. Hegel (*PR*) §270, (*EPSIII*) §552. ²⁰ Cf. Siep (1992b), 270–284.

²¹ The doctrine of the four empires goes back to Hieronymus' commentary on the prophet Daniel. Cf. Hieronymus (1964), I, II, 31–35 (CC 75A): 794, 387–795, 414.

single principle, namely the principle of freedom understood in the sense of Hegel's philosophy of objective spirit.

Regarding the development and articulation of freedom, the acknowledgment of individuality as an absolute value and criterion is the "organizing principle." Freedom must be understood, however, not in its one-sided modern sense, but as a manifestation of an ethical community that expresses itself in individuals deciding and acting according to their personal convictions. Such a community has to recognize both the sovereignty of the individual conscience and the universality of criteria that can be specified in particular traditions, ethical standards of estates and professional groups, and the formation of conscience within the community.

4 PRACTICAL REASON AND ETHICAL SPIRIT IN HEGEL AND MODERN ETHICS

Before judging the significance of Hegel's transformation of practical reason into ethical spirit for today's moral and political philosophy one has to test the immanent coherence of his concept. What are the general traits of the Hegelian synthesis of classical and modern elements in his ethical state?

(1) *First*, the specific and habitual rights and duties of the citizens in their families, professions, and professional estates, as well as their rights to political participation²² are executed in the same habitual way as in classical ethical life. The attitudes in a "normal" family, a functioning professional life, or the usual loyalty towards the State as guaranteeing security and many other social functions exhibit the same habitual pattern as pre-modern ethical life.

In §258 of the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel praises the way in which the national liberties are incorporated into the everyday life and behavior of some nations. They have "entered in every coat that is worn and every crust that is eaten and still enter into every day and hour of the lives of everyone."²³ Thus the rights and liberties of modern nations can be lived as naturally as traditional norms and customs.

(2) *Secondly*, modern moral and legal norms can in Hegel's view claim validity beyond question or doubt. This aspect of the conservation of

²² Hegel's concept of political participation, as is well known, is not that of a general right to vote, but contains mediating procedures such as the delegation of representatives of the corporations.

²³ Hegel (*HPR*), 159

immediate ethical life in modern moral and legal order, however, can be clarified only by anticipating the *Philosophy of Right*.²⁴

In view of the implementation of this claim in the *Philosophy of Right*, two aspects have to be distinguished:

- (a) The levels of ethical life and attitudes.
- (b) The ultimate foundation of the forms and institutions of ethical life.
 - (a) The basic level is the imperturbable traditional ethical life of the agrarian estate, which is followed by the “reflexive” ethical attitudes of the level of trades and business. Here the promotion of the common good is mediated by private interest and the calculation of private utility. However, the “upper” estates of the scientifically educated civil service guarantee the compatibility of these interests with the common welfare and with the aims of the state. Moreover, they provide the “telos” and the foundation of different ethical attitudes. Such a conception of a stable mixture of different social mentalities has its correlate in modern “system theories” of political and social science.²⁵

Hegel understands these different attitudes not only as characterizing mentalities of groups, but also as immanent to individual ways of thinking and behaving. In developing this view he explicitly refers to Greek ethical life.²⁶ Ethical spirit is actualized within the individual’s unquestioned moral and legal obedience as well as in his self-interested reflections, which themselves remain within the framework of the unconditioned purpose of the existence of a constitutional state. To be sure, the three levels of these ethical attitudes have different weights for the individual according to the estate to which the individual belongs.

- (b) Both in the scientific and in the religious perspective there is, in Hegel’s view, an ultimate foundation and justification for the elements of the moral and legal order of the modern State. Within a differentiated modern society the scientific foundation is the task of a special class or estate, namely that of the members of the civil service in higher executive and scientific institutions. Hegel presupposes scientifically educated State officials as well as scientists and scholars dealing with social and political issues. They analyze and justify legal institutions in a way similar to

²⁴ This is no anachronism since the concept of ethical life in the late Jena writings prefigures that of the *Philosophy of Right* to a large extent.

²⁵ Cf. Almond (1960). ²⁶ Hegel (*PR*), §257.

Hegel's own comments on the "Proceedings of the Estates Assembly in the Kingdom of Württemberg" (1817) and his advice to the Prussian Reformers in Berlin. The ultimate justification of a modern constitutional state's institutions lies in speculative philosophy and a rational theology proving that the modern State can be understood as the realization of the Christian idea of freedom. Its existence and its constitution are "the divine will, in the sense that it is spirit²⁷ present on earth, unfolding itself to be the actual shape and organization of a world."²⁸ It is by way of a philosophical theory without rational alternative and by its understanding of Christian theology that the unquestionable validity of ethical norms can be justified.

- (3) A *third* aspect of the transformation of Greek ethical life can be understood as follows. Despite the habitual loyalty to the ultimately justified laws and customs of the modern State, the life of the individual must maintain a positive tension. Mere habitual obedience leads to cultural and spiritual "death."²⁹ But the lively interests of the individuals may not only be directed to private aims or reputation in professional occupations and in society. Rather, life in the State is the fulfillment and end in itself for the citizen as a political being in the Aristotelian sense. Such a State must contain and support universal rational norms of a specific character and penetrate all sectors of cultural life, including art and sciences. It is man's destiny to realize his human faculties by contributing to this life and thereby gaining meaning and fulfillment.

If classical ethical life is preserved in the modern state at least according to these three aspects, how can there be room for an autonomous moral consciousness? Such a consciousness demands a permanent critique of laws and customs and claims to follow only those norms which stand up to its own personal judgment.

As discussed above, such a claim of conscience is in principle justified. But according to Hegel this may not render impossible social behavior that is calculable, predictable, and in accordance with laws. Such behavior must not become dependent on unpredictable individual convictions and decisions such as modern terrorist actions in random situations and places. Instead, conscience must understand itself as the voice and interpretation of a universal ethical spirit. If it feels bound to differ in its decisions from the norms of a community, those decisions must nevertheless fit into the

²⁷ Knox translates "spirit" as mind in Hegel (*HPR*), 166. ²⁸ Hegel (*PR*), §270.

²⁹ Cf. for instance *Encyclopedia*, §375 (death of animal life) and §474 (passionless "dead" morality).

pattern of common decency capable of universal justifications. Such conscience must expose itself to common criticism.

If Hegel's synthesis of traditional ethical life and modern morality can be sketched this way – what are the consequences for his concept of spirit and his emphasis on the transformation of reason into spirit?

The deficiencies of the concept of reason in Hegel's view are basically the following: On the one hand the modern concept of reason rightly assumes that reality is rational in several senses. For instance, natural and social processes can be explained and predicted according to laws. Rational actions following universal laws of freedom are possible in societies which have developed institutions required for such activity. But on the other hand the modern concept of reason undermines its own claim to reality, at least in two regards. First, universal practical reason is not capable of differentiating itself into concrete norms and processes. For theoretical understanding such specification requires accidental events and data. For specific moral acts it is either uncertain (in a Kantian sense) whether they can actually be called moral (and not only legal), or as in consequentialism their rationality depends on future processes beyond the rational control of the agent. As a result the rational observer or agent remains ultimately confronted with a reality, be it natural, social, or historical, that resists his attempt at explanation and "rationalization."

Reason is transformed into spirit if one understands that social and historical reality is a self-differentiation and self-reflection of the principle and institutions of freedom in the sense both of independent moral self-consciousness and of the fulfillment of individuals as representatives of a living ethical spirit of a people. This process can be interpreted from different perspectives: From the perspective of a system of social functions and institutions which are "learned" in the process of history, and from the perspective of a system of mutually recognized individual interpretations of intentions and implications.³⁰ Both perspectives are included in Hegel's concept of "objective spirit."

However, this spirit is not simply a process of social communication about norms. In that case, the norms and institutions would dissolve into temporary conventions valid only "for the time being." This does not correspond to Hegel's understanding of ethical life and to the tradition of the concept of spirit into which he places himself. On the contrary, the

³⁰ This second perspective has been elaborated by modern scholars such as Pinkard or Brandom. Cf. Pinkard (1994), esp. chapters 6 and 7, Brandom (2002b).

principles of ethical life are meant to possess the firmness of a definite justification and a systematic necessity.

Nous in Plotinus' understanding contains the complete system of ideas within itself. This is true for Hegel as well. Therefore the individual realization of the good is in the end only "making explicit" the order of ends and goods implicit in reality.³¹ This reality is not simply an exchange of opinions and creative ideas in a modern sense. It is characterized above all by an order of institutions which can be justified by a systematic conceptual development. At the same time, this order and its conceptual justification can be understood as the result of a world-historical process. If that is the case, the weight of individual interpretations and the chances that communities accept the "innovations" of individual conscience seem rather limited.

From the perspective of modern ethics and modern society it must be stated that individual autonomy cannot be bound by such a final justification of norms and institutions. Some form of "farewell to the unconditional" must be accepted. The validity of basic norms may rather be supported by irreversible common experiences. These experiences have to be interpreted and justified with regard to "essential" human needs and capabilities.³² This, however, allows for a less unquestionable ethical life than the one Hegel establishes through his conceptual reconstruction of a self-understanding *nous* in the Neo-platonic tradition.³³

It seems equally impossible to follow Hegel's conception of the renewal of classical ethical life all the way. The modern distance of individuals from their social and cultural community does not allow them to understand the destiny of this community as their own destiny or as the subject of their "strong" evaluations. Modern civil society is not one of the estates fulfilling necessary social and political functions, and the relation between civil society and state can no longer be conceived in a teleological order. Thus the realm of the private is increasing and its ties to the "national" interests and tasks are being loosened.

To be sure, one may still accept that individual self-reflection requires participation in some meaningful social task. And it is equally true that

³¹ Siep (2004).

³² If we need some form of Aristotelian essentialism here, as Martha Nussbaum suggests, it refers to a historically discovered essence. Cf. Nussbaum (1992). I have sketched a conception of historical experience along such lines in Siep (2004), esp. 105–107, 164–173.

³³ For M. Quante, this Neoplatonic foundation is only "external" to Hegel's conception of ethical life. It can be separated from the internal "pragmatic" foundation of experiences with laws, customs, and virtues which are normally followed without question but can in cases of well-founded doubt be justified by moral reasons. Cf. Quante (2004c), 347 and (2005), 247 f.

some of the basic values and rights of modern States have to be integrated into the core of the citizen's convictions and evaluations – for instance, human and civil rights, the renunciation of the use of force, the recognition of a reasonable pluralism of world-views, etc. But even a communitarian renewal of classical political philosophy may not ask for such a degree of identification with the common spirit and of willingness to sacrifice rights for the common good as Hegel's conception of ethical political life demands.

