Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____ October 15, 2008

James A. Dunson III

The Systematic Socrates: Hegel as Moral Philosopher

By

James A. Dunson III
Doctor of Philosophy

Philosophy

Donald Phillip Verene
Advisor

Rudolf Makkreel
Committee Member

Michael Sullivan
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

_____
Date

The Systematic Socrates: Hegel as Moral Philosopher

By

James A. Dunson III
B.A., Denison University, 2002
M.A., Emory University, 2007

Advisor: Dr. Donald Phillip Verene, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Philosophy
2008

Abstract

The Systematic Socrates: Hegel as Moral Philosopher
By James A. Dunson III

My dissertation reopens a philosophical dispute: Hegel's critique of Kantian moral philosophy. It argues that the standard characterization of this dispute involves a superficial reading of both Kant and Hegel. My reconstruction of Hegel's moral philosophy recognizes his unique contribution to this area of philosophy, while outlining a deeper criticism of Kant. Far from being a merely historical project, however, this reconstruction raises several questions regarding the nature of philosophical inquiry: (1) In what sense, if any, is moral philosophy 'practical'? (2) What is the proper philosophical reply to the challenges posed by dogmatism and skepticism? 3) What substantive ends, if any, result from studying moral philosophy?

I argue that Hegel revives the pre-Kantian substantive ends of self-knowledge and some form of philosophical satisfaction (e.g. Stoic *ataraxia* or Spinoza's blessedness). He recovers an often-overlooked form of moral and practical philosophy: the *Bildung* (the education or self-formation) of one's philosophical understanding, which requires the training of one's judgment. Yet Hegel's revival of this tradition is also an attempt to complete Kant's own practical philosophy. By overcoming what he deems to be the existential disorder of the Kantian moral subject, Hegel's version of autonomy results in being 'at home in the world.' I claim that the revival of these substantive ends does not require the reversion to a pre-Kantian form of speculative metaphysics. The close connection between Hegel's systematic thought and his version of skepticism provides the key insight into how this is accomplished.

The Systematic Socrates: Hegel as Moral Philosopher

By

James A. Dunson III
B.A., Denison University, 2002
M.A., Emory University, 2007

Advisor: Dr. Donald Phillip Verene, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Philosophy
2008

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

G.W.F. HEGEL

PR	*Philosophy of Right*
PS	*Phenomenology of Spirit*
LHP	*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*
EL	*The Encyclopedia Logic*
ETW	*Early Theological Writings*
IPH	*Introduction to the Philosophy of History*
FK	*Faith and Knowledge*
RSP	*Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy*

IMMANUEL KANT

CPuR	*Critique of Pure Reason*
CPrR	*Critique of Practical Reason*
G	*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
P	*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*
MM	*The Metaphysics of Morals*

[Full citations may be found in the bibliography]

INTRODUCTION

> Well, something much more painful than a snake has bitten me in my most sensitive part – I mean my heart, or my soul, or whatever you want to call it, which has been struck and bitten by philosophy, whose grip on young and eager souls is much more vicious than a viper's and makes them do the most amazing things. Now, all you people here . . . *I need not mention Socrates himself – and all the rest, have all shared in the madness, the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy.*
>
> -Alcibiades' speech in Plato's *Symposium*

> Appearance is the arising and passing away that does not itself arise and pass away, but is the 'in itself' [i.e. subsists intrinsically], and constitutes the actuality and the movement of the life of truth. *The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose*. Judged in the court of this movement, the single shapes of Spirit do not persist any more than determinate thoughts do, but they are as much positive and necessary moments, as they are negative and evanescent. In the *whole* of this movement, seen as a state of repose, what distinguishes itself therein, and gives itself particular existence, is preserved as something that *recollects* itself, *whose existence is self-knowledge, and whose self-knowledge is just as immediately existence*.
>
> -G.W.F. Hegel, Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

With this reference to the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy, Hegel offers us an insight into his own philosophical method and a way of reconsidering what it means to study moral philosophy. My task in this project is to reconstruct Hegel's moral philosophy, emphasizing its unique combination of systematic and skeptical elements. This reconstruction will point a way out of conventional and shortsighted understandings of Hegel as Kant's critic or acolyte. It will also make explicit Hegel's revival of a long-suppressed philosophical tradition of *Bildung* (the education of one's self-understanding that involves both self-knowledge and self-transformation) as a form of practical philosophy.

I intend to show how Hegel's account of *Bildung* depends upon his unique revival of Socratic ignorance. The inheritance of this Socratic legacy is an attempt to revive and to reinterpret (in a nondogmatic way) the substantive ends of moral philosophy; namely, some conception of self-knowledge and some form of philosophical satisfaction. Hegel is prompted to revive these substantive ends after pointing out the existential disorder of the Kantian moral subject. His own moral philosophy, then, might be viewed as a Socratic attempt to make explicit Kant's conception of moral autonomy. The end result of practicing philosophy rightly is the achievement of *Beisichselbstsein*, or being 'with oneself' in the world. I will suggest that Hegelian reconciliation runs counter to Kantian consolation, and his particular version of autonomy depends upon being 'at home in the world.'

In this introduction, I will first outline in a general way the motivation for the project. Then, I will examine an indirect and a direct reason to reconsider Hegel's moral philosophy. The indirect reason (briefly examined) is the philosophical connection between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Plato's *Symposium*. The direct reason is Hegel's own understanding of Socrates as the father of moral individualism. This reference to Socrates broadens the scope of Hegel's critique of *Moralität*, instead of reading Hegel merely in relation to Kant. In the second part of the introduction, I hope to show how this reconstruction challenges conventional thinking about the relationship between theory and practice in contemporary ethics. Further, it compels us to reconsider the roles of

dogmatism and skepticism in philosophy, and the corresponding impact of Kant's and Hegel's understanding of dialectic on their respective moral philosophies.

HEGEL'S REVIVAL OF SOCRATIC IGNORANCE

A comprehensive treatment of Hegel's moral philosophy has been largely neglected. When one assumes this task, one discovers how easy it is either grossly to oversimplify his account, or to make it so complex as to ensure that no new insight will be achieved. Even sympathetic interpreters like Allen Wood fail to construct a coherent picture, preferring instead to outline a variety of competing interpretations without attempting to reconcile them.[1] It is odd (if not uncharitable) that the radically new and complicated position often attributed to Hegel in the realm of metaphysics and epistemology is not similarly recognized in his moral philosophy. Here he is seen at best as a reactionary thinker, a skeptic or an anti-moralist; at worst, an uncritical defender of a conservative quietism.

Admittedly Hegel's moral philosophy poses a serious interpretive challenge: any coherent view must be assembled and made explicit from a variety of texts. But despite the difficulty of this task, it is still strange that Hegel's own view has often been reduced to pointing out the formalism of Kantian ethics. Even if Kant could specify the determinate and substantive content of the moral law, he would still, on Hegel's view, fail to provide an adequate account of freedom and moral autonomy. His account of the moral subject would, as I outline in Chapter

[1] See especially Allen Wood's *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

1, still be ‘an entire nest of contradictions.’ So it is not sufficient to stress the accusation of formalism without also examining Kant’s conception of the moral subject.

The suggestion that Hegel’s own view might be a systematic form of Socratic philosophy will strike some as counterintuitive for at least two reasons. First, system-building in general is anathema to Socratic philosophy. Second, Hegel is often seen specifically as a systematic foil to Kierkegaard’s Socratic revival. The existentialist turn in post-Hegelian philosophy points out that Hegel ‘left himself out of’ his own system. The problem with the first reaction is that it presupposes an understanding of a philosophical system, without considering the close connection between Hegel’s form of skepticism and his systematic manner of thinking. The second reaction presupposes an understanding of the individual, while obscuring the fact that Hegel’s entire corpus could be read as an attempt to make sense of what individuality really means.

Hegel struggled throughout his entire intellectual life with the meaning of moral autonomy, from his early embrace of a Christian ethic of love, to his later interest in Kant’s moral philosophy. He came to see each of these as inadequate, but his interest in morality has more to do with the mode of subjectivity it reflects than with the question of establishing a universally valid moral ‘ought’. Indeed, as Hegel shows, the modern moral project of pursuing a universally valid criterion for how to live is a red herring. It conceals the deeper question of the dialectical development of a subject adequate to ethical life. The moral subject is a crucial stage in this development.

The connection between Socrates and Hegel is intimated (without being fully explored) in two recent works of Hegel scholarship. William Bristow writes that "Hegel's procedure of critical self-examination is Socratic in the respect that the self must be willing to stake itself, in staking its own truth, its own conception of the most fundamental norms of its existence, in the inquiry. The critical self-examination has immediate existential stakes."[2] This echoes the view articulated by John Russon several years earlier, when he wrote:

> Moral action as I have described it is precisely the attempt to enable our situations to enact their own dialectical self-criticism without reference to an external standard. Unlike the ethical or cultural agents who look to an already existent universality by which to judge situations, the moral agent must watch for the immanent emergence of criteria for judgment within the determinate situation, and his or her observations will be vindicated or vitiated only by the recognition of this intersubjective situation itself. *Surely this is just the description of Hegel's own phenomenological method, itself a reanimation of the Socratic practice of philosophy*.[3]

Neither Bristow nor Russon attempts to develop in a more comprehensive way what this connection between Socrates and Hegel might involve. They both draw the comparison as a conclusion to an argument, rather than establishing it as a premise and developing a sustained defense of its viability.

After considering in general terms the need to rethink some conventional readings of Hegel, I now turn to a more specific (but indirect) reason to do so: the philosophical connection implicit in the opening quotations from Plato's *Symposium* and Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Conceiving of truth as a 'Bacchanalian

---

[2] William Bristow, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* (Oxford University Press, 2007): p. 14.
[3] John Russon, *Reading Hegel's Phenomenology* (University of Indianapolis Press, 2004): p. 146, emphasis added.

revel' immediately suggests that Hegel's account of experience will be unlike Kant's critical analysis of the synthesis of concepts and intuitions. Hegel echoes Alcibiades' reference to the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy, which impels those who have fallen victim to its seductions to continue their inquiry. This conception of experience conceives of philosophical inquiry as a kind of existential imperative and the inquirer as transformed through its practice.

Further, the *Phenomenology* might itself be seen as a symposium on truth. Hegel's often-misunderstood claim that the True is the whole[4] can only be grasped by traversing the more or less comprehensive accounts along the highway of despair. The True, then, is nothing independent of its articulations, and each inherently partial account is like a symposium speech that contributes to our understanding so long as it is not taken as complete in-itself. Despite the variety of speeches encountered, they are all related insofar as they all have the same object of understanding the world 'as it really is'.

The recollection of the ways in which these more or less partial accounts are *aufgehoben* into one another is Hegel's recipe for self-knowledge, as well as the theme of Diotima's speech to Socrates in the *Symposium*: "'For what we call *studying* exists because knowledge is leaving us, because forgetting is the departure of knowledge, while studying puts back a fresh memory in place of what went away, thereby preserving a piece of knowledge, so that it seems to be the same. And in that way everything mortal is preserved, not, like the divine, by always being the same in every way, but because what is departing and aging

[4] PS §20

leaves behind something new, something such as it had been. By this device, Socrates,' she said, 'what is mortal shares in immortality. . . .'"[5]

Recollection on both accounts makes it possible for one to distinguish between more and less comprehensive accounts of truth. In this way, climbing Hegel's ladder toward Absolute Knowing mirrors the image of the "rising stairs"[6] that comes later in Diotima's speech to Socrates. Ascending to the form of Beauty in the *Symposium* is necessary for one ". . . to give birth not to images of virtue (because he's in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty)."[7] Apperceiving the form is connected with acquiring virtue, so there are moral implications for educating one's self-understanding in this way. Diotima's speech on beauty and virtue also anticipates Hegel's desire to transcend *Vorstellung*, or a merely imagistic representation of the true. Finally, the ascent to the form of Beauty is motivated by the philosopher's love of truth. This type of philosophical Eros reminds us of the existential significance of philosophical inquiry in a way that prefigures Hegel's own moral philosophy.

There is an ambiguity both in Diotima's speech to Socrates and Hegel's own symposium on truth. The form of Beauty is regarded as something that must be apperceived as it is in-itself, and yet one's knowledge must continuously be replenished because, as Diotima puts it, 'forgetting is the departure of knowledge.' Similarly, Hegel instructs us that the whole is seen as a 'state of repose,' and yet its particular moments must be recollected in order to give it any

[5] Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997): 208a-b.
[6] *Symposium*, 211c
[7] *Symposium*, 212a

content. The Bacchic frenzy of philosophy, identified by both Alcibiades and Hegel, consists in the philosopher's ability to regard the moments of experience as both fleeting and as contributing to some greater whole.

This relationship between the whole and its parts is not an epistemological point about what one can claim to know.[8] Nor does it stand in contrast to those who view Hegel as a kind of pre-critical metaphysician, illicitly pursuing speculative metaphysical questions. Rather, the reference to the *Symposium* allows us to see a different kind of affinity between Hegel and ancient philosophy: the recognition of a connection between metaphysics and moral philosophy.

Marcus Aurelius concisely states this connection when he writes, "To live a good life: We have the potential for it. If we can learn to be indifferent to what makes no difference. *This is how we learn it: by looking at each thing, both the parts and the whole.* Keeping in mind that none of them can dictate how we perceive it. They don't impose themselves on us."[9] Marcus must constantly remind himself both of the *Logos* governing the universe and the ephemeral nature of existence (including his own). Stoic *ataraxia* depends upon the state of one's soul mirroring the 'state of repose' (to use Hegel's phrase) of the cosmos. This tranquility must always be accompanied by a vigilant approach to living rightly.

---

[8] See Robert Williams' "Hegel's Critique of Kant" for a recent (and clear) example of this position: *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 38, nos. 1-2 (2006-07): 9-34. See Glenn Magee's *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* for a sustained criticism of this hermeneutic account (Cornell University Press, 1989).

[9] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (Modern Library Press, 2003): p. 152, emphasis added.

The connection between 'seeing rightly' and living virtuously is a central Socratic theme as well. Socrates' search for a proper definition for virtues like piety is akin to the Platonic desire to apperceive the Form. In each case, the inquirer would know the object of his inquiry directly. Just as we saw the ambiguity in Diotima's account of Beauty, so too is there an ambiguity in the Socratic method. Despite his desire to attain a proper definition of a respective virtue, the Socratic dialogues are *aporetic*. Further, Socrates' self-professed ignorance is belied by the fact that he is a master of dialectic. Although he may not know what piety is in-itself, he can skillfully map out the merits and limitations of competing conceptions of piety.

This raises the following question: where is the real philosophical work being done? Does the success or failure of the inquiry depend upon the ultimate attainment of a definition, or can an inquiry be deemed successful (with knowledge having been attained) despite the inevitable *aporia*? For instance, does the method of 'division and collection' (employed in the *Sophist*) yield genuine cases of knowledge?

To put the question more broadly: does philosophical knowledge depend upon the absolute attainment of some determinate answer, or does philosophical inquiry reveal the absolutely conditioned nature of all claims to knowledge? This question suggests one way of interpreting Socratic ignorance: Socrates was propositionally ignorant but existentially wise. His ignorance was genuine, rather than feigned for the sake of his method, with regard to the first way of knowing

something absolutely. However, Socrates was wise with regard to the second way of knowing something absolutely.

As a master of division and collection and a connoisseur of sameness and difference, he accepted the burden of subjecting one's dogmatic understanding to the crucible of experience (thereby exposing it to contradictions). This claim echoes Gregory Vlastos' interpretation of Socratic ignorance.[10] A.A. Long summarizes Vlastos' position as follows: "Vlastos argues, with great force and originality, that Plato's Socrates disavows certain or infallible knowledge of anything, but avows elenctic or fallible knowledge of propositions arrived at and tested by his elenctic method."[11]

Vlastos points out in a footnote the difference between Socrates' professed ignorance and his confidence with regards to living rightly: "[Socrates'] avowals of epistemic inadequacy, frequent in the dialogues, are never paralleled by admission of moral failure; the asymmetry is striking."[12] But conspicuously absent in Vlastos' interpretation (and Long's praise) is an insight into the implications of this understanding of Socratic ignorance for moral philosophy. Focusing on Socratic epistemology obscures the existential implications of the Socratic method.

Hegel pays close attention to this connection in his praise of Socrates, providing us with a direct reason for reconsidering his own moral philosophy: ". . . through the separation of the concrete, [Socrates] brought the universal

---

[10] See Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1985): pp. 1-31.
[11] A.A. Long, "Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy," *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1988): p. 157, note 24.
[12] Vlastos, 6, note 14.

contained therein to consciousness as universal. We see this method also carried on to a large extent in Plato's dialogues, where there is, in this regard, particular skill displayed. It is the same method which forms in every man his knowledge of the universal; *an education in self-consciousness, which is the development of reason*."[13]

Socrates is a model of a s*elbstbewusst* philosopher, having attained the self-knowledge and self-confidence born of practicing philosophy rightly. Hegel writes: "[Socrates'] behavior to others was not only just, true, open without rudeness, and honorable, but we also see in him an example of the most perfect Attic urbanity; i.e. he moves in the freest possible relations, has a readiness for conversation which is always judicious, and, because it has an inward universality, *at the same time always has the right living relationship to the individual, and bears upon the case on which it operates*."[14]

As a master of dialectic and the art of division and collection, Socrates paid attention both to particular cases and to the universal principles they purportedly represented. In judging the relative success or failure of an account, he expertly made explicit its implications in order to understand it concretely. It is this concrete understanding that constitutes genuine philosophical progress. Socrates' ignorance, then, was also a mark of wisdom, since he transformed the

[13] LHP, p. 403

[14] LHP, p. 395-6, emphasis added. Hegel continues by praising Socrates for refusing to adopt a 'dry morality." "Thus what he did was what came naturally to him, and what can in general be called moralizing; but its nature and method was not that of preaching, exhortation, or teaching; it was not a dry morality. For amongst the Athenians and in Attic urbanity, this had no place, since it is not a reciprocal, free, and rational relationship. But with all men, however different their characters, he entered on one kind of dialogue, with all that Attic urbanity which, without presumption on his part, without instructing others, or wishing to command them, while maintaining their perfect right to freedom, and honoring it, yet causes all that is rude to be suppressed" (LHP, p. 396-7).

search for absolute (and merely abstract) understandings into the study of concrete accounts (and their relative success or failure).

Examining the existential significance of Socratic philosophy allows us to recognize some common ground between competing interpretations of Socratic philosophy. Long points out that both the Stoics and the Skeptics "laid claim to being followers of Socrates. We have yet to see what they meant by this claim, and how being rivals themselves, they could appropriate a dogmatic Socrates in the one case and a skeptical Socrates in the other."[15] Depending upon which element of Socratic ignorance one stresses, one finds ground for either interpretation. The Stoics inherit Socrates' rigorous and intellectualized approach to virtue, perhaps even construing the claim that 'virtue is knowledge' as Socratic dogma.

Socrates would qualify as a sage insofar as he embodied virtue, but this could still be consistent with his propositional ignorance (since his practice of virtue would be a knowing-how rather than a knowing-that). On the other hand, Socrates is a plausible Skeptic since his inquiry leads to *aporia* (interpreted here as the skeptical suspension of judgment). Regardless of which interpretation one favors, the existential consequences are arguably the same: both the Stoic and the Skeptic's appropriation of Socratic philosophy leads to *ataraxia*, and both purport to yield self-knowledge.

Raising the question of what substantive ends are appropriate for moral philosophy points to a deeper reading of Stoicism and Skepticism than one usually encounters in Hegel scholarship. Instead of focusing on Hegel's infamous

[15] Long, 156

criticism of the Stoics and Skeptics as endorsing deficient forms of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*,[16] I intend to show (primarily in Chapter 2) how Hegel's relationship with Stoicism and Skepticism is complex and that studying it helps us better to understand his own moral philosophy. This is especially true of Hegel's attitude toward ancient skepticism, which he in turn praised as being more authentic than modern skepticism and criticized as being insufficient.

Michael Forster compellingly argues that "Hegel's interpretation of the skeptical tradition in philosophy and his reaction to this tradition are absolutely fundamental to his philosophical outlook."[17] Kenneth Westphal also focuses on the epistemological consequences of Hegel's understanding of the skeptical tradition.[18] Unfortunately, neither emphasizes the implications of his attitude toward skepticism for moral philosophy. Wearing epistemological blinders when discussing Hegel's relationship to skeptical philosophy arguably conceals what made the topic interesting in the first place.

Distinguishing between the use of a skeptical method and the cultivation of a skeptical consciousness, Will Dudley correctly stresses the significance of the latter for Hegel's view on ancient skepticism.[19] Yet he does not address why Hegel admired this form of consciousness. Tanja Staehler considers the

---

[16] PS §197-206

[17] Michael Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* (Harvard University Press, 1989): p. 1.

[18] See especially Kenneth Westphal's *Hegel's Epistemological Realism*, esp. Ch. 6-7 (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989).

[19] See Will Dudley's "Ancient Skepticism and Systematic Philosophy," in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. David Duquette (State University of New York Press, 2003): 87-105. Dudley writes, "It is therefore this consciousness, shared by all of the ancient skeptics Hegel admires, rather than the method of equipollence, employed by only some of them, that is absolutely indispensable" (p. 101).

connection between skepticism and moral philosophy, concluding that skeptical *ataraxia* is no longer a viable philosophical end: "The skeptical aim of achieving *ataraxia* means a return of consciousness to its simplicity. . . . This is not possible for us today: the historical level of consciousness is not a stage of lightheartedness, and we are not surrounded by customs and habits that we could simply take over."[20] But this conclusion is premature, since it fails to consider whether (and in what way) Hegel's own substantive end of *Beisichselbstsein* might be related to *ataraxia*. Staehler is right to note that the "subjectivism of the modern era"[21] undermines any simple connection between ancient skepticism and Hegel's own view. But a reconstruction of Hegel's moral philosophy might reveal a more complicated relationship.

Making the case for a systematic form of Socratic philosophy requires pointing out not merely Hegel's praise of Socrates but also his criticism (as an unsystematic[22] and even idiosyncratic character).[23] This must be followed by an attempt to show how Hegel's version of a philosophical system depends upon skeptical rather than dogmatic premises. Here we shall see his attempt to overcome the limitations of ancient skepticism. It is also by paying attention to these two types of criticism (of Socrates and of ancient skepticism) that a more

---

[20] Tanja Staehler, "The Historicity of Philosophy and the Role of Skepticism," in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. David Duquette (State University of New York Press, 2003): p. 119.
[21] Ibid.
[22] "Because the philosophy of Socrates is no withdrawal from existence now and here into the free, pure regions of thought, but is in a piece with his life, *it does not proceed to a system* . . ." (LHP, p. 396, emphasis added).
[23] "His philosophy, which asserts that real existence is in consciousness as a universal, is still not a properly speculative philosophy, but remained individual . . . Hence we have to speak of his own individual being, of his thoroughly noble character, which usually is depleted as a complete catalogue of the virtues adorning the life of a private citizen; and these virtues of Socrates are certainly to be looked at as his own, and as made habitual to him by his own will" (LHP, p. 392).

sophisticated understanding of Hegel's critique of Kant begins to take shape. Richard Velkley lays the groundwork for such an interpretation when he writes that "Hegel ascribes 'abstractness' to the moral stances of both Socrates and Kant, an abstractness arising in both cases from the same cause: the assertion of the supremacy of the subjective ground of right and duty, and disregard for the rationality inherent in existing custom, the rationality that custom is itself unable to see. Morality misses the point that the mutual dependence and recognition of humans in the social realm is the presupposition of the individual's effort to use reason independently."[24]

This echoes Hegel's claim in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, when he writes: "Now ethics is partly objective, and partly subjective and reflected morality [*Sittlichkeit und Moralität*], and the teaching of Socrates is properly subjectively moral . . . the Kantian philosophy, which is reflectively moral, again showed the difference."[25] This form of subjective or reflective morality establishes a new standard for truth that, on Hegel's view, is antithetical to any form of external authority: "Socrates' principle is that man has to find from himself both the end of his actions and the end of the world, and must attain to truth through himself."[26]

Cicero's famous claim that Socrates 'brought philosophy down from the heavens to the earth' points to the Socratic way of making philosophical questions

---

[24] Richard Velkley, "On Possessed Individualism: Hegel, Socrates' Daimon, and the Modern State," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 59, no. 3 (March 2006): p. 583.
[25] LHP, p. 387-8
[26] LHP, p. 386. Hegel is referring to the external authority of custom. While it could be argued that the Kantian moral law does have a kind of objective authority, this authority does not seem to stand over-against the individual.

(and the standards for evaluating philosophical judgments) immanent in human experience. But this leaves unresolved the question of how to understand this new form of authority. Neither Socrates (nor Kant) adequately examines this issue, and this failure results in their moral views remaining abstract.

So despite the fact that Socrates is a model of a *selbstbewusst* philosopher, he is not immune to Hegel's critical scrutiny. Socratic self-knowledge (and self-confidence) does not yet result in what Hegel deems to be the proper substantive ends of moral philosophy (i.e. being *beisichselbst*, reconciled, and 'at home in the world'). Velkley writes that "the Socratic turn to the authority of inwardness or consciousness is surely not inherently otherworldly, and marks the first great step toward 'immanence.' All the same, it involves some homelessness or estrangement . . ."[27] Socratic self-knowledge depends upon an unexamined inward authority, resulting in a deficient form of philosophical satisfaction or self-confidence. As Hegel puts it, "Thus Socrates is the hero who established in the place of the Delphic oracle, the principle that man must look within himself to know what is Truth. . . . *This inward certainty, however, is undoubtedly another new god*. . . ."[28]

This particular criticism of Socrates anticipates Hegel's remarks on the moral worldview (or 'Spirit that is Certain of Itself') in the *Phenomenology*. In this section (as I outline in Chapter 1), Hegel makes explicit the existential disorder of the Kantian moral subject. The self-certainty common to the Socratic and Kantian position is also identified in the following section of the

[27] Velkley, 595
[28] LHP, p. 435

Encyclopedia Logic: "The main effect of Kant's philosophy has been that it has revived the consciousness of this absolute inwardness. . . . From now on the prejudice of the independence of reason, of its absolute inward autonomy, has to be regarded as the universal principle of philosophy, and as one of the assumptions of our times."[29] Presupposing the 'independence of reason' in this way is typically associated with some version of the 'formalism charge' against Kant: the moral discovery of an 'inward authority' allegedly results in the failure to generate any determinate content for the moral will. This charge focuses on the abstract nature of this inward authority, and it is probably the most stereotypical version of Hegel's critique of Kant.

In Chapter 1, I show how this charge misses the deeper critique leveled against abstract morality: it results in a deficient form of self-knowledge, because it presupposes an inward authority that is inscrutable. The Socratic version of this 'inner God' is his daimon, which guides him unfailingly in spite of his professed ignorance. The Kantian version can be characterized in several ways, either in terms of one's conscience[30] (which at times seems like a daimon) or in the presupposition that reason is capable of its own self-critique. Kant appeals to the first inscrutable authority when he contrasts two competing grounds for one's will: a moral principle and the principle of one's own happiness. He writes that the practical conflict between these two principles ". . . would ruin morality altogether were not the voice of reason in reference to the will so distinct, so irrepressible, and so audible even to the most common human beings; thus it can

[29] EL §60
[30] At MM 6: 437, Kant conceives of conscience as an "internal court."

maintain itself only in the perplexing speculation of the schools, which are brazen enough to shut their eyes to that heavenly voice in order to support a theory they need not break their heads over."[31]

Kant appeals to the second sort of authority when, at the outset of the critical project, he insists that reason must bring itself to court.[32] This assumes that reason is the kind of thing capable of being critically examined in this way. Bristow makes explicit this presupposition when he writes: "The problem Hegel poses here is the problem of the possibility of the inquiry into the nature of our knowledge, the problem of the possibility of *critique*. Kant does not pose this problem. . . . *Kant in effect presupposes that we already have the criterion in self-reflection itself*."[33] Reason's self-critique purportedly yields fixed and final philosophical conclusions.

Jonathan Robinson references Kant's *Philosophical Correspondence* when he writes: "[Kant] concludes with the observation that the *Critique* is founded on a principle which cannot be contested and is for ever fixed and indispensable for the highest ends of humanity for all ages to come."[34] Hegel attempts to articulate an account of reason that is dialectical, rendering it incapable of a univocal self-critique. Further, as we shall see in Chapter 1, Hegel's system, unlike Kant's, does not attempt to resolve once and for all the 'endless oscillation' between

[31] CPrR 5:35
[32] CPuR Axi
[33] Bristow, 217, emphasis added.
[34] Jonathan Robinson, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's* Phenomenology of Mind (University of Toronto Press, 1977): p. 39, with reference to *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence* (Chicago 1967), 253-4.

dogmatism and skepticism (i.e. it does not purport to make philosophical progress in this way).

Hegel forces us to consider the difference between an external and an internal source of authority, especially when the authority in question is left inscrutable. In the 'Spirit of Christianity,' Hegel famously remarks that, when considering those who obey an external authority, on the one hand, and ". . . the man who listens to his own command of duty, on the other, the difference is not that the former make themselves slaves, while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves, while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave."[35] Even though the second sort of authority is derived from one's 'rational self,' Hegel views this as merely a different kind of enslavement.

In this way, Hegel anticipates Nietzsche's criticism of Christian morality, whose adherents merely manage to make themselves 'tame.'[36] Kant's own view of *Bildung* is susceptible to this charge. He counsels the cultivation of one's moral disposition, but this account is moralistic (i.e. it might be regarded as a systematic justification of conventional morality). Focusing on Kant's conception of autonomy does not negate the concern that one has merely internalized a set of norms. *Bildung* on Kant's view involves eradicating evil impulses and recovering the 'original predisposition to a good will' that these impulses cover over.

---

[35] "The Spirit of Christianity," ETW, p. 211.

[36] See especially Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, §352: "The European disguises himself *with morality* because he has become a sick, sickly, crippled animal that has good reasons for being 'tame'; for he is almost an abortion, scarce half made up, weak, awkward. It is not the ferocity of the beast of prey that requires a moral disguise but the herd animal with its profound mediocrity, timidity, and boredom with itself." *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1974). Compare this remark with Hegel's discussion of a "cloak of morality" covering the envy one feels at another's happiness (PS §625).

He writes that "moral cognition of oneself, which seeks to penetrate into the depths (the abyss) of one's heart which are quite difficult to fathom, is the beginning of all human wisdom. For in the case of a human being, the ultimate wisdom, which consists in the harmony of a being's will with its final end, requires him first to remove the obstacle within (an evil will actually present in him) and then to develop the original predisposition to a good will within him, which can never be lost."[37] Kant continues by remarking that "only the descent into the hell of self-cognition can pave the way to godliness."[38]

This kind of Manichean understanding of good and evil impulses oversimplifies and, at the same time, makes impossible the task of *Bildung*. It implies that there is some 'original' or 'authentic' self that can be recovered if only one could successfully sort through one's heteronomous desires. But for this very reason, the task is impossible: the 'hell of self-cognition' is a descent into a self that is, at its root, inscrutable. Arguably the most famous remark in the Kantian corpus regarding this descent appears in the *Groundwork*, where Kant writes that ". . . it cannot be inferred with certainty that no covert impulse of self-love, under the mere pretense of that idea, was not actually the real determining cause of the will."[39] As will be shown in Chapter 1, Hegel is utterly uninterested in understanding the 'real determining cause,' just as he is unconcerned with establishing secure philosophical foundations for our moral life.

