

MODERN EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHY

Hegel's
*Phenomenology
of Spirit*

Ludwig Siep

CAMBRIDGE

HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

Hegel only published five books in his lifetime, and among them the *Phenomenology of Spirit* emerges as the most important, but also perhaps the most difficult and complex. In this book Ludwig Siep follows the path from Hegel's early writings on religion, love, and spirit to the milestones of his "Jena period." He shows how the themes of the *Phenomenology* first appeared in an earlier work, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, and closely examines the direction which Hegel's thought took as he attempted to think through the possibility of a complete system of philosophy. The themes encompassed by the *Phenomenology* – anti-dualistic epistemology, autonomy, historicity, the sociality of reason – are thoroughly discussed in Siep's subtle and elegantly argued assessment, which appears here in English for the first time. It will be of great interest to all readers studying Hegel's thought.

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OF SPIRIT

LUDWIG SIEP

translated by

DANIEL SMYTH



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*In memory of Werner Marx (1910–1994),
German-Jewish Hegel scholar and American citizen*

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PREFACE

This book tries to prepare the way for a better understanding of Hegel's most influential book, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, by considering it both in its historical context and in the light of contemporary philosophical debates. It follows the path which leads Hegel to the *Phenomenology* and then his line of argument in the work itself (to facilitate an understanding of the structure of Hegel's argument, the table of contents of [Chapter 6](#) corresponds to that of the *Phenomenology* itself). The path – in both senses – which I attempt to trace is narrow and winding, taking as its starting point Hegel's studies in Tübingen and his activity as a tutor for private families (of the “grand bourgeoisie”) in Bern and Frankfurt am Main. To appreciate the ambition of the *Phenomenology* of 1807 (described in [Chapter 1](#)) demands a basic account of Hegel's studies and manuscripts from this early period (which I sketch in [Chapter 2](#)). But the true incubation period of the philosophical system, to which the *Phenomenology* is meant to lead, is the first half-decade of the nineteenth century – the time Hegel spent at the University of Jena, which Fichte had just left (in the wake of the “atheism controversy”) and where Schelling was the dominating figure. At the beginning of that period (1801), Hegel published his first book, the so-called *Differenzschrift* (see [Chapter 3](#)), which locates his own thought among the philosophical systems of his time, particularly those of Fichte and Schelling. In order to understand the *Phenomenology*, one has to start with this booklet and then follow the path of Hegel's thought through the many manuscripts and essays of these early years when he was struggling with what eventually became one of the most complex and imposing philosophical systems ever. To help the reader navigate this serpentine path leading up to the *Phenomenology*, [Chapter 3](#) provides a brief interpretation of the *Differenzschrift* followed (in [Chapter 4](#)) by an overview of the main

developments during the Jena period prior to the *Phenomenology*. After discussing the task and the method of the *Phenomenology* (Chapter 5), the main part of the book (Chapter 6) follows Hegel's argument through the whole work. The concluding chapter (7) focuses on some of the most significant echoes of the *Phenomenology* in nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy. Throughout the book I try to link Hegel's conceptions and criticisms to recent debates, especially in Anglo-American philosophy.

What makes the *Phenomenology* especially difficult to understand is the fact that almost every one of its lines alludes, directly or indirectly, to authors, thinkers, and historical figures ranging across the entire history of spirit and culture.

There are two reasons for this. First, the work represents Hegel's attempt to "settle accounts" with all the errors committed in the history of spirit and culture, even if these were, from his perspective, necessary errors along the path to truth. The fact that Hegel takes this truth to be embodied in his own philosophy is often understood as an unparalleled form of arrogance. Yet the reasoned refutation of past and contemporary positions has, ever since Aristotle, been part and parcel of any philosophical work with systematic ambitions. Why should one put forward a novel thesis, if one regards one of the more familiar philosophical views to be adequate?

The second reason for the proliferation of wide-ranging historical and cultural references is that Hegel considers every apparently new thought or idea to represent only a further development (and often just a minimal, though crucial, revision) of prior thought – or, more precisely, a further development of the total cultural work of human history. The wish to begin anew, "*ab ovo*," can only be born out of ignorance of the presuppositions and preconditions of one's own intellectual existence and orientation. Although it is usually the interpreter who first uncovers the influences that help shape a given writer or thinker, Hegel considers this to be an inexorable duty of the author himself. Indeed, it was one of Hegel's most spirited accusations that his own predecessors, Kant and Fichte, had not carefully observed this duty. Yet the *Phenomenology* also demonstrates that culture has not made any progress without in some way forgetting its own achievements, or at least particular aspects of them.

This saturation with history is one reason the *Phenomenology* constitutes such an inexhaustibly rich source for interpreters and

commentators. (The German version of the present book also contains a “Stellenkommentar” to specific lines in the *Phenomenology* which has not been reproduced in the English version.) Although it is still probably not easy reading, the present book maintains an introductory character and is addressed not only to scholars and students of Hegel but also to a broader academic public.

Hegel published relatively few books during his lifetime. The *Phenomenology* was followed by the two volumes of the *Science of Logic* (1812 and 1816), the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Outline* which went through three successively expanded editions (1817, 1827, 1830), and the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820). Nevertheless, contemporary editions of Hegel’s *oeuvre* stretch to over twenty volumes and the critical edition of his work (AA, see Bibliography) is significantly more extensive.

Of all his published books, however, only the *Phenomenology* and, in certain respects, the *Philosophy of Right* might be considered “great literature.” The others are difficult fare even for philosophical specialists. Some of his Berlin lectures – especially the lectures on aesthetics, the philosophy of religion, and the philosophy of history – also exerted influence on a wider public. However, their first and often-repeated publication by Hegel’s students and followers was guided by dubious editorial principles (they are essentially just a hodgepodge of manuscript fragments mixed together with the notes of different attendees, both of which are drawn from the most various of time periods).

It is surely the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which has most stimulated the imaginations and intellects of the most significant readers in the last two centuries. It transformed Marx into a theorist. Essential features of the thought of Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger, Bloch, and many others are likewise indebted to Hegel’s early masterpiece. One may well ask oneself just how many of the work’s hundreds of (often cryptic) pages these important readers really studied carefully. But productive misunderstandings are often engendered by superficial readings.

At the same time, the *Phenomenology* is a work whose positions vis-à-vis many problems of contemporary philosophy (the theory of rationality, the realism debate, the problem of skepticism, the philosophy of mind, the mind-body problem, action theory, etc.) are considerably more advanced and sophisticated than most critics of Hegelianism suspect. I have taken note of such connections as the occasion to do so presented itself. Other authors have done so much more extensively – especially

for certain sections of the text.¹ The ranks of those who are convinced of Hegel's relevance to contemporary philosophical debates – even outside so-called “continental philosophy” – are steadily increasing.

I am grateful to Wayne Martin for accepting the book for the Modern European Philosophy series at Cambridge University Press. It is a corrected, but not substantially revised, version of the German edition, *Der Weg der Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000). I have a great deal of admiration for Daniel Smyth's translation and his never-fading efforts to clarify difficult passages with me. Other acknowledgments of assistance with the German version can be found in the Preface published with it. The English version remains dedicated to Werner Marx (1910–1994), with whom I first studied the *Phenomenology* at the University of Freiburg after his return from exile in New York in 1964.

Münster, December 2012

¹ See, for example, Graeser, “Kommentar”; Kettner, *Hegels “sinnliche Gewißheit”*; MacIntyre, *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*; MacIntyre, “Hegel on Faces and Skulls”; Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*; Pinkard, *Hegel's “Phenomenology”*; Taylor, “The Opening Arguments of the ‘Phenomenology’”; Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*; etc.

CHRONOLOGY OF HEGEL'S LIFE

1770	August 27: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is born in Stuttgart. His father, Georg Ludwig Hegel, is a state official in the Württemberg finance administration; his mother is Maria Magdalena Hegel (<i>née</i> Fromme).
From 1773	Attends the German and then Latin school in Stuttgart.
From 1776	Attends the Gymnasium Illustre, later renamed the Eberhard-Ludwigs-Gymnasium.
1783	His mother dies.
1785 to 1788	Hegel keeps a diary in German and Latin.
1788	High-school diploma (completion of secondary education). Matriculates at the Tübinger Stift for Theology and Philosophy, where he shares a room with Hölderlin and Schelling (beginning in 1790).
1790	Hegel is awarded his Masters in philosophy.
1792	Hegel begins composition of the text <i>Popular Religion and Christianity</i> , published posthumously (as yet only in German).
July 1793	Defends his dissertation in theology.
September	Finishes his studies.
Beginning in October	Private tutor for the Steiger von Tschugg family in Bern, Switzerland.
1794	Further work on <i>Popular Religion and Christianity</i> (unfinished).
1795	Journey to Geneva.

May to July	Manuscript <i>The Life of Jesus</i> (published posthumously).
November 2	Begins composing <i>The Positivity of the Christian Religion</i> (published posthumously).
July 25, 1796	Hegel hikes through the Bern Alps (until the beginning of August), keeping a diary. Thereafter, Hegel leaves Bern and travels home to Stuttgart.
1797	Through Hölderlin, Hegel becomes a private tutor in the house of the Frankfurt am Main merchant Gogel. In February 1797, Hegel authors or co-authors the so-called <i>Oldest System Fragment of German Idealism</i> (though Hölderlin and Schelling have also been suggested as sole or co-authors). The text remains a fragment (published posthumously).
1798	Hegel anonymously publishes a commentated translation of the writings of the Geneva solicitor Cart: <i>Confidential Letters on the Previous Governmental–Legal Relations of the Waadtland (Pays de Vaud) to the City of Bern</i> .
Beginning in autumn	Works on <i>The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate</i> (published posthumously).
January 14, 1799	Hegel's father dies. Hegel inherits a modest fortune, which enables him to prepare for his academic career.
February until March	Composition of a commentary on James Steuart's <i>An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy</i> (lost). Thereafter, Hegel continues his work on <i>The Spirit of Christianity</i> .
September 14, 1800	Completes the so-called <i>Systemfragment (On Religion and Philosophy)</i> , published posthumously).
September 29	Hegel composes a new introduction to <i>The Positivity of the Christian Religion</i> .
January 1801	Hegel moves to Jena. He shares an apartment with Schelling until December.
Beginning in spring	Works on <i>The German Constitution</i> (published posthumously).
July	Publication of <i>The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy</i> .

- August 27 Hegel completes his habilitation at the University of Jena. The title of his dissertation is *On the Orbits of the Planets*. His review of F. Bouterwek's "On the Foundations of Speculative Philosophy" is published in the *Erlangen Literaturzeitung*. From 1801 until 1807, Hegel teaches at the University of Jena and composes a wealth of manuscripts, including numerous drafts of his System (texts on logic, metaphysics, and the philosophies of nature and spirit), which are not published until the 1930s.
- October 21 Meets with Goethe.
- 1802 until 1803 Together with Schelling, Hegel edits the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*. In it, he publishes a number of essays: "On the Essence of Philosophical Critique in General," "How Common Human Understanding Takes Philosophy," "The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy," "Faith and Knowledge," "On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Right." He continues his work on *The German Constitution* and on his *System of Ethical Life* (both published posthumously).
- 1803 Second meeting with Goethe.
- 1804 Hegel is taken on as assessor for the Jena Mineralogical Society and also becomes a member of the Westphalia Society for Natural Science.
- 1805 Hegel is, with Goethe's support, named extraordinary (i.e. unsalaried) professor of philosophy at the University of Jena.
- May In a letter to Voss, Hegel mentions his work on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* for the first time.
- February 1806 Printing of the *Phenomenology* begins.
- October 14 Napoleon defeats the Prussian army at the battle of Jena-Auerstedt. In the night before the battle, Hegel concludes the *Phenomenology*.
- January 1, 1807 Honorary membership in the Physical Society in Heidelberg.

January	Works on the Preface to the <i>Phenomenology</i> .
February 5	Birth of his illegitimate son, Ludwig.
Spring	Hegel moves to Bamberg, where he edits the <i>Bamberger Zeitung</i> . The <i>Phenomenology</i> is published. Hegel writes his essay "Who Thinks Abstractly?" (published posthumously).
1808	On the urging of his friend Niethammer, Hegel accepts a position as professor of philosophical preparatory sciences and rector of the Ägidiengymnasium in Nuremberg.
September 15, 1811	Marries Marie von Tucher. (Her family belongs to the Nuremberg <i>Patriziat</i> or grand bourgeoisie.)
1812–1813	Publication of the first volume of the <i>Science of Logic</i> .
1813	Birth of his son Karl. Appointed adviser to the Nuremberg City Commission for Educational Affairs.
1814	Birth of his son Immanuel.
1816	Publication of the second volume of the <i>Science of Logic</i> . Accepts professorship of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg.
1817	Reviews the third volume of Jacobi's <i>Works</i> in the <i>Heidelberger Jahrbüchern der Literatur</i> . Publication of the <i>Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Outline</i> .
July 18	Hegel and Creuzer award Jean Paul his doctorate. Publication of "The Assessment of the Published Negotiations of the Assembly of Estates in the Kingdom of Württemberg in 1815 and 1816" in the <i>Heidelberger Jahrbücher</i> .
Toward the end of the year	Inquiry from the Prussian Cultural Commissioner, von Altenstein, concerning a philosophy professorship at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin.
October 1818	Hegel becomes professor of philosophy in Berlin (succeeding Fichte, who had died in 1814).
October 22	Hegel holds his inaugural lecture in Berlin.

- September 23,
1819 Meeting with Goethe in Weimar.
- 1820 Membership in the King's Scientific
Examinatory Commission for the Province of
Brandenburg (until December 1822). The
Elements of the Philosophy of Right is published in
autumn of 1820 (although "1821" is printed on
the title page).
- 1822 Hegel becomes a member of the university
senate. In autumn, he travels to Brussels and the
Netherlands.
- 1823 Trip to Leipzig. Hegel is awarded a
membership-diploma by the Dutch learned
society Concordia.
- 1824 Travels to Vienna through Prague.
- 1827 Edits the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*
(*Yearbooks for Scientific Critique*). Reviews
Wilhelm von Humboldt's work *On the Episode*
from the Mahabharata Known by the Name
Bhagavad-Gita. Second edition of the
Encyclopedia. Trip to Paris. On the return
journey, Hegel again meets with Goethe in
Weimar.
- 1828 Publication of his essay "Solger's *Nachlass* and
Correspondence" in the *Jahrbücher*, as well as
"Hamann's Writings." Ludwig Feuerbach sends
Hegel his dissertation.
- 1829 The *Jahrbücher* publish reviews of Karl Friedrich
Göschel's works "On the Hegelian Doctrine or
Absolute Knowledge and Modern Pantheism,"
"On Philosophy in General and Hegel's
Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Particular,"
and "Aphorisms on Ignorance and Absolute
Knowledge in Relation to Christian Theological
Knowledge." Meets with Schelling in Karlsbad.
- September 11 Last meeting with Goethe. In October, Hegel is
named rector of the University of Berlin for a
year.
- 1830 Speech on the occasion of the 300th anniversary
of the Augsburg Confession (or *Confessio*

1831

Augustana). The third edition of the *Encyclopedia* is printed. Hegel works on new editions of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*. Hegel is awarded the Order of the Red Eagle, 3rd Class. His essay "On the English Reform Bill" appears in the *Preußische Staatszeitung*. His reviews of A. L. J. Ohlert's *Ideal-Realism*, first part, and of J. Görres's *On the Foundation, Differentiation, and Temporal Progression of World History* are published in the *Jahrbücher*.

November 14
1832–1845

Hegel dies in Berlin of cholera.
Publication of Hegel's *Works: A Complete Edition by an Association of Friends of the Deceased*.

THE AMBITION OF THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is at once one of the most obscure and one of the most influential works of philosophy. Yet only members of academic philosophical circles tend to be familiar with his earlier work, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (referred to in the literature as the *Differenzschrift*). Hegel published that work in 1801, at the age of thirty-one, at the very outset of his time at the University of Jena. It has often been construed, not least of all by Fichte himself, as a partisan defense of Hegel's friend Schelling, who was already teaching in Jena.¹ But Hegel also takes the opportunity to indicate his own "difference" from Schelling in the text.² And their shared time in Jena saw the two thinkers grow even further apart.³ Indeed, the position Hegel takes up in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* involves a sharp critique of the Schellingian school. Although Hegel expressly excludes Schelling himself from that critique,⁴ the book has been understood as a definitive repudiation of Schelling.

Hegel nevertheless remains committed to the essential aims of his predecessors in the *Phenomenology*. He shares Fichte's conviction that philosophical knowledge must begin by understanding the principle,

¹ Fichte describes Hegel as a follower of Schelling in his letter to Schelling, January 15, 1802. Cf his *Briefwechsel*, 5, 113; translated by Michael G. Vater and David Wood in *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling*, 73 f.

² Cf Düsing, *Schellings und Hegels erste absolute Metaphysik*, 186 f.

³ Cf Düsing, "Spekulation."

⁴ See Hegel's letter to Schelling, May 1, 1807, in *Briefe* 1, 159–162; translated by Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler in *Hegel: The Letters*, 79–80. Schelling accepted this explanation with some skepticism (*Briefe* 1, 194; *Letters*, 80) but was known to express a negative view of the *Phenomenology* to third parties. Cf Wolfgang Bonsiepen's Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont (1988).

or the structure, of subjectivity. And he simultaneously aligns himself with Schelling in attempting to overcome the dualism between nature and spirit.⁵ There is, in truth, nothing that is not “spiritual”: matter, extension, and sensibility are but implicit, unreflected forms of spirit. Yet this does not represent a typical form of “idealism” (understood as the opposite of “realism”). Objects (things, events, states of affairs) are not dependent on human consciousness – not even in the “transcendental” sense advocated by Kant and Fichte, according to which the categories and schemata in which humans comprehend the world can be traced back to necessary, though unconscious, functions of the human mind. For Hegel, the human mind rather participates in a universal “logic” that determines nature and culture alike. This logic is “reflected” in human thinking itself and can be disclosed through spirit’s (i.e. human) action and codified in the social realm. Cultural history is the process by which human consciousness of the structure of reality becomes more extensive and more differentiated. Of course, Hegel does not employ the modern concept of “culture,” but rather speaks of the history of spirit or of religion – the form he takes to encapsulate the human account of the world. This notion encompasses the histories of law, the state, economics, art, science, etc., though each of these cultural forms and their respective developments may be differently (and increasingly independently) “articulated” in particular periods.

Hegel accordingly had to incorporate world and cultural history into his system in a completely different way from his predecessors. The *Phenomenology* constitutes his first comprehensive attempt to do so, which is partly what enabled it to have such a broad impact on the

⁵ The German concept *Geist* is notoriously difficult to translate. The term is sometimes employed in contexts where an English speaker would say “mind.” For example, the philosophical contemporary subfield “philosophy of mind” is known in Germany as the *Philosophie des Geistes*, which has led some (notably J. B. Baillie) to translate the title of Hegel’s work as the *Phenomenology of Mind*. However, this translation fails to account for other prevalent uses of the term *Geist* which inform and color the German concept. The history of culture is called *Geistesgeschichte*, the humanities (qua academic discipline) are referred to as the *Geisteswissenschaften*, while the “spirit of an age” is described as its *Zeitgeist*, and the Christian concept of the “Holy Spirit” finds expression as *der heilige Geist*. Thus, *Geist* not only pertains to the faculties and achievements of individuals, but comprises social structures and cultural products. Though the English term “spirit” has largely fallen out of common currency and is reserved for quite specific contexts, we hope that any awkwardness its use may arouse will serve to remind the reader of the unfamiliar plasticity of the German concept. In this commentary, therefore, *Geist* is typically translated as “spirit,” except in a few cases where the significance of the term is clearly restricted to or primarily focused on what English-speakers would call “mind.”

“reading public.” Still today, as thinkers like Jürgen Habermas or Francis Fukuyama illustrate, the *Phenomenology* incites us to interpret our time in both its historical origins and its possible future developments.⁶

Hegel’s aim was to help the spirit of the age, as expressed in the great upheavals during the epoch of Napoleon and Goethe, to come to “consciousness” of itself. He therefore sought to provide a system of categories equally capable of making sense of the development of morality, art, the constitutional state, or the natural sciences. But Hegel was no mere cultural critic concerned with interpreting the signs of the times. Indeed, he aims to satisfy even the most stringent demands of the critical philosophy as formulated by Kant and his followers. And he aims to convince even the most rigorous philosophical skeptics by employing their very own method in refuting them. The *Phenomenology* aspires to be a radical (“self-fulfilling,” *PhG* 72/50⁷) form of skepticism – through which skepticism undermines itself and establishes its opposite.⁸ Hegel’s name for this opposite was “absolute knowledge.” Such knowledge is supposed to be absolute both in its degree of certainty and in its contents – an ambition that has elicited as much fascination as it has incredulity and ridicule.

“Absolute knowledge” naturally cannot help but come into competition with religious claims to certainty. Themes like “religious consciousness,” “faith,” and “religion” take up considerable space in the *Phenomenology* and Hegel ultimately wants to translate the true core of religious history into philosophical concepts. Hegel’s

⁶ Cf Habermas, “Können komplexe Gesellschaften eine vernünftige Identität ausbilden?,” 23–75; Fukuyama, *The End of History*.

⁷ Citations of the *Phenomenology* are abbreviated *PhG* and provide the page numbers of both the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash. The German edition is the third volume of the *Theorie Werkausgabe* (1986). The English edition is A. V. Miller’s translation, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Translations follow Miller where possible, but are occasionally modified, often (as here) taking Terry Pinkard’s new, but unpublished, translation as a guide. (Pinkard’s translation is available on his website: <http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html>.)

⁸ Hegel had been exercised by the question of skepticism ever since his time in Berlin. (This interest is also apparent in his “Positivitätsschrift,” cf AA 1, 209, the bulk of which has been translated by T. M. Knox in *Early Theological Writings*, although the cited passage in question occurs in Hegel’s subsequent “additions” which were not included in the English edition.) After Kant, the problem of refuting skepticism became a dominant theme of the period. Cf Fulda and Horstmann, *Skeptizismus und spekulatives Denken in der Philosophie Hegels*; see also Meist’s “Sich selbst vollbringender Skeptizismus: G. E. Schulzes Replik auf Hegel und Schelling,” as well as more recent work by Vieweg.

attempts to “sublate”⁹ religion into philosophy, which are extensively and systematically developed in his late Berlin lectures and writings, have sparked embittered controversies and a schism within his own followers. What he is concerned to do, as we see in the *Phenomenology*, is to effect a reconciliation between religion, science, and philosophy and to resist the banal misunderstandings of religion popularized by a shallow Enlightenment (see pp. 184–186 below). The *Phenomenology* is equally an attempt to show that the philosophical and scientific insights of the modern age (from roughly the early seventeenth century to the early nineteenth) actually confirm the religious belief that an absolute (divine) wisdom reveals itself in the world.

Hegel thereby rejects the contemporary religious and theological “fallback positions” of the time, which introduce a strict separation between knowledge and faith and treat the divine as itself unknowable, but accessible through moral conviction or religious feeling. Such separations took many forms, in Hegel’s view, ranging from Kantian critical philosophy’s reduction of rational theology to the moral postulate of God, to Jacobi and Schleiermacher’s theology based solely on faith and religious feeling. Kant admittedly did not fully reject either the religious belief in God based on the purposive arrangement of the world or the role of divine providence in the course of history. But he denied such thoughts the status of scientific knowledge. The only “strictly scientific” kinds of knowledge were to be found in the cognition of “mechanical” laws of nature and in the analysis of the necessary preconditions of such cognition by human reason.

This mechanistic mode of explanation, according to Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Teleological Judgment* (the second half of his *Critique of the*

⁹ Like *Geist*, the German term *aufheben* poses great difficulties for any translator. Depending on context, the German word can mean any of three things: (1) to annul, void, suspend, or cancel (e.g. a law or decree); (2) to raise up or elevate; (3) to preserve or save for later (e.g. the leftovers of a meal). Hegel most often uses the term in an unprecedented way that synthesizes all three of these meanings (*negare*, *elevare*, and *conservare*). When a shape of consciousness is *aufgehoben*, (1) its present form is eliminated, its self-understanding overthrown, and its key epistemological and ontological claims are negated (*negare*); (2) it is then (and thereby) elevated to a new, higher level, transformed into a novel and more sophisticated form (*elevare*); even as (3) this new form nevertheless preserves essential aspects or elements of the prior one (*conservare*). Whenever *aufheben* is used in this peculiar manner, it has been translated as “sublate.” Uses of the term which rely on only one of the three meanings above have been translated accordingly (as “elevate,” “revoke,” etc.), depending on context. For a brief discussion of the different valences of *aufheben*, cf Pinkard, *Hegel’s “Phenomenology”*, 349–350 n28.

Power of Judgment), does not enable us to fully understand the products of organic nature. Nor does it enable us to connect all our knowledge of nature – including the particular laws of physics and biology – into a systematic whole. Yet human reason must always search for such systematic unity among its various bits of knowledge in order to understand them as parts of a complete, “syllogistic” system, founded on principles and inferences. Consequently, it is necessary to assume, though impossible to prove, that the purposive interconnections of nature rest on the wisdom of an infinite understanding. Moreover, since our attempts to explain our moral feeling of duty lead us to the (equally hypothetical) assumption of an omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent being, it is only consistent for us to search through history for signs of a rational plan.

Kant thus grants that religious belief in “providence” and the wisdom of creation makes rational sense, but disputes its scientific character inasmuch as it could never admit of empirical or “logical” proof. Hegel wants to restore the scientific character of this conviction – albeit at the price of what one might call (following Rudolf Bultmann¹⁰) a radical demythologization of its religious contents. The modern natural sciences and the progress of reason in the modern “secularized” state reveal, if only one does not misunderstand them, the purposive organization of nature and history.

Yet such misunderstandings of the natural sciences are, like the “naïve” conception of religious truths, incredibly widespread throughout the sciences themselves (in their “enlightened” self-understanding), as well as in philosophy, literature, and theology. All these misunderstandings rest on dualisms – between sensibly perceptible matter and intelligible laws, between intuition and concept, between subject and object, between the human and the divine mind, etc. The content of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a comprehensive and complete critique of such dualisms. What one can actually learn from the modern sciences, according to Hegel, is that the world does not simply consist of particular sensible things and universal spiritual laws, but rather constitutes a process whose events and structures exhibit an intelligible order of implicit concepts and inferences. Something analogous goes for the historical development of cultures (particularly legal orders) and also for the historical evolution of art and religion.

¹⁰ Cf Rudolf Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (1941).

But not everything in nature and history is rational or purposive. There are phenomena and realms in which only weak indications of order(s) are visible – such as in the variety of biological species or the elaborate offshoots of particular traditions in human culture.¹¹ Yet these peripheral regions do not spoil the total order. Quite the contrary; the total order reveals its imperturbability in the face of such “overly complex” patterns and various historical relapses and detours.¹²

Now if human beings are to be able both to cognize such an order (in nature) and to produce it (in culture), then human thought and action must be understood as modes of becoming conscious of, and execution or enactment of, universal reason. The manifestation and self-realization of an order is, for Hegel, the essence of “spirit.” Whether one calls it human or divine is ultimately a matter of perspective. One views spirit from a human perspective if one occupies the standpoint of an individual situated in a particular culture and epoch and looks “upwards” at the total order revealed through epochs and peoples. But if one looks “down from above” – from the total order of nature and history that is recognized or “revealed” in the progress of cultures and sciences (though it is always individual human beings who recognize it) – then one occupies an infinite or, in religious terms, “divine” perspective.

It is not until one brings into view the full ambition of Hegel’s philosophy, which receives its first systematic articulation in the *Phenomenology*, that one can understand the idea and the impact of the work. In today’s culture, the claim to “absolute knowledge” and a complete understanding of religion and history necessarily presents itself as untenably hubristic. Practically no one in philosophy shares this project anymore. Contemporary interest in the *Phenomenology* is mostly restricted to its more “modest” aspects. The attempt to synthesize scientific and religious knowledge of the world has nonetheless been characteristic of European philosophy since the advent of Christendom. Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, and Hegel are perhaps the most significant practitioners of such a synthesis.

If one were to call the unity effected by such a synthesis “metaphysics,” then it is understandable that some consider Hegel to mark the end of metaphysics.¹³ For around the end of the nineteenth century some

¹¹ Cf Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* (1830), §§368 and 394.

¹² Cf Henrich’s “Hegels Theorie über den Zufall.”

¹³ One can indeed interpret Hegel as thoroughly “anti-metaphysical,” as, for example, Terry Pinkard does in his book, *Hegel’s “Phenomenology”*. For Pinkard, absolute knowledge

of the central presuppositions of such a synthesis began to appear increasingly dubious as the empirical sciences progressively distanced themselves from the idea of nature as a clear, logically structured totality. Chaos theory and modern conceptions of the origin of the universe have accorded chance an increasingly significant role. The same is true of geological studies of the history of the earth or biological evolutionary theory. Meteor impacts and shifts in tectonic plates cannot be traced back to a rational plan or *telos* any more than can spontaneous mutations or “copying errors” in the replication of genetic information.

With the rise of modern, primary-source-based historical disciplines, there was a similar shift in the study of human culture away from “grand designs” and an increasing tendency to emphasize “unsystematic,” narrative history which cannot be understood as adhering either to a human plan or to divine providence. The political and moral catastrophes of the twentieth century finally shook all faith in reason and its progress throughout history. It is admittedly an open question how successful attempts at a comprehensive, unifying theory (in, say, physics) may be. And we do cleave to the idea of some progress, at least in certain areas such as our legal systems (human rights, democracy, separation of powers). But the idea of a perfectly rational, total order of nature and history is less credible today than ever before in Western history. Accordingly, Hegel’s idea of a system – particularly a system of history – must appear hubristic to us.

Yet the *Phenomenology* also contains opposed, “anti-metaphysical” undercurrents which, for some interpreters, make Hegel the father of modernity. None of his predecessors sought so thoroughly to historicize all religious, philosophical, and scientific standpoints. And none of them gave so systematic a presentation of the genesis of the modern subject, free from all bonds of tradition, as Hegel does in the *Phenomenology*.¹⁴

precisely consists in refraining from any pregiven truths or metaphysics (including natural law): “Absolute knowledge . . . is the practice through which the modern community thinks about itself without attempting to posit any metaphysical ‘other’ or set of ‘natural constraints’ that would underwrite those practices” (262). Cf also 268.

¹⁴ Cf Falke, *Begriffne Geschichte*, 9, 22. In his commentary, Falke emphasizes a modernizing interpretation. Still, he is aware that, even in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel attempts to reconnect “modern subjectivity, as it stands immediately before an Absolute devoid of substance to a traditional order of the state, religion, and metaphysics” (22). An analogous account of the genesis and reconnection of the modern subject can be found in Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*.

Nor had anyone prior to Hegel so emphasized the significance of communal life for the development of our concepts of possible objects and our criteria of truth and goodness.¹⁵ Anti-metaphysical readings have seized on these features of Hegel's views, thus drawing him closer to the pragmatists or to Wittgenstein.¹⁶

But even for those who are skeptical both of the work's aspirations to inaugurate a complete system, and of all-too-"modern" interpretations of the *Phenomenology* that seek to downplay these aspirations, there are important connections to contemporary philosophical topics to be found in the *Phenomenology*. Consider, for example, Hegel's program of overcoming traditional dualisms (between concept and object, understanding and sensibility, form and matter, etc.),¹⁷ or his "holistic" conception of theories and their object domains, or his observations about the dependency of epistemology on social history.¹⁸ Additionally, the *Phenomenology* contains interesting ("rationalist") views about the relation of religion and science.

The genuine contributions of religion to the progress of human culture lie, for Hegel, in precisely those systems of thought which religious teaching and dogma have developed regarding the essence and activity of God – not primarily in religion's contributions to moral development, as Lessing, Kant, and most Enlightenment thinkers maintained. Viewed at an appropriate level of abstraction, these conceptual models and schemata are the very ones we employ to comprehend the nature and structures of the human mind. Hegel thinks he can show that, far from hindering natural science, the progress of theology enabled its very development. It would be impossible for us to understand nature as a self-organizing system without the conceptions of substance, subject, purposiveness, self-differentiation, etc. developed earlier in theology.

¹⁵ Cf below, pp. 200, 202, 231.

¹⁶ For Robert Pippin, Hegel is a philosopher of modernity because he understands the criteria of objecthood and truth as "principles emerged as resolutions of an experienced and logical crisis in a community's self-understanding" ("Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas," 168). For Pippin, the dialectic of this process is to be understood neither in pragmatist terms nor by means of transcendental theories of discourse. Brandom sees Hegel's thought in closer propinquity to pragmatism. Cf also footnote 13.

¹⁷ Leading thinkers in contemporary ontology and epistemology are similarly interested in overcoming dualisms between subject and object, and between concept and matter. See, for example, Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 9; or McDowell, *Mind and World*, 44 f. (cf also pp. 162 and 72 below).

¹⁸ Cf Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro as *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

Conversely, it is indisputable that the divine, too, came to be understood through the categories that proved “successful” in our understanding of man and nature. This only has the effect of “finitizing” or “anthropomorphizing” God, if God is supposed to be something “other,” cut off from the world. The traditional religious oppositions between the here and the beyond, between finitude and the infinite, are, for Hegel, untenable. Our knowledge of nature, man, and God not only involves the same categories; it is knowledge of the same thing – only at different stages of development or different levels of complexity. The concept adequate to this common topic is “spirit.” And to be spirit means, as Christian dogma illustrates, albeit in a figurative manner (creation, incarnation, salvation), to become another (*Sich-anderswerden*: “becoming-other-than-oneseelf”) and to recognize oneself in that other. Knowledge of the laws governing material spatiotemporal systems is just as much a level (or “appearance”) of spirit in this sense as is knowledge of the development of rational moralities and constitutional states in the temporal formations of human culture, the complex totality of which we call “history.”

How could Hegel presume to defend such a “speculative unity” in view of the standards of Kantian critique and its skeptical successors and opponents? This is the question which occupies most modern interpreters of the *Phenomenology*. Accordingly, the texts and manuscripts from Hegel’s time in Jena, prior to the *Phenomenology*, have attracted increasing interest in the literature. Yet as the *Differenzschrift* illustrates, Hegel’s method in these texts is not an immanent critique of the inconsistencies in Kant. Rather, like Fichte and Schelling, Hegel is convinced that the development of philosophy and culture (morality, law, and art) has superseded Kant. This advanced developmental state enables them to survey the significance – and the limits – of Kant’s philosophy.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, Hegel experienced his own personal version of this development. In the manuscripts from his time in Tübingen studying theology (1788–1793) and from his time as a tutor in Bern, Hegel reveals himself to be a disciple of the Kantian philosophy – particularly the religious and moral philosophy – who fully expects the continued development of Kant’s thought to lead to a radical reversal (a “revolution”) in religious and political relations in Germany.¹⁹

¹⁹ Cf his letter to Schelling, April 16, 1795 (*Briefe* 1, 23 f.; *Letters*, 35 f.).

Yet by 1796 or 1797, Hegel was already attempting, together with his Tübingen friends, Schelling and Hölderlin, to unite the Kantian philosophy with opposed movements like Spinozism and aesthetic Platonism.²⁰ He was moved to these efforts as much by his disappointment in the failure of the French Revolution to achieve an ideal of freedom as by his encounters with sentimentalism (*Empfindsamkeit*) in the thought of Hemsterhuis and Shaftsbury, and aesthetic pantheism in Herder and Goethe.²¹

Hegel initially pursued this project within the framework of his philosophy of religion, in particular his reflections on the content and historical role (the “spirit”) of Christianity. Abjuring the fundamental Kantian concepts of law and action, sensible and supersensible world, freedom and nature, Hegel appropriated (and reinterpreted) central concepts like love, life, and (in the early years in Jena) “spirit” – concepts in which the process of “division” (*Entzweiung*) and reunification with what was severed becomes intelligible (cf [Chapter 2](#) below).

Upon entering Jena’s academic philosophical environment, Hegel turned to the task of systematically overthrowing the dichotomies and divisions which, in his view, dominated contemporary culture, and, indeed, modern thought as a whole. In his very first publication and, shortly thereafter, in lengthy essays published in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* (which he coedited with Schelling), Hegel began to critically engage with the leading philosophers of the day – with Kant, Fichte, Reinhold, Jacobi, and, finally, also with his friend and patron, Schelling.

His lectures from the Jena period finally developed an original system of logic and metaphysics as well as a philosophy of nature and spirit, which he continued for many years to announce his plans to publish. But it was only after the end of his tenure as a docent (or unsalaried lecturer) in Jena – an end precipitated by various personal and political catastrophes (the exhaustion of his father’s inheritance, Napoleon’s conquest of Prussia) – that he published his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807. It is not the whole system, but simultaneously an introduction to it and its first part.²² Nevertheless, from the

²⁰ Cf Henrich, “Hegel und Hölderlin” (translated by Taylor Carman in Eckart Förster (ed.), *The Course of Remembrance*) as well as Henrich’s *Der Grund*; Düsing, “Ästhetischer Platonismus”; Jamme, *Ein ungelehrtes Buch*.

²¹ Cf Henrich, “Historische Voraussetzungen”; Pöggeler, “Philosophie”; Jamme and Schneider, *Der Weg zum System*.

²² Cf Hegel’s advertisement of the *Phenomenology*, *PhG*, 593, which is unfortunately not reproduced in the English, Oxford edition.

appropriate perspective afforded by the philosophy of spirit, one can see that it already contains the categories and contents of the other parts. Even compared to his later publications – the two-volume *Science of Logic*, the *Encyclopedia* (1830), and the *Philosophy of Right* – the *Phenomenology* remains an ingenious and prescient early work. Hegel himself noted this when he began, shortly before his death in 1831, to revise the book for a new edition: “Distinctive early work. Do not rework” (*PhG* (1988), 552).

HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT PRIOR TO THE *DIFFERENZSCHRIFT*

Though the *Differenzschrift* is Hegel's first publication,¹ it by no means marks the beginning of his philosophical development. There are a great many manuscripts which date from the decade preceding the publication of the *Differenzschrift*, most of which remained unpublished until 1900, when Dilthey's student Hermann Nohl collected them into a volume he entitled *Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften* (Hegel's Theological Juvenilia). Yet these writings are not theological studies in the sense of academic explorations of a religious denomination. They are rather exercises in philosophical theology and the philosophy of religion, which branch out into moral philosophy, social philosophy, and the philosophy of history. Even as a student in the Tübinger Stift (a seminary which really did train theologians), Hegel's primary influences were the philosophical "revolution" in the writings of Kant and the political revolution in France. Other influences, such as Spinozism, Neoplatonism, and the writings of speculative Kantians (Fichte, Hölderlin, Schelling, Sinclair, Zwilling, Novalis) became significant towards the end of his time as a tutor in Bern (1793–1796), and especially during his stay in Frankfurt am Main (1797–1800, again as a tutor). During this time, his interests in moral and sociological issues give way to attempts to develop his own philosophical system. This ultimately resulted in a brief manuscript commonly known as the *Systemfragment* (cf TWA I, 219–228), dating from his final months in Frankfurt. When Hegel became a docent at the University of Jena in 1801, he sought to lay out his conception of this system in dialogue with the dominant thinkers of his time – Kant and Fichte, Reinhold

¹ That is, if one overlooks the anonymously published pamphlet critiquing the oligarchy in Bern (known as the *Cart-Schrift*), in TWA I, 255–267.

and Jacobi, and increasingly Schelling – as is evident in his first monograph (the *Differenzschrift*), as well as his lengthy essays in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, which he coedited with Schelling.

Hegel's development in the last decade of the eighteenth century has been researched extensively in recent years,² so I will restrict myself here to just the basic contours. In the early 1790s, Hegel understood himself to be a follower of Kant. He was particularly concerned to determine what consequences Kantian moral philosophy and its moral theism might have for theology and political philosophy. He hoped to thereby instigate a spiritual “revolution” in Germany which had to precede any reinvention of the social order.

He was most impressed, on this score, by Kant's so-called “doctrine of postulates” as propounded in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). Kant there “rehabilitates” the contents of traditional metaphysics which he had criticized as dogmatic and indemonstrable in theoretical philosophy – such as the doctrine of the immortal soul, or the existence of a just God to appropriately punish and reward – and presents them as justified assumptions required for the explanation of our moral consciousness.

Now, according to Kant himself, the indubitable moral consciousness of “duty” – i.e. the duty only to act on principles that all rational beings could give themselves as laws – is independent of the assumption of God as a source of just punishment or reward. Indeed, the obligation to act only in accordance with this moral injunction (the “categorical imperative”) precisely must not depend upon the hope or fear of divine justice. Nevertheless, human beings, as creatures who live in an uncontrollable world, would be unable consistently to act morally were they to believe that the natural order was “devilish” or indifferent. We humans must, rather, assume that good actions ultimately yield good effects with respect to the human pursuit of happiness. This comprehensive good, the just distribution of happiness, is necessarily the object of our actions, even if we can only ever strive to be “worthy of happiness.” In assuming this, we must simultaneously assume the existence of a being who can ensure the agreement of morality with happiness, the harmony of the moral and natural world orders. And we must likewise assume that a person's existence (i.e. the life of his soul) is not restricted to his time on earth in order to account for this (endless) approximation to moral perfection.

² Cf inter alia Henrich's *Hegel im Kontext*; Jamme, *Ein ungelehrtes Buch*; Kondylis, *Die Entstehung der Dialektik*.

Hegel and his fellow students in the Tübingen seminary, Hölderlin and Schelling, were fascinated by how this idea transformed the contents of religion and metaphysics into “supporting assumptions” for the actions of autonomous individuals. Moral imperatives – and thus, indirectly, legal obligations, which must not be immoral – were no longer held to be valid because they were promulgated by God, the church, or the sovereign, but rather because they revealed themselves to the individual as appropriate and necessary. Many of the traditional commandments and fundamental tenets of Christianity, however, survive this test of the “rationality” of moral, legal, and religious principles. What cannot survive such a test is the blind dependence of the faithful on the church both for instruction about good and evil and for the disbursement of grace to unworthy sinners. By the same token, any state hand-in-glove with such a church, any state premised solely on the supposed need of its subordinates to be unreflectively guided by authorities is equally incapable of passing the “rationality” test.³ Hegel accordingly expected the increasing focus on autonomy in morality and religion to have political consequences by undermining such blind dependence.

And indeed the French Revolution did garner support from a transformation of religion. The result was admittedly a religion which deified reason itself and which borrowed from ancient civil religions (Rousseau's *religion civile*), with their “political” gods and festivals. This was quite in keeping with Rousseau's doubts about whether a universal, transcendent religion was compatible with enthusiasm for a republic.⁴ Even Hegel's conceptions of a folk religion capable of gripping the “hearts” of free citizens were largely modeled on elements from ancient, and especially Greek, religion. But he mostly proceeded on the assumption that such a religion is to be found in Christianity as well – or at least in the doctrines and “spirit” of Jesus, even if the early church already exhibits the beginnings of domineering doctrinal authority and moral paternalism.⁵ This “turning point” within Christianity also attracted Hegel's interest in connection with the collapse of the ancient world, as presented by Edward Gibbon, the great English Enlightenment philosopher of history.⁶

After Hegel left the Tübingen seminary and while he spent his time in Bern investigating this transition of Christianity from a folk religion

³ Cf Hegel's letter to Schelling, April 16, 1795 (*Briefe* I, 24; *Letters*, 35).

⁴ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8. ⁵ Cf Fujita, *Philosophie und Religion*, 49.

⁶ Cf Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*.

with "Kantian" import to a "positive" religion of laws, dogma, and authority hostile to all autonomy, a movement was beginning in German philosophy to proceed "with Kant beyond Kant."⁷ In 1794, Fichte published his *Science of Knowledge*,⁸ which attempted to explain the unbridgeable oppositions internal to finite reason and transcendental philosophy (concept and intuition, theoretical and practical reason) as results of the self-limitation of a spontaneous subjectivity.

Yet in doing so, Fichte also incorporated into this Kantian philosophy of subjectivity elements of the opposing position – a philosophy of substance, as developed by Spinoza. For Spinoza, philosophy had to begin with the single, true reality, i.e. with that which necessarily exists and can be comprehended through itself. All limited modes of being and all determinations (thought and extension, space and time, will and understanding) are attributed to this single substance as properties (attributes) or their modifications.

For Fichte, however, Spinoza's *causa sui* just is the subject, viz. the I, which spontaneously comes to itself, is immediately certain of its existence, and produces the conceptual schemata of a "world" only within its own consciousness and through its own activity. Now, in human consciousness, the pure certainty of self-activity is, of course, always bound up with a distinction between spontaneity, on the one hand, and non-spontaneity, givenness, or limitation, on the other. Human consciousness can only conceive of an absolute, spontaneous production of self *and* object as an unattainable origin and the goal of its striving for autonomy.

Hegel's friends, Schelling and Hölderlin, were similarly engaged in projects to combine the Kantian critique of finite consciousness with the idea of an absolute unifying ground for thought and world. Schelling's initial attempts sought to further develop Fichte's approach and to elaborate his close relation to Spinoza.⁹ He is more explicit than Fichte in conceiving of self-consciousness as the self-differentiation of an undivided, absolute I, whose spontaneous activity is at once

⁷ The contemporary literature has recently recognized the significance of a series of heretofore neglected authors for the early history of German Idealism, including Novalis, Sinclair, and Zwilling. Cf. Henrich's works, *Grund, Konstellationen*, and *Jakob Zwillings Nachlaß*. Cf. also Diez, *Briefwechsel*, as well as the work of Frank and H. Hegel.

⁸ That is, his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, translated by Peter Heath and John Lachs as the *Science of Knowledge*.

⁹ See his 1795 text *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*, 149 ff. (translated by F. Marti as *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy in The Unconditional in Human Knowledge*, 112 ff.); see also Schelling's *Abhandlungen*, 369 f.

undifferentiated intuition and the source of the oppositions of consciousness. He maintained that one could thus solve Spinoza's unresolved task of deriving the attributes of substance from its unity by understanding substance as a transindividual "I."¹⁰

Hölderlin, by contrast, held that subjectivity could not itself provide the antecedent ground of unity for such oppositions. Even in its most immediate ("pre-reflexive") form, self-consciousness implies a sort of self-distance.¹¹ Hölderlin's term for the supposed ground of unity that precedes all oppositions (at least in the sense of enabling their collective comparison and reciprocal interrelation) was "Being." (Hölderlin emphasized the idiosyncrasy of his concept of "Being" by using the antiquated spelling *Seyn* rather than the more common *Sein*; hence my capitalization of "Being.") Yet Hölderlin's Being is not a thing-like being, but should rather be understood as the origin of consciousness, the source of its division into subject and object, and of its various synthetic functions (intuition, judgment, etc.). All the activity of consciousness is aimed at recovering this "lost" unity. In his Preface to the penultimate draft of *Hyperion* (1795), Hölderlin goes on to describe the manner in which this "Being in the sole sense of the word" is "present" to us as "beauty."¹² He thereby incorporates themes from the "aesthetic Platonism" developed in the Renaissance, which had been reintroduced into eighteenth-century discussions by thinkers like Hemsterhuis, Shaftesbury, Jacobi, and others.¹³

Hegel did not pursue this post-Kantian search for an absolute unity which might serve to explain the oppositions of consciousness and their synthetic unification in judgments and other cognitive achievements on the same level of "first philosophy," i.e. the level of ontology or transcendental philosophy. His investigations into the relation between Christianity and moral and political autonomy near the end of his time in Bern evince the first signs of a movement away from Kant and toward the fundamental considerations of a Spinozistic and Neoplatonic doctrine of universal unity. This can be seen most clearly in a surviving fragment of the winter 1796–1797 *Systemprogramm*,¹⁴ which Hegel may have authored (or co-authored with Schelling and

¹⁰ Cf his letter to Hegel of February 4, 1795 (*Briefe* 1, 22; *Letters*, 32 f.).

¹¹ Cf Henrich, *Der Grund*, 267 ff.

¹² *Hyperion*, 169 (not reproduced in the English translation by Willard Trask); cf Henrich, *Der Grund*, 267 ff.

¹³ Cf Düsing, "Ästhetischer Platonismus."

¹⁴ Cf TWA 1, 234–236; translated by H. S. Harris in *Hegel's Development*, Volume 1, 510–512.

Hölderlin).¹⁵ The text connects the Kantian conception of providing an ethical grounding for metaphysics with the demand for a theory of ideas in which the “first idea” is the “representation of me myself as an absolutely free being,” while its “final” idea “which unites all [others], [is] the idea of beauty, taken in the higher, Platonic sense of the word.”¹⁶ The ground of unity in the philosophical system of ideas is thus a principle which unites all oppositions. In the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition, this unifying principle was conceived as beauty, or even as love.

It is principally the concept of love which assumes the central place in Hegel's Frankfurt manuscripts. Love, for Hegel, represents the true core of Jesus's teachings, which at once fulfill and supersede the law-based morality of the Old Testament. Here, Hegel is participating in the “typological” tradition of interpreting the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old.¹⁷ At the same time, his conception of the incremental progression of morality, love, and religion builds on the classical doctrine of the fourfold course of the Scripture.¹⁸

At this point, Hegel largely identifies the law-based morality of the Old Testament with a Kantian concept of morality. In Kant, there remains an unbridgeable opposition between freedom and nature, and a permanent conflict in moral endeavor. It was this opposition that Fichte placed at the foundation of his theoretical and practical philosophy,¹⁹ conceiving it as the opposition between I and Not-I, between a subject and an object which reciprocally determine one another. In the theoretical register, the subject knows itself to be determined by the object (though according to its own, subjective rules), while in the practical register, the subject determines the object, asserting its autonomy against the resistances of inner and outer nature.

Hegel took this to mean that subject and object stood in a relation of separation and domination:

Theoretical syntheses become wholly objective, wholly opposed to the subject. Practical activity annihilates the object and is wholly subjective – it is only in love that one is one with object; it does not dominate, nor is it dominated. This love, turned into a being by the imagination, is the godhead.

(TWA 1, 242)

¹⁵ On the dating of this text, cf Jamme and Schneider, *Der Weg*, 42.

¹⁶ Cf TWA 1, 234, 235; Harris, *Toward the Sunlight*, 510, 511.

¹⁷ Cf Ohly, “Typologie,” 446 ff. ¹⁸ Cf Ohly, “Vom geistigen Sinn.”

¹⁹ That is, in the first three sections of the 1794 *Science of Knowledge*.

The fundamental features of Hegel's later philosophy of religion are already visible here. God is conceived as the imagination's reification or objectification of a relation that is at once interpersonal and "ontological" – of a unification of separate(d) elements.

In a philosophy of the absolute subject, whether in Kant's moral philosophy of autonomous reason or in Fichte's theory of the I striving to determine the Not-I, "no unification is achieved. The subject, the free being, is the more powerful, and the object, nature, is dominated" (ibid.). Freedom in the true sense doesn't consist in dominating nature, whether inner or outer. It rather consists in harmony, in overcoming the limits of the Other, in unification.

In Jena, Hegel continues to develop this critique of Kant and Fichte as dualistic philosophers who endorse "oppositions of reflection," and it comes to occupy the center of his *Differenzschrift* and his early Jena essays and manuscripts. In Frankfurt, however, he remains primarily interested in the understanding and critique of the transformation of such a religion of love and unification into a philosophy of moral and political domination. In addition to the group of fragments on *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, Hegel also begins a commentary on *The German Constitution*,²⁰ in which he takes as the standard of his critique the unification of nature with social forms of freedom and the harmony of the individual with the life of society:

The ever-increasing contradiction between the unknown, which humans unconsciously seek, and the life that is offered to them – the life that is permitted, and that they made their own – [this contradiction together with] the yearning for life of those who have transformed nature into an idea in themselves both [sc. this contradiction and this yearning] involve a striving for mutual convergence.

(TWA I, 457)

It is not until his time in Jena (1802) that Hegel's critique of the constitution of the declining empire begins to reveal outlines of a civil constitution in which it is possible for the individual to live in harmony with both nature and the life of a people. From a legal perspective, this constitution is, for Hegel, a constitutional monarchy with representation for the various "estates" or social-professional classes. What is crucial for the unification of the individual with an absolute life

²⁰ Viz. the old "Roman empire of the German nation"; cf TWA I, 461–581; translated by H. B. Nisbet in *Hegel: Political Writings*, ed. Dickey and Nisbet, 6–101.

is religion. Thus, even at the end of his time in Frankfurt, Hegel continues to view religion as the highest form of unification between freedom and nature, individual and society.

In performing this function, religion exceeds even philosophy, according to Hegel's 1800 *Systemfragment*, which conceives philosophy as a species of reflection or understanding that never gets beyond the oppositions which govern its thought. Even the concept of life, which represented the highest concept of the unification of oppositions in Hegel's Frankfurt manuscripts, is now presented in the *Systemfragment* as a concept belonging to mere thought – something merely “posited” (a term Hegel borrows from Fichte), a concept that remains restricted by its opposite. This admittedly does not prevent philosophical reflection from attempting to overcome this opposition by means of paradoxical and intrinsically contradictory expressions. Since the course of life, both in man and in nature, continuously gives rise to oppositions, which then resolve themselves into the whole (the species, nature, culture), philosophy understands life as the “combination of combination and non-combination,” or the “combination of synthesis and antithesis” (TWA I, 422).

But insofar as this thought remains a product of discriminating reflection, it still excludes its opposite – a combination can still be distinguished from a non-combination. It is only when the comprehensive combination is treated as a “being outside reflection” that reflection itself can be understood, along with its oppositions, as part of a more comprehensive whole. Yet this cannot simply be *thought*, for such thinking would still remain distinct from what is thought. It must itself be *lived out* in the religious actions of unification with God (e.g. in the celebration of the Mass as unification with the sacrifice of Christ). Philosophy can only “demand” such unification; in religion, it can be lived and experienced: “For just this reason, philosophy must cease with religion” (ibid., 422 f.).

Later, Hegel will speak of the sublation of religion into philosophy, because it is religion, with its ideas of the beyond, which still preserves a division between man and God – a division which can only be overcome in philosophical comprehension. This reversal is already hinted at in Hegel's first publication, the *Differenzschrift*. Yet even there, he persists in labeling philosophy itself as the “worship of God.”

THE TASK AND SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY ACCORDING TO THE *DIFFERENZSCHRIFT*

In 1801, having completed his dissertation and habilitation theses, Hegel advanced to the position of lecturer at the University of Jena, which Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling had made the premier institution for German philosophy.¹ During this first period as a university lecturer (1801–1807), Hegel supported himself financially by drawing on money he had recently inherited following his father's death in 1799. In Jena, Hegel was thought of as Schelling's friend and disciple, since he sided with the latter in his ongoing debates with Fichte, which began in 1799. Fichte himself was forced to leave the University of Jena in 1800 after he was accused of atheism. Schelling, however, remained until 1803, during which time he and Hegel coedited the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*. When exactly Hegel split from Schelling philosophically continues to be a matter of disagreement in the literature.²

Certain differences between the two can already be observed in the *Differenzschrift*. And Schelling is surely also subjected to critique in the *Phenomenology*, although Hegel assured Schelling by letter that the critique was aimed only at Schelling's uncomprehending imitators.³

In any event, Hegel's *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*⁴ takes aim at prominent philosophical positions of the time. The text has four parts: an extensive chapter on the task and

¹ Cf Kimmerle, "Dokumente zu Hegels Jenaer Dozententätigkeit"; as well as Meist's editor's note in AA 5, 611 ff.

² Cf Düsing, "Die Entstehung."

³ Cf below, pp. 55, 113, 235. See also his letter to Schelling, May 1, 1807 (*Briefe* 1, 162; *Letters*, 79 f.).

⁴ Parenthetical citations of the *Differenzschrift* use the abbreviation *DS* and give the page numbers of both the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash. The German edition can be found in *TWA* II. References to the English edition pertain to

the methods of contemporary philosophy (“Various Forms Occurring in Contemporary Philosophy”), a critical presentation of Fichte’s philosophy, a “Comparison of Schelling’s Principle of Philosophy with Fichte’s,” and an Appendix “On Reinhold’s View of Philosophy” occasioned by the publication of Reinhold’s *Contributions to an Easier Overview of the State of Philosophy at the Beginning of the 19th Century* the previous year.

(a) The task of philosophy

Hegel’s account of the task, method, and “instruments” (or “organon”) of philosophy in the first chapter of the *Differenzschrift* clearly exhibits traces of both his philosophical development in the preceding decade and his understanding of philosophy as a cultural and political factor. This is no mere academic debate about the presuppositions of knowledge or the advantages of different philosophical methods. The “need” for philosophy and for a particular philosophy arises within the culture (the *Bildung*) of a particular age. Yet Hegel saw his age as one marked by dichotomies and divisions (*Entzweiungen*) (DS, 21/91) – a point he had already articulated in the Introduction to *The German Constitution*.

This dichotomy afflicts not only the individual, divided from the forms of public life, but also the very foundations of the culture, which is a “culture of the understanding.” Hegel thus participates in the tradition of critiquing late Enlightenment culture – a critique he extends even to the Enlightenment’s “early Romantic” successors, such as Fichte, Jacobi, Schleiermacher, and, some years later, even Schelling. The features of the “culture of the understanding” which Hegel singles out for criticism are its dualism and its attempt to disbar man’s access to the absolute. The understanding erects an “edifice” or “building” (*Gebäude*) of concepts and dichotomies “between man and the absolute” (DS, 20/89). Yet these concepts are themselves treated as “absolute,” insofar as they are understood to be ultimate principles, incapable of further justification:

Antitheses such as spirit and matter, soul and body, faith and intellect, freedom and necessity, etc. used to be important . . . [t]he whole weight of human interests hung upon them. With the progress of culture they

have passed over into such forms as the antithesis of reason and sensibility, intelligence and nature and, with respect to the universal concept, of absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity.

(DS, 21/90)

Philosophers like Reinhold and Fichte, who formulate such abstract principles (e.g. subjectivity and objectivity), do not thereby overcome the “culture of the understanding,” but rather reinforce it by seeking to provide its ultimate justification.

Yet Hegel does not respond by allying himself with those who are critical of the culture of the understanding and who claim to have immediate access to the absolute either in feeling (Schleiermacher) or in faith (Jacobi). As his early *Systemfragment* says, the activities and oppositions of the understanding are themselves part of the absolute life and are conditions of “reflected” unification with it (cf TWA I, 422; Harris, *Toward the Sunlight*, 511). Hegel now claims that the “necessary dichotomy” is itself “one factor in life” and goes on to assert, “Life eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality in its highest liveliness [*Lebendigkeit*] is only possible through its own re-establishment out of the deepest fission” (DS, 21 f./91, Hegel’s italics).

To the extent that Hegel attributes the understanding a function in “life,” his philosophy of life seems to depart from the Enlightenment and rather to anticipate the Romantics and the “philosophy of life” (*Lebensphilosophie*) in the twentieth century (Dilthey, Simmel, Bergson). Nevertheless, it remains clear that Hegel’s point of departure is Kant’s understanding of reason. Reason demands unity and totality, i.e. anything conditioned must be traced back to something unconditioned, not only in human knowledge, but also in man’s practical ends. Reason demands both a system of our knowledge of nature, as a systematic matrix in which everything can be traced back to highest principles by means of inferences, and a “system” of action which postulates the harmony of rational ends in an “organism” (kingdom of ends) in which the actions of all rational creatures participate.

Yet, for Kant, such a demand remains an unachievable task, whose complete realization is utterly impossible given the means available to a merely finite understanding and moral will. The knowledge supplied to us by the understanding, which is grounded on the oppositions between spontaneity and receptivity, concept and intuition, universal and particular, etc., remains the only secure and “objectively contentful” (*realitätshaltige*) mode of knowledge. According to Hegel, the “interest of

reason” Kant speaks of is precisely the unification or supersession of those oppositions which separate mankind both from its goal of knowledge of the unconditioned and from the organic, purposive unity of human action: “The sole interest of reason is to sublimate [*aufheben*] such rigid antitheses” (*DS*, 21/90). These oppositions or antitheses have become rigid, according to Hegel, precisely through the understanding’s attempt to “imitate” reason. The understanding seeks to think absolute unity, but can only do so either by treating a single side of an opposition as absolute, or by regarding the opposition as an antinomy (which, according to Hegel, is the highest expression of the absolute available to the understanding).

This constitutes the central thought of Hegel’s critique of Kant and Fichte, as he articulates it in both the *Differenzschrift*, his first published book, and the major journal essay “Faith and Knowledge”: Kant and Fichte rely only on the means of the understanding in their attempts to execute the task of reason. When Fichte declares spontaneity and self-presence (the I) to be the sole unconditioned and unlimited feature of human thought and will, he thereby negates the other side of consciousness and its relation to the world – namely its limitation by something external to thought, its dependence on the contents of the senses (passivity and receptivity, the Not-I). He thereby locates unconditional unity in one side of an opposition, though it intrinsically involves limitation by the other side. The unconditional is then transformed, for Fichte, into the practical demand to overcome all passivity and heteronomy.

Nevertheless, the “stealthy efficacy of reason” makes itself felt even in these philosophies of the understanding. For even they register the inadequacy of a one-sided formulation of the absolute in their demand for the supplementation and “completion” of this one-sidedness. They postulate a unity that comprehends or underlies both the necessity of the sensible world and the spontaneity and freedom of thought and rational will – as, for example, in Kant’s idea of a highest good, or of a supersensible substrate of the sensible world as one in which freedom is possible.⁵ Yet these ideas are not a “positing of reason without any counterpositing [*Entgegensetzen*]” (*DS*, 27/96); they rather postulate the unity of what the understanding perceives as contradictory – a unity which is consequently inaccessible to the understanding. The understanding, or reflection – both are expressions for discursive

⁵ Cf Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§78 and 86.

thought, which proceeds by drawing conceptual distinctions and excluding contradictions – is “seduced” by reason into accepting antinomial concepts of the unconditioned: the identity of positing and counterpositing, freedom and necessity, the supersensible and the sensible, etc. Yet in doing so, the understanding violates its own law, the law of contradiction. Because it is the understanding itself that demands this violation for the knowledge of the unconditioned, understanding annuls itself. But since the understanding simultaneously characterizes what it demands as unknowable, it stubbornly insists on “remaining understanding and not becoming reason” (*DS*, 28/96).

Yet how can Hegel claim that, despite the limits of the understanding, positive knowledge of the unconditioned is possible? First, because he proceeds on the assumption that our rational activity is directed at unconditional unity and that our cognitive faculties are consequently equipped or even “destined” (*bestimmt*) for this aim. The very fact that we search, in a variety of ways, for unity beyond the oppositions involved in the knowledge normally provided by our understanding shows that such unity is already given to us unconsciously and implicitly. Hegel here inserts himself into a tradition of avowing an innate idea of an *ens perfectissimum* – an innate idea of an infinite and perfect being and its mode of knowledge. This tradition had been recently resurrected by Jacobi, who objected to his “constructivist” contemporaries (e.g. Fichte, in his estimation) that we can only understand and seek to explain what is already immediately given to us. As Hegel puts it, the absolute “is the goal that is being sought; but it is already at hand [*vorhanden*], for how else could it be sought? Reason produces it, but only by freeing consciousness from its limitations” (*DS*, 24/93).

Hegel even adopts some of the more contentful doctrines of this tradition of thought which maintains the immanence of the idea of the absolute to reason. For he characterizes this absolute as the “identity of idea and being” (*DS*, 45/112). In the divine being or *ens necessarium* – i.e. the notion central to the traditional ontological proof of the existence of God – this difference between being and being thought falls away. The very idea of such a being reveals that it must necessarily exist. Yet here Hegel goes on to claim that the notion of a necessary being is not an idea of something distinct from human reason. Reason itself “is nothing other than the identity of both [the idea and being]” (*DS*, 45/112) – the identity of completely self-determining thought and reality. After all, Hegel wishes to understand the development of religion as the progressive sublation of the distinction between man and God.

It is the task of philosophy, however, to “produce” or to “construct” this identity for consciousness by presenting reason as a comprehensive system of antinomial concepts (cf *DS* 35 f./103 f., 43/111). Hegel’s conception of antinomies is drawn not only from Kant, but also from the ancient skeptics. A few years after the *Differenzschrift*, he wrote an essay for the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* that he coedited with Schelling in which he analyzes both ancient and modern skepticism (the latter exemplified in the thought of David Hume). The skeptical undercurrents in Plato’s late dialogues – at least, as Hegel understands them – as well as the Pyrrhonian skeptics are particularly influential for Hegel. Together, they lead him to maintain the (negative) thesis that any concept and its contrasting complement are equally valid, as are any judgment and its negation.⁶ And this holds not only for philosophical “dogmas” but also for basic concepts and the fundamental rules of logic itself. Hegel radicalizes the method of *isostheneia* in attempting to show that the meaning of any concept already involves the meaning of its opposite, in contrast with which it is, at the same time, meant to be distinguished. Yet what the skeptics fail to see – and what the positive side of Plato’s dialogues attempts to capture – is that this skeptical destruction is a condition of a rational comprehension of the totality (*symploke*) of the idea. With the singular term “idea,” Hegel means to signify precisely this totality of developing, reality-constituting concepts and their necessary interconnection in judgments and inferences.

This line of argument prefigures the program of Hegel’s logic, which itself constitutes an “organic whole of concepts, whose highest law is not the understanding” (i.e. the principle of contradiction), “but rather reason” (*DS*, 35 f./103). This doesn’t mean that Hegel dismisses the principle of contradiction as inapplicable to the steps of his argument. It rather means that the concepts fundamental to the various realms of reality – such as being and nothing, essence and appearance, cause and effect, as well as fundamental principles like the principle of identity or the principle of contradiction – can only be comprehended within a system in which each concept is elucidated in light of its own contrasting complement and its “holistic” interconnection with other concept-pairs. Insofar as every concept implicates its complement (and every principle its opposite) in a determinate way, each is an expression of the absolute, the comprehensive and unconditional unity.