Does that mean that we should revert from spirit to reason? This may seem advisable if reason allows for more distance between subjective convictions and historical processes, autonomy of conscience and reigning customs, self-realization and the common "work" (*Werk aller*). But then reason would have to be conceived as less abstract, less restricted to universal rules and to intellectual faculties. It would have to be understood as more holistic, both regarding its relation to the other human faculties,³⁴ especially the emotions, and to the immanent historical rationality of customs and institutions. The reason of historical processes and institutions may be understood as an open development of common, well-founded experiences integrating a diversity of cultural perspectives. A productive transformation of Hegel's own "sublation" of reason into spirit can neither revert to eighteenth-century conceptions of reason nor confine itself uncritically to twentieth-century concepts of rationality.

³⁴ An example of such a holistic conception is the "Psychology" in the *Encyclopedia* where Hegel tries to exhibit the implicit reason within the (traditionally so-called) "lower" cognitive and emotive faculties.

Religion and demythologization in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit

Thomas A. Lewis

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the *Phenomenology's* treatment of religion is its pervasiveness. Several earlier sections – particularly the unhappy consciousness and the beautiful soul – deal with much that we reflexively identify as religion and associate with Judaism and Christianity in particular. Yet it is not until the penultimate chapter, “Religion,” that Hegel articulates a theory of religion as such, one that seeks both to appreciate its significance and to identify its limitations in the modern world.

In the face of widespread challenges to religious tradition, Hegel sought to reconcile religion with the social and intellectual developments of the Enlightenment and its aftermath. In contrast to influential approaches that aim to effect this reconciliation by relegating reason and religion to distinct realms with distinct objects, Hegel's strategy turns upon his conception of representation (*Vorstellung*) as a mode of cognition distinct from thought yet capable of cognizing the same object as thought. Whereas philosophy employs the discursive, conceptual language of thinking, religion is closely associated with the imagistic, metaphorical, and allegorical language of representation. While religious representations express much of the content of philosophy, they do so in a manner that juxtaposes what philosophy reveals to be identical. In so doing, they project our own essence beyond us and, in viewing it as other, alienate us from the world around us. Despite these functions, however, Hegel credits religion with providing partial reconciliation and expressing the content of philosophy in a manner accessible to much of the population. Grasping the significance of representations requires a process of demythologizing – rendering their content in a mode that abstracts from the metaphorical and allegorical form of religious representations. The treatment of religion in Chapter VII of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* thus sketches an account of religion as projection and the need for demythologization that prefigures much later theorizing of religion as well as modern Christian theology.¹

¹ Emphases within quotations are all Hegel's. See also Hegel (*Werke*) 2, 287–433, and (*VPR*), translated as (*FK*) and (*LPR*).

To characterize Hegel's strategy as "demythologizing" is not to enlist him among Christianity's opponents. The term is most closely associated with one of the most important Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann. Despite their differences, Hegel's hermeneutic shares with Bultmann's the goal of bringing forth the genuine significance of religious teachings.² To impose prematurely a specific preconception of Christianity and on that basis judge Hegel to be rejecting Christianity ignores the theological upheaval of his own context. We will gain much greater insight into his potential contribution to both the theorizing and the philosophy of religion if we appreciate that he sought to articulate a conception of Christianity that could be compelling in the post-Enlightenment, post-Kantian world.³

Chapter VII's introductory paragraphs delineate the distinctiveness of this treatment of religion as spirit's self-consciousness (*vis-à-vis* earlier treatments of religious phenomena), set out a preliminary account of representation and its limits, and articulate the relationship between the developments to be traced in Chapter VII and those of the preceding chapters. Hegel begins by indicating the distinctive character of religion as a new stage in the *Phenomenology* and thus the basic elements of his theory of religion. Previous chapters traced the development of the "absolute essence," showing the way in which what was taken to be authoritative or of absolute value for a particular formation of consciousness could not satisfy its own criteria for success. Subsequent stages resolved the problem that resulted in the previous failure and yet showed themselves self-contradictory for other reasons. Over the course of this development, we have seen a great deal that appears to be "religion." These previous stages had the absolute essence as an object, but Chapter VII is the first to focus on our practices of reflecting on this essence. In the discussion of earlier formations of consciousness, we (Hegel and his readers) have been reflecting upon the absolute essence, what is taken to be of ultimate value; in the Religion chapter, we are considering how particular communities have themselves reflected upon this absolute essence.

The absolute essence that is the object of this reflection must be interpreted from a double perspective. On one hand, it is the product of what has come before, the yield of the formations of consciousness examined up to this point. On the other, it functions as a placeholder for the object of

² Bultmann (1984), 99. I return to Bultmann at the end of this chapter.

³ In my study of the *Phenomenology*, I have learned a great deal from Hyppolite (1974); Pinkard (1994); Crites (1998); Forster (1998); and Westphal (1998).

religion and philosophy, so that we first achieve an adequate grasp of it at the culmination of the book in the “Absolute Knowing” chapter. In examining the different ways in which particular communities through history have represented the absolute, the chapter traces developments in this conception itself. Thus, the culmination of the development offers the more definitive account. Crucial to the interpretation of Hegel’s account of religion, then, is not to import unconsciously our own presuppositions regarding “God,” the “divine,” or religion’s object more generally.⁴

The introductory paragraphs, however, focus much more on religion’s form than its object. Hegel distinguishes religion from philosophy primarily through the contrast between their different modes of cognition. Even though it is a form of cognition, representation – associated with religion – begins from content that appears as merely given by the world rather than self-determined by cognition itself. It never achieves complete self-determination or freedom but remains decisively shaped by the given. More concretely, representation makes extensive use of metaphor and analogy, portraying objects and narratives. In doing so, it presents objects as finite and standing over against each other. Representation contrasts with the conceptual language of thinking itself, which Hegel associates with philosophy.⁵

Hegel’s account of representation is central to his conception of religion because this form is responsible for both its broad impact and its limits. Representations portray what is absolute as an other to self-consciousness and as having an existence that is other than the consciousness of this absolute that is itself religion (364–365, ¶678). Religion cannot completely grasp the community’s reflective practices as themselves constitutive of the absolute essence or the social world as expressive of this essence. By virtue of juxtaposing entities, it is incapable of portraying spirit’s freedom in another. It objectifies and finitizes what can only be grasped as simultaneously subject and infinite. It is a finite form incapable of expressing spirit’s self-determination and freedom.

Religion thus effects a double alienation: The self is alienated from what it conceives to be absolute and from the actual world. The revealed religion partially overcomes this alienation in the cultus, but precisely insofar as it

⁴ Like his patterns of capitalization, Miller’s translation of “*absolute Wesen*” as “absolute Being” rather than “absolute essence” contributes to such misreadings by making religion’s object appear more reified than in Hegel’s German text; see, for instance, *Phenomenology* 363, ¶672.

⁵ While this distinction between representation and thought endures throughout Hegel’s mature work, a striking feature of the Religion chapter of the *Phenomenology* is that it encompasses material that Hegel later subdivides into art and religion. As in his later system, both art and religion (like philosophy) are forms of spirit’s reflection upon itself, distinguished from philosophy by virtue of the finite form of the cognition involved.

completes this overcoming, it passes from religion into philosophy. The difference represented between the subject and object of this consciousness – which Hegel conceives as intrinsic to representation – defines the sphere of religion. This difference appears as an inadequacy in the portrayal of spirit and drives the developments of the sphere of religion. Religion is completed but also sublated when it overcomes this difference (367–368, ¶682).

Hegel thus offers a theory of religion as projection. Religious representations portray the absolute as other than both the consciousness of the human community and actuality proper. Rather than recognizing the community's reflective practices as themselves constituting the absolute essence, religion projects this absolute onto an object conceived as other than this consciousness. The particularities of this projection transform over the course of the developments traced in the chapter, but all share this feature of attributing this absoluteness to an existence that is in some sense other. For this reason, although religion strives toward reconciliation – and can achieve it to a remarkable degree – alienation is intrinsic to the form of religion and is fully overcome only through the sublation of religion itself.⁶

The final major issue taken up in the opening paragraphs concerns the relationship between the types of development traced up to this point in the *Phenomenology* and those to be considered in Chapter VII. Previous chapters traced conceptual developments from consciousness, to self-consciousness, reason, and spirit. As considered in the *Phenomenology*, these were fundamentally developments in cognition. Although they occurred in particular times and places, these developments as such were not historical developments or events (361, ¶670).⁷ They were not necessarily manifest in their purely conceptual form but often appeared historically only mixed together with other moments. Hegel's concern has been this conceptual unfolding of cognition itself, not its manifestations in history.

Religion, by contrast, concerns not merely these moments in the development of cognition but the totality of spirit – encompassing both its actuality and its self-consciousness. As a totality – that is, including the interrelated practices, beliefs, and way of life more generally that together constitute a particular manifestation of spirit – spirit does appear in history:

⁶ Merold Westphal offers a particularly valuable discussion of Hegel's theory as projectionist. See Westphal (1998), 194–199.

⁷ To characterize the *Phenomenology* in this manner is not to deny a strongly historical element. These developments in cognition took place in history, and Hegel often seems to have particular historical events in mind as exemplifications of particular moments in the development of consciousness and cognition. Nonetheless, the development central to the *Phenomenology* up to this point has been cognition itself.

“Only the entire spirit is in time, and the formations, which are formations of the entire *spirit* as such, display themselves in a succession” (365, ¶679). In the Religion chapter, then, we are considering manifestations of spirit in its totality, not merely cognition abstracted from such actual formations.

Yet while religion presupposes the previous developments (365, ¶679), this does not entail that all instantiations of religion display the level of cognition achieved in Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology*. Rather, actual, historical religions – although they in some sense contain all of the moments traced in the previous developments of cognition – are dominated by one particular feature, which corresponds to one of the moments in the development already traced (366, ¶680). This point also explains why we have already seen so much that looks to us like religion: Earlier developments considered different formations of consciousness that dominated particular religions. These particular religions appear in history and “are distinguished from one another in time, though in such a way that the later moment retains within it the preceding one” (366, ¶679). The substantive material in the chapter will thus constitute a kind of history of religion.

In framing the contents of the chapter in this manner Hegel highlights questions about the relation between history and the developments he is tracing. Although previous chapters should not be read as a history of the world (even if certain moments are clearly manifest in particular historical events), he claims that once we arrive at religion *per se*, we are dealing with actual historical manifestations, and that these can be ordered conceptually and temporally at once. In passages such as the one just quoted (from 366, ¶679), Hegel seems to claim that there is a linearity to this development, that the succession of religions entails that over time new religions retain developments achieved in earlier ones and rise to higher levels. The question, however, is just how much is entailed by such a claim. If we construe Hegel’s task here as the reconstruction of how we arrived where we are – how to understand our current standpoint as one that resolves problems that emerged from other standpoints – then we can view Hegel as taking other traditions seriously precisely by giving an account that seeks to overcome the problems that emerged in these traditions. Admittedly, such an interpretation does need to question Hegel’s claim that each historical religion preserves what is of value in earlier developments: In itself, that claim does not preclude the possibility of later religions that do not exhibit such progress, but it does seem to preclude the possibility of parallel lines of development that are later united in a single tradition – much as the 1827 lectures on the philosophy of religion portray Judaism

and Greek religion as each possessing elements that the other lacked but that were vital to the emergence of Christianity. (Judaism is glaringly absent from this chapter of the *Phenomenology*.) Taking into account these later developments in Hegel's thinking about the history of religion, we might fault him for making this claim without taking it as the lynchpin of the interpretation of religious history. To the contrary, these developments are best seen as a reconstruction of the historical developments that justify the rationality of our (in this case Hegel's) standpoint.