Leaving one's 'true' self inscrutable goes hand-in-hand with conceiving of moral progress as a regulative ideal that we are duty-bound to strive for (while

[37] MM 6:441
[38] Ibid.
[39] G 4:407

being constitutively incapable of achieving it). In Chapter 2, my account will take a closer look at Hegel's criticism of regulative ideals as theoretically and practically untenable. At this point, it is necessary to note that freedom for Hegel depends upon our ability to make sense of our human condition (i.e. seeing it as rationally intelligible), rather than being associated with a special kind of causality. So an external and an internal standard of authority that are similarly inscrutable are just as enslaving. Nonetheless, Hegel never denies what might be called the 'inviolability of conscience.' He writes: "This is the infinite right of the subjective individual, to satisfy himself in his activity and work. If people are expected to have an interest in something, they themselves must be involved in it, *and they must find their own sense of self satisfied in it*."[40]

Being keenly interested in what the idea of 'conscience' presupposes and how it is formed, he simply refuses to leave it an abstract 'internal court' or 'inner God.' Recall that to know something absolutely is to know it as unconditioned or as absolutely conditioned by the context that gives it meaning. Hegel is concerned with the first sort of absolute knowing (which is merely abstract) when he writes: "But however lofty, however divine, the right of thought may be, it is perverted into wrong if it is only this [opining] which passes for thinking and if thinking knows itself to be free only when it diverges from what is universally recognized and valid and when it has discovered how to invent for itself some particular character."[41]

[40] IPH, p. 25, emphasis added.
[41] PR, Preface

He mocks those who misunderstand the freedom of thought in this way, perverting its inviolable character by avoiding the Socratic 'burden of context' or by seeing themselves as providing unique insight into the nature of our moral life. Such individuals act as if "nowadays – and this 'nowadays' lasts for ever – we had to start all over again from the beginning, and that the ethical world had just been waiting for such present-day projects, proofs, and investigations."[42] The philosophical challenge posed by Hegel involves overcoming the merely subjective position of the 'Meiner Meinung': Philosophical *Bildung* demands that one transform one's self-understanding not by recovering some 'original' nature but by adopting (as we shall see) a thoroughly Socratic ethic. Hegel's *philosophical* form of individuality captures the truth of the Enlightenment defense of the individual, resulting in the substantive end of being *beisichselbst*: "When we think freely, voyaging on the open sea, with nothing under us and nothing over us, in solitude, alone by ourselves – *then we are purely at home with ourselves*."[43]

In contrast to abstract moral philosophies that achieve self-certainty based on an unexamined moral standard, Hegel's form of philosophical satisfaction depends upon a method that is both more skeptical and more systematic. It is

---

[42] PR, Preface

[43] EL §31, addition, emphasis added. W.H. Walsh's dissatisfaction with Hegel's moral thought ignores the role that *Bildung* plays in Hegel's account. Walsh writes, "Where Hegel is unsatisfying is that he apparently leaves no room for personal morality of any kind. He allows, of course, that moral agents shall have freely accepted the principles they apply, but has little or no interest in the cultivation of individual conscience for its own sake" (*Hegelian Ethics*, St. Martin's Press, 1969): p. 18. Lou Matz correctly criticizes Walsh for failing to specify what this 'cultivation' would involve. Yet his attempt to supplement Hegel's 'missing moral virtues' fails to consider whether Hegel had good philosophical reasons for omitting what Kant was so eager to supply. See Matz's "Hegel's Missing Moral Virtues?" *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1997): pp. 321-338.

more skeptical insofar as it inquires into the presuppositions of other moral views. In fact, the *Phenomenology* itself can be read a typology of forms of self-consciousness, each of which collapses under the weight of its internal contradictions. But, unlike the 'merely negative' form of ancient skepticism, Hegel's version has positive content.

Determinate negation produces a comprehensive account of experience that goes beyond a mere "aggregate of information."[44] The recollection of the ways in which different stages of consciousness are *aufgehoben* into one another is Hegel's attempt to overcome philosophical abstraction. Further, it is the key to instantiating the Enlightenment view that stresses the 'infinite right of the individual.' He writes that "without such articulation, Science lacks universal intelligibility, and gives the appearance of being the esoteric possession of a few individuals. . . . Only what is completely determined is at once exoteric, comprehensible, and capable of being learned and appropriated by all."[45]

As will be evident in Chapter 1, Hegel objects to the 'essenceless abstraction of essence,' insisting that the right philosophical method is required for the development of a more concrete form of self-understanding. Distinguishing between a pre-philosophical form of self-understanding and a philosophical form requires, as discussed in Chapter 2, the training of one's way of judgment. Freedom and autonomy for Hegel, then, are achievements rather than metaphysical facts or critical 'conditions of the possibility' for moral life. But to say that they are achievements is to say that philosophy is a practical

[44] PS §1
[45] PS §13

activity in a manner quite different from contemporary understandings of practical philosophy. Further, Hegel's 'science of experience' (as an 'objective' philosophical method) is meant to facilitate, rather than subvert, the sense in which philosophy is a first-person activity. As we shall see in the next part of the introduction, the outcome of Hegel's version of practical philosophy is self-transformation rather than the attainment of some criterion for correct moral or political action.

WHAT IS PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY?

The two versions of knowing something 'absolutely' contrasted in part one correspond to two competing views of practical philosophy. If the purpose of philosophical reflection is to secure an absolute and unconditioned understanding of some concept, then philosophy is practical when it yields determinate answers that can be applied to experience. If, on the other hand, the result of philosophical inquiry is *aporia,* then philosophy cannot be 'practical' in the aforementioned sense. But it still might be practical if one reconceives practice as the on-going training of one's way of seeing things. The first form of practice self-consciously responds to the 'problems' of ordinary experience and attempts to provide some criterion for solving them.

The second sort is more concerned with dissolving rather than solving problems: it is responsive not to ordinary problems but to what might be called existential concerns. By dissolving rather than solving problems, its effect on

one's actual behavior is a side-effect rather than a presupposition of its method. In other words, the transformation of one's self-understanding leaves actual changes in one's behavior open-ended and indeterminate: being 'at home in the world' does not depend upon adopting some fixed and final set of philosophical conclusions.

Just as Hegel inquires into the presuppositions of abstract moral philosophies, he challenges us to rethink conventional understandings of practical philosophy. Simon Blackburn articulates such a conventional view in the following comment to a British newspaper: "In the years after the second world war [sic], there was a sort of Wittgensteinian air about philosophy, which meant practitioners were proud of the fact that they appeared slightly esoteric and were not doing anything practical. There was very little political philosophy, and moral philosophy was disengaged from people's actual moral problems, and that did lead to the subject being marginalized. That has changed. Political philosophy is a central part of the Cambridge course."[46] Perhaps it was the venue (the popular press) or certain institutional pressures (the need for philosophy departments to compete with other disciplines) that compelled Blackburn to make this remark. Regardless of the motivation, this comment begs a series of questions: What sorts of 'problems' should philosophy address?

For instance, does the existential crisis wrought by Spinoza's rationalism (and detailed by Friedrich Beiser)[47] count as a 'problem'? Is Kant's attempt to establish rational grounds for faith (and overcome nihilism) a suitable problem?

[46] 'I think, Therefore I Earn,' *The Guardian*, 11/20/07.
[47] See Frederick Beiser's, *The Fate of Reason*, esp. Ch. 2 and 3 (Harvard University Press, 1987).

Those who argue for the popularization of philosophy seem to forget that all philosophical reflection (to a greater or lesser degree, perhaps) is born from conflicts in ordinary experience. Any motivation that seems vaguely esoteric is discounted as another instance of false philosophical pride. But what does it mean for philosophy to be esoteric? Is philosophy's self-imposed 'marginalization' a consequence of a failure to understand it correctly, or is it connected with the recognition of its inherent limits?

Using Wittgenstein as an example of an esoteric and impractical philosopher makes sense only if one has answered (rather than begged) these questions. As someone existentially engaged in the project of circumscribing the limits of philosophy and revealing ethics to be 'transcendent' (rather than captured in language), Wittgenstein serves as a model of a different sort of philosophical practice: one that dissolves problems rather than solving them. For instance, as a work in moral philosophy, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* requires 'throwing down the ladder' after one has comprehended the limits of philosophy. In this regard, it models Plato's image of ascending the stairs in order to apperceive the Forms, with the caveat that the *Tractatus'* conclusion amounts to the recognition of nonsense rather than the grasping of essences.

Recall that Hegel's remedy for esotericism is the Socratic search for more concrete understandings, and contrast this view with Blackburn's implication that philosophy must become popularized. Blackburn's view involves a new form of esotericism if it means that philosophers bring some unique or hidden truths to the masses. Ironically, it is arguably the applied ethicist (so keen on escaping the

philosophical armchair by dealing with the problems of the people) that unknowingly perpetuates a long tradition of esotericism. Wittgenstein's form of practical philosophy might be esoteric insofar as he is constantly working on the way he sees things, rather than attempting to change the world. But for that very reason, his account stresses the limits of philosophical inquiry.

Kant's moral philosophy sometimes challenges but sometimes depends upon the view I have attributed to Blackburn. In the *Groundwork*, for instance, Kant defends the contributions that practical philosophy makes to 'ordinary human reason.' He writes:

> Thus is ordinary human reason forced to go outside its sphere and take a step into the field of practical philosophy, not by any need for speculation (which never befalls such reason so long as it is content to be mere sound reason) but on practical grounds themselves. There it tries to obtain information and clear instruction regarding the source of its own principle and the correct determination of this principle in its opposition to maxims based on need and inclination, so that reason may escape from the perplexity of opposite claims and may avoid the risk of losing all genuine moral principles through the ambiguity into which it easily falls.[48]

The ambiguity to which he refers is a "natural dialectic" by which one attempts to make strict moral laws "more compatible with our wishes and inclinations."[49] By establishing universally valid principles, practical philosophy shows how a deliberating moral agent can avoid succumbing to heteronomous desires. It is here that 'ordinary human reason' can find 'clear instruction.'

But Kant challenges this view of practical philosophy in his later essay on theory and practice. In this essay he concedes that moral casuistry requires the

---

[48] G 405

[49] Ibid. Here he continues by noting that ". . . peace will be found only in a thorough critical examination of our reason."

development of one's ability to apply a rule discriminately. This act of judgment acts as a 'middle term' between theory and practice, "connecting them and providing a transition from one to the other, no matter how complete a theory may be."[50] In order to be applied correctly, the rule contained in a 'concept of the understanding' requires this act of judgment, "by which a practitioner distinguishes whether or not something is a case of the rule; and since judgment cannot always be given yet another rule by which to direct its subsumption (for this would go on to infinity), there can be theoreticians who can never in their lives become practical because they are lacking in judgment."[51]

So the clear instruction that practical philosophy was supposed to provide is mitigated by the fact that knowing the rule is never sufficient. In contrast to passages that lend credence to the charge of formalism, here Kant stresses the context that makes a rule meaningful. But it would be a mistake to interpret this as another 'situation ethic': Even in the essay on theory and practice, Kant thinks of the act of judgment as a 'middle term' that synthesizes theory and practice, rather than a form of practical wisdom that recognizes Socratically the emergence of universal principles through concrete cases.

Russon describes Hegel's alternative to Kant's view as both rational and intuitive. He writes: "To be moral, according to Hegel, still means to be rational, but being rational means being led by the demands of our determinate situations – *it means being unable to withdraw into an a priori morality that would somehow know what to do in independence of knowing the situation*. This, I think, is

[50] "On the Common Saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice," in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996): 8:275.
[51] Ibid.

another way of saying . . . that our experience always remains fundamentally intuitive."[52] The interesting part of this passage is not the claim that Hegel endorses a kind of situation ethic, but rather the implications of this view for one's self-understanding (i.e. whether or not one can 'withdraw' into an a priori morality). Just as it counts as a failure of self-knowledge to leave one's moral philosophy abstract (and dependent upon an inscrutable authority), so too does Kant's split between theory and practice strike Hegel as untenable (both theoretically and practically).

Kant's concern to establish an Archimedean point for our moral life is also an attempt to transcend the 'endless oscillation' between dogmatic and skeptical positions in the history of metaphysics. But what if the attempt to bring reason to rest in this way (thereby avoiding dialectical entanglements) establishes yet another standard to be skeptically attacked? It is an ironic (and insufficiently examined) historical fact that the Humean skepticism Kant sought to overcome was revived almost immediately by his critics (esp. Jacobi).[53] The same conflict is perpetuated in 20th century Anglo-American thought: two philosophical types that emerge in moral and political philosophy might be described as Neo-Kantian and Neo-Humean.

The basic contrast can be stated as follows: those who operate in a Kantian tradition turn to philosophy for an Archimedean point to anchor ordinary experience. Those more akin to Hume typically stress the significance of moral psychology, which tends to become thinner as philosophical reflection distances

[52] Russon, 155, emphasis added.
[53] See Beiser's account, esp. 29-32 and 44-48.

itself from ordinary experience. Stated superficially, these philosophical types embody theoretical and anti-theoretical approaches, respectively. Philosophers like Rawls and Habermas defend versions of Kant's critical approach, while anti-theorists like Bernard Williams and Annette Baier (who explicitly praises Hume as a model moral philosopher) offer Humean alternatives.

Hegel might regard this affirmation and subsequent denial of an Archimedean point (or some determinate criterion for moral and political action) as a superficial disagreement. He worries about this very issue when he writes: "The task of a writer, especially a writer on philosophy, may be said to lie in the discovery of truth, the statement of truth, the dissemination of truth and sound concepts. *But if we consider how this task is as a rule actually discharged, what we find in the first place is that the same old stew is continually warmed up again and again and served round to everybody*."[54]

Hegel himself has been interpreted in this either-or fashion. Left and Right Hegelians differ on the criterion they ascribe to Hegel, without grasping his dialectical alternative. They both presuppose the distinction between the individual and the social-political order and emphasize one side of this dichotomy to the exclusion of the other side. For instance, the proto-existentialist, Left Hegelian interpretation stresses the power of the individual over the social world, whereas the politically conservative Right Hegelian interpretation argues for the unreality of the individual when it is abstracted from some determinate and authoritative social order.

[54] PR, Preface, emphasis added.

So long as moral philosophy is mired in the affirmation or denial of a criterion, Hegel will never be seen as a moral philosopher. As Chapter 2 and 3 will show, Hegel's philosophy attempts to dissolve practically the 'endless oscillation' between dogmatism and skepticism rather than solving it critically. Unlike Kant, he sees no need for philosophy to secure new and stable foundations, and the only measure of philosophical progress is one's own *Bildung* rather than the discovery of a priori criteria for moral action. Practically dissolving this conflict means accepting the dogmatic and skeptical elements in experience, rather than attempting to eradicate them while unselfconsciously perpetuating them.

Hegel's form of speculative philosophy revives the substantive ends of self-knowledge and philosophical satisfaction. Its combination of skeptical and systematic elements challenges any inscrutable authority (i.e. either external or internal) by making explicit the presuppositions of abstract moral philosophies. In Chapters 3 and 4, I attempt to outline the relationship between Hegel's view of *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* in order to understand the relationship between his moral and political philosophies (both of which contain ancient and modern elements). My reconstruction of Hegel's moral philosophy will have succeeded if it motivates (1) the rethinking of how Hegel should be read in the history of philosophy, especially with regard to Kant (2) a reflection on the meaning of dogmatism and skepticism and their relationship to true philosophy and (3) the reconsideration of the meaning of moral and practical philosophy.

CHAPTER 1

MAKING KANT EXPLICIT

A THEOLOGIAN IN DISGUISE?

Kant's moral philosophy has been likened both to Lucifer's position in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and to the position of a theologian in disguise.[1] In making the first comparison, Iris Murdoch focuses on Kant's attempt to derive an utterly rational moral philosophy, divorced from a transcendent conception of the good. The death of speculative metaphysics results in the collapse of once-transcendent values into the contingency of the human will. The second comparison, made by Arthur Schopenhauer, stresses the extent to which Kant's attempt at a secular ethics depends upon concealed Christian presuppositions.[2]

Each of these interpretations finds strong textual support, since Kant's moral philosophy attempts to reconcile a rational and a fideist approach to morality.[3] Kant defends the autonomy of ethics (i.e. its rational validity is

---

[1] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, second ed. (Routledge Press, 2001): p. 78: "[Kant's man] is the offspring of the age of science, confidently rational and yet increasingly aware of his alienation from the material universe which his discoveries reveal. . . . in fact Kant's man had already received a glorious incarnation nearly a century earlier in the work of Milton: his proper name is Lucifer."

[2] Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Hackett Publishing, 1995): p. 103: "Even in his own hands, theological morals is unmasked toward the end, as for instance in the doctrine of the highest good, the postulates of practical reason, and finally in moral theology. Yet all this did not undeceive either Kant or the public as to the true state of affairs. On the contrary, both he and they were glad to see all these articles of faith now established by ethics (although only *idealiter* and for practical purposes)."

[3] In *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, Richard Popkin outlines the various ways fideism may be understood, including the view that faith is in some sense prior to reason. This view "denies to reason any complete and absolute certitude of the truth prior to the acceptance of some proposition or propositions by faith" (p. xix) (University of California Press, 1979). It is in this way that Kant attempts to incorporate fideist insights into his own philosophical system.

independent of speculative metaphysics and sociological descriptions of moral practice), while also stressing the limits of this secularized approach (i.e. the practical postulates of God, freedom, and immortality of the soul make possible the actual practice of this rational ethic). This attempt at reconciliation is common to Kant's entire corpus. For instance, his epistemology can be construed as a compromise between dogmatic metaphysics and Humean skepticism.

The need for reconciliation in epistemology and ethics arises from a need to overcome the interminable debate between those who affirm and those who deny a rational standard for these types of inquiry. By taking the transcendental turn along with Kant, we are in a position to see that our rational understanding of the world can be preserved (against the challenges of skepticism) by marking a distinction between noumena and phenomena. Similarly, in ethics, we see how the idea of an intellectual or noumenal realm (i.e. God, freedom, and immortality of the soul as the practical postulates of reason) completes without undermining the attempt to understand ethics rationally.

If the compromise in epistemology and ethics is sometimes tenuous, this is merely a reflection of the complexities of human experience rather than a flaw in Kant's philosophy. For instance, as stressed throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason*, reason furnishes us with ideas that can neither be theoretically understood nor wished away as illusions. It might be simpler merely to deny the legitimacy of religious belief and to ground morality rationally. Kant, however, accepts the challenge of incorporating some problematic concepts into our moral experience, giving them a positive role to play rather than skeptically denying them or

asserting them dogmatically.

Kant's strategy of drawing a key distinction, in order to reconcile seemingly opposed philosophical traditions, invites two forms of criticism of Kant's epistemological and ethical thought. The first focuses on his portrayal of phenomena; the second challenges his conception of noumena. After outlining each form of criticism, I hope to show how each constitutes an understandable but insufficient attempt to undermine Kant's position. It is not my goal to settle definitively a set of scholarly disputes that have been loyally carried out for many years. Rather, my task is to induce some skepticism regarding the efficacy of the traditional objections, in order to clear the way for Hegel's deeper and more philosophically interesting appropriation and criticism of Kant.

In epistemological terms, the consequence of the first criticism is that Kant fails to ground rationally our understanding of the world; in ethical terms, it amounts to a denial of Kant's attempt to rationally ground our moral experience. This criticism relies on a specific reading generated by the *Prolegomena* and the *Groundwork*, respectively. Criticizing the role the Understanding plays in Kant's theoretical philosophy, Hegel construes Kantian epistemology as dependent upon a 'triadic form' that is incapable of genuine explanation. In regard to Kant's account of causality, for instance, Hegel stresses the fact that Kant locates the necessity of the causal relationship not in the events themselves but in a category of experience that allows us to think the events in a universally valid way. So Kant 'superadds' a third element to the cause and effect, but in so doing loses the

dynamic quality of the causal relationship he purports to explain.[4] Hegel writes, "Of course, the *triadic form* must not be regarded as scientific when it is reduced to a lifeless schema, a mere shadow, and when scientific organization is degraded into a table of terms."[5]

He criticizes the abstract character of this account, which "imagines that it has comprehended and expressed the nature and life of a form when it has endowed it with some determination of the schema as a predicate."[6] Kant attempts to solve Hume's problem[7] by taking up the a priori as a universal under which particulars are subsumed; but on Hegel's view, this simply moves the problem of causality to the transcendental level. No triadic form of argument can explain the connection between discrete events because it has abstracted itself from all empirical content. Therefore, its version of 'explanation' is mere tautology.

For instance, Hegel writes that "The unification of all laws in *universal attraction* expresses no other content than just the *mere Notion of law itself . . .* universal attraction merely asserts that *everything has a constant difference in relation to other things.*"[8] The same critique applies to Kant's theory of causality: the only demand made by Kant's universal causal principle is that every cause has an effect and every effect a cause. This 'law,' devoid of all content, cannot

[4] On Kant's view, experience requires that a pure concept of the understanding be ". . .superadded to the concepts abstracted from intuition, under which pure concept these latter concepts are subsumed and in this manner only combined into an objectively valid judgment" (P 301). Hegel's point is that Kant cannot give an account of how a fixed set of categories can *explain* dynamic causal relations.
[5] PS §50.
[6] Ibid.
[7] The familiar problem is that necessary connections between events are never themselves perceived. Therefore, causal inferences are born out of habit and their necessity is 'felt' rather than directly known.
[8] PS §150

determine particular, dynamic causal relationships. The 'triadic form' is incapable of accounting for the necessity of the causal relationship, because it alienates the two dynamic events from one another, mediating them with a 'third,' static and universal category. On Hegel's view, there is no way of bringing together the components (empirical and transcendental) of a judgment of experience when they are different in kind.

Just as this triadic form implicit in Kant's theoretical philosophy constitutes a failure of genuine explanation, the triadic form employed in Kantian ethics results in a failure of justification. This reading emphasizes Hegel's charge of formalism against Kantian morality, just as he criticized the formalism of Kantian epistemology. On this view, the Kantian categorical imperative is inescapably tautological.[9] Hegel writes, "Such laws stop short at Ought, they have no actuality; they are not laws, but merely commandments. . . . Since, then all idea of an absolute content must be given up, it can only claim a formal universality, or that it is not self-contradictory."[10]

As the rational moral agent is abstracted from all empirical determinations, so are empirical 'contingencies' distilled from the categorical imperative. So long as the only requirement for universalizing a maxim is that it be rendered formally self-consistent, the categorical imperative remains purely theoretical and cannot be grounded in practice. It cannot yield determinate and substantive principles for action. Conversely, Kant's method gives moral sanction to immoral actions, on the grounds that any action can be described in a logically

[9] It is worth pointing out that I do not hold this view. Rather, I am outlining a standard criticism that I hope to move beyond.
[10] PS §426

non-contradictory manner.[11]

When confronted with a moral decision between two complex and compelling alternatives, the decision procedure Kant endorses is to subject each to a test of universality. But, as Hegel has already indicated, the fact that one can give a logically consistent account of a candidate for moral action does not explain why that action is moral. Further, it fails to explain how a morally concerned individual can be moved to action by the cold logic of the categorical imperative.

This famous charge of formalism is flawed for several reasons. First, it is easily defeated by a more thorough investigation into Kant's moral philosophy, especially into the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Kant is sensitive to the relationship between theory and practice, attempting to specify the way in which his moral method works in concrete cases.[12] It is plausible to claim that, after establishing strict criteria for determining the moral 'ought' in the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he spent the rest of his academic life making explicit the claim that 'ought implies can.' In order for moral obligation to make sense (i.e. that one can unconditionally obligate oneself and others), it must be the case that what ought to be done is in fact possible. Emphasizing the triadic form of Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy requires selecting certain passages from certain texts, while deliberately avoiding Kant's more sophisticated positions. It unduly emphasizes the *Prolegomena* and certain parts of the *Groundwork.*

[11] PR §135

[12] See also Kant's essay "On the common saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice," in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, reflective judgment serves as a bridging principle between the conclusions of practical reason and the successful employment of these principles. Here Kant attempts to bring together the laws of nature (which, as phenomenal, were critically analyzed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*) and the laws of freedom (which, as noumenal, were established in the *Critique of Practical Reason*). Kant's account of moral virtue demonstrates his interest in justifying imputations of moral worth.[13] This depends upon determining some practical criteria by which to make attributions of moral worth.

Second, Hegel accepts a version of Kant's argument that the morally salient aspects of an action refer to the subject's autonomous will. He writes that the will of the subject is "the form of all willing".[14] Hegel's own reflections on morality must be read within the idealist tradition that Kant established, rather than external to it. Third, the charge of formalism is inextricably connected to the infamous conservative readings of Hegel. It seems as though the formalism of Kant's position is overcome only by the state supplying the content for moral action, such that to act morally is merely to follow the law of the state as authoritative.

Despite the fact that there is continuity between Kant's and Hegel's theoretical philosophy, this reading suggests that Hegel utterly ignored or rejected Kant's practical philosophy. If one recognizes some important philosophical development in Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy, then this return to pre-critical philosophy is untenable. Upon a closer reading of Hegel's political

[13] See Rudolf Makkreel's "Reflective Judgment and the Problem of Assessing Virtue in Kant." *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 36 (2002): 205-220.
[14] PR §108

philosophy, it becomes evident that he refuses to sanctify 'tradition' as a suitable replacement for Enlightenment individuality.[15]

Fourth, and perhaps most problematic, Hegel's critique of Kantian formalism threatens to become the decisive reading of his own moral philosophy, thereby ensuring that both Kant and Hegel are read superficially. The untenable and uncharitable formalism argument has given Kant's defenders a simple strategy for dismissing Hegel. For instance, Paul Guyer claims that "Hegel's general polemic against all of the Kantian distinctions based on Kant's supposedly erroneous conception of the insuperable difference between intuition and concept can be regarded as nothing less than the generalization of his attack upon the supposedly empty formalism of Kant's ethics."[16]

Defeating the formalism charge, then, would cast doubt on every instance of Hegel's 'polemic' against Kantian dualism. This claim depends upon Guyer's emphasis on Hegel's *Faith and Knowledge*[17], rather than other texts which advance a very different picture of Hegel's philosophy. Steven Smith, in his otherwise useful account of Hegel's political philosophy, recites the standard formalism charge against Kant, attributes this reading to Hegel, and concludes that Hegel simply did not understanding Kantian moral philosophy in any depth.[18]

It is easy to see why this reading gained so much traction. There is

---

[15] See especially the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel explicitly acknowledges that there is always a contingent element in positive law.
[16] Paul Guyer, "Absolute Idealism and the Rejection of Kantian Dualism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*," ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge University Press, 2000): p. 39.
[17] See especially Section A, pp. 67-96.
[18] See Steven Smith's *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism*, especially pp. 73-74 (University of Chicago Press, 1989). My own project concedes the superficiality of the formalism reading but also advances a deeper Hegelian reading of Kantian morality.

something satisfying in the structure of a logical refutation, something conclusive in the strategy of portraying an argument as tautologous. Attacking the purported universality of Kant's position invites Kant's defenders to save his theory by making some subtle logical move, thereby fostering an endless exchange of scholarly opinions. Whenever a moral theory does not admit of exceptions and refuses to recognize tragic conflict, there is always an open and endless debate over the correct description of the action being analyzed and an interminable number of examples that reinforce or refute the theory.

Just as Hegel challenges the phenomenal side of the noumena-phenomena distinction in Kant's epistemology and ethics, so too does Hegel object to the role that noumena play in Kant's corpus. Perhaps most famous of all is his rejection of the thing-in-itself. Hegel is of course not alone in wondering whether Kant inconsistently reverted to a pre-critical metaphysical notion of a transcendentally real 'thing' that is necessary in order to ground phenomenal appearances. Contemporary interpreters of Kant have downplayed the metaphysical suspicion generated by Kant's constant discussion of something utterly unknowable in experience.

The best of these interpretations shows how the distinction between noumena and phenomena can be understood as two aspects of a single reality rather than a dubious metaphysical dualism.[19] Aside from deflating supposedly

[19] Henry Allison, *Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (Yale University Press, 2004): p. 16: "This epistemologically based understanding of transcendental idealism requires that the transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves be understood as holding between two ways of considering things (as they appear and as they are in themselves) rather than as, on the more traditional reading, between two ontologically distinct sets of entities (appearances and things in themselves)."

illicit metaphysical pretensions, this reading preserves the 'primacy of the practical' in Kant. As Thomas Hill writes, it is necessary to understand Kant's position ". . . less as a metaphysical account of what we are like than as a normative idea about the task, attitudes, and commitments of rational agents when deliberating about what to do."[20]

Even those who disagree with Allison's two-aspect reading of Kant would have to applaud the practical consequences of such a reading. Further, the way that Kant's critical project has been appropriated and extended in the writings of John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Christine Korsgaard suggests ways in which interpretations of Kant can remain practically salient but metaphysically silent. On these views, the significance and originality of Kant's philosophy turns on his constructivist approach to ethics and epistemology. Kant successfully shows how norms can be made intersubjectively valid and meaningful, while carefully avoiding the trappings of dogmatic metaphysics and Humean skepticism.

If Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena can be defended on practical grounds, then this defense holds both for his epistemology and his ethics. In other words, Schopenhauer's charge that Kant's ethics contains concealed theological premises seems to miss the mark. He writes: "Kant had banished eudaemonism from ethics more in appearance than in reality, for he still leaves a mysterious connection between virtue and supreme happiness in his doctrine of the highest good, where they come together in an abstruse and obscure

[20] Thomas Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory* (Cornell University Press, 1992): p. 84.

chapter."[21] Readily conceding the obscurity of Kant's understanding of eudaimonia need not result in denying its rational appeal. The distinction between the constitutive and regulative use of reason enables Kant critically to circumscribe reason to leave room for faith, while also conceiving of faith as rationally acceptable.[22] Those who charge Kant with a dogmatic theological position must respond to the thoughtful way in which he sees theological matters neither as irrational nor as theoretically ascertainable.

Schopenhauer's critique, despite its limitations, highlights a significant shortcoming in standard criticisms and defenses of Kant. As we have seen, Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena invites two forms of refutations of his epistemology and ethics. But one's understanding of Kant remains limited so long as the dispute is over one side of the distinction or the other. A more comprehensive understanding of Kant's philosophy requires a holistic understanding of the relationship between theoretical and practical reason. Even those scholars who have faithfully developed Kant's practical philosophy (e.g. Korsgaard and Hill) pay insufficient attention to his conception of the whole.