⁶ On this point, see Düsing, “Die Bedeutung”; Riedel, *Hegel und die antike Dialektik*; Vieweg, *Philosophie des Remis*.

Here Hegel is picking up on some ideas from the Renaissance (viz. from Cusanus and Bruno) which seek to understand God as the coincidence of all opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*). Even Jacobi,⁷ and, somewhat later, Schelling,⁸ drew attention to Renaissance philosophies of “the One” which comprehends everything. According to Hegel, however, one must progress from one pair of opposites to the next, as the necessary further development of the first, in order to generate a truly “organic whole” (*DS*, 35/103), in which the meaning of each member is determined through the whole and the meaning of the whole is produced and rendered explicit in each member.

The mode of knowledge which “refers” the oppositions of reflection (i.e. of the understanding) to the absolute, the mode which reveals the “identity” and function of each within the whole, Hegel calls “speculation.” This appellation is not meant to suggest anything like free invention, as we would normally understand the word today (e.g. “wild speculation”). Hegel rather imbues the term with a twofold sense. On the one hand, it is closely connected to reflection and the understanding insofar as it aims to survey conceptual interconnections and inferential relations. On the other hand, speculation must equally be capable of capturing the unity of these oppositions and of bringing into view the whole system that comprehends them and constitutes their principle.

Hegel terms this capacity “transcendental intuition.” Transcendental intuition is the immediate consciousness of the unity of opposites. It unites what is separate in “empirical intuition”: the subjective and the objective. Now, Schelling and Fichte had already attributed this function to “intellectual intuition.” Yet Fichte took this to signify the immediate intuition of one’s own spontaneity, especially as it is exercised in objectifying consciousness. Similarly, for Schelling, this capacity is primarily the intuition of an absolute “indifference” prior to all differentiation into subjective and objective, production and product. It is *not* a capacity for synthesis, as it is for Hegel.

Hegel characterizes this mode of intuition as “transcendental” not because it is a condition of our consciousness of objects and our empirical knowledge, but rather because it is a condition of “true”

⁷ In the addenda to his 1785 *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn* (translated by George di Giovanni in *F. H. Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel “Allwilt”*).

⁸ In his 1802 dialogue, *Bruno* (which has been translated by Michael G. Vater).

knowledge concerning the identity of the subjective and the objective, concept and being (*DS*, 42/110). It is thus to be contrasted with “empirical intuition,” which precisely separates the object from the intuiting subject. This is already to demand what the *Phenomenology* is later designed to accomplish: that intuition “become transcendental,” i.e. that we be led from the empirical, divisive form of intuition to the “transcendental” form. To successfully execute this demand, as the *Phenomenology* illustrates, involves adumbrating the oppositions of reflection and then reducing them to contradictions. By means of this sublation and self-transcendence, reflection can be united with transcendental intuition and thus become speculation, i.e. “transcendental knowledge [*Wissen*]”. Such knowledge involves the unification of reflection and intuition.⁹

In light of what I have said thus far, it might appear as though the *Differenzschrift* already sketches the programs of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. And one can indeed find traces of these programs in the *Differenzschrift*. But in that earlier work, Hegel retains the terminology and overall picture of Schelling’s system in formulating his own conception of a philosophy capable of overcoming the dichotomies inherent in the culture of the age. Thus, for example, the systematic sketch he provides in the first part of the *Differenzschrift* largely follows the contours of Schelling’s own system of “identity-philosophy” (*Identitätsphilosophie*).

Schelling sought to overcome the “subjectivism” of Fichte’s philosophy of the I by starting with the identity of subject and object and developing it in two directions. On the one hand, he sought to portray the philosophy of nature as an incremental progression from unconscious production to full self-consciousness. Transcendental philosophy, on the other hand, was meant to proceed in the opposite direction, from immediate self-intuition to consciousness of a material world. This is what Hegel has in mind in the last section of the first part of the *Differenzschrift* (“The Relation of Philosophizing to a Philosophical System”), when he speaks of “the identity that is least dichotomous [*unentzweitesten*],” which is “objectively, matter, but subjectively, feeling (self-consciousness)” (*DS*, 46/113). On account of this contrast, each of these represents only a “relative identity” (*DS*, 41/109).

⁹ On this, see Düsing, “Spekulation.”

Similarly, all the internal levels within the philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy also represent merely “relative identities” which must be supplemented and completed within their proper frameworks. The system of natural philosophy thus “advances until the objective totality is completed” but must “then unite this objective totality with the opposite subjective totality to form the infinite world-intuition [*Weltanschauung*]” (DS, 47/114). This infinite intuition of the world is the concept of the identity of being and thinking, nature and subject, which is unfolded throughout the whole system. Adopting yet another of the metaphors Schelling borrowed from Renaissance philosophy, Hegel characterizes the whole process of this systematic development as a procedure of “expansion” into a totality and “contraction” into the “richest and simplest identity” (DS, 47/114). Even after parting ways with Schelling, Hegel would continue to invoke this rhythm of reason’s self-presentation.

(b) Critique of Fichte

The basic elements of Hegel’s critique of Fichte are already laid out in the introductory chapter of the *Differenzschrift*. Hegel credits Fichte for displaying “the most thorough and profound speculation” in his philosophical argumentation (DS, 51/118). But this complement is directed only at the idea of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, not at its execution as a system in Fichte’s writings between 1794 and 1798. Of these writings, Hegel focuses particularly on the *Science of Knowledge* of 1794, the *Foundations of Natural Right* of 1796, and his *System of Ethics* of 1798. One year later, Hegel also criticizes Fichte’s 1800 text *The Vocation of Man* (*Bestimmung des Menschen*), in his essay “Faith and Knowledge.”

One cannot claim that either of Hegel’s critical efforts do justice to Fichte’s position, much less that they stand up as immanent critiques of Fichte’s system.¹⁰ Hegel suggests that Fichte correctly conceives the idea of reason as the identity of thinking and being, but claims that Fichte’s system was incapable of unpacking this conception, because he understands reason itself exclusively in terms of the unconditioned activity of self-consciousness. In the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the I always remains juxtaposed to a Not-I, despite Fichte’s efforts to explain the latter, in all its forms, as consisting in subjective activities (concept,

¹⁰ Cf Düsing, *Hegel*, 73. On Hegel’s critique of Fichte in his Jena writings, see also Siep, *Hegels Fichtekritik*.

intuition, imagination, etc.). Now Fichte does indeed claim that this explanation cannot succeed without some remainder – there is always some residual otherness (some “check” – *Anstoß*) which remains opposed to consciousness and which cannot be reduced to forms of our knowledge or striving. The I’s unconditional control over what is foreign to it therefore remains the unattainable *aim* of our endless moral striving – an “ought” which can never become an “is.” Thus, the fact that the pure spontaneity of the I at the outset of the *Wissenschaftslehre* ultimately turns out to constitute only one moment or aspect of the thinking subject and to represent an aim of the subject’s will does not, in Fichte’s view, constitute a philosophical shortcoming. For his essential concern is to find something unconditioned and indubitable in consciousness upon which to ground both our theoretical knowledge and the consciousness of our freedom – so that it is freedom which first renders our knowledge of the world intelligible.

But Hegel insists on interpreting Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* as a failed identity-system. Fichte’s system fails to explicate or “construct” the identity of positing and being (*Setzen* and *Sein*), the comprehensive totality of the I who proclaims the first principle. Indeed, his method makes it impossible to do so, since Fichte doesn’t develop an “organic,” holistic system designed to complete all oppositions, but rather starts out from absolute principles, whose conditions of intelligibility are then supposed to be identified in the course of the “deduction.”

Yet for Hegel, as we see in the first part of the *Differenzschrift*, these principles simply treat as absolute the one-sided activities of consciousness, or the categories and logical principles which Fichte takes to correspond to them, such as the principles of identity, contradiction, and sufficient reason. And even Fichte admits that regarding these one-sided determinations as “absolute” leads to contradictions. However, his system does not seek to sublimate or resolve these contradictions within a more comprehensive unity. Fichte rather seeks to avoid these contradictions by limiting the import and, in particular, the scope of the incompatible principles. This method, however, reproduces the sort of conceptual and ontological dualism that modern philosophy has traditionally associated with such concepts and principles since at least the time of Descartes.

To attempt to “deduce” the conditions of theoretical knowledge and moral volition from the “absolute” I is therefore a fundamentally circular undertaking, according to Hegel. For the I in question is only one moment abstracted from within the spontaneity and self-identity

of a consciousness, whose “normal” functions enjoy only a limited capacity for synthesizing opposites (spontaneity and receptivity, reason and sensibility, infinite striving and restricted action, etc.). The deduction thus simply reinfuses this “pure” moment with everything from which we initially abstracted. The inadequacy of this abstract principle simply demands that it be supplemented by what was previously ignored. And such a procedure is circular, and therefore dogmatic: “Dogmatic idealism maintains the unity of the principle by denying the object altogether: it posits one of the opposites, the subject in its determinateness, as the absolute” (*DS*, 61/126).

Hegel thinks that consequences of this dogmatic idealism can be discerned throughout the other parts of Fichte’s system – in his philosophical claims about morality, right, and nature. The relation of reason to nature (inner nature as well as outer nature), according to Hegel, turns out to be a “synthesis by way of domination” (*DS*, 75/138) and nature itself becomes something “determined and lifeless” (*DS*, 76/139). On Hegel’s reading, nature is deduced simply as a condition of self-consciousness – in moral philosophy as an impediment to moral striving, in the philosophy of right as an external condition of free action (*DS*, 76/139). But here, too, Hegel is not doing justice to all the aspects of Fichte’s philosophy of nature between 1796 and 1800.¹¹

The “absolute opposition of nature and reason” (*DS*, 79/142) also comes to the fore in Fichte’s social philosophy – his doctrine of right and ethical theory. As Hegel reads him, Fichte understands the community of human beings within a rational order of legal and ethical norms as a system of limitations governing the natural aspects of human beings and their spontaneous relations to one another: “Every relation is one of dominating and being dominated according to the laws of a consistent understanding. The whole edifice of the community of living beings is built by reflection” (*DS*, 81/144). It is not just nature and freedom which stand in a relation of reciprocal negation, but also the absolute freedom of the pure I and the determinate freedom of rights and duties. Absolute freedom is indeterminate and rejects all limitation. It must consequently be “surrendered” if a community with others is to be possible. This criticism leads Hegel to describe Fichte’s state in the *Foundations of Natural Right* as a tyrannical police state. But this criticism gets no traction on a more sober

¹¹ Cf Lauth, *Die transzendente Naturlehre Fichtes*.

interpretation of Fichte's text, even if one takes account of certain exaggerated "Enlightenment" ideas, such as Fichte's attempt to "deduce" a "mechanism" for pre-empting violations of right.¹² Still, some of the principles Hegel singles out for satirical caricature are now matters of course in many liberal states, such as the duty to carry personal identification.

In contrast to this picture, Hegel understands a "living" community to be a "truly free reciprocal relation of life, [a] relation that is infinite and unlimited for itself" (*DS*, 82/144). But Hegel indicates only the outlines of such a living reciprocal relation of the individual both to other individuals and to his people (*Volk*) to be enshrined in a state's constitution. In his work on *The German Constitution*, Hegel criticizes the emphasis on private rights in connection with the relation between the regime and the various "estates" or social-professional classes and demands a powerful constitutional monarchy. His drafts on *Natural Right* and the *System of Ethics* take their primary orientation from classical political philosophy, particularly from Plato and his theory of social classes. And as Hegel starts to work out his own philosophy of right (around the middle of the Jena period), Fichte's concept of right as reciprocal limitation and recognition of freedom of action begins to exert a positive influence on him after all.¹³

As Hegel reads him, only Fichte's remarks on aesthetics in the *System of Ethics* betray some inkling of the "beautiful" identity of freedom and nature. In aesthetic intuition, nature is not understood as dead, but as living and lively production. Indeed, for Fichte, even the moral law, when viewed aesthetically, does not prescribe the mastery of our natural drives, but should rather be regarded as an expression of our own essence and being and an injunction to obey ourselves. Yet for Hegel, the relation of obedience is just as inadequate to the aesthetic conception of the moral law as it is to the strictly moral conception. Nevertheless, these remarks on aesthetics reveal the speculative impetus of Fichte's system – and they are consequently just as inconsistent with the rest of his system as its speculative beginning is: "It is remarkable how Fichte can express himself so exquisitely about beauty, when what he says is inconsistent with regard to his system" (*DS*, 91/152). Schelling fares better, since, for him, art is the systematic conclusion and the highest expression of the identity of spirit (*Geist*) and nature.

¹² Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, especially §14.

¹³ Cf Riedel, "Hegels Kritik."

(c) Presentation of Schelling's system

The presentation of Schelling's views attempts to show that, unlike Fichte's system, Schelling's does meet the criteria for a truly speculative philosophy articulated in the opening section of the *Differenzschrift* and that it does justice to the problem of the age – the need to overcome dichotomies: “The principle of identity is the absolute principle of Schelling's *whole* system” (DS, 94/155, Hegel's emphasis). Schelling doesn't resolve the problem of “suspend[ing] dichotomy” by “nullifying one of the opposites and exalting the other into something infinite” (DS, 94 f./155). His identity-system around the turn of the century rather attempts to demonstrate the identity of subject and object by articulating a correspondence between the philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy, in light of which both object (nature) and subject (self-consciousness, spirit) are presented as “subject-object” (DS, 97/157). For Hegel, this means that not only identity but also “separation must be admitted as valid” (DS 96/156). Accordingly, the absolute is understood not as pure identity, but as the “identity of identity and non-identity,” the identity of “being opposed and being one” (ibid.).

The two parts of Schelling's system present, as it were, nature and self-consciousness (or “intelligence”) as inversions of one another: “In the system of intelligence, objects are nothing in themselves, nature only has subsistence in consciousness” (DS, 100/160). Like Kant and Fichte, Schelling presents the very constitution of nature as shaped by the forms of our cognition. In the system of nature, by contrast, one “forget[s] that nature is something known; the ideal determinations nature receives in science are, at the same time, immanent in it” (ibid.). Nature is presented as a system of the self-production of forces – the concept of force, for Hegel, signifies something “inner that produces something outer, it is a self-positing = the I” (DS, 104/164). Yet, in the respective parts of the system, both of these sides appear as “substance” in the Spinozistic sense – as *causa sui*, something that “determine[s] itself” (DS, 100/160).

The identity of both sides is initially visible only in the sameness of structure and progression of levels: “every science” is “equivalent to the other with respect to their interconnection and the progression of their levels” (DS, 106/166). To this extent, Schelling's philosophy is the systematic development of Spinoza's theory that every modification in the realm of extension (i.e. the corporeal world) corresponds to a modification in the realm of ideas: “the system of nature and the system

of intelligence are one and the same; to any subjective determination there corresponds the very same objective determination" (ibid.). And in his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*,¹⁴ Schelling had indeed attempted a parallel deduction of the forms of intelligence (of the I) and the levels of nature in order to reveal their correspondence. Thus, "productive intuition" corresponds to matter, and the intuition of the self to the organic (cf *System*, 427 ff./72 ff.).

Such a correspondence can equally well be established with respect to the supposed opposition between freedom and necessity, according to Hegel. Nature "has freedom," for "its non-conscious development is a reflection of the living force which, endlessly splitting itself, yet posits itself and is identical to itself in every limited shape [*beschränkten Gestalt*]; to this extent no configuration of nature is limited; each is free" (*DS*, 108 f./168). Freedom as self-production, as formation and dissolution of forms, is to be met with in nature just as much as in the human will.

Freedom has nothing to do with "whim and contingency" (cf *DS*, 108/167). It has to do with something being its own cause and remaining identical with itself throughout the various forms of being or action. But "intelligence" also displays necessity, which Hegel understands as an objective order or organization. As the "fully developed organization of cognizing and intuiting" (*DS*, 108/167), intelligence (or subjectivity) is, like nature, characterized by an immanent necessity of forms, functions, and modes of operation. And like the forms of nature, some of these forms remain shrouded in unconsciousness: "pre-reflective" feeling, intuiting, etc. Correlatively, nature also contains prefigurations of self-objectification: in organic nature an "inner" is distinguished from an "outer" (e.g. the brain plays a dominating role in "its" body), and each exemplar of a species stands over against others of the opposite sex. Hegel can accordingly dub the philosophy of the organic the "practical" part of the philosophy of nature.

Yet neither Schelling nor Hegel is fully satisfied with this form of a system of correspondences between nature and subjectivity, between the philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy. For their

¹⁴ Parenthetical references to Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* give the page numbers of both the German and the English editions, in that order, separated by a slash. The German edition in question is in *F. W. J. Schellings sämtliche Werke*, edited by K. F. A. Schelling, Series 1, Volume 3, which has been translated by Peter Heath as *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) (1978).

shared task is not only to present the “inner identity” (*DS*, 110/169) of the absolute in the opposed forms of “being” (nature) and “knowing” (intelligence, subjectivity), but also to articulate their “real synthesis” (*DS*, 112/170). Hegel follows Schelling in calling this portion of the system the philosophy of “absolute indifference.” But while art appeared to Schelling to constitute the highest illustration of the indifference between nature and spirit, Hegel conceives this portion of the system to comprehend a philosophy of art, religion, and speculation itself.

These three forms are supposed to be presented as the self-intuition of the absolute, the self-intuition of the identity of nature and subject. Now Hegel interprets this self-intuition as the philosophical significance of Christian doctrine – as the “intuition of God’s eternal human incarnation” (*DS*, 112/171). Yet, at the same time, art and philosophy become a moment within religion, as the intuition of and unification with the divine: “Both art and speculation are in their essence divine service – both are a living intuition of the absolute life and thus a being-one with it” (*DS*, 113/172). Hegel apparently already has the basic contours of his philosophy of absolute spirit in view here, even if he doesn’t come up with his final account of that part of the system during the Jena period.

We can also observe some ambivalence about the proper relation of philosophy and religion here – an ambivalence which will pervade Hegel’s whole corpus. As early as the *Phenomenology*, we learn that philosophy must “translate” the truth of religion’s “narrative” and metaphorical accounts into a conceptual form. A particularly important aspect of this translation involves overcoming the vestigial division between man and God, the mundane and the other-worldly, the present and the eschatological future. Yet on the other hand, religion apparently remains a necessary form alongside philosophy. The intuitive and practical aspects of worship and perhaps also the moral development of the congregation are still indispensable. So it is clearly problematic to determine whether a philosophically educated consciousness can, without hypocrisy, participate in narrative worship while simultaneously accepting the truth of the philosophical translation of fundamental revealed truths into abstract principles.

The inner organization of this third part of Hegel’s system again receives its orientation from Schelling. Hegel distinguishes these three disciplines according to the “balance” of conscious and unconscious “factors.” Schelling had already considered the artistic productivity

of genius to reveal an identity between the unconscious productivity of nature and the conscious creativity of intelligence. For Hegel, artistic creation clearly falls on the side of consciousness, while the side of unconsciousness is responsible for the objectivity of the work as external reality and for its transindividual validity for "humanity" (*DS*, 113/171 f.). In religion, by contrast, the production of myth and worship is something general, "the product of a plurality [*Menge*], a universal genius" (*DS*, 113).¹⁵ At the same time, the truth of religion exists primarily as inner, in the consciousness of the singular. Finally, in speculation, or philosophy, both production and reception are the work of consciousness.

Yet, as Hegel already elaborated in the first part of the *Differenzschrift*, speculative consciousness is the unity of reflection and intuition. And this intuition is as much "objective" as subjective:

In order to grasp transcendental intuition in its purity, philosophical reflection must further abstract from this subjective [aspect] so that transcendental intuition, as the foundation of philosophy, may be neither subjective nor objective for it, neither self-consciousness as opposed to matter, nor matter as opposed to self-consciousness, but pure transcendental intuition, absolute identity, that is neither subjective nor objective.

(*DS*, 115/173 f.)

This transcendental or intellectual intuition (*DS*, 114/173) is thus not merely the pure self-activity of human reason, but also the self-activity at work in nature – Spinoza's *natura naturans*. And both – both the I and nature – are "the highest appearance of absolute, self-intuiting reason" (*DS*, 115/174).

Now, in the years that follow, Hegel does come to distance himself from this position, which affirms a form of absolute self-intuiting that is also at work in nature, albeit blindly, so to speak. Hegel gradually ceases to conceive of the rational structure of nature as intuition and increasingly understands it as a holistic system (or "network," in contemporary parlance) of concepts. And this, of course, involves a reconception of the significance of the understanding (qua faculty) and the import of his logic. In the course of this development, Hegel distances himself further and further from Schelling. But even in his mature thought, Hegel accepts a correspondence between the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit, adheres to a conception of

¹⁵ This phrase is unaccountably omitted in the Harris and Cerf edition of the *Differenzschrift*.

nature as pre-reflective spirit, and rounds off his system with the forms of absolute spirit – art, religion, and philosophy.

The extent to which Hegel does justice to Schelling in presenting his views, and the extent to which Hegel's own position agrees with Schelling's, are topics of some debate in the literature. Hegel's contemporaries, including Fichte himself, understood Hegel as an advocate for Schelling. And the history of philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has largely shared this assessment.¹⁶ More recent literature on German Idealism has, however, drawn attention to clear differences between Hegel and Schelling.¹⁷ Two differences in particular are repeatedly highlighted. First, Schelling continues until 1801 to distinguish between the oppositionless *indifference* of the absolute in-itself and the *identity* of oppositions, which is only predicated of particular forms in which the absolute exists. Even as late as his 1801 *Presentation of My System*,¹⁸ Schelling continues to distinguish between the "essence" of the absolute – which is its absolute identity, i.e. lack of differences – and its self-knowledge: "Absolute identity cannot cognize [*erkennen*] itself infinitely without infinitely positing itself as subject and object" (*Presentation*, 123/151). Intellectual intuition remains, for him, the only adequate mode of access to this absolute, not the unity of reflection and intuition.

The second important difference between Schelling and Hegel concerns the third part of the system, the philosophy of art, religion, and speculation. Schelling himself had viewed the philosophy of art as the culmination of his system ever since his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*.¹⁹ The productivity of genius is home to the highest form of "the identity of the conscious and unconscious" (*System*, 612/219). Consequently, "The ultimate ground of all harmony between subjective and objective could be exhibited in its original identity only through intellectual intuition; and it is precisely this ground which, by means of the work of art, has been brought forth entirely from the subjective,

¹⁶ Cf e.g. Haym, *Hegel und seine Zeit*, 151 ff.

¹⁷ Cf W. Marx, "Die Bestimmung"; Düsing, "Spekulation"; Düsing, "Die Entstehung"; Fujita, *Philosophie und Religion*, 149 ff.

¹⁸ Parenthetical citations of this work use the abbreviation "*Presentation*" and provide the page numbers of both the German and English editions, respectively. The German is to be found in his *Sämtliche Werke*, Series 1, Volume 4; Michael G. Vater's English translation is published in *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling*.

¹⁹ Again, parenthetical citations (with the abbreviation "*System*") provide the page numbers of both the German and English editions, respectively. See note 14 for references.

and rendered wholly objective" (*System*, 628/232). While the philosophy of art here still seems to represent the culmination of transcendental philosophy, by 1801 it constitutes only the "third part" of the system,²⁰ which "unites" transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature.²¹

Nevertheless, Schelling reserves this "third part" of his system (which he never carried out in the intended form²²) for art alone. It is not the triad of art, religion, and philosophy that makes up the culmination of the system, for Schelling. Neither does he treat art as a form of service to God, nor present philosophy as a synthesis of art and religion, with their variously accentuated and contrasting moments of consciousness and unconsciousness, subjectivity and objectivity. Thus, behind the claim that Schelling had fulfilled the task of philosophy there lurks another conception of philosophy quite independent of Schelling's own, and one that apparently even exercised some influence on him.²³

(d) Critique of Reinhold

Hegel's engagement with Reinhold in the final part (the addendum) of the *Differenzschrift* participates in a controversy that no longer receives much attention today. In the early 1790s, Reinhold was an important and innovative interpreter of the Kantian philosophy. His 1789 *Attempt at a New Theory of the Human Faculty of Representation* (*Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens*) was what stimulated Fichte (who took over his Jena chair in 1794) to develop the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Reinhold initially accepted the *Wissenschaftslehre* but then turned away from it, under the influence of Jacobi's critique of the subjectivism and nihilism of the "philosophy of reflection." In his *Contributions to an Easier Overview of Philosophy at the Beginning of the 19th Century*,²⁴ Reinhold sees the subjectivism of transcendental philosophy reach its apotheosis in Schelling:

With this, dogmatism in philosophizing, which assumes something conceivable [*ein begreifliches*] and, as such, something always only relatively primary [*ein nur relatives Erstes*] as the absolute, reaches complete perfection – thereby repressing the originary truth [*das Urwahre*] and,

²⁰ See his essay directed against Eschenmayer, "Anhang."

²¹ Schelling, *Naturphilosophie*, 648. ²² Cf Düsing, "Die Entstehung," 152 ff.

²³ *Ibid.*, 155 ff. ²⁴ Reinhold, *Beyträge*, henceforth cited as *Contributions*.

with it, everything true in philosophy; and the *non plus ultra* of everything that went before, and indeed of all possible confusion in speculation is thus achieved.²⁵

Schelling's theory of the "universal oneness" [*Alleinigkeit*] of nature and self-consciousness only means that everything foreign to consciousness will be dissolved into structures of "I-hood." And that evacuates knowledge of all reality and all reference to a truth independent of it. This it can only attain through an "originary truth" [*Urwahres*] or an "originary ground" [*Urgrund*], which grounds (justifies, underlies) and verifies everything that is true and grounded, but which is something we cannot conceive, but only believe or have faith in (*Contributions*, 70 f.). This originary truth must, however, "announce itself in a conceptual truth, as such" (*Contributions*, 73) – namely, "as confirming it" (*Contributions*, 72). For Reinhold, this first "conceivable" is "thinking as thinking."

Here, Reinhold is drawing on Bardili's *Grundriß der ersten Logik* (*Outline of Primary Logic*), which he regarded both as a great breakthrough in philosophy and as the culmination of Plato's and Leibniz's objective idealism. With respect to thought, one must distinguish between the merely subjective activity of application and quasi-objective thinking, which consists, for Reinhold, in the law of the "endless repetition of one and the same as one and the same in one and the same and through one and the same, or as pure identity."²⁶ Simple unity – which is not yet even numerical identity in the "Platonic sense" – is apparently the indication of originary truth in thought, grasped non-subjectively. Yet this unity and identity of thought is to be contrasted with the "character of mere manifoldness" exhibited by matter (*Contributions*, H.I, 112). The analysis of applied thought must ultimately lead back to these two principles.

It is clear that Hegel considers Reinhold's position to be a blatant case of dualism in which no "speculation" can be found. Reinhold fails to grasp both the speculative import of Schelling's idealism and the materialism of the French Enlightenment. Hegel sees, for example, in d'Holbach's *System of Nature*, a "speculative" attempt to overcome

²⁵ Reinhold, *Contributions*, 86.

²⁶ Reinhold, *Contributions*, H.I, 106. Cf also Bardili, *Grundriß*, §4: "The absolute possibility of thought rests on our ability to endlessly repeat one, as one and the same, in many (not manifold)."

“the dichotomy that takes the form of spirit and matter” (*DS*, 119/177). Reinhold’s critique of Schelling is, for Hegel, contradictory. He is correct to describe the indifference of subject and nature as the “universal-one” in each, but simultaneously wants to reduce this universal underlying factor to I-hood. Nor does Reinhold ever get beyond subjectivism and, consequently, the dualism of subject and object, spirit and matter in his own philosophy.

This dualism, according to Hegel, consists in both the irreducible difference between the “originary truth” and thought, on the one hand, and between thought and its matter, on the other. Since the originary truth is inconceivable, thought stands passively opposed to it – an “absurdit[y],” since “the absolute becomes something true and certain solely through the spontaneous activity of reason” (*DS*, 127/184). If the absolute were true external to reason, “if reason were active in any way, if the absolute were to receive any form through it [reason’s activity], that activity would have to be viewed as an alteration of the absolute, and an alteration of the originary truth would be the production of error” (*DS*, 127/184). The critique of reason would then require the “removal” of rational forms from the absolute – an idea to which Hegel returns in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. And the consequence would be an irrationalism of faith and a relativization of reason.

The conceptual expression of the absolute cannot, however, be a one-sided category such as pure identity either. The endless repetition of the same is not properly infinite, for it would be then separated from difference and manifoldness, and therefore one-sided, i.e. finite. Rather, the only “true revelation of the inconceivable in concepts, the revelation which is possible through reflection,” is the “union of opposite concepts in the antinomy” (*DS*, 128 f./185).

The other side of Reinhold’s thought – pertaining to manifoldness and matter – is just as subjective and lacking in reality. There can be no knowledge without some application to the manifold of “stuff” or “material” (*Stoff*). Reinhold’s purportedly objective “thought as thought” is thus only a product of abstraction from contentful cognition and knowledge (which relates to a manifold of matter). Consequently, this product of abstraction must be supplemented by what has been ignored, which we must therefore “postulate” in its principal form – as mere manifoldness. Here Hegel is repeating the objection he had earlier directed at Fichte’s system of principles in the *Science of Knowledge*.

Hegel finally concludes by showing that this separation of unity and manifoldness, pure form and the material of representation, was already to be found in Reinhold's earlier *Attempt at a New Theory of the Human Faculty of Representation*. Reinhold merely rediscovered his own earlier philosophy in Bardili's logic – an accusation which Reinhold strenuously denied in his open letter to Fichte.²⁷

²⁷ Cf Reinhold, *Contributions*, H.I, 126 ff. (November 23, 1800).

HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT IN JENA (1801–1806)

Hegel did not publish any books between the *Differenzschrift* and the *Phenomenology*, though he did write several essays for the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, which he coedited with Schelling until 1803 (cf AA 4). Yet he left numerous manuscripts from that period which only began to be published around the beginning of the twentieth century (apart from a few excerpts published by Rosenkranz and Haym in their nineteenth-century books on Hegel). These texts have not only played a role in philosophical corrections of Marxism (Marcuse, Habermas), they have also inspired lively discussions about how Hegel's writings should be edited and interpreted.¹ Many have even claimed to find a more "modern" (and, for contemporary philosophy, more interesting) Hegel in the unpublished manuscripts than in the *Phenomenology* itself. Questions related to his practical philosophy, the construction and parts of his philosophical system, and the development of his dialectic have attracted particular attention.²

In the interest of developing an initial understanding of the *Phenomenology*, we will briefly consider three points:

- (a) the shape and development of the system of philosophy,
- (b) the prehistory of the *Phenomenology* as an introduction to speculative philosophy, and
- (c) the development of the concept of spirit.

¹ Cf Siep, "Wandlungen."

² See Kimmerle, *Das Problem*; Düsing, *Das Problem*; Baum, *Die Entstehung*; Düsing and Henrich, *Hegel in Jena*; Harris, *Night Thoughts*; Siep, *Anerkennung*.

(a) The shape and development of the system

From the outset of his time in Jena, Hegel seems to have already conceived a system of philosophy that corresponds, in all its essentials, to the triad of logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit later articulated in the *Encyclopedia* of 1817. Yet closer analysis of this conception, as it is sketched in Hegel's lectures of 1801–1802, reveals several differences and shifts in the six years between the *Differenzschrift* and the *Phenomenology*, as well as in the ten years separating the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia*. One could even maintain that the first conception had four parts, since Hegel still distinguished logic and metaphysics within what would later become the science of logic. Moreover, the internal division of the philosophy of spirit into subjective, objective, and absolute spirit had only begun to evolve during the Jena period.

(1) In one of the earliest lecture fragments from 1801–1802, Hegel calls the *first* part of the system “the science of the idea” (AA 5, 263). This “extended science of the idea” he calls “idealism” or “the logic.” Insofar as this science is presented as a holistic system of categories and rules, “idea” here apparently already signifies the identity of thinking and being, as it does in the *Science of Logic* (vols. I and II). Here, as in the 1796 *Systemprogramm*, the Platonic sense of “idea” – as signifying the genuine actuality of things – is more important than the Kantian sense of the term.³

Yet the science of the idea itself divides into two sections: a “logic” and a “metaphysic.” The former, logic, must first lead us to the true (“speculative”) understanding of the categories through a critique of the “false metaphysics of limited philosophical systems” (AA 5, 263). These attempted either to comprehend absolute objects (God, the soul, the world) through isolated categories (substance, cause), as pre-Kantian metaphysics had done, or to think them through subjective ideas and postulates, as Kant and Fichte had. Such limited metaphysics thereby fail to capture the holistic character of the determinacies – or, as Hegel will later call them, the “determinations of thought” – which, in their systematic interconnection, constitute both subjective thought and reality itself. Hegel's early logical criticisms of such systems seem

³ According to Dorothea Frede, Platonic ideas also “represent a structural manifold: they contain a plurality of subordinate concepts and also have the capacity to allow for an unlimited variety of further differentiations.” Cf her commentary to Plato's *Philebus*, 136.

to be modeled on Kant's antinomies or the methods of the ancient skeptics, insofar as they seek to reveal the highest principles of such systems to be contradictory.⁴

This critical task is then to be followed by the true, Hegelian, metaphysics – the second section of the “science of the idea” – which elaborates (presumably by the method of transcendental intuition) unifying concepts which contain the criticized, antinomial concepts as moments. It is only in 1805 that Hegel abandons the division of logic and metaphysics in favor of “speculative” logic. This change is not yet evident in the *Systementwurf* (*System-Draft*) of 1804–1805,⁵ in which the logic transitions from a criticism of Kant's categories and syllogistic theory into a theory of method that culminates in the identity of knowledge and known content (considered not just as appearance, but as being-in-itself, *Ansichsein*).

The guiding thread through this critical investigation is a gradation of increasingly complex relational structures (simple connection, (reflexive) relationship, proportion – cf *JSE* 11) that increasingly display the structure of self-relations. The metaphysical section then proceeds to interpret the logical principles of identity, excluded middle, and sufficient reason as expressing the identity of cognition and being. Hegel then goes on to present the various doctrines of special metaphysics concerning the world, the soul, and God – and, in particular, early modern and Enlightenment versions of them in the works of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Fichte – as stages in the development of an ever-richer and more reflective idea of this identity (i.e. the absolute).

We can glean only a limited indication of what the later, speculative logic looked like at the time of the *Phenomenology* from the *Systementwurf* of 1805–1806:⁶ “speculative philosophy [concerned with] absolute *being*, which becomes the other to itself (reflexive relationship [*Verhältnis*]) life and cognizing [*Erkennen*] – and a knowing knowledge, spirit, spirit's knowledge of itself” (*JSE* III, 286/181). Here, the concept of spirit

⁴ Cf Baum, *Die Entstehung*, 158 ff.

⁵ The German edition of the 1804–1805 *Systementwurf* can be found in AA 7, which has been translated by John Burbidge and George di Giovanni as *The Jena System 1804–5: Logic and Metaphysics* (1986). Parenthetical citations use the abbreviation “*JSE* 11” and give the page numbers of both the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash.

⁶ The German edition can be found in AA 8, translated by Leo Rauch as *Hegel and the Human Spirit* (1983). Parenthetical citations use the abbreviation “*JSE* 111” and give the page numbers of both the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash.

apparently stands at the very center of speculative cognition of the absolute. Whether Hegel retains this conception in the *Phenomenology* is, however, disputed.⁷

(2) In his 1801–1802 introductory lecture, Hegel calls the two further parts of his system the “science of the reality of the idea” (AA 5, 263). The “real body of the idea” (ibid.) is nature. The *second* part of the system is thus the philosophy of nature, in which Hegel initially follows the ancients in dividing into the “system of the heavens” and the system of the earth (or the “earthly system” in the *Systementwürfe* of 1804–1805). It is only after 1805 that this division falls away and the basic forms of the earthly system – mechanism, chemistry, and organism – come to mark the internal organization of the philosophy of nature.

(3) The form of the organism as self-production, self-differentiation, and self-relation is also a guiding influence for the *third* part – the philosophy of ethical life. There, Hegel treats all the topics of traditional practical philosophy, including those of ancient and modern economics, classical “politics,” and modern theories of law and the state. These too are conceived as organic life-forms of a self-shaping whole, a “free people” (AA 5, 264).

Now art, religion, and speculation had already formed the conclusion of his system as early as the *Differenzschrift* chapter on Schelling. Yet in the Jena *Systementwürfe*, Hegel treats religion merely as part of the philosophy of ethical life. The religion of the people (*Volksreligion*) is a public institution and life-form which supplements the state. It is only in the *Phenomenology* that the significance of religion for the development of culture and true cognition (“absolute knowing”) merits an extensive, chapter-long discussion. Yet art remains a part of this development (cf below, pp. 212–219). Philosophy, as the highest form of spirit’s self-reflection, finally becomes the topic of a series of lectures *On the History of Philosophy* at the end of the Jena period. In these lectures, the truth of speculative philosophy is portrayed as the result of a necessary development of philosophical thought. The correspondence between this development and the history of human culture

⁷ On the significance this sketch of a logic has for the *Phenomenology*, see Pöggeler, “Hegels Phänomenologie.” According to Pöggeler, Hegel corrects this sketch in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* by, among other things, “adding the practical aspect to cognition” (Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee*, 269 ff.). Bonsiepen attempts to correlate the categories in this conception of logic to the parts of the *Phenomenology* itself; see his introduction to the text (PhG 1988, xxvii). Falke, however, expresses skepticism about this correlation in *Begriffne Geschichte*, 49 f.

is one of the central themes of the *Phenomenology*.⁸ Hegel's later conception of the philosophy of absolute spirit thus develops incrementally out of Schelling's idea of the highest "point of indifference" (*Indifferenzpunkt*) between nature and intelligence.

(b) Introduction to speculative philosophy

The need to overcome the antitheses and oppositions afflicting the culture of the time is, for Hegel, not only a general, historical one, but also one internal to philosophy itself. This need reveals itself in man's alienation from institutions and public relationships – an alienation which expresses itself, for example, in the collapse of the French *ancien régime* and of the Holy Roman Empire in Central Europe. It is also evident in the conflict between science and faith, which dominated these waning years of the Enlightenment, and in the literary and philosophical conflagrations about Lessing's supposed pantheism or Fichte's atheism.⁹

Mankind's aspiration for "ultimate" truths, his longing to know an absolute and to arrange his life in harmony or even unification with it, have been hobbled by the fragmentation of scientific empirical knowledge, by philosophical analysis of the presuppositions of science, and by religious faith. When it comes to matters of certainty or practical significance for his life, man cannot rely on "appearances" while relegating what he held to be genuine reality and truth to a realm beyond the reach of his knowledge and will. That would make what is actually important for rational cognition and practice into a taboo and restrict all rational activity – as so many religions of salvation do – to a world that is temporary and ephemeral when compared with "the next life" or "the beyond."

Thus, it is a requirement of philosophy, science, morality, and public life that we seek something unconditioned, something that isn't relativized by some unknowable "beyond" or a perpetually postponed future fulfillment. The philosopher must, rather, do what the *Differenzschrift* demands and find the absolute *in* its appearances. Yet in order to do so, he must call into question all attempts to treat as absolute concepts and methods which are restricted to the world of appearances they render accessible to us.

⁸ Cf Falke, *Begriffne Geschichte*, 58 ff.

⁹ Cf Scholz, *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreits*; Röhr, *Appellation an das Publikum*.

Judging from fragments first published in the 1970s, Hegel apparently held two lecture courses during the winter semester of 1801–1802 (his first semester in Jena): one was an introduction to philosophy, and the second laid out the first part of his own system – logic and metaphysics (cf AA 5, 654). Both fragments present two different conceptions of how to arrive at knowledge of the absolute. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the introductory lectures precisely deny that an introduction to such knowledge is even possible (cf AA 5, 259). For such absolute knowledge surely cannot depend upon something else – either upon some other science or upon a proper “organon” such as logic or a theory of the cognitive faculties.

Hegel is here continuing his *Differenzschrift* criticism of Reinhold and Bardili, who attributed such an introductory and foundational role to logic, as the theory of the forms of thought. The crucial task is precisely to overcome such a separation of form and content and, indeed, the very dichotomous structure – the “fixed oppositions” – of the fundamental concepts of logic and ontology. The only thing an introduction to philosophy, conceived as the knowledge of the absolute, *can* accomplish is to demonstrate the one-sidedness or “subjectivity” of every other standpoint apart from actual knowledge of the absolute.¹⁰ Hegel's first systematic implementation of this function of introduction is to be found in the *Phenomenology* itself. But less systematic instances of it also underlie his argumentation in the *Differenzschrift* and various larger essays for the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* – particularly the essays “Faith and Knowledge” and “On the Scientific Modes of Handling Natural Right,” in which Hegel critically engages the standpoints of empiricism and transcendental philosophy generally, as well as the particular views of Kant, Fichte, Jacobi, and Reinhold.¹¹ And in the winter of 1805–1806, while he was working on the *Phenomenology*, Hegel began to incorporate these critical encounters into a lecture course on the history of philosophy.

Now Hegel's introductory lecture course already lends a historical dimension to the sublation of restricted concepts and philosophical standpoints (as preparation for absolute knowledge). The history of human action itself involves the “annihilation” of cultural forms in which oppositions have become petrified. Great destroyers and creators of spiritual and political orders – Hegel's examples are Alexander

¹⁰ Cf Baum, “Zur Methode.”

¹¹ Cf Zimmerli, “Inwiefern wirkt Kritik systemkonstituierend?”; Bubner, “Problemgeschichte.”

and Napoleon – are, as it were, world-historical “criminals” (*Verbrecher*) who quite consciously destroy prevailing ethical and legal orders and replace them with their own vision of new orders. Yet to do this requires great freedom of thought, for which philosophy prepares us – Hegel notes that Alexander was tutored by Aristotle. Thus, philosophy itself has repeatedly played a historical role in freeing us from thinking and living in accordance with ossified categories. And Hegel suggests that philosophy is again playing such a role in his own time, and he ventures to contribute to it himself – first in his text on *The German Constitution* (cf TWA 1, 461–581 / *Political Writings*, 6–101) and then more concertedly in the *Phenomenology*.

Philosophy can only play this role, however, if it abjures all merely introductory knowledge and proceeds instead in a properly philosophical manner to establish definitive knowledge by dissolving the restrictive function of the fundamental categories of thought and presenting them as the “appearance” (*Erscheinung*) of the absolute. This, as we saw above, is the task of logic and metaphysics according to the lecture notes from winter 1801–1802. Logic, in this capacity, is an introduction that is “immanent to the system” itself.¹² Taking its orientation from the identity-thesis, it demonstrates that antinomies inevitably result from any attempt to give an isolated definition of the traditional categories and principles. This skeptical function will later be taken over by the *Phenomenology* itself.

According to Karl Rosenkranz’s biography of Hegel, the concept of the *experience of consciousness* makes its way into Hegel’s writings around 1804, initially in his introduction to logic and metaphysics.¹³ Then, in 1805, he begins working on an introduction to the system that was meant to replace the logic, which he first called the “science of the experience of consciousness” and then the “phenomenology of spirit.” And in the same year he also begins to present the history of philosophy as a sequence of (“skeptical”) refutations of one-sided positions resting on determinate, isolated categories.

¹² In a handwritten announcement of his lecture course, Hegel writes that he wants to “first treat of general or transcendental logic, namely the system of the . . . forms of finitude, or a theory of objective understanding, and follow it with what is usually called logic, or the construction of subjective reflection. The transition to metaphysics will come through a consideration of reason, which destroys the forms of finitude articulated in the logic” (AA 5, 654).

¹³ Cf Rosenkranz, *Hegel’s Leben*, 144; on this see also Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee*, 412.

The *Phenomenology* thus incorporates all three of the introductory functions mentioned in the earlier lectures. It leads from one-sided philosophical standpoints to speculation; it reflects on the history of the formation and enculturation of spirit and prepares its next level, or at least prepares us to be clear about what the next level of that history consists in; and it criticizes the “logic” that underlies the obsolete levels of culture and the prevailing philosophies of reflection and the understanding. The *Phenomenology* thereby takes up a precarious inheritance. It is supposed to be an introduction that initially leads to true philosophy and, at the same time, to form the foundation of that philosophy, to participate already in that philosophical “science.” And critics of the *Phenomenology* continue today to doubt whether it really can be both without already presupposing what it is supposed to justify.

(c) The concept of spirit

Hegel began to use the concept of spirit as his term for the self-understanding of an epoch (e.g. a religion) and the inner “motor” which drives its development beginning with his Frankfurt writings. It is in this sense that he talks about the “spirit” of Judaism or the “spirit” of Christianity. In the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel also speaks of the opposition between spirit and matter as two metaphysical principles, as they are understood in the philosophical tradition. The proof of their identity – i.e. with respect to their conceptual structure, which is unconscious in matter but comes to itself in spirit – is provided in the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of “intelligence” (of the subject, self-consciousness).

In order to overcome the opposition of individual and universal, finite and infinite, self-consciousness, Hegel prosecutes this part of his philosophy from the very outset as a philosophy of “ethical life,” or the spirit of a people. This spirit manifests itself in a people’s social institutions and itself constitutes the object of the cult (ritual) and theology of that people’s religion. The theoretical capacities of human reason are, accordingly, to be explained as moments within such an “objective” spirit of a people or culture.

It is only in the 1803–1804 *Systementwurf* that Hegel grants “consciousness” (as a complex of theoretical and practical functions) a separate systematic treatment distinct from the social and ethical spirit of the age. Here we can discern Hegel’s renewed interest in

Kant's and Fichte's philosophy of consciousness. And in the last *Systementwurf* before the *Phenomenology*, Hegel singles out the practical form of self-consciousness – the will – for separate treatment prior to the forms of social spirit. He then presents these social forms as processes of separation and unification – analogous to the logical form of the syllogism – between the individual and the general will. The significance of the general will here is another sign of Hegel's renewed attention to the conception of practical philosophy advanced by Rousseau and Kant.

Hegel's rehabilitation of ideas stemmed from transcendental philosophy instead of his prior "neo-ancient" conception of ethical life has been interpreted as a rejection of a Spinozistic philosophy of substance and a turn toward a philosophy of spirit as absolute subjectivity.¹⁴ But ever since the beginning of his time in Jena, Hegel interpreted the ethical substance of a people – in accordance with his identity-thesis – as a form of self-understanding which expresses itself in institutions and subjective modes of comportment ("dispositions" – *Gesinnungen*) and which objectifies itself in constitutions and religions.

Thus, for example, the 1802–1803 *System of Ethical Life* parallels the social order of a society of hierarchal estates or social–professional classes, with dispositions proper to the members of each respective class. Individuality is admittedly of lesser significance during the early Jena years, when Hegel conceived the very fulfillment of ethical life to consist in the individual's "being one" with the mores and life of the people. This concept of ethical life remains preserved in Hegel's later philosophy of objective spirit, though there the rights of the individual and her moral self-reflection receive greater weight. As Hegel writes in the 1804–1805 *Systementwurf*, "spirit is the nature of individuals, their immediate substance, and its movement and necessity; it is equally their personal consciousness in existing, as it is their pure consciousness, their life, their actuality [*Wirklichkeit*]" (*JSE* III, 254/151). Both the personal consciousness of individuals – as right-bearing subjects pursuing their interests – and their "pure consciousness" as subjects making decisions of conscience guided by (religious or philosophical) convictions of what is true must be respected in the order of the community. The substance or spirit of such a community must be conscious of itself *in* the individual.

¹⁴ Cf Düsing, *Das Problem*; Riedel, "Hegels Kritik," 59.

Beginning around the middle of the Jena period (1803–1804), the concept of spirit is characterized by two primary features for Hegel: first, through the process of self-reflection, and second, through the structure of being “other than itself” or “the opposite of itself.”¹⁵ Forms of spirit, such as consciousness, the will, or even the communal self-understanding of a people, have the property of being at once an “immediate” abstraction from all contents and simultaneously a quite particular, concrete content. A human being can abstract from all particular contents of her consciousness and make her object the mere state of being conscious itself. Yet even without performing such a conscious operation, the human individual constantly reaches beyond all particular content; in every moment, in every perception, and in every decision, she is free, at a distance from it. She can likewise express this capacity to separate herself from all particular interests and perspectives in her actions – e.g. in moments of impartiality, in self-distancing, or in taking comprehensive account of all other perspectives. The human individual is thus capable of making every decision against a comprehensive horizon and of thereby realizing a unity of engagement and equanimity.

Hegel attempts to show that this structure of self-distance, or self-negation – of “being with oneself in one’s opposite” – is to be found in all forms of individual and social, theoretical and practical, spirit. This is the reason why each of the forms and levels of spirit is always beyond itself, constantly calling itself into question, and intrinsically reflected. It remains to be shown, however, that this doesn’t just signify an infinite internal mirroring, i.e. an interminable series of “meta-reflections” of the form “I know that I know that I know . . .” or “I will that I will that I will . . .” For that would only be empty self-reflection or infinite relativization. Hegel rather wants his philosophy of spirit to show that every reflection is at once an inversion into the opposite of itself and that these conversions lead to a finite hierarchy of levels of increasingly comprehensive self-knowledge.

On account of this structure of spirit, the functions of an introduction, or justificatory approach to speculative knowledge can now be assigned to a philosophy of spirit. For the one-sided philosophical positions as well as the various levels of spirit’s formation over history can be presented and systematically ordered as hierarchical levels of

¹⁵ Cf Henrich, “Andersheit.”

reflection. Such an order does, however, presuppose that the principles underlying these one-sided philosophical positions, or levels, considered in their pure, “logical” form, can likewise be robbed of their finality by exposing their immanent antinomial, contradictory character. And that means revealing that they too bear the structure of spirit and are the “opposite of themselves.” All three of the aforementioned introductory functions can thus be transposed into a process of spirit’s self-reflection. This process will involve criticizing all the one-sided “appearances” of spirit and simultaneously rendering them intelligible as levels of its own self-knowledge. Moreover, such a critique can itself exhibit the character of “being beyond itself” – i.e. being self-critical – which typifies the forms of consciousness themselves. And this is precisely the idea and the program of a “phenomenology of spirit.”

THE TASK AND METHOD OF THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

As we know from the advertisement of his Jena lectures, Hegel was still planning the publication of his whole system as late as 1805.¹ And as early as February of 1806, the book that was supposed to contain the first part of the system of philosophy (or “science”) went to press.² This first part was entitled a *Science of the Experience of Consciousness*, a title Hegel then exchanged for *Phenomenology of Spirit* during the printing.³ The Introduction, which Hegel conceived and composed prior to writing the work, elucidates the method of the “experience of consciousness.” Whether or not Hegel alters or abandons this method in the course of the work itself continues to be a point of contention in the literature. Yet in the Preface, which was the last section to be written, Hegel continues to call the *Phenomenology* the “science of the experience which consciousness goes through” (*PhG*, 38/21).⁴

¹ Cf AA 9, 457: “totam philosophiam scientiam, i. e. philosophiam speculativam, (logicam et metaphysicam) naturae et mentis, ex libro per aestatem prodituro,” which roughly translates as “the total science of philosophy, i.e. of speculative philosophy (logic and metaphysics), [the philosophy] of nature and mind, based on a book to be published in the summer.”

² Bonsiepen is of the view that, as late as the spring of 1806, Hegel still wanted to complement the first, published part of his system with the *Logic* as the second part, but that he changed his plan “in August of 1806 at the latest” (*PhG* (1988), xxi).

³ On the printing history of the *Phenomenology*, cf Bonsiepen in *PhG* (1988), xvii f., and his editorial remarks in *PhG* (1988), 594 ff.

⁴ Citations of the *Phenomenology* are abbreviated *PhG* and provide the page numbers of both the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash. The German edition is the third volume of the *Theorie Werkausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986). The English edition is A. V. Miller’s translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Translations follow Miller where possible, but are occasionally modified, often taking Terry Pinkard’s new, but unpublished, translation as a guide. For a guide to the citations of the *Phenomenology* see above, p. 3, note 7.

Phenomenology and the history of experience are two aspects of the same thing, not two methods that characterize different parts of the book.

Simplifying somewhat, one can say that “experience” is the path “from the bottom up” – from the most immediate forms and standpoints of “natural consciousness” up to absolute knowledge. “Phenomenology” is, then, the same path characterized “from the top down” insofar as it is along this path that all categories and all spirit’s modes of being and knowing “appear,” i.e. enter consciousness.

Now Hegel has (at least) a twofold concept of experience and of appearance. The ordinary sense of experience, he explains in the Introduction, is the replacement of a false belief with another, true one. But the sense of experience that is essential for the *Phenomenology* is a “reversal” of consciousness – that is, roughly what one would term a “conversion” in a religious context, or describe as an “expansion of one’s horizon” or a “revelation” in the secular, Enlightenment sense of the term. Experience is the insight that the foundations of one’s previous beliefs were contradictory and that one must therefore alter them and take up the contrary position. In what follows, we will examine more precisely how this method takes shape in the *Phenomenology* itself.

The double meaning of the concept “phenomenon” or “appearance” has a long philosophical tradition. An appearance can be a “mere” appearance (viz. an illusion), or it can be a manifestation, the experienceable disclosure of something hitherto inaccessible. Investigating the “essential content” of experience – i.e. investigating how much “essential content” the appearances in any experience have – was a central theme of the theory of appearances (or phenomenology) in Hegel’s time. A leading figure of this philosophical project was Johann Heinrich Lambert.⁵

Yet these concepts were also employed by Hegel’s most important predecessors, Kant and Fichte. Kant famously speaks of “appearances” in connection with the genuine knowledge that results from the co-operation of sensibility and the understanding. For Kant, however, such knowledge is restricted to spatiotemporal objects of possible experience and cannot extend to anything “supersensible” (God, the immortal soul, freedom). Attempting such an extension leads to dialectical uses of reason, such as dogmatic metaphysics and various

⁵ Bonsiepen refers not only to Lambert, but also to Goethe’s concept of phenomenon in his 1798 essay “Experience and Science” (“Erfahrung und Wissenschaft”).

other pseudosciences which ensnare themselves in contradictions. For Hegel, on the other hand, absolute truth *does* become knowable – *does* manifest itself – precisely in “finite” consciousness’s overcoming its contradictory positions through its own “experience” (i.e. in a complete series of conversions) (cf *PhG*, 35/18).

This idea of presenting the one-sided philosophical positions of the tradition as a theory of contradictory appearances and thereby “ascending” to an absolute truth can be found in Fichte as well. After several preliminary attempts in his early (1794) *Wissenschaftslehre*, he systematically implements this idea in his 1804 lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the first part of which he calls a theory of appearances or phenomenology. It is, however, not very likely that Hegel had any knowledge of this.⁶ Yet for Fichte the task of critiquing and dispelling illusion is to be separated from that of advancing a doctrine of truth or the “reinterpretation” of the positions successively overcome along the way. In Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, these two tasks are combined and executed in a single movement. Moreover, this unifying movement takes upon itself a further task which Fichte also sought to discharge in the early *Wissenschaftslehre*: namely the task of displaying the systematic structure of our cognitive capacities as a path of incremental steps of reflection.⁷

“Appearance” thus never signifies mere illusion for Hegel, though the concept can be used to characterize a position as one-sided and to that extent untrue, as long as one abstracts from its “truth” as a “phenomenon” of the self-knowledge of spirit (a content that becomes visible once the position has been superseded and absolute knowledge has been achieved). In this sense, Hegel even calls his own position at the beginning of the work an “appearance.” For so long as his position has not yet refuted those that stand opposed to it and integrated them into true knowledge, it remains a one-sided “appearance still to be unfurled” (cf *PhG*, 19/7). What distinguishes his own initial position from other appearances is the fact that it no longer merely occupies the standpoint of “natural consciousness” but rather anticipates the standpoint of true knowledge.

The concept of natural consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is often misunderstood as one of complete naivety, of common sense, or of the “life-world.” However, Hegel employs the phrase “natural

⁶ Cf Bonsiepen in *PhG* (1988), xvi; cf also Siep, *Hegels Fichtekritik*.

⁷ Cf Düsing, “Hegels ‘Phänomenologie’.”

consciousness” in a technical sense, albeit one that may have much in common with ordinary construals of the world. Natural consciousness is the “standpoint of consciousness which knows objects in their opposition to itself and knows itself in opposition to them” (cf *PhG*, 30/15).

The standpoint of science, or of spirit, by contrast, is one of an identity of “self” and “object”: “pure self-recognition in absolute otherness” (*PhG*, 29/14). This standpoint must, however, justify itself to natural consciousness and offer it a “ladder” by providing an immanent examination and refutation of all forms of knowledge, all modes of action, and all configurations of culture that are marked by this opposition – i.e. that are animated by a conviction in the opposition between object and self. The method of this examination is presented in the Introduction.

(a) The task of the *Phenomenology* according to the Preface

In the Preface, Hegel is primarily concerned to distance his conceptions of the absolute, the true, and the proper philosophical system from the conceptions of Fichte, Schelling, contemporary Spinozism, and the notion of immediate unification with the divine. When Hegel was working on a new edition of the *Phenomenology*, shortly before his death in 1831, he remarked that the Preface was directed against the conceptions of the “abstract absolute” that had come to dominate the philosophy of the period.⁸ These included Fichte’s concept of the I, Schelling’s notion of differenceless identity, Jacobi’s conceptions of intuition and faith, and Spinoza’s concept of substance.

However much Hegel may distance himself from his predecessors, he is nonetheless indebted to them in a number of fundamental respects. He does not dispute that the task of philosophy is to develop a system that incorporates the fundamental concepts of all the sciences as well as their paradigmatic explanatory models or ways of looking at things. Nor does he dispute whether such a systematic philosophy can or ought to cognize something “absolute,” unconditional, and complete. Like Kant before him, Hegel understands philosophy to be “rational cognition from ideas.” Yet while Kant grants these ideas only the regulative function of unifying empirical cognitions, Hegel holds that such empirical cognitions can themselves be understood as “explications” of ideas. Demonstrating this is the task of the *Phenomenology*.

⁸ Cf AA 9, 448.

In the Preface, Hegel also distinguishes his concept of the absolute and his concept of the system of philosophy from those of his predecessors. Briefly, he has a holistic conception of the system of philosophy, his concept of truth has both ontological and epistemological significance, and he understands the “absolute” as a unity of Spinozistic substance and the transcendental subject, viz. self-reflection. All this is expressed in his renowned formulation: “That the true is actual only as system, or that substance is essentially subject, is expressed in the representation that articulates the absolute as *spirit*” (*PhG*, 28/14, Hegel’s italics).

First, holism. For Hegel, any concept, proposition, or theory can only be fully intelligible and justified in its interconnection with all the concepts (propositions, theories) in its proper domain. And a domain is itself only to be understood in its complete interconnection with all the other domains of knowledge. There are no propositions – not even the axioms of logic – which are valid or even intelligible simply on their own, sundered from the wider context of axioms and “combinatory rules.” To demonstrate this is the aim of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, the fundamental ideas of which he had already developed in his Jena manuscripts.

Nor is there any domain – not even the domain of classical mechanics in physics – which is complete unto itself and which might be treated as the foundation of all the others. The mechanistic view of nature must still be placed in some relation to the view of nature as chemical, organic, etc. and, more generally, to the world of culture, knowledge, and other object domains and perspectives on things. Fichte, Reinhold, and Schelling’s respective attempts to deduce a philosophical system from “self-evident” first principles are doomed to failure. As Hegel argues in the *Differenzschrift*, such principles cannot be established independently of what is to be deduced from them. Moreover, these principles get augmented, filled out, differentiated etc. in the course of the deduction itself. Viewed on their own, they are therefore not absolute, but rather one-sided, flawed, and undeveloped (“immediate”). Even immediate certainties and intuitive insights concerning such principles remain unintelligible so long as the concepts and criteria one employs in formulating them as propositions remain unexplained. Far from elaborating and vindicating the system, such a development from a (purportedly) independently valid and certain principle itself constitutes the “refutation of the principle that constitutes the *foundation* of the system” – namely a “demonstration that the foundation or principle of the system is, in fact, only its

beginning" (*PhG*, 28/14, Hegel's italics). A philosophical system must not be understood as an analytic deduction starting from supreme first principles, but rather as an organic development from simpler to more complex theoretical structures which reciprocally explicate one another. A more contemporary example of such a philosophical procedure can be found in Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.

Spinoza and Fichte thus commit the same error in conceiving of the movement from their respective absolute principles (substance; the I) to be one of increasing limitation rather than one of development and fulfillment.

Next, to truth. "Truth," for Hegel, is not just a predicate ascribed to propositions or theories; it also has an ontological significance. There are not only true propositions, there is also "true" artwork, a "true" state, and "true human composure."⁹ In this sense, what it is for something to be true is for it to attain (or at least approach) its intrinsic determination. This surely represents a sort of essentialism: there are certain essential properties of the state and of mankind which something must possess if it is to be a state or a human being. But for Hegel such essentialism is compatible with holism. Each "thing" attains its essence only if it stands in determinate relations to other things and processes – that is, only if it manifests a "network" of relationships. Consider a state, for example. A state is, on the one hand, a structure of rights, institutions, and powers; yet, on the other hand, every state stands in a determinate relation to other states, to nature, and to internal and external cultural structures, like religion, science, etc. All of these features can be more or less developed and hence more or less "true." A state that protects rights, but without offering opportunities for participation in government, is one that is not entirely true.

Like his concept of truth, Hegel's holism also has both epistemological and ontological significance.

Holism and systematicity not only constitute a property of our knowledge, i.e. an organizational form possessed by theories or true propositions about reality; they also pertain to reality itself. The terms "system," "subject," and "spirit" in the passage cited above (*PhG*, 28/14) are at the same time expressions for substance, for the absolute – i.e. for reality proper.

⁹ On Hegel's concept of truth, cf Halbig, "Ist Hegels Wahrheitsbegriff geschichtlich?"

The inheritance here is partly Platonic–Aristotelian, partly Spinozistic. For Aristotle, the concept of a thing contains, as it were, the “code” that guides its development. This code is not itself something material but does “use” matter for its own individual realization. For Spinoza, by contrast, each thing is a constellation of forces playing themselves out according to a fixed (“determined”) pattern as part of a self-contained world-process (“substance”). Hegel adheres to Spinoza’s monism, but without retaining the same parallel between the material and the conceptual determinacy of the “modifications” of this single process.¹⁰ For Hegel, matter is really only the medium in which the form or concept of a thing realizes and manifests itself. Admittedly, the concepts of form and matter are not sufficient, on their own, to fund an understanding of relations such as number, extension, force, law, etc. which underlie, e.g., our physical concepts of nature. And an adequate understanding of the more complex dimensions of the world-process (chemical, organic, mental, and social processes) would require a still more precise determination of the relation between the concept and the “medium” of its presentation. The text of the *Phenomenology* does, however, shed some light on this latter point.

The idea that the absolute is substance, truth, and system can, for the moment, be “translated” as follows: reality is the self-caused and self-grounded (*causa sui*) process of the presentation of concepts. Now this gloss surely does not exhaust the determinations of “subject” and “spirit.” Hegel adopts the concept “subject” from the contemporary philosophy of subjectivity – from Kant, Reinhold, Fichte, and Schelling. The concept of “spirit” belongs, in his own words, to “the modern age and its religion,” i.e. Christianity (*PhG*, 28/14). As can already be discerned in his Frankfurt writings, Hegel is here enlarging the contemporary concept of the subject with characteristics drawn from the Christian Neoplatonic tradition.

The features of this concept of the subject that are particularly important to Hegel in these passages of the Preface are its “self-production” and its reflection, its “being-for-itself” and its “knowledge of itself.” In this he follows Fichte, who saw the common root of all the faculties of the human mind in the unity of spontaneity and reflection. Drawing exclusively upon the “mechanism” of these two “tendencies” of the human mind, Fichte attempts to explain the laws of logic and the

¹⁰ On Hegel’s reception of Spinoza, cf also Chiareghin, *L’influenza*.

categories of the understanding which jointly enable us to produce true judgments about objects of experience. In this context, “reflection” is not only an *intentio obliqua* to the act of thinking, judging, willing, etc. but refers to the original activity of distinguishing and juxtaposing. For Fichte and Schelling, however, reflection remains an act of limitation, of finitization, a loss of the original unity – a view whose anthropological counterpart can be found earlier in Rousseau.

Hegel devotes much of the Preface to an unwavering polemic against the identification of the absolute with such an oppositionless identity. Indeed, he expressly employs the concept of “spirit” in order to integrate opposition, or “otherness,” into the very process of self-production. Hegel takes himself to have discerned precedents for this in Christian dogma. He interprets not only the Trinity (the tri-unity) of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but also the incarnation and redemption as processes of becoming other and recognizing oneself in the other.

Yet modern science and philosophy have “translated” these metaphors into theories and concepts: knowledge of the lawfulness of nature is a matter of reason encountering itself again in its “otherness” – viz. in the structures of space, time, mass, force, etc., all of which are themselves rational. Even history itself can be understood as the gradual development of rational orders of law and will. Hegel takes Kant’s critical philosophy to have expressed this insight into the rational structure of reality in a merely “subjective” manner. This is “subjective” because the objectivity of knowledge is underwritten by categories and schemata which are ultimately features of our own subjectivity, even though there is, for Kant and for Fichte, an “otherness” outside these subjective structures. The *Phenomenology* aims to show that this distinction between the concepts of subjectivity and an in-itself is untenable.