I NATURAL RELIGION

The conceptually first religions are those in which humans posit the absolute in some relatively simple being. Whether the absolute is conceived as light, as plant, or as animal, its form directly engages the senses. As a merely immediate being, it is entirely lacking in subjectivity.⁸ The decisive step within natural religion comes in the sublation of such objects – with respect to their being conceived as the absolute – by the productive process itself. Animal religions represent spirit as dispersed in different beings in conflict, but religion moves beyond this conflict by representing these particular beings as conditioned by the productive process itself. Therewith we arrive at the religion in which “spirit . . . appears as an *artificer* [*Werkmeister*]” (373, ¶691). In natural religion, however, the artificer's productive activity is merely instinctive; it produces its own object without realizing that it is doing so, “as bees build their honeycomb” (373, ¶691). Even though the artificer's activity defines this form of religion, the artificer is still not recognized as spirit. Rather, spirit is posited in the products. Spirit in its entirety therefore remains hidden. Even after the artificer begins to create more lifelike forms, the “work still lacks the shape and existence in which the self exists as self; it still does not in its own self proclaim that it includes within it an inner meaning, it lacks speech, the element in which the meaning filling it is present” (374–375, ¶695). Then this external form comes to be juxtaposed with an interiority that is initially “simple darkness,” fully indeterminate (375, ¶696). As the artificer comes to unite this indeterminate inner and multiform outer, the object begins to

⁸ Though Hegel's discussion of other traditions is not simply a matter of forcing them into a ready-made conceptual scheme, his treatment of these most “elementary” forms of religion displays a noteworthy unwillingness to extend the same charitable hermeneutics that he employs in his treatment of “later” traditions, particularly Christianity. Given the centrality of metaphor to representation, for instance, he seems strikingly blind to the possibility of metaphorical significances to the references to plants and animals.

utter. As the artificer confronts this new object, this merely instinctive character of natural religion is sublated precisely because the artificer recognizes the object as self-conscious: In this work “the activity of the artificer, which constitutes self-consciousness, comes face to face with an equally self-conscious, self-expressive inner being [*Innere*]” (375, ¶698). Here spirit has developed into a genuinely “spiritual shape: into an outer that has retreated into itself, and an inner that utters or expresses itself out of itself and in its own self” (375, ¶698). Here, spirit is artist. Thus, this development – and with it natural religion – culminates with the recognition of spirit as self-conscious, which defines the move to the next stage, the religion of art [*Kunstreligion*].

2 RELIGION OF ART

Revisiting the formations of consciousness treated in the first part of Chapter VI, Hegel’s account of the religion of art focuses primarily on the ancient Greek world. In the religion of art, the object of spirit’s consciousness has the form of consciousness itself (376, ¶699), and the artist engages in self-conscious rather than merely instinctive creative activity. Hegel describes the actual spirit corresponding to the religion of art as “*ethical* or *true* spirit,” which is characterized by citizens’ immediate identification with their social world (376, ¶700). They view themselves first and foremost as Athenians, for instance, rather than as individuals (385, ¶720). They feel their essence expressed in their membership in this polity. This level of identification is one Hegel frequently identifies with ethical life, though – at least in relation to his later work – it is best seen as the most immediate form of ethical life.⁹

Despite their connection, this ethical life and the religion of art stand in a conflictive relationship that reveals the inadequacy of that ethical spirit: Its inability to accommodate an adequate conception of the individual. As Hegel frames the issue: “Since the ethical people lives in immediate unity with its substance and lacks the principle of the pure individuality of self-consciousness, the complete form of its religion first emerges in its separating from its existing shape [*Bestehen*]” (376, ¶701). Greek religion is thus simultaneously expressive of its actual spirit and in tension with this actuality. In coming to grasp spirit’s essence as self-conscious, the religion of art undermines the unconscious immediacy of identification with this ethical world.

⁹ I have developed this point in Lewis (2005), chapter 6.

Hegel initially develops the connection between the religion of art and the emergence of self-consciousness in relation to the artist's creative activity. Through subordination to the norms and disciplines of the ethical order, this individual has overcome determination by natural drives. As pure self-consciousness, this is activity freed of both natural determination and determination by immediate ethical life – activity “with which spirit brings itself forth as object” (377, ¶703). Withdrawn from this order into pure self-consciousness, what is left is “the night in which substance was betrayed and made itself into subject” (377, ¶703).

The tension that drives the initial development within the religion of art itself is the difference between the artist's productive activity and the work produced. With the statue, though it takes a human form, the representation of our essence is split in two; action and existence as a thing diverge. In its fixity, a statue cannot adequately express the artist's consciousness and thus cannot bring forth spirit (379–380, ¶708). In light of this inadequacy,

[t]he work of art therefore demands another element of its existence, the god another mode of coming forth than this, in which, out of the depths of his creative night, he descends into the opposite, into externality, into the determination of the *thing* which lacks self-consciousness. This higher element is *language* – an outer existence [*Dasein*] that is immediately self-conscious existence [*Existenz*]. (380, ¶710)

Works that exist in language, such as drama, constitute a significant step forward in the expression of spirit. Compared to the static character of a statue, language more adequately expresses the self-consciousness at the heart of the artist's creative activity.

The oracle constitutes the first stage of the religion of art that exists in language, and in connection with the oracle Hegel elaborates on the central role of the cultus. The actions of the cultus make this absolute essence actual – as the self-consciousness of a community. Where formerly this essence was conceived as an object standing over against the community, in the cultus this essence begins to be seen present in the community itself – specifically in its own practices including beliefs – i.e. in “the actuality proper to self-consciousness” (382, ¶714). The difference between these two sides – the object of consciousness and the self-consciousness of the community – is thus implicitly, though not yet explicitly, overcome.

Various festivals partially overcome this divide, through the singing of hymns as well as the Bacchic frenzy. Festivals celebrating the athletic prowess of actual human beings take this movement one step further.

The athlete is both the creator and the product of this creative activity. Moreover, in these athletic festivals, there emerges a representation of humanity that rises above national particularity.

This overcoming of national particularity is also expressed in the pantheon of gods, which represents a unity of diverse national spirits: “The pure intuition of itself as *universal humanity* has, in the actuality of the national spirits [*Volksgeister*], this form: the national spirit combines with the others with which it constitutes through nature *one nation* [*Nation*]” (389, ¶727). This universality, however, still exists in “immediate trust,” rather than more reflective self-consciousness (389, ¶727). This pantheon is thus not yet united by or subordinate to a single idea. This more universal content requires a more universal form. Consequently, in this stage, the function of the cultus in providing the self-consciousness of the absolute essence – “the relation of the divine to the human” (390, ¶730) – is no longer fulfilled by a group of devotees to a particular god (“no longer the actual practice of the cultus” (389, ¶729)) but rather the representations of epic, tragedy, and comedy. Here, even the gods are subordinate to a necessity that hovers over them, and the unity of the individual is dispersed among the gods of the pantheon (391–392, ¶¶731–732). In tragedy, the chorus constitutes a “spectator-consciousness” that represents the essence itself as self-conscious (393, ¶735). Yet the universal consciousness represented by the chorus remains both separate from the substance and subordinate to fate. Overcoming this subordination, in comedy thought frees itself from immediate identity with the existing order, such that the difference between general practices and the notion of universality itself is revealed: “Rational *thinking* frees the divine essence from its contingent shape and, in antithesis to the unthinking wisdom of the chorus which produces all sorts of ethical maxims and gives currency to a host of laws and specific concepts of duty and of rights, lifts these into the simple ideas of the *beautiful* and the *good*” (398, ¶746). Having become thoughts, they are represented as mere clouds, as in Aristophanes’ comedy. As empty, indeterminate thoughts, however, they give rise to a spectacle in which they become “the sport of mere opinion and the caprice of any chance individuality” (399, ¶746). At this point, however, there is no fate standing over above the self, and

[t]he *individual self* is the negative power through which and in which the gods, as also their moments, viz. existent nature and the thoughts of their specific characters, vanish. At the same time, the individual self is not the emptiness of this disappearance but, on the contrary, preserves itself in this very nothingness, abides with itself and is the sole actuality. In it, the religion of art is consummated and has completely returned into itself. (399, ¶747)

In comedy, the self represents itself as this power over the particular, as an activity with nothing standing over against it. Although stuck in an incessant movement lacking determination, the religion of art has raised itself to conceiving of the absolute as a self that is free from heteronomous determination.

3 REVEALED RELIGION

The ethical world of the Greek polis, in which particular individuals were submerged in the ethical life of the community, collapses into the Roman world populated by abstract individuals. Conceiving of the self as an absolute that stands over against the existing world, such individuals cannot reconcile themselves with actuality. They exemplify the unhappy consciousness analyzed at length in earlier chapters. This unhappy consciousness is “the loss of substance as well as of the self, it is the grief which expresses itself in the hard saying that ‘*God is dead*’” (401, ¶752). In a passage worth quoting at length for the light it sheds on what it means for god to be dead, Hegel writes:

Trust in the eternal laws of the gods has vanished, and the oracles, which pronounced on particular questions, are dumb. The statues are now only stones from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone. The tables of the gods provide no spiritual food and drink, and from its games and festivals consciousness no longer returns to its joyful unity with the essence. The works of the muse now lack the power of the spirit, for the spirit has gained its certainty of itself from the crushing of gods and men. They have become what they are for us now – beautiful fruit already picked from the tree, which a friendly fate has offered us, as a girl might set the fruit before us. It cannot give us the actual life in which they existed, not the tree that bore them, not the earth and the elements which constituted their substance, not the climate which gave them their peculiar character, nor the cycle of the changing seasons that governed the process of their growth. So fate does not restore their world to us along with the works of antique art, it gives not the spring and summer of the ethical life in which they blossomed and ripened, but only the veiled recollection of that actual world. Our active enjoyment of them is therefore not an act of divine worship through which our consciousness might come to its perfect truth and fulfillment. (402, ¶753)

The oracles, gods, and festivals have lost the power to express people’s deepest sense of themselves, to animate their collective life, and to reconcile individuals to the world around them – to make it appear an appropriate expression of who they are. As much as we might appreciate classical art, it cannot be for us – nor could it be for the Romans of late antiquity – what it was for the society that produced it. It cannot express our deepest reflections on ourselves.