These practical appropriations of Kant were motivated by a desire to divest Kant of metaphysical pretensions. However, they have the ironic effect of suppressing precisely what Kant understood to be practically required. In regard to the practical postulates of reason of god, freedom, and immortality, Kant writes, ". . . practical reason unavoidably requires the existence of them for the

[21] Schopenhauer, 49
[22] This is Kant's ambitious project in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

possibility of its object, the highest good, which is absolutely necessary practically, and theoretical reason is thereby justified in assuming them."[23]

This observation reflects the tension inherent in any attempt to appropriate Kant's philosophy practically while obscuring the conception of the whole (and the corresponding relationship of theoretical and practical reason) that makes this appropriation possible. Coupled with the insufficiency of standard arguments against Kantian epistemology and ethics, this ought to motivate a return to the source of the distinction between the theoretical and the practical. By returning to Kant's conception of dialectic, we can achieve a clearer understanding of how Kant's philosophy fits together as a whole. Further, we can see how Hegel develops a criticism of Kant's ethics that avoids the shortcomings of the standard objections.

WHAT IS DOGMATISM?

Kant's critical project intended finally to bring reason to rest, saving it from the endless opposition between dogmatic metaphysics and withering skepticism. He attempted to achieve this feat by definitively circumscribing the bounds of experience. Having shown that experience is constituted and structured by the categories and the pure forms of intuition, Kant claims that any transcendent application of the categories is illegitimate. Within the bounds of experience, the appropriate use of reason is constitutive; outside the bounds of experience, it is merely regulative.

[23] CPrR 5:134

Dialectic, on his view, is the "logic of illusion"[24] that deceives us into believing that one can determine, and not merely think, what transcends the limits of our experience. In the history of metaphysics, this illusion has generated unsubstantiated claims to prove or to deny, for instance, the existence of an absolute necessary being (God) and the notion of freedom as an uncaused cause. In the 'Antinomy of Pure Reason,' Kant employs the ancient skeptics' method of establishing the equipollence of arguments to show how an uncritical use of reason leaves reason at an impasse.[25] The illusion of dialectic leaves reason forever vacillating between two equally probable and mutually exclusive poles. Kant's critical method moves reason beyond this disastrous fate by establishing (once and for all) a distinction between what can be known theoretically and what can be known practically. On Kant's view, failing to take the transcendental turn leaves reason in an 'entire nest of contradictions.'[26]

Hegel purported to show that reason's conflict with itself was a necessary (and in fact positive) feature of reason. Dialectic, far from being the logic of illusion, is the engine that drives the development of consciousness. On this view, the Kantian desire to bring reason to a rest is not only naïve but fatally flawed.[27] Hegel mocks those who see fixed opposition between what are in fact seemingly opposed but organically related elements. Hegel uses the simple example of a blossoming plant to explain his position. In one sense, he writes, "the bud

---

[24] CPuR A293/B249
[25] Here he follows Hume's use of the ancient skeptics. See Hume's 'skeptical solution' in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Section VII, pp. 263-274. (Oxford University Press, 1978).
[26] See for instance CPuR A609/B637
[27] Bringing reason to rest does not mean that one ceases to ask metaphysical questions. Rather, it means that critical philosophy purports to provide us with a criterion that definitively disposes of the 'logic of illusion' that is dialectic.

disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom," and these forms "supplant one another as mutually incompatible."[28] To stop here would be to posit shortsightedly an antinomy, when in fact the bud and the blossom are both "moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole."[29]

Dialectic on Kant's view entails an intractable conflict of reason with itself that is paralyzing, so long as it is not transcended practically through the critical method. On Hegel's view, the negation between two concepts is determinate rather than merely antinomous. Determinate negation is the 'tarrying with the negative'[30] that marks the transition from an inchoate to a richer and more defined sense of the whole. In the plant example, the blossoming of the bud both cancels and fulfills what the plant was incipiently[31]. The blossoming makes explicit what was there only latently, and this process of dialectical development entails a more sophisticated approach to negation than the Kantian antinomies make possible.

Hegel conceives of consciousness as inherently relational: "Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and at the same time relates itself to it."[32] Determinate negation, then, is a structural feature of the dialectical development of consciousness. A new stage of development is achieved when the

---

[28] PS §2
[29] Ibid.
[30] PS §19
[31] 'Canceling' and 'fulfilling' are two meanings of the German term *aufgehoben*. In his translation of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Reginald Snell claims that "it was from these Letters that Hegel derived the characteristic technical term of his philosophical system" (pp. 88-89, note 1, Continuum Publishing, 1965).
[32] PS §82

concept fails to match the object (i.e. when the world refuses to conform to the criterion that consciousness provides for itself and experience becomes recalcitrant). Consciousness, unsatisfied with the breakdown of its understanding, equips itself with new and more developed concepts and, at the same time, posits yet another object from which it distinguishes itself. The failure of concepts to match objects, far from being a mere failure, is the condition of the possibility of the development of new concepts and new objects to which they relate.

Even though dogmatic metaphysics required the unjustifiable and transcendental use of the categories of experience, its inquiry was motivated by a two-fold necessity. First, reason on Kant's view demands achieving unity or a grasp of the whole. Second, the ideas of reason (God, freedom, and immortality) are trenchant and cannot be wished away or ignored, per Hume's suggestion, by dining with friends. So dialectical illusion motivates the turn from theoretical reason to practical reason, through which one can think regulatively rather than constitutively about such questions. Marking the distinction between theoretical and practical reason in this way is Kant's original solution to the problem of equipollence.

Kant's solution to the problem of dialectical illusion is to circumscribe the limits of knowledge and, therefore, the domain in which one can justifiably employ the categories of the understanding. Kant purchases empirical certainty at the price of knowing the way things are in themselves. If Hegel could successfully incorporate this main element of Kantian philosophy (i.e. the distinction between

phenomena and noumena), then one might have a way of making a comparative judgment regarding the value of dialectic in rational inquiry.

It is often supposed that Hegel's problem with this distinction rests on its unintelligibility. Having marked the distinction between phenomena and noumena, Kant forgets that such a distinction is made in the mind. Further, one might wonder whether Kant is consistent when he seems to employ the category of causality in the noumenal realm (either in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to ground phenomenal appearances, or in the *Critique of Practical Reason* in his discussion of freedom as constituting a kind of noumenal causal chain).

The above account of Hegel's dialectic and determinate negation reveals his ingenious way of appropriating Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena. Rather than merely criticizing it as unintelligible, he builds a version of the distinction into the structure of his dialectic. At each stage of the dialectic, consciousness posits a reality utterly independent of itself, and then employs its concepts in order to understand what it takes to be independently real. For instance, at the stage of 'Unhappy Consciousness,' consciousness feels itself as "agonizingly self-divided"[33] between its essence, which it takes to be infinite and otherworldly, and its existence as a particular individual.

Even though consciousness develops new and more refined concepts in order to understand its world, it fails to grasp the fact that reality does not stand over against it as a thing-in-itself. Rather, the object changes even as the concepts do. Hegel writes, "But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge

[33] PS §217

of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. Hence it comes to pass for consciousness that what it previously took to be the in-itself is not an *in-itself*, or that it was only an in-itself *for consciousness*."[34]

It is true that Kant's critical undermining of transcendental realism (the notion that our concepts correspond, or fail to correspond, with mind-independent reality) begins the idealist movement that Hegel inherits. However, Hegel sees Kant's characterization of dialectic as the 'logic of illusion' as limiting his critical project, because it forces Kant to make an absolute distinction between phenomena and noumena. Kantian noumena are both beyond the bounds of possible experience and are essentially related to the rational subject through the ideas of reason. Similarly, at each stage of the dialectic, the Hegelian consciousness posits a reality both independent of itself and, as we have seen, as essentially related to itself. What Kant takes to be a timeless feature of human existence, Hegel shows to be characteristic of each stage of consciousness.

It is telling that Kant's conception of dialectic, or reason's immersion in an 'entire nest of contradictions,' motivates the search for a more stable philosophical foundation. In other words, the problem with dogmatic metaphysics was only superficially that it illicitly transcended the limits of reason. Truly what is at issue is the need for philosophy to fortify itself against skeptical challenges and ground our epistemological and ethical beliefs. Dogmatic metaphysics fails to ground such beliefs because it sets the bar too high for knowledge.

---

[34] PS §85

Critical philosophy is properly foundational because it does not depend on any particular metaphysical conception, needing only to make explicit what is presupposed by experience itself. Kant writes, "Here philosophy is seen in fact to be put in a precarious position, which should be firm even though there is neither in heaven nor on earth anything upon which it depends or is based. Here philosophy must show its purity as author of its laws. . . ."[35] This claim is reminiscent of Kant's desire in the *Critique of Pure Reason* to 'take reason to court,'[36] or to make reason the judge of its own capacities. In both cases, reason is able to evaluate critically its ideas, and by separating wheat from chaff can claim the purity of its laws.

Herein lies a more trenchant criticism of Kant's critical project than the formalism charge. At issue in this disagreement over dialectic is the proper function and end of philosophical reflection as such, rather than the contingent question of whether or not Kantian ethics has determinate content. Kant's critical philosophy depends upon two related presuppositions, both of which are open to criticism: the first is that philosophy must be foundational, and the second is that it must presuppose experience in order to transcend it. On Hegel's view, one could make a compelling case for the convergence of foundationalism and dogmatism in Kant's critical philosophy. The observation that Kant exhibits many of the traits that Hegel recognizes as symptomatic of philosophical dogmatism is strange, given that the transcendental turn was supposedly the antidote to

[35] G 426
[36] CPuR Axi

skepticism and to dogmatic slumber. But for this very reason, it serves as a more powerful criticism than the standard objections.

Perhaps Hegel's most basic statement of the problem comes in the *Phenomenology* when he writes, "Dogmatism as a way of thinking, whether in ordinary knowing or in the study of philosophy, is nothing else but the opinion that the True consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known."[37] It is clear enough that Kant's conception of dialectic, with the stated goal of bringing reason to a rest, falls into this category. Further, Kantian ethics is distinctly propositional: the categorical imperative can be construed as a decision procedure whereby one tests the universal validity of different propositions (or maxims) in order to determine their moral worth.

Even earlier than the *Phenomenology*, however, we get a glimpse into Hegel's understanding of dogmatism. Robert Williams, for example, highlights Hegel's early essay entitled 'Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy: Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One.' Williams writes, "Modern skepticism is skeptical about metaphysics, but not about experience. For this reason Hegel thinks that modern skepticism is dogmatic, and thus less radical than, and inferior to, classical skepticism."[38]

One could argue that Kant employed the ancient skeptical trope of equipollence in the *Antinomies of Pure Reason*, thereby escaping the charge of being a modern skeptic. However, at the heart of Kant's critical project is

[37] PS §40
[38] Robert Williams, "Hegel and Skepticism," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Fall 1992): p. 73.

precisely what concerns Hegel in this early essay. Following Hume, Kant is skeptical about dogmatic metaphysics, and he achieves the foundations forever eluding such metaphysicians by not adopting the same skeptical stance toward experience. Unlike the metaphysicians who preceded him, the strategy for achieving philosophical foundations is not to draw a distinction between appearance and reality as such. Rather, it is to start with experience and infer the necessary conditions of its possibility.

Both strategies, on Hegel's view, are dogmatic and susceptible to skeptical challenges. In a famous passage in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel dispenses with both strategies in order to advance his own understanding of dialectic. He writes, "It is a natural assumption that in philosophy, before we start to deal with its proper subject-matter, viz. the actual cognition of what truly is, one must first of all come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded either as the instrument to get hold of the Absolute, or as the medium through which one discovers it."[39]

Conceiving of cognition either as an instrument or a medium is a hopeless project: "For, if cognition is the instrument for getting hold of absolute being, it is obvious that the use of an instrument on a thing certainly does not let it be what it is for itself, but rather sets out to reshape and alter it. If, on the other hand, cognition is not an instrument of our activity but a more or less passive medium through which the light of truth reaches us, then again we do not receive the truth as it is in itself, but only as it exists through and in this medium."[40]

[39] PS §73
[40] Ibid.

It would surely be a superficial reading of Kant to claim that cognition is a passive medium; after all, the point of the transcendental turn is to understand experience as the marriage of concept and intuition. An empiricist like Locke would be a more appropriate target for this criticism. However, it is uncontroversial to argue that Kant began his critical project by subjecting reason to its own critique. In this sense Kant is the clearest target of Hegel's criticism, being especially concerned with analyzing our ability to cognize the truth.

Hegel provocatively asks, "Should we not be concerned as to whether this fear of error is not just the error itself?"[41] In doing so, he directly challenges Kant's conception of dialectic. Even if it were desirable to bring reason to rest, determining once and for all what is theoretically knowable and what is not, one should not presuppose that it is possible. If one failure of pre-Kantian metaphysics is that it was insufficiently self-critical, dogmatically assuming that reality as such was accessible, Kant's failure is to be so self-critical that he simply substitutes critical pessimism for dogmatic optimism. Insofar as he perpetuates the foundational project of those who preceded him, however, nothing has genuinely changed. The move from transcendental realism to transcendental idealism maintains the same desire for a criterion independent of experience to serve as the judge of experience and thereby attain foundations for our beliefs. For Kant, this is the identification of the a priori conditions of our knowledge.[42]

Consistent with Hegel's conception of dialectic is a rejection of these related foundational approaches. Rather than seeking to transcend experience,

[41] PS §74

[42] While these a priori conditions are independent of experience (determined through reason's self-critique), they are vacuous without reference to experience and are, therefore, inseparable from it.

either by rationally giving an account of essences or by rationally understanding the condition of the possibility of experience, Hegel radically refuses to presuppose some starting point outside of experience itself: "Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself."[43] In contrast to the modern skeptic's dogmatic refusal to radically question experience itself, Hegel acknowledges the 'state of despair' generated by his non-foundational approach: "The skepticism that is directed against the whole range of phenomenal consciousness, on the other hand, renders the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is."[44] Unwilling to presuppose some criterion (critical or metaphysical) that can be used to judge experience, consciousness is abandoned to experience itself.

Emerging from this 'state of despair' involves 'tarrying with the negative,' rather than presupposing, along with Kant, that the contradiction within reason is itself the problem. On a reconstruction of Hegel's view, then, Kant overcomes the dogmatism of reason but replaces it with the dogmatism of the Understanding. The move from transcendental realism to transcendental idealism is a philosophical version of the old adage that states 'the king is dead, long live the king.' In other words, Kant destroys the transcendental realist's metaphysical pretensions, even as he perpetuates the presupposition that philosophy must be foundational and that it requires some criterion outside of experience itself. Both the transcendental realist and the transcendental idealist purport to go behind the back of experience (either by discovering essences or by inferring the condition of

[43] PS §84. On Hegel's view, the attempt to identify the conditions for the possibility of experience itself is already too 'foundationalist' an approach.
[44] PS §78

the possibility, respectively). What is required, on Hegel's view, is a phenomenology of experience itself.

Controversially calling Kant dogmatic raises the following questions: what was it about dogmatic metaphysics that made it dogmatic? Was it the manner in which dogmatic metaphysicians illicitly transcended the limits of reason? Was it the lack of self-scrutiny, or was it the search for foundations itself? Further, if Kant substitutes the dogmatism of the Understanding for the dogmatism of Reason, is this new dogmatic slumber more insidious and intractable? After all, Kant's critical philosophy prides itself on its own self-scrutiny and the careful distinctions it draws. It claims to be theoretically modest.

If Hegel turns out to be the truly modest philosopher, then this would challenge an entire tradition of reading him as the supreme rationalist system-builder. Finally, what sorts of self-transcendence and disinterestedness are philosophically tenable and satisfying? If there is a deep continuity between transcendental realism and Kant's version of transcendental idealism, and both represent false forms of foundationalism, then what is Hegel's alternative and why could it be claimed to be superior? In other words, if the two-fold presupposition of some criterion outside of experience and the goal of firm philosophical foundations are mistaken, where should one turn philosophically?

One place to begin looking for answers to these questions is Hegel's account of the power of the Understanding. Despite the failure of the Understanding to produce genuine knowledge of the topic which it analyzes, it does produce a compelling, pseudo-philosophical treatment. Or rather, genuine

philosophical knowledge is intimated in the abstract, critical method of the Understanding. Hegel characterizes the distinction-making power of the Understanding as producing a "synoptic table like a skeleton with scraps of paper stuck all over it, or like the rows of closed and labeled boxes in a grocer's stall."[45] The danger posed by the distinction-making power of the Understanding is that it appears as though it has discovered some truth, even though it has merely understood some topic in abstraction.

The Understanding is dangerous because it analyzes a complex whole by marking off its constituent parts and reifying the distinctions, reinscribing them into reality. All acts of reflective understanding, on Hegel's view, clarify and falsify at the same time. Here we find a further statement on what makes a position dogmatic: it not only treats the True propositionally, as a fixed result, but in order to do so must abstract the truth-claim from the context in which it was made meaningful. Robert Williams writes, "The essence of dogmatism is that it posits something finite, limited, essentially constituted, or qualified by opposition, as an absolute, thereby removing it from relation, qualification, and conditioning."[46]

What are the practical effects of this particular (and perhaps peculiar) criticism of Kant's philosophy? There are two sections in the *Phenomenology* that deal with Kant's moral philosophy: much attention has been paid to the sections entitled 'Reason as lawgiver' and 'Reason as testing laws,' where Hegel accuses

[45] PS §51
[46] Williams, 74

Kantian ethics of being formalistic and tautologous.[47] One often overlooked point is that Hegel develops this formalism charge and subsequently moves on to deeper and more interesting refutations. Too little attention has been focused on the sections in the chapter on Spirit entitled 'The moral view of the world' and 'Dissemblance or duplicity,' where Hegel criticizes the role played by the practical postulates in Kant's supposedly rational ethics.[48] The first section contains all of the standard objections to Kant's formalism, whereas the second section is largely neglected. There Hegel is concerned with Kant's practical postulates (God, freedom, and immortality). Each section can be read as a way of making explicit and tangible this charge of dogmatism.

In the section on *Reason*, Hegel writes, "Reason as the giver of laws is reduced to a Reason which merely critically examines them."[49] Consciousness sought some method whereby it could determine objectively what was morally good. It mistakenly believed that it could start with the view of a subject that was the source of moral value, the guarantor of objectively valid moral laws. It learned, however, that this subject-centered approach devolves into merely opining about what the law ought to be. Hegel writes, "It said: everyone ought to speak the truth; but it meant: he ought to speak it according to his knowledge and conviction; that is to say, what it said was different from what it meant; and to speak otherwise than one means, means not speaking the truth."[50] This is

[47] PS §419-431
[48] PS §599-631. Jonathan Robinson's *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's* Phenomenology of Mind is an exception to the rule.
[49] PS §428
[50] PS §424

analogous to Hegel's remarks in 'Perception: Or the Thing and Deception,'[51] in which the consciousness learned that its mistaken perceptions presupposed some prior objective order that could not be understood merely subjectively.

Critical reflection always remains 'external' to its material by attempting to understand something dynamic as static and objective (e.g. the relation between cause and effect). Hegel objects: "But it is not difficult to see that the way of asserting a proposition, adducing reasons for it, and in the same way refuting its opposite by reasons, is not the form in which truth can appear. Truth is its own self-movement, whereas the method just described is the mode of cognition that remains external to its material."[52] Critical reflection treats distinctions as absolute rather than functional and revisable under a different set of conditions. This engenders its optimism regarding its own ability to discover foundations for its beliefs and to bring reason finally to a rest.

Two important effects of adopting the critical method of the Understanding are as follows: it seems as though any rational agent can achieve the same moral understanding by adopting this method, and it appears as if some conclusive moral fact can be reached through such analysis. Hegel deems this second effect the "lifeless knowledge and its conceit" promised by the adoption of this critical method.[53] The 'conceit' in question is the presupposition that philosophical truth is like a minted-coin[54] that can be readily pocketed by those who reflect properly.

---

[51] PS §111-131
[52] PS §48
[53] PS §52
[54] See PS §39

A second and related conceit is the notion that any rational creature can, without any special training, achieve philosophical understanding. Hegel mocks this idea:

> In the case of all other sciences, arts, skills, and crafts, everyone is convinced that a complex and laborious programme of learning and practice is necessary for competence. Yet when it comes to philosophy, there seems to be a currently prevailing prejudice to the effect that, although not everyone who has eyes and fingers, and is given leather and last, is at once in a position to make shoes, everyone nonetheless immediately understands how to philosophize, and how to evaluate philosophy, since he possesses the criterion for doing so in his natural reason – as if he did not likewise possess the measure for a shoe in his own foot.[55]

It is odd that Hegel would level this kind of objection against Kant's moral philosophy, given that Nietzsche would later draw a similar distinction (between genuine and critical philosophy) and wield it against both Kant and Hegel. In distinguishing between critical and genuine philosophy in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes of 'mere critics' like Kant and Hegel:

> Those philosophical laborers after the noble model of Kant and Hegel have to determine and press into formulas, whether in the realm of logic or political (moral) thought or art, some great data of valuations – that is, former positings of values, creations of values which have become dominant and are for a time called 'truths.' It is for these investigators to make everything that has happened and been esteemed so far easy to look over, easy to think over, intelligible and manageable, to abbreviate everything long, even 'time,' and to overcome the entire past.[56]

Nietzsche never specifies what element of Hegel's philosophy 'presses into formulas' some prior positing of values. The crucial difference between Hegel and Nietzsche is that Hegel retains a notion of objective validity rather than

[55] PS §67, and see also the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*.
[56] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1966): p. 136.

claiming that all moral claims reduce to the positing of values. Nonetheless, like Hegel, Nietzsche rejects the egalitarian claim that philosophical understanding is immediately available to all rational creatures. At the heart of their shared rejection of the critical standpoint is that it remains falsely disinterested: for the sake of determining some universally valid law, it denies that the subject is existentially involved in what he purports to analyze critically.

This observation connects Hegel's comments on the moral view in *Reason* with those found in the section on *Spirit*. The subtitle of this section, 'Spirit Certain of Itself or Morality,' is crucial. Just as morality cannot be captured by a merely critical understanding, so too must one be wary of the false sense of security generated by the moral view. In this section, consciousness exhibits the self-certainty wrought by its dogmatic and unyielding desire for foundations. In its desire to find some universally valid laws, it has forgotten that all knowledge is a form of self-knowledge. In other words, it has suppressed the development of its own self-understanding in favor of investigating in a supposedly disinterested way what can be made universally valid. Forgetting its own existential involvement in what it is attempting to understand critically, it stipulates rules for the *Person* rather than the concrete individual.

The practical effects of this merely critical understanding would be deemed pernicious by both Hegel and Nietzsche. Hegel in particular is concerned with a moral view that merely judges and 'pronounces verdicts' in a self-satisfied and certain manner, thereby divorcing philosophical understanding from one's practical comportment and the development of one's concrete self-understanding.

Here we see all the symptoms of dogmatism made explicit: this merely critical understanding deals in propositional rather than existential knowledge (e.g. it attempts to fix universally what is true and false in our moral life); it does this by abstracting some supposedly crucial elements from their context in lived experience; it then proclaims with a self-satisfied sense of certainty that it has finally secured the foundations it set out to discover.

All this time, however, it presupposes that such foundations are necessary (or even possible); it adopts a falsely disinterested view of what it purports to objectively analyze; and it accomplishes all of this at the expense of developing its own self-understanding. This moral view is the philosophy of the *Person*, of the abstractly free individual, rather than the concrete individual existing in a determinate social order under a determine set of cultural and historical conditions.

Perhaps the deepest irony implicit in this entire discussion is that it was Kant who inaugurated the turn toward practical reason and away from the supposedly disinterested perspective of pre-Kantian metaphysics. This practical turn was also an existentialist turn of sorts: Kant reconceived objectivity in terms of intersubjective validity in both his epistemology and his ethics. Just as the transcendental turn conceives the knower as involved in what is known (i.e. through the marriage of concept and intuition), so too does Kant's moral constructivism demonstrate that rational agents are the source and not merely the discoverers of moral value.

Yet this practical and existential turn retained crucial elements of the old

metaphysical systems it attempted to undermine and replace. As we have already seen, Hegel's strategy is to attack Kant's foundationalism and to tie it to a critique of the dogmatism generated by his critical method. Despite the radical nature of the critical turn, then, Kant's philosophy is deeply continuous with what preceded it insofar as he deems philosophical foundations crucial. This makes Kant's turn toward practical philosophy half-hearted: Critical philosophy achieves at best a merely theoretical understanding of the primacy of the practical, as it maintains the kind of disinterestedness required by the search for foundations. What is practically permissible for Kant (e.g. the postulates of God, freedom, and immortality) turns on the critical limitation of theoretical reason and is valid for all rational agents.

Kant's epistemological and ethical foundationalism is designed to refute the kind of skepticism advanced by Hume, thereby putting metaphysics on solid ground. But if the reconstruction of Hegel's critique of the Understanding is plausible, then Kant merely substituted one dogmatic slumber for another. The second sort is a deeper sleep, because it purports to be sufficiently self-critical. The lesson Kant learned from Hume was that new rational philosophical foundations were necessary, instead of appreciating Hume's skeptical position that regards them as either impossible or unnecessary. For instance, Kant attempts to prove the existence of the external world in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[57]

Such a proof would refute various forms of idealism, Berkeley's in particular. But Hume famously remarked that Berkeley could neither be refuted nor believed. That is, Berkeley's empirical idealism was rationally bullet-proof,

[57] See for instance Kant's 'First Analogy,' CPuR A182 - A189/B232.

but so at odds with lived experience that it produced no conviction. The appropriate response, then, was to surrender the search for better rational foundations, rather than to pursue them as Kant did. Of course, Kant deemed it necessary for our self-understanding not to leave elements of our moral life rationally inscrutable. But, on Hegel's view, this turn toward self-understanding fails if it involves an inadequate and abstract conception of the self.

The lessons that Kant learned (or failed to learn) from Hume set the stage for a discussion of why philosophical foundations are deemed necessary in the first place. Kant's initial move into critical philosophy was motivated by a desire to be non-dogmatic and to incorporate the insights of skepticism into a larger philosophical system. In fact, his conception of dialectic, as we have seen, employs the ancient skeptical trope of equipollence in order to demonstrate the limits of theoretical reason. But Hume's response to Berkeley raises the question of what sort of philosophical positions require refutation in the first place. Further, if the reconstruction of Hegel's position is correct, then it looks like one refutes a certain kind of skepticism at the cost of dogmatically asserting the foundational character of philosophy. On this view, Kantian philosophy is the abstract refutation of an abstract form of skepticism that might be better ignored. How might this pitfall be avoided?

SKEPTICISM, SOLVED OR DISSOLVED?

Hegel claims that the appropriate starting point of this inquiry is experience itself, rather than attempting to transcend it either metaphysically (by presupposing a distinction between appearance and reality) or critically (by presupposing that philosophical reflection can clearly outline the conditions for the possibility of experience). Terry Pinkard remarks that Hegel's concept of experience contains within it the seeds of skepticism.[58] The constant disjunction between the *in-itself* and the *in-self for consciousness* comprises the highway of despair that consciousness must travel. If experience contains the seeds of skepticism, it also contains the recipe for overcoming skepticism in fits and starts: the *Bildung* of consciousness involves the transition from narrow and inchoate conceptions of reality to more comprehensive, coherent, and holistic understandings.

Relegating the question of what forms of skepticism are appropriate to the question of experience itself might be described as Hegel's way of shifting the burden onto those interested in philosophical foundations. Rather than presupposing that philosophical reflection is capable of judging experience as such, Hegel provides a more theoretically modest starting point for philosophical inquiry. Robert Pippin observes in a footnote that Hegel is unconcerned with refuting the kind of moral skepticism that preoccupies Kant: "Indeed one other initial way to stress the differences between Kant's and Hegel's approach is to note that Hegel must be striking out in some very different direction because he

[58] Pinkard, *Hegel's* Phenomenology, p. 173

appears to have no interest at all in any refutation of moral or normative skepticism, appears to think it is wholly unnecessary."[59]

On the highway of despair, it is only when experience becomes recalcitrant (i.e. concept fails to conform to object) that the skeptical impulse arises. Conceiving of skepticism as responsive to and arising from actual experience involves discounting or dismissing outright its foundational character. In other words, even if it is possible to skeptically attack experience as such, this abstract form of skepticism does not have any philosophical merit.[60]

The search for philosophical foundations is tied to the kind of skepticism that Hegel does not take seriously. Giving up one involves giving up the other.[61] The philosopher who believes he has discovered the foundations for our beliefs is akin to Lazarus in T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock': back from the dead and eager to communicate some secret and certain truth, his message falls on deaf ears.[62] He alone holds the answer to a question that is not seriously countenanced by those he encounters. The connection between the search for philosophical foundations and the kind of skepticism Hegel refuses to take seriously is often stated ambiguously (and inadequately) by Hegel scholars.

---

[59] Pippin, "On Giving Oneself the Law," *Logos and Eros: Essays Honoring Stanley Rosen*, ed. Nalin Ranasinghe (St. Augustine's Press, 2006): p. 191, note 3.
[60] For a humorous example of this, see O.K. Bouwsma's "Descartes' Evil Genius" in *Twenty Questions*, third edition, ed. G. Lee Bowie (Harcourt Brace Press, 1988): pp. 242-249.
[61] See Michael Williams' *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, especially pp. 1-10 (Blackwell Press, 1991).
[62] See Eliot's *The Wasteland and Other Poems*: "Would it have been worth while/ To have bitten off the matter with a smile/ To have squeezed the universe into a ball/ To roll it towards some overwhelming question/ To say: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead/ Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all' –/ If one, settling a pillow by her head/ Should say: 'That is not what I meant at all/ That is not it, at all'" (Harcourt Brace Press, 1934).

For instance, in the foreward to his translation of the *Phenomenology*, J.N. Findlay writes,

> At the end of these remarks it may be asked whether Hegel's self-justifying circular series of spiritual characterizations has done anything like show that the real must coincide with the intelligible, or that the 'truth' about anything will consist in its teleological relation to the emergence of spiritual self-consciousness. He has certainly shown up the absurdity of believing in objective arrangements which are wholly out of gear with our categories and our thought-demands, and which are not at all accommodated to our theoretical requirements or to our practical approaches and endeavors. *But has he exorcised the doubt that there may be sides of the world which will remain obstinately and depressingly unintelligible, and which are without a significant teleological relation to our spiritual goals and endeavors, and which may in the end bring these all to nought?*[63]

To be sure, Hegel has not demonstrated this, but what would it take to overcome this sort of skepticism? What would count as a sufficient 'refutation' of the view that there are 'sides of the world which will remain obstinately and depressing unintelligible?' Moreover, even if there were such 'sides of the world,' how could they defeat all of our 'spiritual goals and endeavors'? After all, if they are to remain utterly unintelligible, then presumably they could not impact (even negatively) our desire to understand ourselves and our place in the world.[64]

The point that Findlay seems to miss is Hegel's dismissal of what he calls "the essenceless abstraction of essence."[65] Elsewhere Hegel explicitly states the goal of philosophical inquiry as overcoming this kind of abstraction: "It is just the point, however, that the best should not remain in the recesses of what is inner,

---

[63] PS foreward xxx, emphasis added.
[64] Wittgenstein makes a similar point when he writes that "scepticism is not irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked. For doubt can exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said*." *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (Routledge Press, 2001): 6.51.
[65] PS §390

but should be brought out of these depths into the light of day."[66] Like Kant, Hegel rejects as idle speculation any metaphysical discussion of essences that transcends the limits of reason. Unlike Kant, however, he attempts to rehabilitate this metaphysical tradition by arguing for a genuinely speculative philosophy (i.e. by showing how appearance and essence are dialectically interrelated, such that philosophical understanding involves making explicit a thing's essence).