To demonstrate this, however, the *Phenomenology* must provide a new understanding of concepts – one which Hegel had already developed in his Jena Logic. Concepts are themselves “self-like” (*selbstisch* – literally, “selfish”). That is, the explication of their semantic content involves a “logical” movement between various concepts which partially presuppose (partially contain, partially exclude, etc.) one another. This process of explication – a process which does not apply to concepts from without, but is rather inscribed in their very sense and meaning – is itself one in which a concept “becomes other” and “becomes for-itself.” For Hegel, only thoughts – thus conceived as “self-movements, circles” (*PhG*, 37/20) – can be genuinely termed concepts. Logic, which Hegel simply calls “science” in the Preface, is the “self-organization” of concepts

into a system within the “element” of pure thought. That this conceptual movement is simultaneously what we discover in the sciences and what determines the historical development of the human mind and spirit – this is what the *Phenomenology* must still demonstrate, thereby conferring “completeness and transparency” upon the “element” of the self-presentation of concepts “through the movement of its becoming” (*PhG*, 29/14).

To thus understand the absolute, or reality proper, as spirit – i.e. as the explication of the meanings of concepts – involves an “inversion” for consciousness. Here Hegel employs an image that Marx later turns against him: “Science” demands that “natural consciousness” “take a turn on its head” (*PhG*, 30/15). As before, natural consciousness is to be understood here as the “standpoint” that assumes an insuperable difference between consciousness and object. Such standpoints are involved in all possible theoretical and practical attitudes, be they realistic, empirical, subjectivistic, or what have you. According to Hegel, every science, every morality, and every culture’s “collective self-understanding” involves such a standpoint and posits this difference in one form or another.

To refute the view that such a difference might actually obtain, two conditions must be satisfied. First, the refutation must be intelligible to the relevant shape of consciousness as it climbs the “ladder” up to the standpoint of spirit. Second, the refutation must itself proceed in scientific manner and hence exhibit a systematic and conceptually structured form. The *Phenomenology* is at once the preparation for and “the first part of the system” (*PhG*, 31/15, 38/20). As such, it has its own “logic” – its own conceptual development linking arguments and levels of argumentation (stages). “The path along which the concept of knowledge is attained likewise becomes a necessary and complete process of becoming” (*PhG*, 38/20).

But the formation and cultivation (the *Bildung*) of consciousness into science – i.e. into the standpoint of spirit – is not merely the task of a philosophical work. It is a result of the cultural history of mankind. For the history of mankind must itself be understood as a spiritual process in which concepts are successively presented and reflected in various different elements (politics, culture, religion, etc.). The “first part of the system,” as Hegel conceives it, must therefore present this cultural history of mankind as a coming-to-be of “science.” Indeed, “each moment” of history that is relevant and necessary for the preparation of the true standpoint of spirit must be presented in this manner.

Insofar as each such stage makes a necessary contribution to the whole and its result (the “standpoint” of spirit), this coming-to-be displays an immanent necessity and “purposiveness.” It is on account of this purposiveness that Hegel speaks of the “world-spirit.” But world-spirit should not be understood as a subject who is engaged in consciously enacting or guiding this process. Rather world-spirit is the “teleological” and intrinsically purposive process through which a consciousness of spirit first emerges. The world-spirit is, in a certain sense, the tendency and the result of the cultural history of mankind: “One must say of the absolute that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is” (*PhG*, 24/11, Hegel’s italics). World history is, in a certain sense, an “invisible-hand” process with a conscious result. Hegel’s term for what unconsciously guides this process of spirit’s coming to consciousness is “substance” or “spiritual substance.” Thus, relative to the consciousness of individuals, the spirit of their respective epoch counts as substance, while the world-spirit counts as substance relative to the epochs themselves.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to read the *Phenomenology* as a whole as a philosophy of history – a tendency to which Marxist interpreters such as Georg Lukács often fall prey.¹¹ The order in which Hegel presents the systematic refutation of all shapes of consciousness – or, put simply, the refutation of the subject–object distinction – does not always correspond to the temporal succession of historical epochs.

Thus, for example, ancient ethical life (morality, politics, and religion) is treated in the first part of the chapter on spirit (VI A.), which occurs after the treatment of modern science and other aspects of modern culture in the chapter on reason. This ordering reflects the fact that the relation between consciousness and reality was more thoroughly integrated in ancient ethical life – particularly when it came to the relation of the individual to institutions and to public life. In a certain sense, however, this integration was “premature” (and more easily achieved), since some aspects of the individual’s freedom were as yet undeveloped. Hegel’s strategy in ordering the episodes in the *Phenomenology* is to correlate certain aspects of various cultures with the principal versions of the opposition between consciousness and object. Thus “consciousness” in the strict sense refers to the

¹¹ Cf Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, 552 ff./433 ff. As with other citations, the first page number refers to the German edition, the second to the English edition, translated by Rodney Livingstone. See the Bibliography.

fundamental conviction that the object is what is properly real and enduring, while the subjective representation of it is inessential. That is the significance of the heading “A. Consciousness” over the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* in Hegel’s extensive Table of Contents.

By contrast, the title “Self-Consciousness” applies to all versions of the thesis that self-consciousness, thought, or subjectivity constitutes what is properly real. Accordingly, this heading can cover a variety of aspects of ancient or modern philosophies, conceptions of nature, and practical attitudes. Now, within its respective epoch, each of these aspects may well have been connected with a conception of reality that does realize a form of unity between self and objectivity – as, for example, is achieved in Roman law in the concept of the person as the foundation of a social order. But Hegel does not inquire into the conceptions of reality that actually dominate a particular epoch until the chapter on spirit.

In the *Phenomenology*, then, the aspect of world history that comes in for consideration is the history of experience with the opposition of consciousness. This experiential history is at once the science of the experience of consciousness and the “system of the experience of spirit.” It must therefore begin with the most immediate form of the opposition between self and object. “Immediate” means that neither side of the opposition is determined either in itself or in relation to the other side. “Sense-certainty,” which embodies this form, involves only the consciousness that what one sees, hears, feels, etc. “is” or exists independently of consciousness. But the very attempt to formulate such certainty in propositions fails, because all propositions of this kind contain a “theoretical surplus.” Accordingly, the very meanings of “being,” “object,” and “knowledge” must be corrected and refined.

With the help of such “experiences,” whose method is explicated in more detail in the Introduction, Hegel arranges the explicit and implicit philosophies of human history into a series of incremental sublations of the opposition between consciousness and being. This development of knowledge, this refinement of the “background ontologies” of individual and social practice, thus manifests itself as the self-corrective activity of knowing subjects. It is the “disparity which obtains in consciousness between the I and the substance which is its object” or the “separation of knowledge and truth” (*PhG*, 39/21) that is to be overcome through these corrections. Yet to the extent that this sequence of sublations reveals itself to be a purposive path leading to the standpoint of “spirit” – an internally differentiated unity joining

both sides of this supposed separation – it must also be understood as the process by which spirit comes to consciousness of itself.

Hegel follows Rousseau in terming this process both an “alienation” of what is originally simple and a “return” to a system of internally differentiated unity. But since consciousness is the “standpoint” or the “element” of this opposition, it must be overcome as a whole, for this element remains inadequate to spirit. It is not spirit’s truth but “only the *appearance* of spirit” (*PhG*, 39 f./22). We only encounter “the true in the *form of the true*” in the Logic, from the standpoint of identity, and again in the philosophies of nature and spirit, which are systematically developed with the help of the logical categories. Yet portions of the content of this resultant system are already anticipated in the *Phenomenology* itself, albeit from its special perspective as an introduction to the true scientific system.

“Phenomenology” thus has a double meaning for Hegel. On the one hand, it is the “ascent” from “untrue” positions to the true standpoint of philosophy. On the other hand, these “untrue” positions are simultaneously stages in a process that leads to consciousness of the truth – a process whose course is determined by the concepts or moments of the absolute system. In this respect, the process itself is, in Hegel’s sense, “science” (*PhG*, 33/17) or the “first part of the system” (*PhG*, 31/15, 38/20). But this process still only *leads to* the true philosophical standpoint, for it consists in the self-examination and self-correction of “natural” consciousness – i.e. the form of consciousness that rests on the opposition between subject or (in contemporary parlance) “conceptual scheme” and object. Nevertheless, since philosophical knowledge in general consists in developing the “logic” of a topic, this movement of examination need only be reconstructed in conceptual terms to embody genuine philosophy. Just how such a reconstruction is possible and how it can occur in tandem with the process of self-examination is something Hegel explains in the Introduction.

(b) The method of the “experience of consciousness”
according to the Introduction

Hegel engages in further polemic in the Introduction in order to distinguish his method in the *Phenomenology* from prevailing procedures of critical epistemology. Yet the text can hardly be understood as an exacting critical engagement with, say, Kant. The “natural representation” of cognition as a sort of “tool” with which one can attain

(“take possession of”) mind-independent truth (“the absolute”) hardly captures Kant’s theory of the subjective conditions of knowledge and the objects thereof. Nor does Hegel come any closer to Kant with the idea he claims is connected with the first – namely that one can grasp the in-itself of the object by removing all the perspectival distortions of cognition. Such an idea is more likely to be found in the tradition of “negative theology” – in Hegel’s time perhaps in late Fichte, whom Hegel surely does not have in view. He is more likely thinking of Jacobi, who thought it essential to insulate the faithful intuition of God from all concepts of the understanding.

Yet to appreciate what is central to the idea of a *Phenomenology*, we need only grasp the basic thrust of Hegel’s criticism of the separation of forms of knowledge from their content. The epistemology of the Kantian critical philosophy distinguishes between three poles: cognition or knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), reality or the “absolute,” and “us” (i.e. the philosophers examining the relationship between knowledge and reality). This threefold distinction is simply presupposed, never justified. The “use of words such as ‘the absolute,’ ‘cognition,’ as well as ‘objective’ and ‘subjective,’ and countless others whose meaning is assumed to be generally familiar” is, in truth, unaccounted for (*PhG*, 71/48). Of course, at this point, one would be equally unjustified in asserting the antithesis: namely that forms of cognition are *not* to be distinguished from their content as an instrument, medium, or distorting kaleidoscope. Hegel’s aim in the *Phenomenology* is precisely to justify this latter claim through a complete proof *ex negativo*.

The position of critical epistemology is, as it were, a highly developed form of “natural consciousness” which regards the difference between what is “in itself” and what is “for us” as insuperable. In the Introduction, Hegel also refers to this form of consciousness as the “soul.” The *Phenomenology* is the

path of the soul as it wanders through the series of its own configurations [*Gestaltungen*], as stations laid out for it by its own nature, so that it might purify itself into spirit by arriving, through a complete experience of itself, at an acquaintance with what it is in itself.

(*PhG*, 72/49)

What in fact guarantees the completeness of this experience is, of course, one of the central problems of the phenomenological method. The self-knowledge of natural consciousness consists in doubting and examining, according to Hegel. The *Phenomenology* claims to have

integrated and radicalized the skeptical method and to have thereby overcome skepticism as a doctrine (see above, p. 3). But the skeptical method is not to arbitrarily doubt this or that, as Hegel accuses the skepticism of late antiquity of doing in the section “Skepticism” (see below, pp. 97–99). That is the sort of isolated and ad hoc reflection that theories profess to engage in when their validity has been called into doubt. Rather, the series of theories under examination are supposed to give rise to a necessary progression. This is a “self-consummating skepticism” insofar as each successive refutation of a claim to validity generates the next claim to be refuted until the process finally culminates in the complete refutation of natural consciousness.¹²

The “absolute knowledge” which results from this skepticism is neither a “supertheory” nor the impossibility of all theory, but rather a kind of method. And the examination is not directed at theses or theories about particular objects (nature, the law, causality, etc.) but rather at epistemological and ontological theses about both what it even *means* to be an object, or knowledge, or reality, or consciousness, and about how these notions relate to one another. These ontological and epistemological theses are, as we mentioned above, “implied” by “contentful” positions (“shapes”) of knowledge and action, culture, and religion.

But why isn’t skeptical examination and doubt an equally arbitrary method? According to Hegel, it is not arbitrary precisely because self-examination is internal to the human claim to knowledge itself. Nor does this examination stand in need of an external standard, for it contains its own. “While consciousness is examining itself, all that is left for us to do,” i.e. for us the philosophers depicting this path, is “simply to watch” (*PhG*, 77/54). The skeptical examination “rests” on nothing more than the distinction between object and knowledge, according to Hegel. For this distinction implies both that the object is not exhausted in the knowledge of it and that we are supposed to produce agreement between knowledge and its object. The classical theory of truth as *adequatio* of knowledge and object is, to a certain extent, natural to human understanding – or, as Hegel abbreviates it, natural to consciousness. Nor need the direction of fit always involve accommodating our knowledge to the object. Theistic or idealistic

¹² Hegel is possibly referring here to Fichte’s concept of the “self-comprehending and self-implemented skepticism” in his *Appellation an das Publikum* of 1799 (cf Röhr, *Appellation*, 100).

positions locate the “standard” in the mind of God, in ideas, or in the subject, and accordingly understand truth as *adequatio rei ad intellectum*. Positions of this sort crop up in many places in the *Phenomenology*.

What the classical theories of truth and knowledge are not conscious of, however, is the fact that making such adjustments involves altering not only the knowledge, but also the very standard to which it is supposed to conform. The standpoints of consciousness not only imply a difference between self and object as such; they also involve particular conceptions of the “essence” of the object and the intellect. The object is assumed to be something that endures, that is independent of our knowledge of it, that underlies all change, etc. Hence, when knowledge fails to satisfy the demands of correspondence, a “paradigm shift” ensues – one that affects even the standard of correspondence itself. Fundamentally different knowledge demands a different ontology. Our view of reality is altered. Ultimately, we begin to admit not only individual things as real, but also processes, constellations of force, etc. To put the point in contemporary terms: the *Phenomenology* thematizes paradigm shifts, or the consequences of foundational crises in science, morality, etc.

Yet such shifts are here understood not as random, but rather as necessary consequences.¹³ The new conception of the object is supposed to contain the (unique) solution to the old paradigm’s unbridgeable distinction within knowledge between the knowledge itself and its presupposed standard, reality proper. For Hegel, these distinctions are, strictly speaking, contradictions because they can be traced back to mutually exclusive concepts. And it is for this reason alone that Hegel can term the experience of consciousness a “dialectical movement” (*PhG*, 78/55). “Dialectic” in Hegel always means the development and sublation of a contradiction. Yet “sublation” always carries the sense of “conservation” in addition to that of “annulment.” The resulting concept or proposition is supposed to contain both sides of the dissolved, sublated contradiction. Admittedly, it is not in the Introduction that Hegel says that consciousness is doomed to failure at each successive level, since its conceptions of the object implicitly contain incompatible concepts, but rather in the text itself (cf *PhG*, 105 f./77 f.).

Busily engaged in its self-examination, however, consciousness is altogether ignorant of the dialectic of concepts taking place. Hence,

¹³ This constitutes the principal difference between Hegel and the theory of “paradigm shifts” in modern history and philosophy of science (cf Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*).

consciousness is equally unaware of the extent to which the new standard is connected with the old and the extent to which the new shape constitutes a “reversal of consciousness.” Yet this is the proper sense of “experience” in the *Phenomenology* (*PhG*, 78/55). The characterization of experience that Hegel provides in the Introduction (*PhG*, 78–81/55–57) is not very clear. The essential point is that the “being-for-consciousness” of the old object (the in-itself) is what becomes the new object of consciousness. This surely means that the self-correction of knowledge calls for alterations in the underlying “ontology” (the “object”) and that these alterations then lead to a new representation of reality which contains moments of both the old and the altered conception. To this extent, the object is a synthesis, a result, a “determinate negation.” Thus, for example, a dynamic conception of nature or a holistic concept of truth might arise through the unification of features belonging to the old conception (mind-independence, permanence, inter-subjective authority, verifiability, etc.) with moments of knowledge (laws of motion, verification conditions). However, it is not clear to consciousness qua examiner that the new object is a “dialectical” synthesis of moments from the “old” ontology and from actual knowledge; such awareness is rather the “contribution” of the philosopher qua observer.¹⁴

Now the term “dialectic” applies only where there really is a synthesis of contradictory propositions or concepts. But the presence of such a synthesis in various “foundational crises” and “paradigm shifts” will hardly be demonstrable from the perspective of the history and philosophy of science. Hegel in fact imputes a further “contribution” to the philosopher. For it is the philosopher who labels each new “object-conception” (each new paradigm or ontology). The *Phenomenology* does not simply follow the history of science or the history of culture. It is rather the philosopher who says where to find the “determinate negation” of whichever shape of consciousness is currently subject to skeptical examination – i.e. it is the philosopher who says in which science, philosophy, religion, morality, etc. this “determinate negation” is to be found. But the philosopher does not simply invent these new shapes: they have manifested themselves over the course of history. Nevertheless, the philosopher does bring them to

¹⁴ Cf *PhG*, 79/55. On the procedure of the *Phenomenology*, cf also the clear and economical presentation in Fulda’s *Hegel*, 78.

consciousness or analytically disentangle them from the more complex conceptions in which they may be entrenched (e.g. by teasing out the understanding of subjectivity involved in the French Enlightenment). The necessity of the succession of shapes is apparent neither from the perspective of contemporary scientific “revolutionaries,” nor even from the retrospective viewpoint of historians. The historical series of events is, as such, marked by any number of chance occurrences. And to that extent, Hegel would be in partial agreement with the theorist of arbitrary paradigm shifts.

A necessary sequence emerges only thanks to the philosopher, for whom temporally distinct (and not always successive) “object-conceptions” are connected by a dialectical movement that ultimately stems from the “semantic relations” between the underlying concepts. As consciousness runs the course of the philosopher’s demonstration – i.e. as it is “comprehended in the experience” – it must grasp the ineluctability of the procedure, even though it lacks proper acquaintance with the logic of concepts through which “science” first unfolds. Therein lies one of the most obvious difficulties of the phenomenological method.

Like the sequence itself, the presentation of the particular moments in this examination is not purely descriptive. Hegel does not simply recapitulate the reflections of the protagonist of each respective standpoint – a Plato or a Sextus Empiricus, a Newton or a Leibniz, a Rousseau or a Robespierre. The discrepancies, corrections, contradictions, and “revolutions” identified in the science, legal institutions, or religion of an epoch or series of epochs are, in a certain sense, “ready-made,” i.e. simplified and idealized by the philosopher. (Consider the relation of master and slave, which can be found in numerous cultures and epochs.) This idealized interpolation occasionally takes the form of a Socratic dialogue in which one first puts “into the mouth” of an immediate and unreflected “certainty” those theses which it must advance if it is to defend its conceptions of reality and knowledge. There is thus far more of a philosophical “contribution” in play in the *Phenomenology* than Hegel *expressis verbis* admits in the Introduction.

Now today’s reader does, of course, have access to an “interpretive aid” which readers in 1807 lacked, namely Hegel’s later *Science of Logic*. But the state of the *Logic*’s development in 1807 is unclear. Though many contemporary interpreters take one of Hegel’s brief remarks in the *Philosophy of Spirit* of 1805–1806 to get to the very heart of the *Phenomenology*, the fact remains that it provides only a very rough

framework.¹⁵ And even in the later system, the logical foundations of which we know quite precisely, correlating the logical concepts to the contents of the *Realphilosophie* (i.e. the philosophies of nature and of spirit) remains one of the most difficult problems interpreters face.

(c) The organization of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

As far as the organization of the *Phenomenology* is concerned, Hegel himself ensured enduring confusion by providing the work with a new Table of Contents during the final stages of the editorial process. Its divisions (indicated by letters) are not to be found in the text itself, where the eight main chapters are titled only with roman numerals (cf *PhG*, 597/xxxiii–xxxv). In contemporary editions, however, both the numerical and alphabetical divisions are printed in the Table of Contents and often in the text itself.

We do not know whether these two different tables of contents have something to do with the “unfortunate confusion” which beset the final phase of work on the *Phenomenology*, according to a letter of Hegel’s to Schelling, and which attends “even in part the composition itself.”¹⁶ Many interpreters attempt to ascertain compositional changes in the light of the later addition of the second Table of Contents.¹⁷ But such lines of reasoning rely in part on willful interpretations of the text and are, in any case, hardly verifiable. It is even possible to argue for the complete agreement of the two divisions.¹⁸

Even so, the lettered division of the work contains several peculiarities, especially when considered in view of the shape Hegel’s system took on as early as the Jena period and retained ever thereafter.

¹⁵ Cf *JSE* III, 286/181, as cited above, pp. 43 f. On the relation of the *Logic* to the *Phenomenology*, cf also Fulda, “Zur Logik,” and Pöggeler, “Die Komposition.” Cf also the Introduction in Köhler and Pöggeler, *Hegel*, 4 ff., 23, and 25. In his *Analytischer Kommentar*, Scheier also invokes the general determinations of Hegel’s *Logic* (being-in-itself, being-for-itself, the speculative doctrine of the syllogism, etc.), but without identifying this logical framework with a determinate version of the Hegelian *Logic*.

¹⁶ Hegel, May 1, 1807 (*Briefe* I, 159–162/*Letters*, 79–80), 161 f./79. On the problems Hegel had with his publisher, cf Bonsiepen’s Introduction to the Wessels/Clairmont edition of the *Phänomenologie* (1988), xxi ff. On the possible influences of the printing history on the composition and division of the work, cf also the Introduction in Köhler and Pöggeler, *Hegel*, 22 f.

¹⁷ The most radical of these attempts, which also relies on a new reading of the *Logic*, is made by Schmitz in his *Hegels Logik*, 278 ff.

¹⁸ As J. Stewart recently argued with admirable force in his “The Architectonic of Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’,” 447 ff.

On the face of it, it is puzzling that “(A) Consciousness” and “(B) Self-Consciousness” should be followed by a (C) which is given four subtitles in lieu of a principal heading – namely “(AA) Reason,” “(BB) Spirit,” “(CC) Religion,” and “(DD) Absolute Knowledge.”

The internal organization of (C) itself is also curious, particularly its distribution of certain sections of the philosophy of spirit. In light of the development of the Jena system and Hegel’s later system as presented in the *Encyclopedia*, one would rather associate the passages in “(BB) Spirit” with the later form of *objective* spirit (ethical life, law, morality) and the passages from the sections “(CC) Religion” and “(DD) Absolute Knowledge” with *absolute* spirit (art, religion, philosophy). Indeed, this division is already visible in the late Jena writings (see above, p. 44). The contents of subjective spirit are treated from a phenomenological perspective – i.e. under various ontological “banners” – in the opening chapters (I–IV according to the first Table of Contents). Yet this system of numbering accords the first three sections of the chapter “(A) Consciousness” a pride of place which they clearly do not enjoy in the actual line of thought. Indeed, Hegel sets it aside altogether in organizing the abridged version of the *Phenomenology* in the *Encyclopedia*.¹⁹ When listing the crucial “reversals of consciousness,” one must surely highlight the stages of consciousness, self-consciousness, reason, and spirit.

The shapes of consciousness Hegel gathers together in “(A) Consciousness” (viz. “sense-certainty,” “perception,” and “force and understanding”) all proceed on the assumption that reality proper, to which knowledge is supposed to accommodate itself, lies on the “side of the object.” The real must be something enduring, something independent of subjective impressions, perceptions, propositions, etc. By contrast, the theoretical and practical positions addressed in the self-consciousness chapter locate the properly real in the subject – be it in the desirous self or the self who demands recognition, in doubting or in thinking, in the human self or in the divine self. Everything distinct from the subject has reality and meaning only as the object or product of subjective achievements. Under the title “Reason,” by contrast, Hegel examines positions which hold that subjective achievements serve to “constitute” an independent reality, within which alone those very achievements can finally acquire an objective form. As the *Phenomenology*

¹⁹ Concerning the transformation of the *Phenomenology* into a part of the doctrine of spirit in the *Encyclopedia* during the Nuremberg years (1808–1816) cf Rameil, “Die Entstehung.”

proceeds, it becomes increasingly characteristic of shapes of spirit to know their objects and counterparts as their self-objectification and thereby “find themselves again” in their respective other. Natural, historical, and social reality is finally rendered intelligible as a manifestation and reflection of the “order of concepts” by philosophically comprehending the cultural and moral developments in the “Spirit” chapter and the history of religion in the “Religion” chapter. The individual who has arrived at this understanding and adjusted his actions accordingly thereby fulfills both his own essence and the essence of the spirit, which he understands.

It is impossible for an introduction such as this one to provide commentary on every line of thought in each individual chapter. Yet it is equally important for a comprehensive overview to refrain from reducing the wealth of perspectives in the *Phenomenology*. These perspectives are admittedly subordinate, in a certain way, to Hegel’s guiding ontological and epistemological question. But Hegel is also concerned to make philosophical claims about society, morality, history, and religion. As we have seen, Hegel’s philosophical program, beginning with the *Differenzschrift*, strives to overcome the dualisms and dichotomies that afflict not only philosophy, but also the culture of his time. Our aim in what follows will be to elucidate three aspects of his execution of this program in the *Phenomenology*: namely how consciousness overcomes the dichotomies of knowledge and object, of individual and social reality, and of truth and history.

THE COURSE OF THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

In the present work, the aim which I have in mind is to break the strangle hold which a number of dichotomies appear to have on the thinking of both philosophers and laymen. Chief among these is the dichotomy between objective and subjective views of truth and reason.

These are not Hegel's words. They were, rather, penned by Hilary Putnam, as the opening to his book *Reason, Truth and History*. Despite differences in ontology and methodology, however, these sentences could very well serve to express Hegel's philosophical program. For the very topic of the *Phenomenology* is the elevation of "natural consciousness," which is precisely characterized by various kinds of dichotomy, to the standpoint of "identity-knowledge" through its own "experiences." In what follows, we will sketch how the most important of these dichotomies are overcome in the course of the complex and obscure argumentation of the *Phenomenology*.

A. Consciousness

I. Sense-certainty; or the "this" and meaning something

Hegel does not begin the *Phenomenology* with a definition of knowledge – e.g. as "justified true belief" in typical contemporary fashion.¹ He rather begins with "immediate" knowledge. The rationale for doing so – setting aside for the moment the etymological hints contained in

¹ For more on contemporary discussions about knowledge and epistemology, cf Bieri, *Analytische Philosophie der Erkenntnis*.

the word “immediate” itself (“first,” “unmodified,” etc.) – is apparently that one should begin with a position that makes as few conceptual and theoretical presuppositions as possible. Thus, one can view Hegel as attempting to begin from the extreme opposite of the position he will end up endorsing.²

In a certain sense, Hegel is also following the Cartesian method of beginning by calling sensibility into doubt. Yet the issue for Hegel is not the reliability of our senses, but a certain theory of knowledge. One might say that the standpoint of “sense-certainty” is, so to speak, the one “furthest removed from philosophy” and, in that sense, that it is also the “most natural” standpoint. Nevertheless, it is first discussed and defended as a conception of true knowledge. On this conception, we grasp reality directly through sensible intuition and not through concepts or judgments, which rather distort reality. Jacobi had advanced just such a thesis in defending the “faith” that sensible intuition has in the reality of objects. And Hegel had drawn a critical bead on this view ever since his Jena essay “Faith and Knowledge.” Even in his later introduction to speculative thought in the *Encyclopedia* – the “Three Positions of Thought to Objectivity” which took the place of the *Phenomenology* – Hegel discusses sense-certainty as the third, but most immediate, relation of thought to reality.³

What sense-certainty claims for itself is a “rich” knowledge of objects, which has not yet been abbreviated by abstraction. It aims to capture the object “in itself” without engaging in any interpretation, comparison, conceptualization, etc. Accordingly, it is the individual person (“I”) who can enjoy such knowledge – namely by asserting just the predicate “is” (in the sense of “exists”) of an object,⁴ with the addition of a spatial and temporal index and perhaps also a name: “This here is a tree.” The spatiotemporal terms here function as demonstratives or indexicals

² Cf Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 116.

³ Falke rightly emphasizes Jacobi's relevance to this chapter in his *Begriffne Geschichte*, 71 ff. On Hegel's critique of Jacobi in the *Science of Logic*, see Halbig's dissertation, *Objektives Denken*, 279–324. To claim that Hegel might have Jacobi in view here should not, however, be taken to suggest that there are not other advocates of the primacy of sensible intuition for the objective reference of knowledge whom Hegel may be criticizing here. Graeser's “Hegels Porträt” convincingly documents references to Epicurus (40) and Aristotle (44). For the ancient sources of this section, cf also Düsing, “Die Bedeutung.”

⁴ This consequence – that the knowledge made available by mere immediate, sensible intuition can assert no more than the being or existence of its object – is something Hegel repeatedly emphasizes in his criticisms of Jacobi.

(here, now). But the person making the assertion (“consciousness”) does not give any characterizations, descriptions, or indications of context (i.e. information about the speaker, her position, etc.). In contemporary analytic philosophy of language, such context-independent expressions are usually called indicators or indexicals. Hegel does not, however, distinguish between various different types of these expressions (reflexive, quasi-indexical, etc.).⁵

One can distinguish four moments in Hegel’s presentation of the experience of sense-certainty:

- (1) The original intention of this shape of consciousness: namely a single, yet enduring, object, independent of consciousness. Knowledge of such an object would be unabbreviated (“rich”) and yet also certain.
- (2) The actual content of consciousness which gets expressed by the terms “I, this, here, now, is” and the additional names. This content, however, is something general, for indicators are general expressions whose referents can constantly change (since the expressions are context-dependent).
- (3) Since moments (1) and (2) do not correspond to one another, moment (3) involves a correction which has several phases. First, there is an attempt to locate the enduring, singular element alternately on the side of the object and then on the side of the subject (“I”). Finally, the gesture of ostending or indicating is itself construed as fulfilling the intention of sense-certainty. Yet this movement does not capture a singular This, but rather a subdivided sensible continuum.⁶
- (4) The new “object” to which this correction “recoils,” i.e. the new intention or object-conception of the next shape of consciousness: the Thing as spatiotemporal continuum with various and variable properties. The Thing thus represents, as it were, the objectified motion of ostending and indicating itself. To that extent, the “for us” of the previous corrective level of sense-certainty is now the in-itself of the new object. So at least in this section, one can indeed recognize the methodological tenets expressed in the Introduction.

⁵ Cf Castañeda, “Indicators and Quasi-Indicators.” Graeser perspicuously explains the relevance of this section of the *Phenomenology* to contemporary discussions in “analytic” philosophy in “Hegels Porträt.” Kettner has provided a “discourse analytical” assessment of the argument in *Hegels “sinnliche Gewißheit.”*

⁶ A “simple plurality of many Heres,” 90/64.

But what exactly is the *claim* this chapter makes? Is Hegel trying to show that there isn't anything singular or, at least, that we cannot refer to anything singular in our assertions? Some of his formulations do suggest something like this: "Since the universal is the truth of sense-certainty, and language only expresses this truth, it is utterly impossible for us to say, or express in words, the sensible being we *mean*" (*PhG*, 85/60).⁷ Or: "the object and the I are universals" (*PhG*, 87/62). But this does not mean that we cannot use language to refer to individuals or singular objects. It rather means, first, that linguistic expressions always go beyond any given singular object. And second, it means that the linguistic means to which sense-certainty is limited are insufficient for attaining any knowledge (even as sense-certainty understands it). Taken in themselves, indexical expressions ("here," "now," "I"), the existential predicate, and kind-names⁸ are all "universal," i.e. indifferent with respect to the things to which they apply or refer. Hegel does not need to dispute that one can successfully refer to singular objects by using a combination of indexical expressions, characterizations, and spatiotemporal indices.⁹ Nor could he cogently dispute it, since that would disallow the observation sentences which are central to the empirical sciences and presupposed by his own philosophy of nature. But Hegel would argue that the use of descriptions ("such and such a sort of tree") and spatiotemporal indices already presupposes a conceptual scheme that goes far beyond the simple reference of this I to that object. Many contemporary philosophers would agree with him on this point – particularly Peter Strawson, who has himself postulated and analyzed such a conceptual scheme.¹⁰

Hegel shows that sense-certainty's limited linguistic means turn its intention on its head in three "experiential" steps. First, he exposes the generality of the expressions used to pick out the object. They contain precisely none of its sensible "richness," but are rather applicable to

⁷ All italics in quotations, unless otherwise noted, are Hegel's emphasis.

⁸ Proper names in the contemporary sense – i.e. rigid designators of determinate individuals – are not yet in play here. The "names" at issue are rather names for *kinds* – names such as "birch" or "the state." Perhaps Hegel's argument that successful indexical reference is impossible on the basis of mere "sense-certainty" is also supposed to show that no singular reference (and, a fortiori, no reference through proper names) is possible on that basis.

⁹ Cf de Vries, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, 92.

¹⁰ Strawson, *Individuals*.

anything and everything. Anything can be here and now.¹¹ The first correction therefore relocates the essential element of sense-certainty, removing it from the intended object and placing it in the sensing subject. Yet this subject, as an individual thing without any universal predicates, is merely indicated by “I,” which is, likewise, a term that every possible speaker can use to indicate him- or herself. Its identificatory function precisely does not lie in its content, but rather in its use in a situation. The final recourse of sense-certainty is to the “immediacy thesis” – non-linguistic indication (“ostension”) of a sensible, singular Something: the whole, albeit momentary, reference to the object through mere pointing is supposed to simultaneously grasp it in its concreteness and essentiality.

Yet this attempt, too, fails. Pointing cannot capture anything enduring, anything that persists independently of the act of pointing. It can only indicate a spatiotemporal position, but without one knowing whether what “is meant” is a point, a surface, etc. Even this, the most concrete reference to an object of which we are capable, still pertains to a spatiotemporal continuum – a “sensible universal,” as Hegel calls it. Pointing is a “movement that expresses what the ‘now’ is in truth, viz. a result, or a plurality of ‘nows’ all taken together; and pointing out is experience that the ‘now’ is a *universal*” (*PhG*, 89/ 64).

The new conception of an object that arises from all this is one of a “multiplicity” (*Vielheit*) of spatial and temporal points – a spatiotemporally extended “Something” characterized by various “sensible” predicates. This, for Hegel, is the “thing ontology”; that is to say, the view that reality consists of things with sensibly perceptible properties. Like the indicators we discussed, the Thing, too, can take up various sensible contents.

II. Perception; or the thing and illusion

The experience of this new ontology is the topic of the second chapter of the *Phenomenology*. However, this experience itself is framed by a series of introductory reflections by “the philosopher” on the central

¹¹ On Hegel’s peculiar substantivization of indexical expressions (“the Now, the Here”), cf. Graeser, “Hegels Porträt.” According to Graeser, Hegel is here implying that a position which seeks to do without complex spatiotemporal relations “necessarily substantivizes expressions like ‘This,’ ‘Here,’ ‘Now’ and [must] construe them as ‘proper names’ to which real segments of reality correspond as referents” (“Hegels Porträt,” 40). On this point, cf. also Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 116 ff.

concepts which shape that experience (*PhG*, 93–97/67–70) and a retrospective commentary at the end (*PhG*, 103–107/75–79).

The actual experience itself occupies only the smallest portion of the chapter. It is dedicated to a critique of an atomistic view of our natural conception of the world. Atomists seek to “construct” the world out of material things that are, for their part, characterized by perceptible, material properties. The problems discussed here had been a standard theme of philosophical reflection since (at least) Plato’s dialectic of the one and the many in his late dialogues and had endured well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in philosophical and scientific debates about the Aristotelian conception of substance. Hegel seems primarily to have the latter debates in view – particularly the positions of Locke and Hume.¹² This is an important step along the path to a holistic and, in a certain sense, “conceptually realist” view such as the Hegelian one. And it is a step that has been attempted in several other philosophical treatises, such as Cassirer’s “phenomenological” epistemology.¹³

The position of “perception” proceeds on the assumption that things are individuated by their properties: by their shape, color, smell, etc. That is how this particular rose distinguishes itself from other roses, and indeed from all other things. Moreover, a thing is a unity of a manifold or multiplicity of properties. This rose does not simply resolve itself into its red color, its sweet smell, etc. In a certain sense, things are ultimately independent of changes in their properties. A rose can bloom and wilt without ceasing to be a rose. The essence of what it is to be a thing is, accordingly, to be the unchanging bearer of properties.

Hegel now endeavors to show that the individuality, unity, and manifoldness of a thing cannot be coherently combined in a single act of knowing. And the attempts to correct for this incoherence generate yet another conception of objects and objecthood.

¹² In his “Vom Skeptizismus” and *Hegel, Hume und die Identität*, K.R. Westphal has presented strong arguments for considering Hume to be the principal target of Hegel’s discussion, and Hagner (“Die Wahrnehmung”) follows him on this point. But this should hardly be taken to suggest that Hegel might not also have had in view discussions and positions articulated by Plato, Aristotle, Locke, and Kant (cf M.E. Westphal, “Hegels Phänomenologie”; and Fink, *Hegel*). It is interesting to note that Hegel simply “radicalizes” these positions, which are themselves already critical of the common understanding of the unity of a thing or a substance.

¹³ Cf Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Volume 3.

At this point, consciousness no longer consists in the immediate certainty of a manifest sensible relation to the object. Nor does it amount to the theory that reality is directly given in immediate intuition. For this new position now knows, having learned from its previous experience, that consciousness is itself capable of having a false take on an object. Hegel calls this a “consciousness of the possibility of illusion” (*PhG*, 97/70). And this sense of “illusion” is not limited to sensory illusions, but refers generally to the consciousness of a discrepancy between one’s take on the essence of the object and that essence itself. The experiential history of perception is, accordingly, a continuous and meticulous process of correction that aims to confirm the substantiality, simple “self-identity,” and thus the determinacy (individuation) of the thing. Simple unity, individuality to the exclusion of others, and manifoldness are first attributed to the thing, then to its properties, and then to perceiving consciousness itself. But with only this in place, perception simply gets “pushed around” (*PhG*, 105/77) without establishing any correspondence between its knowledge and its criteria for objecthood.

If a thing is itself just the ground of unity among its properties and the ground of its distinctness from other things, then it becomes an intangible substance lacking all properties. If, however, its properties are taken to constitute the ground(s) of its distinctness from other things, then they must not only be distinguished from one another (redness is not roundness) but must also have something in common as properties of this self-same thing. Moreover, they must also be intrinsically distinguishable from similar properties of other things (the redness of *this* rose as opposed to the redness of any other thing). Clearly, material properties that meet these criteria are themselves independent entities, individuated “materials” or elements (something like odor particles, color particles, etc.).¹⁴ The thing is thereby reduced to a mere medium; it is no longer a self-standing substance.

But even the attempt to attribute the differences among properties to perceptual consciousness itself – by claiming that the unity of the thing is, as it were, “fragmented” by the multiplicity of the senses – leads

¹⁴ Hegel’s use of the concept of “materials” is drawn from contemporary scientific theories which held that all the properties of a thing should be viewed as kinds of matter that permeate appropriate pores. Cf *Encyclopedia*, §130. Hegel may particularly have John Dalton in mind here, whom he had already discussed in his *Jena Philosophy of Nature* (cf *JSE* III, 65, not yet translated). On Dalton himself, cf the editors’ note to *PhG* (1988), 580.

to the same problems. For this once again deprives the thing itself of all properties. And then it cannot be distinguished from any other thing.

The final attempted correction involves positing a distinction within the very heart of the thing – between its appearance and its in-itself (*An sich*). The appearance of a thing includes its relations to other things and its inessential properties or “secondary qualities,” as they were termed in seventeenth-century epistemology (e.g. by John Locke). In itself, by contrast, the thing is a simple unity: “It is only a thing, or a One existing for itself insofar as it does not stand in this relation to others” (*PhG*, 103/75). But this renders the individuality of the thing unknowable. As a particular, it essentially stands in relation to other things. Even primary qualities presuppose a spatiotemporal framework and a reciprocal interaction of forces, in which an individual thing can only be determined relative to others.

Nor can this atomistic thing-ontology be rescued by distinguishing inner from outer, in-itself from appearance. To borrow Hegel’s metaphor, “the thing is destroyed by the very determinateness that constitutes its essence and its being-for-self” (*PhG*, 103/76). Since Hegel understands any relation that serves to discriminate between or exclude other things as a form of “negation,” it follows that an individual severed from all relation to other things constitutes “a negation that relates only to itself” (*ibid.*). But such a negation can only negate itself; it is the “sublation of itself” (*ibid.*).

Hegel also summarizes the incoherence of the thing-ontology in simpler terms. The object “is supposed [to possess] an essential property, which constitutes its simple being-for-itself” (*PhG*, 103/76). Now this simple being-for-itself is not marked by any opposition. Yet the object is nevertheless supposed to be individuated and distinguished from others. The idea that this “distinctness” is “supposed to be *necessary*, but not supposed to constitute its *essential* determinateness” is, for Hegel, a “distinction in word alone; something *inessential*, which is simultaneously supposed to be *necessary*, cancels itself out [*hebt sich selbst auf*]” (*PhG*, 104/76).

The line of philosophical reflection Hegel introduces around page 104/76 serves a twofold function. On the one hand, it aims to show that it is only through the experience of consciousness (from sense-certainty to perception) that an understanding of the universality of concepts of the (perceptual) understanding is achieved. On the other hand, it suggests that it is precisely the understanding’s insistence on distinguishing and “fixing” opposed determinations – i.e. a form of “thought-atomism” – that underlies the problems and contradictions associated with thing-atomism.

The thing-ontology remains informed by the opposition between sensibility and universality or generality. The representation of an immediate, self-standing individual still reflects the immediacy of sense-certainty, while the generality and relationality of properties reflect the generality of linguistic expressions and spatiotemporal continua (cf above, p. 76). Yet even these determinations, which disrupt the unity of the thing, are viewed by consciousness as quasi-sensible – as kinds of dependent properties of the material world. Perception “fancies that it always has to do with wholly substantial material and content” (106/78). It is only once we cease to understand what is simple and yet particular as a material thing and begin instead to regard it as a determinate thought that we arrive at the non-sensible universality of concepts of the understanding.

The philosophies Hegel criticizes in this chapter are, of course, aware of such concepts of the understanding, but they employ them in an “atomistic” fashion. They attempt to strictly separate relation to others from “being-for-self,” the essential from the inessential, and appearance from the in-itself. When one employs such concepts in one’s attempts to explain the world and starts applying them to things, one entangles oneself in the sort of “dialectic” which Plato presented in his late dialogues (albeit as a dialectic of pure concepts, or “ideas”). One is attempting to separate aspects (the “insofar as,” 104/76) and determinations which can only be understood together within a holistic system if one is to avoid contradiction: “But the very nature of these abstractions brings them together of their own accord [*an und für sich*]. It is ‘sound common sense’ that is the prey of these abstractions, which spin it round and round in their whirling circle” (*PhG*, 107/79).

Yet it is the goal of the *Phenomenology* as a whole to show that the actual nature of reality is a network of these concepts. The next level of the *Phenomenology* does indeed engage with an explanation of reality by means of the understanding, but the object to be explained is still represented as something external to consciousness. It remains something that *also* has a sensible manifestation: a material play of forces.

III. Force and the understanding, appearance and supersensible world

“Force and the Understanding” is at once one of the most complicated chapters in the *Phenomenology* and one of the most important for overcoming the separation between knowledge and object. For it is

here that Hegel attempts to demonstrate the untenability of the distinction between concepts and material entities. The experience of consciousness leads to the insight that even what we declare to constitute the very being of things itself possesses the structure of subjectivity.

Hegel again dedicates parts of the chapter to discussing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century developments in philosophy and natural science. One can identify the positions of Locke, Newton, Leibniz, Kant, and the Romantic philosophers of nature. The principal issues are the concepts of “force” and “law,” as well as the distinction between the “world” of phenomena and the “realm” (*Reich*) of laws. The position under discussion understands reality not as a conglomeration of things, but rather as a law-governed play of forces. Hegel interprets this conception as an attempt to resolve the paradoxes that afflict a thing-ontology. “Force” is meant to unite within itself the two aspects of thinghood, which the previous section was incapable of combining: on the one hand, the thing’s status as a “One reflected in itself” – i.e. its status as a self-individuating simple entity – and, on the other hand, its role as a “universal medium for a plurality of subsisting materials” (*PhG*, 109/81).

Hegel’s initially puzzling decision to view the materials, or rather material properties, of things as expressions of forces becomes more intelligible once one recalls that Locke, too, had explained properties as forces of substances. Leibniz famously goes even further in this dynamization of nature by claiming that the “substantial forms” of things are forces. Leibniz writes that it is impossible

to find *the principles of a true unity* in matter alone, or in what is only passive, since everything in it is only a collection or aggregation of parts to infinity . . . I found then that their [sc. the substantial forms’] nature consists in force, and that from this there follows something analogous to sensation and appetite, so that we must conceive of them on the model of the notion we have of *souls*.¹⁵

Even Kant, who, in opposition to Leibniz, upheld the distinction between the spontaneity of the subject and mechanical, material nature, nevertheless conceived of material body as a balance of forces – namely as an equipoise of the attractive force and the repulsive force. Schelling then sought to unite Leibniz and Newton by showing that the forces which constitute matter are both preliminary forms and self-objectifications of the fundamental activities of consciousness which Fichte had already

¹⁵ Leibniz, “A New System,” original emphasis.

invoked to explain subjectivity:¹⁶ namely consciousness's unlimited spontaneous activity and its reflexive, self-limiting activity.

One can divide this chapter into three main phases in the experiential history of consciousness:

- (a) The first (*PhG*, 109–116/81–86) pertains to the experience of the concept and the reality of force. The concept of force involves a relation between what is internal or intrinsic (the force “in itself”) and the force’s external expressions. Yet it is impossible to distinguish between these moments unless one posits a plurality of forces which reciprocally trigger one another and change their determinations (one force becomes what another one was). This “play” constitutes the reality of force. But in order to be able to distinguish the “essence” of a force from its actual phases of movement, I must again have recourse to the concept of that force. Concept and reality thus reveal themselves to be just as indistinguishable as the intrinsic constitution or disposition of a force and its expression.
- (b) The second phase (*PhG*, 116–120/86–91) consists in a “Platonic” reaction to the first phase, so to speak. The concept is now conceived to make up the inner core of the dynamic play of forces. But in order to attain the concreteness of reality, the understanding must incorporate differences of magnitude, proportions, variables, etc. into the concept itself. In so doing, it combines the conceptual, which is supposed to be simple, eternal, and immutable, with what is movable and changeable in the world of appearances. The result of this combination is the concept of law, or, more particularly, a system or “realm” of laws.
- (c) The third phase (120–136/91–103) is primarily concerned with the relation of this “supersensible world” to the sensible one.¹⁷ Initially, consciousness tries to understand the world of laws as the “motionless likeness” of the sensible world. In its attempt to really explain the polar processes of nature and the moral world by

¹⁶ Cf Schelling, *Ideen*, 349.

¹⁷ One can perceive in Hegel’s discussion of the relation between the *mundus sensibilis* and the *mundus intelligibilis* a critical engagement with Kant’s critique of Leibniz, as it appears in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (in the “Phenomena and Noumena” chapter and the “Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection”). Cf Flay, “Hegel’s Inverted World,” 93–104. For Hegel, Kant’s critique of Leibniz can be turned against Kant himself: a world outside concepts of the understanding and of reason is (quite literally) unthinkable; the in-itself lies in these self-differentiating concepts themselves.

means of differentiated laws, however, consciousness arrives at a conception of the supersensible world as an inversion of the world of appearances – like a mirror, which reverses left and right. The sensible and the supersensible worlds relate to one another as “inverted worlds.” But since the supersensible world constitutes the truth, the reality, the “core” of the sensible world, the two cannot be separated. The truth is thus a self-inversion, or a positing and revoking of distinctions. And this, finally, is not the character that unconscious objects have, but rather the character of self-consciousness: I am my own object, yet I am not merely an object, but also a subject; I objectify myself only in order to grasp myself as subject. With this, we have arrived at a new shape of spirit and the sublation of “consciousness” into “self-consciousness.”

Hegel’s lines of argument in this chapter are certainly indebted, in part, to various currents of thought in the natural science of his day. The beginnings of the theory of electricity and modern chemistry, the phenomenon of magnetism, and the medical theories of Brown and others called into question, for Hegel (as they did for Schelling and Goethe), the fundamental concepts of the mechanistic account of nature.

But the difficulties associated with the concept of force that Hegel discusses are not merely historical relics of the period. Forces, dispositions, etc. are, in fact, quite difficult to distinguish clearly from their expressions. For what is the “capacity” to produce a certain effect, other than the regular appearance of that phenomenon under sufficiently similar conditions? Yet this is clearly not what is meant by the causal efficacy of a force. Moreover, it would seem that it is precisely the expression “law” which best captures the regular occurrence of such a series of events. And we represent natural laws not merely as our own descriptions of nature, but as realities in their own right. How, then, are they to be distinguished from forces? Hegel illustrates the difficulty with the following example:

The single occurrence of lightning, e.g., is apprehended as a universal [i.e. as an instance of a law], and this universal is articulated as the *law* of electricity. The explanation then condenses the *law* into *force* as the essence of the law. This force is then *so constituted* that when it expresses itself, opposite electricities arise, which disappear again into one another; that is, *the force is constituted exactly as the law is*; there is said to be no difference whatever between them.

(PhG, 125/94 f.)

Laws of this sort are either too concrete – i.e., if they are only descriptions of regularities – or too abstract. Even Hegel’s discussion of early modern and modern attempts to explain the “play of forces” by means of ever more universal forces and laws is not without contemporary relevance. While ancient cosmology had divided the cosmos into different regions – the inner and outer heavenly spheres, the sublunary realm, etc. – each of which was subject to its own laws, modern mechanics discovered the unifying law of gravity. But the law of universal gravitation is *so* universal, so general, that it expresses only a very general feature of the motion of bodies:

The unification of all laws in *universal attraction* expresses no content beyond that of the *mere concept of law itself*, which [the law of universal attraction] simply posits as *existing* . . . The understanding supposes itself to have thereby found a universal law which expresses universal reality *as such*; but in fact it has only found the *concept of law itself*.

(PhG, 121/91)

Hegel credits this discovery with having refuted the “unthinking representation” of contingency in natural processes. Nevertheless, he regards the law of universal gravitation as contentless – a criticism which seems exaggerated when directed at either Newton’s or Schelling’s formulation of the law.¹⁸ Yet there is an objection worth considering here, namely Hegel’s thought that such universal laws cannot constitute the reality of processes and objects.¹⁹ For that would not only entail the unreality of concrete things, states, and processes; it would also imply that the very determinacy of determinate laws “itself still belongs to appearance, or rather to sensible being” (PhG, 122/92).

The attempt to include some expression of this determinacy within the content of the laws themselves – registering “alteration and change,” and, above all, the inversion of polar forces (magnetism, electricity, muscular and nervous processes) – ultimately leads, in the course of consciousness’s experience in this chapter, to what Hegel

¹⁸ Cf Schelling, *Darstellung*, 1968 reprint, 42 f. (*Presentation*, 164 f.).

¹⁹ The claim that universal laws of nature cannot really explain the concrete evolution of complex systems has received a contemporary defense in the work of Nancy Cartwright. Cf *How the Laws of Physics Lie*, 52, 86, 162.

calls the “inverted world.”²⁰ There are several respects in which being “inverted” – or, better, inversion per se – constitutes the principle of this world of laws. For one, the content of this world is concerned with laws governing the inversion of something into its opposite:

The *selfsame*, viz. force, *splits* into an antithesis, which at first appears to be an independent distinction, but which in fact proves to be *none at all*; for it is the *selfsame* which repels itself from itself, and therefore what is repelled essentially attracts itself, since it is the *same thing*. The distinction that was made, since it is none, thus sublates itself again.

(127/96)

Here, Hegel is presenting the lawfulness of electric and magnetic processes in a very general form. He discusses them as a “paradigm of reality.” But this form of lawfulness is also “inverted” with respect to the uniformity and distinctness of forces within the mechanistic paradigm.

Finally, the relationship of laws to appearances is likewise “inverted.” While the initial understanding of law, which is dominant in mechanics, presented laws as mental likenesses or images of the sensible world, the pervasive conception of “laws of alternation [*Wechsel*]” is that things *in reality* behave precisely opposite from how they sensibly appear.

The fact that Hegel’s examples are also drawn from the moral world shows that he is no longer thinking merely of natural laws, but of a general relationship to reality, the likes of which also dominate, e.g., religious worldviews: considered *sub specie dei*, the orders and deeds of this world are reversed into their opposites. Hegel demonstrates here, as he will do from still other perspectives later in the *Phenomenology*, that such a separation of a “true” world from an “actual” one cannot be sustained. If the laws of the true world are supposed to constitute the reality of the sensible world, then change and alternation – i.e. the inversion of the self-same thing into its opposite – must be the universal principle:

²⁰ It would thus seem rather problematic to characterize the primary line of argument in the section on the inverted world as a *reductio ad absurdum*, as Flay does (“Hegel’s Inverted World,” 89 f., 103). Inversion, transposition into a (contrary) opposite, and dependency on that opposite are precisely the “external” modes in which the logical structure of “autonomous negation” can be experienced in science, morality, or religion (cf. Henrich, *Andersheit*, 338). For more on this structure, see also Koch, “Die Selbstbeziehung.”

We must therefore eliminate from the idea of inversion itself ... the sensible idea of rigidly fixing distinctions in a distinct element of subsistence; and this absolute concept of distinction must be purely exhibited and conceived as inner distinction, as the repulsion of the selfsame, as selfsame, from itself, and as the sameness of the non-same as the non-same. It is *to think* pure alternation, or *opposition within itself, the contradiction*.

(PhG, 130/98 f.)

Hegel had already argued in his 1801 habilitation thesis that contradiction is *index veri, non falsi* (the mark of the true, not of the false).²¹ This, of course, does not mean that contradictory sentences cannot also be false. But they may only be false in one respect, and can simultaneously express truths. Indeed, there are truths which can only be formulated as contradictions. And the reason for this is precisely that the principle of inversion (i.e. the inversion of something into its opposite) actually constitutes the structure of reality – most fundamentally in the form of “logical” concepts, whose very meanings already contain their opposites.

The third chapter of the *Phenomenology* concludes by revealing this structure to be that of self-consciousness. For in discovering the principle of “pure alternating change” in the laws of reality, the understanding simultaneously uncovers its own structure as self-consciousness. Hegel had long since taken to describing such a structure (of being the opposite of oneself) as “infinity.” If something is already “in itself” the opposite of itself, then any form of “becoming other” (*Anderswerden*) can only be viewed as its self-realization. It has no external limits, but only internal, self-imposed limits which it recognizes as such.

Yet the “entity” which immanently distinguishes itself within itself, in order to become a “self,” just is self-consciousness. Every I can only grasp itself, as I, in the simple unity of spontaneous thoughts of itself. The I is the unity of its own acts and thought contents. It reflects upon itself in order to become itself, i.e. in order to become self-consciousness, etc. “Insofar as [consciousness] has this concept of infinity as its object, it is thereby consciousness of the distinction as one that is likewise *immediately* sublated; [consciousness] is *for itself*, it is a *distinguishing of the non-distinct*, or *self-consciousness*” (PhG, 134/102).

²¹ Cf Rosenkranz, *Hegel's Leben*, 156, and AA 5, 227.

B. Self-consciousness

IV. The truth of self-certainty

Beginning with the chapter on self-consciousness, the leading transcendental question concerning the relation between conceptions of objects and our knowledge of them begins to engage with themes and topics which are nowhere to be found in traditional epistemology and which are seldom, if ever, addressed by contemporary epistemology. We suddenly find ourselves discussing forms of practical consciousness (desire, fear), types of social relation (mastery and servitude), and forms of religion and history. But even today, one can hear distinct echoes of Hegel's claim that the representations of reality which dominate the sciences are in fact dependent upon our social history. Marxist and existentialist interpretations of the *Phenomenology*, like those of Lukács and Kojève, are among the most influential of the entire twentieth century. And even authors who take their primary orientation from modern epistemology have seized on this aspect of Hegel's thought – cf Habermas (*Knowledge and Human Interests*), Taylor (*Hegel*), Pippin (*Hegel's Idealism*), or Pinkard (*Phenomenology*). The first shapes of practical self-consciousness Hegel addresses – desire, the struggle for recognition, the master–servant relation – have particularly attracted the attention of contemporary interpreters. There is ongoing disagreement, however, about the extent to which Hegel is actually discussing historical social relations here. Some interpreters only see these shapes of consciousness as illustrations of possible principled (“idealistic”) theories of self-consciousness or as practice for operating with logical categories.²²

My own reading of the *Phenomenology*, which is principally based on comparisons with Hegel's Jena writings, construes the shapes of practical self-consciousness as “ideal” forms of human beings' intercourse with one another and with the world. This genre of philosophical reflection was well established both in traditional political philosophy (in its discussions of slavery, despotism, work as *poiesis*, etc.) and in modern theories of natural right (the state of nature as one of war, labor contracts, the social contract, etc.). Yet for Hegel, their ideal status did not prevent such forms from “appearing” or “taking the stage” in diverse cultural variations over the course of human history. Their

²² Cf Becker, *Hegels Begriff*; Pöggeler, “Die Komposition” and *Selbstbewußtsein*, 132; McDowell, “The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self.”

historical development and function is more important for Hegel's account than it would have been for the a priori or purely constructive versions found in classical and modern political philosophy. For, on his view, it is precisely in this development that the "true" concept of social relationships realizes itself. Hegel's term for this concept, both in the *Phenomenology* and in his earlier Jena writings, is "recognition" (*Anerkennung*). The "movement of recognition" is not, however, restricted to the struggle for recognition. It is rather the *telos*, the aim, which can supposedly only be attained by traveling through all the developmental stages of practical spirit, and which is only achieved, at least in its basic contours, in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*.²³ This means that, given a particular understanding of modern law, morality, and religion, Hegel took the concept of recognition to have been realized historically. Now the *Phenomenology* hardly goes into any detail about the legal, political, and social institutions which at least intend to achieve such a realization. Nor does Hegel say anything very concrete about the historical forces and motives that led to this goal. But it is doubtless part of Hegel's thesis that the self-consciousness of individuals and of groups essentially involves a "striving" for recognition by others.²⁴

"Recognition" entails that the very constitution of self-consciousness is plural and intersubjective – involving a relation between You and I as well as between I and We. It was Fichte who first sought to demonstrate that self-consciousness is only possible within such an intersubjective structure and that the latter therefore constitutes a norm for "rational" behavior. In his 1796–1797 *Foundations of Natural Right*, Fichte "deduces" (in accordance with his own understanding of "transcendental deduction") this relation and this norm – the fundamental norm of all relations of right – from the consciousness of the I as a unity of willing and representing. In the introduction to the chapter on self-consciousness (IV),²⁵ Hegel gives only a brief sketch of the genesis of

²³ On this, cf Siep, "Die Bewegung." On the meaning of recognition in Hegel's other writings, cf Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*. Neuhouser has attempted to interpret Hegel's introduction of desire and consciousness's striving for recognition as the conclusion of a series of transcendental arguments; cf also Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*.

²⁴ Cf Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung* (*The Struggle for Recognition*, trans. Joel Anderson).

²⁵ This "introduction" has, in certain respects, many of the marks of a fully fledged experience of self-consciousness in its own right – particularly the section concerning desire and the emergence of intersubjectivity. This has led Stewart to suggest that we read the introduction as describing its own "shape" (*Gestalt*) of self-consciousness (cf "The Architectonic," 451 f.)

intersubjective consciousness over the course of its “experiential history”: “It is a *self-consciousness for a self-consciousness*” (*PhG*, 144/110). And this is complemented by a sort of anticipatory conceptual sketch of the structure of recognition in the beginning of section A (“Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness”). Both these sketches are presented in an extraordinarily complicated form.

The genetic sketch (*PhG*, 137 ff./104 ff.) begins with the true *concept* of self-consciousness, which already reflects the structure of spirit – as a unity of the I and its knowledge of itself, of the I’s being-in-itself and its being-for-itself. This must be distinguished, however, from the “*shape* [*Gestalt*] of self-consciousness” (138/104, my emphasis), which succeeds the previous level of consciousness. All the experiences of consciousness are sublated, and hence preserved, in the shape of self-consciousness, even though they are not completely integrated into self-consciousness itself. Self-consciousness and consciousness remain distinct. Self-consciousness is the true object, and it is in comparison with self-consciousness that the object of consciousness – the sensible, perceptible world explicable through the understanding – is treated as a mere appearance. But this object, too, is altered through experience. The unity of self-sameness and manifoldness, of universality and singularity, which was established at the end of the understanding chapter, now reveals “*for us or in itself*” (139/106) the structure of life. Life is still thought of as an object-like “distinguishing of the non-distinct,” as a process that both shapes and forms (or, better, as an “autopoietic” process of self-formation) even as it dissolves these shapes and forms in processes of self-sustenance and the reproduction of the species.

It is not easy to see whether the concept of life Hegel is employing here is drawn from the philosophy of nature – like the one he developed in his philosophy of “animal life” – or whether it is the sort of “metaphysical” concept which his early Jena writings identify as the highest concept of “true being” as such, viz. the absolute (a concept of the absolute he later came to regard as inadequate). At any rate, life is a process of the production and the negation (dissolution, amalgamation, etc.) of the shapes or “*Gestalten*,” through which something identical persists (the species, the genus, organic life itself, etc.) It is to objects with this structure that self-consciousness now turns in order to “test” its thesis that true being is not to be identified with the *object* standing over against its theoretical and practical attitudes, but rather with *self-consciousness itself*.

When it comes to practical shapes of consciousness's history, tests of this sort take the form of actions, which the philosopher then presents in conceptual terms. These actions rest on views and attitudes as well as on the "object conceptions" implicit in them. And these conceptions are then confirmed or corrected by the outcome of the action and reflection upon it. The most immediate form such a test can take is addressed at the beginning of the chapter on self-consciousness: desire. To see the world from the standpoint of desire and to accordingly make it my own is the most elementary form of demonstrating the world's mere "being for me."

But the experience that all desiring carries with it teaches us how illusory this attitude is. Desiring and enjoying always presuppose further new objects of desire. The object that desire sees only as a thing to be dissolved, as the object of its "negation," is thus accorded self-standing independence. And thus the question arises, what sorts of correction are necessary in this "object conception" if the object is supposed to be simultaneously something negative, yet also alive (self-shaping and self-dissolving) and self-standing, independent of desire (no mere "projection")? Such an object, according to Hegel, must negate itself even as it preserves and sustains itself. And the only thing that can do that is a self, which can distinguish itself from itself, become the opposite of itself (qua subject), and yet remain identical with itself. Just as a "living *Gestalt*" can perish through dissolution even while the genus endures, so too can self-consciousness negate its undifferentiated self-sameness, differentiating it into particular acts and contents, which it can then reintegrate into its "simple" self-knowledge. Self-consciousness is a "genus for itself."

A. *Self-sufficiency and non-self-sufficiency of self-consciousness;
mastery and servitude*

Self-consciousness's object conception thus corresponds only to that of another self. And for Hegel, that already implies that a solipsistic, monologuing self is impossible. Self-conscious creatures are essentially "for one another," yet without thereby losing their self-sufficiency or independence. Their being "for one another" doesn't merely mean that they are set over against one another like two facing mirrors. It is rather in their "identity" that they exhibit a reciprocal and multi-dimensional dependence. The emergence and alteration of a single consciousness is not possible in the absence of the expectations, stimuli, reactions, confirmations, etc. of other "partners." And these are not

simply causal interactions. As Fichte had already argued, the act of understanding another's action is a highly active process that presupposes various subjective achievements.²⁶ Hegel therefore speaks of a "doubly significant deed" in which one subject's deed and thought have constant correlates in the deed and thought of another.

But Hegel goes beyond Fichte in also recognizing the social and cultural preconditions under which individuals' "being for one another" develops. These preconditions themselves have the character of a spiritual, i.e. self-conscious, life; and individuals "differentiate" and "specify" (*ausdifferenzieren*) themselves within that life as they would within a common genus. The self-consciousness of a social class or "stratum" of a people or an epoch determines, or "bears," the self-consciousness of individuals through language, customs, norms, etc. like a "fluid, self-identical" substance. Moreover, it is within, or among, the various peoples and epochs that a true concept of these trans-individual and interpersonal relations begins to take shape (teleologically). Hegel calls this concept "spirit" (*Geist*). It is the concept of a substance in something like the Spinozistic sense; it is the concept of a self-sufficient bearer of "modifications," i.e. individuals, which, unlike the modes of Spinozistic substance, can and do develop to complete self-sufficiency. What we have then is an "absolute substance which constitutes the unity of its oppositions in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency, namely, in the oppositions of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves: The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*" (*PhG*, 145/110).

In the course of the *Phenomenology* itself, however, our next presentation or "experience" of "I-We" relations comes in the form of reciprocal dependencies between the self-consciousness of different individuals. Hegel speaks of a "multifaceted and multivalent intertwining" whose "moments must on the one hand be held strictly apart, and on the other hand must be taken and cognized in this differentiation as not distinguished, i.e. in their opposite meaning" (*PhG*, 145/111).

Now what does this intersubjective structure of spirit – which we will consider more thoroughly in the next section – have to do with the relation of knowledge to its object? We get our first answer as Hegel spells out the knowledge of ourselves and of "spiritual" objects – such as other subjects and the spiritual structures of society and culture – as a

²⁶ Fichte, *Natural Right*, 64/60 f.

relation between the “I” and the “We.” Self-consciousness comes together with its individual or collective “counterpart” to form a unity of self-sufficient moments belonging to a common substance. Even the relation between subjectivity and nature is ultimately supposed to turn out to be an opposition of moments within a common “substance.” This opposition itself is supposed to be nothing more than an objectification and reflection of a single self-same being unfolding itself in diverse orders and “recognizing” itself again therein.