With this shift, the stage has been set and the elements are in place for the emergence of a representation of the absolute essence as spirit. The developments provided by the religion of art combine with “the *world of the person* and of law, the destructive ferocity of the free elements of the content, as also the person as *thought* in stoicism, and the unstable restlessness of the skeptical consciousness”; together, these constitute “the [audience or] periphery of shapes which stands impatiently expectant round the birthplace of spirit as it becomes self-consciousness” (403, ¶754). As Miller’s translation suggests, Hegel’s phrasing here alludes to the figures waiting round the manger in Bethlehem; yet the specific claim is that the ingredients necessary for (as well as the need for – in the absence of alternative satisfactory conceptions) a particular new understanding of spirit had come together in this context.

This new conception of spirit as self-conscious finds its initial representation in the notion of the Incarnation. This conception of spirit initially comes into the world not through philosophical insight into the externalization of self-consciousness but rather in the belief that an immediately existing human being is the incarnation of the absolute:

That absolute spirit has given itself *implicitly* the shape of self-consciousness, and therefore has also given it for its *consciousness* – this now appears as the *belief of the world* that spirit *exists* [*da ist*] as a self-conscious being, i.e. as an actual man; that he exists for immediate certainty; that the believing consciousness sees, feels, and hears this divinity. (404, ¶758)

Crucial here is the belief that this actual individual is the incarnation of the absolute.

“This Incarnation of the divine essence, or that it essentially and immediately has the shape of self-consciousness, is the simple content of the absolute religion” (405, ¶759). The divine becoming human is the centerpiece of Christianity as Hegel here interprets it and is the reason that it is the absolute religion. The absolute essence has been revealed as spirit, and the Incarnation (in Hegel’s account) shows this essence to be identical with the essence of humanity: “the divine nature is the same as the human, and it is this unity that is intuited [*angeschaut*]” (406, ¶759).

The Incarnation is not only the key to Christianity’s being the absolute religion, however, but also exemplary of the finitude of its representations. Precisely because the absolute is here represented as incarnate in one particular person, this representation is ultimately inadequate. Conceived as uniquely present in this one human being, the absolute is an other to other human beings – a “sensuous other,” “opposed to universal self-consciousness” (407, ¶762). Humans have grasped the absolute as a self but limited it to this one particular person. They have not yet reconciled

their consciousness of the absolute essence and their own self-consciousness. Christ being represented as one particular person renders the rest of humanity alienated from the essence of spirit. Concretely, the idea that one and only one person incarnates the absolute stands in fundamental tension with notions of universality fundamental to modern sensibilities. The entire notion immediately raises questions regarding the justification of uniqueness and its attendant exclusions.

This inadequacy is partially overcome by the departure of this sensuous being, i.e. by Jesus' death (407–408, ¶763). The resurrection signifies a step beyond the identification of the absolute with a particular sensuous existence; the absolute is no longer represented as immediately existing but as surviving the death of the body. As a result, Christ is no longer uniquely present for those who happen to live in spatial and temporal proximity to this figure. Yet, as Hegel notes, this temporal and spatial distancing only partially overcomes immediacy. Even if Christianity represents Jesus as having overcome sensuous immediacy in the resurrection, the representation still preserves the sensuousness of this representation of spirit. This conception of the absolute “is merely raised into representation, for this is the synthetic combination of sensuous immediacy and its universality or thought” (408, ¶764).

Hegel's claim, crucial to his theory of religion as a whole, is that precisely because representations are representations, their portrayal of the absolute cannot adequately convey the universality of the absolute. Representation involves particulars that stand over against other particulars and fails to convey the infinite character of thought (408, ¶765). Complex relationships are represented as events – which could have happened otherwise – rather than shown to be necessary. The story of Adam and Eve's eviction from Eden for eating from the tree of knowledge, for instance, portrays the internal bifurcation intrinsic to consciousness as the result of a contingent historical event (412, ¶775). As an amalgam of the merely given and the necessary, representation contains elements of arbitrariness that are at odds with the necessity intrinsic to thought. Consequently, philosophy rather than religion provides the definitive account of the absolute essence: “God is attainable in purely speculative knowing [*Wissen*] alone and is only in that knowing and is only that knowing itself, for it is spirit, and this speculative knowing is the knowing of revealed religion” (407, ¶761).

Though Hegel's view of the limitations of representation might be thought to denigrate doctrine, it rather promotes its significance. Relative to the religious thought of many of his contemporaries, Hegel emphasizes the importance of doctrine – a significant shift from some of

his writing from the early 1790s, but a major feature of his Berlin lectures. These doctrines are integral to Christianity being the absolute religion because they express the content that makes it the highest religion. Spirit is known, or revealed, in these doctrines, motivating Hegel's designation of this religion as "revealed."

The key to these doctrines' importance and the simultaneous superiority of philosophy to religion lies in Hegel's hermeneutic of demythologization. Hegel interprets the Trinity and other Christian doctrines as representational expressions of the content expressed in the highest philosophy.¹⁰ He views them as the way in which these insights were, and are, expressed in a manner accessible to a wider range of people than is philosophy. And although Hegel contends that representation is the necessary path toward this insight – that this insight had to come first in the more immediate form of religion, not philosophy – religion does not contain an insight into the absolute that cannot be expressed, and expressed more adequately, by philosophy. The task of a philosophical analysis of religion – partially carried out here and developed in an extended manner in his Berlin lectures – is to uncover the conception of spirit expressed in the language and imagery of particular religious representations. Hegel has been engaged in this process throughout the historical segments of the chapter, yet it becomes most apparent in his treatment of Christian doctrines. In a hermeneutic strategy that has an extensive legacy in figures such as David Friedrich Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Rudolf Bultmann, Hegel appreciates these doctrines by removing the speculative kernel from the allegorical, metaphorical, imagistic – broadly mythological – husk of representations.

Hegel's phrasing of this demythologizing hermeneutic is surprisingly explicit. In discussing the doctrine of creation, for instance, Hegel writes that spirit "*creates* a world. This 'creating' is representation's word for the concept itself in its absolute movement; or for the fact that the simple which has been asserted as absolute, or pure thought, just because it is abstract, is rather the negative, and hence the self-opposed or 'other' of itself" (412, ¶774). The religious narrative of God's "creation" of the world represents that which philosophy expresses in the language of thought. To adequately interpret the former, then, it must be raised to the level of the latter. Doing so consists in distilling this philosophical insight from these mythological expressions. Similarly, Hegel writes, "[s]uch form of expression as 'fallen,' which, like the expression 'Son,' belongs to representation

¹⁰ For an excellent discussion of Hegel's treatment of specific doctrines, see *Crites* (1998), 497–517.

rather than to the concept, degrades the moments of the concept to the level of representation or carries representation over into the realm of thought” (413, ¶776). This passage in particular stresses the complexity of this relation: On one hand, these imagistic representations reduce or degrade the moments of the concept to the level of representation. On the other, in doing so these representations push against the limits of the form and “carr[y] representation over into” or raise this content to the level of thought. Thus, these representations cannot simply be dispensed with in favor of an exclusive focus on “faith.” It matters “what” is believed, not merely “that” it is believed. Yet neither can they fully express representationally that which finds its fullest expression only in thought.

While Hegel develops representation’s limits largely in relation to the Incarnation, the ultimately most significant consequence of this limit comes forth in the discussion of the cultus, which is central to the final pages of the chapter. The Christian cultus constitutes a major step forward in the reconciliation that was partially effected through the Incarnation and the death of Christ. In the cultus, the absolute is present in the consciousness of the community, and the revealed religion represents this through the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity: “Spirit is thus posited in the third element, in *universal self-consciousness*; it is its *community*” (417, ¶781). In the cultus, the community’s consciousness of the absolute is none other than spirit’s consciousness of itself: “In this way, therefore, spirit is *self-knowing* spirit; it knows *itself*; that which is object for it, is, or its representation is, the true absolute *content*; as we saw, it expresses spirit itself. It is at the same time not merely the *content* of self-consciousness and not merely object *for it*, but it is also *actual spirit*” (419, ¶786). The community is conscious of spirit as present in the community itself; in knowing spirit, it knows itself, identifying its own essence as the self-conscious, self-determining practices – including reflection – that constitute its collective existence.

In some sense, in the cultus the absolute is no longer other: “the distinguishing of its *self* and what it *intuits* [*seinem Angeschauten*]” is sublated (420, ¶786). Here Hegel describes the highest level of reconciliation possible through representation and thus in religion. Through its focus on the presence of the absolute essence in the believing community, the revealed religion identifies the centrality of self-consciousness itself to the notion of the absolute. Because this reconciliation still takes place in the mode of representation, however, it still conceives of this identification as the “deed of an *alien* satisfaction” (420, ¶787). Representation projects this reconciliation into a

beyond [*Jenseits*]. Its own reconciliation therefore enters its consciousness as something *distant*, as something in the distant *future*, just as the reconciliation which the other *self* achieved appears as something in the distant *past*. Just as the *individual* divine human being has a father *in principle* [*ansichseienden*] and only an *actual* mother, so too the universal divine human being, the community, has for its father its *own doing* and *knowing*, but for its mother, *eternal love* which it only *feels*, but does not intuit [*anschaut*] in its consciousness as an actual, immediate *object*. (420–421, ¶787)

Concretely, we are not reconciled to actual existence but rather see that reconciliation as coming in the future: “Its reconciliation, therefore, is in its heart, but its consciousness is still divided against itself and its actuality is still disrupted” (421, ¶787). The actual world – existing practices and institutions – are seen as other to this absolute essence rather than as a formation of spirit. Religious consciousness is separated from the consciousness that governs daily interaction in the world. In this respect, individuals are also alienated from themselves. The element of alienation that abides in even the highest forms of representation thus manifests itself in the way that the community blocks off its “religious” life from other elements of its social existence, as well as in the way that individuals are internally divided.

Though religion here involves the projection of reconciliation into the future rather than the projection of our essence onto a fundamentally other being, projection endures within this sphere. Its overcoming simultaneously constitutes the transition to philosophy. Nonetheless, for Hegel even if the highest form of religion still involves projection, not all projections are equal: he has spent much of the chapter trumpeting Christianity’s value for overcoming alienation. Ultimately, despite the remaining alienation, Hegel’s project defends Christianity on the basis of the degree of reconciliation that it does achieve. As in other respects, the *Phenomenology* is a transitional work with respect to this project. While the demythologizing hermeneutic central to his later lectures on the philosophy of religion is already in place, the account of the final inadequacy of religion bears more similarity to his earlier essay, *Faith and Knowledge* (1802–3). While all of these formulations can be seen as offering a theory of projection, by the time of the Berlin lectures Hegel has come to view this projection in a more positive light than in either *Faith and Knowledge* or the *Phenomenology*.