This genuinely speculative philosophy is Hegel's antidote to the one-sidedness of Kant's subjective idealism. Subjective idealism presupposes that philosophical inquiry must begin with a critical examination of our ability to make justifiable claims to knowledge. But, as we have already seen, this makes the same sort of foundational mistake as the dogmatic metaphysician who presupposes that reality as such is knowable. Both constitute attempts to 'get behind experience,' rather than understanding experience itself as already containing both the seeds of skepticism and the remedy for overcoming it (i.e. a genuinely speculative understanding).

The appropriate remedy for the dogmatism of Reason is not the dogmatism of the Understanding. Rather, it is to give up the incoherent notion of essence in the abstract, as utterly divorced from an inquirer's experience and existential self-understanding. Just as transcendental realism and transcendental idealism are both foundational philosophical views, they both endorse (albeit in different ways) this 'essenceless abstraction of essence.' For instance, Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena, designed to circumscribe

[66] PS §69

definitively the claims of theoretical reason, leaves the inquirer affirming the necessity of an idea that Hegel deems incoherent. This incoherence assumes two forms, one of which has been neglected, and both of which curiously appear in the same article by Sally Sedgwick.

Sedgwick first outlines Hegel's familiar critique of the logical incoherence of Kant's idea of the thing-in-itself, concluding that "it is not just that we can never know the thing in itself; insofar as it is understood to refer to what lies outside the determinations of pure apperception, Hegel's view is that we cannot even think it."[67] Kant's subjective idealism, and the subjective starting point of critical reflection, condemns him to affirm the necessity of an idea that cannot even be coherently thought. The thing-in-itself is, on Kant's view, necessary for grounding phenomenal appearances and avoiding the pitfalls of various pre-critical strands of idealism.

However, Sedgwick later articulates a quite different Hegelian critique: "The thing in itself, insofar as it is thought at all, falls rather 'on this side in consciousness.' Taken in this way there is, as Hegel put it, 'nothing we can know so easily.'"[68] These two criticisms are incompatible, insofar as the second presupposes that the thing-in-itself can be coherently thought after all, and further that it is the easiest thing to think. The incompatibility can be resolved by understanding the sense in which Hegel's philosophy strives to be genuinely speculative. It affirms the distinction between appearance and essence, but marks

[67] Sally Sedgwick, "Hegel's Treatment of Transcendental Apperception in Kant," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Spring 1992): p. 157.
[68] Sedgwick, 159, see also EL, p. 72

it dialectically and within experience itself, rather than asserting it dogmatically (as in pre-Kantian metaphysics and Kant's critical philosophy).

Insofar as the thing-in-itself preserves the philosophical penchant for abstract essences, it is unthinkable. If, however, it is interpreted to mean that experience affords us more than fleeting impressions and that genuine knowledge can be achieved, then this understanding of essence is practically significant and well-understood. As Hyppolite succinctly puts it: "The great joke, Hegel wrote in a personal note, is that things are what they are. . . . The essence of essence is to manifest itself; manifestation is the manifestation of essence."[69]

This understanding of genuine (as opposed to idle) speculation, can be understood either as a way of refuting Kant's subjective idealism or a way of completing it. Recall that Hegel's concept of dialectic incorporates a version of Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena. At each stop along the highway of despair, consciousness posits a reality utterly independent of itself, and then employs its concepts in order to understand what it takes to be independently real.

In his spirited defense of the necessity of Kant's transcendental distinction between concept and intuition, as against Hegel's view, Paul Guyer writes, "concepts define only possibilities and we must always appeal to intuition to establish the actuality of the possible objects defined by our concepts . . . there must always remain an element of contingency in our cognition of the actual –

[69] Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's* Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Northwestern University Press, 1974): p. 125.

that is, the empirical intuition of objects always presents us particular determinations of those objects not foreseen in our general concepts of them."[70]

Guyer inadvertently makes the case for Hegel's (rather than Kant's) understanding of what is given in experience. Rather than denying an element of contingency in experience, Hegel merely denies Kant's attempt to understand critically and ahistorically the distinction between concept and intuition. Hegel relativizes the distinction between concept and intuition to particular stages of consciousness, wedding it to a phenomenological account of experience itself. New concepts arise as a result of the practical failure of the *in-itself* and the *for-itself* to correspond. There is nothing in Hegel's dialectic that entails that every element of contingency is eliminated in Absolute Knowing, but there is a denial that skepticism about what is utterly unknowable is a meaningful sort of inquiry.

Kant is preoccupied with the need to identify some morally crucial fact about a particular action, in order to ensure that moral actions are categorically distinct from immoral actions or from merely prudential actions. On his view, it is not even enough that moral actions conform to the moral law; they must also be done out of respect for it. Kant would find abhorrent the possibility that there is not some singular feature of a moral action that distinguishes it from immoral or non-moral ones.

Hegel, on the other hand, deems perfectly ordinary the fact that there are a variety of possible descriptions of an action, and nothing to guarantee that some one description is morally correct. Actions that are candidates for moral evaluation are, as Hegel puts it, 'infinitely complex.' He writes that "what others

[70] Guyer, 53

call violence and wrongdoing, is the fulfillment of the individual's duty to maintain his independence in fact of others; what they call cowardice, is the duty of supporting life and the possibility of being useful to others; but what they call courage violates both duties."[71]

Refusing to presuppose that philosophical reflection can distinguish categorically between moral and immoral or nonmoral actions, Hegel need not be concerned with the fact that it is always possible to redescribe a particular action. However, the fact that this is possible, and quite common, does not mean that all descriptions are equally valid. In other words, rejecting the skeptical preoccupation with reflectively determining some essential feature of a moral action need not condemn one to a merely relativistic or perspectival view. In both the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*, for instance, Hegel writes that "no man is a hero to his valet . . . but it's not because the man is not a hero . . . it's because the other man is a valet."[72]

What Hegel refuses to supply is some definitive philosophical proof that this is so. The valet's mistake is to presume that the fact that the hero is also an ordinary person somehow tarnishes his heroism. This is the mistake of anyone who discounts his heroism on the grounds that it might supply some heteronomous motivation for acting. As Allen Wood puts it, "Hegel scorns the attitude of the moralist who criticizes the substantively good acts of great men on the ground that they intended and achieved happiness, fame, honor, or self-satisfaction for themselves. He finds no moral defect in those who do noble deeds

[71] PS §644
[72] See for instance PS§488

for the sake of these satisfactions, so long as their intention and insight accord with the good."[73]

In fact, on Hegel's view, any discussion of an agent's intention that is radically divorced from what they actually do leads us to the moral illusion of the *Schöne Seele*:[74] If morality's proper object is the good understood objectively, than it cannot rest content with what moral agents meant to do. Morality on Hegel's view is not about discerning some singular, secret psychological fact but about rationally evaluating one's actual behavior.

Refusing to take seriously the kind of possibility that preoccupies Kant is a theme that runs throughout Hegel's corpus. The above line from the *Philosophy of Right* that is echoed in the *Phenomenology*[75] can also be found in the essay "Wer Denkt Abstrakt?" There Hegel asserts that the common person, rather than the philosopher, is truly the one who thinks abstractly: he believes that he has identified the essential description of a person's action or character. For instance, Hegel writes, "This is abstract thinking: to see nothing in the murderer except the abstract fact that he is a murderer, and to annul all other human essence in him with this simple quality. It is quite different in refined, sentimental circles – in Leipzig. There they strewed and bound flowers on the wheel and on the criminal who was tied to it. – But this again is the opposite abstraction."[76] Those who think abstractly not only take seriously the notion that there is some essential feature of

[73] Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990): p. 149.
[74] See PS §632-671
[75] PS §404
[76] "Who Thinks Abstractly?" in *Hegel: Texts and Commentary*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Anchor Books, 1996): 113-118.

an action that makes it what it is, but they dogmatically assert their particular description of the action as the true one.

What, on Hegel's view, is the remedy for this two-fold mistake? Even this early in his thought, Hegel stresses the difference between the way in which one thinks about something and one's practical attitude toward it. Here the relationship between the hero and the valet is cast as the relationship between the nobleman and the servant. Hegel praises the nobleman who refuses to treat the servant merely as a servant, as if that title were the sole determining factor of his character. He writes, "The nobleman knows that the servant is not merely a servant, but also knows the latest city news, the girls, and harbors good suggestions; he asks him about these matters, and the servant may say what he knows about these questions. . . . and when the master wants something, it is not done with an order but he has to argue and convince the servant of his opinion and add a good word to make sure that this opinion retains the upper hand."[77]

Hegel contrasts this relationship with another specific relationship between an officer and a soldier, claiming that "the common soldier is for the officer this *abstractum* of a beatable subject. . . ."[78] The officer thinks abstractly, taking the common soldier's rank as the sole determining factor in their interaction, rather than regarding him as a free being like himself. This manner of 'annulling all other human essence' results in a beating. Ironically, Hegel prescribes the same kind of violence as the only way of 'refuting' someone who behaves like the officer.

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

In his 'refutation' of phrenology, or any other kind of determinism that reductively regards a human being as a merely physical thing, Hegel writes, "When, therefore, a man is told 'You (your inner being) are this kind of person because your skull-bone is constituted in such and such a way,' this means nothing else than, 'I regard a bone as your reality.' . . . the retort here, would strictly speaking, have to go the length of beating in the skull of anyone making such a judgment, in order to demonstrate in a manner just as palpable as his wisdom, that for a man, a bone is nothing in itself, much less his true reality."[79]

The relevant point here is that the determinist fixates on one supposedly essential element of human experience (e.g. the shape of a skull) and thereby suppresses all other facets of human existence. Either 'punishment or perception' is required because the presuppositions with which the determinist operates are not susceptible to rational revision. They have already mistaken the abstract for the concrete, believing that freedom can be refuted by the identification of some physical property that can be studied scientifically.

Those who would 'refute' determinism are compelled to resort to equally abstract claims about what it means to be free. For instance, one alternative would be to think of freedom as being utterly undetermined (or to be free negatively). Failing to appreciate the equal and opposite abstractions of negative freedom and determinism, Allen Wood discusses "Hegel's apparent belief that there is such a thing as 'negative freedom,' which attempts to actualize the self as nothing but the power of abstraction. Hegel plainly regards negative freedom as irrational and wholly destructive, but if he thinks it possible at all, that would seem to imply a

[79] PS §339

kind of action that defies all particular desires at once."[80] Negative freedom is, in fact, nothing at all. It implies that individuals are capable of abstracting themselves from any particular determining impulse, rather than entailing the stronger metaphysical position that freedom requires no determination at all.

When one attempts to understand freedom absolutely (as either true or false), one not only resorts to related abstractions, but one divests the concept of freedom of its practical significance. A related example of this shared series of mistakes is evident in Hegel's discussion of the 'infinite right of the subject.' After endorsing the Enlightenment thesis that the individual has an infinite right to scrutinize critically all claims to truth, Hegel cautions us that this infinite right is trivial in its abstraction. Hegel writes, "But however lofty, however divine, the right of thought may be, it is perverted into wrong if it is only this [opining] which passes for thinking. . . ."[81] Similarly, in the *Philosophy of Right*, he inverts Kant's position on the absolute value of a good will by claiming that "the laurels of mere willing are dry leaves that never were green."[82]

The notion that the very same thing could seem infinitely important and yet be utterly abstract is confirmed in the famous beginning of the *Science of Logic*.[83] Here Hegel affirms Being in its absolute glory, which quickly devolves into Nothing because it lacks all determination. The dialectical relationship of these two basic categories produces Becoming. In keeping with the analogy of

[80] Wood, 37, note 4
[81] PR §4
[82] PR addition to §124
[83] *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Prometheus Books, 1989): part 1.

freedom, what is required for achieving true freedom is the individual's ability to become rationally self-determined.

Perhaps a more familiar example is suggested by the social contract tradition. In both the Hobbesian and Lockean state of nature, individuals have the unlimited right to anything they can acquire. The problem with this kind of perfect freedom and equality is that it is trivial in its abstraction. The establishment of a commonwealth is necessary for ensuring that an individual can maintain possession of anything he acquired freely.

Kant establishes what Hegel calls 'abstract freedom' without taking the further step of developing an understanding of freedom in its concrete manifestations. His is the freedom of the *Person*. He is in fact incapable of developing the second, and more robust, conception of freedom because critical philosophy seems incapable of comprehending actual individuals. Dealing in universal validity and theoretical statements of what is practically permissible, Kant achieves what Hegel deems to be a merely subjective understanding of freedom. Hegel writes, "Reflection, the formal universality and unity of self-consciousness, *is the will's abstract certainty of its freedom*, but it is not yet the truth of freedom, because it has not yet got itself as its content and aim, and consequently the subjective side of the still other than the objective."[84]

Here again we see the symptoms of dogmatism being identified by Hegel: understanding something propositionally (e.g. the *Person* is free), abstractly (i.e. removed from the context under which descriptions of freedom or unfreedom make sense), and asserting this understanding with certainty (i.e. freedom holds

[84] PR §15, emphasis added.

universally for all rational individuals). Notice, however, that what it would take for this abstract conception of freedom to become concrete is that the will would have to be self-determining, rather than having its content given from without.

Contrary to the standard charge of formalism against Kant, it would not be sufficient to show how Kant's supposedly formalistic philosophy can be given content casuistically.[85] It would be necessary to show how form and content are interdependent, such that a change in one yields a change in the other. But this is just the dialectical method of the *Phenomenology* itself: as a result of the perpetual failure of correspondence between concept and object, consciousness continually posits a new *in-itself* and understands itself and its world in a new light (*in-itself for consciousness*).

In this way Hegel avoids the pitfalls of dogmatism. As we have already seen, he presupposes neither a fixed and final foundation for philosophical understanding nor a criterion external to experience that can critically examine it. Further, his much-disputed concept of Absolute Knowing, on at least one reading, is in accord with what Robert Williams identifies as the third trope of ancient skepticism: "According to the third trope of relationship, the 'absolute' turns out not to be absolute. Indeed, there can be nothing absolute in the traditional sense of the term – i.e., exempt from all relation and conditioning."[86]

Donald Verene points out that, contrary to the thesis-antithesis-synthesis reading of Hegel's system, the *in-itself* and the *for-itself* are never actually

[85] This seems to be Kant's strategy in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, in which be shows how his moral philosophy categorically prohibits specific actions such as suicide.
[86] Robert Williams, 74

synthesized. Verene's 'double ansich'[87] reading of the *Phenomenology* stipulates that there are always two forms of the *in-itself* that are fundamentally irreconcilable: the *in-itself* and the *in-itself for consciousness*. This is a way of articulating the third skeptical trope: Absolute Knowing is, paradoxically, the non-foundational claim that knowledge itself is inherently conditioned. On this reconstruction of Hegel's position, Hegel turns Kant's own appropriation of ancient skepticism (the method of equipollence that allows Kant to articulate his conception of dialectic) on its head: rather than fulfilling the legacy of ancient skepticism, Kant violates its strictures by falling short of Absolute Knowing.

Hegel's 'absolute,' on this interpretation, does not refer to some proposition that it knows independent of all context, but rather to the knowledge gained by appreciating the rational and non-foundational structure of experience. This constitutes an alternative to Kant's practical solution of the conflict of reason with itself: rather than bringing reason to a rest, and leaving theoretical reason abstractly antinomous, Hegel's version of dialectic reveals dogmatism and skepticism as being two constitutive moments of experience.

Consciousness habitually forgets the role it plays in constituting the objects of its beliefs, thereby asserting with dogmatic certainty that it has achieved an understanding of the thing-in-itself. Conversely, it is constantly confronted with skeptical challenges to its interpretation that threaten to undermine this illicit self-certainty. In other words, the great metaphysical conflict

[87] See Donald Phillip Verene's *Hegel's Recollection*, (State University of New York Press, 1985): pp. 14-26.

that Kant sees as driving the history of philosophy actually plays out in experience itself.

AN ENTIRE NEST OF CONTRADICTIONS

Kant's foundationalist approach attempts to understand the conflict between dogmatism and skepticism in absolute terms, and therefore succeeds in thinking merely abstractly. This observation is at the heart of Hegel's critique of the Kantian moral subject. In a rare explicit reference to Kant in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that "The moral world-view, is, therefore, in fact nothing other than the elaboration of this fundamental contradiction in its various aspects. It is, to employ here a Kantian expression where it is most appropriate, a 'whole nest' of thoughtless contradictions."[88] What is this 'fundamental contradiction'? It is the way in which Kant preserves elements of both rationalist and fideist elements in his moral philosophy. Or, to put it differently, it is the compromise he strikes between dogmatism and skepticism.

Contrary to the competing interpretations of Kant outlined at the beginning of this chapter (i.e. Murdoch's view as opposed to Schopenhauer's view), the real concern is the way in which Kantian moral philosophy is both secular and religious at the same time. Hegel elaborates on the rationalist elements in this way: "In the moral view of the world we see, on the one hand, consciousness itself *consciously* produce its object . . . it thus knows this latter to be its own self, for it knows itself to be the *active* agent that produces it. It seems,

[88] PS §617

therefore, to attain here its peace and satisfaction, for this can only be found where it no longer needs to go beyond its object, because this no longer goes beyond *it*."[89]

This kind of satisfaction is the kind Hegel attributes to Enlightenment thought: he deems the Enlightenment to be 'faith satisfied' because it is no longer restlessly concerned with some standard of truth outside of itself.[90] For instance, Kantian moral philosophy rationally determines what it would mean for an action to be moral (i.e. it must be done out of respect for the moral law). The satisfaction of this rational awareness is, however, short-lived for the moral consciousness. Hegel writes, "On the other hand, however, consciousness itself really places the object *outside* itself as a beyond of itself. But this object with an intrinsic being of its own is equally posited as being, not free from self-consciousness, but as existing in the interest of, and by means of it."[91]

In other words, Kantian moral philosophy sacrifices the peaceful self-certainty of knowing what it would mean for an action to be moral for the knowledge of whether a particular action is in fact moral. But it is this understanding that forever eludes its grasp. Hegel writes, "[The moral consciousness] knows only the pure essence, or the object so far as it is duty, so far as it is an abstract object of its pure consciousness, as a pure knowing, or as its own self. It thinks, therefore, only in abstractions, and does not comprehend."[92] One might think that this leads to the formalism charge (i.e. Kantian philosophy

[89] PS §616
[90] PS §572
[91] PS §616
[92] PS §611

cannot be grounded in practice). More specifically, Kant lacks the kind of moral psychology that would explain how his abstract theory can be made concrete.

On the contrary, it is Kant's preoccupation with moral psychology that leads him beyond the rationalist, secular ethical position with which he began. As early as the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (often considered his most theoretical and formalistic text), Kant is concerned with a potentially fatal circularity in his argument. He characterizes this as a "hidden circle involved in our inference from freedom to autonomy, and from this to the moral law – this is to say that we had perhaps laid down the idea of freedom only for the sake of the moral law in order subsequently to infer this law in its turn from freedom."[93]

In other words, freedom must be independently established rather than assumed as "a principle which well-disposed souls would gladly concede us but which we could never put forward as a demonstrable proposition."[94] It is the idea of an intelligible world that puts freedom on secure ground. Similarly, as Christine Korsgaard writes, the idea of an intelligible world is central to Kant's moral psychology:

> A being which must regard itself as free really is 'practically free' and so bound by the laws of freedom [G 448]. But Kant then complains that this argument by itself is circular if offered as an account of how we can be morally motivated. A *purely* rational will is just a will under moral laws, but we are not purely rational. Morality demands we subordinate our happiness to our freedom. What is needed is an explanation of how we can be motivated to do this. This explanation is provided by the idea of the intelligible world.[95]

[93] G 453
[94] Ibid.
[95] Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge University Press, 1996): p. 26.

Kant's practical postulates of God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul are necessary in order to make his rationalist ethics actual. For instance, Kant believes that the ancient correlation of virtue and happiness is refuted by observing the misery that often befalls good people and the pleasures accorded to those who lack virtue.[96] Yet the idea that virtuous actions lead to happiness rationally justifies the belief in an omniscient and benevolent God who rewards and punishes according to one's merit. Moreover, it is, on his view, rationally justifiable to believe in the persistence of the soul after death that can be judged accordingly.

On Hegel's view, this novel way of combining rational and religious elements leads to the existential disorder of the self. Peaceful self-satisfaction (obtained through the recognition that the moral law is not metaphysically discovered but actively produced through the will) gives way to the recognition of one's imperfection. Hegel writes, "Just as, in regard to its knowledge, it knows itself then as a consciousness whose knowledge and conviction are imperfect and contingent; similarly, in regard to its willing, it knows itself as a consciousness whose purposes are affected with sensuousness."[97]

In other words, the moral consciousness takes itself and its own will as the supreme standard, and yet sees itself as fallen and flawed. Kantian moral psychology looks beyond the self-certain moral subject to the practical postulates that transcend the moral subject and complete its moral understanding. Hegel writes, "This self-consciousness which, *qua* self-consciousness, is *other* than the

[96] See especially Kant's criticisms of the Stoics in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:127-5:129).
[97] PS §608

object, is thus left with the lack of harmony between the consciousness of duty and reality, and *that, too, its own reality*."[98]

The key question, then, is how to reconcile these rationalist and religious elements, such that morality is neither a standard merely immanent to reason (which raises the problem of moral psychology) nor utterly transcendent (which would undercut Kant's own idealism). Kant is incapable of genuinely resolving these elements because he preserves the most questionable characteristics of each. In other words, the search for foundations (and the accompanying sense of self-certainty) is a form of dogmatism, and the desire for some metaphysical guarantee for one's moral psychology raises the specter of skepticism. Aside from the accompanying sense of uncertainty that one is acting morally, he stipulates that an omniscient and benevolent God is required for achieving the kind of happiness that is forever elusive in this life.

Kant's approach is thus an unhappy hybrid of dogmatic and skeptical elements. It represents a truce brokered between these two fundamental metaphysical positions, a "syncretism of these contradictions"[99] rather than a genuine resolution. Setting the bar for virtue and happiness this high results in the "insincere shuffling"[100] between an immanent and transcendent standard for moral conduct. Kantian morality, on one hand, refuses to recognize the authority of any standard not critically scrutinized; on the other hand, it makes the actual practice of morality (i.e. moral psychology) dependent upon practical postulates that are theoretically unknowable and merely rationally asserted.

---

[98] PS §613, emphasis added.
[99] PS §631
[100] PS §617

This shuffling between standards is a more sophisticated version of the position of the ancient skeptics. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel attacks the skeptical argumentative strategy of equipollence, accusing it of entailing a whole series of performative contradictions: "[The skeptical consciousness] affirms the nullity of seeing, hearing, etc., yet it is itself seeing, hearing, etc. It affirms the nullity of ethical principles, and lets its conduct be governed by these very principles . . . Its talk is in fact like the squabbling of self-willed children."[101] This form of willful argumentativeness results from "*absolute dialectical unrest*, this medley of sensuous and intellectual representations."[102] The kind of hypocrisy that results from acting on a principle implicitly recognized as rational, and then explicitly asserting its 'nullity,' is echoed in Hegel's criticism of the hypocritical moral consciousness.

Kant explicitly appropriates this method of equipollence in his version of dialectic (i.e. outlining an antinomy or a conflict within reason itself). Rather than a 'medley' of the sensuous and intellectual, Kant draws a sharp distinction between the two. Yet the same sort of performative contradiction results on Hegel's view. Practically speaking, consciousness makes no such sharp distinction between reason and sensuousness, and it is insincere to deny theoretically what one cannot deny practically. This distinction is made for the sake of securing more stable foundations for moral philosophy, but this self-certainty is purchased at the cost of skeptically undermining ordinary moral action. Recall the lesson that 'no man in a hero to his valet.' Hegel refuses to

[101] PS §205. For a more detailed discussion of equipollence, see Michael Forster's *Hegel and Skepticism*, especially pp. 36-43.
[102] Ibid.

countenance the kind of skeptical position that concerns Kant (i.e. the desire to know whether an action is really moral).

An example of this insincere shuffling between immanent and transcendent standards for moral conduct can be found in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. This text is often taken to be the strongest refutation to the formalism charge because there Kant outlines his moral casuistry. The problem, though, is that the *Metaphysics of Morals* is susceptible to the different and more damning existential (rather than logical) charge. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* 6:441-6:447, Kant outlines moral duties to oneself. Consistent with the theme of 'self-knowledge' that motivated the beginning of the critical project,[103] Kant eloquently states that "Moral cognition of oneself, which seeks to penetrate into the depths (the abyss) of one's heart which are quite difficult to fathom, is the beginning of all human wisdom."[104]

The project of self-knowledge is conceived as the "first command of all duties to oneself,"[105] and yet this command is arguably undermined several paragraphs later when Kant writes: "The depths of the human heart are unfathomable. Who knows himself well enough to say, when he feels the incentive to fulfill his duty, whether it proceeds entirely from the representation of the law or whether there are not many other sensible impulses contributing to it that look to one's advantage (or to avoiding what is detrimental) and that, in other circumstances, could just as well serve vice?"[106]

---

[103] See especially CPuR Axi
[104] MM 6:441
[105] Ibid.
[106] MM 6:447

What might be deemed the ‘problem of moral certainty’ in Kant is not logically antinomous: there is no direct contradiction in arguing that reason can tell us what it would take for an action to be moral, even though we can never be similarly certain that we have performed a moral action. It does, however, involve a kind of practical antinomy: it is the insincere shuffling between a dogmatic and skeptical position. Further, there may not be any logical conflict between the moral command to ‘penetrate into the depths (the abyss) of one’s heart’ and the subsequent claim that ‘the depths of the human heart are unfathomable.’ Just as the ‘problem of moral certainty’ involves being certain about the universal validity of an action but skeptical about particular actions, so too does Kant’s version of self-knowledge involve ‘knowing oneself’ in one’s universal moral capacity rather than as particular individual.

This merely reiterates the existential, rather than logical, problem with Kantian moral philosophy. Claiming that Kant’s conception of the self or the moral subject is abstract constitutes an existential rather than epistemological argument against his philosophical method. It leaves untouched the scholarly debates over the nature of Kantian dualism (e.g. as metaphysical or as two-aspects of one reality). Instead, it recognizes the deeper problem as being the dogmatism of the Understanding which establishes the dualism in the first place.

Hegel’s argument in the *Reason* section on morality admittedly looks more epistemological than existential: as we have seen, he criticizes the rational moral view as being tautologous and therefore not logically capable of providing the foundations for moral life. However, as we have also seen, he moves on to a

more philosophically rich criticism of the moral worldview in *Spirit*.

Here the strategy is to reveal the existential dissatisfaction associated with an abstract conception of the self. "The antinomy of the moral view of the world, viz. that there is a moral consciousness, and that there is none, or that the validation of duty lies beyond consciousness, and conversely, takes place *in* it. . . . *moral self-consciousness did not accept responsibility for this self-contradictory idea*, but shifted it on to a being other than itself."[107] The dualism of dogmatism and skepticism is perpetuated, rather than overcome, by a moral consciousness which has not yet taken responsibility for making morality actual. This would involve giving up moral purity, on one hand, and making moral psychology immanent rather than transcendent, on the other hand.

Arguing that the essence of Hegel's critique of Kant is existential, not epistemological, illuminates a deficiency of Kant's account that is seldom appreciated. The observation that Kant's critical method committed him to an abstract account of the self and the dogmatism of the understanding amounts to a moral rejection of his views. In other words, the interminable debate over the success or failure of Kant's casuistry would be rendered moot. Even if this project succeeded, it would still entail a deficient account of the self; on Kant's own account, this would be a damning critique.

Allen Wood eloquently alludes to this existential issue. However, he then proceeds in the very next section to outline the standard formalism charge. Wood writes: "When we displace morality to a beyond, locating it on the struggle of motives in an intelligible world, we alienate our practical reason from our self-

[107] PS §632

satisfaction. When we locate our moral worth in a noumenal self that is hidden from us, we devalue the only self-worth we can actually possess. Our noblest actions and highest accomplishments become for us nothing but so much worldly splendor, the dazzling costume that cloaks a bad will. In the long run, the lie serves the ends only of envy and hypocrisy."[108]

An adequate understanding and criticism of Kant's moral philosophy must move beyond the one-sided criticisms offered by philosophers like Murdoch and Schopenhauer. Attempting to transcend foundationally the distinction between dogmatism and skepticism (via critical philosophy) results in abstract understanding of the moral self (*Person*) that is, on Hegel's view, ultimately existentially unsatisfying. Focusing on the standard debate over Kant's formalism has for too long obscured both Hegel's deeper critique of Kantian moral philosophy and, as we shall see, his own alternative.

[108] Wood, 153

CHAPTER 2

HEGEL AS MORAL PHILOSOPHER

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way:
> anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical,
> when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them.
> (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)
> He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.
>
> -Ludwig Wittgenstein
> *Tractatus* 6.54

KANT, HEGEL, AND ANCIENT SKEPTICISM

The notion that the more compelling criticism of Kant turns on whether critical philosophy is existentially satisfying will strike some as strange. It certainly lacks the conclusiveness of the formalism charge, which posits some logical problem with Kantian philosophy. Also, it merely points out what Kant would have already known: if critical philosophy does not fully satisfy the lust of reason, then perhaps this merely shows how existential satisfaction is not a suitable goal for philosophy.

In this chapter, I will further develop Hegel's alternative understanding of how to deal with the endless oscillation of dogmatism and skepticism. Then I hope to show how this account of dialectic goes hand in hand with a form of philosophical satisfaction foreign to Kantian philosophy: being 'at home in the world' and being reconciled with it. Finally, I will outline how the connection between dialectic and satisfaction has implications for what it means to study

moral philosophy, and the ways in which philosophy is a practical activity. Hegel's charge that the moral worldview results in an 'entire nest of contradictions' reveals the deficiency in Kant's account of the moral agent. Defending this claim means examining Kant and Hegel's competing strategies for reconciling the contradictions of dogmatism and skepticism.

Through the use of the ancient skeptical method of equipollence, Kant attempts to save reason from antinomous conclusions and to permit it to rest conclusively. Critical philosophy carefully circumscribes the limits of a theoretical use of reason, showing how both dogmatism and skepticism ultimately fail to justify their respective claims to knowledge. At the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, true philosophical progress purports to have been made, and Kant invites his readers to advance further his efforts to avoid relapsing into the 'logic of contradiction.'