Hegel takes up this segment of consciousness’s experience again just after the exposition of the structure of mutual recognition. Immediate self-consciousness, Hegel tells us, is “simple being-for-itself, self-equal through the exclusion *from itself* of all that is *other*. Its essence and absolute object is, to it, *I*” (*PhG*, 147 f./113). Self-consciousness distinguishes this absolute, essential object from the “existing” (*seienden*), or inessential object: its own life, or that of others. “[F]or the existing object has determined itself here as life” (*PhG*, 148/113). That life is the inessential must be shown through a practical “test.” Yet for an “intersubjective” self-consciousness, this test can no longer take the form of a monologue. Any truth claim must rather be intersubjectively “proven” (*bewährt*). The most elementary form of such a practical proof is battle. The battle or struggle for recognition of one’s own take on the truth is, as it were, the beginning of science. Comparison with his Jena writings reveals that Hegel is thinking here of the nearly pan-cultural historical phenomenon of fighting for honor. The goal is to compel one’s opponent to confirm one’s own “self-image.” By putting their very lives at stake, the embattled opponents demonstrate that it is their self-consciousness which represents, for them, genuine or “essential” reality.

But like all theses about the truth in the *Phenomenology*, this “proof” likewise entangles itself in a contradiction. For the actual death of the opponent renders impossible precisely what it was supposed to prove. In taking the life of one’s opponent, one revokes his self-consciousness of its self-sufficient status and thereby robs oneself of the possibility of being recognized by him. Killing in battle not only puts an end to the opponent’s nature life, but also to the spiritual life of a communal substance by “decomposing” it into independent members (“extremes”) (*PhG*, 150/114). The result of self-consciousness’s experience here is thus that “life is just as essential for it as pure self-consciousness is.” The fact that both are “just as essential” is initially brought out by representing two distinct self-consciousnesses: one for whom pure self-consciousness is “essential” (i.e. its highest good) and another for whom

life and individual self-preservation is essential. With reference to the development of relations within society, these positions correspond to the consciousness of the master and that of the servant respectively.

Hegel is apparently drawing on a theory of slavery which traces back to the ancients. But while Aristotle distinguishes two forms of slavery – slavery through battle and slavery by nature – Hegel combines them. From Aristotle through Locke, slavery through battle was often argued to be just on the grounds that an enemy defeated in a just war may be killed. If, however, the defeated enemy offers his service as a slave in exchange for his (forfeited) life, the victor can accept this fair trade and forgo his right to kill the defeated. By contrast, a slave by nature is someone who does not possess independent, active reason.²⁷

For Hegel, these two moments bleed together. Servitude is established when one of the opponents opts for his life. Such a servile consciousness occupies a lowly position not in virtue of its very nature, but rather because its insufficiently developed consciousness has not arrived at “pure being-for-itself.” But Hegel views slavery as a transitory historical phenomenon. The spiritual history of mankind, which Hegel characterizes in his later lectures on the philosophy of history as “progress in the consciousness of freedom,” must progress beyond this level. Yet the *Phenomenology* presents even this emancipation from slavery as an “epistemological” experience.

It is a twofold experience, since masterful and servile consciousness have different “object conceptions.” The master’s thesis that his object is not self-sufficient proves to be untenable, because the master himself experiences his dependence on the object. This dependence is itself twofold. The master needs a voluntary, self-sufficient partner in order to receive any true recognition. Moreover, to preserve his own life, the master needs both the servant and material sustenance. The servant is, just as in Aristotle (*Politics* 1.4), a living tool. And Hegel understood tools – beginning in his early Jena writings (*JSE* 1, 297 f./228 f.) – as “objectified knowledge.” A tool embodies a sort of know-how, without which the master would be helpless. All this bears on the second form of dependence, but Hegel follows Aristotle with respect to the first form as well. For they both share the conviction that a rational being, capable of freedom, cannot realize its nature by only serving as the master of a household: it must also “realize” itself in a society of free

²⁷ Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5, 1254b27 f.

men, a *polis*. Hegel, however, seeks to justify this thesis by recourse to the symmetrical, intersubjective structure of self-consciousness – recognition among self-sufficient individuals.

The essence of mastery is thus in both respects “the inverse of what it wants to be” (*PhG*, 152/117). Mastery is, in truth, servitude: the master is himself dependent, and lacks the free recognition requisite for his own freedom.

The experience of the servant has a different structure. For the servant, what counts as genuine reality is consciousness of free being-for-itself – i.e. the consciousness belonging to the master. But servile consciousness does not correspond to this reality. In contrast to the other experiences presented in the *Phenomenology*, however, the development of servile consciousness turns out to approach the truth. Servile consciousness comes to acquire knowledge of its own self-sufficiency and can verify this knowledge against its object to a far greater degree than the master can. And this, of course, entails a reversal of servile consciousness and, with it, the whole “intersubjective relation” of mastery and servitude: the servant is “in truth” more self-sufficient than the master. The whole relation must therefore be “sublated” and replaced by another. In the 1805–1806 Jena *Realphilosophie* (cf. *JSE* III), the social relation that takes its place is a legal relation of right – in line with the sequence from the state of nature (as one of war) to despotic rule and finally to legal relations of right in the modern natural law tradition (Hobbes, Spinoza). But in the *Phenomenology*, what follows is a theoretical shape of consciousness (the philosophy of Stoicism), albeit one that Hegel views as the foundation of the first historically realized legal order based on the rights of persons, namely Roman law (*PhG*, 355 f./290 f.).

The “emancipation” of the servant that leads to this new social relation rests on three “partial experiences” which liberate him from the heteronomy of life and nature: (i) the fear of death in battle, (ii) the imitation of the master’s free consciousness in the *ascesis* of servitude, and (iii) work or “labor” as the forming of nature in accordance with one’s own plans. Hegel’s account of work also transforms the moments of the traditional concept of *poiesis* into a process of self-reflection and self-objectification: “through work, it [sc. servile consciousness] comes to itself” (*PhG*, 153/118). On the one hand, work is the “restraining of desire” insofar as planning, cultivating, and preparing things (either for later consumption or to make life easier) all involve releasing man from the immediate determinations of nature. On the other hand, work also provides human plans and intentions with an enduring, “objective” form.

Hegel is here following the Aristotelian concept of *poiesis*. According to Aristotle, someone who possesses a *techné* – i.e. the knowledge of how to produce artifacts – transfers the form of the planned product from his soul into the material (cf *Metaphysics* VII.8). The craftsman forms his materials in accordance with his plan and thereby makes them into an enduring, artificial thing. For Hegel, this means that the craftsman views his own intentions in the external thing. And in doing so, he also experiences his independence from the threatening external power of nature and of the enemy. The worker “destroys this alien negative and posits *himself* as such a negative within the permanent element and thereby becomes *for himself* a *being-for-itself*” (PhG, 154/118). He thereby succeeds in objectifying himself. When he views the forms of the objects he has worked on, he sees himself as the “truth,” as their constitutive form. Hegel even calls this function of work *Bildung* – “formation,” “education,” “enculturation.” After all, it leads to emancipation and self-realization. Historically speaking, Hegel may well have had in mind the emancipation of the bourgeoisie from the nobles through “inner-worldly ascesis” (Max Weber) and formative work.

But any such grand social emancipation presupposes general concepts of human beings as creatures with equal rights. And servile consciousness does not possess these concepts per se. The servant may experience and pursue his emancipation “selfishly,” in support of only his own particular plans and intentions, or those of his group (or class). Hegel’s servants differ from Marx’s proletariat in that they do not embody the interests of mankind as a whole. They continue to separate, as Hegel says at the outset of the following section (“Freedom of Self-Consciousness”), between their consciousness of their mastery over things and the consciousness of freedom from the particular interests of life, which they see only in the master. What is called for is a consciousness of the free being-for-itself of *all* human beings – a consciousness Hegel first finds evidence of in ancient Stoic thought.

*B. Freedom of self-consciousness; Stoicism, Skepticism,
and unhappy consciousness*

Hegel groups the next three shapes of consciousness – Stoicism, Skepticism, and unhappy consciousness – together under the title “Freedom of Self-Consciousness.” The freedom at issue here goes well beyond the “self-sufficiency” of section A. It amounts to more than just independence, detachment from life, and dependence on things; it is rather the

consciousness that pure, thinking self-consciousness can give itself reality and objectivity. This form is present first as consciousness of the sovereignty of thought over reality, and then in the “objectivity” of an absolute thinking being – a singular, self-conscious, and personal God, with whom religious consciousness seeks to unite itself.

In considering the shape of “Stoicism,” Hegel is not concerned with particular authors or schools (like early or middle Stoicism), but rather with the basic thesis that one and the same reason is responsible for the determinations of both man and the cosmos and that man can grasp such all-pervasive reason through self-reflection. This position expresses a new level in the relation of self-consciousness to the object. For unlike desire or mere representation (*PhG*, 156/120), thought, which captures reality in concepts, can be credited with its own form of objectivity. Concepts have their own meaning and content – a timeless identity independent of particular acts of thinking. Insofar as they are *thoughts*, however, they are in no way foreign or external to thinking consciousness: “In thinking, I *am free* because I am not in an *other*, but remain utterly with myself, and the object, which to me is the essence, is in undivided unity with my being-for-myself; and my movement in concepts is a movement within myself” (156/120). And yet concepts make up the essence of things and are part of one, universal world-reason.

In Stoicism, self-consciousness is no longer understood as the “pure abstraction of the I,” but rather as the “I, which has otherness in itself, but as a distinction in thought” (158/121 f.). The Stoic does continue, however, to distinguish self-consciousness from life, or “natural existence.”

As Hegel argues – primarily by highlighting the Stoic ideal of freedom from material needs and the wise person’s consequent immunity to disappointment – Stoic thought “lacks the fulfillment of life.” It is constantly withdrawing itself “from the movement of existence, from action as out of passion, into *the simple essence of thought*” (157/121). Stoic thought thus lacks what constitutes the very essence of self-consciousness – the negation of one’s own simplicity, self-division, and differentiation. Stoic thinking is not in a position to “grasp the living world as a system of thought” (158/122), for it is not yet able to develop concepts into a system in virtue of their very content, as Hegelian logic does. Consequently, Stoic thought receives both theoretical and practical “determinacy” from without. The Stoic, who “whether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of his individual existence, [is] free,” alters nothing in prevailing social

relations. He admittedly relativizes mastery and servitude, but does not replace them with a system of rights, i.e. a system of determinate freedoms (permissions, claims, guarantees, etc.).

Hegel also accuses Stoic ethics of lacking all content, since their theory of duties is not developed out of the *logos* or the ideal of the unconditionally good (for the wise). The Stoics did, of course, distinguish between the unconditioned good of the wise man, which is practically unattainable, and ordinary duties as mere images of that good reflected in the eye.²⁸ Even such a systematic theory of duty as Cicero presents in *De Officiis* is not derived from reason itself, but rather consists of a heterogeneous combination of reason and anthropological empiricism (e.g. in the theory of *oikeiosis*, i.e. appropriation or self-sustenance). Hegel thereby anticipates his critique of Kantian ethics, which he nevertheless views as the highest form of the unconditioned morality originally conceived by the Stoics.²⁹

Because it does not conceive thought as self-differentiation, and does not conceive concepts as constituting an internally differentiated holistic system, Stoicism fails in its attempts to reveal self-consciousness to be the foundation of objecthood and objectivity. The ensuing corrective to Stoicism is Skepticism,[†] the “actual experience” of the “freedom of thought.” Just as Stoicism was a “spiritualization” of the independence of the master’s consciousness, Skepticism is now a “spiritualization” of the “negative direction, toward otherness, desire, and work” (*PhG*, 159/123). Yet it is simultaneously an active appropriation of what had previously just passively “happened” to consciousness through its experiential history up to that point: the refutation of the claims of sense-certainty, of perception, of the understanding, of mastery, and of “servitude” (160/123).

The Skeptic calls all these claims into doubt and then rebuts them by proving that they are no more plausible than their opposites. What is sensibly perceived may be an illusion; it is no more probable that there

²⁸ The ancient Stoics marked this distinction by calling the unconditioned good *katorthoma* and ordinary duty *kathêkon*; the middle Stoics preferred to distinguish between *kalon* and *kathêkon*; and Cicero likewise distinguishes *honestum* from *officium*; cf Cicero, *De Officiis*, I 15, 46 and III 3, 14 f.

²⁹ Siep, “Was heißt,” 224 f. (“The ‘Aufhebung’ of Morality in Ethical Life”).

[†] (Translator’s note.) I have consistently capitalized “Skepticism” and its cognates wherever the reference is to the particular form of consciousness which succeeds Stoicism in the *Phenomenology*. When the word is used more broadly to refer to a genre or method of philosophizing it appears in lower case.

are stable objects than that everything is just a chaos of “sense data”; any concept, any logical or normative law, can be replaced by its opposite, etc. The only certainty is the possibility of doubt itself. The Skeptic is therefore certain of the freedom and “essentiality” of thought. The dialectical inversion into the relevant opposite, which previous forms of consciousness had to “experience,” now constitutes the Skeptic’s own active and consciously applied method. Skeptical self-consciousness practices “dialectic” but only in its negative form – without the positive turn into a new *Gestalt* or a new truth. It is still a conscious activity, but one “through the self-conscious negation of which it provides *itself* with the *certainty of its freedom for itself*” (160 f./124). The Skeptic can then confirm this certainty by applying this negation to all possible objects.

Since Hegel understands the whole of the *Phenomenology* as a radical form of skepticism – one which leads us to a holistic understanding of the categories and thus to absolute knowledge by refuting every intervening position which is characterized by isolated fundamental concepts³⁰ – his refutation of Skepticism in this particular shape of consciousness must be restricted to specific aspects of skeptical thought. Hegel still views the skeptical critique of immediate certainty – whether that certainty rests on the senses, the understanding, logic, or moral feeling – as a valuable accomplishment. Indeed, the *Phenomenology* itself will strive to adduce all possible forms of such immediate certainty and enmesh them in contradictions. But Hegel means to engage in this mode of operation only as preparation for a novel form of “absolute knowledge,” a “productive-dialectical” mode of thought, so to speak. One must never grant skepticism absolute status – neither as a method, nor as a form of life. Otherwise one will entangle oneself in contradictions.

The first such contradiction occurs between the Skeptic’s freedom of thought and his dependence on that to which he applies his method. The ancient Skeptic hardly attempts to systematically prove the equipollence (*isostheneia*) of all claims as a matter of principle – his doubt is not “methodical” like that of Descartes in his *Meditations*. He rather casts doubt upon all the individual claims that he encounters, i.e. the ones he finds advanced by ordinary common sense or by philosophical schools: “this self-moving negativity has to do solely with what is

³⁰ On the development of this idea of a completed skepticism and the skepticism debates of the time, cf Vieweg, *Philosophie des Remis*.

single, and occupies itself with what is contingent" (*PhG*, 162/125). The Skeptic always needs – like an “obstinate youth” – someone to say *A* so that he can say *B*, or rather, so that he can say that *B* is equally possible. Thus the Skeptic fails to raise himself up to the level of the Platonic or Stoic wise man – a level free from all “nullities” or insignificances – and remains an “empirical” I.

The second contradiction, which rests, of course, on an age-old objection to skepticism, obtains between the Skeptic’s word and his deed. When the time comes for action, the Skeptic relies on the same realities, things, and laws, the existence of which he theoretically calls into question: “his deeds and his words always contradict one another” (*PhG*, 162/125). Not even someone who doubts the validity of sensory perception and natural laws will literally “put his hand in the fire” for the sake of his position, as John Locke observes.³¹

Since the Skeptic qua agent is not exempt from all the dubious, distorted, and untenable beliefs that he claims to be free from qua thinker, Skeptical consciousness fundamentally embodies the contradiction between the thought of “immutability and identity” and the thought of chance and change. But he is not conscious of this contradiction within himself.

For the philosopher “looking on,” however, the “truth” or the “new shape” that arises from this experience of Skepticism’s contradictions is a consciousness that knows its own contradictoriness. It is “*for itself* the doubled consciousness of itself as self-liberating, unchangeable, self-same self-consciousness, and of itself as absolutely self-confusing, self-inverting, and it is the consciousness of this its contradiction” (*PhG*, 163/126). Such a shape of consciousness is embodied in the religious striving for salvation.

Hegel calls this new shape “unhappy consciousness.” Religions built upon the concept of salvation are characterized by their adherents’ consciousness that, in themselves, they stem “from God” and are destined to be reunited with Him, even though they are currently separated from Him by earthly existence, divided within themselves and trapped in sin and suffering. This is servile and masterful consciousness “turned back into One” (163/126). Accordingly, “unhappy consciousness” represents for Hegel the final and most extreme version of self-consciousness’s “object conception”: only the pure, “infinite”

³¹ *Essay*, Book IV, Chapter XI, section 7.IV; in Campbell Fraser’s edition, Volume 2, 331.

I has genuine reality, though it is burdened in unhappy consciousness with the “nugatory” finite existence of fallen man, in need of salvation.

Hegel’s actual interest in the *Phenomenology* now lies in conceptual development. His aim is to bring together the moments of “unchangeableness” – i.e. universality as freedom from all distinctions – and “singularity.” Note, however, that “singularity” only has to do with individuality to the extent that both involve a simple negation in excluding all others. *Self-conscious* singularity, however, is, primarily, self-differentiation. And in Hegel’s logic, singularity signifies the moment of conclusion, bringing about the self-knowledge of an internally differentiated whole (universal) within its reintegrated members (particularizations).

In light of this guiding interest of Hegel’s, the real function of the history of religion, which culminates in Christianity, is the “discovery” that the unity of universality and singularity constitutes the essence of spirit and the foundation of all reality. This discovery only achieves its end, however, once philosophy has helped to sublimate the specific religious “divisions” between God and man, the world and the beyond, etc. That is the aim of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. The chapter on “unhappy consciousness” is directed specifically at the contradictions, but also at the advances, involved in religious consciousness.

The fundamental contradiction from this perspective obtains between, on the one hand, the claim that finite consciousness (which is “singularity,” limitation, separation, and “change”) is destined and determined to elevate itself to infinite consciousness (“unchangeableness”) and, on the other hand, the way this infinitude is rendered finite both by the mere possibility of such an “elevation” and by the “finitary” consciousness of the infinite. This, according to Hegel, is the dilemma of Judeo-Christian religion,³² which finally “comes to concepts” in the

³² This problematic concerning the prevention of “finitization” (beginning with the ban on making graven images or writing the name of God in Judaism) distinguishes unhappy consciousness from other kinds of religious consciousness concerned with salvation. The problem is made more acute in the Christian dogma of the incarnation of God and is ultimately resolved by the thought that God renders Himself finite, i.e. by the “concept of spirit which has come to life and entered into existence” (*PhG*, 163/126) – a concept which belongs to Christianity alone (cf Preface to *PhG*, 28/14, “the modern age and its religion”). Burbridge (“Unhappy Consciousness”) has rejected this reading, arguing that Hegel’s topics in this section are constant features of religious consciousness across all epochs. For Hegel, however, religious consciousness is to be understood, irrespective of any formal constants (piety, ceremony, doctrine), as engaged in a constant development of its work on the understanding of itself and of God. But that does not, of course, rule

philosophies of Kant and, especially, Fichte. Whether and how God exists “in Himself” is not something that a finite consciousness can know. Nevertheless, such a conception underlies the moral duty of uniting oneself with God, or at least “infinitely approaching” Him.

According to Fichte, we can attribute to God neither consciousness nor personality, for we cannot conceive of either except as finite. In his later work, Fichte would turn this into a form of negative theology: we must negate (“eliminate”) in ourselves all conceptual–discursive thinking in order to give a negative indication of the “truth” as a coincidence of the (for us) unbridgeable oppositions of “being” and “knowing.” However, the history of religious engagement with and experiences of this problem can be understood – much like consciousness’s experiential history of conceptions of the “true object” generally – as consciousness’s reactions and self-corrections to its concept of the in-itself. And it is ultimately religious consciousness that comes close to the truth, namely that our consciousness of “being in itself” is nothing other than its own self-consciousness. The history of religious modes of thought is the revelation of God both to man and to Himself. Put in nontheological terms: the world, as it is in truth, reflects itself in human knowledge and action. There is no truth “behind it.” But it is only once it can be conceived as a self-reflective system that human knowledge and action reflects the truth.

Surely one of the most fascinating features of the “unhappy consciousness” chapter for the reader is the “cognitive” relevance accorded to this development of religiosity in its concrete forms (devoutness, the struggle with “worldly” inclinations, work as service to God, etc.). But Hegel makes this enormously difficult to understand by introducing seemingly endless perplexing reversals of the relation between the “unchangeable” and the “singular” – pure versus finite self-consciousness.

Historically speaking, this portion of the development deals with the “spirit” of Judaism and Christianity (late ancient and medieval). Hegel is thus returning to themes of his earlier writings (especially during the Frankfurt period, 1797–1800), though his account of them has now become far more conceptual and abstract. And in his later Berlin

out the possibility that essential aspects of the form of religious consciousness dealt with here (*asceticism*, sacrifice, mediation through the priesthood, etc.) may also be important to other religions based on salvation – particularly to those in which representations of the death and resurrection of a God play some role (see below, p. 207).

lectures on the philosophy of history (beginning in 1822), Hegel presents the dissolution of the ancient world and the transition to Christianity in a way that is quite reminiscent of the beginning of the “unhappy consciousness” chapter. The prevalence of Stoicism and Skepticism around the end of the Roman Empire contributed to the dissolution of everything “firm and [all that] existed-in-and-for-itself.”³³ For Hegel, these philosophies achieved their aim – the “imperturbability of man in himself” (VPG, 385/LPH, 407)³⁴ – only through a form of contentless thinking and willing whose purpose was “purposelessness” itself (indifference to all aims). But the “living spirit,” which seeks to understand the world as free, thinking self-consciousness, demands a “higher reconciliation” (ibid.).

According to the theological schema of the “fullness of ages,” Hegel explains the “world-historical significance and importance” of the Jewish people, their monotheism and yearning for salvation (messianism) for the preparation of the “reconciliation of the world” (VPG, 391/LPH, 413). This reconciliation happens first “in itself” in the person of the incarnate God (i.e. God become man) but only gets appropriated (“for itself”) over the history of Christianity.

In contrast to the later chapter on religion, the section on “unhappy consciousness” deals with only a particular aspect of Jewish and Christian religiosity: namely the contrast between one’s consciousness of one’s own finitude and insignificance as compared to one’s essence, i.e. “infinite,” free self-consciousness.

The experience of “unhappy consciousness,” which initially takes place “on the side of changeable” consciousness, has a “twofold sense,” for it is simultaneously a development of the essential side – the side of the pure self, or the “unchangeable.” Thus, just as “object conceptions” alter with alterations in knowledge, and just as the consciousnesses of two subjects who stand in a “communicative” relation must likewise undergo changes together, so too the very concept of God alters

³³ Hegel is apparently influenced by Gibbon here. Gibbon likewise emphasized the significance of Skepticism for the dissolution of the Roman Empire (cf *The Works of Edward Gibbon*, Volume 2, Chapter 15, 299 f.). Indeed, Gibbon’s monumental *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* had already stimulated Hegel to write his Frankfurt drafts of *The Spirit of Christianity*.

³⁴ References such as this one to Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of history provide the page numbers for both the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash and indicated by the abbreviation “VPG/LPH.” [Translator’s note: I have frequently modified J. Sibree’s translation in the English edition.]

through religious experiences. It “forms” or “shapes” itself through these experiences. The crucial development of Judaism into Christianity constitutes precisely this shaping of the unchangeable. Hegel calls this the “emergence of singularity in the unchangeable” (*PhG*, 165/128). He distinguishes three phases of this transition, in which “the unchangeable receives the form of singularity” (*PhG*, 166/129). In the first (Jewish) phase, the unchangeable is, for finite, singular consciousness, “only the foreign being which condemns singularity.” The unchangeable manifests singularity only as separation from finite consciousness as such. In the second phase, the unchangeable itself receives the “form of singularity just as it [sc. singular, finite consciousness] itself” manifests that form – God is represented as a person and as incarnate. The third phase occurs when both these sides “become spirit.” Singular, finite consciousness “has the joy of finding itself therein [sc. in the unchangeable], and it becomes conscious that its singularity is reconciled with the universal” (*PhG*, 165/128).

This “joy” is just a passive relation at first. The “singularization” of God is an external event of revelation and incarnation. Moreover, human consciousness is confronted with the divine human being (Christ) “as an opaque sensible *One* with all the intractability of *something actual*” (166/129). It is only through a new form of religious elevation that “the initially external relation to the incarnate [*gestalteten*] unchangeable as an alien actuality [must be elevated] into an absolute oneness with it” (*PhG*, 167/130). Such a goal is admittedly unattainable for early or medieval Christianity, however, so long as it has not overcome the separation between this world and the beyond.

The attempt to overcome the aforementioned division of consciousness from its absolute essence (i.e. divine consciousness) itself has three phases, each with its own form. It is not entirely clear whether Hegel is thinking of temporal phases, or rather principled forms of the Christian striving for salvation. These forms are distinguished “in accordance with the threefold relation this consciousness will have with its incarnate beyond [*gestalteten Jenseits*]: first, as *pure consciousness*; second, as *singular being* [*einzelnes Wesen*] which relates to *actuality* as desire and labor; and third, as *consciousness of its being-for-itself*” (167/130).

Here I can offer only a brief account of this development. The first form is that of religious devotion or devoutness, the “movement of infinite yearning,” through which consciousness seeks to unite itself with God, who has become human and died. Its constant denial of reality – the “grave of its life” (169/132) – cannot, however, liberate

consciousness from its state of separation. It always returns to its sensible reality, just as the Skeptic does in his practical life.

The ensuing correction consciousness performs yields the “second relationship.” Consciousness now attempts to unite itself with divine consciousness in real life, through work and enjoyment – where these are not understood as ends in themselves but rather as divine worship. The reality consciousness works upon is no longer merely “null,” but itself divided: “In one respect [it] is null in itself, but in another respect [it] is also a sanctified world” (*PhG*, 171/133). It is the creation, an expression of God’s will and thus a “shape of the unchangeable” itself.

But in this manner, religious consciousness cannot subject reality to its will, as servile consciousness did. It rather receives its objects as well as its power to work with and on them as a divine gift, i.e. as grace. Thus it is incapable of vindicating its transformative activity as the sublation of the nugatory here and now. It cannot become one with the absolute self-consciousness of God through work. In regarding itself and the world as a “gift from God,” all that remains for consciousness is the gratitude which prevents it from attaining self-sufficiency.

This, now, is the third relationship, which involves yet another movement of inversion. The very need for active harmony with the unchangeable now turns its negation on itself. It is now consciousness’s own nature which becomes the “enemy” of its unification with the absolute. Consciousness accordingly seeks to overcome its own nature through ascetic practice. But just as desire regenerates its object, so too does such *ascesis* reproduce what it attempts to overcome. “Animal functions” like eating, sexuality, etc. – functions that are, in themselves, completely inessential – now become the “object of [consciousness’s] serious endeavors.” It is thus consciousness itself that lends them significance in the first place:

This enemy, however, reproduces itself in its very defeat, and consciousness, in fixating on it, does not free itself from [the enemy] but continually dwells on it and forever sees itself as polluted . . . We have here only a personality confined to its own self and its own petty acts, a personality brooding over itself, as unhappy as it is impoverished.

(174/136)

This passage reveals just how far Hegel is willing to go into the details of religious psychology and its critique, even though his ultimate concern is progress in the synthesis of universality and singularity, being and knowing.

In this state of pitiful singularity, consciousness would appear to be decisively separated from unchangeable, divine self-consciousness. Yet it also knows that its self-negation is a task set for it by God, and not by its own will. Consciousness therefore renounces all credit for its ascetic practices and turns to a mediator to intervene between God's will and its own. This mediator is supposed to, as it were, translate divine commandments for consciousness and communicate its liberation from its guilt. This is God's servant who is in charge of the sacraments and doctrinal education: the priest. The priest can bring consciousness a kind of magical purification through (ordered) fasts and mortifications, sacrificial offerings and rituals.³⁵ Hegel is apparently describing here what Kant had so frequently criticized as counterfeit worship (*Afterdienst*)³⁶ – that is, a magic-ritual Catholicism in which man seeks to gain God's favor not through reason and morality, but through religious exercises. Hegel does not, however, reject this kind of religiosity wholesale. For he views it as a necessary developmental stage, albeit an essentially premodern one. Only the philosopher can recognize, at the end of this development (*PhG*, 175–177/137–138), a unity of finite and pure self-consciousness which anticipates modern reason.

In the course of these rituals and modes of life ordered by the church – and especially in the consciousness that none of what is thereby effected is to one's own credit – consciousness has, in a certain sense, made itself into a nugatory object and has arrived at a form of "actually performed self-sacrifice" (not merely a devout cast of mind). In this self-sacrifice, "inessential" consciousness not only negates its own nullity, but also its dividedness, its separation from God (its "unhappiness").

Yet this liberation is at the same time the "deed of the other," i.e. of the "essence existing-in-and-for-itself." It is only through grace that consciousness's own, singular will receives approval from the divine, "universal" will, only through grace that its earthly deeds are blessed. Thus consciousness has not yet arrived at the full concept of such reciprocal recognition. For it remains hung up on a separation between deed and grace, here and beyond – a separation which can only be overcome and mediated by a third party, the priest. These are the limits of premodern, pre-Reformation Christianity, in Hegel's view.

³⁵ "Practicing a business that is not understood," *PhG*, 175/137.

³⁶ Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6: 179 f.

And Hegel's presentation of these themes incorporates ideas drawn from modern accounts of rational right, and related critiques of the priesthood – e.g. in Rousseau.³⁷

The divine will does not become known to the individual as the law of a universal will (*vox populi, vox dei*), but is rather elucidated “by the third party, the mediator as counselor” (*PhG*, 176/138). On all accounts, the singular will must “renounce its own qua singular will” and thus “renounce its property and enjoyment.” But here, this renunciation is not conceived as an expression of the singular will and its participation in the universal will – a renunciation which thus restores the individual amidst its property as a member of a lawful society (as Rousseau's *Social Contract* presents it). Rather, consciousness performs this sacrifice on the advice and counsel of the priest, and it consequently has only “negative significance” (*PhG*, 176/138). Consciousness does not know the universality, the divinity that demands this sacrifice as “his own deed” (*PhG*, 177/138). Consciousness does not itself produce its unity with the absolute, universal will. It rather “lets the mediating minister express this still fragmented certainty, namely that its unhappiness is only *in itself* the inverse ... namely a blessed enjoyment” (177/138). God accepts and blesses the sacrifice, but only as mediated through the priest and the sacraments and as an anticipation of ultimate reconciliation in another world, another life (the beyond). For us, or “according to its concept,” the finite deed is an “absolute deed.” “However, *for* [*consciousness*] *itself*, its deed remains impoverished and its enjoyment remains pain, and the sublation of these in any positive sense continues to be postponed to an *other-worldly beyond*” (*ibid.*).

Hegel, a Lutheran, closely adheres to the tradition of Calvinist critiques of Catholicism, as expressed in the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. According to this critique, Catholicism is not truly loyal to the state, since the Pope can, at any time, dissolve Catholics' duty to obey the law. But Hegel's philosophy of religion goes even further. The very opposition between divine and human consciousness needs to be sublated just as much as that between thinking and being, or self-consciousness and object. To Hegel's mind, both modern science and the Reformation prepare the way for this sublation. Modern science facilitates it through its discovery of the lawfulness and “spirituality”

³⁷ Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8.

of nature (in force, law, etc.), while the Reformation's contribution is its sublation of the mediation of priests, its sanctification of "the ethical life of common citizens,"³⁸ and the transformation of the state into an "image of eternal reason" (*GPR*, §272), i.e. a system of rational rights and institutions forged by the general will. For Hegel, the Reformation is an essential presupposition of the modern state.

These developments (the scientific revolution, the Reformation, the American and European revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, etc.) still lie ahead for "unhappy" consciousness. In the next chapter, on reason, Hegel will turn to consider modern natural science and its most developed philosophical interpretation (until Schelling's and his own philosophies of nature) in the transcendental philosophy of Kant and Fichte. He additionally discusses the forms of practical reason – in its modern understanding – which seek to alter social reality and rationally shape it in accordance with ideas.

This form of practical reason is already implicated in the "representation" of unhappy consciousness's reconciliation: "But in this object, in which it views its actions and its being, as those of this *particular* consciousness, to be action and being *in itself*, it is confronted with the representation of *reason*, with consciousness's certainty of being, in its singularity, absolutely *in itself*, of being all reality" (*PhG*, 177/138). So reality is no longer just self-consciousness as such, but rather the unity of singularity and universality – in the "Hegelian" sense of a self-differentiated whole which in its differentiating activity (specification, *Besonderung*) reflects and realizes itself (singularity, *Einzelheit*).

C. (AA) Reason

V. The certainty and truth of reason

Hegel's conception of reason resembles Kant's in that reason is taken to be a "faculty for inference." The inferences of logical or analytical reason uncover concepts' implications or presuppositions. In its empirical application, reason serves to combine judgments, via inferences, into theories. Yet in so doing, as Kant observes, reason employs "regulative ideas" – i.e. concepts of unity and totality to which no

³⁸ Namely work, marriage, and obedience to state law. Cf *EPW* (1830), §552.

intuitions correspond, but which can nonetheless generate or justify conceptual relations between empirical judgments. The aim is to explain the whole of reality by means of such theories.

Now Hegel thinks he can show, contra Kant, that “regulative” ideas are, in truth, “constitutive” concepts. Scientific and merely analytic inferences ultimately only unpack and expound the inferential relations implicit in concepts, which do not refer to anything external but are themselves totalities of thought and being. There is no “reality” over and above these concepts, nor is the sensibly perceptible world something extra-conceptual. Like our perception itself, it is (unconsciously) conceptually structured.³⁹ Even simple human activities like the satisfaction of drives can, for Hegel, be understood as implicit inferences.⁴⁰

According to Hegel, modern natural science already contains the idea that, in knowing something, we only unpack the objective rationality of conceptual implications, as is evidenced by the fact that natural science proceeds by way of experiment. For experimentation is the attempt to demonstrate necessary connections. Particular data or events must occur because they can be “inferred” from a law (or hypothesis about a law). The ensuing events thus follow from an inferential connection. And this already entails that there is a rational “pattern” underlying natural processes. The “genuine reality” of natural processes is not to be found in their contingent “surface,” but in their rational lawfulness. Reason, which seeks to prove this by means of experiment, is thus certain of “its reality” in nature.

However, the thesis that rational investigations of reality can disclose only reason itself does not have its home in modern natural science proper, but rather in a philosophy that, like Kant’s, seeks to legitimate modern natural science and simultaneously to reconcile it with rational morality and autonomy. Now Fichte had claimed to have accomplished the task Kant set himself in his third *Critique* – the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* – namely that of uncovering the common source and systematic connection of theoretical and practical reason. In this respect, Hegel basically accepts Fichte’s claim to have completed the Kantian philosophy. In his early *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte seeks to explain both

³⁹ Here Hegel prefigures modern critiques of the dualism between concept and intuition, or between concept and extra-conceptual reality, e.g. in McDowell’s *Mind and World*. Cf Halbig, *Objektives Denken*, and Quante, “Reconciling Mind and World.”

⁴⁰ Cf *EPW* (1830), §§ 473 and 475.

the theoretical and the practical “form” of reason in terms of the original autonomy of a spontaneous, self-thinking I, from which the systematic interconnections of all the fundamental concepts of science can be “inferred.” This inferential procedure is supposed to begin with the principle of the original self-positing of the I and then investigate the very “possibility” of such a self-consciousness. In the course of pursuing this question, we trace our way back through the whole system of fundamental concepts and principles (identified as conditions of the possibility of such self-consciousness) to a (or rather, *the*) first principle.

In his early reception of Fichte’s philosophy, Schelling explicitly attributed to the I the properties of Spinozistic substance. The I was *causa sui* in existing through itself alone, it was also *ratio sui* or intelligible through itself alone, and it was *omnitudo realitatis* – the whole of reality. Schelling is going beyond Fichte here insofar as, for Fichte, (i) the I had necessary existence only “for itself,” and (ii) only what the I brings to consciousness has reality for it. Consciousness of objects is not, for Fichte, explicable solely in terms of the I itself. Self-consciousness regards itself as dependent in various respects and views its spontaneity as restrained or “checked” in some inexplicable manner.

To Hegel’s mind, however, this position is inconsistent and involves a contradiction, as he had already sought to show in the *Differenzschrift*. Like the Kantian dualism between receptivity and spontaneity, between appearance and thing in itself, Fichte comes to grief on account of his own “principle of reason.” In order to make good on this principle’s philosophical purpose, the “idealism” of Kantian-cum-Fichtean philosophy would have to “derive” the forms in which we grasp reality from the original thesis that everything which is real for us must trace back to autonomous, self-conscious reason. Moreover, this derivation of forms must not rely on yet another principle (a thing in itself, a non-I, a checking or *Anstoß* of the I), unless that other principle stands in such a logical relation to the first that one can be derived from the other.

From Hegel’s perspective, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling’s “idealism” – which he understands as the necessary development of a certain line of thought – represents the only adequate understanding of (what Hegel takes to be) modern natural science. Yet on the other hand, such idealism remains abstract and unable to really develop the fundamental concepts and principles of the sciences out of its own principle. Insofar as the self-interpretation of these sciences cleaves to the “extra-conceptual” objectivity of their subject matter, they continue to lag

behind idealism, although they do succeed in “realizing” the ambition of idealism in its rational explanation of nature. Hegel accordingly dedicates the opening of the chapter on reason (v.) to a critical discussion of “idealism.” This is followed by three main sections (A, B, C) which engage with the empirical sciences of man and nature (A), as well as with the various conceptions of rational action advanced in classical, sentimental, and Enlightenment literature and philosophy (B, C). The discussion proceeds by first identifying the categories and structures of reason which are rediscovered in the “reality” we are presented with (A). This reality is then supposed to get formed in accordance with the laws of practical reason (B). And finally, the concrete individual seeks to realize itself in the world and find itself to be recognized (B, C).

Hegel’s discussion of Kant and Fichte here has often, and quite rightly, been criticized as insufficiently immanent or even altogether inapt.⁴¹ But Hegel takes himself to be able to show that particular principles have been developed in the various philosophical positions of his time – as well as in literature, theology, and law – whose consequences their authors have failed to draw. Above all, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling succeeded in overcoming the dualism plaguing modern thought in their fundamental ideas, but then fell back into this dualism in the course of elaborating their systems. And instead of pursuing these correct intentions, their followers seized on and elaborated precisely those “relapses.” In Kant’s case, his followers were principally concerned to retain the distinction between appearance and thing in itself and the distinction between pure practical reason and concrete, historical rights and duties. Hegel discusses this latter trend primarily in section B of the chapter on reason.

Kant’s and Fichte’s crucial insight, according to the chapter on reason, is that the sort of objectivity which “naïve” consciousness takes to be the in-itself obtaining independently of consciousness and knowledge, actually traces back to “activities” of subjectivity. It’s not just the case that the understanding contains the modes of connection (the categories) among our representations while the imagination contains the schemata for their application to perceptions. According to Fichte, the spontaneous self-activity of these subjective accomplishments (of the understanding, the will, the imagination, in short, of all “positing”)

⁴¹ Cf Görlandt, *Die Kanthritik des jungen Hegel*; Kaehler and Marx, *Die Vernunft in Hegels “Phänomenologie des Geistes”*, 65; Düsing, *Hegel und die Geschichte*, 232 f.

just is genuine reality. We only ascribe reality to our representing because we find our representative activity “constrained” and attribute to this constraint an activity analogous to our own spontaneity – e.g. the “power” of generating impressions in us.⁴²

The category of “reality,” for Fichte, is derived from the spontaneous “positing” that characterizes “the form of action of the human mind.” To that extent, Hegel is right that idealism understands active reason as the paradigm of reality. He is not correct, however, to assert that idealism begins immediately with the I’s certainty of “being *all* of reality” (*PhG*, 179/140). For the ability to quantify, on Fichte’s view, presupposes distinguishing and referring – subjective activities that he first discusses in the second and third of the three principles of his 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Self-consciousness unifies both: the spontaneous, self-present activity (of the I), and the distinguishing a Not-I which refers to the former. Self-consciousness is therefore *not* “consciousness of the *non-being* of any Other – a singular object, all reality and presence” (*PhG*, 179/140). As Fichte goes on to explain later on in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, self-consciousness only contains and pursues the ideal of such an I, which produces through its “positing” everything that can be an object for it. It is in terms of this never-ending attempt to approximate such an I that Fichte explains the unity of theoretical and practical reason.

One can thus doubt whether the first principle of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* really attributes “all reality” to subjectivity. What is correct, however, is that Fichte seeks to explain all *forms* of objectivity in terms of subjective activities. And to that extent, human reason really does “find” itself in objects.

Hegel’s critique of Kant and Fichte presents the systematic development of the idealistic principle itself as an experience. He had already argued in his early Jena writings that these systems could not deliver on their ambitions (cf above, p. 23). Their principle does not afford immanent development into a system, nor can Kant and Fichte explain the object of singular judgments in terms of subjective forms of cognition without remainder. Moreover, Kant failed to derive the categories of the transcendental deduction from transcendental apperception or, as Hegel calls it here, the “simple category” drawing on the Aristotelian, ontological meaning of the categories as the most

⁴² Cf Siep, “Naturrecht und Wissenschaftslehre,” 26.

general kinds of beings: “logos [is] reason, the essence of both thing and speech, *topic* and *talk* [*Sache* und *Sage*], category” (*JSE* III, 190/90).

If Kant took the objective validity of the categories to reside in the fact that, without them, self-consciousness would be impossible, then Hegel takes this to signify that the unity of self-conscious reason actually constitutes reality itself. But then the categories must be the immanent “distinction” of the one category: self-consciousness. And this is something Kant is not in a position to show. For he simply imports the categories “empirically” from the table of forms of judgment set forth in traditional logic.

Kant, like Fichte, admittedly understands self-consciousness to constitute genuine reality and a condition of all experience of objects, but self-consciousness nevertheless remains for them dependent on something other, towards which it “gestures,” as Hegel puts it: namely the multiplicity of forms of understanding and of intuition, the manifoldness of the given and of the “thing in itself” which underlies all “affection” or “restraint” of the faculty of representation. Idealism thus repeats the experience of Skepticism, which, in all its freedom of doubt, remains dependent upon a manifold of given claims (to be doubted).

But idealism is only entangled in a “contradiction” if the I – or the “unity of apperception” – is really supposed to be “all reality” or “the truth of knowledge.” For then it really would be inconsistent to simultaneously maintain the reality of the Not-I or the thing in itself. However, neither Kant nor Fichte is committed to the latter claim. Even Fichte holds that only what we can bring to consciousness through spontaneous activity can be called “real.” Yet this activity still experiences itself as “checked” or constrained. And though this constraint can be explained, in part, through “self-affection,” one thing that remains unexplained is why this particular feeling (of all possible feelings) occurs at this particular point in time. Abstracting for a moment from the fact that Hegel’s critique here is not particularly “immanent,” it nevertheless points to a difficulty which continues to command attention today.⁴³ Recourse to causal expressions like “check,” “restraint,” “constraint,” or “affection” leads to a problematic dualism between a closed conceptual system of subjectivity and a non-conceptual given that impinges on the subject in a way it cannot understand. The causality

⁴³ Cf McDowell, *Mind and World*.

of the object and the intentionality (understanding, conceptualization) of the subject are ontologically heterogeneous.

Hegel's claim that Kant and Fichte failed to cash out their own principle that the autonomy of reason is the sole reality becomes more plausible once one also takes into account their philosophy of *practical* reason. And the opening of the chapter on reason is surely aimed at this practical philosophy as well, though it does not become the explicit topic until sections B and C.

A. *Observing reason*

In the three sections of "Observing Reason," Hegel engages with the natural science, medicine, and psychology of his day. The section on the observation of nature in particular is one of the longest of the whole book and several times larger than the comparatively more famous sections in the chapter on self-consciousness. Hegel took great interest in the empirical sciences, although, in his day, these frequently incorporated "ambitions" now associated with the philosophy of nature. The life sciences in particular (biology, medicine) had recently been influenced by Schelling's philosophy of nature. Hegel's presentation of their "experiences" is therefore simultaneously a critical discussion of Schelling. Today, these sections are principally of interest to the historian of science. In an introductory work such as this, they can only be treated in overview. What Hegel is concerned to do is represent the process by which the concepts and laws of these sciences cease to adhere to their sensible objects. As science becomes more systematic, it progressively drifts free of the givenness and contingency of its objects, which it continues to regard "as sensible things juxtaposed to the I" (*PhG*, 187/147). But, as Hegel wishes to show, "what it [science] actually does contradicts this view, for it *knows* [*erkennt*] things, it transforms their sensuous being into *concepts*, i.e. into a being which is, at the same time, the I" (*ibid.*). Now not just any general or specific concept is a concept in the Hegelian sense. What we are concerned with here are fundamental concepts that are independent of concrete, sensible objects and events (instantiations). Even concepts like "force," "electricity," etc. only count as concepts of reason if they enable rational inferences. Every concept of reason, for Hegel, must embody an implicit inference. It is by explicating these inferences that one develops a holistic conceptual system which is differentiated ("concrete") enough to capture the objects and laws of the natural and social world.

What Hegel seeks to show in the first part of the chapter on reason is that the modern natural sciences avail us of such concepts, though they constantly misconceive them through “admixture” with the sensible.

It is not just in reflecting on the nature of scientific explanation that natural science comes to attribute “reality” to concepts, but also in its understanding of the objects of scientific investigation themselves. The scientist discovers that these objects themselves have a purposive, differentiated structure which generates distinctive results, just as determinate premises generate a conclusion. Organic life and all the processes it involves embody a kind of living inference in which a result follows from conditions by means of “steps.” We must not seek to understand organic life as Kant does in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* – namely by supposing some underlying understanding which planned it (cf §85). We should rather explain organic life as a self-organizing, rational constellation – an inference.

A. THE OBSERVATION OF NATURE. In the section on the “Observation of Nature,” Hegel does address sciences of inorganic nature, but pays special attention to the sciences of organic nature. Initially, the order of nature is supposed to be revealed through description and classification according to common features. But such a classification is arbitrary and incomplete, for the boundaries between natural species remain fuzzy wherever the classificatory features cannot themselves be explained in terms of a law. It is thus incumbent on the “modern” natural sciences (of Hegel’s day) to provide a lawful explanation of the system of species – as contemporary science seeks to do today through evolutionary theory and genetics.

In addressing this issue, however, Hegel sees the same problems recur that were already treated in the chapter on force and the understanding. One problem is the relation between the universality of the law and the concreteness of the phenomena. The other pertains to the internal connection between the “components” of the law: “If the law does not have its truth in the concept, then it is something contingent, not a necessity, and, in fact, not a law” (192/151). The components of a law must themselves be developed out of a concept that has its source in reason.

According to Hegel, it is the role of the experiment to address these problems – both the mediation of the universality of the law with its concrete cases and the “purification” of the law into a concept proper (194/152). The function of an experiment, on Hegel’s interpretation, is not inductive, but deductive. It is not primarily concerned to verify or falsify hypotheses regarding laws, as contemporary scientific theory

would have it. Experiments are rather supposed to show that what is genuinely real across various cases is the law itself – that it is independent of the particular sensible properties of objects or events. Their task is “to elevate the law completely into the form of the concept and to completely *free its moments* from being tied to *particular beings*” (ibid.).

The law of electricity, for example, is not dependent on the constitution of particular bodies as it was in older theories which distinguished, for example, between vitreous and resinous electricity (i.e. the electricity of gas and that of resin). For these laws are primarily concerned with lawful electric processes; bodies are, as it were, only functions within these processes. But if these processes result from the essence of electricity itself, and are thus already contained in its (the electricity’s) “simple” concept, then it is the concept – the implicitly “syllogistic” concept – which constitutes the genuine reality of such things and processes.

This is the object conception which underlies the organic sciences that Hegel is particularly concerned with. Both Kant and Aristotle agree that the organic can only be understood as purposive, or teleologically structured. And Aristotle would further agree that the means–end relations that obtain between the whole and its parts behave like the elements of an inference.⁴⁴ For Kant, of course, that is because we impute an underlying “plan” to purposively organized organisms (thus presupposing an understanding to whom the plan belongs), albeit in only an interpretive, reflective mode of explanation, not a constitutive, causal one. In the chapter on reason, Hegel rejects Kant’s view in favor of a (distinctively modified) Aristotelian position.

The entire section is concerned with the attempts that dominated contemporary biology and medicine both to discover a system of organisms and to understand its inner organization in a similarly systematic – and, in the case of Schelling and his school, a priori – manner. Consequently, the relevant object conception here presents us with an intrinsically necessary system that can be derived from only a few principles. Yet all of these rational strategies still remain on the level of *consciousness* which dominates all forms *prior* to absolute knowledge. For they continue to distinguish between principles and objects, between rational concepts and material entities, viz. organisms.

The various stages or levels of this rational systematization of nature emerge as follows. First, a system is developed through classification on

⁴⁴ Cf *Physics*, II 9, 200a 15 f.

the basis of common features. It then becomes apparent that only explanations in terms of laws are genuinely systematic. In this connection, Hegel first discusses laws concerning the relation of organisms to their environment and then laws concerning the internal organization of living things. Yet fundamental laws of organic life are always simultaneously laws of the interconnection between living things and the whole of organic nature. Accordingly, this section concludes by establishing that the whole of nature can no longer be regarded as a system of species, but must be conceived as intrinsically organic life.

What makes it especially difficult to understand this portion of the text is the fact that it involves a twofold “failure” of “reason” – i.e. a twofold failure of the sciences and philosophers of nature – in its (their) attempt to discover the true system of nature. First, their attempts at systematization are too abstract – their categories of differentiation and their laws simply explain too little. And second, the degree of systematization itself is “exaggerated” – particularly by the scientists and natural philosophers who follow Schelling. As Hegel makes especially clear in his later philosophy of nature, it is hopeless to try to conceive of nature as a gapless logical (syllogistic) system. Even within organic nature, it is only possible for fundamental determinations to be developed out of one another – the multiplicity of species cannot be (cf *EPW* (1830), §368).

Thus, one dimension of Hegel’s argument is concerned to show that gaps remain in the systems of species put forward by scientists from Aristotle to Linnaeus – and particularly in the conspicuously arbitrary systems developed during the Enlightenment. The boundaries between species remain fuzzy and specific division itself is never really explained. Such a speciation ought really to be traced back to laws. And the sort of laws at issue – at least as they were discussed in the biology of the time – pertain to the relationships between organisms and their environment, the adaptation and the external suitability of the environment (including other living things) for the self-preservation of the organisms. Hegel now attempts to show that a necessary, law-governed system of species can be developed neither from the “material” constitution of organisms, nor from their adaptations to “zones and climates” (here Hegel is presumably criticizing Treviranus⁴⁵), nor from the utility of things for the respective organisms. Laws of this sort allow

⁴⁵ Cf the editors’ notes in *PhG* (1988), 586.

too many exceptions – they are too “impoverished” for “organic manifold variety” (197/155). Either that, or they involve only external, contingent “appropriateness” rather than conceptual relationships and insights into the inner constitution of living things and the objects that are useful to them:

However often a thick coat of fur may be *found* to go together with northerly latitudes, or the structure of a fish to go together with water, or the structure of birds with air, the concept of a thick covering of fur is by no means contained in the concept of the North, nor does the concept of the sea contain the concept of the structure of fish, nor the concept of air the concept of the structure of birds. (197 f./155 f.)

By contrast, the “concept of an acid” most certainly does contain “the *concept* of a base.”

Reason comes closest to discovering its “conscious concept” to be “something real and present” in understanding the organic as immanent purposiveness. It is not enough to impute purposes or “intentionality” to organisms or their behavior in a merely “heuristic” manner, as Kant or, more recently, Daniel Dennett recommends.⁴⁶ Dennett thinks that, by imputing ends or purposes to organisms – or even to lifeless “intentional systems” – we can explain more of their behavior and perhaps even something of their inner organization. We must not, however, suppose that such intentions or purposes are real. According to Hegel, this mode of explanation allows too much arbitrariness relative to the ends imputed to organisms and their behavior. And indeed, as contemporary biology confirms, there is a wide spectrum of possible forms of organization and behavior by means of which a supposed end (e.g. self-preservation) can be attained.

For Hegel, the necessity of the “means” – i.e. the particular differentiated structure of organization, the particular components of a behavior – must follow from the end itself. Hegel thus accepts Aristotle’s account of the organism as the self-realization of a form which is simultaneously its end, or *telos*: “The necessity is hidden in what happens and reveals itself only *at the end*, but it does so in such a way that this very end reveals that the necessity has been there from the beginning as well” (199/157). This self-realization is not, however, the effect of some later event on an earlier one; rather it is the sort of “becoming itself” that is precisely characteristic of self-consciousness: “What it therefore arrives at through the movement

⁴⁶ Cf Dennett, “Intentional Systems.”

of its activity is *itself*, and in arriving only at itself, it is its *feeling of self*. We are thus admittedly confronted with the distinction between *what it is* and *what it seeks*, but this is only the *semblance of a distinction*, and hence it is the concept in itself" (ibid.).

The living organism itself displays its concept, the plan of its life and structure, precisely in its vital processes; the concept, as it were, comes to itself in the individual and as the individual. Yet the concept is also independent of individual aberrations, for it is only the form of the species that it "concretizes" in individuals. Similarly, what appears in the species as such is nothing other than the concept of life itself – namely in the three moments of sensibility, irritability, and reproduction. And in Hegel's philosophy of nature, these moments are, for their part, nothing other than particular versions of the conceptual moments of universality, particularity, and singularity.

It is precisely this "conceptual" character of life which goes missing in the accounts developed by the scientists and philosophers of nature of Hegel's day, who conceive the aforementioned three forms as forces and propose laws to describe their quantitative relations. Hegel is here intervening in a debate that had been raging since the middle of the eighteenth century – ever since the Göttingen-based thinker Johann Georg Zimmermann and his teacher, the great Swiss physician and poet Albrecht von Haller, had proposed sensibility and irritability as the fundamental capacities and forces of the organism.

In the years that followed, a controversy developed over whether or not Haller had understood these forces to be mechanical. Schelling was of the view that Haller had understood irritability as "a principle of life that is inexplicable in terms of mechanical concepts."⁴⁷ It was likewise controversial where further developments of the excitability theory – particularly the work of the Scottish physician John Brown – stood on this point. In his system of medicine (*Elementa medicinae*, 1780, translated into German in 1795), Brown defines the life of an organism through its capacity to react to stimuli. He calls this capacity excitability (*incitabilitas*). An organism is healthy when stimuli and excitability stand in the appropriate relation to one another; conversely, it is sick to the extent that there is disproportionately more of the one or the other. The doctor's task is therefore either to extract stimuli from the body, or to administer invigorating and stimulating agents.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Cf Schelling, *Von der Weltseele*, 557.

⁴⁸ Cf Wiesing, *Kunst oder Wissenschaft?*, 68.

Brown's theory (later known as "Brownianism") was extraordinarily influential in medicine, and its philosophical interpretation was proportionately controversial. Schelling advanced a mechanical interpretation in his 1798 *Von der Weltseele* (*On the World-Soul*, 557 f.). One year later, however, in his *Erster Entwurf*,⁴⁹ Schelling praises Brown for overcoming mechanism on the grounds that Brown's principle of excitability contains the "insight" that "life consists in neither an absolute passivity nor an absolute activity, that life is the product of a higher potency than the merely chemical, though not a supersensible [one]" (*Erster Entwurf*, 91/69). Schelling's reading was heavily influenced by his friend, the physician Andreas Röschlaub, who interpreted Brownian excitability against the background of Fichte's synthesis of spontaneity and self-limitation, or self-restraint.⁵⁰

A less philosophical theory, but one which also exercised a great influence on the scientists and natural philosophers of the day, was Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer's theory of organic forces. In a well-known talk the title of which translates as *On the Relations of Organic Forces among Themselves in the Order of Their Various Organizations and the Laws and Consequences of These Relations* (1793), Kielmeyer distinguishes five fundamental forces – sensibility, irritability, the power to reproduce, the power to secrete, and the power of propulsion – of which the first three are supposed to be the most important. These three manifest an interdependence such that, whether within a single organ or between organs, or even between individuals and species, an increase in one is connected with a decrease in the others. Schelling's early philosophy of nature adopts this system of forces as well as their quantitative interdependence and seeks to justify them from universal principles. And though he begins to distance himself from Kielmeyer's position in 1803, Schelling's followers, Hoffmann and Kilian, continue Kielmeyer's program in the field of medicine.⁵¹

In his own philosophy of nature, Hegel himself develops the three "systems" of sensibility, irritability, and reproduction as well as their "embodiments" in an entirely holistic and "syllogistic" manner. The organs and bodily functions participate in all three systems, while

⁴⁹ In keeping with our practice throughout the book, parenthetical citations of Schelling's *Erster Entwurf* provide the page numbers of both the German and English editions cited in the bibliography, in that order, separated by a slash.

⁵⁰ Cf Tsoyopoulos, *Andreas Röschlaub*, 200 f.; Wiesing, *Kunst oder Wissenschaft?*, 206 f.

⁵¹ Cf the editors' remarks to the *PhG* (1988), 587 ff.

the systems themselves overlap, bleed into one another, supplement one another, etc. Hegel nevertheless believes he can recognize the order of the concept here. Sensibility relates to irritability and to reproduction as universality relates to particularity and to singularity. Sensibility is “simple, universal being-within-self” – the subjective feeling of the living creature in its sensations. Irritability is particularization, i.e. the dissociation of the living creature from other things: “sensitivity to external stimuli and the response from within the affected subject back outward.” Reproduction is the unity of these two moments as the “return to itself from the relations of externality and thereby the generation and positing of itself as an *individual*” (*EPW* (1830), §353).

Even the “reality” of these processes within bodily “systems” – the “nervous, circulatory, and digestive systems” – is likewise “syllogistic”: though every bodily system is primarily the embodiment of one of these three concepts, each also contains within itself the moments of universality, particularity, and singularity and hence also contains the other two processes. Within the nervous system, for example, the brain and the efferent nerves constitute the “moment of irritability,” while the “sympathetic nerves and the ganglions” represent reproduction, and so on (cf *EPW* (1830), §354). As we would say today, the body is to be explained as a whole but under various aspects, in accordance with various functions, etc.

As Hegel understands it, this way of considering things amounts to unpacking concepts both in accordance with their general conceptual structure and in relation to their particularity on a determinate level of the whole system – here, the level of organic nature. Since he is therefore concerned with general features of the conceptual structure of reality as a whole, these three systems also have an important role to play in Hegel’s logic and philosophy of spirit. In the *Science of Logic* they represent the moments of the idea of life (*WL* II, 478 f./683 f.) and in the later philosophy of objective spirit, they correspond to the state-organism’s three constitutional powers.⁵² Such references can already be found in the *System of Ethical Life*⁵³ and the 1805–1806 Jena *Philosophy of Spirit*.⁵⁴

⁵² Cf GPR-Wa, 182 and GPR, §271, remark. Cf Siep, “Hegels Theorie der Gewaltenteilung.”

⁵³ For example AA 5, 340–346, translated by Harris and Knox in *System of Ethical Life*, 157–163.

⁵⁴ The 1805–1806 Jena *Philosophy of Spirit* (henceforth *JSE* III) is contained in AA 8, but only portions of it have been translated. The passages I have in mind here can be found at 151 (not translated) and 265/161 f.

What Hegel is really concerned to demonstrate in this chapter of the *Phenomenology*, however, is that the scientists and natural philosophers of his day have been blind to both the “spiritual” character of these processes and their correlation to particular bodily organs. If one attempts to understand these three systems or processes as separate powers and searches for quantitative laws governing their interaction, one will land oneself in a nest of contradictions. And these contradictions correspond to those Hegel identified in the chapter on force and the understanding: different modes of inner and outer simply cannot be clearly distinguished. Are these powers to be understood as mechanical, “vitalistic,” or “spiritual”? Does their genuine reality lie in their quantitative relations or in the systems or functions of sensibility, irritability, and reproduction? And do these systems themselves constitute the essence of their physical bearer or are they just some of its properties? Can the three functions really be clearly separated in the first place, much less correlated to separate bodily organs? On account of the distinction between laws, forces, and embodiments, “the essence which originally existed and was posited as concept retains the mode of sense perception” (*PhG*, 215/170).

Both rational and empirical (“observing”) natural science is characterized, for Hegel, by the attempt to discover a lawful, quantitative relationship between an “inner” and an “outer.” Nor is this attempt limited to medicine and the life sciences. It also dominates the scientific approach both to the relation of the organic to the inorganic and even to the laws of inorganic materials as such. In contemporary terms, this attempt pervades both organic and inorganic chemistry.

As Hegel sees it, all these attempts result in the same contradictions. The “inner” loses all determinacy when one separates it from the outer – it becomes a mere power or relation, viz. a “number.” Similarly, to the extent that one conceives the outer as purely material and quantitative, it ceases to be the outer of an inner – that is, it ceases to be the inner’s outer differentiation or “articulation” of *itself*. Moreover, the laws pertaining to these relationships cannot be “rational” because their “sides” – i.e. the concepts that stand for the things between which a regular correlation is to be asserted – do not stand in a “logical” relation to one another: they cannot be derived from one another, i.e. “defined” within a “network” of concepts. In the remainder of the section on the “Observation of Nature,” Hegel devotes particular attention to Heinrich Steffens’s *Beyträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde* (*Contributions to the Inner Natural History of the Earth*). Steffens adopts the

relation between cohesion and specific density as his guiding thread for a systematization of metals.⁵⁵ But in executing this project, Steffens entangles himself in the same contradictions between his principles (specific gravity, cohesion), the quantitative relations in question, and the relevant sensible properties which also plagued the aforementioned theories of organic nature.

Hegel's critical discussion of Steffens likewise incorporates or anticipates features of his own philosophy of nature. Attempts to construct a "natural history" in the style of Steffens does lead to an "inference" in which the (organic and inorganic) material processes constitute the universal, the species of living organism and inorganic materials (e.g. different types of metal) are the particular, and the singular is constituted by the earth as a whole. And precisely this idea that the earth is a "universal individual" out of which and in terms of which the particularities of its materials, constituent parts, and processes are to be developed is likewise central to Hegelian natural philosophy.

Of course, the form of this inference is also rational. But Hegel sees in the theories of his contemporaries the mere appearance of a true inference of reason (a syllogism). The relation between the universal (the "genus" of movable and vital matter) and the particular (species thereof) is not properly rational, but only quantitative – i.e. it is a relation marked only by sensible differentiations ("shape, color, etc."). The fact that such relationships and properties actually get realized is wholly contingent upon the fact that the earth contains such species, viz. such materials and forms:

The genus may carve itself up into species according to the *general determinateness* of number, or it may ground its divisions on particular features of its existence, e.g. shape, color, etc.; but still it suffers violence even in this peaceful enterprise from the side of the universal individual, *the earth*.

(PhG, 224/178)

A genuinely rational inference from concepts that reciprocally entail one another is nowhere to be seen here. The version of reason that these sciences discover and uncover in things is, therefore, "reason only *as life as such*, which, however, in its differentiating process, does not actually possess any rational ordering or arrangement of parts and which does not make up a system of forms [*Gestalten*] grounded in itself" (224/178).

⁵⁵ Cf the editors' note to PhG (1988), 589.

Thus, the form of observing reason on display in the sciences ultimately has two concepts of reason: that of life, which articulates itself “unsystematically” in species and individuals but which does not comprehend itself, and that of self-consciousness, which is for itself simultaneously universal and singular.

B. THE OBSERVATION OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN ITS PURITY AND IN ITS RELATIONSHIP TO EXTERNAL REALITY; LOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL LAWS. Modern natural science likewise regards self-consciousness as an object to be observed. It starts from the assumption that self-consciousness, too, is governed by discoverable rational laws. Section b of part A of the chapter on reason is devoted to critically assessing such contemporary, empirical accounts of logic and psychology.

Laws that can only be observed in thought would seem, for that reason, to have only formal, not ontological, significance; they are without “reality” and “lack truth” (*PhG*, 227/180). Laws of thought are not ontological rules, nor are they criteria for the truth of statements about objects. On the other hand, the form of reason – its lawfulness – is what is genuinely real. Thus, the laws of reason are likewise the forms “of things.” Reason contains – as the soul did for Aristotle – the forms of everything that can become an object for it. To that extent, it not only has its own content – the laws of thought – but “all contents” since it contains the form of all possible contents.

There is also a further respect in which the laws of thought are not mere form, but also content. They are, after all, put forward as “facts” about thought by observing reason. To that extent, they have the “determination of something *found*, something given, i.e. a content that *merely exists*” (228/181). This, however, contradicts the unity of thought which is at once the “unity of self-consciousness” (*ibid.*). The laws of thought cannot be a “set of separate necessities.” And so it is incumbent on us to show that the unity of thought is only possible in the form of precisely *these* laws.