This complexity generates the deep ambiguity of Hegel’s legacy. In concluding, I want to suggest four strands of this legacy for religious thought and the theorization of religion – without implying that Hegel is the unique source of these developments. First, Hegel makes the need to

reconcile Christianity with commitments to universality central to the goal of offering an account of Christianity that coheres with modern social and intellectual developments. Hegel develops this point most clearly in relation to the doctrine of the Incarnation, thereby suggesting the value of the problem of the universality of Christ as a lens for viewing central developments in modern Christian thought. While Karl Rahner's notion of "anonymous Christianity" grapples with this issue by trying to make sense out of salvation outside the Church, some of the most vivid examples come from recent liberation theologians. Despite their differences, each of these try to overcome the problem of Jesus' particularity and otherness by locating the Incarnation in the present community, whether as the "Black Christ" (in James Cone), the "scourged Christ of the Indies" (in Gustavo Gutiérrez's appropriation of las Casas), or the "Queer Christ" (in Robert Goss).¹¹ And it is no surprise that one of the major charges against liberationists is that they undermine the universality of the Christian message by privileging a particular group, the oppressed.

Hegel's hermeneutic of demythologization constitutes another strand of this legacy, one taken up by both constructive Christian theologians and their critics. He shares much with the hermeneuts of suspicion but indicates that such a strategy does not intrinsically discredit the materials it analyzes; it may defend them through reinterpretation. David Friedrich Strauss' *Life of Jesus* advanced this current almost immediately following Hegel's death, arguing that the Bible should be understood as a kind of philosophical myth expressed in language corresponding to early Christians' mythical views of the universe.¹² Despite his intentions, Strauss was largely viewed as undermining Christian belief, and this family of hermeneutic strategies is perhaps most often employed with this intent – as in the classic masters of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Yet a hermeneutic of demythologization should not be reduced to a hermeneutics of suspicion. The most famous advocate of "demythologizing" is the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann. Whereas Hegel focuses on representation, Bultmann discusses myth – understood to involve "supernatural, superhuman forces or persons" and juxtaposed with "science" – and thereby makes transcendence intrinsic to the project.¹³ Abstracting an essential – in Bultmann's case, existential – seed from this mythological or representational husk need not involve rejecting Christianity but has played a central role in efforts to

¹¹ See Rahner (1969), 390–398; Cone (1990); Goss (1993); and Gutiérrez (1993).

¹² Strauss (2005). ¹³ Bultmann (1984), 95.

reconcile Christianity with the contemporary world. This dual legacy – among the hermeneuts of suspicion and among those seeking to reconcile Christianity and challenges to the tradition – shows the way in which Hegel’s hermeneutic of demythologization provides a frame broad enough to unite a number of figures with very different views of religion.

In Hegel’s case, this demythologizing hermeneutic is closely linked to a conception of religion as projection. Ludwig Feuerbach has played a central role in both of these currents. Feuerbach argues that “[t]he *absolute* to man is his own nature” and spends much of *The Essence of Christianity* analyzing the conception of human beings expressed by Christian doctrine.¹⁴ While Feuerbach’s shift from a conception of “spirit” to a conception of human nature is significant, reading Hegel and Feuerbach in this manner suggests that Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* is not nearly as far from Hegel as Feuerbach’s rhetoric suggests. Specifically, Feuerbach’s account of religion as a reifying projection extends, rather than undermines, the theory of religion Hegel develops. Yet Feuerbach offers a much more negative view of the ethical implications of religious projection. Positing a fundamental conflict between faith and love, Feuerbach argues that projecting our essence onto another being hinders our ability to love each other. While in the *Phenomenology* Hegel is somewhat critical of religion’s impact on our relation to the world around us, by the time of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* he places greater weight on Protestantism’s ability to highlight rather than undermine the actual world’s significance. In one of the most influential accounts of projection, Peter Berger in some sense seeks to split the difference between Hegel and Feuerbach by maintaining neutrality with regard to both the validity of religious belief and its consequences.¹⁵

While each of these first three trajectories emerged soon after Hegel’s death and continues today, the last is perhaps the most recent to develop and the most vital in the contemporary study of religion. The role Hegel attributes to the cultus makes practice central to religion. For this reason, Hegel has much to contribute to contemporary discussions in religious studies, such as those building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Catherine Bell, and Talal Asad.¹⁶ Hegel’s complex account of the mutually constituting relationship between consciousness and practice, however, provides

¹⁴ Feuerbach (1957), 5. For an excellent account of Feuerbach’s theory of religion, see Harvey (1995). Harvey argues that Feuerbach’s later but lesser-known work offers a more sophisticated view than his *Essence of Christianity*.

¹⁵ Berger (1967), esp. appendix 2. ¹⁶ Bourdieu (1990); Bell (1992); Asad (1993).

resources for attending to practice's centrality to religion without sacrificing the import of consciousness and belief.

Taking these four trajectories together, we can see that despite his influence Hegel avoids several of the facile juxtapositionings that are too often taken for granted today. In presenting accounts of demythologization and projection with which an appropriately understood Christianity might be reconciled, Hegel indicates the difficulty of any simple account of "religious" versus "secular" or "sacred" versus "profane." By undermining widespread presuppositions about these terms, he may help us move toward a more complex view of the ongoing relevance of religion to understanding the modern world.

The “logic of experience” as “absolute knowledge” in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit

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I

The problem with Hegel’s characterizations of the new philosophical form that he invented, a *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is simply that there are far too many descriptions. Some are clearly reformulations or specifications of others; but in many other cases the descriptions seem inconsistent, or to reflect different periods in Hegel’s rapidly evolving thought between 1802 and 1806 in Jena. The *Phenomenology* was originally a “Science of the Experience of Consciousness.” He names it “the Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit” and the “Introduction” to the “System of Science.” It was also the first part of such a system. The *Encyclopedia* calls the *Phenomenology* “the scientific history of consciousness.” In the body of the work, Hegel calls the work “the way of the soul which journeys through the series of its own configurations as though they were the stations appointed for it by its own nature, so that it may purify itself for the life of the Spirit, and achieve finally, through a completed experience of itself, the awareness of what it really is in itself” (55, ¶177). He famously calls the *Phenomenology* “the pathway of *doubt*,” indeed “the way of despair” (56, ¶178), and thereby “the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science” (56, ¶178).

And this is only the beginning. All at once in the first pages of the “Introduction” and in the “Preface,” we are introduced to something that is not only, as just noted, an introduction, a first part of a system, a self-purification, spirit’s self-knowledge, and the “history” of the education of natural consciousness, but also “Spirit’s insight into what knowing is” (25, ¶29), a “ladder” to the standpoint of science (23, ¶26), a record of the way Spirit “look[s] the negative in the face,” and “carries with it” (27, ¶32), a way of coming to an understanding of “the True” as “the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet . . . each member collapses as soon as he drops out” (35, ¶47), and all this by means of that constant struggle with doubt and despair. In a slightly more prosaic image in the

"Preface," and one which clearly identifies Hegel's unique and original contribution to philosophy, Hegel notes that the *Phenomenology* will serve a need peculiar to our own age: "to give actuality to the universal, and impart to it spiritual life" (28, ¶33). It will do this by "freeing determinate thoughts from their fixity," that is, "to bring fixed thoughts into a fluid state," and so to make "the pure thoughts become *concepts*," that is, "spiritual essences" (28, ¶33).

And of course any serious reader must also confront a number of long-standing and relatively unresolved philological questions. There is the famous problem of the alternative, truncated version of "Phenomenology" in the *Encyclopedia* and there is Hegel's summary of the *Phenomenology* – as a "propaedeutic" – for his students at Nürnberg, both of which summaries present the work as concluding with the Reason chapter, raising endless questions about two famous issues: The role of the treatment of historical Spirit and religion in the published work, and the systematic place of *Phenomenology*, either as introduction or propaedeutic on the one hand, or as the second moment of a Philosophy of Subjective Spirit on the other. There are also complex questions about the putative unity or incompleteness of the text (there is some suspicion that it may be a palimpsest) and what appear to be frequent alterations in Hegel's own mind about his system and its Introduction.

In the face of all these issues, I want to make four relatively uncontroversial claims about the book, all of which together will raise immediately the question I want to pursue. First, the great contrast in the book is clearly between an initial mode of self-understanding in relation to the world, to one's deeds, and towards others that Hegel designates as "consciousness," or "natural consciousness," or sometimes the point of view of "understanding," and an achieved self-understanding as Spirit. In more traditional philosophical terms this amounts to a new theory of subjectivity, of what it is to be a cognizing and acting subject, making up one's mind about facts and events and resolving to act, one opposed to Cartesian interiority, Kantian transcendentalism, Christian dualism, and self-causing models of individual agency like Kant's. What this successor notion of subjectivity amounts to, what Spirit is, is clearly the major issue in the book, but there is no question that the heart of his claim is introduced at the end of the first three chapters, when Hegel announces: "With this, we already have before us the concept of *Spirit*," and offers his famous initial definition: "I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (108, ¶177).

Secondly, whatever else the *Phenomenology* is, its logic, the way it presents the case it wants to make about Spirit's ultimately successful self-knowledge

and sociality is, broadly speaking, developmental, not deductive or analytic. Later parts are, at the very least, supposed to rely or rest on what transpired in earlier passages, especially on the inadequacy or partiality of the point of view entertained in any one section, and on some sort of improvement or correction or more comprehensive perspective.

Some commentators have even claimed that this developmental logic is actually a kind of narrative and that its logic or the coherence of its ordering is much closer to the logic of a *Bildungsroman* than an ever more logically consistent treatment of ever more self-conscious presuppositions. This clearly goes too far, since Hegel wants to claim that the development and self-realization of Spirit is a rational process, although it is also true that, since Hegel is insisting on a “living” and “fluid” form of such rationality, it is initially unclear just what one would be claiming against a more dramatic or literary notion of narrative development.

Third, the “engine” that drives all of this forward is, stated most broadly, “negation”; more specifically, a kind of self-negation. Natural consciousness is said to suffer a kind of “violence” at its own hands. The image is of a subject embodying a point of view or world-orientation or self-understanding or practice, which is born in such a way that such a subject comes (apparently, for some reason, unavoidably or inevitably) to create a dissatisfaction with its own deepest principles and commitments. Such disaffection, whatever it is, is not something that can be said to happen *to* whoever the subject of the narrative is; it is *self*-inflicted. In the Preface, compressing almost the whole book into a formula, Hegel remarks on “the mediation of becoming-other-to-itself [*Sichanderswerdens*] with itself” and, as he often does, defines true human subjectivity as “pure, *simple negativity*” (18, ¶18). These two notions – the developmental nature of Spirit and this self-negating quality – are combined in the *Encyclopedia*’s quite paradoxical and frequent characterization of Spirit as a “product of itself” and is the foundation of the claim that “the Absolute . . . is essentially a *result*” (19, ¶20).