Kant writes, "The critical path alone is still open. If the reader had had the pleasure and patience in traveling along in my company, then he can now judge, if it pleases him to contribute his part to making this footpath into a highway, whether or not that which many centuries could not accomplish might now be attained even before the end of the present one: namely, to bring human reason to full satisfaction in that which has always, but until now vainly, occupied its lust for knowledge."[1]

This passage reveals the connection between one's philosophical method and the satisfaction that one achieves or fails to achieve. Dogmatic and skeptical philosophies fail to satisfy the demands of reason, and critical philosophy alone

[1] CPuR, A851/B879

seems to satisfy reason's demands by allowing us to discriminate between its legitimate and illegitimate claims. A glaring weakness in any dogmatic philosophical system is that it remains open to skeptical attack, thereby rendering it vulnerable to having its core assumptions undermined. For instance, a primary target of Pyrrhonian skepticism was the Stoic presupposition that their first principles adequately expressed the Logos.

The skeptical tropes attempt to undercut the necessity of such first principles, and the defeat of these core assumptions results in the dogmatist's dissatisfaction, provided this philosopher is honest and perceptive enough to concede when this has occurred. Conversely, on Kant's view, the skeptic's self-satisfied defeat of dogmatic principles is a short-lived victory. Reason demands satisfaction and cannot rest content with the skeptical undermining of dogmatic presuppositions.

The connection between philosophical method and philosophical satisfaction is ancient. Pyrrhonian skepticism results in the attainment of *ataraxia*, or tranquility of the mind, precisely because it limits the metaphysical pretensions of systematic philosophies like Stoicism. Unlike these systems, it does not presuppose a substantive end to philosophical reflection; rather, the attainment of *ataraxia* is regarded as a happy accident. Sextus Empiricus includes a short parable to make his point.[2] He writes of a painter who wished to capture the effect of foam on a horse's mouth: "he was so unsuccessful that he gave up, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours from his brush, and flung it

[2] I will discuss interchangeably ancient skepticism and Sextus' view in *Outlines of Scepticism* (often entitled *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*). The difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism, while interesting, is not taken up here.

at the picture. And when it hit the picture, it produced a representation of the horse's lather."[3] Similarly, the philosopher achieves tranquility "fortuitously, as a shadow follows a body"[4] when he ceases to seek it and instead suspends his judgment.

This sort of satisfaction is no less objective than that sought by the Stoics and the Epicureans. However, it purports to be more fulfilling because it does not depend upon a set of dogmatic presuppositions. It is neither presupposed as a substantive end, nor does it invalidate the skeptical method once it is attained. Sextus' form of skepticism is self-subverting: Skeptical phrases are "purgative drugs [that] do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours."[5] Likewise, Michael Forster stresses the fact that Hegel's skepticism is 'self-completing.' He writes, "One interesting twist in Hegel's epistemological enterprise is that his attempts to defend his own system against skeptical assault and in general to make it epistemologically secure involves essential and extensive use of a procedure which he characterizes as itself skeptical. It is in this sense, for example, that he refers to the procedure of the *Phenomenology* as one of 'self-completing skepticism.'"[6]

Just as Kant attempted to satisfy the lust of reason by critically circumscribing its appropriate domain, so too does the Pyrrhonian skeptic believe that he has given the only valid account of *ataraxia*. If their respective accounts of philosophical satisfaction seem inadequate from the standpoint of speculative

---

[3] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge University Press, 2000): I 28.
[4] Ibid.
[5] *Outlines* I 206
[6] Michael Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* (Harvard University Press, 1989): p. 3.

philosophy, then so much the worse for their metaphysically-minded critics. It is only after recognizing the strict limits of philosophical speculation that satisfaction can for the first time be truly attained. Sextus and Kant seek to overcome the problem of the criterion by avoiding any dogmatic claims regarding ultimate reality.

Sextus counsels us to affirm the appearances without positing any corresponding metaphysical reality. Kant strictly separates constitutive and regulative uses of reason, such that any claim that transcends the limits of theoretical reason is made merely regulatively. Withholding assent when confronted with questions of ultimate metaphysical reality is the best recipe for avoiding the illicit positing of some criterion for knowledge.

Even though, as we have seen, Hegel recognizes dogmatic elements in both ancient skepticism (e.g. its tendency to devolve into childish argumentativeness) and Kantian philosophy (e.g. its one-sided, merely critical, merely subjective character), he also praises elements of ancient skepticism and commends Kant's appropriation of its method. Michael Forster points out that Hegel criticizes modern skepticism as being "founded on a cluster of *specific problems*."[7] This makes modern skepticism essentially conservative rather than radical, because in its various forms it presupposes a starting point (e.g. facts of consciousness or sense impressions) for its inquiry. Merely methodological doubt precedes a return to ordinary experience (a return which was perhaps anticipated all along).

[7] Forster, 11

In contrast to this kind of skepticism, George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris argue that early interpreters of Kant failed to appreciate the genuinely skeptical elements of his critical philosophy. They write that "Hegel was the first to take seriously the skeptical aspect of the *Critique*, which was after all its most revolutionary one. He understood that reason is antinomic by nature. It *has* to enter into conflict with itself, since it is capable of reflecting upon its concepts, and hence is constantly creating a distance between itself and itself."[8]

This genuine conflict arises when one posits or presupposes a rational standard independent of oneself and claims to have an account of this standard. Sextus provides us with an early version of this 'problem of the criterion' that, as we have seen, Hegel takes up in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. Discussing the 'reciprocal mode,' Sextus writes, "For a proof always requires a standard in order to be confirmed, and a standard always requires a proof in order to be shown to be true. A proof cannot be sound if there is no standard there already, nor can a standard be true if a proof has not already been made convincing."[9] The *Phenomenology* is the working out of this genuine conflict between the in-itself (the independent standard posited or presupposed) and the for-itself (the account of this standard arrived at through reflection).

For Hegel, this is a highway of despair, since no in-itself turns out to be genuinely independent of what one takes it to be, and since no account of the in-itself straightforwardly grasps its object. Far from being a merely pessimistic view, Hegel claims that the despairing philosopher is also the authentic skeptic.

---

[8] George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris, eds. *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (State University of New York Press, 1985): Preface, viii.
[9] *Outlines* I 114

He writes, "Scepticism should not be regarded merely as a doctrine of doubt; rather, it is completely certain about its central point, i.e., the nullity of everything finite. The person who simply doubts still has the hope that his doubt can be resolved, and that one or other of the determinate [views] between which he wavers back and forth will turn out to be a firm and genuine one. Scepticism proper, on the contrary, is complete despair about everything that the understanding holds to be firm, and *the disposition that results is imperturbability and inward repose*."[10]

Here again we see the connection between one's philosophical method and the satisfaction that is attained through its careful application. True skepticism sees the 'nullity of everything finite,' and yet the result of this 'complete despair' is a kind of imperturbability. Recall that the outcome (however accidental and fortuitous) of Sextus' use of skeptical tropes was *ataraxia* and not merely the denial that knowledge of essences was possible. Yet, in spite of his praise of ancient skepticism and Kantian critical philosophy, Hegel insists that these styles of skepticism adopt an external and ultimately superficial understanding of what they purport to understand.

The problem is that neither Pyrrhonian skepticism nor Kantian critical philosophy results in a deeper understanding of the phenomena it investigates. Nor does either position involve a greater degree of self-understanding. Remarkably, Hegel levels similar criticisms against both of these philosophical

[10] EL §81 (addition), emphasis added.

methods.[11] Though the ancient skeptic correctly recognizes the 'nullity of everything finite,' his tropes prevent him from marking meaningful distinctions between essential and accidental features of the phenomenon. He affirms contrary and equally compelling descriptions of what he investigates, content to withhold judgment and achieve, however accidentally, *ataraxia*. Hegel writes, "To be sure, the authentic skepticism does not have a positive side, as philosophy does, but maintains a pure negativity in relation to knowledge. . . ."[12]

Even if the ancient skeptic has not gained a deeper understanding of phenomena, perhaps he has achieved greater self-understanding by confronting the limits of what he can claim to know. But this achievement is illusory, since he has merely employed tropes that are available to any inquirer, applicable to any sort of inquiry. Insofar as he better understands himself, his newfound understanding is only abstract. He understands himself only with respect to the skeptical capacities of any rational inquirer, rather than developing a deeper understanding of himself as a particular and concrete individual. The 'pure negativity' of the skeptic's understanding of phenomena amounts to a merely subjective form of self-understanding.[13]

---

[11] Hegel's similar treatment of these methods is evident in a passage that deserves to be quoted at length: "The Critical Philosophy deserves great credit, negatively speaking, for establishing the conviction that the determinations of the understanding are finite, and that the cognition that moves within them falls short of the truth. But the one-sidedness of this philosophy consists all the same in the fact that the finitude of those determinations of the understanding is identified with their belonging merely to our subjective thinking, while the in-itself is supposed to remain an absolute beyond. *In fact, however, the finitude of the determinations of the understanding does not lie in their subjectivity; on the contrary, they are finite in themselves, and their finitude should be exhibited in these determinations themselves*." EL §60 (add. 1), emphasis added.

[12] RSP §30

[13] Ibid. See also RSP §43.

Recall Hegel's derisive criticism of those who believe that anyone can philosophize in the same way, ". . . since he possesses the criterion for doing so in his natural reason – as if he did not likewise possess the measure for a shoe in his own foot."[14] Echoing his criticism of the 'pure negativity' of ancient skepticism, Hegel writes that "Kant stopped at the merely negative result (that how things are in-themselves is unknowable), and did not penetrate to the cognition of the true and positive significance of the antinomies. This true and positive significance (expressed generally) is that everything actual contains opposed determinations within it, and in consequence the cognition and, more exactly, *the comprehension of an ob-ject amounts precisely to our becoming conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations*."[15]

Here Hegel sets the stage for his account of determinate negation (i.e. his own understanding of how reason's antinomies play out in experience). He also implicitly associates critical philosophy with ancient skepticism, both of which adopt a merely external or negative understanding of the antinomies, and both of which involve a merely subjective form of self understanding. Recall that the moral worldview is 'self-certain,' since it presupposes that it can understand absolutely what it would take for an action to be moral. Of course, this perspective also denies that it ever achieve the kind of self-knowledge necessary to know whether any particular action has been performed out of respect for the moral law. Nonetheless, the self-certainty of the moral worldview is, at the same time, a merely subjective form of self-understanding. It is the philosophy of the

[14] PS §67
[15] EL §93, emphasis added.

abstract *Person*, rather than the view of a concrete individual who has achieved (or failed to achieve) a deeper understanding of himself and his world.

Sextus employs the tropes to undermine any dogmatic claim (suspending judgment and achieving *ataraxia* fortuitously), and Kant suspends judgment with respect to theoretical reason's attempt to make sense of its antinomies. The main difference between these philosophical styles is that Kant self-consciously strived to bring reason to rest, whereas the ancient skeptic was compelled to continue his investigation into new phenomena even after establishing equipollence in a particular case. In a sense, then, reason was never brought to rest; the skeptic's *ataraxia* depended upon his continued confirmation of the limits of reason.

Just as ancient skepticism fails to lead to a deeper understanding of phenomena or of oneself, Kantian philosophy fails on the same terms. At issue is whether the genuine conflicts of reason can be understood in absolute terms or, on the contrary, whether they are part of a greater and more complex scheme. If the first account is more compelling, then the task of the philosopher will be to draw strict and careful distinctions that reflect the limits of reason. This would be a form of foundational philosophy; it assumes that genuine philosophical progress would be made if one could properly draw these limits. If the second view is more plausible, then the philosopher is charged with showing how the distinctions one draws make sense only with respect to the greater whole in which they are given context. This approach rejects any foundational attempt to draw such distinctions absolutely. The only 'absolute' would be the complete articulation of these distinctions; in Hegelian terms, the true is the whole.

What purports to stress the limits of reason perhaps has the unintended effect of saying something absolute about reason's antinomous nature. This approach common to Pyrrhonian skepticism and critical philosophy can best be described as a 'good fences make good neighbors' method. For Kant, it represents a way of overcoming the equally false positions of dogmatism and skepticism. But one can wonder whether good fences really do make good neighbors, whether reason really can be brought to rest by drawing foundational and absolute distinctions, and whether the merely abstract form of self-understanding that results from employing this method is sufficient reason to reject it.

As we have already seen, on Hegel's view, to know something absolutely is to know it abstractly. Identifying one essential characteristic of a complex action, on one hand, and regarding every characteristic as equally inessential, on the other hand, are equally absolute and abstract ways of making judgments. Seeing the murderer as nothing but a murderer and excusing his actions by explaining them away are two sides of the same mistake. The philosophical challenge is to make these merely abstract understandings of oneself and one's world more concrete; this means giving up the desire for some absolute way of drawing distinctions. It also means surrendering certain abstract kinds of satisfaction: namely, the imperturbability acquired through the ancient skeptic's 'purely negative' relation to philosophy, and the self-certainty presupposed by the moral worldview.

In the case of Kantian philosophy, carefully defining the limits of reason not only saves us from dogmatic presuppositions, but it also preserves a noumenal

realm that can safeguard our moral psychology and the possibility of happiness. Recall that on Kant's own view the practical postulates are required to escape a vicious circularity: Kant must show how morality is not merely rationally grounded a priori, but that it is also possible for a moral individual to subordinate his or her happiness to this moral principle. Acting out of heteronomous motivation would undermine moral autonomy, but practically postulating the highest good of the unity of virtue and happiness complements, rather than cancels, the rational grounds for morality.

In this way, Kant is able to maintain the same substantive ends posited by pre-critical moral philosophers: self-knowledge and eudaimonia. However, he transforms our fundamental orientation toward these ends. Neither is to be achieved by devising of set of metaphysical principles that correspond to the way things are in themselves. For instance, unlike Stoicism and Spinozism, self-knowledge is not achieved by building a metaphysical system in which the self stands as part to the whole. Eudaimonia is not presupposed as the necessary outcome of acting in accordance with moral principles.

As Kant puts it, this was the shared mistake of the Stoics and Epicureans. After commending the Stoics for their defense of virtue as the 'supreme practical principle,' Kant criticizes their presupposition that virtue is fully attainable in this life. He writes, "[the Stoics] really left out the second element of the highest good, namely one's own happiness, placing it solely in acting and in contentment with one's personal worth and so including it in consciousness of one's moral cast of

mind – though in this they could have been sufficiently refuted by the voice of their own nature."[16]

Confusing contentment and happiness, the Stoics presupposed that the two elements of the *summum bonum* go hand in hand. Like the Epicureans, they searched out "identity between extremely heterogenous concepts, that of happiness and that of virtue."[17] Being content with one's personal worth, however, does not constitute happiness in its fullest sense. Kant defines this concept in terms that are sometimes too ambiguous and sometimes too strict to be fully achieved in this life. In the *Groundwork*, he stresses that ". . . men cannot form any definite and certain concept of the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations that is called happiness."[18] Later in the corpus, however, he outlines a strict and even severe definition of happiness: "*Happiness* is the state of a rational being in the world in the whole of whose existence *everything goes according to his wish and will*, and rests, therefore, on the harmony of nature with his whole end as well as with the essential determining ground of his will."[19]

Being content with one's decision to abide by the moral law seems an insufficient ground and guarantee of an individual's ability to do this consistently. The Stoics offer us a picture of human nature that strains credulity, especially when it is supplemented with the idea of a sage who acts only out of virtue. While one should not dogmatically presuppose that one achieves happiness merely by acting virtuously, or that human beings are in fact capable of the rigorous moral

[16] CPrR 5:127
[17] MM 5.111
[18] G 399
[19] CPrR 5:124

standard outlined by the Stoics, the unity of virtue and happiness is in fact a crucial feature of Kantian moral philosophy. While it is no less desirable end than it was for the Stoics, Kant treats the *summum bonum* as a regulative ideal. Happiness is to be regarded as "solely as object of hope."[20]

Despite the Stoics' lofty expectations for flawed moral agents, it sometimes seems that, in Kant's view, they fail to set the bar high enough. For instance, the Stoic account of rational suicide leaves out the individual's capacity to master even the 'strongest sensible incentives.' Kant writes, "But there should have been in this very courage, this strength of soul not to fear death and to know of something that the human being can value even more highly than his life, a still stronger motive for him not to destroy himself, a being with such powerful authority over the strongest sensible incentives, and so not to deprive himself of life."[21] Kant's argument against rational suicide relies upon merely immanent premises; that is, the same moral agent incapable of guaranteeing his own happiness by acting virtuously needs to recognize nothing beyond his own moral worth to see that suicide is wrong. It is unclear what this motive of self-mastery amounts to: it seems stronger than 'mere contentment,' but it cannot be happiness as such.

After refuting Stoicism's uncritical and lofty assumptions regarding human nature, Kant supplies his own idea of 'holiness' as a means of preserving the same moral end while transforming our understanding of how it is achieved. He endorses ". . . an ideal of holiness [that] is not attainable by any creature but is

[20] CprR 5:129
[21] MM 6:422

yet the archetype which we should strive to approach and resemble in an uninterrupted but endless progress."[22] The Stoics' morally rigid standards were not incorrect; they just failed to take into account certain crucial limitations in human nature. Preserving these same standards as regulative ideals confronts human limitations while refusing to sacrifice moral rigor.

The turn toward a regulative use of reason allows Kant to maintain concepts that were important in ancient ethics while avoiding any dogmatic claims about how such ends are to be achieved. Self-knowledge and eudaimonia play crucial roles in his moral philosophy. Recall that 'knowing oneself' is the 'first command of all duties to oneself,' and yet we are constitutively incapable of knowing our own hearts and understanding in any definite way our real motivations. In other words, although we can perhaps make progress with regards to acting in accordance with the moral law, it seems we can never know for sure whether we have truly acted out of respect for it. Only God can know our heart, just as only God can guarantee that virtue and happiness are unified in the highest good.

The same substantive ethical principles of self-knowledge and eudaimonia are preserved in Kantian philosophy but transformed into regulative goals. Instead of presupposing that acting virtuously leads to happiness, we ought to strive to be worthy of happiness. Instead of assuming that metaphysics leads to self-knowledge, we ought to strive to avoid the kind of self-deception that inevitably befalls us. Kant writes that "It is a human being's duty to *strive* for this perfection, but not to *reach* it (in this life), and his compliance with this duty can,

[22] CPrR 5:83

accordingly, consist only in continual progress."[23] But the following question arises: can we understand what it would mean to progress toward a standard of perfection that we cannot achieve?

The ideas of pure duty and moral progress might be incompatible goals, insofar as progress seems to require moral gradations rather than a single moral standard (acting out of respect for the moral law). Further, it perhaps implies some determinate way of discriminating between actions that advance our moral progress and those that do not. It is not clear that Kant supplies us with either of these preconditions for understanding what it means to make moral progress, since pure duty does not seem to allow for differences in degree, and since the moral will remains fundamentally inscrutable even when apparent progress has been made.

Hegel stresses the tension between moral progress and moral perfection when he writes: "In morality, as in consciousness, for which the moral purpose is *pure* duty, there cannot be any thought at all of difference, least of all the superficial one of quantity; there is only one virtue, only one pure duty, only one morality."[24] Moral and immoral actions are different in kind and not degree. Even if this were not the case, though, the second condition for progress would still have to be satisfied. There would have to be some way of determining whether our endless striving really constituted progress, and whether it truly made us more worthy of happiness. On Hegel's view, Kant again fails to make moral progress intelligible: "That consciousness is not in earnest about the perfection of morality

[23] MM 567
[24] PS §623

is indicated by the fact that consciousness itself shifts it away into infinity, i.e. asserts that the perfection is never perfected."[25]

Conceiving of the same substantive ends posited by the ancients (e.g. self-knowledge and eudaimonia) as regulative ideals renders critical philosophy an unhappy hybrid of optimistic and pessimistic elements. As we have already seen, Hegel deems the moral worldview to be 'an entire nest of contradictions,' since it both affirms and denies a rational foundation for moral life. Now we are in a position to call into question the existential satisfaction, or lack thereof, generated by this position.

In one sense, the moral worldview involves a Sisyphian struggle without end. Stipulating that perfection is never perfected calls into question the way in which moral perfection and moral progress make sense together. Since our true motivations are forever concealed in an unknown and unknowable heart, we cannot be sure that we are in fact progressing. Just as the rock forever rolled down the hill for Sisyphus, the moral worldview lacks determinate standards for making moral progress. It involves a classic case of a 'bad infinity,' in which the standard we seek to attain is shifted 'away into infinity.'

Yet this particular case of a bad infinity has the positive consequence of a rationally grounded faith in God. We are rationally entitled to believe in an all-powerful God who rewards our virtuous behavior and in the persistence of the soul after death (which accounts for the possibility of endless progress). In this sense, the moral worldview is not merely a Sisyphian struggle. As Theodor Adorno has pointed out, Kantian philosophy can be characterized as 'the

[25] PS §622

unthinkability of despair.' Considered from one perspective, it is pessimistic and even tragic; considered from another, it expresses optimism that eudaimonia is achievable (though not merely through virtuous action).

RECONCILIATION AND CONSOLATION

As an especially fierce critic of regulative ideals, Hegel seems to consider them to be philosophical shortcuts that leave reason fundamentally unsatisfied. In the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, he even employs some Biblical rhetoric to castigate this superficial philosophical method:

> The saying has become famous that 'a half-philosophy leads away from God' – and it is the same half-philosophy that locates knowledge in an 'approximation' to truth – 'while true philosophy leads to God'; and the same is true of philosophy and the state. Just as reason is not content with an approximation which, as something 'neither cold nor hot', it will 'spue out of its mouth,' so it is just as little content with the cold despair which submits to the view that in this earthly life things are truly bad or at best only tolerable, though here they cannot be improved and that this is the only reflection which can keep us at peace with the world: There is less chill in the peace with the world which knowledge supplies.[26]

This passage refers to the Book of Revelations: "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth."[27] Deeming the regulative ideal an 'approximation to truth,' Hegel implies that the philosopher who endorses this view is at best a lukewarm critic: wanting to settle the interminable philosophical debate between faith and reason by giving each its

[26] PR, Preface
[27] Book of Revelations, Ch. 3 (15-16).

due (i.e. by building the fence that makes for good neighbors), it ends up endorsing a moral standard so amorphous as to avoid both truth and error. This objection coincides with the main criticism from Chapter 1: the moral worldview is an unhappy hybrid of rationalist and fideist elements, a 'syncretism' rather than a genuine reconciliation of these views.

The philosopher becomes a lukewarm critic through his insufficient attempt to come to some definitive resolution of this dispute. The optimism associated with being morally autonomous quickly devolves into the pessimistic view which stipulates that that the *summum bonum* cannot be guaranteed by acting autonomously. Happiness is deemed either too amorphous or so definite that it requires that one's entire life proceed 'according to his wish and will.' Hegel seems to fear that this kind of all-or-nothing moral rigor actually makes a soul cold and timid.

Perhaps the moral hero, the man of moral action, becomes a moralist who is content to point out the shortcomings of great men. Confusing the risk of self-deception with the utter inscrutability of one's actual motives, the moralist can always point out the 'heteronomous' influences that undermine the purity of the moral will. Or perhaps the faith in a future reward fails to supplant the desire for happiness in this life. Hegel writes, "The moral consciousness cannot forego happiness and leave this element out of its absolute purpose. . . . This element is the objectified purpose, in the fulfilled duty, is the individual consciousness that beholds itself as realized."[28]

[28] PS §602

The moralist could become timid if he believed that to act without sufficiently understanding his options was too risky. He would have too much to lose, since he is charged with striving for a perfect but unattainable standard. At stake is whether or not he is worthy of happiness. On the contrary, he might believe that he did not have enough to gain, preferring to make the safe choice when confronted with several options. The tragic recognition that happiness is either too amorphous or too elusive means that the moralist perpetually striving for perfection 'knows neither victory nor defeat.'[29]

He is like one of those unfortunate souls, not fit to be damned, in the vestibule of Dante's inferno. These souls must forever run in circles, chasing a whirling banner: "And he said to me: 'This miserable state is borne / by the wretched souls of those who lived / without disgrace yet without praise. / They intermingle with that wicked band / of angels, not rebellious and not faithful / to God, who held themselves apart. / Loath to impair its beauty, Heaven casts them out, / and depth of Hell does not receive them / lest on their account the evil angels gloat."[30]

The bad infinity of a regulative ideal without any internal standards for measuring moral progress coincides, in the moral worldview, with the endless oscillation between competing moral standards. Purporting to be a genuine reconciliation of these views, it instead promotes a cold and timid standard of truth that results in cold and timid souls. Judith Shklar observes that "Hegel began his assault upon moralism with Schiller's old complaint about Kant. The divorce

[29] See the T. Roosevelt's "The Man in the Arena," speech at the Sorbonne (Paris, April 23,1910).
[30] Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (Doubleday Press, 2000): III, 34-69.

of moral reason from happiness would reduce us all to a monkish and miserable condition. Mankind simply cannot renounce happiness and, added Hegel, the remote hope of some eventual harmony between duty and happiness is at best a mere 'postulate.'"[31]

Roger Scruton optimistically suggests that critical philosophy involves comprehending the incomprehensibility of what we must nonetheless affirm practically.'[32] There is some consolation in understanding what we cannot understand, and whatever existential satisfaction is to be attained through philosophy must take this into account. On this view, philosophy provides consolation while stressing the limits of our understanding.

Michael Hardimon draws the distinction between consolation and reconciliation as follows: "Consolation involves essentially coming to terms with the failure of satisfaction of expectations that one *still* regards as reasonable (i.e., even after one has found consolation). Attaining reconciliation, on the other hand, turns on freeing oneself of expectations that one has justifiably come to regard as unreasonable."[33]

One might say that Sextus and Kant are consoling philosophers, insofar as they demonstrate how satisfaction can be attained even though we cannot adequately understand they way things are in themselves. For Sextus, we

---

[31] Judith Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's* Phenomenology of Mind (Cambridge University Press, 1976). pp. 183-4.
[32] Roger Scruton, "Kant," in *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche* (Oxford University Press, 1982). Scruton writes: "Kant is able to derive, with compelling logic, an entire system of common-sense morality from the premise of transcendental freedom. Since the paradox of freedom remains unsolved at the end of this derivation, Kant may not be wholly wrong in his suggestion that we shall never be able to comprehend it" (p. 74).
[33] Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge University Press, 1994): p. 89.

fortuitously attain *ataraxia* by suspending judgment and affirming appearances. Likewise for Kant, we can view ourselves as autonomous moral agents and be assured that our happiness is in the hands of a rationally acceptable God. Yet Sextus never truly transcends the possibility that he can know the essences of things: he must meet each new dogmatic judgment with a new set of equipollent arguments. Kantian philosophy is tragic in the sense that it endorses a regulative ideal that we are constitutively incapable of reaching. Consolation, then, is a type of satisfaction attained only through recognizing the limits of our understanding.

Reconciliation, as Hardimon writes, involves freeing oneself of unreasonable expectations, rather than continuing to countenance the possibility of something that transcends human experience but cannot be known. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris claim that Hegel committed philosophy ". . . to the circle of conceptualization, whereas all previous philosophy had tried to transcend it. . . . Kant had of course implicitly defined a programme of this sort. Criticism was for him a way of living at the very limit of thought, by recognizing that limit and ensuring that it is never transcended. But Kant still hankered after a supposed intellectual intuition that would have removed the limit – as if the labour of the concept could yield only the second best truth, or the only truth *for us*. The difference in Hegel is that for him that labour is *all* that there is. . . ."[34]

Philosophers of consolation are in truth no less certain or foundational than the dogmatic philosophers they criticize. As the skeptics stand to the Stoics, so does Kant stand to Spinoza: in each case, a systematic philosopher (i.e. a philosopher of the whole, or one who attempts to give a complete account of

[34] RSP, Preface, viii-ix

reality as such) is under attack by a philosopher who stresses the limits of our understanding. But the 'dogmatist' and the critic are equally sure that they have correctly gotten to the bottom of things. The critical philosopher attempting to circumscribe the limits of reason attempts to do so absolutely. In this sense, his conclusions are just as determinate and final as those of the speculative metaphysician.

Stoicism and Spinozism might be described as reconciling philosophies: they attempt to give an account of ultimate reality and, consequently, an account of how we are to understand our place in the whole of things. The self stands as part to this metaphysical whole. In both systems, the self is inextricably bound up with the causal chain that governs and determines events in the world. Free will is, then, an illusion. Yet freedom can be attained by philosophically understanding one's place in the scheme of things and coming to terms with it.

It might seem that to call Hegel a great philosopher of reconciliation is to compare his system unproblematically with Stoicism and Spinozism. After all, he is similarly concerned with understanding the whole as such, rather than drawing some absolute distinction between what can and cannot be known. This sort of comparison is arguably at the heart of any reading of Hegel as a pre-critical metaphysician. If Kant is the consoling philosopher who forces us to confront the limits of human reason, Hegel is the reconciling philosopher who builds a system that purports to overcome these limits.

Hegel sometimes invites this sort of reading. For instance, in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, he implicitly compares his own

philosophical method with Spinoza's, contrasting it with the Cartesian and Kantian dualism of will and intellect: "Thus they understand little of the nature of thinking and willing who suppose that while, in willing as such, man is infinite, in thinking, he, or even reason itself, is restricted. In so far as thinking and willing are still distinguished, the opposite is rather the truth, and will is thinking reason resolving itself to finitude."[35]

Further, one way of dissolving skeptical concerns is to show how reason puts us into contact with a primitive whole. Writing about the early German Idealists' desire for this kind of Spinozist understanding, Terry Pinkard writes, "The Sceptical worry about whether our 'representations' matched up with things-in-themselves could only be dissolved, not disproved, by showing that they were secondary 'reflections' on a necessary unity of thought and being, a conception of truth as a kind of 'primitive', that already had to be at work before such skepticism could ever put itself into play."[36]

One of the many problems with this reading of Hegel is that, although he claims that the true is the whole, the whole never seems to be known as such. Stoicism and Spinozism purport to transcend the appearances in order to grasp things as they really are. Coming to understand the Logos operative in the nature of things amounts to understanding the whole as it really is and seeing oneself as a part of it. Even at the culminating stage of Absolute Knowing, though, what is it that consciousness knows absolutely? Surely some insight has been attained, but it

---

[35] PR §13. See T.M. Knox's note 50, where he suggests that Hegel has Kant in mind here. For Spinoza's criticism of Descartes on this point, see E2, P49, S: *Ethics*, trans. G.H.R. Parkinson (Oxford University Press, 2000).

[36] Terry Pinkard, "Virtues, Morality, and *Sittlichkeit*: From Maxims to Practices," *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1999): p. 219.

seems remarkably unlike the metaphysical principles common to the Stoics and Spinoza.

One way of stating the difficulty is that it seems that Absolute Knowing ought to provide a new set of absolute foundations for philosophy, and yet these are never really made explicit. Further, although Hegel has speculatively shown how every distinction consciousness makes presupposes some dialectical connection between these opposites, this connection is left unstated. Rather than accusing Hegel of being opaque, perhaps we should consider the possibility that he appropriates some elements of pre-critical philosophy while rejecting others. Absolute Knowing is not some final metaphysical resting point, nor can it be understood without traveling the highway of despair and seeing the various stages as *aufgehoben* into one another. If the true is the whole, the whole is utterly abstract and inarticulate unless one recognizes the various twists and turns in the highway as contributing to its formation. In short, the Absolute *is* nothing apart from its various, more or less comprehensive, articulations.