Yet any such proof must itself employ the laws of thought. All that one can do, therefore, is to explain these laws – viz. the concepts underlying them – in terms of one another and show that thought constitutes a “self-differentiating” system of concepts, an unfolding of their logical-semantic relations. In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel seeks to show that even the classical basic laws of thought – the principle of contradiction, of identity, etc. – are not severally valid unto themselves, but only within a system. They are “singular vanishing moments, whose

truth is only the whole of the thinking movement which is knowledge itself" (ibid.). Within this movement, even contradictory propositions ("being is nothing," "essence is appearance," etc.) can be true in the sense that they belong to a true system of propositions.⁵⁶

The sort of observational, "descriptive" logic that Hegel discusses here cannot deliver on its promises. The ontological primacy of rational lawfulness, the mere formality of logical laws, and the empirical mode of their discovery jointly constitute an inconsistent triad. Hegel's critique of psychological, "observational" logic is thus in agreement with Husserl's and Frege's later critiques of psychologism, however much their respective modes of argument may differ.⁵⁷

The contradictions in which this concept of reason becomes entangled may be traced back to the concepts of form and content. This pair of concepts succeeds the relation of inner and outer in the observation of organic nature and Hegel accordingly treats both pairs of concepts within the rubric of his "Logic of Essence."⁵⁸ Hegel wants to show that a concept of this sort presupposes, in its very meaning, its respective conceptual counterpart and is consequently only "definable" through the explication of this relation. To adopt Hegel's metaphor from the logic of essence, they "shine in one another." And this is precisely what observing reason is not yet clear about. For it attempts to "hold" form and content "apart from one another" and thereby dooms itself to failure, in Hegel's view.

Once the object conception of psychological observation is corrected to take account of the moment of self-differentiation, the "negative unity of thought" (*PhG*, 228/181), we are then confronted with the psychology of the "acting reality of consciousness" (*PhG*, 229/182). Its themes are the laws governing the interaction of individual consciousness and its "milieu" of "pregiven [*vorgefunden*] habits, customs, and ways of thinking" (ibid.). It is concerned with the laws of "socialization" ("coming to conform" – *gemäß zu werden*) as well as with the laws of practical modification ("making to conform" – *gemäß zu machen*). In the former case, one just adapts to the reality one finds oneself confronted with, becoming conscious of it in one's own "conforming" behavior. In the latter case, one "modifies" reality either privately

⁵⁶ Cf Wolff, *Der Begriff des Widerspruchs*.

⁵⁷ Cf Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Volume 1, §§21–24; Frege, *The Thought*, cf 355–62 in his *Kleine Schriften*, translated by Peter Geach and R. H. Stoothoff in *The Frege Reader*, 338–345.

⁵⁸ Book II of the *Science of Logic*.

(as a “criminal”) or “for all” individuals as a revolutionary, “setting another world, another right, another law and ethical life in place of the present ones” (ibid.). Hegel engages with these practical attempts to modify reality in more detail in the second and third parts of the chapter on reason. Here he is primarily concerned with the one-sided and unsustainable separation of the individual from its surroundings.

Even when it comes to an individual psyche, observational psychology is blind to any rational, systematic interrelation between various affects and capacities, equally blind between different sorts of individual character and disposition. Yet individuals have their own “inner system” of capacities and “motions” (i.e. emotions) just as they do in their “spiritual” interrelation with other individuals in a culture or epoch. Their differences and commonalities are not as arbitrary as those of “insects or moss,” and so on.

The dominant conception of the laws governing the relationships between individuals and their social surroundings in observational psychology rests on a simplified notion of causal relations. They are concerned with “effect” and “influence.” The individual is, however, capable of taking a stance on these influences, of “letting them exert an influence on him” or “setting himself in opposition to them” (231/183). The dependency that obtains between individual and social environment is not a mechanical, causal relation. Now admittedly, in the absence of the prevailing social “circumstances,” “the individual would not have become what he is” (231/184). For individuals unavoidably stand in reciprocally determinative relations of mutual “recognition.” Their expectations, interpretations, reactions, etc. do not change in isolation from one another, but in reciprocal dependence. And this results in a cultural pattern above and beyond any individual consciousness: “Everyone, who finds himself in this state of the world, is this universal substance” (231/184).

This likewise means that there can be no such “states of the world” in the absence of individuals with their “perspectives.” Individuals do not simply reflect their cultural surroundings.⁵⁹ The world of the individual is rather determined by his or her conscious behavior, interpretations, and appropriations (or even “conversions”). On account of the “freedom” of this appropriation, the “world of the individual can only be comprehended in terms of the individual itself” (232/184). In view

⁵⁹ Recall here the lovely image of the “double gallery of pictures” (231/184).

of this free selection and appropriation of cultural influences, one cannot properly speak of any “psychological necessity” in the sense of influence according to causal laws.

Just as it is a mistake to conceive the “world” of the individual as something complete and ready-made standing over against it, it is similarly misguided to separate the individual from the world as a featureless mirror or its sovereign creator. “Individuality is what *its* world as *its own* is” (232/185). The individual becomes itself by critically working through the customs and habits that confront it. It is the “unity of the *being* that *confronts it* and the being it has *made*” – a formulation which very closely prefigures Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein* as simultaneously “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) and “projection” or “self-design” (*Entwurf*).⁶⁰ If, however, one understands the world as “present in itself” and the individual as “existing for itself” like a monad, then there can be no “law of their relationship for one another” (*PhG*, 232/185).

Although no outright contradictions seem to arise in this case, the goal of the relevant kind of knowledge simply has not been attained. Moreover, Hegel also proclaims the failure of the attempt to incorporate into the conception of reality as lawful rationality the moment of individuality as the activity and “negativity” of modifying behavior and self-correction. The resulting individuality as the mediation between “making” and what is already on hand – the “for itself” and the in-itself – is the new object of our phenomenological examination, which now turns to the relation of the soul (or psyche) to the body.

C. OBSERVATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS TO ITS IMMEDIATE REALITY; PHYSIOGNOMY AND PHRENOLOGY. The object that occupied the previous experience of observing reason consisted of empirical theories concerning the laws of the “being-in-itself” or immediate “pregiven” (*vorgefundenen*) reality of the individual psyche. And in the present section, as before, Hegel goes out of his way to give an exhaustive discussion – albeit one that is often sharply polemical – of contemporary medical and psychological theories which are today considered “obsolete.” At the time, however, Lavater’s *Physiognomy* and Gall’s “cranioscopy” (later renamed “phrenology” by one of his followers) attracted the close attention of intellectuals from Goethe to Lichtenberg.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Cf *Being and Time*, §§29 f. and 38.

⁶¹ Cf the editors’ remarks in *PhG* (1988), 592.

Hegel distinguishes these theories from “other false arts and worthless studies” such as “astrology, chiromancy [i.e. palm-reading], and similar sciences” (*PhG*, 236/188) but still hesitates to call them “sciences” (240/191). While these “arts” merely draw connections between external features (e.g. between astral constellations or lines in one’s palm and one’s impending fate), physiognomy starts from the assumption that human character and human facial features are “related to one another through their concept” (236/188). Indeed, Lavater believed he could discover lawful relations between kinds of facial features and character traits, just as Gall believed he could similarly relate character to typical forms of the cranium.

For both “sciences,” the determinative reality of the individual is no longer considered to be its environment but its very “bodiliness.” The body is now “the unity of unshaped and shaped existence [*Sein*] and is the individual’s reality permeated by his being-for-self” (234/186). It is at once the “originality” of the individual – his “non-produced Having” – and the “expression of himself which he himself *produces*” (233/185 f.). In the Anthropology of his *Encyclopedia*, Hegel later demonstrates the extent to which even the normal activities involved in movement and perception are results of a psychic “self-cultivation.”⁶² Surely, if the body functions as an instrument or external expression (“sign”) of the soul, it must likewise inflect individual skills and, to some extent, even character traits and “traces of individual destiny.”

But physiognomy and phrenology entangle us yet again in contradictions involving the categories of “inner” and “outer.” Like the earlier forms of empirical psychology discussed above, they are blind to the essence of the individual’s freedom and its “dialectical” interaction with “outer” things such as its own body, its actions, and its surroundings. The individual is not governed deterministically; it creates its character in negotiating the prevailing conditions it encounters and it can influence its character through its free decisions. Hegel approvingly cites Lichtenberg’s dictum, “Even supposing that physiognomy really has captured a human being, it would only take a courageous decision to make oneself unintelligible again for millennia” (239/191).

The “essential thought” that underlies physiognomy is, however, a “partial truth” according to Hegel. The thesis that an individual’s true character expresses itself not in his words and deeds but in his features

⁶² Cf Siep, “Leiblichkeit,” 199 f.

contains the genuine insight that the individual is not “exhaust[ed]” in his deeds but is “reflected out of this doing and into himself” (240/191). This thought also plays a role in Hegel’s theory of action in his *Philosophy of Right* (cf *GPR*, §§5–7). Hegel there argues against separating intention or conviction from outer deed, but also against a “behaviorism” which would deny freedom of reflection to all individual action. This philosophy of action is fundamental to his moral philosophy, which opposes both an ethics based on conviction and pure consequentialism concerning actions’ outcomes. An individual acts freely and ethically when she manages to find expression for her own reflected “version” of shared, rationally intelligible ethical principles.

Hegel’s discussion of physiognomy incorporates an astonishing amount of these reflections from the philosophy of action. In response to the physiognomist’s attempt to separate human beings’ true intentions and dispositions from their conscious expressions and actions, Hegel raises the following objection: “The *true being* of man is rather *his deed* . . . it is murder, theft, or beneficence, bravery, etc. and what *it* is can be *said* of it” (*PhG*, 242 f./193 f.). The deed is the determination and revelation of the individual human being; the mere intentions or dispositions inferred from deeds are only “opinions” – opinions belonging either to the observer, or to the agent herself, since Hegel takes intentions to be opinions about one’s own action (243/194). Similarly, it is only possible to have “opinions” about bodily indications of character, while one can have intersubjective “knowledge” of deeds. Deeds can, however, “invert” or “distort” intentions either on account of the agent’s own ineptness, or through the misunderstandings of others, infelicitous circumstances, etc. The individual need not, therefore, let the deed be wholly ascribed to her, for she can at least distance herself from those effects of the action which were outside her control. Hegel would later come to address such problems in his *Philosophy of Right*.⁶³

To this extent, we must qualify the apparent identification of the agent’s “true” intention with her deed. All that matters here is that the true “objectivity” of self-consciousness is to be found in the works and deeds in which its body participates in an “objectifiable” way – and not in an ambiguous bodily “clue” about the character hidden in the action.

⁶³ Cf Quante, *Hegel’s Concept of Action*.

This does not, of course, solve all problems in the philosophy of action. If one understands action as a “causal interaction” of inner and outer, then one must accept – as contemporary philosophers of action do – that “for spiritual individuality to have an effect on the body it must, qua cause, be itself corporeal” (*PhG*, 245/195).⁶⁴ Hegel discusses a series of theses about the organ(s) relevant to the source of mental action⁶⁵ – brain, spinal cord, nervous system, etc. The brain and nervous system appear to spirit as a “system of movements, in which it [sc. spirit] differentiates itself into moments yet remains free in this differentiation” (246/197) – a system whose primary function is to enable bodily effects. The brain is a “center” (*Mitte*) of “bodily organization” which seems to participate both in spiritual self-differentiation and in the fixed “being” of the body. The shape of the brain is therefore the most probable place to look for a lawful relationship between “inner” and “outer,” character and body.

Hegel interprets Franz Joseph Gall’s “cranioscopy” (or “phrenology”) to be just such an attempt.⁶⁶ From a contemporary perspective, Gall’s account is a mixture of speculative theories, some of which are naive while others evince great foresight.⁶⁷ For example, Gall’s hypothesis that different human capacities have “their seat in different and independent parts of the brain” is, from the perspective of contemporary neuroscience, by no means absurd.⁶⁸ It is rather Gall’s further assumption that the growth of parts of the brain affects the form of the surrounding cranial bones that leads him to his sometimes outlandish attempts to infer mental capacities and character traits from the form of the skull. Hegel points to a number of the theory’s explanatory deficiencies (relying in part on the work of other contemporary critics). For example, he notes that it is unclear how the mechanical interaction of brain and skull is to be combined with the organic process of growth on both “sides.”

⁶⁴ MacIntyre, “Hegel on Faces and Skulls,” discusses Hegel’s relation to contemporary causal accounts of action. He argues that, for Hegel, only subordinate aspects of an action are susceptible to explanation in terms of causal laws, because actions are essentially unrepeatable since they are characterized by reference to a unique situation and an intended goal specific to it.

⁶⁵ As our discussion above already suggests, “mental action,” for Hegel, does not signify something exclusively “inner.” Hegel is, as we would put it today, an “externalist” about the mental. We have therefore persisted in using the translation “spirit” in referring to what we might otherwise term “mental” causation.

⁶⁶ Cf the editors’ notes in *PhG* (1988), 593 and 595.

⁶⁷ Cf Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind*, 14–21. ⁶⁸ Cf Gall, “Prodromus,” 318.

The assumptions about lawful relationships between cranial forms (and, accordingly, the size of certain brain regions) and subjective states (feelings, inclinations, deeds) strike Hegel as particularly untenable. First, because it is impossible to observe or give an intelligible explanation of any correlation between quantitative material sizes and the “qualia” of mental states. The “shades” and “gradations” of feelings and types of character – which are, in any case, only accessible through “more refined psychology and knowledge of human nature” (*PhG*, 253/202) – their “holistic” interrelation to one another and their reflexive character (feelings are always simultaneously feelings of oneself) undermine any isolated mapping to parts of the brain or the skull. Second, predictive knowledge based on laws is also impossible on account of the “freedom of the individual” (255/204). For the individual’s decisions enable him “to be something other than he is in his original internal nature, and still more than he is as a skull-bone” (*ibid.*). Moreover, to speak of “capacities” – today we would say “dispositions” – rather than genuine determinations is a cheap “excuse,” for it is impossible to demonstrate the presence of capacities that do not lead to actions (their presence or absence is a matter of mere “opinion”).⁶⁹

Hegel’s flurry of ironic and sarcastic remarks thus turns out to contain a series of arguments that continue today to be discussed in debates in the philosophy of mind. And the same holds for his thesis that it is impossible to establish any strict laws concerning psychophysical interactions.⁷⁰

Hegel does acknowledge Gall’s attempts to defend himself against accusations of materialism.⁷¹ But he takes Gall’s defense to be inadequate. Even if “spirit” or “the mind” is supposed “to be something more and something other than these bones” (*PhG*, 259/208), it is still supposed to exist in the manner of a “singular reality,” i.e. the manner of a “thing.”

Spirit, or mind, is accordingly placed on the same ontological level as other things. And to that extent, Hegel’s claim that the truth of phrenology lies in the principle “that *the being of spirit is a bone*” (260/208) is not merely polemical. Hegel interprets this principle as an infinite judgment which sublates itself. In Hegel’s logic, an infinite judgment

⁶⁹ In “Hegel on Faces and Skulls,” 214, MacIntyre maintains that “Hegel here sides with Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* in his enmity to the notion of dispositions as causes of the actions that manifest them.”

⁷⁰ Cf Davidson, “Mental Events,” 216 f.

⁷¹ Cf the editors’ notes in *PhG* (1988), 596.

is one that registers the “complete incongruousness [*Unangemessenheit*] of the subject and the predicate” – on the model of “spirit is not an elephant” (*EPW* (1830), §173). The positive infinite judgment “spirit is a bone” – or, more generally, “the ontological status of spirit is that of a thing” – involves a contradiction insofar as it identifies things that belong to mutually exclusive categories. Hence, logically speaking, it is not a *true* judgment. But if one views this contradiction in the object conception of reason as a result of its experiential process, then it takes on a different significance. It “supplements” the result of the experience of self-consciousness (*PhG*, 260/209). This result was the consciousness of the “unity of the I and Being” qua “category,” i.e. as the constitution of reality through the concepts and laws of reason (260/209).

The experiential history of observing reason has now brought to consciousness this “unconscious certainty” (260/209) of the rationality of things. Not only are things rational, reason itself is thing-like (bodily present and locatable, with all its subjective activities correlated with bodily organs). That reason is not merely a form or idea, but itself a “being” or objective reality, is, for Hegel, entailed by its very concept. But to understand this reality as “*immediate, sensible*” (262/210) is to distort the concept of reason. For, as the chapter on self-consciousness demonstrated, reason is self-consciousness, i.e. self-differentiation and the negation of things insofar as it “works [them] up” in thought and practice. The idea that reason has immediate, sensible, material existence thus amounts to a self-sublating negative judgment.

This idea does, however, contain the truth that reason “is immediately divided into itself and its opposite, an opposition which is, for that very reason, just as immediately sublated” (262/210). The unity of reason with reality simultaneously sublates this opposition as well as the supposition that construes the spiritual, or mental (*das Geistige*) as a thing. Yet this unity does not consist in spirit understanding itself as a material thing. We are rather driven to the opposite extreme: things no longer count as “rational at base,” i.e. as constituted by and explicable through concepts and laws. Rather, they are yet again counted as “negative.” Like the original self-consciousness of Chapter IV, reason seeks to generate its unity with things by negating their immediate shape and form. Rational self-consciousness is no longer concerned with explaining observable things but rather with itself: it “no longer aims to *find* itself *immediately*, but instead to produce itself through its own activity” (261/209). In order to do so, however, the “surface” (263/211) of things must first be altered so that their rational essence

can be brought to light. The shapes which this object conception seeks to confirm are, accordingly, shapes of practical reason.

B. The realization of rational self-consciousness through itself

This chapter opens with a multi-dimensional introduction and then divides itself into three subsections: (a) "Pleasure and Necessity," (b) "The Law of the Heart, and the Insanity of Self-Conceit," and (c) "Virtue and the Way of the World." The chapter is primarily concerned with literary and political *Weltanschauungen* or "worldviews" that prevailed during the last third of the eighteenth century (the late Enlightenment, sentimentalism, *Sturm und Drang*, etc.). But first, Hegel indicates the trajectory and the target of rational self-consciousness's self-realization in the social world. The target is a form of ethical life in which the individual "realizes" itself in the customs of a people – one in which the individual finds its own meaning in a culture that it can grasp as a communal "work" or achievement.

One of the difficulties in understanding this chapter is that, for Hegel, such a form of ethical life already existed in the ancient Greek world. Yet the Greeks did not do justice to the individual's self-consciousness of the value of his or her own singularity nor to the legitimacy of his or her critical examination of common ethical norms. This unity was consequently bound to get "lost" in the development of Greek philosophy and Christianity. Modern self-consciousness understands the "universality" of reason only as the practical reason of every individual. It has "*not yet attained this happy state of being ethical substance, the spirit of a people*" (267/215).

In contrast to his later philosophy of objective spirit and its history, Hegel's present phenomenological treatise on practical reason does not trace out the world-historical process of "division" that this form of ethical life undergoes. Instead, he severs modern consciousness from its ancient ancestry, in a certain sense, and views attempts to establish a rational community constituted out of the subject itself as the "beginning of its ethical world-experience" (268/215). The shapes of self-consciousness that concern us here are involved neither in an "opposition" to that "lost ethical life" nor in the "search" for it. It is only through the lens of the philosophical "concept" that these shapes appear as failed precursors of the unity of modern subjectivity and the classical ethical life of the *polis*.

The chapter is supposed to recapitulate the development of self-consciousness in Chapter IV, according to Hegel, but on the higher

level of reason. However, Hegel only indicates in general outline how individual self-consciousness, which seeks to realize itself “in another,” gets elevated to “universal reason.” Reason here is at once the “real substance” of the customs and norms of a “people’s spirit” and the “unification” of individual self-consciousnesses.

Hegel’s term for the “concept” of this unity of reason’s being-in-itself and its being-for-itself is *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*) or rather the “realm of ethical life.” But this is itself an anticipatory interpolation on the part of the philosopher. For the shapes of consciousness attained in the “movement of the examination,” by contrast, this remains an “inner spirit” that consciousness is not yet clear with itself about. Consciousness first runs through a developmental series of one-sided interpretations of this unity. It either views its own individual reason as the source of all rational insights into the ethical order, or it abstracts reason’s being-in-itself up to an “intellectual law,” a *lex naturalis* (from the Stoic or Scholastic traditions), or a Kantian moral law. From the philosopher’s anticipatory perspective, the “perfected reality” of the concept of “self-conscious reason’s actualization in the independence of the other” – i.e. in the “free thinghood of another” – is the “life of a people” (*PhG*, 264/212).

In the life of a people, singular and universal reason reciprocally bring each other forth, so to speak. The life, or the spirit, of a people is, on the one hand, the work and deed of all: “this universal” “is their deed as individuals or the work that they have produced” (265/213). And conversely, individuals’ consciousnesses are shaped by the customs and laws of their people. They think and act on the basis of communal standards and “patterns.” These standards are absorbed through a process of learning in the course of which individuals first become themselves. After that, they are in a position to support and defend this communal life. Hegel selects the stark term “sacrifice” as his label for this process: “They are conscious of being these individual, self-standing beings through the sacrifice of their particularity and by having this universal substance as their soul and essence” (265/212 f.).⁷²

Interpreters and critics of Hegel have all too often magnified this latter aspect at the expense of the former. But Hegel is precisely concerned with the unity of both. Reason is substance in the Spinozistic

⁷² But he adds on the same page, “There is nothing here which would not be reciprocal.” Indeed, in the Jena manuscript of the *Philosophy of Spirit* of 1805–1806, he speaks of a self-sacrifice of the universal substance (AA 8, 255).

and Aristotelian sense: it is “fluid, universal substance,” for individual consciousness it is an “unchangeable, simple thinghood,” but it simultaneously “lives” in individuals as “completely self-subsistent beings, just as light bursts asunder into stars as innumerable self-luminous points” (265/212). As such “points,” individuals, or Aristotelian singular substances, are “in their absolute being-for-self . . . [explicitly] *for themselves*” (ibid.).

Of course, Hegel does not understand the “spirits” of various “peoples” biologically, much less racially. Indeed, he regards them as particular articulations of very comprehensive cultural and historical domains. In the *Philosophy of Right*, the only text in which Hegel himself published an outline of his philosophy of history, he speaks of the Oriental, Greek, Roman, and Christian-Germanic “empires” – that is, he addresses large epochs of world history shaped by comprehensive cultural, religious, and moral-legal institutions and modes of thought. The subjects of world history are, admittedly, peoples distinguished by their own legal governments, but these are themselves only individuals within a common culture.

Yet there is an obvious problem with such an “organic” unity of individual and spirit of the people in which each is “caused” by the other and, as Hegel explains in the *Philosophy of Right*, each has the other “as its end” (recall here the Kantian concept of the organic). The problem, of course, is to determine the extent to which the individual can influence “the people” on the basis of his or her own convictions – i.e. the extent to which an individual is capable of altering a people’s customs and institutions. And we are not only talking about particular individual “rulers,” but about each “free self-consciousness.” Hegel addresses this problem in the next series of steps, again on the basis of one-sided, actual historical interpretations of “practical” (i.e. moral, legal, but also social) reason.

Hegel does not provide a full systematic solution to the problem in the *Phenomenology* itself. Such a solution can, to a certain extent, be extracted from the 1805–1806 *Realphilosophie* (JSE III) or the later *Philosophy of Right* (GPR) – though it is controversial whether these accounts represent the same stage in the development of Hegel’s thought.

Hegel opens this chapter of the *Phenomenology* by explaining the unity of the individual and the spirit of a people in terms of the satisfaction of needs accomplished through the distribution of labor: “The *labor* of the individual for his own needs is just as much a satisfaction of the needs of others as of his own, and the satisfaction of his own needs he obtains only through the labor of others” (265/213).

Later, in his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel calls the satisfaction of needs organized through exchange and the distribution of labor the “system of needs.” For Hegel, however, this requires no planning of production or distribution on the part of the state – in contrast to Fichte’s 1796–1797 *Grundlage des Naturrechts* or his 1800 *Geschlossene Handelsstaat*. For if the state were to organize these things, then the individual would not be free to choose his or her occupation or to freely develop his or her capacities into “skills.” Hegel follows Adam Smith’s classical national economics and shares its belief in the “invisible hand” of market processes, which, though fueled by individuals pursuing their own interests, conduce to the good of all. It should be said, however, that this endorsement of the invisible hand is later amended in the *Philosophy of Right* by rather strong state interventions for social welfare.

This unconscious labor for the common good must now be supplemented by conscious “ethical” labor. The individual must participate in the communal “work” with intentional and public contributions – albeit, Hegel grants, in a manner mediated by an organization of professional classes. It is only in the consciousness that he is participating in the communal work of the life of a people that the individual frees himself from his self-serving interests and becomes “rational.” But reason here not only signifies that, instead of living “heteronomously” in accordance with one’s nature, one lives autonomously in accordance with universal laws. It also means that one “finds oneself again” in others and in the communal laws and customs:

The laws proclaim what each individual is and does; the individual knows them not only as his universal objective thinghood, but equally knows himself in them, or knows them as *particularized* in his own individuality and in that of his fellow citizens . . . In a free people, therefore, reason is in truth realized; it is a present living spirit in which the individual . . . has attained his *determination or essential character* [*Bestimmung*].

(PhG, 266/213 f.)

And this is, of course, just as unacceptable to the religious doctrine that there are two worlds as it is to Kant’s and Fichte’s ethics of “striving,” according to which the individual is supposed to seek its determination in an infinite approximation to the ideal. Hegel will take on each of these views again in the chapters on reason and spirit.

To Hegel’s mind, his age is still far from attaining the consciousness or the institutions of such a “free people.” He is, after all, writing this text during the collapse of Prussia at the hands of Napoleon’s army.

His representations of institutions, at this point in time, take their primary orientation from Napoleonic constitutions – particularly those from northern Italy.⁷³ Later, in his Heidelberg lectures on the philosophy of right, Hegel instead looks to the French constitution of 1815 (cf GPR-Wa, 190/240) and in his Berlin *Philosophy of Right* he criticizes Napoleon for having disregarded the cultural traditions of the peoples he “liberated” (e.g. in Spain) and for having forced abstractly rational constitutions upon them instead (cf GPR, §274, addition).

Here, at the outset of the chapter on reason, only Hegel’s general idea of ethical reason comes into view. A paradigm of ethical satisfaction in the life of a people is to be found in the ancients, and especially in the Greek *polis*. But individual, autonomous reflection had yet to develop in the Greek *polis*. Instead, a “felicitous” harmony prevailed, which was not yet “clouded” by a consciousness of the absolute value of individual freedom of opinion. Even the particularity of the various constitutions and moral systems was not yet measured against the general standards of a universal practical reason. The individual was only a “vanishing quantity” in the general spirit (*PhG*, 267/214).

Conversely, in the development of the spirit of the modern age – through the Reformation, religious wars, and the Enlightenment – “The individual has thereby placed herself in opposition to the laws and customs. These are regarded as mere ideas having no absolute essentiality, an abstract theory without any reality, while she as this particular I is her own living truth” (267/215). From this standpoint, the ancient harmony between individual and *polis* is a lost “felicity” which has yet to be regained. And in the context of the phenomenological development Hegel is recounting, it is only consistent that this “felicity” must first be attained through individual struggles. Observing reason failed in its attempts to find reason realized in pregiven reality and was consequently thrown back on a conception of reason as “inner essence.” Yet it did manage to understand reason as negativity, self-differentiation, and alteration of the pregiven through individual action. Thus, reason is now determined as “practical consciousness, which steps into its pregiven world with the aim . . . of becoming conscious of this unity of its own actuality with the objective essence” (268/215).

Hegel calls these attempts at “self-realization” “ethical world-experience.” Such experience is initiated by the individual’s search

⁷³ Cf Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat*, S. 236 f.

for happiness. (Hegel is here making a play on the literary trope of “going off to seek one’s fortune”.) The individual understands itself as something natural, which (naturally) satisfies its drives and needs and seeks to realize and “enjoy” itself as an individual in the shared world. Such a conception is completely blind to the constitutive significance of the “social” for individual self-consciousness.

Yet experience leads reason from individual self-realization to the form of consciousness in which one recognizes the common good in one’s own reason and is conscious of one’s obligation to realize that good. This is the object of the chapter’s second shape of consciousness (“The Law of the Heart”). The realization of the common good is precisely impossible through the self-realization of natural drives and can only be attained in the self-satisfaction of virtue’s readiness for self-sacrifice. Virtue’s attempt to improve the world gives rise to the experience that reality has its own rational laws and that the active individual must give way to them if she wants to attain her goals.

The opposition between the individual and the negative reality which she seeks to change is thus sublated, at least in a provisional manner. The “cultured” individual, now freed from her naturalness, no longer understands reality as “juxtaposed” to herself, but rather as a “medium for the expression” of universal individuality in the “classical” sense elaborated by someone like Goethe or Wilhelm von Humboldt. And that is the topic of the third section of the chapter on reason.

A. PLEASURE AND NECESSITY. The experience of practical reason recapitulates the experience of desire and the struggle for recognition, but on a higher level. The consciousness of the self-realizing individual “by behaving as a being-for-self, aims to see itself as another self-standing being” (*PhG*, 270/217). But now, the other, in whom and as whom consciousness seeks to see itself, is understood from the very outset to be self-standing. The rational individual is no longer just a self-conscious, living creature who regards the world solely from the perspective of satisfying its wishes, as desire was in the chapter on self-consciousness. The individual rather begins from the certainty that she is to “find herself again” as self-standing in a self-standing reality. She is no longer conscious of herself as pure desire, but instead as an embodied, individual agent.

In a certain sense, the section entitled “Pleasure and Necessity” builds on the “embodiment theories” articulated in the preceding sections about observing reason. Self-consciousness “has its object in

its own self, but as an object which is initially only *for self-consciousness* and does not as yet have being [*noch nicht seiend ist*]” (270/217). Even its own bodily existence is not yet an actual mode of “being” if it has not yet given itself social existence in the consciousness of others. And simply knowing or even following universal, rational laws is not sufficient for this purpose. Hegel alludes to Faust’s disillusionment with not only theoretical knowledge but also universal rules of morality – the “shadows of science, laws, and principles” (271/218).

Goethe’s *Faust* (part 1) provides the background for the “examination” of the section as a whole but,⁷⁴ as Jean Hyppolite has suggested, so does the entire tradition of hedonism.⁷⁵ The Faustian individual

therefore plunges into life and brings to fruition the pure individuality in which he appears. He does not so much make his happiness as straight-away take it and enjoy it . . . He takes hold of life much as a ripe fruit is plucked, which readily offers itself to the hand that takes it.

(*PhG*, 271/218)

The “rational” presupposition is precisely that reality is fitted to the individual and that the individual can realize himself in it. This reality is intersubjective and social, but is no longer a form of natural life. It is a world in which the unity of subjectivity and being (i.e. the “category”) has already taken determinate shape and in which individuals have self-standing and self-conscious status. “He thus attains to the enjoyment of pleasure, to the consciousness of his actualization in a consciousness which appears as self-standing, or to the vision of the unity of the two independent self-consciousnesses” (272/218).

Yet this success, this attainment of its goal, produces an experience that contradicts the “thesis” that was supposed to be confirmed. In the realization of its end, in this individual self-realization through pleasurable unification with the other, consciousness experiences itself not as an individual “but rather as the *unity* of itself and the other self-consciousness, hence as an individual that is only a moment, or a *universal*” (ibid.). Throughout the philosophical tradition, beginning with Plato’s *Philebus*, pleasure has repeatedly been understood as a dissolution of boundaries. But individuality consists precisely in its self-delimitation from others – the limitlessness of pleasure contradicts individuality just as much as merging with the other would. Indeed, in

⁷⁴ Falke suggests a closer connection to Max Klinger’s *Faust* novel, cf *Begriffne Geschichte*, 222.

⁷⁵ Hyppolite, *Genèse*, 272/282.

his Frankfurt fragments on love, Hegel had already interpreted shame as a “raging of love against individuality” (*TWA* I, 247/*Early Theological Writings*, 306).

This reversal of the intended self-realization arises not only from pleasurable unification, but also from the opposition of the social world to the “lawless” lovers – an opposition which Faust and Gretchen, as representatives of all couples who are dismissive of norms, must experience in the course of their “tragedy.” The self-affirmation which love promises is annulled not only through an emotional loss of independence but also through the discriminating and punishing power of society – “destroyed by the negative essence confronting it” (*PhG*, 272/219). The individual who seeks to realize himself in his pleasurable connection with another, free from universal rules and moral laws, comes to experience his failure when confronted with the powers of chance and with the order of law. This is clearly a reference to the tragedy of Faust’s lover, Gretchen – namely the chance murder of her brother Valentin and Gretchen’s punishment. Faustian consciousness “experiences the double meaning implicit in what it did, viz. when it *took hold of life* and possessed it; but in thus seizing life, it really laid hold of death” (*PhG*, 274/220). Of course, one could also hear a more general reference to the enduring dissolution of the self in pleasure in the text, as Hyppolite does: “In all enjoyment, our specificity [*singularité*] is abolished as specificity and we die; we consume ourselves at every instant.”⁷⁶

The reversal of the individual’s intention results not just from a physical failure, but also from the unintelligibility of the social order. This does not consist in a rational confirmation of the individual but in the “negative, uncomprehended power of universality, on which individuality is smashed to pieces” (*PhG*, 274/221). Here Hegel is clearly referring to the universality of the ethical norms and laws that bring down Faust and Gretchen.

For Gretchen, at least, this universality is, of course, not just some alien fate, but something she understands and, in principle, endorses. But her consciousness thereby becomes alien to itself in her very actions. This thought (or feeling) of self-alienation⁷⁷ contains the “truth” that the universality of ethical norms and laws which are opposed to immediate, individual consciousness in fact constitute “its

⁷⁶ Hyppolite, *Genèse*, 273/283.

⁷⁷ “[T]he thought of itself as a being that is absolutely *alien* to it” (*PhG*, 274/221).

own essence.” However, this does not yet lead to the individual’s overcoming herself – which occurs only in the section on virtue – but to a subjective certainty that spontaneity ought to be the universal law of action for everyone.

B. THE LAW OF THE HEART, AND THE INSANITY OF SELF-CONCEIT. It is much more difficult to associate a particular literary or philosophical position with the second section of part B. Some commentators have viewed it as a critical engagement with “eighteenth-century theories of natural right” – such as that of Thomas Paine, among others (cf *PhG* (1988), 598). But Hegel presents the “law” of the heart as fairly irrational and clouded by feeling, which can hardly be said of Paine or his fellow natural right theorists. The more probable reference is to Rousseau’s *cult du cœur* – i.e. to *Julie, or the New Héloïse* and to Rousseau’s autobiographical writings rather than his work on natural right. Yet what Hegel most likely has foremost in mind are certain themes from Schiller’s early plays and from Jacobi’s novel *Woldemar*. Jacobi’s novel, which exercised extraordinary influence during that “age of genius,” even more clearly occupies the focus of the next chapter and the morality section of the chapter on spirit. Or perhaps Hegel is thinking of Hölderlin’s novel fragment *Hyperion* and the failure of Hyperion and Alabanda in following the law of their hearts.⁷⁸

At any rate, this shape of “practical reason” no longer begins simply with the self-realization of the individual, but with the realization of a universal *in* individual self-consciousness, i.e. in the “law of the heart.” This law encounters opposition from reality in the form of the “necessity” of social relations hostile to the individual (the “violent order of the world”). For this necessity forbids all human beings from obeying the law of their hearts: “Individuality therefore directs its energies at getting rid of this necessity, which contradicts the law of the heart, and also the suffering caused by it” (*PhG*, 276/222).

The individual is no longer just concerned with his or her own realization, but with the “well-being of mankind.” However, she takes this well-being to consist in everyone’s being able to follow the law of his or her own heart – to live as he or she wants and feels, without conforming to universal rules and without, as Hegel puts it, “discipline” (*Zucht*) mediating between others’ customs and forms of life: “The realization of immediate, *undisciplined* nature is counted as a display of excellence and

⁷⁸ Alabanda cites the “divine law [*Recht*] of the heart” (Volume 2, Book 2, fifth letter from Hyperion to Bellarmin).

as productive of the welfare of humanity" (*PhG*, 276/222). By contrast, the existing divine and human orders, i.e. the ones "in power," are nothing but "illusion," since they are not supported by the "heart" and inner convictions.

As in the case of pleasure, the realization of this "truth-thesis" through action reveals its internal contradictions. The individuality of inner conviction and the universality of the law cannot be combined in the same deed. The very publicity of the action subjects it to different interpretations and interactions with other intentions and deeds. No individual intention can be sustained unmodified in a public deed, for it must give way to the prevailing order and to the intentions of others and thereby undergo some change.

Moreover, if spontaneous self-realization is supposed to contain a "law," then it too must assume the form of a "public order." But it will then be experienced by others as a suppression of their own spontaneity. The revolutionary who "expresses *his being-for-self* or *his pleasure* . . . in his deed" cannot conform his inner convictions to the views of others without self-alienation (278/224). Yet if he does not do so, then he forces his own "*particular* contents" on others, which means that those others see "the fulfillment not of the law of their hearts, but rather that of someone *else*" (278/224). They therefore resist and oppose the revolutionary and become, for him, just another part of oppressive reality.

The individual who does not seek his own private pleasure, but rather takes pleasure in improving the world, thus experiences just the reverse of what the previous shape of consciousness did. The "divine and human order" that oppresses humankind is not a "dead reality," but "animated by the consciousness of all as the law of every heart" (279/224 f.). But according to the individual's standards, even those following their own hearts participate in a common, and therefore oppressed, form of life. The opposition of individual laws of the heart represents itself as a form of common customs. (Here we again encounter Hegel's refutation of practical solipsism.) Any attempt to realize a form of reason which does not see the necessity of social life and a shared order is doomed to failure, for it leads to the sort of distortion of inner intentions and beliefs that Hegel describes as a breakdown and "madness." Through his own deed, the individual creates an "enduring and living order" in which he cannot recognize his own intentions, which consequently present themselves to him as part of the oppressive order. The individual "belongs to a doubly

antithetical essentiality”: the inner “absolute” law of his heart and the external reality of his deed, in which he realizes himself as a social being (279/225).

The “result of his experience” is the “inner inversion of himself” (279/225). In the course of being realized, his inner law becomes precisely what it had been opposed to (viz. the social order that oppresses others) and the alien pseudo-reality of the social order becomes his true essence – namely the social self-realization of individuals.

It is unclear whether Hegel has concrete positions in view in describing this reversal. In using the concept of “madness,” he may have in mind Karl Moor from Schiller’s play *The Robbers*, for it is Moor’s well-meaning denial of the oppressive order that ultimately destroys the “good guys” and leads him through a crisis verging on insanity to an insight into the divine moral order.⁷⁹ Additionally, the expression “self-conceit” comes to characterize the titular hero of Jacobi’s novel *Woldemar*. There, “self-conceit” means that someone places his own conviction against the prevailing orders without taking others’ opinions into account. Woldemar likewise falls into a crisis of alienation from himself and from his environment. Or perhaps Hegel is (also) thinking more generally of the character type that was so popular in the literature of *Sturm und Drang* and early Romanticism: the individualistic revolutionary who cannot manage to combine the authentic realization of his innermost convictions with his need for a shared, public life and who cannot endure this incompatibility.

One can also detect some “madness” in the way consciousness resists its own experience and holds fast to its starting point. It first manifests madness in trying to make other “evil” individuals responsible for the inversion of the public order and the inversion of its own intentions – blaming the “fanatical priests and gluttonous despots and their minions who compensate themselves for their own degradation by degrading and oppressing others, a perversion of the law of the heart and its happiness which has led to the nameless misery of deluded humanity” (*PhG*, 280 f./226). Hegel here engages in a polemic against the political critique of the priesthood, despite the fact that the chapter on unhappy consciousness itself implies a kind of religious critique of the clergy (cf above, pp. 105–107).

⁷⁹ According to Hyppolite, *Genèse*, 274–279/284–288, Hegel is referring to Karl Moor in Schiller’s “The Robbers.”

This political critique is just a form of self-deception; the inversion is necessarily entailed by this position and the incompatibilities it sees between the concepts of private and public, individual and universal – the revolutionary heart is “in all its aspects perverted and perverting [*verkehrte und verkehrende*]” (281/226). The individual wants to preserve itself in its purity and simultaneously gain public authority; it is its own end both as individual and as “non-individual,” universalizing itself through its deeds while declaiming this universality in its “heart.”

If all individuals adhere to their own private vision of the law of the heart, what results is a battle in which each individual seeks to realize his or her *own* law:

The universal that we have here is, then, only a universal resistance and struggle of all against one another, in which each claims validity for his own individuality, but at the same time does not succeed in his efforts, because each meets with the same resistance from the others, and is nullified by their reciprocal resistance. What seems to be public *order*, then, is this universal state of war, in which each wrests what he can for himself.

(*PhG*, 282/227)

The revolutionary liberation of the “heart” from its oppressors itself leads to a civil war, viz. a state of nature.

But Hegel is not here tracing out the familiar problematic from the philosophy of right. Rather, what emerges from experiencing this chaotic social reality is a new vision of the relation of the universal to the individual. On the one hand, the universal – social reality – appears to be indifferent to the opinions and struggles of individuals; it is just the “way of the world.” Its essence consists in the inversion of individual intentions and deeds – in “the essenceless play of establishing and nullifying individualities” (282/228). On the other hand, there is the enduring experience that individuals realize themselves in the social, public world which they produce as their own work. The new conception of the truth of practical reason brings these aspects together. The individual does not realize herself through deeds based on the conviction that everyone’s spontaneity should be liberated, but rather by sacrificing herself for the universal. This self-sacrifice is “virtue.”

C. VIRTUE AND THE WAY OF THE WORLD. Hegel opens this section with a summary of the constellations of individuality and universality displayed in the previous shapes of practical reason. The section “Pleasure and Necessity” involves the juxtaposition of the

“pure individuality” of self-consciousness against the “empty universality” of fate and hostile society. By contrast, the attempt to realize the “law of the heart” unifies individuality and universality, albeit as contraries: the spontaneous liberator embodies their immediate unity, while society represents their opposition (*PhG*, 283 f./228 f.). The “heart,” of course, signifies the individual’s intention of realizing a “law of spontaneity” that is nevertheless valid for everyone. However, this leads to a chaos of good intentions – that is, to a whole or a universal which deprives individuals of their authority.

The third shape involves a still more complex relation between the two moments of individuality and universality. Both are simultaneously “the unity and antithesis of these moments, or are each a movement of law and individuality towards one another, but a movement of opposition” (*PhG*, 283/228). In this movement “towards one another,” however, it is individuality which calls out to be sublated – sublated both from the side of consciousness and from that of the social world it confronts. Virtue involves the individual’s subjugating his drives and wishes in order to act for the sake of the universal. The independence of history (i.e. the “way” or the “course of the world”⁸⁰) from individual intentions, which previous shapes of consciousness understood as an “inversion” of individual intentions, is now self-willed. One ought to realize the universal rationality of the course the world actually takes rather than the false intentions and deeds of individuals – “this sublation [of individuality], however, only makes room for the *in-itself* of the way of the world to enter into existence in and for itself” (284/229).

The virtuous individual executes nothing other than the plan of history itself; she is the agent of progress. What is inverted here, what gets things exactly backwards, is, in fact, the idea that the way of the world consists solely in a play of individual intentions and deeds. Virtue must struggle with this false consciousness. Hegel describes this struggle in ironic metaphors as a cloak-and-dagger fight between knights of virtue and vice. In truth, however, what is at issue is a “modern” struggle between revolutionaries and reactionaries. The “virtue” section naturally calls Robespierre to mind, although the French Revolution becomes an explicit theme only later in the *Phenomenology*. We only learn something about the respective “programs” of

⁸⁰ The German expression *Weltlauf* means both the “way of the world” and the “course of the world” or of world history. Baillie prefers the latter phrase in his translation.

the two antagonists at the end of the section: virtue fights for the “talents, skills, powers” of individuals which would have to be realized within a rational order.

Hegel caricatures this program toward the end of the chapter as the “pompous talk about doing what is best for humanity, about the oppression of humanity, about making sacrifices for the sake of the good, and the misuse of talents” (289/234). He engages in a sharp polemic against the “empty words” that “elevate the heart and leave reason empty, which edify, but build up no edifice [*erbauen aber nichts aufbauen*] . . . a puffing-up which inflates him with a sense of importance in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, whereas he is, in fact, just inflated with his own conceit” (289 f./234). Here Hegel can hardly have in mind the Enlightenment program propagated by the revolutions of the eighteenth century. He is rather thinking of the “sunken,” edifying moral applications of that program. Such applications assume that the content of this program is “already familiar” from the “culture of our age” and thus feel free to replace that content with a “gust of phrases” or an “appeal to the heart” (290/234). It is only at the end of the experience mapped out in this section that Hegel engages in this polemic – which is perhaps an indication of how trivial Enlightenment ideas had become over the course of their brief history.

The other side – the side which sees the way of the world as an unordered play of individual deeds – opposes this account of virtue by pointing to the self-servingness of individuals. Hegel likewise criticizes this point of view for its “empty cunning and subtle explanations which manage to spot self-interest everywhere” (291/235). Here, too, it is unclear which historical positions Hegel may have in mind. One might first think of figures like Mandeville, the author of the famous 1714 *Fable of the Bees*, or other skeptics of virtue and defenders of egoism. Yet Hegel’s advocate for vice seems oblivious to the processes of the “invisible hand” which promotes the common good precisely through “private vice” (private vices – public virtues). And this is exactly the view of Mandeville and his followers, e.g. Adam Smith. So once again, Hegel apparently has in mind various trivializations of the theory of self-interest.

The struggle between virtue and vice ends, at least on the surface, with an unambiguous victory for the advocate of self-interest and the indifference of the way of the world to rational intentions. But as with the experience of mastery and servitude, it turns out that the views of the victor are not really proved right.

The successive steps of this experience give expression to problems that Hegel thinks have found their way into many “progressive” movements. Neither the content of historical reason, the future rational state of society, nor the form of its realization are really independent of the “principle of individuality.”

Reason, or “the universal,” depends on individual deeds because the realization of a society in which all talents and skills can be developed can look very different depending on one’s individual interpretation. Good ends can also “be misused for the production of a reality” (286/231) that leads to the “destruction” of individuality. Indeed, even a stringent benevolent dictatorship can be established in the name of enabling individual development. The good intentions and selflessness of virtuous revolutionaries by no means guarantee the realization of what is good in itself.

The revolutionary counters this by invoking the logic of history and of progress. But the conception of virtue contains a contradiction between the omnipotence and the impotence of historical reason. It is supposed to be independent of individuals’ deeds and yet would remain unreal without its “executors” or the struggle against “reactionaries.” Yet this turns the struggle into a sort of “shadow boxing” or a self-deception, since what is being fought for would realize itself in any case. It follows that historical tendencies cannot actually be fought at all.

Hegel’s discussion thus anticipates a notorious problem of “historical materialism,” whose proponents aim, on the one hand, to effect progress through revolutionary activities while, on the other hand, they want to let the “contradictions” of history develop and radicalize themselves. The “true strength” of revolutionaries lies in the “unity of their end and the essence of the way of the world” (286/231) – i.e. it lies in the fact that “the good is in and for itself, i.e. it brings itself forth” (287/231). Adopting his metaphor of the one-on-one duel, Hegel construes this as an “ambush from which the good *in-itself* is supposed to cunningly attack the way of the world [i.e. the reactionary party] from behind” (288/233). One might think here of his famous metaphor about the history of philosophy and the “cunning of reason” in effecting its progress through the deeds of individuals, who intend to achieve something quite different.

Yet what is in itself good and necessary in the course of history cannot be separated from the individual deeds that make it up. There are various reasons for this. For one, even the activities of self-serving individuals constitute the development of skills and talents. Moreover, they are themselves part of the necessary realization of the good in

itself. This universal, this good (reason in history), realizes itself through the deeds of individuals. It is, “as the *in-itself* of the way of the world, inextricably interwoven in every appearance [*Erscheinung*] of the way of the world” (287/232). And thus it must not be opposed: “Where virtue gets a grip on the way of the world, therefore, it always encounters places which are the existence of the good itself” (ibid.). At this point the metaphorical fight takes on nearly quixotic characteristics: virtue is not permitted to fight, but must “keep its sword polished” and “protect” the weapons of the enemy “against itself” (288/232).

Virtue has thus fallen into a contradiction – it must fight something which is, in fact, the realization of the good. Virtue’s contrasting complement is initially free from this contradiction. For the latter’s principle is morality-free individuality, for which “nothing is established or absolutely holy” (ibid.). This position can therefore fight and alter things without contradiction, and in this it has the course of the world on its side. For it does not conceive of the world’s course as something hidden, but as the play of conscious individuals – “alert, self-certain consciousness” (288/233).

Up to this point, the result has been the victory of the way of the world and of the reactionary adversary over virtue: “The way of the world was supposed to be the inverse of the good because it had *individuality* as its principle; yet individuality is the principle of the *actual world* [*Wirklichkeit*]” (289/233). The way of the world becomes actual through individual deeds and its “reason” is only the consciousness that individuals have of it. The realization of the good is nothing other than the consciousness which individuals manage to attain about historical events. The way of the world “inverts the unchangeable, but it inverts it in fact from the nothing of abstraction into the being of reality” (ibid.).

The “worldview” of those virtuous activists and do-gooders is not something “real” but only the “creation of distinctions which aren’t [distinctions]” (289/233). This worldview is, as we mentioned, “pompous talk” without any clear content. Hegel contrasts it with the substantial concept of virtue in the ancient world:

Virtue in the ancient world had its own sure and determinate meaning, for it had its *contentful foundation* in the *substance* of the people and had an *actual good that already existed* as its end. Consequently, it was also not directed against the actual world as a *universal perversion* [*allgemeine Verkehrtheit*] or against a *way of the world*.

(290/234)

The representation of a good that cannot articulate itself in rights, institutions, forms of life, and concrete social aims is simply empty – it is something that the virtuous knight “drops like a discarded cloak” (ibid.).

The thesis that individuality must be sacrificed to the universal good as an (as yet) unrealized idea is unsustainable, since “individuality is precisely the *realization* of what is-in-itself [*des Ansichseienden*]” (290/235). Individuality is thus not empty and insignificant, but the realization of a universal of shared mores or of a common good which is manifested and made conscious in deeds. But this indicates that “what stood opposed to the consciousness of what is-in-itself, in the guise of the way of the world, has likewise been conquered and has disappeared” (291/235). Since this experience not only shows the idealized universal or good to be untenable but also reveals individuals to be the executors of (real) universal orders, it also refutes the thesis that the way of the world is indifferent to the “chaos” of individuals following their own self-interest.

The virtuous revolutionaries sacrifice themselves for an abstract idea that supposedly has the power to govern history, while the defenders of the status quo are so blinded by individual freedom that they no longer recognize the social patterns and universal goals that realize themselves – in part consciously, in part unconsciously – “behind the backs” of individuals. Thus the universal, or the rationality of history, realizes itself in and through the actions of individuals.

The content of the universal, the rational, in history itself is constituted by the talents and skills of individuals. The development and portrayal of skills, self-revelation, and the failure of self-confirmation in the other or in the transformation of the social world make up the content of the third section (c) of the chapter on reason. Rational self-consciousness

starts afresh from *itself*, and is occupied not with *another*, but with *itself*. Since individuality is, in its own self, actuality, the material of its efficacy and the aim of its action lie in the action itself. . . . The element in which individuality displays its shape has the significance of a pure taking-on of this shape; it is the day per se, to which consciousness wants to present itself.

(293/237)

The tension which resides and develops in these shapes obtains between the universality that the individual “represents” – whether that of classical humanism or that of a Kantian, Enlightenment form of

reason – and the particularity both of the individual and of the rules and contents that arise from this form of reason.

C. The individuality which is real in and for itself

The three shapes of consciousness at issue in this section are (a) the “spiritual animal kingdom and deceit, or the issue itself,” (b) “law-giving” reason, and (c) “law-testing” reason. The first is concerned with representations of self-development or self-realization in works of art and in pursuit of an idea, i.e. a *Sache* – an “issue” or “matter.” Historically speaking, this shape of consciousness may target the artistic and intellectual ideals advanced by Goethe (the Goethe of *Wilhelm Meister*, not the Goethe of *Faust*) or the Humboldt brothers.⁸¹ The remaining sections involve a particular reading or further development of Kant’s practical philosophy – which is evident from the fact that the examples are clearly drawn from the *Groundwork* and the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

A. THE SPIRITUAL ANIMAL KINGDOM AND DECEIT, OR THE ISSUE ITSELF. The very title of this section itself has caused problems for commentators.⁸² Is the “spiritual animal kingdom” to be understood merely ironically or metaphorically, as was the case with the duel between virtue and vice? Is Hegel only seeking to caricature the bustling officiousness and vanity of intellectuals and the “art scene”? Is he referring back to the state of nature as a war of all against all? Or is the phrase meant to align the section with the philosophy of nature?

At any rate, Hegel draws a parallel between the self-presentation of individuality with respect to its determinate nature and “animal life” which develops and moves within a specific element or biotope – depending on peculiarities of the respective species – thereby preserving and expressing both its individuality and its genus (cf *PhG*, 294 f./237 f.). Such a correspondence with animal life would certainly be far

⁸¹ Hyppolite, *Genèse*, 287/297, suggests (with Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, 742) that Hegel has in mind specialists, professors, and artists who accord an absolute value to their work. One could then view the experience represented in this section as giving a conceptual account of the transition from the artistic self-realization of the “universally cultured” individual to the postclassical “intellectual” in the scientific, religious, or political service of some issue.

⁸² An overview of their suggestions has been provided by Shapiro, “Notes on the Animal Kingdom of the Spirit.” Gram, “Moral and Literary Ideals,” 328, refers to a passage from Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*, in which Hyperion refers to the scholars that surround him as a “spiritual animal kingdom” (Volume 1, Book 1, *Hyperion an Bellarmin* 6, 19–23 in the German edition, 13–16 in the English edition).

more apt than a reference to the struggle for honor – which Hegel never construes as “animal” – much less to the “dog-eat-dog” relationship among intellectuals in civil society, which various Marxist interpreters have read into the text.⁸³

Yet even this correlation to the animal kingdom cannot be meant literally, however. For unlike animals, which have no knowledge of their individuality or of their species, the rational individual sets as her goal the representation of her own nature in action and the generation of a lasting product of that action. She realizes her “particular skill, talent, character, etc.” To realize an end is to transfer what is initially present only to consciousness over into a social reality. Yet in the course of this process, identity of content must be preserved despite differences in the form of “inner” and “outer” – differences between the merely represented, the enacted, and (ultimately) the objectively realized end. Above all, one’s own character must be displayed to others without distortion and also be so understood by them. Here too, we see tenets of Hegel’s philosophy of action playing a significant role (cf our discussion above, at 128).

Presupposing this identity of content, rational self-consciousness knows no difference between knowledge and object. It is consciousness of the “pure translation *of itself* from the night of possibility into the day of the present” and the certainty that “what presents itself to him in the latter is nothing other than what lay dormant in the former” (299/242). In this sense, consciousness is “certain of itself as the absolute interfusion of individuality and being” (300/242). But in the course of translating its character into a work, consciousness undergoes an experience that refutes just this certainty.

At a first pass, this just recapitulates on a higher level consciousness’s experience of the impossibility of a pure self-presentation of individuality, untouched and undistorted by social relations. The work in which the gifts and talents of individuality are supposed to unfold and represent themselves is “thus expelled into a *subsistence* in which the *determinacy* of the original nature in fact turns against other determinate natures, encroaches on them as they do on it, and loses itself as a vanishing element in this general movement”

⁸³ Cf Shapiro, “Notes on the Animal Kingdom of the Spirit,” 231 f. and 235 (with reference to Marx, Lukács, and Kojève). In *Der junge Hegel*, Lukács regards this section as generally anticipating the relation of individuals to the laws of “the capitalist commodity-relation” (593/483).

(*PhG*, 300/243). The very need to delimit one's own individuality from that of others is the beginning of the distortion which perpetuates itself through the interpretations of others, their reactions, self-assertions, etc.

Just like the realization of the "law of the heart," the display of one's character is, for others, an "alien reality." And they must counter it with their own self-realization (cf 301 f./243 f.). Thus consciousness once again falls into an "interplay" of "forces and interests." Yet if the work exists within the context of a competition in which it is dependent on the interpretations and claims of others, then it is dependent upon contingencies and represents individuality not as "completed" but as "vanishing."

In this experience, the identity of end and reality, inner and outer, doing and being, etc. evaporates. Hegel makes it clear that the opposition between consciousness and being or concept and reality, the opposition which, "in the earlier shapes of consciousness was at the same time the beginning of action," has now turned out to be the "result" of experience (301/244). If a deed is not a necessary and unequivocal expression of character, if there is only a contingent relation between ends and means, intention and action, work and interpretation, then it is appropriate to speak of an ineliminable difference between consciousness and being.

Unlike in the earlier shapes of consciousness, in which the rational individual "defended" the essence of *objects* against contingent construals and points of view, he now cleaves to the essence of his *end*, or "concept," and abjures the contingency of its realization. Hegel no longer refers to this essence as the nature or the character of the individual, but as the *Sache selbst* – the "matter" or "issue" itself.

One might think here of a certain phenomenon of human action – namely individuals' engagement with and dedication to ideas or undertakings that they hold to be important – whether political, scientific, or artistic. It is hardly surprising that a commitment to certain issues is intimately connected with finding and expressing one's character – as one might learn from the novels of Joseph Conrad (e.g. *Nostromo*, or *Heart of Darkness*) even if they were written a century after the *Phenomenology*. But the concept of an issue can also indicate a general feature of one's "object conception" – namely by showing what endures through contingent individual deeds and their circumstances and means.

This is the sort of significance that an "issue" (or the "issue itself") has in Hegel's *Science of Logic* (WL II, 119 ff./414 ff.). Here in the

Phenomenology, however, a *Sache* is a *Sachverhalt*, something that underlies external and apparently contingent determinations, something that holds them together and lends them meaning, an underlying order or an action-inspiring cause.⁸⁴ Such an “issue” has quasi-subjective qualities: it “expresses” itself, it “holds things together,” etc. That is especially true of an “issue” that guides action, which remains identical through the various contingent modes of its realization.

The “issue itself” in the *Phenomenology* is consequently the “interfusion of reality and individuality” (*PhG*, 304/246) or of “individuality and objectivity itself” (*ibid.*). It is only with reference to such a rational, deed-guiding issue that means, circumstances, and occurrences have meaning. And it is on this meaning, as it is expressed through and for the action of the subject, that “the distinction [between] a *thing* and an *issue*” rests, according to Hegel (*ibid.*). Yet, Hegel continues, these rational issues now come to repeat the “movement” of sense-certainty and perception.

One can see this in the further development of the “spiritual animal kingdom” insofar as any attempt to separate the “being-in-itself” – the enduring essence of the matter or the issue – from the contingencies of its realization in individual actions is doomed to failure. The “issue” hence becomes an empty title through which one might justify anything whatsoever. Given any “world event,” an individual can “make [it] his own” just because it interests him, or even if it “does not really concern him” (306/248). As we would say today, an individual can “identify” with anything he or she wants to and can count this very taking of sides as to his or her credit. Taking up a certain issue – such pure “commitment” – becomes a satisfying life in itself, an end-in-itself for individuality, regardless of the actual content of the issue in question. After all, the issue is independent of the contingencies of individuals’ external actions. What Hegel is describing and criticizing here is a kind of activism and decisionism that should be familiar to us from debates in the second half of the twentieth century: a humanistic mode of “commitment” or dedication that can endorse all possible movements and groups, independent of their concrete aims and deeds, independent of the success or failure of their planned “works.” What is essential to this mental attitude is sincerity – the honestly altruistic pursuit of an issue. But this sincerity is “not as honest as it

⁸⁴ For example, the genuine historical processes behind external goings-on: the creation of the modern state, the emancipation of the individual, etc.

seems" (307/248 f.). For the individual is not just concerned with the issue, but also and primarily with his or her own action, or at least with his or her passive taking-of-sides.

For the individual "is concerned only with being active and busy" (ibid.) – all that matters is that the issue is "his" issue. Hegel is not trying to reveal all commitment as surreptitiously self-serving – a diagnosis we saw him criticize earlier (see above, p. 145). He is rather concerned to sublimate the distinction between the in-itself of the issue and the actually contingent deed. It is simply dishonest to relativize all forms of external appearance – e.g. by making "true" socialism independent of any *real* instances of socialism – and thus to attempt to immunize one's chosen issue from its actual means and works. As character reveals itself in its acts, so too an issue reveals itself in the works and deeds of the individuals who pursue it. But "committed" consciousness is not yet capable of recognizing this truth. For it cleaves to the distinction between the issue itself and the intentions and actions of the individuals who realize it. And this is precisely what transforms the realization of individuality in the honest endorsement of an issue into a "play" of reciprocal illusions.

Hegel's polemical presentation of the "spiritual animal kingdom" as a mutually reinforcing, hypocritical engagement with issues and works can, in places (cf 309 f./251 f.), read like a critique of the "literary scene," which was apparently much the same then as now. There, too, artists and critics are supposedly oriented toward the works themselves, but are, in actuality, engaged in a vain self-display. In certain passages, Hegel seems to have anticipated the "structure of the public sphere" in our own media-dominated age.⁸⁵

Yet the background for this polemic is derived from Hegel's philosophy of action. The idea of realizing something for its own sake involves various aspects of the public and the private, the universal (objective) and the personal, which cannot be united on an abstract understanding of rational action. Someone seeking to bring a certain issue to fruition considers his or her own acts to be unimportant – they feel that someone else could have done the job equally well, or even better. On the other hand, such a person cannot distinguish his or her own intention from the issue itself, and must therefore understand any critique or interference by another as an assault on the issue itself. And

⁸⁵ Cf Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

then others feel deceived, for it appears to them that the individual is not solely concerned with the issue, after all, but also (and perhaps primarily) concerned to realize his or her own intentions.

But it cannot be that everyone simply restricts himself to his own issue, however, for a genuine issue (not a mere personal wish) has a universal character. To pursue and realize *my* issue is a task for everyone. Hence, we are once again faced with a conflict about the correct viewpoint and the appropriate means for realizing issues. And in such a conflict, everyone feels deceived by others' pursuit of their own self-interest.

What is experienced through "issue-oriented" individuals' reciprocal deceit of one another is the indistinguishability of (i) issue and act and (ii) individual and universal action:

Consciousness experiences both sides as equally essential moments and in doing so learns what the *nature of the issue itself* really is, namely not only to be an issue which stands opposed to action in general and to individual action . . . but rather to be a being, whose *existence* is the *act* of the *single* individual and of all individuals, and whose act is immediately *for others*, or is an *issue*, and is such only as the action of *each* and *everyone*.

(310/251 f.)

It is impossible for anyone, isolated and alone, to know or to realize issues that are independent of private opinions, intentions, and acts, for an issue is the object of communal action. But how can one determine which issue it is incumbent on us to pursue, i.e. which issue is rational? That is the topic of the next two sections.

B. LAW-GIVING REASON. The form of practical reason that contains universally valid laws is a new level of the unity of self-consciousness and being. The new "*true . . . is and is valid* in the sense that it *is* and *is valid in and for itself*; it is the *absolute issue*" (*PhG*, 311/252). Such a form of validity indicates neither a thing-like, nor a merely "intellectual," reality like that manifested by mathematical objects or laws. Nor is it a merely intersubjective or communicative relation for Hegel, since the validity of a moral law precisely signifies its independence of individual assent or "certainty." Nor does it betoken mastery over individual self-consciousness, but bindingness and satisfaction at once: it "cannot and no longer wants to go beyond this object, for it is with itself in it: it *cannot*, for it [sc. the object] is all being and power" (312/253). This "object" has the structure of the subject – as immanent differentiation – for it is simultaneously the undifferentiated unity of moral validity, i.e. the moral law and the differentiation into particular laws.

The self-consciousness of the individual is the understanding, the reflection, the “being-for-itself” of this moral “issue.” The individual didn’t just think up or invent this “issue”; it knows it immediately through moral consciousness, i.e. through its “sound and healthy reason . . . which knows immediately what is right and good” (313/254).

Now it is true that, for Kant, autonomy doesn’t mean consciousness of one’s power of choice regarding moral commands, but consciousness of one’s immediate participation in a form of reason which is transpersonal (and which possibly even transcends humanity itself – if, that is, there are nonhuman, finite, rational creatures), and which contains these laws. Moreover, Kant also accepts an ordinary (“common”) kind of moral consciousness which is aware of these laws even in the absence of any “ratiocination” or “rationalizing” and he sees the role of moral philosophy as merely refuting false justifications of them (e.g. on the basis of self-interest, or immediate divine command). It is precisely this purported agreement with “common moral reason” that forms the topic of this chapter. In particular, the chapter scrutinizes the claim that there are immediately evident but also concrete and universal moral commandments. Hegel takes as his examples a narrow (or perfect) and a wide (or imperfect) duty in the Kantian sense: the narrow duty to tell the truth and the wide or “meritorious” duty to love one’s neighbor. Narrow or perfect duties, according to Kant, are those which it is always forbidden to leave unfulfilled, while imperfect (or meritorious) duties are those which may occasionally be left partially unfulfilled, because one maxim may be restricted by another. Kant’s example in the *Metaphysics of Morals* is that the general duty to further the welfare of all other human beings can be restricted by the duty to love one’s parents (6:390). However, Hegel’s discussion of the examples takes them rather in the “popular” understanding as commands of reason which are simultaneously unconditional and specific.

What Hegel seeks to show through his sometimes “sophistical”-sounding “examination” of these laws is apparently the untenability of understanding morality as a system of simple, rational laws. Moral laws are not universal propositions about necessary, concrete contents, as moral consciousness takes them to be. The proposition that one should always tell the truth ultimately means,

everyone ought to tell the truth to the best of his knowledge and conviction at the time. But with this correction, what the proposition wanted to enunciate as universally necessary and intrinsically valid, has really turned into

something completely *contingent*. For my speaking the truth is made contingent on whether I can know the truth and convince myself of it; and the proposition says nothing more than that a confused muddle of truth and falsehood ought to be spoken just as anyone happens to know, mean, and understand it.