Fourth, and most important, this turn against itself is explicitly said by Hegel *not* to be like what we now think of “critical reflection,” the attempt to examine unexamined assumptions, to take nothing for granted, to think for oneself and not blindly follow the lead of others, in general to see if one can reflexively defend some norm or principle to which one is committed. For, as Hegel briefly argues in the Introduction, all such attempts must commit the very sin against which they preach: any determinate attempt at such reflection must embody something unreflected, as standard or criterion, in order to move forward at all. What I want particularly to stress is that Hegel says that, in any case, what is going on in the *Phenomenology* is

not this story, or not primarily the story of this sort of education, as if a Socratic expansion of what is more and more “examined” in a life or within a culture. In the most relevant passages from the Introduction, Hegel first notes that the “doubt” in question in his book will *not* correspond to the usual notion of doubt, which he calls “shilly-shallying about this or that presumed truth” (56, ¶78). He speaks instead of “this thoroughgoing skepticism” (56, ¶78), and of an experience of losing one’s way that is so profound it is said to involve “the loss of its own self” (56, ¶78), all of which he contrasts explicitly with the kind of language Kant had used to define the practical motto of Enlightenment: *sapere aude*. This difference corresponds for some commentators (such as Ludwig Siep) to a difference in the senses of “experience” [*Erfahrung*] invoked by Hegel.¹ The critical, reflective sense just refers to one’s correcting false beliefs and substituting, if not true, then at least better-grounded beliefs, on the basis of “experience.” The more dramatic sense that Hegel appears to invoke is much closer to a complete overturning or conversion of consciousness, the kind of change we think of as a religious experience or deep political transformation. I think it is right that Hegel is thinking more of the latter sort of “experience”; and therein lies the problem. This last is exactly the sort we think most certainly has *no* “logos” or account. It seems to happen to us for a very wide variety of reasons, and the idea that we actually bring this about ourselves, and there could be a science of experience in *this* sense, a “logic” to this sort of experience, indeed as part of some collective purposive activity, seems very counterintuitive.²

So the question of Spirit raises the question of the status of sociality (in contrast with reflective individuals and self-causing agents), the nature of a developmental logic or a form of rational development for “living,” “moving,” “fluid” concepts, and the somewhat masochistic notion of self-negation. I suggest that the last question is the best window onto the others: Why does Hegel here invoke a level of self-inflicted doubt that reaches *despair* to describe the nature of phenomenological development, and if it is *not* “doubt that my beliefs might not be true,” or doubt “that I am really entitled to the normative claims I make,” what sort of doubt/despair is it? Put in terms of another powerful image which Hegel uses much later in the *Phenomenology* to describe the problem facing Spirit (and which he repeats

¹ Siep (2000), 63–64.

² The two issues – that such an experience is self-made, and is rationally explicable – are linked. The link could be said to be Kant’s modernity – the claim that reason knows best only what it makes, that reason knows only itself.

in such generality at the beginning of his *Lectures on Fine Art*), what does it mean to say that Spirit or even human existence itself is like a “wound” that is (1) self-inflicted, (2) one which Spirit itself can heal, and even more astonishingly, (3) one which, when healed, leaves no scars (360, ¶669). Put another way: Wittgensteinians sometimes talk about being “caught in” or “grabbed by” a “picture.” What Hegel appears to be addressing is the problem of what it is for a “picture” or shape of spirit to lose its grip, cease to command allegiance, fail in some way, *and all this in a way that is open to a philosophical, not merely sociological or historical explanation*. Indeed, Hegel seems to think that making philosophical sense out of such a process just *is* what it is to “heal” this experience of loss; to heal it so well that no scars remain. This, of course, requires an answer to the very largest question of them all: What is it to have obtained “absolute knowing” and how could *that* be said to heal, without scars, the wound of existence itself?

Raising this question obviously forces our attention to the surprisingly few “metaphenomenological” digressions inside the *Phenomenology* itself about itself and clearly calls for some, let us say, demythologizing work, a way of rendering the notions of “wound,” “self-inflicted,” “healing” and “scars,” “fluidity,” “looking death in the face,” and “violence” less metaphorical and more prosaic. That is what I propose to do briefly in what follows.

2

There is one interpretive problem that must be addressed first. The language I have quoted is very dramatic and seems to refer to some sort of existential failure in a “shape of Spirit,” perhaps as manifest in Attic tragedy or the French Revolution. Yet there are a large number of transitions in the *Phenomenology* that do not seem to involve any such notion of failure. The first three chapters come to mind in this respect, as do many of the transitions in Chapter V. No despair, no bold facing up to death or tarrying with the negative, no religious conversion, seem involved by the realization that perceptual discrimination requires the active work of the understanding, or for the realization that “physiognomy” is self-refuting.

I suggest that Hegel must have in mind two different questions posed by the *Phenomenology*, questions that must be posed separately if we are to understand both *why* Spirit must be understood phenomenologically, and *what* it is to understand Spirit phenomenologically, an approach that, from Chapter VI onwards seems much more tied to historical actuality. There is

a difference, in other words, between the question of possible *models* of cognizing and acting subjectivity, or putative candidates for such a status which, as quite fragmented, partial, and so distorted "shapes" of a possibly experiencing subject, can *not* actually stand as models of experience at all, and, on the other hand, a self-dissolving (*sich-auflösende*) "actual" (as he calls it) experience in the full sense, experienced *by* a historical "shape of Spirit," now understood in sufficient complexity to count as a full subject of experience but which just thereby can be shown to undermine its own satisfaction. This distinction, between failing to be a possible model of experience at all, and an actually experiencing subject which can be "shown" to experience its inability to carry through or realize its commitments, is not a hard and fast one, and at some points in the text it is, admittedly, not clear how Hegel is organizing these possibilities. At some point the appeal to the spiritual life and the fluidity of concepts just seems to amount to a rather forced "personification" of positions in epistemology or theories of freedom, with such representative "characters" arguing back and forth. At other points, there seems instead to be an appeal to an existential logic of sorts, or a demonstration of a different sort of insufficiency or failure, as in the account of the French Revolution or of Rameau's nephew. At some points, both strategies seem in play, as in the paradoxes of mastery, which are both conceptual (coerced recognition is not recognition) and, for want of a better word, existential (there is something unsatisfying in being recognized by one whom one does not recognize).³

However, formally, this is not at all a mode of argumentation that is foreign to Hegel. In his *Philosophy of Right*, abstract right and morality are not distinct *experiential* stages, partial alternatives to what will turn out to be ethical life. The failure of such limited putative forms of normative-mindedness stems from precisely the doomed attempt to think them independently of, as if prior to, and independent of, ethical life. As he says at the end of the Morality section, by contrast with such a view:

The sphere of right and that of morality cannot exist independently [*für sich*]; they must have the ethical as their support and foundation.⁴

These earlier stages cannot then be said to be "actually" educative or formative in the way that experience in the family or modern civil society *can* indeed be said actually to *form* a rich, living sense of the relation

³ It is also open to a critic to say at this point: If Hegel wanted to say, as you seem to be suggesting, that the *Phenomenology* really only truly begins in Chapter VI, he could have said so. I am trying to respond that, in a way, that is exactly what he did claim.

⁴ Hegel (*PR*), 186, §141 A.

between individuality and universality in a rational form of life. He goes so far as to say, when explaining the differences between the abstractions “person,” “subject,” and the concrete aspects of ethical life, that it is only well along in the account of ethical life, in a distinct form of sociality – certain relations of needs – that it is even possible for the first time to refer to such a putative bearer of right as “the human being.”⁵ And this seems to mean just what it says: That putative (*vermeintlich*) relations merely of right or morality cannot, considered on their own, be said to be fully human relations.

Something very similar is going on in the crucial third paragraph of Chapter VI:

Spirit is thus self-supporting, absolute, real being. All previous shapes of consciousness are abstract forms of it. They result from Spirit analyzing itself, distinguishing its moments, and dwelling for a while with each. This isolating of those moments *presupposes* Spirit itself and subsists therein; in other words, the isolation exists only in Spirit which is a concrete existence. (239, ¶440)

We still need to know how Spirit can be “self-supporting” as well as just also thereby being self-negating or “self-wounding,” but the point for the moment is to notice how Hegel makes this separation between the analysis of what will turn out to be non-separable moments of Spirit, abstractly considered *as if* possibly distinct models of experience, and Spirit’s “actual” experience of itself, as Hegel keeps putting it. At this point, just at the conclusion of his account of the ultimately impossible attempt to consider practical reason in such an isolated way as a faculty of an individual subject, he puts the point this way:

Finally, when this Reason which Spirit *has* is intuited by Spirit as Reason that *exists*, or as Reason that is *actual* in Spirit and is its world, then Spirit exists in its truth; it *is* Spirit, the *ethical* essence that has an *actual* existence. (239, ¶440)

Another very odd formulation – a transition from a subject which *has* reason to one which sees itself *as* reason – but as in many other formulations about this break in the text (from, let us say, the component conditions for the possibility of Spirit to the attempts by actual Spirit to know and realize itself), the key phrases concern “actuality,” “actual,” and “actualization.” Such an emphasis continues in the crucial metaphenomenological remarks at the beginning of the “Religion” chapter.

Here Hegel makes a distinction between what should be phenomenologically represented as happening in time and what should not. In making

⁵ Hegel (*PR*), 228, §190.

pretty much the distinction noted above, he says quite explicitly that the “presence” of the moments consciousness, self-consciousness and reason in Spirit, and Spirit’s representation to itself of its own significance in religion are “not to be represented as occurring in Time” (365, ¶679). This is only one way of considering the elements of and possibility of experience that Hegel is treating as preliminary, if also crucial and indispensable. Such a way of considering such inseparable moments in separation from one another is then distinguished from the representation of “the totality of Spirit”:

Only the totality of Spirit is in Time, and the “shapes,” which are “shapes” of the totality of *Spirit*, display themselves in a temporal succession; for only the whole has true actuality and therefore the form of pure freedom in face of an “other,” a form which expresses itself as Time. (365, ¶679)

This interesting but very compressed passage connects the themes of actual Spirit (as opposed to possible models of Spirit), temporality, and freedom, and so provides a hint of how and why Hegel thinks of Spirit’s self-realization in time as a manifestation of freedom. For the moment, though, the point is that, if only the totality of Spirit or Spirit *as* Spirit is in time, and so must be studied as such, and we have *not* been doing so heretofore, then we have not yet begun the study of Spirit in its “actuality.” It is only now, after all, that we are beginning to get in view what Spirit as an actually experiencing subject is. Even the subject of Chapter VI is still a limited treatment because, as Hegel says at the beginning of the Religion chapter, Spirit does not yet know itself as Spirit and so regards religion, the representation of its (ultimately) absolute status, as but one of the distinct experiential components of a life. This is confirmed quite clearly and definitively when Hegel, in describing what the *Phenomenology* will now be about, compared to its earlier discussions, says:

These shapes, however, are distinguished from the previous ones by the fact that they are real Spirits, actualities in the strict meaning of the word, and instead of being shapes merely of consciousness, are shapes of a world. (240, ¶441)

We are, in other words, under way in just what Hegel often says the *Phenomenology* is, an Introduction or even a propaedeutic. For most of the *Phenomenology*, we are, strictly speaking, not yet studying or coming to understand Spirit; we are coming to understand what such a mode of self-knowledge would have to be, and to speak plainly, we are coming to see that it must be historical, *that Spirit is only what it has made itself in actuality*. Only as historical can consciousness be given “the form of free actuality,” and so be understood as Spirit; “but only Spirit that is object to

itself as absolute Spirit is conscious of itself as a free actuality to the extent that it is and remains conscious of itself therein” (365, ¶678). Given this understanding of Spirit being object to itself as absolute Spirit, perhaps it is not too premature to suggest that *this* realization of the necessity to understand Spirit in its actuality has something to do with attaining absolute knowledge.