Hegel represents a unique way of dealing with the necessary conflicts of reason. Pre-critical metaphysicians deny the reality of this conflict, claiming to transcend it in favor of an original unity. Sextus and Kant recognize the conflict for what it is, yet they affirm both sides of the antinomy as absolute. Through his understanding of determinate negation, Hegel shows how the conflicts of reason play out in experience. Unlike the previous two ways of dealing with antinomies, Hegel need not affirm anything absolutely about the reality or the unreality of these conflicts. Affirming anything absolutely means that one has understood it

merely abstractly. Hegel's goal, in contrast, is to understand concepts in their concrete manifestation.

What, then, is the meaning of Hegel's form of reconciliation if it is substantially different from other forms of reconciling philosophy? What epistemological and existential benefits does it have over a philosophy of consolation? First, recall that there is no real answer to Findlay's question regarding the success or failure of Hegel's idealism. Findlay wrote: "But has [Hegel] exorcised the doubt that there may be sides of the world which will remain obstinately and depressingly unintelligible, and which are without a significant teleological relation to our spiritual goals and endeavors, and which may in the end bring these all to nought?"[37] This sort of unintelligibility needs no refutation, since on Findlay's own view it could not be understood as impacting experience at all.

The deeper philosophical point is not that no refutation is necessary but that no refutation is possible. Yet Hegel's way of dissolving these skeptical concerns must be different from the pre-critical manner of dissolving them. Hegel understands that the relationship of skepticism and philosophy must be adequately addressed. He writes, "Without the determination of the true relationship of skepticism to philosophy, and without the insight that skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy, and hence that there is a philosophy which is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once,

[37] PS, foreward xxx, emphasis added.

without this, all the histories, and reports and new editions of skepticism lead to a dead end."[38]

Recognizing the close connection between skepticism and true philosophy immediately distinguishes Hegel from pre-critical speculative metaphysicians. Insofar as he is a systematic philosopher, his system will look remarkably different compared with these views. Further, the kind of reconciliation attained through philosophy will stand as unique. Initially, it looks like Hegel's desire for a philosophy that is 'neither skepticism nor dogmatism' resembles Kant's desire to transcend this endless oscillation through critical philosophy. Just as Kant invites us to turn the 'footpath' of critical philosophy into a highway (in order fully to satisfy reason), perhaps Hegel's own highway is the path to a fully reconciled view of oneself and one's world.

But whereas Kant's highway is one of progress ('the critical path alone is still open'), Hegel's highway is one of despair. Whatever progress is made in the *Phenomenology* must take into account the way in which consciousness perpetually makes the same mistake: it posits an *in-itself* that stands as an independent and objective standard of truth, and then is constantly disappointed when what it takes for true does not meet this standard.

The consequence of this disappointment is not only a reorientation of what one takes for true, but a reconsideration of the standard that was initially posited as true in-itself. As Steven Houlgate succinctly puts it: "Increasing self-consciousness does not, therefore, merely involve an advance in the theoretical understanding of a given form of consciousness which remains constant, but

[38] RSP §18

involves an advance in theoretical understanding which itself actively transforms consciousness. Increasing self-consciousness thus necessarily entails the production of new modes of consciousness."[39] The transformation of what one takes for true and the standard that one has posited as true requires making explicit the internal contradictions of each mode of consciousness.

In this sense, Hegel's method is thoroughly skeptical; he avoids having to build his philosophical system on a dogmatically presupposed set of first principles. Yet his skepticism satisfies the same pre-critical desire for reconciliation. Michael Hardimon writes of the complex nature of Hegelian reconciliation as follows: "In contrast to 'reconciliation,' *Versöhnung* strongly connotes a process of transformation. When two parties become genuinely *versöhnt*, they do not resume their old relationship unchanged. They become *versöhnt* by changing their behavior and attitudes in fundamental ways. Parties who have attained *Versöhnung* do not have to decide to get along together; their getting along together is, instead, the natural result of their being in a new, transformed state."[40]

In this way, Hegel's idealism attempts to surpass the absolutist and abstract understandings of the antinomies of reason in pre-critical metaphysics and Kantian critical philosophy. The philosophical view which is neither dogmatism nor skepticism, but 'both at once,' involves 'knowing the antithesis' of the two elements one is comparing and contrasting. Recognizing that these two

[39] Stephen Houlgate, "World History as the Progress of Consciousness: An Interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy of History," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Fall 1990): p. 71.
[40] Hardimon, 85

elements are different from one another, and yet that their meanings are interdependent, constitutes Hegel's form of idealism.

Hegel writes of one such conflict as follows: "In this conflict between Reason and sensuousness, the essential thing for Reason is that the conflict be resolved, the result being the emergence of the unity of both, a unity which is not the former original [i.e. immediate] unity of both in a single individual, but a unity which proceeds from the *known* antithesis of both. Only such a unity is actual morality, for in it is contained the antithesis whereby the self is consciousness, or first is an actual self in fact, and at the same time a universal."[41]

Actually understanding what something is involves situating it with respect to what it is not. Discerning sameness and difference in this manner requires a steadfast refusal to make absolute, one-sided, and (as we have seen) dogmatic claims. At the end of the *Phenomenology*, then, one does not know any particular doctrine or metaphysical principle to be absolutely true. Rather, one understands the absolutely conditioned nature of knowledge. Recall what Robert Williams said about the third trope of ancient skepticism: "According to the third trope of relationship, the 'absolute' turns out not to be absolute. Indeed, there can be nothing absolute in the traditional sense of the term – i.e., exempt from all relation and conditioning."[42]

Just as Hegel diagnoses dogmatic views as merely one-sided, so too does he characterize even the praiseworthy skepticism of Sextus and Kant as being 'purely negative' and equally one-sided in its conclusions. In articulating his own

[41] PS §603
[42] Robert Williams, "Hegel and Skepticism," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Fall 1992): p. 74.

understanding of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy, he characterizes true philosophy as being two-sided: "Philosophy, on the other hand, contains the skeptical as a moment within itself – specifically as the dialectical moment. But then philosophy does not stop at the merely negative result of the dialectic, as is the case with scepticism."[43] Rather, the philosophical view attempts to understand both the dogmatic and the skeptical elements of experience; at each stage of the highway of despair consciousness posits an independent standard against which to measure its own claims to truth. But every time this attempt fails, generating new and more sophisticated attempts to understand the world as it really is.

The skeptical undermining of every posited in-itself thus has positive consequences: determinate negation is Hegel's way of transforming the merely negative power of skepticism into a truly philosophical method. Hegel's views are more systematic and more thoroughly skeptical than those of consoling philosophers: claiming that the true is the whole provides a check on one's desire to make absolute, abstract, and ultimately dogmatic claims. It forces one to put into context the claims that one makes, instead of settling for the self-certainty of the moral worldview that refuses to take responsibility for its ideas. Recall what Hegel wrote of the bad infinity of the moral worldview: "The antinomy of the moral view of the world, viz. that there is a moral consciousness, and that there is none, or that the validation of duty lies beyond consciousness, and conversely,

[43] EL §81

takes place *in* it. . . . *moral self-consciousness did not accept responsibility for this self-contradictory idea*, but shifted it on to a being other than itself."[44]

The restlessness of this approach (as Hegel puts it, this 'to-ing and fro-ing')[45] is overcome not by bringing reason to rest or by discovering some original unity that reveals the antinomy to be merely apparent. Rather, it is overcome by seeing philosophy as an inherently circular activity: "Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an original or immediate unity as such – is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual."[46] Through the articulation of what one pre-reflectively takes for true, the contradictions in one's view are made explicit and are understood reflectively.

'Knowing the antithesis' of the dogmatic and skeptical elements of experience is a way of transcending their mere contradiction, while still preserving the reality of their difference. In contrast to the bad infinity which purports to know something by knowing what it is not (and by shifting the standard of truth into a 'beyond' that is ultimately not completely intelligible), Hegel thinks of philosophy as an essentially retrospective activity: it is only after

---

[44] PS §632

[45] In the *Encyclopedia Logic* (§60), Hegel elaborates on this problem of Kantian philosophy: "In any dualistic system, but especially in the Kantian system, the fundamental defect reveals itself through the inconsistency of uniting what, a moment earlier, was declared to be independent, and therefore incompatible. Just as, a moment before, what is united was declared to be what is genuine, so not it is said that both moments . . . have truth and actuality only by being separate. What is lacking in a philosophizing of this kind is the simple consciousness that, in this very to-ing and fro-ing, each of the simple determinations is declared to be unsatisfactory; and the defect consists in the simple incapacity to bring two thoughts together."

[46] PS §18

one moves ‘beyond’ the conflicts in experience that one can properly put them in context.

This way of ‘getting beyond’ or transcending the conflicts in experience accepts the fact that such progress is always tenuous. The further one travels down the highway, the greater one’s understanding is, since previous stages are *aufgehoben* into more complete and comprehensive conceptions of the whole. Still, this greater understanding leads to a more significant risk of dogmatically asserting one’s standard of truth as the definitive one. The bigger they are, the harder they fall: the temptation to claim that one has finally gotten to the bottom of things becomes a greater threat as one’s views genuinely become more comprehensive. By preserving the dogmatic and skeptical elements of experience rather than seeing them as merely apparent, Hegel dissolves the threat that they pose. Seeing these elements for what they are, and confronting the challenges that they perpetually pose, frees us from being caught in the grip of dogmatic or skeptical concerns.

Acknowledging that we cannot avoid taking something for true gives us a more determinate standard of truth than an amorphous regulative idea. Whereas, as we have seen, the mere critic is too certain and too skeptical at the same time, Hegel forces us to surrender the self-certainty associated with Sextus and Kant’s views, as well as the merely negative approach to the way things are in themselves. We have to confront the risk of self-deception, instead of treating the moral will as inscrutable. We have to allow for the possibility of failure in order to gain the possibility of success. In the words of John Milton, ‘I cannot praise a

fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world; we bring impurity much rather; *that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary*."[47] We have to tarry with the negative rather than settling for a regulative ideal that admits of neither victory nor defeat.

Hegel's version of reconciliation differs from pre-critical versions because it achieves the same substantive ends (i.e. being at home in the world) without having those ends dependent upon principles that could be construed as dogmatic. His philosophical system is built upon skeptical premises: the unique solution to what we have called the problem of the criterion is to point out that each stage of consciousness brings with it its own criterion. We need only make this presupposed criterion explicit in order to see how it fails to match up with the standard of truth it posits.

Hegel's form of skepticism is self-subverting, just as Sextus' was: rather than dogmatically presupposing any particular criterion, he attempts to show how every attempt at making the in-itself and for-itself correspond necessarily fails on its own terms. Like the foam on the horses' mouth, the satisfaction of becoming self-conscious is achieved only after making the antithesis known; the despair of traveling the highway leads fortuitously to the satisfaction of being at home in the world, rather than having this satisfaction dogmatically presupposed as an end.

The reconciliation achieved by acknowledging this perpetual failure is different from the reconciliation attained through pre-critical metaphysics. It is

[47] John Milton, *Areopagitica* (H. Regnery Co., 1949).

tragic in the sense that it confronts the ineradicable conflicts that make up our experience. As Terry Pinkard puts it, ". . . there is no way to repress the conflict or eradicate the conflicts between [morality and *satisfaction*]; there can be at best a way to reconcile ourselves to it – as it were, to learn to live with it – by seeing that this type of conflict is an ineradicable part of, and perhaps at times even a tragic accompaniment to a more rational form of life that itself has freedom as its basis. As Hegel puts it, this kind of 'distress' (*Not*) reveals the finitude and hence the contingency of both right and welfare."[48]

Acknowledging human finitude is not merely tragic or pessimistic, because it means that we can at least make sense of our condition. So this tragic attitude is also optimistic since it assumes that satisfaction can be attained by becoming self-conscious of this condition. Hardimon writes that reconciliation "crucially involves accepting the present in its own right, not merely as a stage to something else. To be reconciled is to find satisfaction in the present. . . . Hegel says, 'Philosophy is . . . not consolation; it is more; it reconciles'."[49]

If true reconciliation involves confronting the limits of reason and human finitude, then one wonders whether the traditional way of understanding the difference between consolation and reconciliation is correct. After all, it is the consoling philosopher who carefully circumscribes the limits of reason, and the reconciling philosopher who allegedly transgresses them. But the consoling philosopher draws his distinctions absolutely, whereas Hegel's form of reconciliation does not. Whereas Kant attempts to transcend the endless

[48] Pinkard, *Virtue*, 223
[49] Hardimon, 88-89

oscillation of dogmatism and skepticism through critical philosophy, Hegel shows how dogmatism and skepticism are two moments of a whole that are integral to experience.

If the argument from Chapter 1 was compelling, then it seems that Kant retains dogmatic and skeptical elements without acknowledging it, whereas Hegel's idealism (self-consciously) makes these conflicts explicit as a 'known antithesis.' Rather than attempting to bring reason to rest, his conception of dialectic positively appropriates the conflict of dogmatism and skepticism and shows how the development of this conflict transforms the philosopher's self-understanding.

THE SATISFACTIONS OF STOICISM AND SPINOZISM

After examining what Hegel perceived to be the inadequacies of alternative philosophical methods, we are now in a position to ask about the consequences of his view for moral and practical philosophy. Whereas the ancient ethical ends of happiness and self-knowledge are maintained (in a merely regulative form) in critical philosophy, Hegel's highway of despair can be understood in terms of the transformation of one's self-understanding and the corresponding satisfaction that results. Achieving these ends non-dogmatically requires the use of a skeptical method that reveals how the conflicts of the in-itself and for-itself play out in experience.

True skepticism and true systematic philosophy go hand-in-hand: understanding something concretely means subjecting it to the crucible of experience and retrospectively understanding its essential character. Accepting what might be called 'the burden of context' challenges the philosopher to become a connoisseur of experience: one must understand the world on its own terms rather than merely offer opinions about what ought to be the case. Further, reconciling oneself to the ineradicable dogmatic and skeptical elements of experience transforms one's self-understanding: surrendering the self-certainty of the moral worldview and the *ataraxia* of the ancient skeptics relieves oneself of the Sisyphean burden imposed by Kantian moral 'progress' and the restlessness of the ancient skeptic who must continually employ the skeptical tropes. Hegel's philosophy moderates both the optimism and the pessimism associated with critical and skeptical philosophy.

Retrospectively recognizing how the various forms of consciousness are *aufgehoben* into more comprehensive forms makes the philosopher a master of dialectic. More importantly, though, it forces the philosopher to give up once and for all what Hegel has called 'the essenceless abstraction of essence,' and to see himself as existentially responsible for the distinctions he draws. This is what distinguishes the genuinely speculative philosopher from the idly speculative or the critical philosopher: the end result must be a deeper understanding of oneself and the phenomena with which one is concerned.

As opposed to philosophical methods which remain external to what they purport to understand, Hegel writes that "speculative thinking behaves in a

different way. . . . In this movement the passive Subject itself perishes; it enters into the differences and the content, and constitutes the determinateness, i.e. the differentiated content and its movement, instead of remaining inertly over against it."[50] All along the highway of despair, the self has unwittingly undergone its own philosophical education, its own *Bildung*. While this education has objective elements, it must be undergone by each philosopher who travels the highway.

Progress, then, is not made through the employment of some philosophical method to get beyond the endless oscillation of dogmatism and skepticism. Rather, whatever progress can be made is made by the philosopher who has become educated. Yet this point is often obscured. Bernard Mabile writes, for instance, that "Hegel invites us to abandon the conception of philosophical activity according to which the exclusive terrain, actor, and yardstick are constituted by the particular philosophizing individual. To philosophize is to engage not only the philosophizing subject but also the subject of philosophy which for Hegel is indeed the True itself."[51]

This observation is undoubtedly correct in one respect: the entire *Phenomenology* might be understood as an attempt to transcend the problem of the 'Meiner Meinung,' of an individual lacking philosophical consciousness merely opining about what ought to be the case. But Hegel distinguishes between different understandings of the individual. He writes, "The single individual is incomplete Spirit . . . the individual whose substance is the more advanced Spirit runs through this past just as one who takes up a higher science goes through the

[50] PS §60
[51] Bernard Mabile, "Is Hegel Dogmatic?" *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. XXXI, nos. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2000): p. 271.

preparatory studies he has long since absorbed, in order to bring their content to mind: he recalls them to the inward eye, but has no lasting interest in them."[52]

The process of self-transformation results in no new propositional knowledge. Rather, the individual at the beginning of the highway and the individual at the end are distinguished only in terms of their self-understanding. In this sense, absolute knowing results in *aporia* from the perspective of propositional knowledge but wisdom from the standpoint of existential knowledge.

In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel uses a simple example to demonstrate the difference between these two types of knowledge: "The absolute Idea is to be compared with the old man who utters the same religious sentiments as the child, but for whom they carry the significance of his whole life. Even if the child understands the religious content, it still counts for him only as something outside of which lie the whole of life and the whole world."[53] In one sense, philosophy leaves everything as it is. In another sense, it transforms one's world by transforming one's self-understanding. A proper interpretation of reconciliation must recognize both of these elements.

In the introduction to this project, we saw that Hegel's moral philosophy can be understood as a reinterpretation of Socratic ignorance. The philosopher is propositionally ignorant but existentially wise: he recognizes that to claim anything absolutely is to understand it abstractly, yet he has become a master of dialectic and the Socratic method of division and collection. Further, he is

[52] PS §28
[53] EL §237Z

selbstbewusst in both senses of the term: his self-assurance transcends the endless oscillation between an unwarranted optimism and pessimism. Neither self-aggrandizing nor self-mortifying, his philosophical passions have been moderated by the achievement of self-knowledge.

Conceiving of knowledge as existential rather than propositional corroborates Hegel's own view on the value of ancient skepticism:

> We must now consider . . . the method in which the skeptics proceed, and it consists in this, that they have brought the universal principle that each definite assertion has to be set over against its 'other,' into certain forms, not propositions. Thus, in view of the nature of skepticism, *we cannot ask for any system of propositions* . . . Sextus hence says that skepticism is no selection . . . of dogmas, it is not a preference for certain propositions, but only that which leads, or rather which directs us . . . *to live rightly and think correctly*; thus it is in this way rather a method or manner by which only universal modes of that opposition are shown.[54]

From the perspective of modern ethical theory, this conclusion will not be a recognizable contribution to moral philosophy. Operating with a rather narrow and distinctly modern view of practical philosophy, Allen Wood writes, "Thus Hegel treats 'the will' not from the perspective of the volitional agent engaging in practical deliberation, but from the perspective of the speculative philosopher contemplating the will and its mode of actualization."[55] The distinction between a contemplative and a practical orientation confuses as much as it clarifies. It ignores the fact that Hegel distinguishes between a pre-philosophical and a philosophical form of individuality. In other words, contemplation is not an idle

[54] Forster, 10, emphasis added. Quoted from Hegel, LHP, tran. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simon (Humanities Press, 1974). vol. 2, p. 345.
[55] Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990): p. 8.

activity, just as reconciliation did not mean accepting whatever was merely conventional. Both are self-transformative acts.

This sense of self-transformation is often left out of debates over whether one can 'throw down the ladder' at the end of the *Phenomenology*. One standard view is that Absolute Knowing involves a final correspondence with the way things are in themselves. Consciousness has finally transcended mere appearance and has encountered essences; for the first time, it has 'seen rightly.' J.L. Findlay writes, "[The *Phenomenology*] is meant to be a forepiece that can be dropped and discarded once the student, through deep immersion in its contents, has advanced through confusions and misunderstandings to the properly philosophical point of view."[56] In his Oxford introduction to Hegel, Peter Singer concurs with this view, suggesting that Hegel regards this 'seeing rightly' as his unique achievement in the history of philosophy: "On Hegel's view, mind comes to its final resting-place when he, Hegel, understands the nature of reality. There can scarcely be a more momentous conclusion to a work of philosophy."[57]

After spending hundreds of pages detailing the dialectical breakdown of any ultimate standard that could be known in-itself, it seems odd that Hegel would conclude with the optimistic assertion that he had discovered the nature of things. Further, Singer's stereotypical reading ignores the close connection between true skepticism and true philosophy. Singer is correct to imply that the philosopher is no longer restless once he has traveled the highway of despair, but this is not because he has reached a final resting-place. Rather, it is because he has finally

[56] Findlay, foreward to PS
[57] Peter Singer, "Hegel," in *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche* (Oxford University Press, 1983): p. 190.

reconciled himself to the precarious and stable nature of experience. He has given the dogmatic and skeptical elements of experience their due, rather than attempting to transcend them for the sake of more secure philosophical foundations.

The view shared by Findlay and Singer suggests that the ladder can be thrown down after one has achieved Absolute Knowing. An alternative view, however, would stress the fact that the *Phenomenology* is a prolegomena to the *Science of Logic*. On this reading, climbing up the ladder allows us to transcend the 'confusions and misunderstandings' of experience and prepares us to undertake the serious business of the *Logic*. The *Phenomenology*, on this view, merely clears the path for the *Logic*. These views share the presupposition that some final understanding is achieved at the end of the *Phenomenology*, such that the ladder either can be discarded (because some final philosophical conclusion has been reached) or not (because it allows us to segue into the *Logic*).

This debate begs the question by presupposing that Absolute Knowing can be understood as independent of the various manifestations of consciousness. Hegel clarifies his own view in a remark in the *Encyclopedia Logic*: "When the expression 'absolute Idea' is used, people may think that it is only here that we meet with what is right, that here everything must give itself up. It is certainly possible to sing the hollow praises of the absolute Idea, far and wide; in the meantime, *its true content is nothing but the entire system, the development of which we have been considering so far*."[58] The 'hollow praise' of the absolute

[58] EL §237Z

Idea regards it as some definitive philosophical conclusion, thereby understanding it only abstractly.

Just as Hegel's idealism stipulates that the distinction between the in-itself and the for-itself can be understood only retrospectively, so too does Absolute Knowing require the recollection of the various manifestations of consciousness. Hegel writes, "In the whole of the movement, seen as a state of repose, what distinguishes itself therein, and gives itself particular existence, is preserved as something that recollects itself, whose existence is self-knowledge, and whose self-knowledge is just as immediately existence."[59]

Even though Hegel admits that the philosopher takes 'no lasting interest' in the various steps on the highway of despair, he must still understand them as more or less sophisticated versions of the same philosophical mistake. Each is a necessary step, not merely the manifestation of a mistake but also a partial truth: "Impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means. But the *length* of this path has to be endured, because, for one thing, each moment is necessary; and further, each moment has to be *lingered* over, because each is itself a complete individual shape, and one is only viewed in absolute perspective when its determinateness is regarded as a concrete whole, or the whole is regarded as uniquely qualified by that determination."[60]

The various stages serve as a Wittgensteinean 'diet of examples,' a collection of vivid attempts at understanding the nature of things. Donald Verene stresses the significance of *Erinnerung* and the crucial role played by the

[59] PS §47
[60] PS §17

memorable images of the *Phenomenology*. He writes that "the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a philosophical speech in which all the powers of language, its imagistic and its conceptual powers, are brought forth so that the reader may recollect."[61]

The philosophical progress made retrospectively is always threatened by the ineradicable dogmatic element of experience. It is necessary to recollect the various manifestations of consciousness because it is inevitable that one forgets the contributions one makes to experience: one necessarily forgets that the in-itself is posited or presupposed by consciousness. There are more or less comprehensive accounts of experience, and some partial truths are more partial then others.

Still, the deeper understanding of oneself and one's world gained by traveling the highway of despair depends upon confronting both the contingency of what one takes for true and the necessary and unalterable relationship of dogmatism and skepticism. 'Seeing rightly,' then, is a matter of cultivating a philosophical temperament, rather than reaching some determinate conclusion, some final resting-place for thought. It depends upon one's ability to call to mind through vivid examples both the successes and the failures of the journey along the highway of despair.

Retrospection and recollection point to the need for philosophical repetition: throughout the *Phenomenology*, consciousness forgets and must relearn the basic fact that the in-itself it posits or presupposes is really the in-itself *for consciousness*, rather than a truly self-standing and objective standard of truth. This repetition does not abruptly stop at Absolute Knowing, since, as Hegel has

[61] Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection* (State University of New York Press, 1985): p. 25.

instructed us, the content of the absolute Idea is nothing other than the entire system. The existential (rather than propositional) knowledge achieved by traveling the highway depends upon (and is nothing other than) the ongoing spiritual formation of one's philosophical understanding. The *Bildung* of one's philosophical understanding is both contemplative and practical: it requires that one 'climb the ladder,' but it yields no new propositional knowledge upon which one can base one's self-understanding.

Training one's judgment in order to see rightly is a moral project. A more nuanced understanding of contemplation and philosophical practice sees Hegel as reviving and continuing a long and suppressed history of moral and practical philosophy. On this view, the development of a certain kind of self-consciousness is a moral project which requires the cultivation of what might be called a 'cosmological perspective.' Here a comparison between Hegel's views and pre-critical philosophies like Stoicism and Spinozism is salient. What they share is the recognition of a deep relationship between metaphysics and ethics.

Recall that, in both Stoicism and Spinozism, the self stands as part to a whole. One's self-understanding is dependent upon understanding the nature of things, and one 'lives rightly' insofar as he acts according to nature. This metaphysical inquiry leads to the substantive ethical end of being at home in the world, since the self participates in the same Logos governing reality itself. So, for instance, the Stoic and the Spinozist attempt to overcome the illusion of a free will and accept the fact that we are determined just as the nature of things is

determined. Being free no longer means having a free will but rationally understanding (and coming to terms with) our condition.[62]

For the Stoic, being at home in the world demands serious philosophical training. Marcus Aurelius, for instance, must constantly remind himself of his Stoic principles in order to maintain his 'spiritual armor.' He writes, "Doctors keep their scalpels and other instruments handy, for emergencies. Keep your philosophy ready too – ready to understand heaven and earth. In everything you do, even the smallest thing, remember the chain that links them."[63]

His *Meditations* serve as iterations of a set of Stoic themes. Yet the repetitive nature of this work complements, rather than undermines, its systematic structure. Stoic imperturbability must be constantly maintained by calling to mind maxims that express Stoic metaphysics. Marcus lists such maxims after making the following observation: "The things you think about determine the quality of your mind. Your soul takes on the color of your thoughts. Color it with a run of thoughts like these . . . ."[64]

Paying attention to oneself constitutes a kind of existential imperative brought about by one's own mortality: "So we need to hurry. Not just because we move daily closer to death but also because our understanding – our grasp of the world – may be gone before we get there."[65] The various reminders Marcus makes to himself are his attempt to meet this challenge and to cultivate his own

---

[62] Spinoza writes: "Men are deceived in that they think themselves free, an opinion which consists simply in the fact that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which those actions are determined." (E2, P35, S).
[63] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (Modern Library Press, 2003): p. 33.
[64] *Meditations*, 59
[65] *Meditations*, 27

imperturbability. He admonishes himself to "stop allowing your mind to be a slave, to be jerked about by selfish impulses, to kick against fate and the present, and to mistrust the future."[66] The cosmological perspective he attempts to call to mind puts things into their proper perspective: "Keep in mind how fast things pass by and are gone – those that are now, and those to come. Existence flows past us like a river: the 'what' is in constant flux, the 'why' has a thousand variations. Nothing is stable, not even what's right here. The infinity of past and future gapes before us – a chasm whose depths we cannot see. So it would take an idiot to feel self-importance or distress. Or any indignation, either. As if the things that irritate us lasted."[67]

This passage calls to mind Hegel's own view of the True as a 'Bacchanalian revel' discussed in the Introduction. Focusing on both the Logos governing reality as well as the precariousness of existence, Marcus views philosophy as a spiritual exercise that enables him to see rightly. The maxims generated by adopting this cosmological perspective are his spiritual armor: they fortify his nascent imperturbability, making his judgment sound and his will strong. Whereas Hegel praised the ancient skeptic for attempting to 'live rightly' (rather than devising a 'system of propositions'), it seems that the Stoic does both. There is a connection between the propositions or maxims with which Marcus fortifies himself and his attempt to live rightly. In this sense, Stoic metaphysics and Stoic ethics are interdependent.

[66] *Meditations*, 17
[67] *Meditations*, 61

Spinoza carries on this Stoic tradition when he affirms that "in so far as men live in accordance with the guidance of reason, to that extent alone they always necessarily agree in nature."[68] However, he criticizes the Stoics for overestimating the rational control one has over one's emotions: "The Stoics, however, thought that the emotions depend absolutely on our will, and that we can have absolute rule over them. But they were compelled to admit by the protest of experience – though not from their own principles – *that no small amount of practice and study are necessary to restrain and control the emotions*."[69]

Stressing the need for practice is itself a Stoic position, but for Spinoza practice is necessary because reason fails to rule the emotions absolutely. Just as Marcus conceived of philosophy as spiritual exercise, so too does Spinoza recommend committing 'fixed and certain' maxims to memory: "The best we can do, therefore, as long as we do not have a perfect knowledge of our emotions, is to conceive a right way of living, i.e. fixed rules of life, that are certain, and to commit these to memory and apply them constantly to particular things that often meet us in life, so that in this way our imagination is widely affected by them and they are always at hand."[70]

These rules of life are meant to spark the imagination and smooth the transition from seeing rightly to living rightly. Even if rational control of the emotions requires much practice, true knowledge of the virtues (i.e. identifying these fixed and certain maxims) can be readily obtained: So the person who tries to control his emotions and his appetites simply from the love of freedom will, as

[68] *Ethics*, E4, P34, S
[69] *Ethics*, E5, preface, emphasis added.
[70] *Ethics*, E5, P10, S

far as he can, strive to know the virtues and their causes, and to fill his mind with the delight that arises from a true knowledge of them. But he will be far from striving to contemplate the vices of men, and to decry men and to rejoice in a false show of freedom. *The person who will observe these things diligently (and they are not difficult) and will make use of them will in a short space of time be able to direct most of his actions in accordance with the rule of reason.*[71]

The person who has fostered this 'rule of reason' has achieved 'true contentment of mind.' Like the Stoic, he has trained his judgment to understand things as they are in themselves, rather than perceiving them in a distorted fashion: "whatever he thinks to be irksome and bad, and whatever besides seems impious, horrible, unjust, and base arises from the fact that he conceives the things themselves in a distorted, mutilated, and confused way."[72] Perceiving things clearly and distinctly paves the way to 'blessedness,' which Spinoza conceives of as a reconciliation of virtue and happiness: "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but is virtue itself."[73]

So Spinoza's moral philosophy depends upon principles that are self-evident (when the correct method is applied diligently). Yet he seems to vacillate between affirming and denying that these principles are easy to put into practice. Referring to the complexity of his account, he concludes his *Ethics* in this way: "If the way that I have shown to lead to this seems to be very arduous, yet it can be discovered. And indeed it must be arduous, since it is found so rarely. For how could it happen that, if salvation were ready at hand and could be found without

[71] Ibid, emphasis added.
[72] *Ethics*, E4, P73, S
[73] *Ethics*, E5, P42

great labour, it is neglected by almost all? But all excellent things are as difficult as they are rare."[74]

Stoicism and Spinozism are contemplative and practical at once.[75] Yet the spiritual exercises they espouse depend upon first principles which must be presupposed rather than proven. The self is conceived of as a part to the whole, which can be investigated metaphysically. The substantive ends of self-knowledge and happiness (e.g. *ataraxia* or blessedness) are assumed to be not only possible but also mutually entailing. Further, living according to the rule of reason is equated with living in accord with nature.