(313/254)

One could easily reject this account by claiming that Hegel here confuses objective truth with truthfulness. The command to be *truthful* would appear to be unrestricted, but one clearly cannot be obliged to tell the objective truth when one doesn't know what it is. Yet it is not entirely clear what the prohibition on lying, or the demand for truth, really means. Perhaps in addition to being truthful one also has the additional duty to inform oneself as far as possible about true states of affairs. According to Hegel, such an "improved" formulation of the principle would completely spoil the immediacy that is essential to commands of "common moral reason": "Sound, healthy reason was initially supposed to immediately possess the capacity to speak the truth" (314/255). The command to articulate determinate contents immediately and unconditionally has become its "contradictory" – namely a command to know something wholly indeterminate (viz. whatever happens to be true).

It is clear that Hegel does not intend to simply refute the Kantian prohibition on lying as contradictory but rather aims to criticize a particular form of moral consciousness. In truth, seemingly simple, unconditional commandments are not immediate injunctions to do something determinate. They are intrinsically multifarious and multiply attuned to situation and circumstance. An unconditional, deontic duty can very well be formulated conditionally as part of a "situational ethics" (e.g. "if you are convinced of something after doing your utmost to investigate the issue in question, etc."). Such duties involve gradations (doing one's utmost, being sufficiently convinced, etc.) which entail probabilities and (relatively) arbitrary differentiations (we draw the line *here*).

The command to love one's neighbor can likewise be shown to involve contingencies and gradations. One must determine what is good for another person, what his "well-being" consists in, and what would harm him in the short or long term. In addition, one must co-ordinate one's beneficence with the legal and social order of the state. Hegel is gesturing here at an account he later develops in his *Philosophy of Right* – namely that only institutional assistance from the state is capable of providing a stable foundation for the care of individuals' well-being in

the long term, while private beneficence is something ephemeral: “Intelligent, substantial beneficence is, however, in its richest and most important form, the intelligent universal action of the state – an action in comparison with which the action of a single individual, as an individual, is so insignificant that it is hardly worth talking about” (314 f./255). This thought provides the basis for the notorious “sublation” of morality into ethical life in Hegel’s later philosophy of right.⁸⁶

Thus even the command to love one’s neighbor does not determine any immediately obligatory actions. It lacks a content that “is in and for itself.” It has only conditional contents and an indeterminate “ought”: “Such laws stop short at ‘ought,’ they have no actuality; they are not laws, but merely commandments” (315/256). This can make Hegel’s critique of Kant’s understanding of morality sound like an unfulfillable demand. But it is crucial to note that what is at issue here is an immediate understanding of moral laws as unconditionally valid, universal, and yet concrete injunctions to action. Indeed, the concept of “law” here seems to involve the notion of laws of nature, much like the concept of *lex naturalis* as it was employed by the Stoic and medieval tradition and in much of early modern ethics. If, however, one wants to take account of individual and situational differences in knowledge, conceptions of happiness, and social orders while still holding on to the idea of universal validity, then such universality can only lie in the *form* of laws: moral commandments must be able to be thought and willed as universal laws. Their universalization must not lead to any contradictions.

C. LAW-TESTING REASON. This is the starting point for the third shape of the section – the shape of self-actualizing reason that is “real unto itself.” The very title of this section seems to take aim at Kant’s formulation of the categorical imperative as an injunction to test whether all the maxims of one’s actions can serve as universal laws. Now Hegel understands this suitability as general freedom from contradictions, which was how it was understood in pre-Kantian moral philosophy as well. But for Kant, the idea that it must be possible to will any maxim as the principle of an act of universal legislation seems to mean something more. One must be able to think the maxim in question as one law within a larger system of laws for all rational creatures. Whether such a system is really possible without making further assumptions about the nature of such creatures is a question we cannot consider here.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Cf Siep, “The ‘Aufhebung’ of Morality.”

⁸⁷ For a critical perspective see, for example, Ricken, *Allgemeine Ethik*, 97 ff.

On Hegel's account, by contrast, law-testing reason asks whether the content of a given command (as opposed to "every maxim") is free from contradictions in the sense of being "identical with itself" or "tautological." "Identical with itself" evidently also means it is considered on its own, in "isolation," and not with reference to other ends or injunctions (*PhG*, 317/257).

His example of such a test considers the case of private property – i.e. the "question whether it ought to be a law in and for itself that there should be *private property*" (317/257). Taken on its own, without reference to other ends (e.g. utility), the concept of and the demand for private property satisfies the criterion of non-contradiction. But its contrasting complement, the concept of an absence of private property – whether this is achieved through an absence of all ownership or through collective ownership of goods – likewise satisfies the criterion. Hence the two cannot be allowed or enjoined in the same legal order.

If one doesn't view these injunctions or institutions "as simple determinacy" but distinguishes the moments of their meaning and justification, then *both* become contradictory. Speaking in favor of the idea of no ownership, or of collective ownership, of goods is "the thought that a thing is arbitrarily allotted to the most proximate self-conscious life, depending on its needs" (318/258). Yet this thought "does not agree with itself." The two principal moments of this justification – "need" and "self-conscious" – are incompatible. Needs arise spontaneously and can be fleeting. But it belongs "to the nature of conscious beings" that they represent their needs "in the form of universality" – i.e. in such a way that typical needs crop up again and again over the course of one's "whole existence." And consciousness wants to secure their satisfaction through an "enduring" good, i.e. discretionary private property.

Contradictions can likewise be pointed up in the meaning and justification of private property, however. And as with the absence of private property, these contradictions can similarly be traced back to moments of contingent singularity and enduring universality. Private property is supposed to be simultaneously utilizable and enduring; property is supposed to be kept from others and yet acknowledged by them, i.e. it is supposed to be at once exclusive to an individual and yet also universal. Even the owner of the property is supposed to count as an exclusive individual and a universal subject of rights at one and the same time.

Hegel has not, of course, shown that these moments cannot be combined through a legal institution of private property. If one

supplements this discussion with Hegel's own theory of property in the *Philosophy of Right*, then one can say that the concept of private property is meaningless unless it is "developed" and that contrary moments arise in the course of this development – e.g. the claims of needs and those of the institutional will, the group (family, tribe), and the individual – which must be balanced out in a differentiated system of right. Hegel's version of this system contains forms of exclusive private property as well as forms of communal ownership (in the family) and of "social" intrusions into private property.⁸⁸ But the question of non-contradiction does not contribute to either the justification or the elaboration of such a concrete legal order – just as little as freedom from contradiction indicates anything about the truth of theoretical propositions (cf 319/259).

The recognition that such testing only brings to light the arbitrariness of the contents of the commands being tested – since they are just as possible as their opposites – has yet further significance for moral consciousness. For such a process of testing and examination cannot reveal the laws that immediately present themselves to moral consciousness to be necessary or universal. Since they are just as well grounded as their opposites, they are contingent and arbitrary. So here, too, we arrive at a skeptical result. Thus any act of "giving," legislating, or promulgating such laws becomes arbitrary and, thus, following such laws becomes obedience to a capricious and arbitrary legislator – like in the political realm of a tyrant: "To legislate immediately in that way is thus the tyrannical insolence which makes caprice into a law and ethical behavior into obedience to such caprice" (320/260).

The experience of law-testing reason thus brings down the whole presumption that there is such a thing as moral reason which is at once present in individuality and yet independent of the latter's arbitrary choices.

Kant's apparent stabilization of "common moral reason" turns out to be, according to Hegel's examination, its skeptical destabilization. Yet philosophers are still capable of giving this result a positive interpretation – and then it represents the transition to "spirit." What is essential to such a philosophical interpretation is that this sort of unconditional validity, which is independent of even the individual's examination and testing, be combined with the differentiation and the "movement" of

⁸⁸ Cf Siep, "Constitution, Fundamental Rights, and Social Welfare," 298 ff.

meanings, social contexts, types of situation, etc. And here the emphasis is on the “transindividuality” – of the body of laws, mores, and institutions.

The content of moral reason must be independent of the immediate consciousness of “legislating” and testing individuals. For it is “an eternal law which does not have its ground in the *will of this individual*, but which is in and for itself; it is the absolute *pure will of all*, which has the form of immediate being” (321/260). At the same time, however, this “spiritual creature” (i.e. the law) is not a reality alien to the individual. The laws of this will, of this form of moral reason, are “thoughts of its own absolute consciousness, thoughts which it itself immediately *has*” (321/261). Yet it does not have these thoughts as an individual has immediate beliefs or opinions, but as an individual who has “sublated itself as singular” and become “immediate self-consciousness of ethical substance” (ibid.).

Moral laws are not valid because they are confirmed by the autonomous reason of the individual; rather, the individual is only rational in virtue of his agreement with these laws. He has a “simple, clear *relation* to them. They *are* and nothing more” (ibid.). This, however, is a form of morality that is not characteristic of the modern individual, who only trusts his own reason. It rather typifies ancient ethical life: “It is in this way that they are valid for Sophocles’ *Antigone* as the *unwritten* and *infallible* law of the gods” (322/261). The simple moral or ethical bindingness of a legal and normative order that is valid independent of individual testing is, for Hegel, a truer account of the moral law than is the modern conception of conscious autonomy:

Whether this or the opposite determination is right, that is determined *in and for itself*. For my own part, I could make whichever of them I liked the law, or neither, and as soon as I begin to test them, I have already begun down the immoral path.

(323/262)

It is precisely in virtue of this “clear,” unquestioned relation that the individual is no longer separated from moral laws, no longer ruled by something foreign; it is in virtue of this relation that the self-conscious individual is “its *self* and *will*” (323/262). But the essence of self-consciousness is to draw distinctions, to differentiate, and to negate. And it must be shown how this character jibes with “ethical substance.” The self-conscious individual must be able to find itself again in the “distinctions” or “articulation” of the ethical order. And that order

must be recognizable as a necessary condition of the “unity of essence and self-consciousness” (321/261). Just how such an order is constituted is, however, only apparent from certain passages in the *Phenomenology* and only after we have traveled down a path that leads through the many one-sided analyses and inverting experiences that make up a philosophically interpreted “world history of ethical life.”

(BB) Spirit

VI. Spirit

The transition to spirit marks a caesura in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel makes that sufficiently clear in the introduction to this chapter. Spirit is the “*being that exists-in-and-for-itself* . . . which is at once actual to itself as consciousness and represents itself to itself” (325/263). This self-knowledge is not yet complete at the outset of the chapter, however. It runs through another series of developmental levels which are no longer “only shapes of consciousness” but “shapes of a world” (326/265).

Does the *Phenomenology* begin to pursue a completely different method beginning with the chapter on spirit? Are we no longer talking about the experiential history of consciousness? This is a widely shared position in the secondary literature. Yet it is unlikely that it can be correct, if only because, as I noted in discussing the Preface (which, you will recall, was written after the rest of the *Phenomenology* was completed), Hegel continues to use the concept “experience of consciousness” to characterize the work as a whole. Moreover, the chapter on spirit is, like previous chapters, concerned to develop contradictions between various conceptions of knowledge, objecthood, and action. As before, epochal shapes and positions are still revealed to rest on conceptual dichotomies that become unsustainable as their termini transform into their opposites.

So what is different in the spirit chapter? The fact that we are now concerned with “shapes of a world” seems to mean that historical processes become relevant for the first time. And indeed, the shapes of spirit can be understood as a series of epochs beginning with the “age of tragedy” in early Greece and reaching all the way to the “moral worldview” of postrevolutionary and post-Kantian Germany.

The chapter on religion would then admittedly run through this series once more, although it has a considerably earlier starting point in the religions of the Orient. Furthermore, Hegel’s concept of religion

comprehends the whole culture of a people insofar as they aim at an absolute truth and an absolute object. By contrast, the shapes of spirit examined *prior* to the chapter on religion (setting aside the “theoretical” struggle between the Enlightenment and Christian faith) are predominantly shapes of “objective” spirit (in Hegel’s later terminology) – that is to say, shapes of the social world, ethical action, and moral consciousness.

Since prior shapes also dealt with the experiences of historical epochs – such as the experience of medieval Christianity or modern experimental science – it is difficult to find actual confirmation of this distinction between “shapes of consciousness” and “shapes of a world” in the text itself. Yet one can say, at any rate, that the previous shapes primarily had to do with one-sided aspects of a culture. But it is not easy to see why (from Hegel’s perspective anyway) the medieval world should be characterized more one-sidedly through Christianity than the Roman world was through its legal system (cf VI.A.c., 173–175). At any rate, these earlier shapes remained caught up in the various dualisms which are now, in principle, overcome. Since their one-sided aspects had to be organized in a systematic sequence which led to spirit they could be presented in an order which didn’t always correspond to the historical chronology. With the beginning of the spirit chapter, this ceases to be possible.

What does it mean that the prior shapes belonged to a consciousness that was “still, as an individual, in fact distinct from substance” (324/263)? Are we still dealing with individual experiences, as some interpreters contend? Yet how can one understand the fate of premodern Judeo-Christian faith (“unhappy consciousness”) or that of modern experimental science (“observing reason”) as individual experiences? It can only mean that these positions still presuppose an ontological difference between subjectivity – which is only instantiated in individuals – and reality (including social reality). Ontologically speaking, reality was taken to be fundamentally different in kind from the individual subject.

Now we already claimed (above, at pp. 108–112) that Hegel, like many contemporary philosophers (e.g. Davidson and McDowell), wants to overcome the ontological dualism between a realm of concepts or subjectivity and a realm outside or external to the conceptual (e.g. the material, sensible realm or some other in-itself). There is no “outside”; there are only various ways in which the “network” of concepts articulates itself and is given to us: in intuition or in thought, in consciousness, in nature or in culture. For Hegel, these realms are not only

governed by *logos*, by laws and categories, but also by self-thought (*noesis noeseôs*, as Aristotle would say), i.e. subjectivity. Actual reality is not only conceptual, but is, in its essence, the becoming conscious, the self-reflection of concepts.

In his logic, Hegel attempts to show that such reflexivity already characterizes the development (differentiation and “interwovenness”) of concepts’ meanings. But in order to guide an advocate of a dualistic position to this truth, it is more straightforward to look to the “realities” involved in the social, cultural, and institutional realms. For at least *prior* to the modern separation of the “autonomous” I from all reality – even social reality – the subjectivity of the latter realms was taken for granted. The individual understood himself as a moment of a people, whose ethical norms, laws, ideas of virtue, and common consciousness (personified in the “city god”) were alive in him and ruled his thought and action. The notion that *Geist* – spirit or mindedness – exists primarily or exclusively in individuals is the result of a historical development. It was in the European modern era that this idea came to be dominant – culminating in the “methodological individualism” of the modern social sciences, which allow thought and action to be ascribed only to individuals.

Thus, in establishing his fundamental ontological and epistemological thesis that conceptuality *and* subjectivity are to be found in extra-individual reality – both social and natural – the concept and shapes of objective spirit have a special argumentative significance for Hegel. His intention in doing this is not to reduce all theory to social forces and interests (not even “epistemic interests”), as some commentators believe. His aim is rather to examine “phenomena” in which the fundamental structure of reality – the self-knowledge of concepts and the self-reflection of something “objectively present” and yet spiritual (a people, a state’s constitution, a “culture”) – is particularly evident. This structure, according to Hegel, disappeared from consciousness only “recently,” as it were.

The historical “traces” of dualism are identified in the earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology* and belong, to that extent, to the genealogy of modernity. The belief that, outside the individual subject, there is only nonsubjective objectivity, thinghood, material substantiality, or unknowable being-in-itself, governed not only the experiences of distinct individuals but the shapes of consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason themselves, albeit in different forms and to varying degrees. To the extent that such theoretical convictions actually embody one-sided modes of thought which, according to Hegel, presuppose the whole of spirit – a spirit which comprehends individuality and sociality, culture

and nature – Hegel is entitled to say that “all previous shapes . . . [are] abstractions” of spirit (325/264). From the perspective of this comprehensive concept of spirit which is active not only in these one-sided shapes and their self-examination, but also in the activity of the philosopher presenting them, it is indeed the case that “they [sc. the previous shapes] result from spirit analyzing itself, distinguishing its moments, and dwelling for a while with each” (325/264). The prior shapes are only “appearances” (ibid.) because the comprehensive concept of spirit is not conscious of itself in them. It is only with the chapter on spirit that an internal development of “true” reality begins – though it, too, is fueled by one-sided theories and “abstract” forms of cultural self-understanding. But first, an overview of the chapter’s structure.

According to the two different numbering systems in the table of contents, the spirit chapter is either the sixth of eight chapters marked with Roman numerals, or the second chapter of the third part’s four chapters, designated by Latin letters – part (C) being divided into the chapters “Reason” (AA), “Spirit” (BB), “Religion” (CC), and “Absolute Knowledge” (DD). It is the longest chapter of the entire book. In its introduction, Hegel distinguishes spirit from reason and gives a preview of the development of the chapter. The three main levels of this development pertain to “true,” “alienated,” and “self-certain” spirit.

On the “reason” level of the object- and truth-conceptions examined in the *Phenomenology*, the belief in the unity of objectivity and subjectivity remained formal. Consciousness is “still, as an individual, distinct from substance and either promulgates arbitrary laws, or fancies that it has knowledge of the laws as they are in and for themselves and holds itself up as the adjudicating power over them” (324/263). In spirit, by contrast, the knowledge or act of an individual *just is* the self-consciousness of the ethical order itself. Spirit is

the self of actual consciousness to which it opposes itself, or rather which opposes itself to it [spirit] as the objective, actual *world*, albeit a world which has ceased to signify something alien to the self, just as the self has ceased to signify a (dependent or independent) being-for-self separated from the world.

(325/263 f.)

Spirit is thus an order that produces and changes itself through the thought and action of individuals, while nonetheless remaining independent of them. It cannot be altered directly through the intentions and actions of individuals, but only through collective and “historical”

processes. To that extent, it is independent of the *particular* individuals who follow laws and generate patterns of behavior through both their conscious action and their unconscious behavior. On the other hand, spirit is also independent of the *collective* “actions” of groups, peoples, and epochs insofar as they do not themselves determine their historical “roles” and often cannot even recognize them. The philosopher, however, can recognize a kind of “providence” in such collective actions – namely the “logic” of a process which evolves toward the freedom and self-knowledge of spirit. The “levels” of this process can be made intelligible retrospectively with the categories of a speculative logic and semantics.

Thus, in the introduction to Chapter VI, Hegel says that “all previous shapes are abstractions” of spirit (325/264). He then lists these previous shapes (in accordance with Chapters A, B, and C as well as the later introduction to phenomenology in the *Encyclopedia*) as consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason. These abstractions or moments “exist” only in spirit. They are aspects of this self-standing form of order which is conscious of itself. On the one hand, philosophies, perspectives on nature, practical worldviews, etc. are dependent moments of a “culture.” On the other hand, they are aspects of the comprehensive “truth” of self-conscious reason which knows itself as objective reality. In this respect, once we have arrived at the standpoint of spirit, we can view these previous shapes as one-sided modes of spirit’s self-knowledge. Hegel goes so far as to call them isolated “moments of the analysis” of spirit itself (326/264). Reason is thus the consciousness that the reality independent of self-consciousness itself exhibits the structure and the moments of subjectivity – i.e. that it is an immanently self-differentiating conceptual order. But this structure is still distinguished from self-consciousness, its immediate self-certainty, and its own “private” judgment. The rationality of reality is not present in the individual or in the appearances that belong to the social world, nor is it known as such: “Finally, when this reason which spirit *has* is intuited by spirit as the reason that *exists*, or as the reason that is *actual* in spirit and is its world, then spirit exists in its truth; it *is* spirit, the *ethical, actual being*” (326/265).

Yet the “truth” of spirit that initiates its development is not yet the whole truth. It is noteworthy that Hegel begins the development of spirit with “true” spirit. Two interpretations suggest themselves here. One would be that the ensuing development begins not with a mere subjective certainty – something “*held to be true*” by the individual – but with a correspondence between individual belief and what is publicly

valid. Reflection on the public norms and subjective certainty of them first develop out of this unquestioned correspondence.

The second interpretation suggests that the *telos* (truth) which this development is meant to realize – viz. the concordance of ethical norms and subjective convictions – is likewise already anticipated in this first shape. The ultimate aim is that there should be enduring agreement between public validity and habitual life, on the one hand, and subjective reflection and certainty, on the other – an agreement which can be endorsed on reflection though it does not depend on constant testing. Testing the legality or permissibility of ethical norms and rules must itself become a codified public procedure, though one that will, naturally, be accompanied by a communal process of conscience formation and examination, to which both religion and philosophy contribute (cf below, at p. 200). But this is a goal that the *Phenomenology* does not attain until the chapters on religion and philosophy (“absolute knowledge”). It is worth noting, however, that Hegel had previously included these latter chapters in his 1805 philosophy of spirit and later conceived them to form the final parts of the philosophy of spirit, called “absolute spirit.”

Here in the *Phenomenology*, the spirit chapter comprises the shapes of what he later terms “objective spirit”: ethical life, law, and morality. While his later *Philosophy of Right* has ethical life succeed abstract right and morality, the development here begins with ethical life. Historically speaking, we are dealing with the “naïve” form of ethical life, prior to the emancipation of the subject. Hegel draws on the earlier Greek tragedians (Aeschylus and Sophocles). These historical accounts are linked with systematic considerations about the family, its proper relation to the state, and the nature of the sexes. His treatment of private law as the determinative “spirit” of the Roman world is marked by the same sort of connection between historical and systematic considerations. In the Roman world, ethical life “sinks under the formal universality of the law” (326 f./265). At the same time Roman laws concerning legal persons and their private access to items turn individual self-consciousness into the principal content of the universal ethical norms themselves. Yet public life thereby loses its common aims and cohesive forms of life, and spirit is once again divided into public and private, objective and subjective-reflective modes.

The second form of spirit develops this division into an opposition between two “worlds” or domains: an objective, this-worldly realm of public culture and an other-worldly “world of faith” that unfolds itself in the “element of thought.” In this middle section, Hegel presents the

development of European culture from medieval feudalism to the French Revolution. His presentation is, again, interwoven with a systematic theme from ethical life: the relation of “wealth-producing” society structured by the division of labor (“civil society” in the terminology of the *Philosophy of Right*) to the state.

But unlike in the *Philosophy of Right*, these “ethical powers” are not presented here as powers that leave room for the moral reflection and the rights of the individual. Instead, we find the opposition between subjective freedom and the social orders of these ethical powers deepen to the point of alienation. The individual becomes conscious – historically in the Reformation and Enlightenment – of her own ability to gain insight and of her right to do so. And unlike in the chapter on reason, this provides the foundation for an entire ethical-moral culture: the morality, religion (deism), and social order of the Enlightenment.

This is, however, a culture which increasingly relativizes everything “enduring” in both ontological and moral registers. This relativization and “confusion” of all distinctions ultimately leads to a subjectivized understanding of spiritual reality: “The realm which was divided and expanded into *this world* and the *beyond* returns into self-consciousness which now, in the form of *morality*, grasps itself as essentiality and essence, as actual self” (327/265). Morality thus appears here as the highest form of spirit. But the reconciliation of public ethical life and personal conviction achieved in morality is, yet again, contentless and abstract for itself. It must be supplemented with the sort of thoughtful and public, active shaping of the moments of spirit, such as is present in religion. The history of culture as the development and self-reflection of spirit is therefore recapitulated in the religion chapter. It is only once we have completed both developments together that we may attain true knowledge of spirit, i.e. “absolute knowledge,” through philosophical insight.

A. True spirit. Ethical life

In the first two sections of this chapter, Hegel gives a partly systematic, partly historical interpretation of the relation between the family and the state which takes its primary orientation from Greek tragedy. He principally engages with Sophocles’ *Antigone*, but also draws on Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and his *Seven against Thebes*. The historical process Hegel is concerned to interpret against this backdrop of systematic tensions and “experiences” is one that leads to the collapse of the

Greek *polis* in the Roman world, which had its own form of “ethical life” enshrined in Roman law. The internal contradictoriness of a communal life that is restricted to private law constitutes the topic of the third section, entitled “The Condition of Right or Legal Status.”

A. THE ETHICAL WORLD, HUMAN AND DIVINE LAW, MAN AND WOMAN. This section does not itself mention any kind of “experience.” It concludes by stating,

The ethical realm is in this way in its *enduring* existence an immaculate world, a world unsullied by any internal dissension. Similarly, its movement is a tranquil transition of one of its powers into the other, so that each preserves and brings forth the other. We do indeed see it divide itself into two essences and their reality; but their antithesis is rather the authentication of one through the other.

(341/278)

These two powers or modes of reality are two different ways to integrate the individual into the unconditionally valid ethical norms of a group.

In the family, the individual itself is an end or aim of mutual care and solidarity. Hegel says that the “ethical connection between the members of the family is not that of feeling, or the relation of love” (331/269). Familial solidarity must be lasting and independent of contingent feelings; it must also be a duty. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel does come to speak of “legal-ethical love” (*GPR*, §161, addition). Such solidarity is due to the family member as a whole or a “universal” – it is due not just when particular needs arise but for the duration of the family member’s life. Indeed, Hegel notes (with reference to *Antigone*) that familial solidarity is due even to “the *dead*, the individual who, after a long succession of separate disconnected experiences, concentrates himself into a *single* completed shape, and has raised himself out of the unrest of the accidents of life into the calm of simple universality” (*PhG*, 332/270).

This unquestionable, lifelong solidarity with family members which even extends into death and which is not secured by any enforceable laws is termed the “divine law.” The concept of the “divine” here is surely meant to remind us of the fact that the family is not based on rational arrangements but on natural forces and their interpretations in mythology and religion.

The other mode of ethical life is community or the “human law.” Here the individual, qua civil citizen and private legal person, is, on the one hand, the aim and object of public activities: “The community may,

on the one hand, organize itself into systems of personal independence and property, of laws relating to persons and things" (335/272). Yet the community must also, on the other hand, subordinate these systems to its own subsistence and indeed it must "from time to time shake them to their core by wars" (335/272). The individuals who "break loose from the whole" in virtue of the entrenchment of the institutions of private law and private property must thus be forced by the *polis* – and later by the state – "to feel ... their lord and master, death" (ibid.).

Already in his early Jena text *The German Constitution* (cf TWA I, 461–551/*Political Writings*, 6–78), Hegel traced the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire against the inrush of the French revolutionary armies back to self-interest and the private-legal relations between individuals, classes, and the state dominating the German constitution. That war is an instrument for the ethical education of citizens is an ancient idea – ever since Plato, the cardinal virtue of bravery has been seen to paradigmatically consist in courage in war and in sacrifice for one's community. Even for Kant, the knightly form exhibited by wars of the past – if not by modern armies – had an ethicizing function.⁸⁹

Hegel continues to unpack these two "laws" or forms of ethical spirit in their internal differentiation. The structure of the family involves three "relationships": between man and wife, between parents and children, and between siblings. Hegel presents these as a "living movement." In his drafts of a philosophy of spirit leading up to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel critically engaged with Aristotle's theory of the *oikos* and presented the first two familial relationships as a process of recognizing oneself in the other.⁹⁰ The union of man and wife becomes "objective" for them in the child. According to the *Phenomenology*, however, both these relationships involve a tension between natural modes of relation and ethical modes which are shaped by the institution of the family and its duties. It is only in the sibling relationship of brother and sister that mutual recognition is "pure and unmixed with any natural desire" (*PhG*, 337/275).

Hegel is apparently combining his interpretation of *Antigone* with a general theory about the interaction of natural and ethical relations within the family. His pronouncements about various familial roles (mother, daughter, etc.) and about the character of the desires,

⁸⁹ Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, 334.

⁹⁰ Cf Siep, "Der Kampf," 174–192.

emotions, and modes of consciousness enjoyed by husband and wife are as detailed as they are conventional.⁹¹ Hegel does not diverge from the traditional European distribution of roles, but rather seeks to justify them by co-ordinating the two forms of ethical life with the “naturally different modes of self-consciousness” in husband and wife.⁹² The “wife remains the head of the household and the guardian of the divine law” (338/275), where “divine law” signifies the organization and duties of the family. The husband, by contrast, possesses “as a citizen the *self-conscious power of universality*” (337/275).

However, there is a tension between these two forms of ethical life and between the two sexes – a tension which develops into an opposition in the course of the emancipation of the individual. In the ethical world – historically speaking, the world of archaic and classical Greece – this tension remains in a tense, charged harmony: “The universal ethical beings are, then, the substance qua universal, and the substance qua individual consciousness. Their universal actuality is the nation and the family; while they have their natural self and operative individuality in man and woman” (339/276). The relationship between the two is, at this level, a “tranquil equilibrium of all parts” (340/277) and the whole is a “world unsullied by any internal dissention” (341/278).

Hegel sees this ethical world as having achieved the “end” that reason futilely sought to realize in all its shapes. He shows (339 f./277 f.) how all the intentions of both observing reason and practical reason have been satisfied here. And he shows that they have been satisfied in a way that does not separate the subject from what it “finds itself presented with” and does not allow any conflict to arise between the private intentions of the individual (pleasure, the law of the heart, the certainty of virtue) and the rules and powers of the social world. The place of the “insubstantial commands” of law-giving reason is now occupied by the concrete bonds and duties of family and state, which themselves present a “contentful and intrinsically determinate standard” for “what is done” (340/277).

⁹¹ A critical account of Hegel’s metaphysics of the sexes in this section can be found in Mills’s “Hegel’s ‘Antigone’.”

⁹² Despite its replacement of the “divine” law by the rational law, this distribution of roles between the sexes is not fundamentally changed in Hegel’s later *Philosophy of Right* (cf §§ 165–167).

This fulfillment and harmony depend on the balance of the masculine and feminine principles, the rational form of which is itself a syllogism. In both necessary “extremes” – both in the divine (mythical) law and in the human law, both in the family and in the state (or city-state) – a “union of man and woman” must be achieved, albeit in different ways: in the family with the primacy of the woman, in the state with the primacy of the man. However, the “syllogism” involving these two converse forms of union is still only contingent in ancient ethical life. For neither husband nor wife is yet conscious of their universal human subjectivity (i.e., reason) or the rights connected with it. They therefore do not yet understand the “logic” of the other’s ethical order but identify themselves wholly with their “own” – women with the family, men with the state. And this leads to the tragic development of “ethical action.”

B. ETHICAL ACTION, HUMAN AND DIVINE KNOWLEDGE, GUILT AND FATE. In this section, Hegel is not concerned to explore every sort of “ethically good” or moral action. He is rather interested in a “level of culture” in which actions of the individual are thoroughly identified with the order of the group (family or state) – an order the individual just finds himself confronted with, but one that strikes him as “evident.” The particular character of ethical action consists in unconditionality and decidedness: “Ethical consciousness, however, knows what it has to do, and has already decided whether to belong to the divine or the human law” (342/280). This univocal and one-sided identification on the part of the individual makes the other law inessential to him. The individual seeks to ensure the primacy of his law and to “subjugate the reality which is opposed to it by means of force” (343 f./280). But such unconditional obedience brings the two laws “into conflict.” The ethical agent, however, becomes guilty, for he, “as simple, ethical consciousness, has turned towards one law, but turned his back on the other and violates the latter by his deed” (346/282).

This violation of the opposed law and the inseparability of the two laws is unbeknownst to the individual who commits it. He thus provokes a hidden vengeance, which Hegel illustrates by expanding the focus of his discussion beyond *Antigone* to include the *Oresteia*. The experience of the tragic agent is one of affiliation with the law she herself has violated. For Antigone, this is the experience of suffering, which leads to the acknowledgment of her guilt. As early as his time in Frankfurt, Hegel had already begun to interpret tragedy and its concomitant experience of separation from the community as an alternative to the relationship

between law and punishment.⁹³ While the latter relationship remains one involving the mastery of the universal over the particular, the experience of having offended against the community and thus estranged oneself from it represents the beginning of the agent's repentance and conversion through acknowledgment of her guilt.

Here in the *Phenomenology*, however, reintegration into the ethical community is initially experienced as a negation and loss of self, for it involves the dissolution of the decidedness and resoluteness of one's ethical convictions in acknowledging the opposed law, and also because it involves the subjugation of the divine law of the family, for which individuality is the highest end. Creon's triumph over Antigone is the triumph of the legal order of the community over the family and its unwritten laws of solidarity.

Yet this victory, which perhaps even Sophocles understood as the triumph of the ethical life of the *polis* over the mythical and daemonic powers of the past, is, for Hegel, a disturbance of the "true" equilibrium between the state and the family: "Since the community only gives itself subsistence by disturbing the happiness of the family and by dissolving [individual] self-consciousness into the universal, in what it suppresses and what is at the same time essential to it, it creates for itself an internal enemy – womankind in general" (352/288). "Womankind in general" is the principle of the primacy of the family over the state. And in a bold reference to the attempts of various women (mostly in European monarchies) to subordinate the state to the interests of the family, Hegel describes it as the "eternal irony of the community" (352/288) that a state which does not allow the family its freedom ultimately falls victim to familial egoism.

The conflict between individuality and the ethical life of the state also illuminates, in Hegel's eyes anyway, the historical dissolution of the Greek *polis* into the Roman Empire and its mode of formal ethical life, the law. The Greek *polis* neither internally nor externally tolerates an individuality which challenges it. As the fate of Socrates shows, there is a fundamental incompatibility between fragmented, doubting, and reflective subjectivity and the unquestioned validity of laws and customs. Even for the young Hegel (i.e. while he was still in Bern), Socrates, like Jesus, stood for the liberation of autonomous, rational-justification-seeking subjectivity from the mere positivity of prevailing laws that rest on authority and habit.

⁹³ Cf Pöggeler, "Hegel und die griechische Tragödie."

Yet the very identity of city-states is bound up with particular traditions and natural conditions. The *polis* does not have access to any universal legal order which would be able to integrate other traditions and people (as the Roman law does). Accordingly, the continued existence of the *polis* is entirely bound up with the contingency of having great individuals and continued military success: "Because the existence of ethical life depends on strength and luck, it is *already decided* that its downfall has come" (354/289). Ethical life collapses into a community that lacks "ethical substance" but does possess a universal legal order – viz. the Roman global empire. And this legal order is precisely oriented around the individuality of the legal person. When it comes to such legal status, natural distinctions are as inconsequential as traditional or cultural distinctions. And this is precisely what enables the Roman Empire to integrate within itself a wealth of different cultures and religions.

C. THE CONDITION OF RIGHT OR LEGAL STATUS. The third part of the chapter on "true spirit" shows that even in the Roman Empire – the paradigm of a state limited to orders of private law – it was not possible to integrate particular and universal orders or the demands of individuals with those of the state's governmental demands. Hegel sees a correspondence between the history of Rome and the development of Stoicism and Skepticism in a historical and political dimension. The principle of Roman law was the person as a self-conscious, thinking, "sheer *empty unit*" (356/291). Few individuals actually attain this status, however – only the male heads of families can acquire full citizenship. But this "legalization" of the family deprives it of its proper ethical function, according to Hegel. Even the relation between a legal person and the other members of his family becomes one of ownership. The element of the "feminine" – of emotional and traditional solidarity – thus disappears from the family.

Like Skepticism, the formalism of legal right is thus by its very nature without a peculiar content of its own; it finds before it a manifold existence in the form of "possession" and, as Skepticism did, stamps it with the same abstract universality, whereby it is called "property."

(357/291)

The principle of the legal person transforms individual self-consciousness into a social actuality. Yet no "inner organization" of a community and no cohesive habits and institutions can be developed on the basis of a such a principle: "This empty unity of the person is,

therefore, in its *reality* a contingent existence, an essence-less movement and act which comes to no lasting result" (356 f./291). In a social order that is determined solely by this principle, there would no longer be any concrete ethical norms, any shared goals, or any communal self-understanding. The essence of this spiritual world is the contradiction that "in itself" the individual qua legal person is supposed to be "everything," while the facts on the ground reveal a helpless play of power struggles and "ideological" battles. Hegel illustrates this by pointing to the Roman world – and particularly to the imperial period – but he also sees it as a continuing problem for modern society insofar as the latter restricts the role of the state to the protection of private rights.⁹⁴

Since the law is no longer in a position to effectively regulate social relationships and to set goals for and limits on the egoism of individuals, according to Hegel, power eventually becomes concentrated in a single, all-powerful individual – in Roman history, for example, in the emperor. Shared convictions, by contrast, reduce themselves to local traditions and religions – to "spiritual powers" – which battle with one another. It is difficult to determine, however, whether Hegel's talk of the "chaos of spiritual powers" that "in their unfettered freedom, [rage] madly against one another in a frenzy of destructive activity" (358/292) is meant to reference the conflicts between Hellenistic or late Roman religions and sects – as later depicted, for instance, by Flaubert in *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* – or rather refers to the revolts and border struggles between Rome and various subjected peoples. At any rate, the community in question lacks the sort of shared convictions, ethical norms, and goals that transcend the contingent (but legally protected) aims of individuals and the interests and convictions of various groups. The ultimate result is, accordingly, the tyranny of the powerful individual who gets revered as a god – which is precisely the inverse of the principle that guarantees the legal freedom of every person. The power of the emperor does not rest on the "unity of spirit" but on the "destructive power he [sc. the "lord of the world"] exercises against the self of his subjects" (358/293).

⁹⁴ The modern debate about communitarianism and liberalism likewise turns on the reduction of the state's ends to the protection of private rights. Fine collections on this topic are available in both German (e.g. Honneth, *Kommunitarismus*; Brumlik and Brunkhorst, *Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit*) and English (see Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*).

This is certainly a one-sided view of the history of Rome, and Hegel later does far more justice to Roman history and culture in his philosophy of religion and philosophy of history. But in the *Phenomenology* he is primarily concerned with the unique contribution of the Roman Empire to the development of ethical spirit and to the unity of individual freedom with the fundamental customs and institutions of a state. The discovery of the rights of the legal person is simultaneously the dissolution of the harmonious ethical life of the *polis*. Moreover, because this discovery provides no enduring principle for the internal articulation of a constitution or ethical norms, it leads to the opposite of its intention: from the establishment of legal freedom springs the “alienated reality” of universal domination.

B. *Self-alienated spirit. Culture*

Following “true” spirit’s immediate identification of individuality with the ethical order or institution, we encounter alienated spirit. Its presentation in the *Phenomenology* makes up one of the longest chapters and bears one of the most intricate internal organizations (see the table of contents). Despite the fame that the concept of alienation now enjoys (principally thanks to Marx), the contents of this chapter are far less well known than those of earlier parts of the book (especially the chapter on self-consciousness). And, as we shall see, Marx was in a position to adopt only a few aspects of the Hegelian concept of alienation.

Indeed, the concept of alienation has a far more positive significance for Hegel than it did for either his “successor,” Marx, or his “predecessor,” Rousseau. “Alienation” is a necessary process of cultural differentiation. The concept of what is alien is initially to be understood in relation to the simple, naive form of spirit’s truth, as represented by ancient ethical life. Differentiation, by contrast, involves a moment of separation and inversion, of transformation into the respective opposite. And this involves the reversal of intentions and distinctions. Now this process is, of course, characteristic of phenomenological experience from the very outset. But here it becomes the mark of a whole level of culture.

In the introduction to this chapter (*PhG*, 359–362/294–296), Hegel gives an overview of the development to come, in which at least *four* different concepts of alienation play a role.

The *first* concept is made intelligible by invoking the experience of legal status (*Rechtszustand*) as the character of the (late) Roman world. This concept indicates that the world is “in itself the mutual interfusion

of being and individuality,” although the individuality or the self “does not recognize” or “know” (*erkennen*) itself in this world (360/294). Now the world of law is indeed a system of rules – and therefore the “work of self-consciousness” – and, within the world of law, the legal person’s freedom of action is the supreme end. But at the same time, that world contains only power struggles between individuals which end in despotism and the loss of freedom.

This concept of alienation as the work’s mastery over its author is the one Marx is principally building on in his discussion of the mastery of capital produced through labor over its creators. The individual no longer recognizes the cultural world (a world which is, for Marx, essentially economic) that it created for the sake of its self-realization as a product and “objectivization” of its powers and activities. The individual is dominated by that world and its own intentions are turned against it. And this has the principal effect of “turning” human beings’ relationships with one another “on their head.” Instead of the supplementation of the individual into a “species being” in accordance with its essence, what we find is reciprocal instrumentalization and exploitation.⁹⁵

The *second* concept of alienation arises from the experience of the “dissolution” of this world of private law into a new substantial form of ethical life – historically speaking, the German-Christian world. Hegel reminds us of the chapter on “unhappy consciousness” in which self-consciousness was conscious of its own unreality (sinfulness, mortality) and sought to approach the ideal of the incarnate God (God become man) though asceticism and devotional meditation. Divine spirit was supposed to become actual in man not through the affirmation of the person in the law, but through the emptying of the finite self and the “alienation of the personality” – this ascetic “emptying” being the complement of God’s emptying Himself of His divine attributes in order to become man (*kenosis*). Here “alienation” means self-denial and self-transformation into a “new human being” and the resulting spiritual community of the church. This concept connects up with Rousseau’s notion of *aliénation*. Employing a clearly religious metaphor, Rousseau understands the social contract as an *aliénation totale* – a transformation of the natural individual into a citizen of the state through the emptying out of his natural rights and their transformation into guarantees of the state.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Cf Lange, *Das Prinzip Arbeit*; Meszaros, *Der Entfremdungsbegriff bei Marx*.

⁹⁶ Cf Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book 1, Chapter 6.

The two foregoing concepts of alienation are opposed to one another. On one side we have the unity of self and spiritual “substance” though the emptying out and self-renunciation of the person; on the other side we have the impossibility of recognizing oneself in the world one has oneself produced. As in unhappy consciousness, both involve a division into two “worlds.” We are thus dealing with the same epoch, though it is now actually being viewed *as* an epoch within the entire development of culture. This two-worlds and two-domains theory is the defining characteristic of Christian–European culture, even as it embodies a continuation and deepening of the distinction within Greek ethical life between the divine law and the state.

The relationship between these two worlds forms the *third* concept of alienation. Spirit, the unity of self and reality, of individual and community, is “not only One world, but a doubled, separated, and opposed world” (361/295). And these two worlds once again stand in an inverse relation to one another: “The *present*, actual world immediately has its opposite in its *beyond*, which is both its thinking and its being-thought, just as the beyond has the present world as its actuality, but an actuality alienated from it” (361/295). This reciprocal inversion is likewise familiar to us from the “inverted world” of force and the understanding, as well as from unhappy consciousness.

As in the case of the “inverted world,” what we have here are two conceptions of the world which are mirror images of each other, only one of which is supposed to form – Platonically, as it were – the true world while the other constitutes its untrue appearance: a distinction which collapses again and again in the *Phenomenology* and leads to a confusion of contents and “truth values.” This “reversal” of opposites “into one another,” when compared with their clear separation and juxtaposition, represents an “alienation.” The *topos* of a world split in two and of the transfiguration of the present into a better, but unreal, beyond has been taken up by the Hegelian left’s (i.e. Feuerbach, Bauer, and Marx’s) critique of religion.⁹⁷

In the course of development, both worlds turn out to be themselves alienated in the sense that they involve the inversion and dissolution of their own moments. This brings us to the *fourth* concept of alienation. Historically speaking, it corresponds to the appearance of modern subjectivity beginning with the Reformation, continuing through the

⁹⁷ Cf Löwith, *Die Hegelsche Linke*.

Enlightenment, and ending with the French Revolution. Hegel sees a parallel here to the downfall of the Greek world through the emancipation of the individual in late ancient philosophies and in Roman law. Subjectivity is the “negative power” which dissolves the faith of the Middle Ages as well as the distinction between the present world and the beyond. But this time the result is not “the individual person” but the “*universal self*, the consciousness which grasps the *concept*” (362/296). The “concept,” in this loaded Hegelian sense, is the unity of the three moments of universality, particularity, and singularity. The first form of this consciousness of the concept is moral consciousness that “specifies” a universal law in the singularity of conscience.

One might compare this fourth meaning of alienation – as the dissolution of the spiritual order of faith and the traditional ethical and moral order – with Rousseau’s critique of culture. Still, Hegel is less concerned to highlight the loss of the individual’s authenticity and self-agreement in “competitive society” and more interested in the dissolution of clear religious and ethical distinctions brought about by individual critique. And Hegel takes Rousseau’s cultural critique itself to have been a significant historical factor in bringing on this dissolution. In Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality*, alienation is the loss of identity, autonomy, and happiness on the part of the individual. The development of culture, of cohabitation, and of the distribution of labor disrupts the original equilibrium between needs and their fulfillment, between self-understanding and action. Modern man in the urban cultures of the eighteenth century does not live on his own terms, in harmony with his nature and his authentic experiences and aims. His very self-consciousness has become completely dependent on comparison with others, on fashions and expectations, on contrasts and artificial distinctions.

When Hegel calls the first of the three main parts of this section “The World of Self-Alienated Spirit,” the first three meanings of alienation are apparently dominant. By contrast, the two subsequent titles (“The Enlightenment” and “Absolute Freedom and the Terror”) have to do with the dissolution of the opposition between the two worlds and with the emancipation of the subject. Yet it is astonishing that this first section, which is historically concerned with the Middle Ages and the early modern era, does not address the relation between church and state, but rather the relation between the state and society – in a way that is similar, for example, to how the first part (“True Spirit”) addressed the relations between the family and the state and between husband and wife.

It is only in the second part that the relationship between faith and knowledge, religion and science, receives due attention. Hegel's discussion there often takes the form of a sharp polemic against a shallow Enlightenment, a religion based on mere feeling, and a Romantic cultural critique. At the same time, however, it does already contain the basic contours of the true theory of objective and absolute spirit.

In the third part, the historical topic is the French Revolution, but Hegel's systematic concern is a higher level of the actualization of the individual's freedom in the state, i.e. in the general will. Here, one must simultaneously read Hegel's text on a number of levels – viz. the theory of spirit (law, custom, religion), the philosophy of history, and epistemology – for he is concerned to overcome the opposition between knowledge and object. A final interpretive layer is added by Hegel's anticipation of the logical categories, whose systematic development makes up his *Science of Logic*.

I. THE WORLD OF SELF-ALIENATED SPIRIT. Unlike ancient consciousness, Christian consciousness does not feel at home in its world. The "world of actuality" is one that has yet to be saved; it is the world of "its alienation." Christian consciousness's true home is in its unity with God in the world of "pure consciousness." Hegel thematizes not only the religious version of this opposition, but also the more general relationship between an order of thought and the actual world. "Spirit" doesn't merely involve social relationships and their mental correlates, but also knowledge of the foundations and basic laws of the spiritual and the natural world. And this can take the form of a religion, a philosophy, or a system of sciences. It can even take different attitudes toward the "real" social world – either explanatory, or critical, dismissive, affirmative, etc. It can even happen that oppositions and critical relationships develop between various forms of these cognitive systems – as was the case, for example, in the modern era with the deepening opposition between religion and science. These oppositions are then reflected in mentalities and in individual consciousness. And they can cause a fissure in individual consciousness to the point of "schizophrenia." These, too, are forms of "alienation" for Hegel.

This is the "other form of that alienation which consists precisely in being conscious of two different worlds, and embracing both" (363/297). The special form of opposition which consists in having one's true "identity" in the spiritual, but not yet "present," world – that is, the "flight from the actual world" – is what Hegel calls "faith." Yet Hegel distinguishes faith from religion, which consists in "self-consciousness

of the absolute being as it is *in and for itself*" (363/297). This, apparently, is Hegel's own, true concept of religion as the self-knowledge of the actual, present order of the world in man. It is the task of the chapter on religion to show that this concept represents the immanent *telos* of the history of religion.

a. *Culture and its realm of actuality.* It is certainly a bit perplexing that the concept of "culture" is not supposed to be central to the ancient world – despite the significance of *paideia* in Greek culture⁹⁸ – but rather to the Christian world. Indeed, individuals' renunciation of their natural interests in subordinating them to the state already constituted a specific moment in Hegel's characterization of the Greek ethical world. Yet this moment remained subordinate to the "felicitous harmony" between private and public interests. Furthermore, the Greek world also lacked the thought of a future completion and reconciliation of the spiritual world with the individual.

For Hegel, "culture" is a two-sided process involving both the "socialization" of the individual and the realization of the spiritual order:

It is therefore through *culture* that the individual acquires standing and actuality. His [sc. the individual's] true *original nature* and substance is the *alienation* of himself as spirit from his *natural* being. This transformative externalization is, therefore, both the *purpose* and the *existence* of the individual. It is at once the *means*, or the *transition*, both of the [mere] *thought of substance* into *actuality*, and, conversely, of *specific individuality* into *essentiality*.

(364/298)

This enculturation belongs to human nature itself inasmuch as human beings are at once natural and cultural beings.

This already marks a clear departure from Rousseau and from the opposition of nature and culture characteristic of the Cynic tradition.⁹⁹ Man must cultivate himself, co-ordinate his bodily functions with his will, in order to live and survive. And in so doing, humans unconsciously integrate themselves into social behavioral patterns.

Now Hegel distinguishes two fundamental ways in which the individual cultivates herself and in which behavioral patterns and institutions come to life in the individual. One is wealth, the other is the power of the state. Or, as one might also put it: the economy (or market society)

⁹⁸ Cf Jaeger, *Paideia*.

⁹⁹ Cf Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*; see also Siep, "Hegels politische Anthropologie."

and the state. We now have before us the essential components of ethical life according to Hegel's own mature social philosophy: the family, civil society, and the state. These went on to constitute the principal divisions of ethical life for Hegel, beginning with his 1817 *Philosophy of Right*.¹⁰⁰ In the *Phenomenology*, however, "wealth" also includes pre-bourgeois feudal society. The dissolution of the distinction between private acquisition and the "public service" of the nobility as royal vassal is, for Hegel, one of the reasons for the collapse of the *ancien régime* in Europe – and especially in France.

Both these elements – wealth and state power – constitute "culture," and each in a twofold sense: "Thus state power is simultaneously simple *substance* and the universal '*work*' – the absolute 'heart of the matter' itself in which individuals find their *essence* expressed, and where their separate individuality is simply a consciousness of their *universality*" (367 f./301). That is to say, it is in the state that the individual actualizes herself as someone fit for society and capable of making public use of her reason. Yet the individual actualizes herself precisely by subordinating herself to the general will, i.e. by obeying the laws and deferring her private well-being, when necessary. In the form of *wealth*, by contrast, the universal is

the perpetually *produced result* of the *labor* and *activity* of all, just as it is dissipated again in the *enjoyment* of all. It is true that in the enjoyment, the individuality becomes *for himself* or as a *particular individual*, but this enjoyment itself is the result of the general activity, just as, reciprocally, wealth produces universal labor and enjoyment for all.

(368/301)

Here Hegel is following the understanding of the "wealth of nations" advanced by what we today call the "classical" economics of Adam Smith and other eighteenth-century authors.¹⁰¹ But he is simultaneously applying this theory in his interpretation of premodern society. State power and wealth not only stand in different relations to the individual, they also have different categorial structures. State power is primarily an end in itself – unchangeable, enduring, and valid in itself. Wealth, by contrast, has the structure of "being-for-another" – it is only actual in the motion of production and exchange; it has the significance of a means for other ends that the individual or the community may have.

¹⁰⁰ On the development of civil society in Hegel's Jena writings, cf Horstmann, "Über die Rolle."

¹⁰¹ Cf Smith, *Wealth of Nations*.

But, as always in the *Phenomenology*, the attempts to maintain a separation between such categories turn out to be futile, for they reveal a structure of “reversal into the other” and accordingly dissolve the boundaries of the respective social order that they were meant to demarcate. This finds historical expression in the dissolution of medieval and early modern feudal society, in which the realm of production was essentially restricted to the *oikos* – i.e. to the personal allegiance or serfdom relationship between the physical producers and their noble protectors. The state relationship, by contrast, was not self-serving, since the “vassal” found his identity precisely in his sacrifices for king and country.

This separation dissolves to the extent that private interests begin to be connected with service to the state – with the availability of noble privileges for sale, the relevance of these privileges for personal income, the advent of state-owned lands, the levying of taxes for the private income of the crown, etc. These developments are by no means arbitrary, for they reveal the untenability of an abstract separation between these two ethical orders. In Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, both “forms of integration” must contain their respective other within themselves and take over its functions as well. In civil society, for example, the processes of the “invisible hand” must be accompanied by the conscious and institutionalized promotion of the common good through professional organizations and the administrative provisions of economic and social politics. Conversely, the state must care for the material existence of the individual as well as for his rights and his ethical self-realization in public activities.

All of this is lacking in pre-revolutionary European society; nor does it explicitly come into view in the revolution itself. However, the development of pre-revolutionary society involves not just a dissolution of institutions, but also, and primarily, a dissolution of ethical standards of good and bad, of the noble and the base. This confusion reveals itself, in fact, in the state of noble and civil pseudo-morality which Rousseau and Diderot so ably criticize.¹⁰²

b. Faith and pure insight. The second part of “Culture” has to do with the corresponding processes in the sphere of “worldviews.” The first form in which the individual relates to the explanations of the world and the ethical orders (both of which are, of course, inseparable in

¹⁰² On Hegel’s critical engagement with Diderot, and particularly with his novel *Rameau’s Nephew* (which had recently been translated into German by Goethe), see Price, “Hegel’s Intertextual Dialectic.”

mythology and religion) is through religious *faith* – i.e. immediate recognition of the revealed supernatural order. The second form, by contrast, is the claim to be able to know or at least verify such an order through one's own insight. And each of these attitudes can, for its part, relate the spiritual order to the actual world in different ways. One can either retreat from the world into the pure sphere of truth and ascetic service to it, as the medieval monks did, or one can attempt to adapt the actual world to the spiritual order, joining with those who call for the church to direct worldly affairs.

Here, too, Hegel uncovers the same processes of reciprocal contagion and interpenetration. Faith develops its own theology – an intellectual justification that appeals to reason and insight. It thereby creates the space for a demand for justification, which the Reformation subsequently turns into a rejection of authority and a demand for the authentic examination and recognition of truth and salvation instead of naive faith – that “tranquil pure *consciousness* of spirit” (397/326). Moreover, insight itself experiences a reversal from primarily intuitive, subjective certainty of truth and salvation, which turns away from the world and leaves worldly orders intact (cf Luther's “two kingdoms”). From this simple certainty, insight turns into the demand that every consciousness find its own self-consciousness in every content: “This pure insight is thus the spirit that calls to *every* consciousness: *be for yourselves* what you all are *in yourselves* – *rational*” (398/328).

II. THE ENLIGHTENMENT. With this, we arrive at the world and the spirit of the Enlightenment, in which the opposition between faith and insight or religion and science first arises – although it then comes to sublate itself, according to Hegel.

This development has two parts. The first is the Enlightenment's struggle with superstition – i.e. with faith, which is viewed as superstition by its opponents.¹⁰³ This struggle reveals that the Enlightenment cannot actually distinguish itself from its “superstitious” opponent. The initial result is that faith becomes mere yearning, or religious feeling.

¹⁰³ With reference to the Enlightenment critique of religion, Hegel likely had foremost in mind the theoretical writings of d'Holbach (e.g. *Christianity Unveiled* and the *System of Nature*, cf the comments by the editors of *PhG* (1988), 604). Widely read versions of the critique of the priesthood can also be found in the novels of Voltaire and Diderot (cf e.g. Voltaire's *Les lettres d'Amabed* and *Candide*; cf e.g. Diderot's *The Nun* or *Rameau's Nephew*). Within German literature, Wieland might come to mind (e.g. his novel *History of the Abderites*). On the reception of the French Enlightenment in this chapter, cf Hyppolite, *Genèse*, 413 ff./426 ff.

It thereby becomes identical with the Enlightenment itself. For the Enlightenment exposes all immediate certainties and its deism reduces all things to products of an incomprehensible, absolute being who does not interfere in the course of the world.

After this initial “victory” of the Enlightenment, it collapses in on itself and fractures into oppositions. In the second section, Hegel describes the various Enlightenment factions, paying particular attention to the opposition between materialism and deism as well as their synthesis in thought about the individual and social usefulness of various things.¹⁰⁴ But with this, the aspiration of the Enlightenment to be a system grounded in pure reason (insight) collapses. It becomes a new kind of skepticism whose individual certainty lies in demonstrating the respective usefulness of all things and arrangements. Thus individual certainty and spiritual substance once again stand in unmediated opposition to one another.

a. The struggle of the Enlightenment with superstition. The Enlightenment’s struggle with superstition ultimately reveals that its “opponent,” faith, is fundamentally no different from the truth of the Enlightenment. This opponent takes various shapes. For one, it is the consciousness of the masses which have been deceived by the priests and the despots they support. Its other shape is seductive “priestly consciousness” itself. The first must clearly be essentially related to the consciousness of the “Enlightener” himself, for otherwise it could not arrive at true insight simply by “opening its eyes.” The consciousness of the masses is “in itself” quite healthy. It is capable of pure insight and would not resist it, if only it were freed from the domination and seduction of priests and despots.

The consciousness of the Enlightenment is, on the other hand, identical to that of the priests or theologians insofar as the latter misunderstands faith in just the same “reifying” manner as it criticizes on the side of “superstition.” In particular, the Enlightenment fails to recognize that the representations of faith are an imperfect form of the truth – the truth that the absolute is self-finitizing, self-concretizing thinking. It fails to understand what religious (“unhappy”) consciousness has already experienced, according to the *Phenomenology*. It takes symbols to be objective things and takes God – understood as spirit – to be a “transitory thing”:

¹⁰⁴ This focus on the usefulness of various things for individuals or for society is, of course, distinct from the subsequent tradition of thought that would come to be called “utilitarianism.”

But in apprehending the object of faith as insight's own object, it already does faith an injustice. For it is saying that faith's absolute Being is a piece of stone, a block of wood, which has eyes yet does not see, or again, a piece of dough which, having come from the field, is transformed by man and returned to earth again.

(409/337)

The Enlightenment misunderstands the point of faith, which is to view everything finite *sub specie aeternitatis* and to unite oneself with the infinite. The Enlightenment hypostatizes and separates the absolute from finite consciousness, the unchangeable from changeable things, etc. Now the Enlightenment's own "true" theory is itself a kind of "idealization" in that it traces things back to laws and traces the world itself back to an indeterminate divine creator. But this "truth" is not yet conscious of itself, for various versions of the Enlightenment continue to "hypostatize" or "reify" it and divide it into fixed oppositions.

Hegel summarizes the result of this struggle, in which the Enlightenment both fails to understand and fails to genuinely differ from its opponent, from the perspective of faith (the end of subsection a.). The faith which opens itself up to the arguments of reason and the standards of individual insight thereby loses the content of those images and representations which do not stand up to scientific critique:

As a result, faith has lost the content which filled its element, and sunk into listlessly weaving spirit back and forth into itself. It has been expelled from its kingdom; or, this kingdom has been ransacked, since waking consciousness has seized its every distinction and expansion and has vindicated earth's ownership of all its portions and returned them to earth . . . Since faith is without any content and cannot remain in this void, or since, in going beyond the finite which is the sole content, it finds only the void, it is a *sheer yearning* . . . Faith has, in fact, become the same as Enlightenment, viz. the consciousness of the relation of what is in itself finite to an absolute without predicates, an absolute unknown and unknowable; but there is this difference: the latter is *satisfied* Enlightenment, but faith is *unsatisfied* Enlightenment.

(423 f./349)

In other words, the feeling-based religion which has been "purified" of superstitious theology is no longer distinct from the abstract deism of the Enlightenment. The only difference is that the intentions of the Enlightenment are thereby "satisfied." Yet this "triumph" over faith proves to be nothing but a mere appearance, as the next section reveals.

b. *The truth of the Enlightenment.* Hegel discusses the deistic and materialistic versions of the Enlightenment as a kind of disintegration of the victorious party into factions: "One party of the Enlightenment calls the absolute being that predicateless absolute which exists in thought beyond the actual consciousness which formed its starting point; the other calls it *matter*" (426/351).¹⁰⁵ Each contradicts the other, yet they are fundamentally indistinguishable. For, as opposed to consciousness, the deistic God, separated from the world, is "*something existing externally* ... and thus the same as what is called *pure matter*" (427/352). Materialism's concept of matter, however, abstracts from all sensible properties and thereby makes matter into "something simple, without predicates, the essence of *pure consciousness*" (ibid.). As such, it cannot be distinguished from "*pure thinking*."

The Enlightenment, however, is an actual activity that draws distinctions and generates particular insights. Thought and materiality are united in this activity. This is the third version of Enlightenment – the thought of usefulness – in which "pure insight achieves its realization," according to Hegel (428/353).¹⁰⁶ What is useful is "an enduring being in itself, or a thing," yet at the same time only a "pure moment," i.e. "something absolutely for another" (429/354). To take the principle of usefulness as a guideline both for the explanation of the world (subjective teleology) and for its formation (the arrangement of the world as useful for the individual and society) is, for Hegel, to realize the unity of both these worlds: the world of pure thought and actuality itself as given to the individual who is certain of it. He writes,

the useful is the object insofar as self-consciousness sees through it and has in it the *individual certainty* of itself, its enjoyment (its *being-for-itself*); self-consciousness sees right into the object, and this insight contains the *true essence* of the object (which is to be something that is seen right through, or to be *for-an-other*) ... [S]elf-consciousness has the universal certainty of itself, its *pure consciousness*, equally immediately in this relationship in which, therefore, *truth* as well as presence and *actuality* are united. Both worlds are reconciled and heaven is transplanted to earth below."

(430 f./355)

¹⁰⁵ The materialist "party" naturally calls to mind Helvétius and d'Holbach, or perhaps even Diderot. The editors of *PhG* (1988) suggest Robinet (author of *On Nature*) as the paradigmatic deist, though one might also think of Voltaire.

¹⁰⁶ Here too, Helvétius may stand foremost in Hegel's mind (cf *PhG* (1988), 607 f.). Reflection on usefulness was, however, very widespread in the German popular Enlightenment as well (cf for example Campe, *Robinson der Jüngere*).

In the final part of “Alienated Spirit,” it will turn out that this unity can only be realized through the process of negating individuality, i.e. through the reduction of individuality to what is socially useful. That is the topic of the next section, “Absolute Freedom and the Terror,” in which Hegel critically engages with the French Revolution.

III. ABSOLUTE FREEDOM AND THE TERROR. The Enlightenment’s general theory of usefulness has now made the world thoroughly transparent and referred everything in it to human beings – to rational, self-conscious beings. But “is useful” “is still a predicate of the object, not itself a subject or the immediate and sole *actuality* of the object” (431/355). Such a conception only comes on the scene in Rousseau’s theory of law and the state and in the French Revolution, both of which arose out of the Enlightenment. It is only at this point that reality is conceived as the activity of the general will. The general will, however, is nothing other than the immediate joint operation of individual wills. The individual is

conscious of its pure personality and therein of all spiritual reality, and all reality is solely spiritual; the world is for it simply its own will, and it is a general will. And what is more, this will is not the empty thought of will which consists in silent assent, or assent through a representative, but a real general will, the will of all *individuals* as such.

(432/356 f.)

Hegel is apparently engaging with Rousseau’s theory of direct legislation through all citizens – without mentioning that Rousseau only accorded this right to full citizens (out of up to five classes of citizenship)¹⁰⁷ and that even then, voting was restricted to an up or down (“yea” or “nay”) vote on the legislative suggestions of the government.¹⁰⁸ Hegel contrasts this idea of direct legislation with all theories that involve only a hypothetical contract (even in Kant), for the crucial issue here is not “the *idea* of obedience to *self-given* laws” but the “*reality* of actually giving the law *oneself*,” for where the self is only “*represented* by proxy, it is not” (435/359). The consciousness that, as an individual, one immediately gives or legislates the laws of the social world is a

¹⁰⁷ Cf his footnote to *Social Contract*, Book I, Chapter 6 concerning the concepts of *citoyen* and *bourgeois*.

¹⁰⁸ Cf *Social Contract*, Book IV, Chapter 2. As the “Dedication” to the *Second Discourse* and the *Lettres écrites de la Montagne* prove, Rousseau’s conception of direct democracy follows the constitution of Geneva as he interprets it.

consciousness of unrestricted freedom. Such absolute freedom is irresistible; it “ascends to the throne of the world without any power being able to resist it” (433/357). Here, Hegel is not only alluding to the triumph of the French Revolution and Napoleon’s rise to power, for in his own philosophy of right and philosophy of history, he also maintains that a people’s consciousness of its freedom is irresistible (cf *EPW* (1830), §482). And he takes this to reveal that the substance of history is spiritual and that what is spiritual does not remain a mere idea (in the ordinary sense of the word) or a demand, but necessarily realizes itself.

For Hegel, the modern revolutions in England (1688), in the United States (1776), and in France (1789) reveal this realization of the rights of the individual to be an irresistible force of history. These revolutions realize, in ever more radical forms, individuals’ rights to resistance and, increasingly, their rights to political participation. The French Revolution qua “Enlightenment put into practice” demanded the immediate efficacy of the individual will, and not only the individual’s rights to “insight.” For the sake of this reality, the Revolution destroyed the shape of society; the distribution of power; the order of social classes (“spheres of labor”); and, ultimately, the family, the state, and society as the “*real essences*” of the “real world of culture” (435/358) – just as the Enlightenment had dissolved the order of the world into pure usefulness and the abstraction of the *être suprême* (*PhG*, 434/358).

But such a general will, lacking internal differentiation and determinate shape, is no longer capable of becoming a “work” in which the individual might find and recognize himself. The same thing holds for action, as well. For the general will can only act through the deeds of individuals that “execute” it. Once again, action has become something exclusive that “restricts” the participation of others and fails to express the general will (cf 435/358).