But it is certainly somewhat premature. We need also to return to the question of self-inflicted wounds. The idea that for Hegel human subjectivity should be understood as self-made across time and that at the heart of such making and re-making are commonly held or social forms of self-understanding, undergoing cycles of gaining and losing social authority, contains familiar aspects of so-called left-Hegelian interpretations. But two aspects of Hegel’s position have prevented his basic idea from having had much contemporary resonance: The idea (which now seems naïve) that this self-making has an underlying fixed teleological direction, and that it has a goal or telos which, in some sense or other, is beginning to be achieved in Western modernity. This is another way of saying again that, when Hegel introduces his appeal to experience as manifesting the fluidity and spiritual life of concepts, he is introducing what almost everyone now regards as wholly *a-logos*, merely the wild and random contingency of a particular culture’s historical life and its various internal disputes about authoritative norms. The idea that philosophy could be – indeed, must be – *about all that* is not regarded as a contemporary option.

3

These doubts return us again to the question of “suffering violence at its own hands,” “tarrying [*verweilen*] with the negative,” and self-inflicted wounds as the engine driving forward this development in a way Hegel thinks of as rational and, because rational, the realization of freedom. It is in the final “Absolute Knowing” chapter that Hegel attempts to clarify one final time this “logic of experience” that he has appealed to throughout. That logic can appear to involve merely the test of various norms for cognizing and acting “against” experience as a kind of independent validator, an “exposure” to possible negation or an experiential measure that forces alterations in what had been self-certainty. But Hegel begins to explain in more detail in this chapter that this would be far too simple a way of viewing what has gone on. Rather, the “externalization” of some sort of self-conception or normative commitment (by which he also means the “negation” of what begins as mere subjective certainty) is “internally”

driven and such experience does not function as an independent validator or external test but as helping to fix or realize or “fulfill” the determinacy of some self-understanding or *conceptual content itself*.⁶ Experiential manifestations are not “instances” of such content, or examples; such dimensions *make up* the concept’s content.⁷ Hegel points out that it was precisely the error of the beautiful soul and a strict moralism of pure duty to regard itself as in opposition to an external public world subject to the interpretations of and implications for others that a subject could not control and so would cease to recognize as “his.” When Hegel tries to explain what it would be to give up such an attitude, he begins to describe what he clearly regards as the most important “movement” in all of the *Phenomenology*. His introduction of this explanatory language is important enough to warrant a full quotation:

Since the Concept holds itself firmly opposed to its realization, it is the one-sided shape which we saw vanish into thin air, but also positively externalize itself and move onward. Through this realization, this objectless self-consciousness ceases to cling to the *determinateness* of the Concept as against its *fulfillment*; its self-consciousness gains the form of universality and what remains is its true Concept, or the Concept that has attained its realization; it is the Concept in its truth, viz., in unity with its externalization. (426, ¶1795)

This passage introduces formulations that would become canonical in Hegel’s work, especially the insistence that we need to understand a concept in its “actuality,” that so understanding conceptual content is true understanding, a comprehension of the idea, defined as the concept together with its actuality. And it formalizes the *Phenomenology*’s claim to understand concepts in their “spiritual lives” and as always “self-moving,” as well as the claim that this notion of “living” content is the result of an content-constituting, unavoidable self-externalization, not the submission of an *ex ante* determined content to an external experiential test.

4

So far, these just seem to be re-formulations of the problem, and they serve mostly as a warning about how much and what sort of attention to

⁶ Any full discussion of this issue would have to take account of the implications of Hegel’s criticism of the way Kant distinguishes concept and intuition in his first *Critique*. Put another way, what I am claiming in this passage is that *these* are the implications of denying any strict separability of concept and intuition.

⁷ This is a crude and simplistic summary. Hegel is no nominalist. He seems to think of his positions on universals and particulars as Aristotle’s “immanentist,” anti-*chorismos* position, with the crucial and huge additional claim – that such universals “move,” are in time, change.

historical change would have to be involved to understand properly both the content and the authority of “thick” concepts such as “freedom,” “justice,” “explanation,” “beautiful,” “pious,” and so forth. But in the next paragraph, Hegel takes a giant step towards clarity when he tells us, and then repeats several times throughout this pivotal chapter, that a paradigmatic instance of the logic of self-externalization and so fulfillment and reunification with externality is “the self-assured Spirit that *acted*” (426, ¶796). He is appealing here, I would suggest, to the two most important discussions of action in the *Phenomenology* – V.C, “Individuality which takes itself to be real in and for itself” (a passage the point of which is to show that individuality *cannot* be “real in and for itself”) and VI.C, “Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality” (the point of which again is to show that a subject could *not* coherently carry through a merely self-certain conception of itself). In both passages, Hegel offers a phenomenology of what amounts to the standard or default understanding of the distinction between actions and events in the modern Western tradition, and of the relation between individual and deed, and he exposes their limitations in ways ultimately of great relevance for the question of absolute knowing.

That default modern distinction understands actions as things done intentionally by individuals, purposely, for a purpose. This is sometimes said to mean: Acting from or on or because of an intention. Or, of the many possible descriptions of some occurrence, it is an action if there is a true description under which is intentional. The relation between an individual and his deed is, in both the Humean and Kantian sides of the modern tradition, understood *causally*. In the former this is natural causality and in the latter noumenal causality, but in both cases the assumption is that had not a discrete mental event initiated a body movement there would not have been action, and that the proper focus for any explanation of an action is on this causally efficacious, determinate, prior mental state or intention, whether a passion or a maxim.

In both the relevant sections of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel tries to exhibit phenomenologically the severe limitations of this position and proposes instead to look not at several distinct causally initiated phases of an action but to view actions as evolving and changing expressions of a subject’s intentions over an extended time, determinate only in extended confrontation and reaction within what Terry Pinkard has called “social space,” and not the causal results of a discrete event. That is, Hegel denies that the right way to fix the determinacy of an action, to determine just what it was that was done, is to look exclusively to a subject’s *ex ante* formulated intention. He insists that such putative intentions cannot, if they are to

be understood as “actual” intentions, be temporally isolated from their expression in action, that such subjective formulations and reasons change in the course of the deed, and that it is quite possible that persons can be wrong about their actual intentions and motivation, that only as expressed in the deed in this public, social space is it clear what they are committed to and sometimes clear why. This is a counterintuitive position. It means that a subject can often only “learn from the deed,” as Hegel says, what it is he did and what his stake in the deed actually was, and it implies a deep dependence on the reception of the deed in society as helping to fix determinately what was in fact done. But in our context, this position makes intuitively clearer why Hegel is referring so frequently to this position as a way of explaining why there is no strict separation between a concept and its “actualization” or “fulfillment,” why the comprehension of conceptual content requires attention to the “fluidity” and “living spirituality” of a norm, what I have identified as the core position of the *Phenomenology*. In Hegel’s view in the relevant sections of the *Phenomenology*, actually to have an intention *is* to struggle to express that intention in a public and publicly contestable deed, subject to great temporal fluidity and to appropriations and interpretations by others that can greatly alter one’s own sense of what one is about.

It is, to use Hegel’s term, to “sacrifice” the purity and certainty (and so security) of one’s self-understanding and to subject oneself to the reactions, counterclaims, and challenges of others. Were one to remain in the Inner Citadel of Subjective Certainty, or cling only to what can be formally definable, one’s self-understanding would have to remain suspended in doubt – the question of whether I am actually committed to what I take myself to be, the question of the “actuality” of any self-image, or any claim about normative propriety, would be left suspended, and because of that could be counted as much a fantasy of resolve or intention or commitment as genuine. Action must be understood as a self-negation in this sense, a negation of the subject’s pretension to complete ownership of the nature and import of the deed, and therewith the sharing of such authority with others, or even the sacrifice of philosophy as an ahistorical *a priori* discipline in the traditional, both Platonic and Kantian, senses. All of this can seem like “the way of despair” just in the sense Hegel suggested, “the loss of its own self” (56, ¶178).⁸ But as in many other examples of Hegel’s Christian

⁸ Cf. especially with respect to the speculative identity that Hegel maintains exists between inner and outer in action: “The power of Spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition” (6, §10).

imagery, the experiential *Bildung* can show that by this loss of a false independence and mastery, one has gained true independence, referred to in the *Philosophy of Right* as being “with itself . . . in this other.”⁹

5

This is the sort of language Hegel uses several times in the Absolute Knowing chapter. He remarks:

Through this movement of action, Spirit has come on the scene as a pure universality of knowing, which is self-consciousness, as self-consciousness that is the simple unity of knowing. It is only through action that Spirit *is* in such a way that it is *really there*, that is, when it raises its existence into Thought and thereby into an absolute *antithesis*, and returns out of this antithesis, in and through the antithesis itself. (427, ¶1796)

What is highlighted in the Hegelian account of the nature of action, what he takes as paradigmatic for the logical form of “reconciled” experience and knowledge of this requirement (i.e. absolute knowing), is what he had described in the following way:

This letting-go is the same renunciation of the one-sidedness of the Concept that in itself constituted the beginning; but it is now its own act of renunciation, just as the Concept which it renounces is its own Concept. (426–427, ¶1796)

And so:

to set in motion the *immediacy of the in-itself*. . . or conversely, to realize and reveal what is at first only *inward* (the in-itself being taken as what is *inward*), i.e. to vindicate it for Spirit’s certainty of itself. (428, ¶1801)

In this context, Hegel reverts to his sacrificial metaphors and notes how each side of this opposition – formal universality versus rich, living content, or a purely self-certain formulation of subjective intention as the essence of an action, versus the meaning and scope of responsibility

⁹ Hegel (*PR*), 42, §7 A. Hegel makes what he would consider a “logical” point about the major events in “both” Bibles. The story of creation in the Hebrew Bible represents the insufficiency of a God merely contained with himself, and so the need to “empty” [*entäussern*] himself in creating the world. (There is little doubt that Hegel accepts the Lutheran take on this word – Luther’s translation for *kenosis* – and goes farther, claiming as a meaning for the image that God had to empty or lose or externalize himself in what appeared other than him in order finally to be God. I follow here Terry Pinkard’s translation and reading in his forthcoming translation of the *Phenomenology*.) And in the New Testament the imagery is even more Hegelian. God the Father had to become his own son, externalized in the world and lost to him (to himself), preparing the way for reconciliation, or the Holy Spirit. The deeper point here is also, I would argue, ultimately politico-ethical: Christ’s iconic status as both Master and Servant, his own father and his own son, at the same time.

assigned to one by others, or pure duty versus the inescapable relevance of all-too-human, sensible motivations – can be said to “die” (*sterben*) to the other. The paradigm picture Hegel keeps reverting to is of an acting subject so stubbornly insistent on the decisive role played by his subjectively formulated intention, so insistent on the individual authority to determine the determinate content of what was done and what scope the action should include, that the actual transition from intention to action is experienced as a regrettable qualification and intrusion on such purity. The execution of an intention is as much a violation as expression. The reception and reaction of others is regarded as the irritating and ultimately irrelevant intrusion of others into one’s own business, “like flies to spilled milk” as he says in V.C. This is shown to lead to an “experiential” impasse, generating various existential pathologies: “the law of the heart,” “the frenzy of self-conceit,” “the spiritual animal kingdom and deceit, or ‘the matter in hand’ itself,” and “the ‘beautiful soul,’ evil.” Neither side of this fantasy world, either a self-conception as a contingently motivated, passion-satisfying engine, or a pure self-legislating noumenal subject, can “actually” *act* on its self-conception and so would die a kind of living death without the moment of reconciliation and “sacrifice” that Hegel points to.