Hegel either rejects or reinterprets each of these presuppositions. Allen Wood invites a misinterpretation of Hegel's moral philosophy when he writes, "Like the classical ethical theories of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, Hegel's practical philosophy is based on a conception of an encompassing human good which is *objective* in the sense that it is not reducible to the contingent desires and preferences of particular human beings."[76]

This interpretation downplays what Hegel calls the 'right of the particular,' his concession to the Enlightenment view that rejects the attempt to see the self as merely a part to the whole. Spinoza's idea of self-determination, then, is significantly different from Hegel's insofar as Hegel has taken the critical turn. Hegel famously writes, "When we think freely, voyaging on the open sea, with nothing under us and nothing over us, in solitude, alone by ourselves – then

---

[74] *Ethics*, E5, P42, S
[75] Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life* has influenced my understanding significantly on this point: trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold Davidson (Blackwell Publishing, 1995).
[76] Wood, 20

we are purely at home with ourselves."[77]

Recall that we distinguished between two forms of individuality, one pre-philosophical and the other philosophical. Being at home in the world, on Hegel's view, amounts to the achievement of the second sort of individuality, rather than the self-abnegation required by pre-critical metaphysics. Wood confuses two types of self-transcendence: transcending oneself by conceiving of the self as a part to the whole, as opposed to transcending the contingent desires and preferences one adopted pre-philosophically. Hegel denies the first but endorses the second.

Hegel's systematic philosophy is founded on skeptical principles, rather than first principles that must be adopted. So even though the substantive ends of Hegel's moral philosophy are versions of those endorsed by Stoicism and Spinozism, they are not dogmatically presupposed. Nor are there any 'fixed and certain' rules for living rightly, such that the moral person has both existential and propositional knowledge. Hegel's spiritual exercises fortify one's self-understanding without resulting in any corresponding sense of self-certainty.

Rather, the *Phenomenology* provides us with a wide variety of ways of conceiving the relationship between self and world. Each example in this typology of self-consciousness is a limited whole, a partial truth that reveals something essential about experience while concealing other elements. We must remind ourselves of the failure of each stage of consciousness (resulting in existential wisdom) and learn to recognize the ways in which earlier stages are *aufgehoben* into later stages (i.e. identifying sameness and difference).

[77] EL §31 (add)

These conclusions may be regarded as Hegel's revival of a Socratic understanding of moral and practical philosophy. As William Bristow writes, "To avoid the subjective idealism of Kant's critique, Hegel insists that we must be open in the critical investigation to development and change in our conception of the ultimate nature and source of the law. Given that we are (at least partly) determined through our relating to the law (through our conception of what is ultimately authoritative), the change or development to which we must open ourselves is a change in who or what we are."[78]

Discerning the ways in which Hegel's moral philosophy is reminiscent of Stoicism and Spinozism (and the ways in which it is significantly different) reveals two ways in which metaphysics and ethics are interrelated inquiries: the first form remains dogmatic in Hegel's sense of the term, whereas the second is truly philosophical. Stoicism and Spinozism remain vulnerable to skeptical assault because their fixed and certain maxims presuppose a particular metaphysical conception of the world. What is required to live rightly is the conversion to a Stoic or Spinozist way of seeing rightly. But the Hegelian philosopher is constantly attempting to make explicit the criterion that one posits or presupposes. So the conversion experience required by Stoicism and Spinozism will necessarily be unphilosophical, since it stops the Socratic inquiry that risks one's self-understanding for the sake of truth.

The false form of the relationship between metaphysics and ethics makes one's self-understanding dependent upon metaphysical principles that must be

[78] William Bristow, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* (Oxford University Press, 2007): p. 241.

taken for true. The true form, however, is equally contemplative (insofar as the true in the whole) without generating any determinate principles that must be asserted dogmatically. Hegel's understanding of reconciliation leaves everything as it is, in one sense, while effecting the Socratic transformation of one's own self-understanding. It is systematic and skeptical at the same time.

As we have seen, the difference between a pre-philosophical and a philosophical form of individuality is the *Bildung* of a philosophical consciousness: recognizing and reconciling oneself to the dogmatic and skeptical elements of experience fosters existential wisdom and compels the philosopher to become a connoisseur of experience. Contrary to those who read Hegel as a pre-critical metaphysician (who attempts to recover some original unity that would reveal the conflicts of experience to be merely apparent), the conflicts in experience are preserved in Hegel's form of idealism.

What is dissolved is not the conflict itself but rather the grip that the conflict has on the inquirer: on Hegel's view, one can be at home in the world only insofar as one is no longer determined by the heteronomous forces. Retrospectively understanding the conditions of consciousness (and fortifying one's self-understanding through the recollection of one's successes and failures) allows one to be s*elbstbewusst*. As we shall see, understanding the dialectical interplay between autonomy and heteronomy is required for being 'free in one's determinations' (or *Beisichselbstsein*).

Hegel's recovery of Socratic moral philosophy is also his attempt to make Kant's conception of autonomy more concrete and closer to lived experience.

This reconstruction of pre-critical and Kantian ethics seems unique to Hegel. Stoicism and Spinozism operated with the right substantive ends for moral philosophy, but Kant supplied the right account of the moral subject. The whole point of Hegel's moral philosophy, then, is to move from abstract freedom and individuality (the *Person*) to concrete freedom and universality (or true individuality). The complexity of the dialectical account is the price one pays for refusing to presuppose some account of the individual that is complete before philosophical *Bildung* has taken place.

In other words, Kant establishes transcendentally what can only be achieved through actual philosophical practice. Russon stresses the first-person perspective implicit in Hegel's discussion of autonomy when he writes, "The reason that is to be morally autonomous must always be *my* reason; it must be *my* autonomy. If not, whatever moral worth might attach to reason's self-determination would have no significance for my moral worth. Moral worth, thus, enters *into* the world of experience only if it is a phenomenon *of* the world of experience, and thus experience must be the soil and seed of moral value, rather than an alien matter upon which it is overlain."[79]

Inferring freedom as the condition of the possibility for moral action is the kind of determinate philosophical conclusion that Hegel mocks when he writes, "But it is more convenient of course to arrive at the same point by taking the short cut of supposing that freedom is given as a 'fact of consciousness' and that we must simply believe in it!"[80] Hegel's reconstruction of the distinction between

[79] John Russon, *Reading Hegel's Phenomenology* (University of Indianapolis Press, 2004): p. 151.
[80] PR §4Z

autonomy and heteronomy sees the self as formed through the recognition of its rational (as opposed to arbitrary) attachments.

The circumscription of the self, then, involves a moment of self-knowledge (of making explicit what one already finds oneself committed to) and a moment of self-creation (the implicit commitment becomes rational by being made explicit). As Allen Wood puts it, "*Beisichselbstsein* does not refer merely to a state of myself. 'Being with myself' is always a relation between me and an 'object' or 'other' whose difference or otherness has, however, been overcome. Freedom is always *Beisichselbstsein in einem Andern*, 'being with oneself in an other.'"[81]

This process of self-formation, this dialectical account of freedom and autonomy, models and mirrors the dialectic of dogmatism and skepticism already discussed. Here we find an important connection between the *Phenomenology* (often taken to be Hegel's metaphysical or epistemological treatise) and his *Philosophy of Right* (his ethical or political treatise). Bernard Mabile summarizes the connection as follows: "Thought is free insofar as it is determining. This is its dogmatic dimension, that which displays the power to posit, to decide, to be imperative. It is indeterminate in its skeptical dimension, for it has the capacity to dissolve everything fixed and firm. But this freedom remains unachieved if these two sides exist separately: imperative freedom degenerates into blind dogmatism, freedom to negate risks sinking into pure nothingness."[82]

[81] Wood, 45
[82] Mabile, 286

Engaging in this process requires the surrender of both a dogmatic self-assurance and a skeptical self-effacement. It demands that one overcomes the 'to-ing and fro-ing' that correctly identifies the conflict of reason with itself, yet leaves each of the poles of the antinomy absolute and abstract. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel claims that "every self-consciousness knows itself (i) as universal, as the potentiality of abstracting from everything determinate, and (ii) as particular, with a determinate object, content, and aim. *Still, both these moments are only abstractions; what is concrete and true (and everything true is concrete) is the universality which has the particular as its opposite . . . This unity is individuality, not individuality in its immediacy as a unit, our first idea of individuality, but individuality in accordance with the concept*."[83]

Consistent with his general attempt to resolve antinomous thinking by showing how each side is a distinct moment in a greater whole, Hegel sees himself as resolving the conflict between freedom and necessity through his account of *Beisichselbstsein*. Just as consciousness reconciles itself to the dogmatic and skeptical elements of experience, thereby freeing itself from being caught in the grip of dogmatic or skeptical concerns, it must practically deal with the interdependence of freedom and necessity. In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel writes, "When the antinomy of freedom and necessity is more closely considered, the situation is that what the understanding takes to be freedom and necessity are in fact only ideal moments of true freedom and true necessity; neither of them has any truth if separated from the other."[84]

[83] PR §7, emphasis added.
[84] EL §48

Forming oneself through the recognition of rational attachments is reminiscent of the Stoic and Spinozist attempt to bring about self-transformation based on metaphysical principles. However, it differs from these attempts because it understands the individual's own rational commitment to be a necessary feature of this self-transformation. In other words, the self is not discovered by learning how to live naturally or by figuring out how the self is determined necessarily. In this sense, Hegel would agree with Kant contra Spinoza.

In his introduction to his translation of Spinoza's *Ethics*, G.H.R. Parkinson weighs a Kantian criticism of Spinoza's moral philosophy with Spinoza's potential reply: "Kant might object that Spinoza, in so far as he says in effect, 'Act in such a way as to preserve your own being', is offering a hypothetical rather than a categorical imperative. . . . Spinoza would doubtless reply that no 'if' is involved here. We must endeavor to preserve our being, and if we are to succeed in our endeavor we must act in the ways that reason prescribes."[85]

This conflict of freedom and necessity is cast in universal terms, just like the endless oscillation of dogmatism and skepticism. But this presupposes that philosophical reflection must (or even can) get to the bottom of things. Hegel's understanding of *Beisichselbstsein* is a practical attempt to dissolve the antinomy by showing how each pole is a distinct and necessary element of experience. Autonomy is an achievement rather than a universal way of making judgments, and it depends upon (and is sustained by) the retrospection, recollection, and repetition that philosophy provides.

[85] *Ethics*, introduction p. 44, footnote 70

CHAPTER 3

HEGEL AS PRAGMATIC METAPHYSICIAN

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson
'Self-Reliance'

Conceiving of autonomy as an achievement rather than a metaphysical fact or a critical 'condition-of-the-possibility' transforms the nature of philosophical practice. Recall that, in the *Groundwork,* Kant counsels a turn to philosophy to clarify the conflicts of ordinary experience. It is strictly on practical, rather than speculative, grounds that philosophy can contribute to ordinary experience. Yet, as I outlined in Chapter 2, Hegel's transformation of practical philosophy is also an attempt to make it genuinely speculative: the impetus for moral philosophy is not the attempt to solve problems that arise in ordinary experience but rather the desire to make sense of our condition. Freedom for Hegel is tied to the rational intelligibility attained by practicing philosophy rightly, and philosophical progress depends upon making abstract concepts concrete by Socratically subjecting them to the crucible of experience.

In this chapter, I will discuss the conditions (e.g. social, political, historical) under which the type of *Bildung* outlined in Chapter 2 is possible. After considering an ambiguity inherent in Socratic inquiry, I will discuss Hegel's attempt to achieve a genuinely speculative philosophical position. This requires

outlining the ways in which he transforms the history of metaphysics, reconstructing its essential elements while refusing to revert to a pre-critical position. As noted in Chapter 1, genuinely speculative philosophy conceives of the distinction between appearance and essence to be immanent in experience. Hegel carries on the Socratic project of bringing philosophy 'down to earth' without being reductively pragmatic. By attempting to find the right level of theoretical abstraction, he is able to stave off sophistic rejections of metaphysics while fortifying his own system against skeptical challenges. I will also consider the roles that his 'science of the state' and his philosophy of history play in this broader reconstruction of moral and practical philosophy.

AUTONOMY AS *BEISICHSELBSTSEIN*

Hegel's version of autonomy (*Beisichselbstsein*) brings to light an ambiguity in Socratic philosophy. The form of *Bildung* outlined in Chapter 2 conceives of philosophy as a first-person activity, but (as I noted in the introduction) Hegel challenges the subjectively moral position of Socrates and Kant. At issue is what it means for philosophy to be a first-person activity when the *Person* is precisely the kind of abstraction Hegel seeks to overcome. Hegel skeptically refuses to endorse any sort of authority as given, either externally (as in ancient ethical life) or internally (conceived as a daimon, a moral conscience, or even the use of one's reason). He succinctly states this in a passage in the *Philosophy of Right*: "What more does this truth require – since the thinking mind

is not content to possess it in this ready fashion? It requires to be grasped in thought as well; the content which is already rational in principle must win the form of rationality and so appear well-founded to untrammeled thinking. *Such thinking does not remain stationary at the given, whether the given be upheld by the external positive authority of the state or the* consensus hominum, *or by the authority of inward feeling and emotion and by the 'witness of the spirit' which directly concurs with it*."[1]

What is 'already rational in principle' must be made explicit and understood by the individual undertaking the philosophical inquiry. The ambiguity lies in the fact that Socratic philosophy is both a first-person activity and one that requires the right sort of social and even political conditions for its possibility. For instance, Socrates cannot think for Euthyphro, but he can operate as a midwife for Euthyphro's self-understanding. Yet he can be an effective midwife only insofar as he and Euthyphro share a set of meanings. Their shared understanding is required for advancing the inquiry and for recognizing the difference between more and less complete accounts of what they are discussing.

Socratic inquiry is both a first-person and an intersubjective activity in a manner that echoes the ambiguity discussed in the introduction. On the one hand, the success of the inquiry seems to depend upon the ultimate attainment of a definition, but, on the other hand, the success or failure might be seen in terms of the concrete comparisons of competing accounts. If the first view is compelling, then it seems as though an inquirer could see for himself the nature of the virtue in question (e.g. piety) just by considering it rationally. Akin to apperceiving a form,

[1] PR, Preface, emphasis added.

the definition could be attained without any actual elenctic inquiry taking place. Aside from the obvious problem that no definition is ever attained absolutely in Plato's Socratic dialogues, this view fails to consider the extent to which one's concepts are socially dependent. The second view acknowledges that thinking for oneself is never a solipsistic endeavor, and that a shared set of meanings is the precondition for deliberating at all.

The Stoics and Skeptics, despite their opposite interpretations of Socrates outlined in the introduction, seem to share the first view. Neither seems to require a determinate set of social and political conditions that serves as the foreground for deliberation.[2] The philosophical act is conducted by each inquiring individual, and its conclusions do not depend upon the conditions under which that individual has been formed. Alasdair MacIntyre writes: "Plato sees that if one asks seriously for answers to the Socratic questions, one necessarily becomes the partisan of one sort of social order against others, and in so doing, one has to abandon the role of the merely private person and critic. But among Socrates' disciples there were some who retained this mode . . . *Independence and self-sufficiency become for them the supreme values; the only way to avoid injury from changing circumstance is to make oneself radically independent of circumstance*."[3]

Aristotle criticized Socrates on this very point: he deemed the Socratic intellectualization of virtue to be insufficiently attentive to lived experience

[2] Hegel frequently levels this objection against the Stoics. See especially PR §138 and PS §199**,** where he remarks that the same Stoic doctrines are available to an individual regardless of his social standing (e.g. on the throne, in the case of Marcus Aurelius, or in chains, in the case of Epictetus).

[3] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (Macmillan Publishing, 1966): p. 101, emphasis added.

(especially the influence of custom and habit) and neglectful of the social conditions that make virtue possible.[4] Richard Velkley argues that Hegel is sympathetic to this Aristotelian argument: "It is indeed Socrates' great insight that consciousness contains the divine, but this account of thought in his 'religion of the good' is narrowly moral. . . . Hegel adduces Aristotle's criticism of Socrates for neglecting habituation and for requiring that virtue be a science, to support Hegel's own view that Socratic morality lacks 'heart' and has no connection with 'the real spirit of the people.'"[5]

But this criticism neglects the elements of Socratic thought that intimate a deeper relationship between the individual and society. The obvious example is Socrates' 'social contract' speech in the *Crito*,[6] where he explains why he chose to face his own execution rather than flee the polis. Formed under a determinate set of social and political conditions, Socrates incurs a set of obligations to the city that made him who he is. The less obvious and more interesting example is hidden in plain sight. In dialogues like the *Sophist* (which, if not a 'Socratic dialogue', still serves as an example of the Socratic elenchus in action), the inquiry is advanced only if the interlocutors agree on the meaning of the concepts they are discussing. That is, they must already share a set of meanings before

---

[4] See especially *Magna Moralia*, Bk. 1 1190b21-1190b32, where Aristotle rejects the Socratic claim that courage is knowledge. *Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1971): pp. 1868-1921.

[5] Richard Velkley, "On Possessed Individualism: Hegel, Socrates' Daimon, and the Modern State," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 59, no. 3 (March 2006): p. 595.

[6] *Crito*, 50d-53b. See especially 51d-e, where Socrates states: "'Reflect now, Socrates,' the laws might say 'that if what we say is true, you are not treating us rightly by planning to do what you are planning. We have given you birth, nurtured you, educated you, we have given you and all other citizens a share of all the good things we could. Even so, by giving every Athenian the opportunity, once arrived at voting age and having observed the affairs of the city and us the laws, we proclaim that if we do not please him, he can take his possessions and go wherever he pleases." See *Crito*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997).

inquiry is even possible. They could not agree on the use of the method of division and collection if they did not already recognize the same sorts of distinctions between sameness and difference.

The difference between these two interpretations of Socratic inquiry turns on whether those engaged in the inquiry have an unmediated access to rational principles, or whether the variety of ways in which their self-understanding is mediated must be taken into account. To put the question concisely: In what sense is the *Bildung* of one's self-understanding a personal achievement, and in what sense is it socially dependent? The account of *Bildung* outlined in Chapter 2 strongly suggests that there is some truth in solipsism. As Wittgenstein puts it, "the world is *my* world,"[7] and the self-transformation undertaken by the philosopher produces a genuinely new way of seeing things. Hegel deems this to be the truth of the Enlightenment deification of the individual: it is the right of the subject to undergo this inquiry for himself.

On the other hand, one's self-understanding depends upon making explicit the variety of mediating factors through which one's 'self' is produced. Terry Pinkard claims that, on Hegel's view, "our own 'mindedness' requires a form of 'like-mindedness,' and that form of 'like-mindedness' is not always purely a matter of propositional, or even theoretical reflection."[8] So the attainment of freedom is seen both as a personal project of *Bildung* and as a social project whereby the conditions for freedom must be jointly secured. If philosophical

[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (Routledge Press, 2001): 5.62.
[8] Terry Pinkard, "Virtues, Morality, and *Sittlichkeit*: From Maxims to Practices," *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1999): p. 221.

Bildung demands a change in perspective, then its social conditions amount to the fashioning of a shared perspective.

Herein lies the connection between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*. On Hegel's view, the dialectical development of one's self-understanding cannot be isolated from the social form that makes such a development possible. For Hegel, the forms of subjectivity and sociality are mutually constitutive (although neither can be reduced to, nor described solely in terms of, the other). A certain kind of society is possible only when its members have achieved the requisite stage of self-consciousness appropriate to the social form; likewise, this development of self-consciousness is possible only under a certain set of social conditions. Whereas, for Kant, freedom and autonomy are logically regressive and atemporal 'conditions of the possibility', for Hegel they are the products of an entire set of mediating factors made rationally intelligible.

Hegel turns to his 'science of the state' in order to show how the moral worldview depends upon social and political conditions it does not acknowledge. But the connection between freedom and the state (outlined in the *Philosophy of Right*) requires two points of clarification. First, despite Velkley's claim that Hegel shares Aristotle's concern for habituation, it is not the case (as it arguably was for Aristotle)[9] that ethics is merely a part of a science of politics. Just as an individual is not a part to the whole (see Chapter 2), so too does Hegel's remedy for moral individualism avoid conceiving of the individual as merely a part of a political order. Having already argued that Hegel's version of reconciliation

[9] This remains an open question, given Aristotle's complicated discussion of contemplation in *NE*, book 10, trans. Terence Irwin, second edition (Hackett Press, 1999).

involves self-transformation, Michael Hardimon writes: "The idea of reconciliation does involve the idea of unity with the social world, but the sort of unity that reconciliation involves is quite different from what Hegel took the participants in ancient *Sittlichkeit* to enjoy. *It is a form of unity that preserves difference*."[10]

The second point of clarification is that Hegel's early writings seem to reflect the Stoic's and Skeptic's appropriation of Socrates rather than Aristotle's criticism (i.e. they are closer to the first interpretation of the Socratic ambiguity than the second). It is only with the *Philosophy of Right* that Hegel fully turns to political philosophy to make explicit the presuppositions of the moral worldview. His early writings manifest a distrust of the state and a defense of an unmediated form of individuality: "From nature I come to the *work of man*. The idea of mankind being premised – I shall prove that it gives us no idea of the *state*, since the state is a mechanical thing, any more than it gives us an idea of a *machine*. Only something that is an object of *freedom* is called an *idea*. So we must go even beyond the state! – For every state must treat free men as cogs in a machine; and this it ought not to do; so it must *stop*."[11]

This image of the state as a machine is later supplanted with the image of the state as a type of organism. This marks a transition to thinking of the individual as mediated by determinate social and political factors, instead of

---

[10] Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge University Press, 1994): p. 36, emphasis added.

[11] "The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism," trans. H.S. Harris, in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Blackwell Publishers, 1998): p. 28. This piece was published anonymously, but it is commonly considered to be the work (perhaps in collaboration) of the young Hegel. Further, its themes echo those expressed in other early writings.

understanding individuality in the following (rather abstract) terms from 'Fragment of a System': "The concept of individuality includes opposition to infinite variety and also inner association with it. A human being is an individual life in so far as he is to be distinguished from all the elements and from the infinity of individual beings outside himself. *But he is only an individual life in so far as he is at one with all the elements, with the infinity of lives outside himself*."[12]

What remains the same in the transition from Hegel's early to later works is his refusal to presuppose some conception of the individual, but there is a marked shift from a more cosmopolitan view to one that highlights the particularity of the political order that produces the individual. Hegel's provocative remarks in his early writings on the need for a 'mythology of reason' offer a clue to understanding his later science of the state. He writes, "Until we express ideas aesthetically, i.e., mythologically, they have no interest for the *people*, and conversely until mythology is rational the philosopher must be ashamed of it."[13] As we have already seen, the state is, at this time, viewed as a machine rather than an organism, with individuals as its cogs.

But the *Philosophy of Right* might be read as Hegel's attempt to construct the 'mythology of reason' he desires in his early work. Here he uses an architectural metaphor in outlining his conception of *Sittlichkeit*: "the rich inward articulation of ethical life, i.e. the state, the architectonic of that life's rationality – which sets determinate limits to the different circles of public life and their rights,

[12] "Fragment of a System," trans. Richard Kroner, in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Blackwell Publishers, 1998): p. 34, emphasis added.
[13] "Earliest System-Programme," 29

uses the strict accuracy of measurement which holds together every pillar, arch, and buttress and thereby produces the strength of the whole out of the harmony of the parts."[14]

The kind of architectural arches Hegel refers to here are produced as a result of the various parts of the building being organized proportionately. Similarly, although Hegel talks about the state as a kind of metaphysical entity, its collection of institutions and affective bonds are made possible only when its individual citizens regard themselves as members of the political order. The state, then, is produced through this recognition, rather than being foisted upon individuals who must resign themselves to it.[15]

So the kind of philosophical *Bildung* discussed in Chapter 2 must be supplemented with a political form of *Bildung*. T.M. Knox claims that the shift from civil society to the state depends upon this new form of *Bildung*: "The educative influence of civil life (especially the life of trade and commerce) makes men realize that they are by nature not self-seeking individualists but creatures of reason . . . *hence the transition from civil society to the state is due to education*."[16]

This education requires a 'mythology of reason' that overcomes the 'cold logic' of law and duty. Hegel writes, "The formal character of the right as a duty and a law it feels as the letter, cold and dead, as a shackle; for it does not recognize itself in the law and so does not recognize itself as free there, because

[14] PR, Preface
[15] Those who dismiss Hegel's 'science of the state' by referring to it as the 'divine on earth' beg the difficult question of what Hegel means by 'the divine.'
[16] Knox, PR, xi, emphasis added.

law is the reason of the thing, and reason refuses to allow feeling to warm itself at its own private hearth."[17] Hegel's science of the state attempts to make explicit what is presupposed in civil society: rather than establishing new philosophical foundations for politics, it is designed to transform the self-understanding of those who study it. Recall Hegel's remark from the *Encyclopedia Logic* regarding the old man and the child.[18]

His science of the state is an attempt to 'apprehend in thought' the spirit of his time, rather than establishing some criterion for correct political action.[19] Leaving everything as it is, the transformation occurs in the self-understanding of those who study it. Hegel's solution to the Socratic ambiguity is to conceive of the individual both as formed through social, political, and historical factors and as *beisichselbst* only insofar as these factors have been rationally understood.

Rather than establishing an a priori distinction between autonomous and heteronomous motivations, his account dialectically demonstrates how freedom is achieved through an understanding of what was previously regarded as heteronomous. *Bildung*, in its moral and political senses, requires overcoming the equally one-sided notions that the individual exists independent of a social and political order, or that the individual is reduced to a mere part of a greater whole. The subject is not an "inert point,"[20] but is produced through its own understanding of the ways in which it is formed.

---

[17] PR, Preface
[18] "The absolute Idea is to be compared with the old man who utters the same religious sentiments as the child, but for whom they carry the significance of his whole life. Even if the child understands the religious content, it still counts for him only as something outside of which lie the whole of life and the whole world" (EL §237Z).
[19] PR, Preface
[20] PS §23

Freedom for Hegel requires the Socratic questioning of anything heteronomously and authoritatively presupposed as 'given.' Hegel's version of autonomy attempts to reconcile the first Socratic legacy of independence and self-sufficiency with the second Socratic legacy of membership in a determinate social and political order. Understanding this dialectical relationship between autonomy and heteronomy requires an examination of Hegel's transformation of traditional metaphysical and epistemological concerns.

A SOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION OF METAPHYSICS

Hegel's account of *Bildung* (and the difference it entails between pre-philosophical and philosophical forms of individualism) requires us to give attention to the first-person perspective of the inquirer. A discussion of autonomy and heteronomy cannot be divorced from the self-understanding of those engaged in the inquiry. On Hegel's view, these terms no longer have univocal meanings: the practical dissolving of heteronomous concerns goes hand in hand with the practical dissolving of fixed and final epistemological and metaphysical positions.

For instance, the dispute between those who regard Hegel's epistemology as realist, and those who construe it as idealist, fail to consider the perspective of the inquirer. William Bristow calls attention to the fact that realists like Kenneth Westphal claim that "Hegel defends the view that there is a way the world is that does not depend on our cognitive and linguistic activity and that we can know the

way the world is."[21] Idealists like Robert Pippin counter that, on Hegel's view, "Human reason can attain non-empirical knowledge only about itself, about what has come to be called recently our 'conceptual scheme,' and the concepts required for a scheme to count as one at all."[22]

Bristow evaluates this supposed dispute without considering that one view might be correct prospectively and the other retrospectively. What is commonly regarded as the 'myth of the given' is not a myth in one sense: the given is reconceived pragmatically in Hegel's thought as recalcitrant experience. Hegel's in-itself differs from Kant's in that it depends upon the perspective of the inquirer. So the realist is correct to discuss the world 'as it really is,' as long as he considers this prospectively and relative to the inquirer. The idealist, on the other hand, is correct retrospectively. The *Phenomenology* is the story of the successive failure of consciousness to secure a criterion that corresponds to the world 'as it really is.' What consciousness regards as the in-itself is really only the in-itself *for consciousness*.

The absolute correspondence originally sought is recast in terms of partial truths seen retrospectively. But the failure of the realist's project of correspondence does not mean that we can know only our own conceptual scheme, as if the way the world 'really is' still transcends our understanding. Adam Scarfe correctly evaluates this pseudo-dispute as follows: "The mutually cancelled or negated contents of 'ideality' and 'reality' are equally preserved and

---

[21] William Bristow, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* (Oxford University Press, 2007): p. 148, note 26. See especially Kenneth Westphal's *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989).
[22] Ibid. See especially Robert Pippin's *Hegel's Idealism*: *The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

raised up as they are null. Therefore, according to Hegel, the truth resides in the process of the mutual dialectical sublation of the two terms, in opposition to the fundamental bias of the Ancient skeptics that 'dialectic has only a negative result.'"[23] Even though what is 'given' in experience can be recognized only retrospectively, it is not therefore a mere appearance. To claim this is to engage in an all-or-nothing form of philosophy that neglects the nuances of Hegel's position.

The standpoint of the inquirer is also systematically suppressed in many discussions of Hegel's metaphysical views. Beatrice Longuenesse, for instance, perpetuates the misleading view that the distinction between concept and intuition is merely apparent. She writes, "It is for Hegel that both intuition and concept, particular and universal, being and thought are mere appearances of an original identity which is that of the *intellectus archetypus*, or the *ens realissimum*."[24] The condition of the possibility of determinate negation is a distinction between the in-itself and the for-itself. Discussing this 'original identity' manages to make Hegel's thought more (rather than less) abstract, since he clearly conceives of experience in its "concrete richness."[25]

This requires affirming the reality of our ability to make distinctions and rejecting the "monochromatic formalism"[26] which "palm[s] off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black – this is cognition naively

[23] Adam Scarfe, "The Role of Scepticism in Hegel's 'Doctrine of the Concept,'" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2003): p. 83.
[24] Beatrice Longuenesse, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*, trans. Nicole Simek (Cambridge University Press, 2007): p. 184.
[25] PS §3
[26] PS §15

reduced to vacuity."[27] Hegel's version of the Absolute is nothing independent of its various manifestations, each carrying with it a conception of the in-itself. Drawing these distinctions absolutely (e.g. Kant's distinction between concepts and intuitions) or reducing them to mere appearances of some 'original unity' seem like opposing views. Yet they similarly suppress the ability of the inquirer to draw the fine-grained distinctions necessary for making sense of experience. Recall that *Beisichselbstsein* requires not eradicating the conflicts in experience but in dissolving their heteronomous influence.