The immediate unification of the general and individual will turns out to be impossible, just as the immediate synthesis involving the law of the heart did. For a general will must, of course, be free from particular interests and individual opinions and yet simultaneously be an immediate expression of the individual will. Therefore, if these interests and opinions are not informed by the habits and modes of thought and action specific to groups and institutions, and thus bound up with the well-being of the whole, then the result will either be a battle between various interests or the domination of the general will

over the individual. In the French Revolution, the latter tendency took hold. The general will separated itself – particularly in the Jacobin phase – into “abstract extremes,” namely “into a simple, inflexible cold universality, and into the discrete, absolute hard rigidity and self-willed atomism of actual self-consciousness” (436/359). After “complet[ing] the destruction of the real organization of the world,” the individual self is the “only object” that still remains juxtaposed to the general will, which has long since become unmoored from the actual wills of the individuals.

Hegel interprets the rise of Jacobin totalitarianism and ultimately the “terror” of all its state-ordered executions in an admittedly speculative fashion, but his discussion nevertheless contains much genuine insight into the structures of total despotism, which we have seen reproduced in the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century – whether fascist, communist, or militaristic. The breakup of social organizations, the suppression of political parties, the paranoid suspicion directed at dissenters, etc. – Hegel develops all these phenomena with clairvoyant accuracy. To take just one example:

Being suspected, therefore, takes the place, or has the significance and effect, of *being guilty*; and the external reaction against this reality that lies in the simple inwardness of intention, consists in the cold, matter-of-fact annihilation of this existent self, from which nothing else can be taken away but its mere being.

(437/360)

Hegel’s presentation of these phenomena, however, does not properly belong either to history or to political science. He is rather concerned to trace them back to their categorial background.

Even Napoleon’s rise within the French Revolution is to be understood “categorially” (i.e. through philosophical categories). The negation of the abstract universal is aimed against the very free self-consciousness, which serves as its own principle. This is self-sameness, pure thinking and willing. The negation of this principle is also aimed at the abstract identity of the general will. But a negation directed at itself is always, for Hegel, to be understood as an instance of the principle of self-differentiation. In the case of the general will, this leads to a new “organization of the spiritual masses” (438/361). This organization and discipline is, once again, the work of the fear of death, but this time it is a collective fear. The individuals “who have felt the fear of death, of their absolute master, again submit to negation

and distinctions, arrange themselves into the various spheres or masses, and return to an apportioned and limited task, but thereby to their substantial reality" (ibid.). The idea that individuals can only participate in an enduring, legal, state order through "limited" activity clearly harkens back to the theory of the Platonic republic (*politeia*), in which justice is understood as acting in accordance with the particular class to which one belongs. Hegel himself adheres to a different conception of social class and, more importantly, endorses the individual's freedom to choose his profession (and thus social–professional class), provided that he is appropriately qualified. Such a "Neoplatonic" concretization simultaneously overcomes and rounds out the Enlightenment's abstract theories of will.

Hegel understands Napoleon to be the restorer of such an internally differentiated society, in which professional classes are integrated into an organic legal system. Napoleon is at once the one who delivers the abstract legal order – the Code Napoléon – as well as the founder of the "organic" constitution based around an organization of classes and powers, e.g. in his 1806 reorganization of the north Italian states.¹⁰⁹ Napoleon's battles and victories – which themselves interrupted Hegel's completion of the *Phenomenology*¹¹⁰ – were by no means random, but rather necessary developments of free spirit. In Hegel's later writings after Napoleon's fall, however, Hegel maintains that Napoleon's constitutions and legal codes likewise fell back under the concept of the abstract. The reason is that Napoleon was unable to reconcile the concrete cultures and religions of the peoples he conquered with a rational, legal constitution, a failure which Hegel dated back to the war in Spain (1808).

In the *Phenomenology*, however, Hegel's summary of the legal and governmental developments of the freedom of spirit remains cautious and brief. And he did not end up publishing his contemporaneous reflections on the rational constitution of constitutional monarchy (viz. in the 1805–1806 *Realphilosophie*, cf. JSE III / *Hegel and the Human Spirit*). The development of spirit in the *Phenomenology* proceeds further into morality. For Hegel viewed the developments in the German philosophy and literature of his time as further stages in the integration of individual and universal freedom.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Rosenzweig, *Hegel und der Staat*, 236 f.

¹¹⁰ Cf. his letter to Schelling, May 1, 1807, in *Briefe* 1, 161 f. / *Letters*, 79 f.

Now what does this transition look like? Hegel begins by invoking the experience of terror:

For consciousness, the immediate unity of itself with the general will, its demand to know itself as this specific point in the general will, is transformed into the absolutely opposite experience. What vanishes for it in that experience is abstract *being* or the immediacy of that insubstantial point, and this vanished immediacy is the general will itself which it now knows itself to be . . . insofar as it is a pure knowing or pure will.

(440/362 f.)

The individual knows itself, not immediately, but through the subordination of its private opinions and wishes, to be at one with the general will: “the *general will* is its *pure knowing and willing* and it is the general will qua this pure knowing and willing” (ibid.). This *pure knowing and willing* on the part of the individual is moral willing: “absolute freedom leave[s] its self-destroying reality and pass[es] over into another land of self-conscious spirit . . . Thus arises the new shape of *moral spirit*” (441/363). This new land is a new dimension of spirit, and one that actually developed in a different geographical location – viz. in the philosophy and art of Germany.

C. *Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality*

In the first two parts of the morality chapter, Hegel principally aims his critical energies at Kant’s doctrine of the postulates of practical reason and its further development in the work of Fichte. The last part of the morality chapter then turns to the theory of conscience and moral “genius” advanced by Fichte, Jacobi, Novalis, and other Romantics. The issue there is how to understand the relationship between morality and reality – the reality of nature, of sensibility, and of the action of particular individuals. The chapter on conscience then expands the discussion to incorporate the relationship between individuality and universality – the universality of moral rules and laws, but also the universality of general moral consciousness in a community.

A. THE MORAL WORLDVIEW. Hegel understands the moral worldview to historically characterize post-Kantian German philosophy and literature (particularly Romanticism). Systematically, however, he takes it to denote the interpretation of the natural and social world in terms of the principles of autonomous, moral consciousness. Kant’s doctrine of the postulates of practical reason is, for Hegel, a paradigmatic

interpretation of the natural world in terms of the principles of morality: to clarify and support the certainties of moral consciousness we necessarily suppose a certain account of the natural order and of its creator. Morality and happiness – i.e. “moral” and natural “*being-in-and-for-itself*,” respectively – must, at root, be in agreement, even if we do not find them to be so in our own, “this-worldly” experiences (cf 443 f./365 f.).

The difference between Hegel’s discussion of Kantian morality in the chapter on reason and his discussion here in the section on “spirit” lies in the fact that reason’s starting point is the possibility of realizing rational, moral laws, while spirit begins from the idea that morality represents the true reality and that other apparent “realities” are to be traced back to it.

This idea expresses itself differently in the work of Kant, Fichte, and the Romantics. For Kant, it comes out most clearly in his doctrine of the highest good, which holds that any self-consistent moral consciousness must presume that there is no fundamental contradiction between the order of nature and the moral order, but that the two are in harmony with one another. It is contrary to reason that the just ultimately and definitively suffer. Yet since it is impossible for us humans either to theoretically demonstrate that there is such agreement or to practically effect it, we are obliged to assume the existence of a moral, omnipotent, and supremely good being who guarantees a proportional correlation between morality (virtue) and happiness. And we are furthermore compelled to assume that the soul, in striving to be worthy of happiness, must be able to complete and perfect its efforts beyond the time span of its existence in a mortal body. That is the moral postulate of the immortality of the soul.

This account of God as the guarantor of the harmony between morality (being worthy of happiness) and happiness – which together constitute for us the highest conceivable good to be promoted through moral action – can be found in each of Kant’s three Critiques. In the third Critique, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant adds still further arguments based on the observation of nature. He maintains that our view of nature as a purposive system of beings which are themselves functionally organized presupposes the idea of an intelligent, super-sensible, creative substance.¹¹¹

In his “Aenesidemus” review – that is, his refutation of Gottlob Ernst Schulze’s skeptical critique of transcendental philosophy – Fichte further develops the Kantian doctrine of the postulates in order to ground

¹¹¹ Cf the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §§78, 82 (5: 413, 429).

both theoretical and practical philosophy in the conception of the autonomous I. Human consciousness, according to Fichte, can be explained in terms of its striving to approximate a purely rational and simultaneously omnipotent being, who creates the world through its very thought. Consciousness seeks to achieve this approximation through rational self-determination and reflection on its own activity. But such reflection is bound up with the distinction between activity and passivity, rationality and sensibility: the I “opens” itself to outer influences, it “finds” itself with various sensory representations and wishes. According to Fichte, to actually achieve pure moral self-consciousness – much less a truly divine creation of the Not-I – would annul our very mode of consciousness, which is only possible in virtue of distinguishing the I from the Not-I, from the constraints of what is non-rational.

Fichte thereby intensifies a dilemma that is already implicit in the Kantian doctrine of the postulates. On the one hand, perfected morality is the goal of all human striving and the explanans of theoretical consciousness. The latter can only grasp what is given to it as a constraint on its spontaneity, and can only conceive its spontaneity as striving to completely overcome passivity or sensibility – that is, as striving to become perfectly moral. On the other hand, perfected morality in receptive and temporal consciousness is utterly inconceivable, for its achievement would mark the dissolution of consciousness itself. This, according to Hegel, is the contradiction in which the moral worldview entangles itself. For its first principle or fundamental thesis holds that there is such a thing as moral self-consciousness and that all experience of reality ultimately traces back to it. But the insight into the inconceivability of perfect morality then leads us to the counter-principle: “*there is no moral, perfect, actual self-consciousness*; and, since the moral sphere only exists at all, insofar as it is perfect, for duty is the *pure* unadulterated *intrinsic being* or in-itself,” the counter-principle concludes “that there is nothing moral in reality” (452/373). Moral consciousness can only extract itself from this conflict by assuming the “unity of duty and reality” in a “*beyond*” which is nevertheless “supposed to be real” (ibid.). At base, however, this is a kind of “false” consciousness, a “duplicitous” position.

B. DISSEMBLANCE OR DUPLICITY. This section continues Hegel’s critical discussion of Kant’s postulate doctrine and Fichte’s expansion of it. Instead of going through the text point by point, it should be sufficiently explanatory to identify the principal contradictions

Hegel finds in Kant's postulates concerning the immortality of the soul and the highest good, guaranteed through an all-powerful and supremely good being.

- (1) We are supposed to strive to be moral, not to be happy. But the highest good, the ultimate end of all striving, is the agreement of virtue or morality (deserving to be happy) with happiness or natural satisfaction. But can one strive to be worthy of happiness without striving to be happy?
- (2) Nature does not automatically reward the virtuous. Nevertheless, one is supposed to battle sensibility insofar as it conflicts with morality and to hope for eventual happiness. In truth or "ultimately," however, nature is supposed to agree with morality and thus to reward moral people. Now true nature cannot consist in some future state, for God is outside all time. But if nature "is already now" in conformity with morality, then we are not permitted to alter it through our action – i.e. we are not permitted to battle either sensibility in ourselves or the "irrational" effects of nature outside us.¹¹²
- (3) We ought to strive for moral perfection. But it is impossible for us to achieve with our twofold sensible–rational constitution. According to Kant, we can always be influenced by sensible impulses; indeed, we can never know for certain whether we have ever acted in a "purely" moral manner. Nevertheless, we are always supposed to act morally and we are obliged to endlessly perfect ourselves morally. The ultimate morality, which would make us deserving of happiness, is freedom from all sensibility. But we cannot actually understand what such a state would be. Indeed, according to Fichte, such a state fundamentally exceeds the possibilities of a finite consciousness.¹¹³ We are thus supposed to strive for something that we can never achieve.
- (4) As mentioned above, the "reality" of pure morality is supposed to reside in every moral act and simultaneously in an unreachable "beyond." Analogously, the reality of the supposed harmony between nature and morality is supposed to lie somewhere beyond our temporal existence and yet nevertheless obtain and subsist.

¹¹² In *The Vocation of Man*, 267/116, Fichte speaks of the "last struggles" of an as yet undomesticated nature. Here, and elsewhere, the pages of both the German and the English editions are provided, in that order. Cf the translation of William Smith.

¹¹³ Cf *PhG*, 458/378: "the abolition ... of consciousness itself."

- (5) Finally, the very thought that morality itself might be able to increase is inconsistent, for Hegel. If “the moral end is *pure* duty” (458/379), then the thought of gradations of morality, i.e. a quantity of morality (the superficial concept of “magnitude”), is unthinkable (459/379). But if we are not able to morally perfect ourselves, then happiness cannot be regarded as something earned, but remains dependent on the “chance and caprice” of divine grace. And such grace can also be gained through non-moral means (e.g. religious services, sacrifices).

One can, of course, attempt to resolve all these problems by means of Kantian and Fichtean moral philosophy itself. Whether that is feasible, I shall leave open here. Hegel, at any rate, wants to develop these problems into contradictions within a “spiritual” conception of reality. He thus views the various levels in the development of this moral theory as different levels of spirit’s consciousness of these contradictions. This constitutes the main theme of the second part of the morality chapter, in which consciousness becomes clear about the impossibility of the moralization it is demanding. Despite the impossibility of following the demands of pure morality, and despite the impossibility of distinguishing between moral actions and those aiming merely at happiness (i.e. heteronomous actions in Kant’s sense), consciousness cleaves tenaciously to its claims. And this is what leads to duplicity and hypocrisy.

The moral consciousness of “duplicity,” for whom perfect morality resides in an unattainable beyond, “is not in earnest about the perfection of morality” (458/378). It has resigned itself to the “intermediate state” of “non-morality,” but without being able to admit it. Accordingly, it can no longer regard happiness as something “deserved” but must conceive of it as “free grace” – a “Lutheran” position that can also be found in Kant. Later on, Fichte even attempted (in his writings during the “atheism controversy”) to view every moral action that is required by conscience as an effect of the self-realizing (“divine”) moral world order. The sensible world is the “material of duty.” From the perspective of the moral world order, the expressions of an organic life that pervades all things can even be regarded as the appearance of an absolute self-realizing will.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Cf Fichte, *The Vocation of Man* (1800), Book III; see also Siep, “Autonomie und Vereinigung,” 299.

In the morality chapter, Hegel aims to present the internal contradictions of such a position as a “truth-thesis” about the spiritual and sensible world. Once again, he construes the philosophical development from Kant to Novalis and Schlegel as an internally consistent “experiential history.”

An abbreviated sketch of this history must necessarily emphasize the end of the conscience chapter and the “reconciliation” achieved there. Taken together with the conclusion of the religion chapter, they form the basis for the “absolute knowledge” in which the *Phenomenology* culminates.

C. CONSCIENCE, THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL, EVIL, AND ITS FORGIVENESS. The highest form that the moral interpretation of the world and conception of reality can attain is the morality of conscience. The voice of conscience and the deeds of agents acting out of conscience are supposed to embody “pure practical reason” and yet also constitute a concrete reality. It is through the verdicts of conscience that all duties and laws first gain validity and become concrete injunctions to action. Indeed, it is conscience that is supposed to lend sense to life and the world in the first place. Free, conscientious action is meant to be nature’s ultimate purpose. At the same time, the individual is supposed to act out of his or her innermost personal conviction, yet without coming into conflict with the universal commands of reason.

Nevertheless, precisely such a conflict arises in the section on conscience. A particular form of this conflict can, however, be reconciled through moral, ethical, religious supplementation. It is worth considering this “reconciliation” of individual conscience with universal ethical life in more detail.

Neither Hegel’s morality chapter as a whole nor its final section (“Conscience, the beautiful soul, evil, and its forgiveness”) in particular manages to address all the problems connected with conscience. The legal aspects of freedom of conscience are barely touched on, and the problem of the religious content of conscience is not mentioned at all. In approaching these questions, one must therefore draw on the further resources of the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopedia*.¹¹⁵ In the *Phenomenology* itself, Hegel’s primary focus is the conception of morality advanced by Jacobi, Fichte, and the Romantics.

¹¹⁵ Cf Siep, “Was heißt,” 225 ff., and “Hegels politische Philosophie,” 324.

Hegel begins by unpacking the oppositions internal to the moral standpoint that recognizes individual conscience as the highest authority governing decisions about dutiful action. The claim that an action is in keeping with duty implies that it has a universal character and aspires to be acknowledged by every self-conscious being. Yet at the same time, it is individual conscience itself which is supposed to decide, in any concrete case, what its duty in that situation is.¹¹⁶ This sort of insight or cognition is an act of intuition. Conscience knows immediately, without testing or weighing individual duties, what it is obliged to do. “In the simple moral action of conscience, duties are submerged in such a way that all these single entities [sc. the particular duties] are *harm*ed, and the scrutinizing and shaking of duty itself does not take place in the steadfast certainty of conscience” (467/386).

But there are limits to the “conscientious” analysis of a situation. Conscience simply cannot make good on its claim “that the actual case before it should be viewed unrestrictedly in all its bearings, and therefore that all the circumstances of the case should be accurately known and taken into consideration” (471/389). For one simply cannot get an overview of “an absolute plurality of circumstances which breaks up and spreads out endlessly in all directions, backwards into their conditions, sideways into their connections, forwards into their consequences” (472/389). One could make the same point in connection with contemporary discussions of utilitarianism with respect to the effects of an action on the overall balance of pleasure and pain for all those affected. Hegel discusses a version of this in addressing the maxim “that action for the general good is to be preferred to action for the good of the individual” (475/392). Such a maxim contradicts the distance between conscience and public laws, for the “substance” and purpose of the latter is precisely the common good (*ibid.*).

It is constitutive of the concept of conscience in the *Phenomenology* that this form of moral consciousness manifests unshakable, intuitive self-certainty and sovereignty over public rules. Apparently, Hegel’s teleological interpretation diagnoses the post-Kantian development of moral philosophy with a form of extreme subjectivism, albeit one in which he already sees a form of self-individualizing universality. Conscience here is not merely an ultimate authority in the assessment of duties, but the very ground of moral and legal validity. It is principally

¹¹⁶ Cf Fichte, *The System of Ethics*, §15 section IV, 166/157 f. As usual, citations give the page numbers of the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash.

in passages from Jacobi's novel *Woldemar* (which, unfortunately, has not yet been translated into English) and Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* that one finds conscience or moral genius accorded such an absolute status.¹¹⁷ For Jacobi, however, the central concept of moral genius is virtue, not conscience. Indeed, his *Woldemar* criticizes both the idea that conscience is superior to right and law and the equation of moral and artistic genius.¹¹⁸ Only Novalis unreservedly attributes to conscience the power of divine creativity that Hegel addresses.¹¹⁹ The problematic which Hegel is discussing – namely the idea that the claims of conscience can extend to cover any arbitrary decision and thus are incapable of intersubjectivity – is not, however, peculiar to his own contemporaries. It has also attracted attention in current discussions in ethics, for example in the work of John Mackie.¹²⁰

Hegel continues his analysis of this problematic by going on to consider the relationship between the “agent,” or individual “enactor” of conscience, and the universal moral consciousness that judges his act.¹²¹ The social group, within which the agent calls upon his conscience, is supposed to acknowledge this claim and, therewith, the agent's freedom from publicly valid rules. But since this claim is grounded on nothing other than a private conviction, it cannot be acceptable to a universal and public moral consciousness: “Others, therefore, do not know whether this conscience is morally good or evil, or rather they not only cannot know, but they must also take it to be evil” (477 f./394).

Anyone who places his own will above the universal is, of course, evil according to the Kantian definition, too. In order to refute the claims of conscience, one need only reinterpret the agent's motives. One can impute to him self-interest, a thirst for fame or glory – an interpretation that is just as well (or poorly) grounded as the claim of the “conscientious” agent himself.

¹¹⁷ Jacobi, *Woldemar*, 87, 217, 379; Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, 231–235/164–166. Cf. Hirsch, “Die Beisetzung”; Pöggeler, “Hegels Kritik”; Gram, “Moral and Literary Ideals.”

¹¹⁸ Jacobi, *Woldemar*, 379, 469.

¹¹⁹ Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, 234/165. Gram, “Moral and Literary Ideals,” 320 f., likewise judges that Hegel principally has Novalis in view here.

¹²⁰ Cf. Mackie, *Ethics*, 91 f.

¹²¹ In his “Hegel und Jacobi”, Falke attempts to show that this opposition largely corresponds to the positions of Woldemar and Henriette in Jacobi's *Woldemar*. According to Gram, “Moral and Literary Ideals,” 326 ff., however, Hegel is rather referring to Schlegel's *Lucinde*. And for Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's “Phenomenology”*, 214–219, the opposition reflects the moralizing versus the ironic point of the Romantic understanding of morality.

The “dissolution” of this opposition is only possible through modification of both sides – modifications that seem immanent and necessary to philosophical insight, although they require real moral efforts of both parties. To philosophical reflection, both sides are equally one-sided. The agent’s own consciousness is one-sided because it sets its own divergent decisions of conscience against the prevailing ethical norms. And the moral consciousness which judges such acts is one-sided because it is incapable of concretizing its standards – it is unwilling to compromise its universality through any form of application. This latter form of consciousness is embodied in the “beautiful soul,” a concept and literary trope that Hegel likely finds in Jacobi, and perhaps also in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* and in Novalis.¹²² To preserve the purity of its moral ideals, such a consciousness abjures action and even communication, “he refuses to let his own *inner* being come forth into the *outer* existence of speech” (490/405, Miller’s emphasis).

Now both parties to this dispute put forth a universal claim that the other is supposed to acknowledge. But this can only happen if both sides mutually restrain themselves. The individual who insists on following his conscience must admit the one-sidedness and possible error of his or her decisions. And universal moral consciousness must, for its part, acknowledge that individual decisions – even nonconformist and evil ones – form a necessary moment of spirit. “The word of reconciliation is the *objectively existent* spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself, qua *universal* essence, in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself qua absolutely self-contained and exclusive *individuality* – a reciprocal recognition which is *absolute* spirit” (493/408). Conscience and universal lawfulness are thus two moments of a single spirit – a spirit that concretizes itself as individual decisions, enriches and develops itself through them, and yet simultaneously either incorporates each decision into the system of communal law and life, or else “takes it back” (492/407).

Hegel had not yet worked out the concrete forms of this reconciliation at the time of the *Phenomenology*. But the suggestion in the final

¹²² Cf Jacobi, *Woldemar*, 14, 281, 375, 419. Novalis admittedly does not *employ* this concept, but is himself an embodiment of the “beautiful soul,” according to Hegel. On this point and on the contemporaneous use of the concept, cf Hirsch, “Die Beisetzung”; and Gram, “Moral and Literary Ideals,” 315 ff. Gram argues (at 319) against Hyppolite’s suggestion (*Genèse*, 496/513) that Hegel is referencing Schiller, and similarly rejects the idea that he is referencing Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (for a contrary view, cf the editors of *PhG* (1988), 612).

chapter that this shape of morality corresponds to the final level of revealed Christian religion (cf 572 f./476 f.) permits us to assume that he primarily saw such reconciliation at work in forms of rational, religious morality.

The religious community, if it is not just the collection of beautiful souls that Hegel caricatures on pages 481 f./397 f.,¹²³ can provide a medium for the reciprocal correction of public morality and private conscience. For it is capable of recognizing outsiders and – possibly even by correcting its own prior communal standards – integrating them into the community. There are, however, also different forms of legal and political integration of “outsiders,” which Hegel discusses in the *Philosophy of Right*: e.g. direct appeal to the highest authority of the state (king or president), who can correct the sentences of the law and administration and can pardon the accused, i.e. “undo” what they have done (cf *GPR*, §§282 and 295). The “evil” of decisions of conscience, by contrast, can be minimized in various ways: through the subjugation of the conscientious agent to public laws, through the enculturation and education of conscience through the law and professional duties, and finally – as Hegel elaborates in the *Encyclopedia* – through the confirmation of the truth of the legal state within religious conscience.¹²⁴ Revealed religion and speculative philosophy can lead to such a reconciliation of conscience with public laws.

In the *Phenomenology*, this reconciliation of conscience with the moral community is likewise followed by a chapter on religion and one on philosophy. But these are not concerned with providing a religious or a philosophical justification of the state, but with further developing and deepening our conception of the identity of individual self-consciousness, universal spirit, and “objective reality,” which was achieved through the reconciliation of conscience with universal consciousness. Yet in order to finally demonstrate and completely grasp this identity we must develop a philosophical understanding of the history of religion. Note, however, that Hegel is using a broad concept of religion here. Insofar as a people’s culture contains a concept of “the highest,” of truth, and of “genuine” reality, it counts as a religion.

The true concept of “the highest,” which the history of religion only arrives at with its culmination in philosophically enlightened Christianity, is the concept of absolute spirit. At the end of the morality chapter,

¹²³ Cf 481/398: “the mutual assurance of their conscientiousness, good intentions,” etc.

¹²⁴ Cf Hegel, *GPR*, §§140 and 220; *EPW* (1830), §552.

Hegel attempts to show that this concept has already been achieved in the reconciliation of universal, moral consciousness with individual conscience – at least, it has been achieved “in itself,” i.e. for the philosophical observer. It is the concept of a unity of pure, distinction-less self-certainty (conscience) with “complete externalization” in a plurality of persons and a conceptually determined, objective “existence” (cf 494/409). In religion’s *most immediate* form, this concept is expressed as the appearance of the divine in nature; in its *highest* form, however, it expresses itself as the idea of a theologically sophisticated and philosophically enlightened religious community which understands *itself* as the divine: “it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge” (494/409).

(CC) Religion

VII. Religion

In order to understand Hegel’s religion chapter in the *Phenomenology*, one must be clear about the distinction between religion and spirit and about Hegel’s particular understanding of religion.

Religion is, in Hegel’s words, “spirit that knows itself as spirit” (495/410). Morality, the shape of spirit considered in the previous chapter, is described in the title as “spirit that is certain of itself.” The difference thus comes down to the distinction between “certainty” and “knowledge.” Certainty, for Hegel, is always “immediate” – it is, as it were, punctuated self-evidence, without complex theoretical content, without any “unfolding” of some material or principle. Conscience, as the highest form of self-certain spirit, knows that the moral world order (Fichte) or the self-legislation of rational beings as ends in themselves (Kant) is what constitutes genuine reality. And conscience knows that this reality manifests itself in reciprocal recognition among judging and acting moral consciences. But decisions of conscience cannot be derived from the moral order. One cannot infer any concrete commands of conscience from the mere idea of autonomous legislation and the kingdom of ends. Conscientious self-consciousness and the “spiritual” reality of decisions and actions remain separate.

Similarly, the unity of the natural and moral orders is present in morality only as a certainty or “postulate.” The moral standpoint involves the belief that moral action generates consequences in the natural order and that it is ultimately compatible with our natural

aspiration for happiness (the postulate doctrine). But just how this interaction is to be understood remains hidden from this dualistic moral consciousness. It can only “postulate” such a unity between morality and nature, but it cannot “understand” such unity by unpacking it in theories or laws. Moral spirit is *certain* of this unity, but it does not have *knowledge* of it. It is the task of religion to realize such a unity in actions, works, institutions, and doctrines. In a certain sense, Kant likewise held that realizing the unity of human nature and morality was a job for religion, i.e. for the “ethical community.”¹²⁵

In order to gain a more precise understanding of the sense in which Hegel takes religion to be spirit’s knowledge of itself, we will have to look ahead to the true, philosophically adequate understanding of religion. Hegel distinguishes this *true* understanding from “consciousness’s understanding” at the very outset of the religion chapter. Consciousness continues to distinguish genuine reality – here, the absolute, or the divine – from the religious subject. But this separation between an other-worldly God and this-worldly, faithful consciousness has already been “refuted” in all the forms of religious consciousness that have appeared thus far – namely through experiences of the contradictions and illusions that result. In truth, God knows Himself in man; man is God’s own self-consciousness. Yet even such self-consciousness may be more or less developed. And its development in human consciousness presupposes the development of reflexive self-relations in both nature and history. Both the structure of natural orders (mechanical, chemical, organic–teleological) and the increasing knowledge of such orders in the sciences embody processes in which an intellectual order unfolds and reflects upon itself.

Scientific progress, however, makes up only a part of the whole culture and is itself influenced by legal, moral, and religious ideas. Indeed, the transition from “unhappy consciousness” to reason has already shown that the modern age and its science grew up out of the soil of Christianity and must be understood against this background. It is interesting to note that one central claim of the 1802 Jena essay “On the Relation of Natural Philosophy to Philosophy in General” (the authorship of which is disputed – either Schelling, or Hegel, or both) is that the “effect of Christianity ... inexorably

¹²⁵ Cf Kant, *Religion*, 6: 96.

determined the whole culture of the later world.” Indeed, according to Hegel, it is generally true of every epoch of human history that the prevailing understanding of self and world plays a decisive role in the “subsystems” of human culture.

The whole culture of an epoch, insofar as it gives expression to a thesis about the “ultimate” truth and genuine reality, constitutes a religion, for Hegel. Legal notions, art, and morality are ultimately informed by the prevailing conception of the truth, even if, in such a “scientific age,” that conception can make do without a concept of God. Hegel saw the contemporary age as one marked by the disintegration of various systems of thought and action. Ultimately, it is precisely the task of (his) philosophy to oppose this tendency, for otherwise the human being, as a rational being, would be “alienated” from himself in such a sheer plurality, such a complete “differentiation” of independent subsystems.¹²⁶

For Hegel, philosophy must take on the task of providing a theory of the ultimate truth because only philosophy can mediate between faith and theology, on the one hand, and science and rational orders of freedom, on the other. “Metaphysics” is the “holiest of holies” in the temple of modern culture, insofar as it is rational. Indeed, in the Preface to the first edition of his *Science of Logic*, Hegel declares “a cultivated people without metaphysics” to be “a temple richly ornamented in other respects but without a holiest of holies” (WL I, 14/8). Yet this metaphysics is a theory of the systematic interconnection of the fundamental concepts of all knowledge. To that extent, it is itself a science: “science alone is theodicy,” as Hegel writes to Zellmann (January 23, 1807, cf. *Briefe* I, 137/*Letters*, 122 f.).

A comprehensive and “ultimate” understanding of God’s self-reflection in history and nature thus crucially requires a proper understanding of the history of religion. Accordingly, the history of religion must itself present us with a comprehensible, necessary order and not just a sequence of arbitrary forms and “mutations” of religious consciousness. For Hegel, the history of religion is nothing other than the

¹²⁶ Today, social scientists interested in systems theory, such as Hegel Prize recipient Niklas Luhmann, argue for the recognition of such thoroughgoing “differentiation” which entirely lacks any common, integrating idea, apart from a diffuse mode of permanent societal communication. Cf. Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft*, Volume 1, 82 f. A translation by Rhodes Barrett has been published by Stanford University Press under the title *The Theory of Society*.

unfolding of the essence or the concept of religion itself. From its “naïve” beginnings, religion goes through a teleological, goal-oriented process in which it becomes what its *telos* was from the very beginning, viz. its fully developed essence. (Naturally, once it has reached this goal, religion’s “cognitive” part – though not the parts concerned with ceremony, practical worship, and promoting morality – becomes philosophy. We’ll address that transition later.) Hegel’s term for the sequence of religious forms that are necessary for this teleological realization is “specific religion.” In the 1821 manuscript for his Berlin lectures (cf *VPR-T*. I),¹²⁷ Hegel divides the philosophy of religion into three parts:

- A. The Concept of Religion,
- B. Specific Religion,
- C. Perfected (Revealed, Absolute) Religion.¹²⁸

In the first section – on the concept of religion – Hegel develops the necessary components and general developmental trajectory of religion using philosophical categories and abstract distinctions (the concept of God, religious consciousness, ceremonial worship). With this concept in hand, one can go on to approach the history of culture and religion (i.e. “specific religion”) and begin to understand its immanent development and the ultimate perfection of the idea of religion. Once again, general philosophical categories are active in this process (particularly the “conceptual–logical” structures of universality, particularity, and singularity – where singularity is understood as the self-manifestation of the totality in its particularization). But those categories are present in an entirely different manner in religious dogma, religious services, and religious “piety.”

¹²⁷ References to this distinct collection of Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion (which draw on his lecture manuscripts as well as students’ notes from 1824, 1827, and 1831) provide the respective page numbers of both the German and English editions and are indicated by the abbreviation “*VPR-T*,” with a Roman numeral for the volume number. The German edition has been published as Volumes 3–5 of *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*; it has been translated by Brown, Hodgson, and Stewart as *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. The translation has occasionally been modified.

¹²⁸ The concept of “absolute” religion, which Hegel’s students employ in the first edition of his complete works, apparently first appears in students’ notes from his 1827 lectures on the philosophy of religion (cf *VPR-T*. I, 91/183). Prior to that, Hegel speaks only of “true,” “perfected” (or “consummate”), and “revealed” religion. Cf *VPR-T*. I, 28/128; *VPR-T*. I, 59/146. See also Jaeschke, “Vorwort,” xvii.

Although all three of these divisions appear in the *Phenomenology* as well,¹²⁹ the religion chapter has a different internal structure:

- A. Natural Religion,
- B. Religion in the Form of Art,
- C. Revealed Religion.

The contents of these three sections ultimately come to constitute the second and third sections of Hegel's later work, namely the sections on specific and revealed religion.¹³⁰ Now Hegel does not give a general conceptual determination or definition of religion. Instead, the introduction to the religion chapter reviews the course of the *Phenomenology* itself. Insofar as the *Phenomenology* has constantly been concerned with "truth-theses," all previous shapes of consciousness already belonged to "religion." Nor are they temporally prior to the forms of religion now under discussion, for the history of religion spans all epochs. In any case, the "moments" of consciousness, self-consciousness, reason, and spirit "have no existence in separation from one another" temporally speaking, for Hegel (498/413). They are points of view from which various epochs can be viewed with respect to their ontologies and conceptions of truth. By contrast, the internal development of the "moments" – e.g. the development from sense-certainty to understanding – does indeed follow a temporal progression – either a historical sequence of philosophies (in the chapters on consciousness and self-consciousness), phases in the development of the sciences (in parts of the chapter on reason), or a series of ethical norms, institutions, and related worldviews (in the chapter on spirit).

The concept of religion is introduced in the *Phenomenology* as the sublation of the distinction between "actual" (ethical, legal, social) spirit and self-knowing (moral) spirit – in the terminology of the *Phenomenology*, the distinction between consciousness and self-consciousness of spirit (500/414). Religion takes the genuine content of reality – both social and natural reality – to consist in an absolute self-consciousness which is no longer (ontologically) separate from its objects. Yet so long as this absolute self is still represented as external to religious consciousness, religion itself retains a "moment of consciousness" (cf 500 f./414 f.).

¹²⁹ The "concept of religion" appears at *PhG* 501/415; "specific religion" at 500/414; and "revealed religion" at 502/416.

¹³⁰ Kroner has suggested Schleiermacher's *On Religion* as a source for these titles.

The sublation of this “moment of consciousness” is a process internal to religion itself – a development of its concept and its history. The *true* concept of spirit surely cannot just be *one* conception of God among others, for then there would be independent truths external to it. The true concept of spirit must instead be the fulfillment of the understanding of God intended by all religions and cultures. And these must themselves be understood as part of a teleological development in which the whole generates itself out of its antecedents, prior stages, and proper parts as “the genesis of its complete reality through its individual aspects, or through its incomplete shapes” (502/416).

This is the idea of a complete history of religion. The sense in which it is “complete” is not that it addresses all historical instances of religion. As Hegel writes in his 1821 lecture manuscript, “a survey of these religions reveals what supremely marvelous and bizarre flights of fancy the nations have fallen into in their representations of the divine essence and their own duties and modes of conduct” (VPR-T. 1, 107/198). The point is not to describe or justify these religious variants, but to “recognize [their] meaning, what they contain that is *positive*, true, and connected with the truth – in short, what is rational in them; [after all,] those who fell into such religions were human beings; so there must be reason in them, in all contingency [there must be] a higher necessity” (ibid.). A complete history of religion in the philosophical sense thus consists in making clear how, over the course of actual history, “the consummation of religion itself brings forth its concept” (VPR-T. 1, 106/196).

In this regard, what matters is not the numerous contingent forms religion has taken, but rather the three main “levels” of “natural,” “artistic,” and “revealed” religion. In the *Phenomenology*, this set of distinctions corresponds to the sequence of concepts “consciousness,” “self-consciousness,” and “being-in-and-for-itself” (PhG, 502/416) – that is to say, Hegel treats these distinctions as a self-differentiation and “gathering together” of the moments of spirit. On the first level, the absolute is represented in natural forms or shapes; on the second, in human, self-conscious form; and on the third, as spirit which “externalizes” itself in nature and returns back into itself. Historically, these correspond to the levels of (A) Oriental religion (including Judaism), (B) classical Greco-Roman religion or culture, and finally (C) Christianity. We are thus confronted with a clearly Eurocentric history of religion whose very starting point is the truth of Christianity.

What is crucial in determining this selection, for Hegel, is the spiritual, artistic, and practical (legal–moral–political) “work” done on the

image of God. Such work on the image of God and in His worship is itself a process of the “education of mankind” through which it becomes conscious.¹³¹ The first thing that is necessary in order for human beings to become conscious of their spiritual essence is a process of separation from nature and their complete absorption into a community. This separation, however, is itself supposed to be overcome on the level of a “religion of salvation.” The practice and doctrine of a religion of salvation or redemption has as its goal the sublation and elimination of the separation between humankind and God, here and the beyond. But this sublation presupposes the religious–historical “incarnation” of God as man. This sublation begins in Greek religion, which imagines and represents God(s) in human form. And it is perfected in Christian religion, whose central dogma is, of course, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. That the very course of the history of religion corresponds to Christian doctrine is, for Hegel, itself an argument for its truth.

A. *Natural religion*

In his later writings, Hegel characterizes natural religion as the “unity of the spiritual and the natural” (VPR I, 254/LPR I, 265).¹³² His 1821 lecture manuscript has natural religion begin with the religions of the “Orient,” in which the representation of God as “light” plays an important role.¹³³ In subsequent lecture series, he presents a more differentiated view of natural religion. There, it begins with “magic” and comes much closer to twentieth-century conceptions of the history of religion and mythology.¹³⁴ It is only on the final level within the development of natural religion that we arrive at “Persian” religion in the “religion of

¹³¹ Both Lessing (in his *The Education of the Human Race* (1780)) and, following him, Kant (in the third part of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (6: 115 ff.)) understand the sequence of historical religions as an approximation to rational morality, in which each particular stage is appropriate to human rationality’s respective state of development at the time. As early as his time in Bern, Hegel was strongly influenced by Lessing and Kant’s philosophies of religion. For more on Lessing’s influence, cf TWA I, 131/*Early Theological Writings*, 91, and Pöggeler, “Werk und Wirkung,” 11.

¹³² Note that this is a distinct edition of Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion, as collected in TWA Volumes 16 and 17 and as translated by Speirs and Sanderson, Volumes 1–3. As usual, parenthetical citations provide the page numbers of the German and English editions, in that order, separated by a slash and indicated by the abbreviation “VPR/LPR” with the relevant volume number in Roman numerals.

¹³³ Cf VPR-T. II, 12/104 f. and VPR-T. II, 17/114, and *passim*.

¹³⁴ Cf Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Volume 2.

the good or of light.” Egyptian religion then marks both the conclusion of this level and the transition to the next – notions of God as a spiritual being. The next religion to belong wholly to this second level is the Jewish “religion of sublimity.”

The religion chapter in the *Phenomenology*, however, follows a different conception. Its first three shapes recapitulate the organization of the consciousness chapter but now on the level of spirit. Here, spirit is immediately understood as its self-manifestation in sensible nature. At the same time, it contains the early forms of self-consciousness (the struggle for recognition, the master’s domination over the servant, the working up of nature). This renewed engagement with the first shapes of consciousness and self-consciousness seems to be the reason Hegel begins with Oriental religions. Naturally, spirit is first understood as substance here and not yet as subject. It is through spirit’s self-production – Spinoza’s *causa sui* – that it creates the world. Hegel thus brings together the concept of the Orient with the “dawning” of the divine light (cf *PhG*, 506/419) which has not yet “set,” i.e. returned into itself in reflection.

In the first chapter (“God as Light”), one can clearly detect features of Judaism and Persian religion in the background. The second (“Plant and Animal”) is supposed to address Indian, Egyptian, and Syrian religion. And the third (“The Artificer”) returns to Egyptian religion and culture as a whole.

A. GOD AS LIGHT. Hegel begins his presentation and “examination” of religions with an image of God that is, in one respect, completely “objective”: what is true is completely independent of man and of human consciousness. On the other hand, this conception possesses – in a quasi-naïve manner – the characteristics of the concept of spirit which arose out of this phenomenological development: the revelation and self-objectification of an “inner,” or an “I” (*PhG*, 505/419). Hegel recognizes this concept of God in its sensible form in the Oriental, and particularly Persian, idea of a divine, world-creating “light.”¹³⁵ In his Berlin lectures on the philosophy of religion, he calls “the light this abstract subjectivity in the sensible [sphere]” (*VPR* I, 399/*LPR* II, 74).

Apparently, some aspects of Judaism also come into play here.¹³⁶ The creation of the world through the separation of light from

¹³⁵ On this point, and on Hegel’s reading of the *Zend-Avesta*, see Bonsiepen, “Altpersische Lichtreligion.”

¹³⁶ Cf Jaeschke, *Vernunft*, 211 ff.; Falke, *Begriffne Geschichte*, 334 ff. Vieillard-Baron, “Natural Religion,” 359 ff., suspects that there may be a reference to Böhme and his

darkness (*PhG*, 505 f./419), as well as the place of man with respect to this “abstract” contentless divinity, are clearly aspects of Judaism that Hegel has in view. Man is incapable of ascribing any contentful determinations (“attributes”) to this God, but can only give “names of the many-named one” (*PhG*, 506/419). In the religion that treats God as light, anything with determinate shape, anything natural or human, gets “degraded to mere semblance” (*VPR* I, 255/*LPR* I, 266).

Nature and the human world are nothing compared with God. Looking back from the religion of the Greeks which he had already touched on in the chapter on ethical life, Hegel writes, “the cult of the religion of this simple, amorphous essence gives back to its votaries, therefore, in general merely this: that they are the people of their god.” But the divine does not actually reveal itself in this people per se and, accordingly, the people understands itself as “rejected” (*PhG*, 525/436). What is true of the relation between a people and their god in Judaism is, in the political sphere, the mark of Oriental “despotism”: “The glory of the Oriental view is the single subject as substance, to whom everything belongs, so that no other subject separates itself and reflects upon itself in its subjective freedom” (*VPG*, 136/*LPH*, 165).

Hegel himself draws a connection, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, between Judaism and the religion of Persia (*VPG*, 241/*LPH*, 267). Indeed, he conceives of the Jewish people “in their broader associations” as belonging to the Persian Empire and sees the image of God as light transform into the God of creation: “The light, however, is now Jehovah, the pure One” (*ibid.*). Yet Hegel sees this moment in Judaism as a first reflection of the divine – a separation and retreat from the world. He observes in this “a break between East and West; spirit goes down within itself and grasps the abstract fundamental principle as the Spiritual” – i.e. as the spiritual creator, separate from nature. To this extent, the identification of Judaism as a “natural” religion in the *Phenomenology* is problematic. Later, Hegel quite clearly locates Judaism in the religion of “free subjectivity” (*VPR* I, 255/*LPR* I, 266).

Its placement at the beginning of the religion chapter in the *Phenomenology* also conflicts with the function accorded to Judaism in other chapters. In the chapter on “unhappy consciousness” (see above, pp. 101 f.), Judaism occupies a far more “advanced” role, namely as

interpretation of pure light in the Kabbala (probably communicated to Hegel by Oetinger). Extensive commentary on this section can be found in Schmidt, “*Geist*,” “*Religion*” und “*absolutes Wissen*”.

Christianity's immediate precursor. The decisive feature at issue at the outset of the religion chapter, by contrast, is the understanding of the divine as "a being [*Sein*] filled with the concept of spirit" (*PhG*, 506/419), as a simple absolute, amorphous, yet all-pervasive and governing everything – that is, as divine light, which "disperses its unitary nature into an infinity of forms" (507/420).

B. PLANT AND ANIMAL. In the second shape that natural religion assumes, these various forms are substantivized and individualized. In accordance with the transition from sense-certainty to perception, distinctionless divine being now becomes "a manifoldness of being-for-self" (*PhG*, 507/420). The divine is no longer the light or fire "destructive of [all] structured form" (506/419), but immediately the "pantheism" of deified things. It is, however, principally living things – as at the beginning of the self-consciousness chapter – which manifest the divine power.

According to Hegel's Berlin *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the worship of the divine in the vital energy and the self-changing power of living beings is characteristic of the religion of ancient India.¹³⁷ The permanent change of the gods corresponds conceptually to the life of plants. In his *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel says that the gods of Indian epics (the *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*) express the subtle sensitivity of a "plantlike spirit" (*VÄ* III, 397/LFA II, 1095).¹³⁸ Animal gods, by contrast, are characteristic of Egyptian religion.¹³⁹ In an 1827 transcript of Hegel's lectures, he is recorded as saying of Indian and Egyptian religion, "If God is known as the power *tout court*, then such power is activity without consciousness, such as life generally: such unconscious power then steps forward in a determinate shape, initially the shapes of animals" (*VPR-T*. II, 528/634). For Hegel, the animal represents "absolute individualization, finitization" (*VPR-T*. II, 14/108), but it simultaneously constitutes a first step toward the subjectivization of the divine.

It is difficult to interpret the transition from the "passivity and impotence of contemplative individuality" in "the innocence of the *flower religion*" to the "negativity," the "earnestness," and the "guilt" of

¹³⁷ *VPR* I, 369/LPR II, 42 and *VPR* I, 373/LPR II, 46 f.; *VPR-T*. II, 489/592 f.

¹³⁸ References to Hegel's lectures on aesthetics or fine art are indicated by the abbreviation "VÄ/LFA" with respective volume numbers in Roman numerals and the page numbers in Arabic numerals.

¹³⁹ Cf. *VPR-T*. II, 266/365.

animal religions. In accordance with the negative, exclusive relation between things in the perception chapter, we now encounter a negative delineation of the shapes of the divine. Hegel sees this negative delineation in the battles of peoples, which first coalesce through their identification with certain animal gods – i.e. which “become conscious of specific forms of animals as their essence” (507/420).

The tempting invocation of totem-worship, which both Kojève and, following him, Derrida endorse,¹⁴⁰ hardly fits into this historical and religious framework. Comparing this section to the 1827 transcripts of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Religion* lectures, it is more likely that this portion of the *Phenomenology* concerns Egyptian religion. For there, in discussing “the worship of animals” which “the Egyptians practiced with the greatest intensity,” Hegel writes that “the different districts of Egypt worshiped particular animals, such as cats, dogs, apes, etc. and even fought wars with one another on their account” (VPR-T. II, 528/634 f.). Thus Hegel’s remark that “the artificer therefore retains the upper hand over these mutually destructive animal spirits” (PhG, 508/421) is very likely a reference to the unification of the Egyptian empire.

Through these battles, the hatred of the animal gods, and the peoples collected behind them, opposition and exclusive negativity find their way into the divine itself, which is now no longer represented as light or as the good and counterposed to darkness. The idea that “struggle, pain, and death” belong to the essence of the divine is, according to Hegel’s later Berlin *Philosophy of Religion*, particularly characteristic of “Syrian religion” (VPR I, 394/69). He makes reference to the Syrian cult of Adonis, to the Egyptian cult of Osiris (cf VPR-T. II, 269/368 f.), and to corresponding ideas in India (“Indra,” cf VPR I, 421/98).

Hegel is aware, in these lectures, that these representations of the death and rebirth of life-giving God are connected with observed cycles of vegetation (cf VÄ I, 452/LFA I, 350). But what is more important for him is the subjectivization of the image of God through individualization and negative self-relation. The exclusive function of “being-for-self,” or individuality, now becomes – again, in parallel to the perception chapter – “sublated being-for-self” (PhG, 508/421).

The self-sustenance of the divine in the negation of its individual life simultaneously corresponds to the experiences of living self-consciousness in doing battle, in overcoming the fear of death, and

¹⁴⁰ Kojève, *Introduction*, 240 (French), cf 114 (English); Derrida, *Glas*, 274/247.

in labor (cf *PhG*, ch. IV): “*Sublated being-for-self* is the *form of the object*” (508/421). On the level of religion, however, spirit – the self-productive and self-objectifying principle of reality – is understood as “labor” or “work.” It is this understanding which represents the central achievement of Egyptian culture in the history of religion by lending a spiritual and symbolic form to all living things.

C. THE ARTIFICER. In the section on “The Artificer,” a title which Hegel may have borrowed from Novalis,¹⁴¹ Hegel interprets Egyptian religion as an apotheosis of labor in the sense of the objectification of a form of spirit. At the same time, however, this level leads to a separation or “differentiation” of spirit and nature. Once again, Hegel has the entire culture of Egypt in mind here: the invention of writing (hieroglyphs being a mixture of depiction and abstraction), the discovery of geometry, the birth of “free architecture” out of the combination of organic and geometrical forms (*PhG*, 510/422), as well as the cult of death (the pyramids are the “crystal, the form characteristic of the understanding, which houses the dead,” 515/427) – all these phenomena reveal spirit’s coming-to-itself from nature. The divine becomes a separate space (“dwelling”), is represented in a sculpture (initially in animal form), and is even attributed linguistic expressions (the riddle of the Sphinx).

Hegel is principally interpreting the late phase of Egyptian religion, looking ahead to the Greek “humanization” of the divine image. In Egyptian culture, however, it remains the case that “the conscious wrestles with the non-conscious,” the human with animal form.¹⁴² This is, as it were, the final phase of the attempt to find the spiritual, the divine, in nature itself.

B. *Religion in the form of art*

Greek religion initiates the understanding of the divine in human form: there are gods with human and superhuman attributes, and one can tell human stories about them, represent them in human form, etc. Hegel’s title literally means “art-religion” and it comprehends both Greek and Roman religion and culture. This term has various meanings. It signifies that the divine is an “unnatural” product of the human power

¹⁴¹ This same German word *Werkmeister* – “craftsman” or “master workman” – recurs frequently in the Old Testament and is employed by Novalis in his *Lehrlinge zu Sais*. Cf Jaeschke, *Vernunft*, 209.

¹⁴² E.g. in the Sphinx as “blending the natural and the self-conscious shape” (511/424).

of invention, that the truth expresses itself not in science or theology, but in art – in epics, tragedies, sculpture, etc. – and, finally, that such art is thoroughly religious: an expression of the truth and a part of the ceremonial cult, whether in the temple or in religious services. This ceremonial cult is simultaneously political and religious in nature, for religion is how the ethical and legal foundations of the community are made explicit and communicated within the community. It is the act of “reverting from its truth” – recall that ethical spirit is “true spirit,” unreflectively present in social life – “into the pure *knowledge of itself*” (513/425). It is only with the advent of the cult of the mysteries (cf the cult of Dionysus) that Hegel sees the beginning of a religion, in the specific sense, that is truly distinct from politics. For it is only in the end of the *polis* that its religion finds its perfection: the “complete form of its religion [sc. the religion of this “ethical people”] first appears as *separated* from its *subsisting shape*” (513/425).

Even the ethical and political life of the Greeks is “art” for Hegel – their “free ethical life” of collectively shaping the life of citizens relieved from self-sustaining labor (514/426). Because the “free spiritual activity” of the artist and the citizen of the state is the highest expression of truth and self-fulfillment here, Hegel calls this the epoch of “absolute art” (514/426). But in his formulation, “later on, spirit transcends art,” one can already hear murmurs of the famous “end of art” thesis from Hegel’s Berlin lectures on aesthetics. Of course, even after this later conception of art, it is still possible for (Christian) religious art to express the highest “truth” in sensible form. Only the function of art to *discover* the highest truth – though not the manufacture of artworks – comes to an end in the age of science (in Hegel’s sense of *philosophical science*).

The development of Greek art-religion is, in sum, a process of subjectivization and individualization. Hegel further divides the section into three subsections:

- a. The Abstract Work of Art,
- b. The Living Work of Art,
- c. The Spiritual Work of Art.

A. THE ABSTRACT WORK OF ART. For Hegel, “abstraction” always means separation, the unmediated juxtaposition of meanings that, in truth, form a complex unity. It is not easy to track the application of this sense of abstraction to the forms of early Greek art treated in this section. For one thing, Hegel appears to hold that the elements of Greek culture’s political-religious “total artwork” were, in a certain

sense, developed separately in this epoch. The sculptures of gods, the early hymns, the secret cults, etc. were not yet combined in the ethical order of a community and its religious self-reflection. For another, the essential elements of religion are still separate from one another. These essential elements are, figuratively speaking, the descent of the divine to man and the ascent of man to God.

The first element is embodied, first and foremost, in sculpture – where God assumes human form. Additionally, there are the linguistic versions of mythology, especially poems about the “gods’ coming into being” (Hesiod’s *Theogony*). It is in these narratives that Greek ethical life likewise comes into being: the “unethical realm of the Titans” (516/428) is “conquered,” and the place of the tribal gods as natural beings comes to be occupied by “lucid, ethical spirits of self-conscious nations” (517/428). This discovery of ethical life as the commands of ethical spirits advances further in the ancient tragedy (Aeschylus, Sophocles), which is dedicated to the conflict between family and state ethical life.¹⁴³

That “the shape of the god has taken on consciousness and thus individuality in general” (520/431) is also apparent in the discovery of “the utterance peculiar to the god,” which no longer expresses itself in the riddle-like pronouncements of the Sphinx, but in the “oracle, which knows its [sc. the ethical people’s] particular affairs and utters what is advantageous concerning them” (ibid.).

This marks the beginning of a development in which the will of the gods – i.e. the set of proper guidelines for action – is supposed to be discovered by human reflection. Even in his later *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel continued to accord an essential role to the oracle qua ultimately decisive authority in the Greek conception of the state. The oracle usurps the most important decisions away from rational, self-conscious judgment. It contains elements of chance and inscrutable fate. All this must be overcome through the liberation of the principle of rational knowledge. But for the history of religion, the oracle represents a necessary step in the “subjectivization” of the divine. For it is supposed to give intelligible instructions that a people can use – and indeed, concrete instructions, not just general propositions about the “beautiful and the good” (ibid.). Thus it is an early and undeveloped anticipation of both conscience and the individual head of state (the monarch).

¹⁴³ *PhG*, 519 f./430 f. See also above, Chapter VI.Aa (161–167).

The language of the early hymns, however, also involves the other direction of religious movement: the elevation of the human to divinity, in consciousness. Hegel thinks of the singing of the hymns as a collective process of rapture and religious “devotion.” In his *Philosophy of Religion*, he understands “devotion” to cover all forms of elevation to God in thought, so long as they do not yet represent theoretical knowledge, but are permeated by images and tones or moods (*Stimmungen*): “Devotion, kindled in the manifold units of self-consciousness, is conscious of its act as the act of all alike and as *simple being*” (519/430). The worship of God in hymns is one of the first forms of presence of the divine in the religious community, a unity of acting and being, I and We: “Spirit, as this universal self-consciousness of all, has its pure inwardness, no less than the being-for-others and the being-for-self of the individuals, in a single unity” (ibid.).

These two moments of religion – the humanization of God and the elevation of the individual to divine life – receive their first mode of mediation in the religious ceremonial cult.

The “cult” elevates the human to divinity through the “purification” of the “exteriorities” of daily life. It thus anticipates the moral education of the individual through outer rites and rituals, as well as through “works, punishments, and rewards” (522/433). As the cult evolves from its secret rites and private sacrifices into a public ceremony in the temple and treasury, it uses the divine for the good of man:

The dwellings and halls of the god are for the use of man, the treasures preserved therein are his own in case of need; the honor and glory enjoyed by the god in his adornment are the honor and glory of the nation, great in soul and in artistic achievement.

(524/435)

B. THE LIVING WORK OF ART. In the art and culture of Greek religion, the people, united through their ethical norms, recognize their own spirit. But the people has yet to incorporate the character of spirit into its conception of God. This character, you’ll recall, consists in the self-reflection and self-knowledge of nature in man. Hegel thus interprets the Eleusian mysteries and the Olympic festivals as a unification of nature and spirit and as the apotheosis of the human body.

In the Christian tradition, he understands the Eleusian mysteries – the meal of bread and wine – as a precursor of the Last Supper. In the framework of Greek religion, this meal consists in the spiritualization of nature:

The silent essence of self-less nature in its fruits attains to that stage where, self-prepared and digested, it offers itself to life that has a self-like nature. In its usefulness as food and drink it reaches its highest perfection; for in this it is the possibility of a higher existence and comes into contact with spiritual reality.

(526/436 f.)

The self likewise experiences its spiritual character in its mystical unity with divine nature: "For the mystical is not concealment of a secret, or ignorance, but consists in the self knowing itself to be one with the divine being and that this, therefore, is revealed. Only the self is manifest to itself" (ibid.).

This unity is, however, not yet conscious of itself as the self-conscious character of the divine being. The divine rather appears in the self-conscious forms of nature, e.g. in bacchants (527/438) or – in a still higher form – in the living human body. Even Greek athletic festivals – Hegel speaks here of "the beautiful fencer" who represents "the honor of his particular people" – are a preliminary stage of the humanization of God: "But this cult lays the foundation for this revelation and unfolds its individual moments separately" (528/438). The athlete representing his people is an "ensouled and living work of art" who takes the place of the animal gods and the "statues" of the tribal deity (ibid.). In these festivals, the competition between peoples is superseded by an idea of common humanity. In this "externalization . . . into complete corporeality" (529/439), the natural particularity of different peoples is marginal. The human being becomes "conscious of the universality of his human existence" (ibid.). This universality must still, however, come to be recognized as spiritual. The first form in which this occurs is Greek world-culture, which develops in the literature of classical and Hellenistic epic, drama, and philosophy.

C. THE SPIRITUAL WORK OF ART. In this section, Hegel gives yet another interpretation of Greek and Roman history, the upshot of which he had already intimated in the section on ethical spirit. Taking his orientation from literary works of art – epics, tragedies, and, finally, comedies – Hegel develops the "spiritualization" of the Greek understanding of God and, in doing so, the Greeks' ethical, religious, and philosophical self-understanding.

The central thread in this chapter, which covers so much ground and is so rich in references and associations, is the "depopulation of heaven, that unthinking mingling of individuality and essence"

(540/449), which lurks in Greek polytheism. Hegel presents this first by considering Homeric epic (530–533/440–443), then tragedy (533–541/443–450), and finally comedy and philosophy.

In the epic, “what is *implicitly* accomplished in the cult *presents* itself as such to consciousness, namely the relation of the divine to the human” (531/441). But it is presented to consciousness in such a way that the gods now represent human characteristics, and later even ethical institutions (the family, the state) and principles. At the same time, epic mythology posits a universal power over the gods which is independent of their particular attributes and which subjugates them to its own necessity. Moira and Ananke (the uppermost Fates) are, for their part, only preliminary stages of the spiritual power of thinking self-consciousness.

However, it is in the “higher language” of tragedy that the “substance of the divine, in accordance with the nature of the concept, sunders itself into its shapes” (534/443). While the chorus essentially cleaves to the unprincipled multiplicity of the Greek world of the gods, the actions in their tragedy obey the ethical powers, i.e. the necessary forms of self-knowledge and the recognition of the individual in the community.

Hegel approaches the various constellations of chorus, actors, and audience in Greek tragedy – particularly the tragedies of Sophocles – from the standpoint of a progressive “enlightenment” of consciousness vis-à-vis the ethical principles embodied in the gods:

The expulsion of such notions, which lacked all essence, which was demanded by the philosophers of antiquity, thus already begins in [Greek] tragedy itself, insofar as the organization of substance is there controlled by the concept, and consequently individuality is essentially individuality, and its determinations are absolute characters.

(540/449)

At the same time, the “tragic” movement of separation from ethical powers, their increasing one-sidedness, and the downfall of the persons who identify with them reveals the “dialectic” reversal of this division in a self-conscious, self-particularizing universal. Hegel had already adduced such a movement as a paradigm case of reconciliation between individuality and communal spirit in his Frankfurt writings. And he had even gone on to invoke it in the morality chapter of the *Phenomenology* to explain the moral unification of universal and individual consciousness (see above, [Chapter VI.CC.](#) (196–200)).

From the point of view of Greek religious art, the tragic dissolution of one-sided ethical powers next enters into the triumph of ironic self-consciousness in comedy: “*Comedy* has, therefore, above all, the aspect that actual self-consciousness exhibits itself as the fate of the gods” (541/450). The comical exposure of the gods’ heaven in the “actual self-consciousness” of both the poet and the audience corresponds to the sovereignty of individual self-consciousness in Greek democracy and in the philosophies of Stoicism and Skepticism.

On all three of these levels, spirit’s individuality and its universality go their separate ways. In comedy, the gods no longer embody universal ethical principles (of state, family, traditional and reflective law, etc.) but are merely “all too human” individuals in the “nakedness of their immediate existence” (543/451). Similarly, in democracy, the common good and the contingent interests of the majority (or the demagogue) also go their separate ways; it “betrays still more immediately the contrast between the universal as a theory and that with which practice is concerned, the complete emancipation of the purposes of immediate individuality from the universal order, and the contempt of such individuality for that order” (543/451).

Stoicism and Skepticism, the philosophies which, for Hegel, dominated the Hellenistic and Roman eras and which he had already addressed in the self-consciousness chapter, reveal the positive aspects of this separation. The thinking self frees itself from all traditions and opinions; it experiences its freedom and its unconditional value:

The *individual self* is the negative power through which and in which the gods vanish, along with their moments, viz. existent nature and the thoughts of its determinations [Skepticism]. At the same time, the individual self is not the emptiness of this disappearance but 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 to itself.

(544/452)

This freedom is simultaneously a fearlessness, a dissolution of everything alien and threatening, which “is a state of consciousness’s well-being and repose, such as is not to be found anywhere outside this comedy” (544/453). In Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics, comedy returns in the modern era to play this role in the subject’s sovereign self-enjoyment in all contents, which have become indifferent (VÄ III, 572/LFA II, 1236).

C. *Revealed religion*

If one follows Hegel's Berlin *Philosophy of Religion*, then the *Phenomenology* appears to lack an adequate treatment of both Judaism and Roman religion. That makes the transitions from Skepticism to unhappy consciousness and from religion as art to revealed religion exceedingly difficult to follow. If the well-being and joviality of the late ancient world is contrasted with a consciousness of deep loss, then one would like to know whether this is an experience belonging to Greco-Roman culture itself, or whether it occurs through the earnestness of what Hegel (in the Berlin lectures) calls Judaism's "religion of sublimity" and its Christian "fulfillment."

At any rate, we "see," according to Hegel, "that this unhappy consciousness constitutes the counterpart and the completion of the comic consciousness that is perfectly happy within itself" (547/454 f.). In the early section of the self-consciousness chapter which actually bears the title "Unhappy Consciousness," Hegel explained this unhappiness primarily in terms of the faithful Christian's consciousness of his distance from God and his own insignificance. But now Hegel gives us a description of the loss of that mirthful religion of art, which reminds one of Hölderlin. Thus freed from the fear of the gods through comedy, and from ethical traditions through Roman law, the "self-worth" of "immediate personality," its ethical bindings, and its home in a world enlivened by imagination and reverence have vanished. The "knowledge of this *total* loss," however, first consists in "unhappy" consciousness, which apparently means Christianity (547/455).

Hegel's nostalgic, poetic turns of phrase, however, hardly describe the consciousness of early Christianity and are much more attuned to the consciousness of his own age: "The statues are now only corpses 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 in his games and festivals man no longer recovers the consciousness of his joyful unity with [divine] essence" (ibid.). Apparently, Hegel assigns his own philosophy the task of reinvigorating the happy Greek religion within the purview of Christianity – i.e. the fulfillment of the concept of religion – through a form of memory which achieves sublation through comprehension. He distances this philosophical memory from a preservational antiquarianism, which is interested only in "wiping off ... specks of dust" and, instead of engaging with the "inspiring actuality of ethical life" in the ancient

world, busies itself with the “scaffolding of the dead elements of their outward existence – the language, the historical circumstances, etc.” but “not, however, in order to live one’s way into them, but only to possess an idea of them in one’s imagination” (548/455 f.).

In contrast to this critique of mere scholarly enterprise, which was not uncommon in the time of Goethe, the actual mnemonic understanding Hegel offers strikes a supremely poetic tone:

But just as the girl who offers us the plucked fruits is more than the nature which directly provides them – nature diversified in the fruits’ conditions and elements, the tree, air, light, and so on – because she sums all this up in a higher mode, in the gleam of her self-conscious eye and in the gesture with which she offers them, so, too, the spirit of the fate that presents us with those works of art is more than the ethical life and the actual world of that nation, for it is the *re-collection*, the *inwardizing* in us of the spirit which in them was still [only] *outwardly* manifested; it is the spirit of the tragic fate which gathers all those individual gods and attributes of [divine] substance into one pantheon, into the spirit that is conscious of itself as spirit.

(548/456)

Both the knowledge of the ethical attributes of the divine (state, family, the virtues, etc.) and the presence of the divine in nature must be renewed within the deeper truth of Christianity, for which God is the single spirit, conscious of itself.

This requires not only the spiritual (philosophical–theological) development of the doctrine and ceremonial cult of Christianity, but also the scientific permeation of nature, which has become “prosaic” in the modern age. Only then can we “recover” and “recognize” in nature and the community a spirit that comprehends both nature and humankind.