So from an initial, subjectively self-certain point of view, action looks like a self-negation, a violation of the purity and exclusive ownership of the deed thought to be a condition for seeing myself in the deed and so for freedom. But Hegel tries to illuminate the enormous burden carried by such a self-understanding, tries to render experientially plausible the claim that such stubbornness will eventually “break” under such a burden (as in “the breaking of the hard heart” in “Morality” (360, ¶669))¹⁰ and that ultimately such a subject will come to understand such a negation of its own pure subjectivity as the true *realization* of such subjectivity. This “burden” is not solely or even mainly a matter of logically incompatible commitments and this “breaking” is not merely the conceptual resolution of such incompatibilities. To think of it in this way would be to perpetuate the one-sidedness whose hold the *Phenomenology* is trying to break.

I think Hegel is right that this reliance on the analysis of action to illuminate the central “movement” of the *Phenomenology* is helpful. If one keeps it in mind, passages like the following are clearer. In commenting on the content of an ‘I’s self-knowledge, he remarks:

¹⁰ This is the same paragraph where Hegel makes the remark: “The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind” (407, §669).

It is only when the 'I' communes with itself in its otherness that the content is *comprehended*. Stated more specifically, this content is nothing else than the very movement just spoken of; for the content is Spirit that traverses its own self and does so *for itself* as Spirit by the fact that it has the 'shape' of the Concept in its objectivity. (428, ¶799)

But this appeal by Hegel to his account of action raises the question of why he thinks there are such important implications of that account for the *Phenomenology's* account of conceptuality itself. This is a large topic, but I would suggest that Hegel treats the problem of conceptuality as in general the problem of normativity, where that simply means: The question is what ought to be done to render a phenomenon intelligible and how actions ought to be justified (what ought to be believed and what ought to be done, one could say), not how the brain processes information or what actually motivates human beings. A recent commentator (Brandom) is right that for Hegel the "realm of *das Geistige*" is "the normative order," and it is now well known and much appreciated that conceiving of the central modern dualism not as a metaphysical issue about nature and freedom, or materialism and immaterialism, but as a "logical" or categorical issue about the natural and the normative, or the space of causes and the space of reasons, has catapulted Hegel back onto the world, especially Anglophone, contemporary scene in a very exciting way. It is also true that Hegel thinks of concepts or norms functionally, in Kantian terms as predicates of possible judgments and then goes much farther than Kant in linking any possible comprehension of conceptual or normative content to actual use within a linguistic and norm-sensitive or "judging" community. Moreover, although a much larger issue than can be dealt with here, the direction of this interpretation ultimately requires that the nature of the authority of such normative constraints and ideals is "self-legislated," that Hegel's self-making language (that Spirit is a product of itself) is not an entry into philosophical anthropology, but the beginning of an account of the nature of such authority and echoes Kant's famous claim in the *Groundwork* about our having to be the author of whatever laws we are subject to, subject ourselves to.¹¹ Under these assumptions, exercising normative authority is understood very much like the expression of intention in a public, social space, functioning as authoritative only if there is a sufficiently harmonious social, meaningful context, and responsive, in the right way, to possible challenges to such authority.¹²

¹¹ See Pippin (2003). ¹² In the Preface, Reason is glossed as "*purposive activity*" (12, §22).

6

However, as in the account of action, Hegel's attack on the one-sidedness of intentionalist and causalist accounts and on all notions of conceptual formalism, is not an invitation to behaviorism, as if "others" determine, independently of any subject's view of what is happening and why, what was done. So in the general position which the theory of action serves as an image for, the same applies. Hegel's position is not a prolegomenon to the transformation of philosophy into a mere conventionalism or a sociology of knowledge.

This is so for two reasons. The most important is that Hegel links the comprehensibility of normative claims to some process of rationalization for the individuals and the communities at issue, and this means that for us or for any phenomenologist of these claims to justification, the thesis is that we have to be able both to understand the bases of such claims *for the participants* (why and in what sense they find the claims justifying) and be able to understand in a broad enough way how "justification" works in order to understand the failure or breakdown of such practices of reason-giving and reason-demanding. That is, secondly, Hegel regards as a condition of such comprehension the ability also to understand the determinate partiality of such normative principles and so the *philosophical* reason for their breakdown. (There is no gap for Hegel between understanding what was taken to be justifying and the question of the quality of that claim. We are not interested in what vocalizations subjects would emit when challenged, but whether and if so why, their expressions count for them as justifying.)

Admittedly, this sketchy summary assumes quite a lot. In fact it is enormously contentious. Also, the idea that a form of irrationality can be experienced as a kind of suffering, one determinate enough to explain the cycles of authority and loss of authority in the normative history of community, is an extremely controversial one. The empirical evidence is pretty strong that human beings can live with the putative burden of irrationality or indeterminacy for quite a long time.

But Hegel makes no claim that his account is predictive. It is clearly a retrospective and reconstructive sort of teleology, and it targets for comment only *those* "actual" moments where some correction in the abstract opposition between putative normative content and its "externalization" come to be experienced in a way less subject to such a dualism, and to comment on the significance of such moments within an overall account of Spirit's self-knowledge. Of course, it would take several studies, no doubt

several books, to work out the details of this account of determinacy, understood as a kind of self-negating or self-externalization that not only concedes that a coherent social context and appropriate social reception is necessary for meaningfulness, but that the contestations inherent in such a context can be shown to have an intelligible form, prior to all such distinctions, and then a few more studies to understand why Hegel thinks that this view is superior to the Kantian doctrine of concept and intuition, or Fichte on the self-positing of the Not-I, or Schelling's *Indifferenzpunkt*.

7

Hegel's account, understood in the way suggested, does have two large implications for understanding the claim to absolute knowledge. The first has to do with the infamous completeness or closedness (*Abgeschlossenheit*) problem and so the question of what sort of completion is reached at the end of the *Phenomenology*. It is true that Hegel remarks that:

the unification of the two sides [Hegel appears to mean Spirit's "pure" knowledge of itself, and a putatively external constraint, limit and opposition to such self-understanding in the public social world, an opposition eventually sublated] has not yet been exhibited [Hegel appears to mean in the self-understanding of Religion]; it [apparently the unification achieved in this chapter, "Absolute Knowing"] is this that closes the series of the shapes of Spirit. (425, ¶794)

And in the next paragraph, Hegel speaks of a certain "completeness" in the presentation of the "content . . . of self-conscious Spirit" (425, ¶795).

But in general there is actually not much "content" presented as the content of a phenomenological notion of absolute knowledge and this completeness is that of an Introduction. The thematic content of the claim made for absolute knowing is for Spirit simply to have arrived at a point of "knowledge of itself not only as it is *in-itself* or as possessing an absolute *content*, nor only as it is *for-itself* as a form devoid of content, or as the aspect of self-consciousness, but as it is both *in essence and in actuality*, or *in-and-for-itself*" (425, ¶794). This merely prepares us for an understanding of any particular claim to legitimate normative content, and as of yet in the *Phenomenology*, makes no such claim. (Most famously and very consistently there is no account of the modern objective Spirit or ethical life.)¹³ Such a study of an "actualized" Spirit would be a truly "scientific" one, and that raises the second point that follows from this kind of interpretation.

¹³ That the action-theoretic orientation of account of absolute knowledge is not merely exemplary but essential finds partial confirmation in the 1805–6 Jenaer *Geistphilosophie*, where *das sittliche*

It is common for commentators to offer an understandable interpretation of the reference of “Science” in passages like the following:

As a result, that which is the very essence, viz. the Concept, has become the element of existence or has become the *form of objectivity* for consciousness. Spirit, *manifesting* or *appearing* in consciousness in this element, or what is the same thing, produced in it by consciousness, is *Science*. (427–428, ¶798)

That reference, it is sometimes said, must be to Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, the book written a few years later at Nürnberg and the basis of his system. This is understandable, given what Hegel says at the end of the Preface.¹⁴

However, from everything we have seen, that would be too narrow a reference. We also have to keep in mind what is required in order to understand properly the “movement of pure essences” (and not to mystify this as “pure” or independent self-moving thought all over again) (28, ¶34).¹⁵ After all, the position arrived at amounts to the claim that “the Concept in its truth” is to be *always* understood “in unity with its externalization” (426, ¶795). This must mean that those who think that an independent category theory, or that a doctrine of self-moving conceptual or actually noetic structure underlying the apparent world, constitutes the basic Hegelian position have missed the most important lesson of the *Phenomenology*, have failed to be properly educated by it. Hegel must, on the contrary, be referring to the totality of Spirit’s self-knowledge made possible by “knowing what Spirit is in and for itself,” and that means not only the *Encyclopedia* as a whole, but its proper phenomenological preparation and the “externalizations” manifest in the history of art, religion, politics, and world history. Indeed the *Science of Logic* itself clearly manifests this warning against partial and “logicizing” readings of Hegel. If nothing else, this passage from the beginning of “The Concept Logic” itself manifests what was for Hegel the unforgettable and non-isolatable lesson of the *Phenomenology*. It is even expressed in imagery appropriate to the *Phenomenology*:

The universal . . . is itself and takes its other within its embrace, but not without doing violence to it; on the contrary, the universal is, in its other, in peaceful communion with itself. We have called it free power, but it could also be called free love and boundless blessedness, for it bears itself toward its other as towards itself; in it, it has returned to itself.¹⁶

Gemeinwesen is called *das Dasein des absoluten Geist*. See Siep (2000), 247. Siep also emphasizes the striking fact that absolute knowing is introduced as a matter of practical self-consciousness; but he does not connect the issues with Hegel’s theory of action as here proposed.

¹⁴ In his remark on “*Logic or speculative philosophy*” (22, §37).

¹⁵ See here the especially helpful remarks in Siep (2000), 256–257. ¹⁶ Hegel (*SL*), 603, §1331.

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