One can roughly divide this chapter on revealed religion into four sections. The first (545–550/453–457) addresses the transition from ancient religion to Christianity, where Hegel again follows the theological schema of “*kairos*,” or the “fullness of time,” in which the true religion can and must appear. The second section (550–555/457–462) explains the essence of absolute or revealed religion – the unity of universal spirit, which constitutes the “essence” of all reality – with the historical individual. There, Hegel claims that only speculative knowledge can understand this unity – a sort of apotheosis of his own philosophy: “God is attainable in pure speculative knowledge alone, He only is in that knowledge, and is only that knowledge itself” (554/461).

This apotheosis, of course, involves a “demythologization” that would hardly be acceptable to faithful Christians, for Hegel reconstrues Christian theology in completely general categories (substance, subject, universality, particularity, singularity, etc.). If God “is” this knowledge, then He is the human understanding of nature, history – and religion. Conversely, Hegel takes his speculative thesis that consciousness and object, matter and concept, knowledge and truth, immanent ontology and scientific theory are not separate to receive additional and decisive confirmation in Christian dogma.

The third section of the chapter (555–568/462–473) is dedicated to elaborating and interpreting this dogma. It begins with an interpretation of the relationship between the Christian community and its founders – a sort of Christology and ecclesiology (555–557/462–463). Hegel then unpacks the three dogmas he takes to be central to Christian theology – the Trinity, creation, and salvation (557–568/463–473). The final section (568–573/473–478) is dedicated to the sublation of the structural limitations on religious consciousness: “representational thinking,”¹⁴⁴ which separates the moments and determinations of dogma from one another and cleaves to natural, “narrative” images and thoughts, must be transformed into philosophical understanding. This simultaneously makes the reconciliation of man with God, which was expected only in the future, i.e. in the “beyond,” possible in “this world” – in the ethical order of the state and the religious–moral life of the community.

We’ve already said a bit about the first of these four sections above. So I will now offer only a few, unavoidably selective, remarks about the ensuing three sections. These latter three sections receive extensive explanation in any number of works on Hegel’s philosophy of religion.¹⁴⁵

The second section concerns the “simple content of the absolute religion” (552/459) – the religion, that is, which Hegel calls “revealed”

¹⁴⁴ The German word is *Vorstellung*, which Miller understandably, but somewhat misleadingly, translates as “picture thinking.” However, not all *Vorstellungen* are strictly imagistic, for Hegel. The key point is that *vorstellen* is a form of *immediate* thought with an implicitly reifying function: *Vorstellungen* are of *objects*. They consequently do not exhibit or bring out the dialectical movement and self-differentiation of what they are (in truth) concerned with. This logical and epistemological function is reserved for *conceptual* (*begriffliches, begreifendes*) thought.

¹⁴⁵ For more extensive commentaries, see Schmidt, “*Geist*,” “*Religion*” und “*absolutes Wissen*”; and Schöndorff, “*Anderswerden und Versöhnung Gottes*.”

in the title of this chapter. The concept of revelation involves various aspects. Hegel's first move is to draw on the ordinary concept: "Consequently, in this religion the divine being is *revealed*. Its being revealed obviously consists in this, that what it [really] is, is known. But it is known precisely by being known as spirit, as a being that is essentially *self-consciousness*" (552/459). Not only is Christianity the religion revealed in and by Christ; also the incarnation is its decisive content: "This incarnation of the divine being, or the fact that it essentially and immediately has the shape of self-consciousness, is the simple content of absolute religion" (ibid.).

Hegel then proceeds to emphasize two aspects of this content. The *first* is that self-consciousness means self-transparency and manifestation. If God is self-consciousness, then He is not an inscrutable will – as the voluntaristic understanding of God maintains – nor something hidden which reveals itself in some non-rational manner. To be self-conscious means to be present to oneself and to communicate oneself to others. The Cartesian and rationalistic roots of this concept are clearly on display in Hegel's philosophy of religion:

For there is something hidden from *consciousness* in its object if the object is for consciousness an "*other*" or something *alien*, and if it does not know it as *its own self*. This concealment ceases when the absolute being qua spirit is the object of consciousness; for then the object has the form of *self* in its relation to consciousness . . . Spirit is known as self-consciousness and is immediately revealed to this self-consciousness, for spirit is this self-consciousness itself. The nature of the divine is the same as that of the human, and it is this unity that is beheld.

(552 f./459 f.)

As Hegel understands it, the incarnation does not mean that God "has descended from His eternal simplicity" (553/460). For it is only by being incarnated that God first becomes "actual self-consciousness," thereby "attain[ing] for the first time to His highest essence" (553/460). The incarnation – and this is the *second* aspect of incarnation as spirit's self-manifestation – is thus to be understood as the knowledge that the "essence," the cognitive order of reality, is at once "*pure thought* and hence the pure individuality of the self" (ibid.). Yet a simple, individual self is also "immediately there," in the same way that being, i.e. the object of sense-certainty, is. In the human being, the logical, spiritual order of the whole is "there" in an immediate – and that also means a corporeal – existent. With this "speculative" concept of

Christian religion, the *Phenomenology* thus returns to its starting point – sense-certainty. Yet it must also understand the sensible immediacy of Christ qua human being as embodying the content of “spirit,” as it has been developed over the course of its phenomenological movement.

In the Christological reflections of the third section (beginning at *PhG*, 555/462), this phenomenological history is presented as paralleling the story of Christ and the community. In his life, his death, and his transition from a sensibly present existent to one that is “recollected” by the community, we see the same spiritualization of the sensible which was the result of the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*: “In the vanishing of the immediate existence of what is known as absolute being, immediacy receives its negative moment; spirit remains the immediate self of actuality, but as the *universal self-consciousness* of the [religious] community” (556/462). The sensible presence of God as man passes over into the “actuality” of the religious community which is shaped by His teachings and by the memory of Him. This too is a process of perfecting God: “Not the individual by himself, but together with the consciousness of the community and what he is for this community, is the complete whole of the individual as spirit” (556/462).

For a spiritual consciousness, however, “what [the individual] is for this community” cannot simply consist in remembering the life and teachings of a certain human being. It must be developed in thought. Hegel understands this development in the history of Christianity and Christian theology as the life of spirit as it reveals itself in the community: “This, therefore, is the movement which it accomplishes in its community, or this is its [sc. absolute spirit’s] life” (557/463).

In a certain sense, Hegel is here following the Catholic principle of tradition rather than the Protestant principle that the holy Scripture is the sole source of revelation (*sola scriptura*):

Consequently, what this self-revealing spirit is *in and for itself*, is not brought out by, as it were, unraveling the rich life of spirit in the community and tracing it back to its original strands, to the ideas, say, of the primitive imperfect community, or even to the utterances of the actual man himself.

(557/463)

In his later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel engages more extensively with the relations between biblical exegesis, theology, and tradition. In the manuscript for these lectures, Hegel criticizes the idea of tracing things back to the original sense of the biblical message:

"The explanation of the Bible exhibits the content of the Bible in the form, the mode of thought of each particular age; the explanation which was first given was wholly different from that given now" (*VPR* II, 200/*LPR* II, 342).

Here in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel goes one step further and extends his relativization to include the very person of Jesus, speaking of the "spiritless recollection of a supposed individual figure and his past" (557/463).¹⁴⁶ Little seems to depend either on the "authentic teaching" or even on the person of Christ, once he has played his historically revelatory role. It was this understanding of divine spirit which later sparked controversies among Hegel's followers about the compatibility of the Hegelian philosophy of religion with Christianity.

What matters is primarily the development of dogma in thought, which is ultimately "translated" into philosophical concepts in Hegelian philosophy. All Hegel's texts on the philosophy of religion contain a philosophical interpretation of the fundamental dogmas of the Trinity, the creation, and salvation. Here we must restrict ourselves to only its most general features.

Philosophically, Hegel understands the Trinity as "three distinct moments: essence; the being-for-self, which is the otherness of essence and for which the essence is; and the being-for self which is knowledge of itself *in the other*" (559/465). The Trinity itself is a process of distinguishing genuine being (essence, lawfulness, the order of things) from knowledge and then sublating the opposition of these sides – just the sort of process the *Phenomenology* is engaged in with respect to epistemology and the history of philosophy. Hegel's *Logic* is then supposed to trace the "pure," conceptually necessary path of this process. The Christian community and Christian theology, however, with their concrete doctrines and narratives, simply have faith in this path as a history without any conceptual necessity: "But the *representational thinking* of the religious community is not this *conceptual* thinking; it has the content, but without its necessity, and instead of the form of the concept, it brings into the realm of pure consciousness the natural relationships of father and son" (560/465 f.).

¹⁴⁶ Even Kant extends this relativization of the historical Jesus vis-à-vis the ideal of a morally perfect ("holy") human being – "the prototype of a humanity well-pleasing to God (the Son of God)" – rather far. Cf his *Religion*, 6: 119 ff., 6: 128 f.

We must similarly “demythologize” the theology of the creation:

This “creating” is representational thought’s word for the concept itself in its absolute movement; or to express 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.

(561/467)

In the image of a world-less God resides the undifferentiated unity of pure thought, which can abstract and be abstracted from all contents. Yet for itself, this is just a one-sided moment of the “*logos*,” which is not only pure thought, but the totality of determinations of thought. This one-sidedness necessarily leads to the thought and development of the determinations – to the totality of a “world” of concepts, laws, and law-governed processes. Religion “represents” this development through the image of creation. But from a philosophical perspective, creation is not concerned with a real event, either in time or outside it.

Finally, we come to the dogma of the world’s alienation from God through man’s (and the angels’) Fall into evil and their subsequent redemption through God’s grace. Hegel holds that this too can be translated from the element of imagination and representational thinking into that of conceptual thought.¹⁴⁷ Spirit not only involves the opposition between the “simple” and the “other” (this is spirit’s self-differentiation, its development), but also otherness’s “going-into-itself” – its self-separation from the totality. These distinctions further develop themselves, distinguishing themselves from one another and from the totality, gaining determinacy in their “self-assertion.” It is this conceptual moment of “going-into-itself,” according to Hegel, which underlies the religious distinctions between good and evil and the doctrine of creation’s alienation from God. Viewed philosophically, this is just the distinction between a world of sensibly present nature and its foundation of concepts and laws.

This involuted motion – this “going-into-itself” – belongs to spirit’s development, and even this belonging itself must be developed and understood conceptually. In the world of Christianity’s religious representations, this development is the history of salvation. But such Christian “soteriology” views the necessity of the concept as the free act of God abandoning His “undifferentiated unity” and expressing Himself in the world. Insofar as God identifies Himself with “fallen” man (Hegel

¹⁴⁷ For an extensive discussion, cf. Schöndorff, “Anderswerden und Versöhnung Gottes.”

apparently does *not* assume that Christ is free from “original sin”), evil itself – i.e. self-assertion against the totality, the “universal” of spirit – is likewise recognized as a moment of spirit. “Insofar as evil is *the same* as goodness, evil is not just evil, nor goodness good; on the contrary, both are sublated – evil in general is self-centered being-for-self, and goodness is what is simple and without a self” (567/472). Apparently these two concepts contain only two different aspects of self-reflection. Evil contains the separation of the reflecting subject from its objects and contents, while goodness involves the differenceless simplicity of self-relation.

Insofar as the incarnation of God in man is understood theologically as an “eternal decision” of the Father, it even follows that “the divine being *from the beginning* externalizes itself, that its existence withdraws into itself and becomes evil” (566/471). The “identity” of good and evil, of God and the world (God and man, respectively) is imagined in the history of salvation as the process of death, resurrection, and the life of the spirit of God in the religious community. But the life of the community itself involves the transition from representational thinking to self-consciousness, i.e. to the ultimately philosophical understanding of the story of salvation.

The philosophical significance of all this is the definitive sublation of the separation of divine spirit from human knowledge and “reason in history” – a sublation that is no longer pictured (represented) as some future salvation. The image of the death of Christ and his continued life in the community “contains, therefore, at the same time the death of the *abstraction of the divine being* which is not posited as self” (572/476). There is no longer any separate “substance” of divine spirit outside the historical development of human consciousness. It is in this development that the “eternal truths” of the intellectual order of the world come to consciousness; and they do so, as the *Phenomenology* has shown, in their subjective, self-differentiated structure. Faithful consciousness’s “feeling” that “*God Himself is dead*” contains the “loss of substance and of its appearance over against consciousness; but it is at the same time the pure *subjectivity* of substance, or the pure certainty of itself” (ibid.).

Christianity “represents” this in its theological treatment of the community or “the church,” but the actual development of the community’s consciousness involves converting its world of religious representations into philosophical understanding, which “harmonizes” religion with the truth of science and the reason of legal-ethical institutions. In the absence of doing this, the Christian church continues to live in a false consciousness, so to speak: “The community

also does not possess the consciousness of what it is; it is spiritual self-consciousness which is not an object to itself as this self-consciousness" (573/477). Hegel recognizes here that "pious," simply faithful, consciousness does not itself participate in the last step in the history of the religious community. It cleaves to its images of a future, other-worldly reconciliation of "essence and the self" (ibid.): "The spirit of the community is thus in its immediate consciousness divided from its religious consciousness, which declares, it is true, that *in themselves* they are not divided, but this merely *implicit* unity is not realized, or has not yet become an equally absolute being-for-self" (574/478).

In order to come to this realization and attain this knowledge, the religious community must separate itself from the element of representational thinking and transition to speculative knowledge. Hegel presents this transition in part in the religion chapter, and in part in "Absolute Knowing," since religious consciousness cannot fully separate itself from its images. For the decisive step in this separation consists in the demythologization of all biblical narratives until one arrives at the knowledge that the death and resurrection of Jesus do not have the "natural significance" of "the death of the divine human being" (570/475), but rather mark "the death of the *abstraction of the divine being* which is not posited as self" (572/476). "As self" here does not mean as an individual with self-consciousness, but rather as a process of self-knowledge, i.e. as the movement of the thoughts that underlie both nature and history, through which movement they are known and thereby achieve self-consciousness.

For religious consciousness, however, this death of a God so separated from nature and from humankind is "the feeling . . . that *God Himself is dead*" (572/476). To religious consciousness, a god that is identical with nature, scientific knowledge, and the ethical will is no longer God. It is therefore more inclined to dispute the rationality of nature, the state, and history and to relocate reconciliation in an other-worldly beyond. And in fact, the main movements of Christianity did not accept the logic Hegel purported to develop out of their theology and they rejected his sublation of representational thinking into understanding as a loss of genuine Christianity.

Hegel, by contrast, apparently thought it possible for religious consciousness to hold fast both to religious services and to reciprocal moral perfection (cf the end of the morality chapter), while simultaneously viewing its truth as residing in philosophical demythologization.

He views this philosophical knowledge as itself embodying a sort of mystical experience of the unification of the human self with the true and with the substance of all reality. This is an experience which recapitulates on the highest theoretical level the moral-practical reconciliation of conscience with the rational morality of the community. Just as in the latter reconciliation “the absolutely *opposed* recognizes itself as *the same* [as its opposite] and this recognition bursts forth as the *affirmation* between these two extremes” (572/477), so too religious consciousness “overcomes the difference between its self and what it intuitively apprehends; just as it is subject, so also it is substance, and hence it *is* itself spirit just because and insofar as it is this movement” (572 f./477).

The result of this interpretation of Christian dogma and its story of salvation for the ontological program of the *Phenomenology* is that there are no definitive ontological differences between the simplicity of thought and the internal differentiation of concepts, between subjective reflection and the objective existence of thoughts (as the “order of being” and the “social order”), nor, finally between this order of concepts and the immediate presence of what is given to the senses. These are all just various forms of the same thing or structure, the conceptual, objective, and self-reflective nature of what Hegel calls “spirit.” For philosophical understanding, the various forms (concept, self-consciousness, sensible things, natural and social order, etc.) develop out of one another, as Hegel will later show in his system. Christian theology was familiar with this absolute spirit all along, but without being clear about its full content and consequences.

(DD) Absolute knowledge

VIII. Absolute knowledge

In his commentary on the *Phenomenology*, Jean Hyppolite describes its concluding chapter as the most obscure in the whole book.¹⁴⁸ Other authors have regarded it as the final breakdown of the argumentative thrust of the work, namely to establish a form of speculative knowledge.¹⁴⁹ One thing that clearly distinguishes this chapter from

¹⁴⁸ Hyppolite, *Genèse*, 553/573.

¹⁴⁹ Cf de Vos, *Hegels Wissenschaft* and “Absolute Knowing.” Other commentators lay particular weight on this final chapter; see Kojève, *Hegel*; Labarrière, *Structures*; and Rousset, *G.W.F. Hegel*.

previous ones is that it does not contain any experiential history. Its opening sections (*PhG*, 575–578/479–482) aim to overcome the limitations of religious representational thinking, which continues to distinguish between divine spirit and the spirit of the community, thereby “objectifying” divine spirit. In demonstrating the untenability of this distinction, Hegel invokes the previous experiences in the *Phenomenology*, placing special emphasis on those which are primarily concerned with superseding the opposition between consciousness and truth conceived objectively (qua genuine reality).

“Consciousness,” as we have seen, represents the common character of those shapes in which genuine reality is considered to lie in something ontologically distinct from knowledge. Thus, from the perspective of spirit, to overcome the image of absolute (divine) spirit as something that exists “objectively” and is separate from human consciousness constitutes a “reconciliation of spirit with its own consciousness proper” (578/482). The only non-objectified instance of consciousness which has appeared in the *Phenomenology* thus far – in the development of consciousness *prior* to religion – is *conscience*. For conscience gives expression to an absolute – a universally valid order – in its immediate, concrete consciousness of itself and its situation. The concept of a “universally valid order,” however, still lags far behind the concept of a self-conscious, internally differentiated, and finitized spirit, which returns to its “self-identity” – that is, the sort of spirit developed by the religious consciousness of Christianity.

Now religious consciousness has already grasped the “reconciliation” of finite consciousness, which lives and thinks in distinctions and oppositions, with the idea of a pure self-harmony – but it has grasped this reconciliation in the “form of being-in-itself” (579/482). Conscience, by contrast, has no proper *concept* of this reconciliation, though it does achieve it in its certainty, in its action, and in the reciprocal recognition of its own consciousness and universal, moral consciousness: conscience has this reconciliation (merely) in the “form of being-for-self” (*ibid.*).

The next section (578–583/482–486) is dedicated to demonstrating that moral “reconciliation” is no different from religious “reconciliation.” In so doing, we are supposed to arrive at the grand conclusion of the “series of the shapes of spirit” (579/483). This conclusion is, according to Hegel, a “last shape of spirit” even though it finds itself in an “element” that is no longer the element of knowing or recognizing something “other,” but rather the element of self-explication of those

thoughts that underlie all knowings and all knowns. In Hegel's terminology, this is the element of the *Begriff* – the “concept” (which is frequently, but misleadingly, translated as the “notion”). The self-explication of the syllogistic interrelation of these thoughts is what constitutes genuine science, for Hegel – the science he elsewhere calls “the science of logic.” The remaining pages of the chapter are dedicated to the relation of this science to real history, to the *Phenomenology* as a reconstruction of the emergence of this science in the cultural history of mankind, and to the remaining parts of philosophy – especially the philosophy of nature and its spatiotemporally conditioned object with its partly contingent determinations (583–591/486–493).

Since the first section (575–578/479–482) focuses on previous experiences of overcoming the opposition between consciousness and object (or “thing”) in the *Phenomenology*, I will restrict myself here to a few remarks about the two remaining sections.

Now what does Hegel mean by the “unification of both sides”? What is the religious and moral “reconciliation” between individual consciousness and universal, absolutely valid spirit which “exists in itself”?

Hegel apparently considers the crucial point to be that the experience of moral consciousness “individually performs,” as it were, a process which is also constitutive of the object of perfected religion: the individualization and externalization of a self-consciousness that is “originally” purely in agreement with itself – a self-consciousness which appears in morality as at once universal law and “communal consciousness.” It is the very same “spiritual” process which is thought, or faithfully believed, in the dogmas of the Trinity, creation, and salvation and which is to be found in the moral action of autonomous, conscientious consciousness. In the latter, we find that even the consciousness of “holiness” – i.e. of the complete agreement of all the “beautiful soul's” thoughts and intentions with the demands of the ethical law – must lead to a division in which the individual deed, which is never completely intelligible or acceptable to others, stands over against the consciousness of the moral community.

Hegel now accepts that the beautiful soul manifests the divine attributes which Jacobi accords to it (cf above, p. 199) as well as the property of intellectual self-intuition, which Kant reserved for an infinite intellect: the beautiful soul is “this pure knowledge, *pure inwardness* of spirit,” or the “self-intuition” of the divine (580/483). This “self-intuition” of reason in the beautiful soul, which has subordinated all its needs and interests in its readiness for purely rational action, must

“externalize itself and move onward” (580/483) – just as divine self-intuition must concretize its divine thoughts in a world and bring to consciousness the unity of the two (world and thought) in the “son of man.”

Through the process of his experience, the individual moral agent “accomplishes the life of absolute spirit” (581/484). He needs only to understand this, in order to become absolute knowledge. The beautiful soul, who “moves onward” into action and thus into the division of the community, is nothing other than “that simple concept which, however, surrenders its eternal *essence* and *is there* [in the real world], i.e. acts” (ibid.). Hegel accordingly writes in the somewhat earlier (1805–1806) Jena philosophy of spirit (*JSE III / Hegel and the Human Spirit*) that the ethical community – the state in its rational order – is the “existence” of absolute spirit. Such a state must not, however, be conceived as something separate from individual agents, but must rather be understood as the manifestation and development of individual agents’ ethical consciousness.

This development involves the opposition addressed in the morality chapter between how the individual who acts out of his own conscience and conviction “becomes evil” while universal ethical consciousness “remains good” (cf *PhG*, 581/484). But more importantly, this development leads to the reciprocal “renunciation,” the recognition of the one-sidedness of the individual agent and of the “abstract universality” of institutions and the “normal” consciousness that supports them. The general will is not something alien to individuals, but precisely realizes itself through the “creative” individual. Hegel had already talked about the various modes of unintentional divergence and conscious “reconciliation” in the morality chapter and later goes on to pursue their moral and legal aspects in his *Philosophy of Right* (cf above, p. 200).

Thus far, “absolute knowing” would, in the first instance, appear to be a kind of practical self-understanding. It is the “knowledge of the self’s act within itself as all essentiality and all existence, the knowledge of this subject as substance and of the substance as this knowledge of its act” (582/485). The communal spirit is a “subjective substance” which reflects itself in individual agents even while remaining, on the whole, independent of their particular opinions.

Yet the translation of these contents of religion into “existing” consciousness would still be incomplete, if this structure of communal spirit’s division into individual subjects and their reintegration were only to be understood as a consciousness of action. Indeed, religion already conceives of the entire world order as a manifestation of divine

spirit. The point of demonstrating the structural parallel between divine spirit and consciousness of action in a moral and legal community is thus not limited to bringing the divine “down to earth” and into human consciousness of action. Rather, this structure of the division of something simple and its “process of becoming *for itself*” (581/484) by reintegrating the resulting oppositions back into a totality is precisely the structure of the concept. That is to say, it is the intellectual movement of the principles that determine all the laws of nature and theoretical knowledge.

If the content of religion has “received the shape of the self” (583/485), then it is known as the unfolding of these principles in human knowledge and action. Even as the development of “logical” principles – i.e. as the interrelation of the meanings that underlie all rational constellations which thereby can be exhibited as syllogisms – this content is no longer anything foreign or alien to human consciousness. Nor is it a realm of thoughts or a third world, distinct or separate from human self-consciousness. Its structure is the structure of the self. And when man understands the “logic” of all states of affairs, what he understands is himself. The “spirit” of these logical, natural, and cultural laws is man’s own. In maintaining all of this, Hegel is further developing a thought which formed the basis for the French Enlightenment conception of the *Great Encyclopedia* (Diderot’s, d’Alembert’s, etc.).¹⁵⁰

But how does this spirit and the explication of its contents relate to real and contingent processes in time, space, and matter – in nature and history? That is the theme of the final section of the chapter (583–591/486–493).

That this unfolding of the concept into a science in its own proper “element” – i.e. in a mode of thought that no longer acknowledges any difference between consciousness and object, infinite and individual reason – is “logic or speculative philosophy” is not something Hegel makes clear in the concluding chapter itself, but only in the Preface, which he wrote subsequently. In the “element of knowing,” where the “opposition of being and knowing” has been overcome, there remains only a “variety of contents” – namely a variety of concepts that are fundamental to formal logic, general ontology, and particular ontologies (*PhG*, 39/22). The *Science of Logic*, viewed in rough outline,

¹⁵⁰ The contents of various sciences and techniques (*arts et métiers*) were presented in the *Grande Encyclopédie* as developing and exhausting the various capacities of the human mind (cf Diderot’s prospectus for the *Encyclopedia* of 1750).

involves a correspondence between the content of the “Doctrine of Being” (the first book) and traditional *metaphysica generalis* or general ontology, and between the content of the “Doctrine of the Concept” (the third book) and *metaphysica specialis* (cosmology, rational psychology, theology). The laws of formal logic and the principles of transcendental logic (as developed by Kant and Fichte) are mostly to be found in the “Doctrine of Essence” (the second book) and the first part of the logic of the concept (in the doctrines of concept, judgment, and inference).

But all these contents are treated as “self-organizations” of the conceptual structure of reality and not as forms of thought distinct from the contents of reality and the sciences. The systematic unpacking of these contents as a “subjective” process of differentiating and enriching the concept “being” is the object of the logic: “Their movement [sc. the movement of the concepts], which organizes itself in this element into a whole, is *logic* or *speculative philosophy*” (*PhG*, Preface, 39/22). There is also talk of this science of concepts’ “self-organization” in the closing chapter:

Spirit, therefore, having won the concept, displays its existence and movement in this ether of its life and is *science*. In this, the moments of its movement no longer exhibit themselves as specific *shapes of consciousness*, but – since consciousness’s difference has returned into the self – as *specific concepts* and as their organic self-grounded movement.

(589/491)

In keeping with both the tradition of formal logic and that of ontological doctrine, Hegel takes these logical moments or concepts to have timeless validity. But just how far this validity extends – what the concepts actually mean and how they relate to one another – is something that can only be established in the science of the concept (i.e. logic) itself. Hegel calls the *single* thought which differentiates and unfolds itself in the logic “the concept” and refers to the determinate thoughts in this development (being, being-for-self, essence, actuality, etc.) as its “moments.” And among these moments there is a particular developmental level which is, itself, called the “concept” and which appears in the third part of the *Science of Logic* – the logic of the concept, as opposed to the logic of being or of essence.¹⁵¹ It is through

¹⁵¹ For more on understanding the logical-ontological meaning of “the” concept, cf Horstmann, *Wahrheit*.

this systematic analysis of the concept that the logical and semantic interrelations between concepts for human thought or “consciousness” are conclusively elucidated and removed from time; the time of their discovery or formulation thus loses its significance. Hegel calls this the “annulment” of time through spirit’s “grasping its pure concept” (584/487).

The temporal development of this knowledge of spirit and of its pure structure is not, however, simply insignificant and contingent. Hegel understands time to be not merely a form of intuition (as Kant did), but also a form of self-reflection and of the concept itself – albeit a form which is merely externally intuited, not conceptually understood. A thorough explanation of Hegel’s thought about time is not possible here.¹⁵² For Hegel, time – which must be variously understood as time in nature, as historical time, and as the temporal form of particular “histories” (political history, art history, religious history) – is, like the self or the concept, essentially “negativity.”¹⁵³ It consists in distinguishing moments which are not determinate in themselves, but only receive their determinacy through relations (simultaneity, succession, earlier/later). This “distinguishing” is not the activity of some “other” (the thinker, say), but is itself a property of a structure – just as the distinguishing of thoughts (identity/difference, something/other, etc.) does not first come about through “our” thinking, but rather pertains to the thoughts or meanings themselves and is only then understood by us. Such “distinguishing of oneself from oneself” represents, according to Hegel, the structure of every intelligible order.

Although time is thus not alien to the concept, but to its own form (viewed from an objective external perspective), every process of understanding which is not restricted to demonstrating purely intellectual principles (logical, mathematical, and, for Hegel, also ontological) is accordingly subject to time. Even the self-knowledge of spirit presupposes time and, to that extent, also experience. Hegel acknowledges

¹⁵² On the problem of time in the chapter on absolute knowing, cf Baptist, “Das absolute Wissen.” On Hegel’s theory of time as a whole, cf Brauer, *Dialektik der Zeit*. Martin Heidegger provides an extensive critical engagement with Hegel’s concept of time from the perspective of his own conception of time in his fundamental ontology. (Heidegger discusses Hegel’s concept of time as a whole in *Being and Time*, §82; he focuses on the concept of time in the closing chapter of the *Phenomenology* in his lectures on the *Phenomenology* in *Gesamtausgabe*, Volume 32, 207 ff./*Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 143 ff.). See also Murray’s discussion, “Time in Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’.”

¹⁵³ On the various forms of time and the “histories” of the different manifestations of spirit, cf Fulda, *Das Problem*; and Jaeschke, “Die Geschichtlichkeit.”

the necessity of experience for every level of spirit which is “not in itself perfected,” i.e. which is not solely concerned with contemplating its pure intellectual structures. This acknowledgment of the significance of experience in the chapter on absolute knowledge is, however, less concerned with classical empiricism than it is with Jacobi and those of his contemporaries who held that precisely the most important things reveal themselves to us immediately and are only present to us in feeling and faith.¹⁵⁴ For Hegel, too, moral and religious feeling involves the immediate presence of the spiritual ground of all reality. And the history of these experiences is part of the experiential history of the true. But this history must still “perfect” or “complete” itself in a conceptual, reflective, and timelessly valid account of spirit.

In the course of elucidating the relationship of spirit to history, Hegel not only returns to Jacobi, but also recalls the Spinozism controversies of his early years. He attempts (*PhG*, 586 f./488 f.) to trace back the two attributes of *thought* and *extension* – which were, for Spinoza, the irreducible and fundamental essential properties of the all-encompassing divine substance as perceived by the human understanding – to a common structure of a “movement which reflects itself into itself.” The arch anti-Spinozist Fichte had, in principle, discovered the properties of this autonomous movement-structure in his theory of the I (cf above, pp. 15 f., 55 f.).

For Hegel, what is crucial in order to reconcile Spinoza with the philosophy of the subject is to understand time, extension, and the I as an increasingly complex and increasingly “more stable” structure (587/489). Hegel renews his earlier critique of Fichte, however, in arguing that the philosophy of the I remains “empty” so long as the self-differentiation of an immediate self-knower is not conceived as a logical–ontological structure of reality *tout court*. And, as in the Preface, Schelling is likewise targeted by this criticism of “contentless intuition.”

Space and time, nature and history, are, for Hegel, not external to spirit. They are themselves structures that are analogous to spiritual self-knowledge and which come to consciousness as such in the higher forms of spirit. And they are conditions of this knowledge qua temporal–historical self-discovery.

Anyone who claims to have “absolute” knowledge, however, is also obliged to show why there nevertheless are such “external” forms of

¹⁵⁴ Cf Jacobi, *David Hume*; Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*; Eschenmayer, *Die Philosophie*.

spirit in addition to the pure, conceptual order and its presentation in a “logical” science. To this end, Hegel employs the frequently misunderstood concepts of externalization and free “self-release.” His use of these concepts has given rise to theological interpretations, though these are highly questionable in light of the previous chapter’s supersession of religious representational thought. Three forms of externalization are articulated in the final pages of the text (589–591/491–493).

- (a) Externalization into “sensible consciousness,” whose conception of objecthood and truth constituted the starting point of the *Phenomenology*.
- (b) Externalization into nature, in which spirit intuitively or apprehends “its being as space” (591/492).
- (c) Externalization into history, in which spirit intuitively its “self as time outside it” (ibid.). This externalization into history itself has two forms: the form of a contingent process in the sequence of cultures and the form of a “conceptual organization” of this series as a cultural history leading up to spirit’s knowledge of itself (ibid.). The latter is, for its part, the “science of knowing in the sphere of its appearance” in its historical aspect (591/493).

Hegel characterizes spirit’s relation to these externalizations of itself with concepts drawn from epistemology, the philosophy of action, and moral philosophy. He understands externalization as the manifestation of the “supreme freedom and certainty of [spirit’s] self-knowledge” (590/491). This is because even what seemed to be the extreme opposite of spirit turns out to be a form of its self-knowledge. It is only once this has been demonstrated that spirit is revealed to be “*pure* self-knowing in absolute otherness” (29/14).

Sense-certainty constitutes just such an absolute otherness, because its unreflected self-certainty is, like absolute knowing, “immediate identity with itself” (589/491) even though it takes itself to be the pure uptake of the uninterpreted richness of sense. Even *nature* constitutes such an otherness, since it represents order and self-differentiation while it is simultaneously determined as the opposite of self-hood and necessity. Nature’s “element” is space – an array of contentless relations between points – and its internal differentiation lacks strict necessity, for necessity and contingency reciprocally condition one another. The chapter on reason already demonstrated that, in addition to its lawful, “inference-shaped” processes and orders, nature also contains contingent multiplicity. Indeed, on the level of living beings, the only possible

and comprehensible order comprises a multiplicity of contingent, non-conceptually determined forms (e.g. subspecies and local variations).

Finally, history likewise constitutes an otherness to spirit. We've already indicated that the structure of history's determining element – time – is “analogous to [that of] the concept.” But in addition, the whole “sense” or “meaning” of history is only intelligible as the self-knowledge of spirit. Now history, too, contains “contingent events.” Moreover, the historical education and enculturation of spirit is shaped by the alternation of recollection and forgetting – the precise opposite of the organic analysis of determinate concepts in the *Science of Logic*. History arrives at new “levels” of spirit, where many developments of previous cultural stages are “forgotten,” or “fade away” in the one-sided emphasis on the new – e.g. the emphasis on individual autonomy in modern ethical life.

Yet there is no way to definitively forget all the developments that are important for the course of spirit's self-recognition. Instead, what we have is a sort of collective unconscious in which “achievements” are preserved to be rediscovered within a new framework. As in his discussion of the individual (cf *EPW* (1830), §454), Hegel calls this unconscious the “night of its [sc. spirit's] self-consciousness” (*PhG*, 590/492). That the development of spirit does not get lost in this “night” reveals its imperviousness to even apparent losses of self.

The fact that cultures and peoples collapse, and that their accomplishments are initially lost, does not, according to Hegel, hinder the progressive self-recognition of spirit. The *Phenomenology* makes visible a complete process by which this self-knowledge comes into being. Thus, the externalization in time of what is logically necessary is once more sublated, or “externalized” (591/493). Indeed, the *Phenomenology* seeks to shift this temporal development into another, conceptual order. It shows the efficacy of conceptual moments behind the experiences of historical epochs.¹⁵⁵ This knowledge, in its independence from historical development, is the “absolute knowing” of spirit.

The closing chapter of the *Phenomenology* does not make it very clear whether these externalizations of the self-knowledge of spirit or of “science” themselves correspond to parts of the system of philosophy. As in the Preface, Hegel here speaks of “science” in two senses: as pure science, which knows itself in conceptual or spiritual form, and as the science of knowledge in the sphere of its appearance. Insofar as the

¹⁵⁵ Even in his later 1831 notes for a planned new edition of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel still focuses on the “logic behind consciousness” (cf *PhG* (1988), 552).

latter (i.e. the *Phenomenology* itself) already addresses the emergence of spirit's self-knowledge in nature and history in "scientific form" – namely by bringing out a necessary order through determinate concepts – one could consider the true, speculative knowledge of nature and of the historical shapes of spirit (art, law, religion, etc.) to be partial aspects of this science.

In Hegel's own advertisement of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in November 1807 in the intellectual periodical the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (Halle and Leipzig), he describes the work both as a "preparation" and as a "first science of philosophy" (cf *PhG*, 503, unfortunately not republished in the English edition). In the *Phenomenology*, he says, the "wealth of the appearance of spirit" already appears with the "necessity" of a "scientific order." Nevertheless, it is only the announced "second volume" that "contains" the "system of logic" and the "two remaining parts of philosophy, the sciences of nature and of spirit" (*ibid.*).

Toward the end of his life, in the third edition of his *Encyclopedia* (*EPW* (1830), §25, remark), Hegel returns once more to the relation of the *Phenomenology* to the other parts of the system. He confirms that what belongs to the "concrete parts" of the system – i.e. the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit – already falls "in part in that introduction." For the introduction (the *Phenomenology*) is concerned with the necessary path of "immediate consciousness" to "philosophical science" through the internal "dialectic" of consciousness that is fueled by its self-examination. But that cannot be shown just by looking at the "form" of consciousness – namely the opposition of knowledge versus object and philosophy's supersession of that opposition. Since the philosophical standpoint is the "most contentful and most concrete," it also "presupposes the concrete shapes of consciousness, such as morality, ethical life, art, religion." It is therefore necessary for the *Phenomenology* to anticipate the contents of the system itself, and its "presentation thereby becomes more intricate."

In the *Phenomenology* itself, Hegel takes this parallel between the system and its introduction even further by claiming that "to each abstract moment of science corresponds a shape of spirit's appearance as such" (589/491). These "abstract moments" are the concepts of the *Logic* which, for their part, underlie the contents and the necessary structure of the philosophies of nature and spirit.

So what, then, is this "absolute knowing" to which the *Phenomenology* leads us? It is not a peculiar form of "mystical" or (in the ordinary

sense) “speculative” knowledge that lies beyond normal human cognition. It is rather a science of principles which brings the fundamental concepts of the sciences, of law, morality, religion, and history, into a unified system – a system that rests on the fact that there are no insurmountable ontological oppositions between spirit and nature, matter and thought, individual and culture, particular and universal. These concepts and objects can rather be explained as incremental self-differentiations and self-reflections of a single spiritual actuality. The network of concepts thus unfolded, along with their necessary (“logical”) interrelations, constitutes the genuine actuality of nature and history – below the surface, as it were, of the contingent and the “non-conceptual.”

This actuality is not something alien to individuals, not anything fundamentally distinct from their thought and action. For our action incorporates cultural patterns as well as moral and legal principles, the sense of which is explicated in those very actions. And in all known laws and principles, our knowledge identifies a structure which is that of our own spirit: self-differentiation for the sake of understanding oneself in the resulting distinctions, and the individualization or concretization of universal, indeterminately comprehensive thoughts. This process, through which reality and self become transparent (as, at root, identical), is “absolute knowing.”

But has the *Phenomenology* managed to prove that this sort of knowledge is superior to and explanatory of all other alternatives? Many have come to doubt this on account of the final chapter’s peculiar argumentative strategy. For rather than subjecting the content of Christian religion to any further dialectical experience, the chapter seeks only to overcome the form of “representational thinking”¹⁵⁶ – and it does so, oddly enough, by essentially reminding us of previous experiences in the *Phenomenology* (cf *PhG*, 575/479). Hegel thus appears to remain trapped in the Christian explanatory paradigm.

Yet Hegel’s sublation of the separation between the spirit of the community and a divine being distinct from it, his task of showing that the “long-term goal” of the story of salvation is to promote the “reconciliation” achieved in the modern constitutional state and its scientific culture, is so radical that precious little remains of the substance of Christian faith. The equation of moral action in a community with the

¹⁵⁶ Cf *PhG*, 575/479: “The *content* of this representative thinking is absolute spirit; and all that now remains to be done is to sublate this mere form.”

self-intuition and life of divine spirit leaves only very general structural features of the Christian paradigm in place (e.g. inward-being versus externalization, etc.). Ultimately, Christian dogma remains a metaphorical description of the life of reason in the morally and legally constituted community and in the “trinitary” (i.e. syllogistic) inferences of theoretical reason. Of course, such interpretive claims would have to be grounded in a more thorough engagement with the philosophy of religion.

Another fundamental objection which is often raised is that, in the end, Hegel’s justification of the completeness and scientific status of the *Phenomenology* simply invokes the complete organization of “determinate concepts” in his *Science of Logic*. And thus the *Logic* is presupposed in the *Phenomenology*, not “proved” by it.¹⁵⁷ But in what sense does the *Phenomenology* seek to “prove” the *Logic* or the pure science of the concept? Surely in at least a twofold sense. For one, Hegel wants to show that the contradictions afflicting all interpretations of knowledge and world that start with an opposition between consciousness and object, subjective knowledge and objective truth, “inner” self-consciousness and “outer” reality, etc., ultimately rest on determinate concepts whose internal semantic interrelations have not been understood by the position in question. For another, he wants to thereby prepare the way for a science which explicates these concepts without succumbing to an “ontological” misunderstanding of them – namely an understanding of them as mere forms of thought or as thought-independent categories of objects. It seems to me that neither of these attempts fails, in principle, on account of any particular argument. It is, however, regrettable that Hegel does not explicitly present the concepts that, “behind the back of consciousness,” generate the confusions within each shape of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* and justify each shape’s transition into the next. That is to say, it’s a shame we aren’t presented with the logic of the *Phenomenology* in the text itself.¹⁵⁸

It seems more important to me, however, that a number of steps in the course of Hegel’s phenomenological argument do not seem compelling – much as a number of steps appear suspect in his later *Science of Logic*. Hegel sheds light on a great number of things, especially in the

¹⁵⁷ Cf Düsing, *Hegel*, 80; Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, 32 f./ *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 21 f.; Hagner, “Die Wahrnehmung,” 61; de Vos, “Absolute Knowing,” 231 ff. Further discussion of this problem can be found in W. Marx, *Hegels “Phänomenologie des Geistes”*, 106.

¹⁵⁸ Cf also above, *** 68 f.

chapters on reason and spirit which bear on historical shapes of ethical life, art, religion, etc. And the processual interrelations he exhibits really are quite enlightening. But a determinedly skeptical reader will not be convinced that Hegel's interpretation is superior to all other possible ones and that the *Phenomenology* comprises the complete set of alternative interpretations in the shapes and experiences of consciousness that Hegel presents.

The skeptical reader is all the more likely to remain unconvinced in this respect since so many new alternatives in science, art, state constitutions, etc. have arisen in the wake of Hegel. To that extent, the attempt to mediate, in a comprehensive and systematic manner, between the truth of religion, scientific discoveries, and the achievements of morality, law, and art must remain ultimately unconvincing to the contemporary reader, in my view. But if Hegel's attempt in the whole of the *Phenomenology* has "failed," its first fatal flaw did not appear in the final chapter. It is the monumental effort to discover and systematize a spiritual unity, an identical self-differentiating structure and syllogistic logic behind all forms of nature and culture which seems less than conclusive and vulnerable to doubt. The modern "speciation" or "differentiation" of religion, science, art, or politics – as unsatisfactory as it may be for the human spirit in its quest for a unifying truth – is not fundamentally called into question. But that is not to say that the disconnectedness of all systems, the lack of all normative integration of society, and the reduction of the human being to a self-describing subsystem of social evolution represents the sole alternative for sober thought.¹⁵⁹

It remains an important issue for contemporary philosophy whether Hegel mightn't have been justified in his belief that the entrenched dualisms which continue, as they did in previous centuries, to predominate philosophical and scientific thought today prevent the satisfactory resolution of age-old questions. Self-consciousness and object, conceptual form and sensibly given matter, body and soul, freedom and necessity, individual consciousness and cultural systems continue today to represent oppositions that parts of our culture along with philosophical "normal science" assume are insurmountable. Or, alternatively, there are reductionistic attempts to smooth over such oppositions into

¹⁵⁹ In somewhat simplified form, this appears to me to be the outcome of the most "differentiation-enthusiastic" versions of modern systems theory, e.g. in the theories of Luhmann.

an undifferentiated monism – whether materialist or subjectivist (e.g. constructivist) makes no difference. Such attempts always lead to theoretical stances whose one-sidedness or “distance from the phenomena” is as plain as day. (Either that, or they fail to explain what we wanted to know.¹⁶⁰) There are, however, contemporary philosophers who are attempting to overcome the dualism of concept and sensible given, consciousness (mind) and objective world, in a non-reductionistic manner.¹⁶¹ It remains to be seen whether their efforts can clearly eschew the constructive “expenses” of the *Phenomenology*.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt*, 9: “Disappointment in the results of skilled philosophical analysis leads us to ask what it was we wanted to know.”

¹⁶¹ E.g. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*; McDowell, *Mind and World*.

IMPACT

One could, in fact, write an entire book about just the impact of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Not only the work as a whole, but also its individual chapters continue today to exercise an unabated influence on philosophers and political theorists – particularly the chapter on mastery and servitude. But one cannot always clearly distinguish the impact of the *Phenomenology* in particular from the impact of Hegel's corpus as a whole. In the wake of Hegel's own school of students and followers, there have been, roughly speaking, both more conservative and more reformatory or even revolutionary movements influenced by Hegelian thought. The practice of distinguishing Hegelians into "the left" and "the right," which has since established itself, has its basis primarily in his philosophy of religion but also stems from his practical philosophy. The "right" maintained that Hegel's philosophy was compatible with the form of Christianity as well as the governmental and societal orders that were dominant around the middle of the nineteenth century. The "left," by contrast, thought Hegel's philosophy demanded a fundamental alteration of these prevailing orders.¹ The justification of the prevailing order appears to find its best support in the 1820 *Philosophy of Right*, while the call for an alteration of consciousness through an understanding of its genesis (including its historical genesis) seems better supported by the *Phenomenology*.

This is, admittedly, a simplified schema, since the Hegelians who urge change also tend to invoke the entire corpus, including the *Philosophy of Right*. This is true of Eduard Gans, for example,

¹ Cf Lübbe, *Die Hegelsche Rechte*; Löwith, *Die Hegelsche Linke*; Toews, *Hegelianism*.

who undertakes an interpretation and further development of the *Philosophy of Right* that comes close to the constitutionalism of the *Vormärz* period (i.e. the period from the 1815 Congress of Vienna to the failed March revolutions of 1848).²

One could, however, give a fairly accurate overview of the *Phenomenology's* impact by noting that those who were most strongly influenced by it – particularly by its concept of dialectical inversions of consciousness and its deployment of the master–slave relationship – tended to be revolutionary thinkers, especially in the Marxist tradition. But if the contemporary literature on Hegel and the interpretation I have presented here are correct, this massive influence is clearly – as so often in the history of spirit – based in large part on misunderstandings of the book.

Apart from Marxism, the intellectual movements on which Hegel's *Phenomenology* exercised the greatest influence were French existentialism and German neo-Hegelianism. In saying this, I am setting aside Hegel's impact on philosophy and politics in other countries where it is difficult to separate the impact of the *Phenomenology* from the influence of the Hegelian corpus as a whole.³ In Germany, the impact of the *Phenomenology* even extended beyond strains of Marxism and neo-Hegelianism. Martin Heidegger, for example, held his 1930–1931 winter semester lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁴ And he would later devote an important article to Hegel's concept of experience in the *Phenomenology*.⁵ Nevertheless, it is difficult to discern any clear influence of the work on Heidegger's thought either before or after 1930. His critical engagement with Hegel is primarily devoted to the "ontotheological" (i.e. logical and ontological) principles of Hegelian thought which are primarily laid out in the *Science of Logic*.⁶ The traces of the *Phenomenology* – in anthropologically abridged form – are much clearer in the French existentialism of Sartre and Kojève or in the Marxism of a Lukács or a Marcuse.

² Cf Gans, *Naturrecht und Universalrechtsgeschichte*; Waszek, *Eduard Gans*.

³ On this point, see also the international reception of Hegel's entire corpus recorded in Pöggeler, "Werk und Wirkung," 22 ff.; as well as Ottmann's *Individuum und Gemeinschaft*. On different interpretational approaches to the *Phenomenology*, cf Göhler, "Die wichtigsten Ansätze."

⁴ Cf Heidegger, *Hegels "Phänomenologie des Geistes"*, translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly as *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

⁵ Heidegger, *Holzwege*, translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes as *Off the Beaten Track*.

⁶ For more on Heidegger's engagement with Hegel, cf Pöggeler, "Nachwort zur zweiten Auflage," 408 ff. and 437 ff.

To assess the influence of the *Phenomenology* since the 1930s, one must take into account the publication of Hegel's Jena manuscripts during that period. All the Jena texts could then be regarded by Marxists⁷ and existentialists, but also by conservative Hegelians such as Hermann Glockner, as the work of the "young" Hegel, not yet perverted by logicism, a "compulsion to systematize," or the glorification of the postrevolutionary political order in the Berlin writings.⁸ In recent decades, the close study and editing of Jena manuscripts has led some to draw the line between Hegel the reformer and Hegel the "quietist" even *before* the *Phenomenology*.⁹ The Frankfurt school tends to locate a concept of spirit oriented around forms of interaction and socialization only in the early Jena writings – a concept which, beginning in 1804, increasingly gives way to a monological and identity-theoretical concept of spirit.¹⁰ By contrast, Anglo-American philosophy has become increasingly interested in the *Phenomenology* as a paradigm study of both the genesis of social interaction and the interrelation of epistemology and social history.¹¹

Instead of futilely attempting to be comprehensive, the following discussion will sketch only the two most influential receptions and interpretations of the *Phenomenology* – that of the young Marx, and that of Alexandre Kojève.

Marx's first critical engagement with Hegel in his early manuscripts (1843, first published in 1932) does not focus on the *Phenomenology*, but rather on the *Philosophy of Right*. Nevertheless, it is possible to show that, even then, Marx's understanding of Hegel's philosophy (which he got, in part, from Feuerbach) views it from the perspective of the *Phenomenology*.¹² But it is only in his Paris manuscripts from 1844 that Marx explicitly engages with the *Phenomenology* as "the true birthplace and the secret of Hegelian philosophy."¹³ For Marx, the *Phenomenology*

⁷ Cf for example Marcuse, *Hegels Ontologie*, 291 ff./256 f.; or Marcuse, "Studie", 109 ff. (untranslated).

⁸ Glockner, *Hegel*, 539 ff.

⁹ Cf Siep, "Wandlungen der Hegel-Rezeption," 114; Habermas, "Nachwort," 357 and 359.

¹⁰ Cf Habermas, "Arbeit und Interaktion," translated by John Viertel in *Theory and Practice*; Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, 104; *Struggle for Recognition*, 63.

¹¹ Cf Taylor, *Hegel*; Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*; and Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*; Pinkard, *Hegel's "Phenomenology"*; Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*; Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, 91 ff.; Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, 178–209; Brandom, *Reason in Philosophy*, Chapters 2 and 3; McDowell, "The Apperceptive I", 147–165.

¹² On Marx's reception of the *Phenomenology*, see also Pöggeler, "Die Verwirklichung"; Lange, *Das Prinzip Arbeit*; and Quante, "Die Funktion." On Marx's reception of Hegel's corpus as a whole, cf Hillman, *Marx und Hegel*.

is Hegel's progressive work and the work on which "critique" – i.e. the philosophy Marx himself advances – must build.

At the same time, however, it already contains what is inverted, positivistic, and ideological in later Hegel. Marx establishes that

despite its [sc. the *Phenomenology's*] thoroughly negative and critical appearance and despite the genuine criticism contained in it, which often anticipates much later developments, there is already latent in the *Phenomenology* as a germ, a potentiality, a secret, the uncritical positivism and the equally uncritical idealism of Hegel's later works.

(644/331 f.)

Marx's engagement with Hegel is based on his own anthropology and philosophy of history, both of which were influenced by the *Phenomenology*, but also by other authors such as Kant, Fichte, Feuerbach, classical national economics, etc. Marx is as little interested in the epistemological justification of this anthropology as he is in the critiques of epistemologies and implicit ontologies in the *Phenomenology* itself.

One could say that Marx had a "fundamental anthropological" understanding of the human being as a sensible, "objective," species-being. As a being with needs and affective impulses, human beings strive to produce objects and to represent their own essential abilities in them (651 f./337 f.). The human is characterized by – in modern terms – emotional and practical intentionality. Marx's idea that humans can only become conscious of their abilities or "essential powers" by transforming inner and outer nature is surely borrowed from Hegel's concept of labor in the master–servant chapter. And Hegel's own concept of labor was, for its part, influenced by Aristotle (transference of spiritual form into the product) and Fichte (consciousness as the objectivization of purely subjective activity).

Marx interprets the entire history of mankind – primarily understood not as a history of law and religion, but as an economical–political history – as an "externalization" of essential human powers through social labor. In keeping with Kant's philosophy of history, he holds that the abilities of man cannot be completely unfolded in the individual, but only in the historical development of the species. But for Marx, this

¹³ Marx, *Zur Kritik der Nationalökonomie*, 641/329. As usual, the first page number refers to the German edition, the latter to the English translation by Jack Cohen et al. in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Collected Works*, Volume 3 (under the heading "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844").

development, as it was for Rousseau and Hegel, is a dialectical process of reflection in which man must become alienated from his own undeveloped, though happy, nature and pass through a state of complete loss of self. The only way for man to become conscious of himself as an actual human being is reappropriation. Man's self-generation through his labor and reflection is "the action of world history" (650/336).

This process is "dialectical" because it can be understood as a sequence of negation, self-negation, and the self-sublation of that negation. The necessary development and objectivization of human abilities and of human knowledge in the products of the economy, technology, and culture not only negates the undeveloped and indeterminate nature of the human, it also negates man's sensible-concrete actuality and "authenticity" – man's self-possession. Here, Marx is indebted to Rousseau (*On Inequality*).

In this manner, there emerge "rational," abstract systems of divided or distributed labor, ultimately capitalistic economies, the law, the state, and religion, all of which hinder the self-realizing labor and the satisfaction of needs in the service of the particular interests of those engaged in "capital valorization" (*Kapitalverwertung*) – i.e. the creation and use of capital (through investments, interest on loans, etc.). And then it is not only abstract rationality which dominates the actual "passions" and needs of human beings, for every moment of this alienated state is the very opposite of itself, i.e. its own self-negation:

Estrangement [or alienation – *Entfremdung*] is manifested not only in the fact that *my* means of life belong to *someone else*, that which I desire is the inaccessible possession of *another*, but also in the fact that everything is something *other* than itself – that my activity is *something other* and that, finally (and this applies to the capitalist as well), everything is ruled by an *inhuman* power.¹⁴

This self-negation can only be discovered through "critique" and must be overcome or sublated through the "appropriation" of the abstract powers of wealth, the law, and the state.

According to Marx, Hegel's *Phenomenology* both recognizes and presents this structure of objectivization, alienation, and reappropriation. But in the course of the presentation, this structure gets "idealistically" and "positivistically" inverted. For the *Phenomenology* does not understand the essence of man to lie in sensible activity, or in concrete labor

¹⁴ Marx, *Zur Kritik der Nationalökonomie*, 619/314, original emphasis.

in the transformation of inner and outer nature, but rather in pure, philosophical thought. Marx even puts forward an anthropological interpretation of Hegel's absolute knowing as an essential human characteristic which, according to the old European tradition, finds its genuine realization in toil-free "theory" – i.e. in the spiritual intuition of eternal principles and laws. Plato and Aristotle (see, e.g. Book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) are the forerunners of this conception of man as a creature which finds its realization in abstract thought – a conception Marx regards as alienated.

For such a conception must view all sensible consciousness and activity itself as an externalization and loss of the genuine essence of humanity. Just as Hegel's system in the *Encyclopedia* proceeds from the Logic to the philosophies of nature and spirit only to then return to absolute philosophical knowledge, so too, Marx thinks, the *Phenomenology* fundamentally presents only a return from the externalization of human essence in the forms of objective consciousness to pure, object-less, and non-sensible absolute knowing – an interpretation which is, however, doubtlessly more Neoplatonic or Gnostic than the *Phenomenology* was meant to be.

Real world history, according to Marx, traces the opposite cycle: from happy and naïve originary communism through the dominance of alienated economical rationality to consciously planned communism, in which everyone "objectivizes" their abilities both for their own needs and for those of others. However, the outcome of Marx's attempts to demonstrate that this is the real logic of history and to enact that logic through the avant-garde of the proletariat may well make the Marxist conception appear even more "idealistic" to us today than the Hegelian conception. Indeed, Hegel himself had already anticipated some of the dilemmas facing this conception of revolution and history in the chapter on reason of the *Phenomenology* (cf above, p. 146).

Now, the Marxist movement was not directly influenced by Marx's interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. Nevertheless, it would appear that many of the basic ideas of Marx's later theory (including his monumental *Capital*) arose out of and already found expression in his critical engagement with the *Phenomenology*. To that extent, Marx's reception of the *Phenomenology* is quite plausibly the most influential of all.

The only other interpretation which has proved comparably influential is that of Alexandre Kojève, a Russian emigré in Paris, who developed his distinctive reading of the *Phenomenology* in lecture series between 1933 and 1939. At the very least, his reading exerted a

tremendous influence on French philosophy in the twentieth century – from Sartre through Merleau-Ponty, E. Weil, and J. Hyppolite, to Foucault and Derrida.¹⁵ Like Marx, Kojève reads the *Phenomenology* from an anthropological perspective and within the framework of a philosophy of history. Unlike Marx, however, Kojève finds these perspectives to be adequately expressed in the *Phenomenology* itself, and feels no need to turn them against Hegel. Man's self-generation through nature-altering labor and through the historical struggles of "servants" for their liberation is, for Kojève, one of Hegel's own theses. Absolute knowledge – that is, Hegel's own philosophical "wisdom" – only brings this self-production to consciousness. Kojève is also more interested than Marx in individual self-generation, and not just the self-generation of the species. Moreover, he finds an account of individual self-generation in those forms of Hegel's conception of recognition to which Marx pays less attention: the forms of love, struggle, and the experience of death.

Kojève understands Hegel as a philosopher of human finitude and consciousness of mortality – a perspective that certainly calls to mind Heidegger's *Being and Time*.¹⁶ The fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology* is, for him, the veritable center of all of Hegelian philosophy:

With the discovery of the concept of recognition, Hegel is in possession of the key concept for his entire philosophy. The analysis of this fundamental concept thus guides us in understanding how the various aspects and moments internal to the Hegelian dialectic hang together as well as how his philosophical writings relate to one another.¹⁷

The phenomena of recognition that Hegel discusses represent, for Kojève, both the historical beginnings of the emergence of man and the program for the future conclusion of history. Man "creates" himself

¹⁵ In his Preface to the German edition of selections from Kojève's writings (*Hegel, Eine Vergegenwärtigung*), Iring Fetscher attributes the entire "breakthrough of dialectic in French thought" to the impact of his lecture series.

¹⁶ Cf especially Kojève's text on "The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," which makes up the fifth chapter of the German edition and the second Appendix to the French edition, but which has not yet been made available in English.

¹⁷ Kojève, *Hegel, Eine Vergegenwärtigung*, 284. This passage originates from an extensive review of a book on Hegel by Henri Niel (1945/1984), which Kojève published in *Critique* in 1946 (Volume 3–4, September–August, 339–366, here 351 f.) and which was printed as an appendix to the German edition but which has, unfortunately, not yet been translated into English. The ideas it expresses, however, can already be found in the lectures Kojève held between 1933 and 1939 themselves. For more on Kojève's reading of Hegel, cf Pinkard, *Hegel's "Phenomenology"*, 437, and Roth, *Knowing and History*, 81–146.

as a cultural being through his “act” of re-creating inner and outer nature. Insofar as this act is a modification, i.e. a negation of outer nature and a mode of self-discipline, it is “labor” in the Marxist sense. But human labor is, from the very outset, “interaction.” It is bound up with “talk” (*discours*) and with our striving for affirmation through the desire, emotion, and intellect of the “other.”

Talk is, of course, not just communicative understanding but also *the* understanding which “reveals” or “discloses” reality by negating its sensible “givenness” in abstract concepts. For Kojève, man’s way of understandingly existing in the world, disclosing both the being of things and of himself, just *is* what Hegel terms “spirit.” This spirit is absolute because the human is bound to nothing in the world, not even to his own life, which he is free to risk or even take. It is also absolute because man is capable of becoming fully conscious of his place in the world. Yet in order to become so, he must understand himself as finite and historical. He must accept his mortality and accede to death (239 f./cf 148 or 254 f.).¹⁸

As a creature that generates itself historically through its own act, man can also be absolute in the sense of being perfect. Man himself is essentially a “totality,” a unity of oppositions – natural and free, individual and universal. But he must realize this essence in a historical process of recognition, which has as its goal a homogeneous world-society without any class disparity and with universal equality of rights.¹⁹

According to Kojève, Hegel identified the goal of “becoming human” (*devenir humain*) in the synthesis of the master’s warrior existence and the servant’s life of labor (*vie laborieuse*). Such a human being would be the “worker–soldier of Napoleon’s revolutionary army.”²⁰ That is not to say that the perfection of man had already been achieved with Napoleon. It is only once the revolutionary or external “war for recognition” (*guerre pour la reconnaissance*) has led to a homogeneous world-state (*empire universel et homogène*) that man will cease fighting and become an ahistorical keeper of wisdom, who no longer needs to alter anything (*ibid.*). Kojève seems to have had no doubt that this

¹⁸ This portion of Kojève’s lectures has not been translated into English. See page 546 of the French edition.

¹⁹ Cf Hegel, *Eine Vergegenwärtigung*, 254 and 288, which correspond to the French editions “Introduction,” 560 f., and the review of Henri Niel’s book in the journal *Critique*, 355 f. Cf the editor’s introduction to the English edition, xi.

²⁰ Hegel, *Eine Vergegenwärtigung*, 254; cf the French edition, “Introduction,” 560 f. The passage is not reproduced in any English edition.

goal was actually achievable – at least, he did not doubt it during the period from 1933 to 1939.

Kojève thus follows Marx in reintroducing the dimension of future reconciliation into Hegelian thought. He furnishes his Hegel, the radical atheist and philosopher of finitude, with quasi-religious ideas of salvation. But unlike Marx, he takes love, struggle, the experience of death, and the acquisition of rights to belong as much to individual as to social-cultural history. However, Kojève leaves us somewhat in the dark about the internal structures of a classless society that secures the rights of all citizens – i.e. about its legal, economic, and emotional relations of recognition. And he seems quite unconcerned to provide any justification of his particular anthropology against alternative conceptions.

Kojève's reading of Hegel is the first version of that synthesis of Hegelian, Marxist, and Heideggerian thought which became so influential in French philosophy in the twentieth century and which continues to shape it today. Already in Kojève, we find the idea that man is radically free from all traditional and metaphysical conditions: man "projects" (*entwirft*) and generates himself through his very own act. As an agent and as a discursive (talking) intellect (understanding), man is simultaneously the negation of naturally given being and the revelation of the structure of the natural and historical world: "The mode of being that reveals itself is human, essentially finite being, which produces itself in time through the active negation of being."²¹ This line of thought already prefigures some of the fundamental thoughts of Sartre's 1943 *L'être et le néant* (*Being and Nothingness*), the central work of French existentialism. Still today, a wide variety of thinkers invoke and build on Kojève, including "reform Marxists" (such as Habermas in "Arbeit und Interaktion," or Honneth) and, more recently, liberal thinkers (such as Fukuyama), all of whom take as their starting point aspects of anthropology and the philosophy of history in Hegel's Jena writings.

Yet both Kojève and Marx fail to devote adequate attention to the epistemological function of the *Phenomenology*. The problem of justifying a kind of knowledge that does not allow for any principled distinction between conceptual scheme and its content, or between consciousness and objects "in the world,"²² simply doesn't occupy "left Hegelian" interpreters. Such problems tend to be addressed by more

²¹ Hegel, *Eine Vergegenwärtigung*, 241; French edition, "Introduction," 548. Not included in any English edition.

²² On this problem, cf also Siep, "Hegel's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."

“conventional” readings of the *Phenomenology*, for example in the work of Hegel’s own students (such as Gabler²³) or in more contemporary attempts to do justice to Hegel’s idea of justifying a form of “absolute” or “speculative” knowledge.²⁴

Modern interpreters have likewise devoted due attention to the embeddedness of object-categories and truth-criteria in social forms of life and their development. And, in fact, the development of knowledge is necessarily connected to practical and social recognition, for Hegel. That objects are nothing other than a network of self-differentiating concepts is something one can only understand – and is something that can only be “true” in the first place – within social orders that rest on legal principles of freedom. Interpretations differ, however, on the question whether absolute knowledge is the permanent, presuppositionless process of “communal self-reflection” on legal principles, object-categories, and truth-criteria,²⁵ or whether there is a fundamental and unsurpassable content of legal orders and categorial systems. A number of things speak against a reading of absolute knowledge as a permanent process of communication and self-reflection: Hegel’s critique of the “bad infinity” of processes that lack any knowable and attainable conclusion; his teleological understanding of historical and conceptual development (e.g. his understanding of modern Christianity as the conclusive fulfillment of the “concept” of religion);²⁶ and (finally) his interpretation of the agreement between religion, science, and the modern European state (constitutional monarchy in his sense, with fundamental rights and a division of power). All these commitments make a processual reading of absolute knowledge questionable – questionable as a hermeneutically adequate interpretation, not necessarily as a philosophically fruitful appropriation. Yet the fact that such modern interpretations have neglected neither the practical–social, nor the epistemological, dimensions of the *Phenomenology* can strengthen us in the hope that the last several decades have brought us significantly closer to an adequate understanding of this philosophical masterpiece.

²³ Gabler, *Kritik des Bewußtseins*.

²⁴ Cf. for example, Fulda, *Das Problem*; Pinkard, *Hegel’s “Phenomenology”*; Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*; Schmitz, *Hegels Logik*.

²⁵ Pinkard, *Hegel’s “Phenomenology”*, 261.

²⁶ Cf. *PhG*, 585: “Consequently, until spirit has completed itself *in itself*, until it has completed itself as world-spirit, it cannot reach its consummation as *self-conscious spirit*” (585/488).

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