Drawing the distinction between appearance and reality in absolute terms is also the shared mistake of the dogmatist and the skeptic. Hegel, discussing the skepticism of Schulze and his characterization of speculative philosophy, writes, "*existence* is supposed to be made *discoverable* by the aid of abstract principles and of *concepts*; what things may be, taken in their true but hidden *actuality* is to be *reconnoitered*; the tools that philosophy employs for this reconnoitering of things are *concepts*, abstract principles, // conceptual implications; and the bridge to those hidden things is built out of nothing but concepts. It is not possible to conceive speculation and the rational realm in a cruder way."[28]

Just as the debate between the realist and the idealist failed to consider the standpoint of the inquirer, this way of distinguishing between appearance and reality presupposes some 'hidden things' that our concepts either access or fail to reach (without regard to the status of the inquirer). Genuinely speculative philosophy, on the other hand, regards this abstract formulation as theoretically

[27] PS §16
[28] RSP §8-9

and practically untenable. It leaves one either affirming or denying that mind and nature are hylomorphic, such that our concepts either correspond to ultimate reality or not.[29]

But William Maker points out that the foundationalist (who affirms this to be the case) and the postfoundationalist (who denies it) share the same fundamental presupposition: "The general idea that the human project is somehow unavoidably other-determined, that we are inextricably beholden to forces beyond our grasp, *be they divine, natural, or the consequences of the contingencies of history and language* . . . is a common view of both foundationalists and pragmatic postfoundationalists."[30]

Hegel rejects the notion that essences are static universals, in favor of the idea that they are determined through the practical activity and self-understanding of the inquirer. The distinction between appearance and essence, immanent in experience, is understood retrospectively rather than presupposed as given. On Hegel's view, the metaphysics of static universals ". . . was not a free and objective thinking, for it did not allow the ob-ject to determine itself freely from within, but presupposed it as ready-made."[31] But by reconceiving this distinction, and understanding it with respect to the standpoint of the inquirer, Hegel shields the metaphysical concern for truth from sophistic scorn. Maker singles out

---

[29] See Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* for an extended evaluation of the idea of hylomorphism (Princeton University Press, 1979). It is a strange and underappreciated fact that Hegel can be superficially interpreted as endorsing side of this dispute. Depending on which elements of his thought one emphasizes, he resembles either Aristotle or Nietzsche. See Stephen Houlgate's *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics* for a comprehensive comparison of Hegel and Nietzsche's transformation of metaphysics (Cambridge University Press, 1986).
[30] William Maker, "Hegel and Rorty, or, How Hegel Saves Pragmatism from Itself," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 37, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2006): p. 109, emphasis added.
[31] EL §69

Richard Rorty as a pragmatic postfoundationalist (and admitted sophist) who remains unselfconsciously 'wedded' to the foundationalist project.[32]

In *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, Rorty writes: "What was needed, and what the idealists were unable to envisage, was a repudiation of the very idea of anything – mind or matter, self or world – having an intrinsic nature to be expressed or represented."[33] Even on Rorty's own view, this is not something that can be argued for. It stands as a skeptical rejection of foundationalism that sees contingency where others see necessity. Yet it is similarly silent with respect to its own starting point: why is the 'repudiation' of the idea of an intrinsic nature any less dogmatic a starting point than its affirmation?

There might be good pragmatic reasons for regarding concepts like 'self' and 'world' as having an intrinsic nature, especially if this intrinsic nature is not regarded as some 'hidden truth' waiting to be discovered. Rejecting the idea of an absolute criterion for knowing the world 'as it really is' does not rule out need for provisional criteria that allow us to make sense of ourselves and our experience. So Maker claims that Hegel 'saves pragmatism from itself' by avoiding Rorty's turn to sheer contingency. He writes, "Thus Hegel avoids the 'anything goes' which Nietzsche and other postfoundationalists see as the only alternative to foundationalism. It is not the case that anything goes in the system, simply because sustaining autonomous self-determination produces determinate

[32] See especially p. 107, where Maker writes: "Despite its efforts to extricate itself, pragmatic antifoundationalism remains wedded to the foundationalism it purports to reject. For even an appeal to habit as the allegedly underlying basis for our preferences must claim to be a true account of our situation. By contrast, Hegel's critique has involved no claims about some alternative conception of truth or about anything other than what is contained in and entailed by the defining assumptions of the foundational project."

[33] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989): p. 4.

conditions for autonomy as part of the process of its determination."[34] These 'determinate conditions' are partial and provisional, but determinate nonetheless.

So although Hegel's view is *aporetic* with respect to the determination of an absolute criterion, genuinely speculative philosophy takes seriously the idea that there is something to be right or wrong about in concrete cases. It seeks Socratically to make explicit its presuppositions, since, as Bernard Mabile writes, it is willing to ". . . risk a sensible discourse, conscious of its finitude but forcing itself never to be content with the lazy dogmatism of relativism which, in pretending to hold modestly to its personal views, subtracts itself from the constitutive requirement of rationality: to expose all its theses to contradiction."[35]

Rorty partially misunderstands Hegel when he praises him as the sort of philosopher ". . . interested in dissolving inherited problems rather than solving them. In this view, substituting dialectic for demonstration as the method of philosophy . . . is not a discovery about the nature of a preexistent entity called 'philosophy' or 'truth.' It is changing the way we talk, and thereby changing what we want to do and what we think we are."[36] My reconstruction of Hegel's moral philosophy (see Chapter 2) emphasizes the way in which he dissolves dogmatic and skeptical concerns, rather than securing new and more stable philosophical foundations. But this does not mean that Hegel merely 'changes the subject' when confronted with metaphysical or epistemological questions.

One way of dissolving inherited problems is to show how the perspective of the inquirer has to be taken into account, such that (as we have seen) the realist

[34] Maker, 112
[35] Mabile, 291
[36] CIS, 20

is right prospectively and the idealist retrospectively. Further, substituting 'dialectic for demonstration' means attempting to understand abstract concepts concretely (and criteria as partial and provisional), rather than abandoning rational standards entirely. Finally, Maker's observation that foundationalists and postfoundationalists share the view that we are 'inextricably beholden to forces beyond our grasp' resonates when one reads Rorty.

In *Philosophy and Social Hope*, for instance, it seems like Rorty is more interested in constructing new problems than dissolving old ones. He writes: "Both the words we use and our willingness to affirm certain sentences using those words and not others are the products of fantastically complex causal connections between human organisms and the rest of the universe. *There is no way to divide up this web of causal connections so as to compare the relative amount of subjectivity and of objectivity in a given belief*."[37]

If Rorty is right, then the Hegelian connection between freedom and rational intelligibility would be undermined: the old metaphysical 'hidden truths' would be replaced by the new inscrutability of a 'web of causal connections.' But Rorty's claim that one cannot carve up experience into its 'subjective' and 'objective' elements applies perhaps to Kant but not to Hegel. It might challenge the view that experience is the synthesis of concepts and intuitions (superficially standing in for 'subjective' and 'objective'), and Hegel might agree that this division cannot be made univocally. Yet, as we have seen, Hegel conceives of experience as the perpetual failure of the synthesis of the in-itself and the for-

[37] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Penguin Books, 1999): xxvii.

itself. Despite this failure, one learns retrospectively to distinguish between the in-itself and the in-itself-for-consciousness.

In other words, although the subjective and objective cannot be distinguished absolutely, we in fact distinguish them pragmatically all the time. When experience becomes recalcitrant, we are forced to discriminate between those beliefs which were merely opinions and those which equipped us to grasp the situation as it really was. Here, as in the case of whether the concepts of 'self' and 'world' have intrinsic natures, Hegel seems more pragmatic than Rorty.

Pragmatically distinguishing between the subjective and objective elements of experience is necessary for making experience rationally intelligible and, correlatively, for making ourselves free. Recall that Hegel refuses to accept any authority as given and therefore rationally inscrutable. This is not to say that philosophy constructs its own truths a priori and superimposes them on experience. Whereas for Kant 'ought' implies 'can,' Hegel accepts a version of Aristotle's dictum that 'actuality is the best evidence of possibility.' Actuality (what is *wirklich*) is the middle-term between the standard distinction of what is and what ought to be. This is the adjectival form of the verb *wirken*, which means to effect or to bring about.

Hegel's often-mistranslated aphorism in the *Philosophy of Right* ('the rational is the actual and the actual is the rational') charges the philosopher with the task of making explicit the rational form that underlies appearances, rather than theoretically constructing a moral ought and imposing it as universally valid. As Michael Hardimon writes, "Hegel understands actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) to be

the unity of essence (*Wesen*) and existence (*Existenz*). Things are 'actual' only to the extent that they realize their 'essence,' their underlying rational structure."[38]

The observation that *Wirklichkeit* connotes a practical activity forces one to rethink traditional understandings of rationality. For instance, it challenges both the pre-critical view that virtue and happiness necessarily entail one another, and the Kantian view that their unity is only ever a regulative ideal. Both strands of *eudaimonistic* thought remain committed (either speculatively or regulatively) to the notion that there is some fundamental reality in which the correspondence of virtue and happiness is secured. The guarantor of this unity is either philosophy itself or, given the limits of philosophy, an omnipotent God. Yet Hegel's account of actuality rejects both views: ". . . since philosophy is the exploration of the rational, it is for that very reason the apprehension of the present and the actual, not the erection of a beyond, supposed to exist, God knows where, or rather which exists, and we can perfectly well say where, namely in the error of a one-sided, empty, ratiocination."[39]

To say that the rational is the actual is to transform practically the question of the relationship between virtue and happiness. Just as Hegel's version of reconciliation (see Chapter 2) involves self-transformation rather than resignation, his account of *Wirklichkeit* refuses to divorce 'the rational' from the self-understanding of the inquirer. As Russon writes, "The moral spirit – the moral we – is a we that is not guaranteed, but is real only through the actions of single agents who make it real by establishing a shared identity through cooperative

[38] Hardimon, 26. See also EL §142.
[39] PR, Preface

action. The moral stance is the stance that recognizes the need to bring a shared community to birth within the particularities of the relationships of single selves who cannot turn beyond themselves for the means and the actuality of doing so."[40]

Rather than preserving the absolute unity of virtue and happiness by making it a regulative ideal, Hegel's conception of *Wirklichkeit* implies a kind of 'spiritual hylomorphism': it is only through the actual formation of a 'like-minded' form of life that moral ideals become real. Mind and world correspond only insofar as one participates in the on-going formation of oneself and of a determinate community of inquirers. So *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* require one another: without the reflective endorsement of the inquiring individual, social norms derive their authority merely from custom and habit. But without the external embodiment of these norms in the actual behavior of individuals, they become moral castles in the air.

In the *Phenomenology,* Hegel mocks any conception of moral goodness that purports to be objective, refusing to acknowledge its contingency and dependence upon the actual efforts of individuals. For instance, he criticizes the way in which the 'knight of virtue' abdicates responsibility for defending his high-minded ideals: his is a ". . . sham-fight which he cannot take seriously – because he knows that his true strength lies in the fact that the good exists absolutely in its own right, i.e. brings itself to fulfillment – a sham-fight which he also *dare* not allow to become serious."[41] Were the fight to become serious, the

[40] Russon, 145
[41] PS §386

knight of virtue would no longer be able to base his own self-understanding on values he deems to be objective.

Refusing to undertake Socratically his own *Bildung*, the supposedly virtuous individual is both conceited and self-effacing. His conceit comes from his certainty that he understands the nature of moral goodness; this self-certainty is, at the same time, self-effacement insofar as he has not earned this understanding philosophically. Rather, he deferentially relies upon an objective order of things that exists independently of his best efforts.[42] But just as freedom and autonomy were practical achievements, I shall suggest that the ongoing 'spiritual' formation of *Sittlichkeit* constitutes Hegel's practical understanding of *nous*. Hegel's turn to history, then, is his alternative to the kind of 'fact-of-the-matter philosophy' so pervasive in metaphysical and epistemological debates.

THE PROPHET IN REVERSE

> Their faces were reversed upon their shoulders / so that they came on walking backward, / since seeing forward was denied them. / . . . 'See how his shoulder-blades are now his chest. / Because he aspired to see too far ahead / he looks behind and treads a backward path.'
>
> -Dante, *The Inferno*

[42] See PS §390, where Hegel writes that the knight of virtue ". . . glories in this 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 gifts. Ideal entities and purposes of this kind are empty, ineffectual words which lift up the heart but leave reason unsatisfied, which edify, but raise no edifice; declamations which specifically declare merely this: that the individual who professes to act for such noble ends and who deals in such fine phrases is in his own eyes an excellent creature – 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, inflated with his own conceit."

When studying Hegel's philosophy of history, it is all-too-tempting to let one's thoughts become mired in fascinating but superficial distinctions. Two sets of such oppositions come to mind: the historically-conditioned nature of knowledge versus the desire for an unconditioned Absolute, and the eschatological versus the epochal reading of the Absolute. To elaborate on the second distinction, one wonders if the Absolute represents the infamous 'end of history' and, therefore, the end of dialectical progress, or rather the epochal transition into a 'post-historical' time in which the dialectical method of development is preserved.

Joseph Esposito states the problem concisely: "The central problem brought out by such commentators is: How can the interiorization (*Er-innerung*) of the past, which is made possible through the cultivation of memory (*Erinnerung*), become a permanent condition of man, if in the post-historical epoch there is no longer a traditional historical past to be interiorized? On the other hand, if history never ceases and contingency is real, how can the philosopher be assured that his concepts are sufficiently comprehensive for all levels of physical, mental, and social reality in all kinds of epochs?"[43]

The question of how to interpret the achievement of Absolute Knowing, and its relationship to the historically-conditioned nature of knowledge, is a persistent problem in Hegel scholarship. However, I think that both sets of distinctions conceal what is truly important in Hegel's philosophy of history: the relationship between history and philosophy. In this section, I shall address two

[43] Joseph Esposito, "Hegel, Absolute Knowledge, and the End of History," *Clio*, vol. 12, no. 4 (1983): p. 361.

related questions: What does Hegel mean by 'history'? What does Hegel's philosophy of history reveal about his conception of philosophy as such? I suggest that Hegel's complicated conception of history's relationship to philosophy can be described in a three-fold manner that roughly parallels his account of what history is itself (i.e. original, reflective, and philosophical history). Having clarified the relationship between history and philosophy, I suggest that commentators who focus on the aforementioned sets of distinctions simultaneously overemphasize the role of history in Hegel's system and fail to see its actual significance. That is, they focus on history as such (and what its end might mean), rather than emphasizing its function as the condition for the possibility for true philosophy.

Subordinating history to philosophy makes its significance relative to a larger context and shows why history is so important for Hegel's system. History brings about the realization of Spirit in time. Spirit is realized in various deficient (or merely partially true) forms until the advent of the state. Hegel deems the state to be the final form of Spirit because it embodies the full realization of freedom, the instantiation of the universal in a social form in which individuals reciprocally recognize each other as free. The birth of the state, then, entails the end of history insofar as the idea of freedom has arrived on the scene of human consciousness.

This, however, does not mean that the idea of the state has been perfectly instantiated (i.e. that every particular state is the true embodiment of its idea). Rather, as Stephen Houlgate writes, Hegel's philosophy is "profoundly realistic because it warns us against confusing the idea of the progress of human self-

understanding with the chimera of total human perfectibility."[44] The end of history does not mean the end of time or the end of action; rather, as we shall see, it means something much more specific for Hegel.

So it is important first to investigate what history means to Hegel, rather than leaping directly to the interesting distinctions that Hegel's philosophy of history makes possible. Hegel writes, "The application of the principle of freedom to worldly reality – the dissemination of this principle so that it permeates the worldly situation – this is the long process that makes up history itself."[45] History is the story of the self-actualization of Spirit, manifested in the world through the development of freedom. To say that Spirit is self-actualized, however, is not to posit an otherworldly unmoved mover. Rather, the manifestation of Spirit in the world is accomplished through the will and passions of individuals.

These actions have historical meaning that transcends the narrow interests and intentions of those who undertake them. Reason is cunning insofar as it manifests Spirit through the actions of individuals who are conscious only of their particular interests. Working behind the back of self-interested individuals in this way, however, does not mean that Spirit's manifestation reduces individuals to mere means to a super-historical end. Such a claim conceals the nature of the 'infinite right' of the individual to satisfy his particular consciousness.

In order to expand upon this understanding of history, Hegel discusses three different types of historical inquiry: original history, reflective history, and philosophical history. The original historian attempts to record events as they

---

[44] Stephen Houlgate, "World History as the Progress of Consciousness: An Interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy of History," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Fall 1990): p. 80.
[45] IPH, p. 21

were but "is not concerned with offering reflections on these events, for he lives within the spirit of the times and cannot as yet transcend them."[46] His account is subjective insofar as he, a particular individual, is representing events in a certain way. The reflective historian transcends his own time by offering an account of a time and place foreign to his own: "the spirit that speaks through the author is different from the spirit of the times for which he speaks."[47] The reflective historian is conscious of how his account ought to be constructed. That is, he does not merely record events as they were but employs a critical method for selecting events that merit the attention of history.

However, only the philosophical historian is confronted with the burden of a fully self-conscious history. He must reconcile his desire to treat history as "raw material, not to be left as it is, but to be construed according to thoughts, a priori"[48] with the demand that philosophical reflection remain true to what is (rather than prescribing a priori laws from on high). This reconciliation, between what is and what ought to be, between the real content of history and the a priori method of philosophy, becomes the unique and important task of the philosophical historian. Just as Hegel practically dissolves the superficial debate between foundationalists and postfoundationalists, he turns to history to strike the right balance between rationalist and empiricist accounts.

This reflects Hegel's general attempt to find an appropriate level of theoretical abstraction for philosophical inquiry. An overly rationalistic account tries to derive a theory and then apply it to empirical particulars, whereas an

[46] IPH, p. 4
[47] IPH, p. 6
[48] IPH, p. 10

overly empirical account sees a theory as merely an inductive generalization from particulars that emerges after-the-fact. The truth for Hegel is somewhere in between: a theory derived independently from empirical facts is a meaningless abstraction, whereas a theory arrived at through induction is a mere generalization.

Hegel's solution to the rationalist-empiricist dichotomy in modern philosophy is his own philosophical science: it is a historicized rationalism or, in other terms, an empiricism made rational. Philosophy must focus on what is actual or *wirklich*, transforming ideally what it encounters in experience. It thereby achieves a level of theoretical abstraction suitable to experience, rather than attempting to derive some theoretical truth independent of experience. This leads to the realization that concepts are ineluctably historical, developing dialectically over time.

Operating with this understanding of history and its various modes of inquiry helps to frame the question of history's relationship to philosophy. This relationship is three-fold, paralleling the modes of historical inquiry. First, philosophy gives conceptual clarity to its own place and time, and it is determinately bound by these restrictions. History, then, offers philosophical reflection both a determinate content for its thought and proof of its own intrinsic limitations. In his famous statement in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel says, "As for the individual, every one is a son of his time; so philosophy also is its time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to fancy that any philosophy can transcend its present world, as that an individual could leap out of

his time or jump over Rhodes. If a theory transgresses its time, and builds up a world as it ought to be, it has an existence merely in the unstable element of opinion, which gives room to every wandering fancy."[49]

When a philosophical theory 'builds up a world as it ought to be,' it constructs "a castle in the air, having no formal existence except in the terror of a one-sided and empty formalism of thought."[50] This kind of 'empty formalism of thought' reveals the dangerous limits of subjectivity. It is true that history as such cannot properly begin without a subjective account of events. However, when this account lacks self-consciousness of its subjective element, it is tempted to ignore its own intrinsic limitations and to prescribe to the world how it ought to be. History situates the philosopher in a particular time and place, in a specific society, so that his reflections are meaningful rather than mere castles in the air. However, the price the philosopher must pay for meaningful reflection is the circumscription of what he can say meaningfully. He cannot jump over Rhodes but must accept and make use of his own historical limitations.

In this description of the relationship between history and philosophy, the role of the philosopher is to offer conceptual clarity to his time and place. Although philosophy always arrives on the scene too late to change what it must study, its valuable service is to understand its own historically-conditioned culture. In this way, the philosopher's task is like the original historian's: he is immersed in the spirit of his time and cannot transcend it, yet he must articulate it coherently. A similar account of the task of philosophy may be found in Hegel's

[49] PR, Preface
[50] PR, Preface

account of the 'phenomenological we' in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*; the consciousness that experiences the events of a particular time and place does not yet see the form they assume when one adopts a retrospective philosophical position.

Hegel writes, "Thus in the movement of consciousness there occurs a moment of *being-in-itself* or *being-for-us* which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself. The *content*, however, of what presents itself to us does exist *for it*; we comprehend only the formal aspect of that content, or its pure origination. *For it*, what has thus arisen exists only as an object; *for us*, it appears at the same time as movement and a process of becoming."[51]

The benefit of hindsight is to see the 'method behind the madness,' to understand the reasons why a particular stage of consciousness collapsed under the weight of its own internal contradictions. The consciousness experiencing events as they happen not only fails to see the internal contradictions in its conceptual scheme but, furthermore, cannot comprehend the transition to a new and higher form of consciousness: ". . .our experience of the untruth of the first notion comes by way of a second object *which we come upon by chance and externally*. . . ."[52] However, *for us* (i.e. those who accompany Hegel in his journey through the phases of consciousness), each stage of this dialectical development can be given a determinate form in retrospect (e.g. sense-certainty, force and the understanding, etc.).

[51] PS, Introduction, §87
[52] Ibid, emphasis added.

It is only after outlining this version of history's relationship to philosophy that one sees the limits of the historical relativist reading made possible by the *Philosophy of Right*. Recall Houlgate's claim quoted in Chapter 2: "Increasing self-consciousness does not, therefore, merely involve an advance in the theoretical understanding of a given form of consciousness which remains constant, but involves an advance in theoretical understanding which itself actively transforms consciousness. Increasing self-consciousness thus necessarily entails the production of new modes of consciousness."[53]

The very act of reflecting on one's own time and place marks the birth of a critical consciousness. Analogously, the detailed work of the original historian becomes the building-block for the development of a critical method that transcends one's own historical limitations. In this way, history not only provides philosophy with content for its reflection but exponentially expands the scope of what it can say.

So in the second mode of the relationship between history and philosophy, history provides philosophy with a method that allows it to transcend its own limitations. Here one can see a connection between Hegel's historical relativism and his world-historical, eschatological approach to history. Recall that it is misleading to assume that Hegel began his philosophy of history by positing a super-historical Absolute that had to be realized in history. Hegel recognizes the inadequacies of metaphysicians who posit such super-historical realities. He explicitly distances himself from those who have proposed *nous* as such a metaphysical reality, and those who have posited Providence or blind fate as

[53] Houlgate, 71

super-historical forces: "The mere belief in nous and providence is still quite inadequate. 'Reason' – which is said to rule the world – is just as indefinite a term as 'Providence.'"[54]

Yet there might be a different understanding of *nous* more consonant with Hegel's own view. As Eric Voegelin writes, "Reason in the noetic sense, it should be understood, does not put an apocalyptic end to history either now or in a progressivist future. *It rather pervades the history which it constitutes with a new luminosity of existential order in resistance to disordering passion*."[55] As we have seen, Hegel's account of *Wirklichkeit* involves the practical activity of securing the correspondence (only ever partial and provisional) between one's concepts and the world 'as it really is.'

His attempt to overcome the idle speculation and abstract claims of traditional metaphysics similarly commits him to the understanding of *nous* articulated by Voegelin. The essence of the distinction between autonomy and heteronomy, then, turns on the rational intelligibility that imposes 'existential order' on 'disordering passion.' Neither a mere metaphysical fact nor a critical condition-of-the-possibility, one's freedom and autonomy depends upon the 'new luminosity' provided in part by historical interpretation.

Just as the form of *Bildung* outlined in Chapter 2 depends upon the retrospection, recollection, and repetition that philosophy provides, the 'new luminosity' gained through historical interpretation exists only after the fact. Karl Löwith is correct to call Hegel's method a 'prophesy in reverse': "[Hegel] knew

[54] IPH, p. 18
[55] Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis* (Notre Dame University Press, 1978): p. 90.

this will and the plan of history. He did not know it as a prophet predicting future catastrophe but as a prophet in reverse, surveying and justifying the ways of the Spirit by its successive successes."[56] The reflective historian is, like the blind Tiresias, condemned to walk backward through the Inferno of history without ever foretelling the future. He can judge retrospectively, but this judgment cannot merely be superimposed upon past events and cannot annul the validity of the discrete forms of ethical life he witnesses throughout his journey.

Still, the reflective historian is armed with a method for discerning the rational development of history, and, in this way, has superseded the original historian. The reflective historian or, analogously, the philosopher whose consciousness has been expanded by his study of history, has acquired a method and a criterion for determining the 'end of history' (e.g. the realization of freedom as a universal concept). But the end of history does not mean the end of human action, nor does it imply that every internal contradiction has been overcome. Rather, it simply means that, on Hegel's view, the modern state is both the latest and the final form for Spirit's actualization in time. As Houlgate writes, "At the completion of history, therefore, no utopian perfection has been achieved, but, in one part of the globe at least, humanity has at last achieved a mature awareness of its freedom and has begun to live a life in accordance with that freedom."[57]

The end of history, then, is both banal and significant: it is banal because, just as there were pre-historical human societies, there will be post-historical states that have yet to fulfill in reality the idea that they embody. Neither time nor

[56] Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (University of Chicago Press, 1949): p. 58.
[57] Houlgate, 72

human action has ceased, because the idea of the state does not guarantee its perfect actualization under contingent worldly conditions. Hegel says explicitly that "a bad state is one which merely exists. A sick body also exists, but it has no true reality."[58] But the end of history is significant because Spirit has reached the final form of social arrangement, and has thus brought about the possibility of truly realizing freedom.

With regards to history's end, Daniel Berthold-Bond advocates adopting a ". . . non-absolutist, epochal version of Hegel's eschatology if we are to preserve the spirit of his metaphysics."[59] But he fails to see that something has changed decisively when the state comes on the scene. Berthold-Bond's effort to preserve the method of dialectic is understandable, provided one realizes that its purpose would be different in a post-historical age. The dialectical method might still work for discovering and rooting out internal contradictions in a particular, unhealthy state, but it is no longer required for its former purpose: to move Spirit along toward an essentially different stage of consciousness.

In a similar way, Esposito misunderstands what Hegel means by history. He writes, "It might just as well be argued that Hegel's view of history is no different from that of all writers of universal history since Hellenistic times, except that he simply had more data to universalize."[60] Esposito fails to see that history is more than a collection of data; on Hegel's view, history reveals distinct, more or less developed, levels of Spirit's self-actualization that progress

[58] PR §270, addition
[59] Daniel Berthold-Bond, "Hegel's Eschatological Vision: Does History Have a Future?" *History and Theory*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1988): p. 14.
[60] Esposito, 355

dialectically until they reach a final form. On Hegel's view, Hellenistic philosophers lacked not only a quantity of historical data but also a sufficiently developed historical consciousness.

The 'end of history' marks the transition from the second mode of the relationship between history and philosophy to its third and final mode. History, having provided philosophy with a method that allowed it to transcend its particular place and time and to become a 'prophet in reverse,' now bids philosophy farewell (insofar as history is a determinate content that is merely given for philosophical reflection). This third mode entails recognizing the end of history as the condition of the possibility of true philosophy: it is only in and through history that true freedom (freedom as a universal category) can be actualized.

The earlier modes of philosophy (as unable to leap over Rhodes, as walking blindly backwards through time) now turn out to be imperfect forms of philosophy itself. The final stage of self-consciousness entails philosophical reflection on the universality of human freedom. As Houlgate writes, "Now, in Hegel's view, mature self-awareness is finally attained, and the education of the human race completed, when the true nature of human freedom is comprehended *philosophically*."[61]

Rolf Ahlers recognizes a dilemma in Houlgate's interpretation when he writes, "On the one hand Hegel stresses the objectivity of reason and that philosophy cannot dictate to the world how the world *ought* to be, that philosophy always is too late for this task because the truth of the spirit *has already* been

[61] Houlgate, 79

realized. On the other hand, however, Hegel stresses that 'reconciliation' happens mainly *'in philosophy.' Reconciliation is to occur primarily in philosophy, and that means, not in temporal reality.*[62] But the dilemma is dissolved when one recalls that the philosopher is charged with making explicit the rational form underlying appearances. The existential order imposed through historical interpretation makes *wirklich* what was implicitly (and only abstractly) rational. Hegel's claim that 'every human is free by virtue of being human' would be entirely tautologous, were it not for the historical development that has given this statement determinate content. It has earned its content through the struggle for a social form suitable for freedom's recognition (i.e. the state).

The universality of freedom, as developed and achieved through historical consciousness, differs from the universality of freedom as a pure abstraction, posited by philosophers a priori and independent of history. As Hegel writes, "Freedom, as the ideal dimension of original nature, does not exist as an original and natural state. On the contrary, it must first be achieved and won, and indeed won through an endless process involving the discipline of knowledge and will."[63] The idea of existential order ('in resistance to disordering passion') philosophically connects Hegel's understanding of freedom and autonomy with his conception of history.

In a similar fashion as the metaphysicians Hegel repudiates, philosophers of the moral a priori try to superimpose the moral ought on any and every form of ethical life. But Hegel recognizes an element of contingency in our moral life,

---

[62] Rolf Ahlers, "History and Philosophy as Theodicy: On 'World History as the World's Judgment,'" *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Fall 2000): p. 164, emphasis added.
[63] IPH, p. 43

which is comprised of partial and provisional truths and sustained only by the spiritual formation of those involved. Alan Wood writes, "The claims of the ethical are therefore always conditional, imperfect, ultimately unsatisfying to our reason. Kant and Fichte got things backwards when they tried to make morality or ethics the foundation of the highest things, even of religion and speculative philosophy."[64] Hegel's philosophy of history reflects the naiveté in positing an absolute standard, the dangerous hubris of building a castle in the air, and then trying to impose it upon the world. Philosophy cannot tell the world how it ought to be a priori, but it can reflect upon a world that has become suitable for philosophy through the rational development of history.

[64] Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990): p. 221.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING ETHICAL LIFE EXPLICIT

Philosophy does not waste time with such empty and otherworldly stuff.
What philosophy has to do with is always something
concrete and strictly present.

-G.W.F. Hegel
Encyclopedia Logic, §94, addition

The relationship between freedom and recognition, which connects the philosophical and political forms of *Bildung*, has earned Hegel the reputation for being either a great critic or a great defender of a liberal political tradition. At stake is whether and in what way it is possible to reconcile the 'liberty of the ancients' with the 'liberty of the moderns.' Jürgen Habermas draws the distinction as follows: "Liberals have stressed the 'liberties of the moderns': liberty of belief and conscience, the protection of life, personal liberty, and property – in sum, the core of subjective private rights. Republicanism, by contrast, has defended the 'liberties of the ancients': the political rights of participation and communication that make possible the citizens' exercise of self-determination."[1] Ancient and modern liberty might be considered as two forms of autonomy and self-determination: the autonomy of the individual and the autonomy of a political society that is sustained through the on-going formation of a collective identity.

[1] Jürgen Habermas, "Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls' Political Liberalism," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XCII, no. 3 (March 1995): p. 127.

In this chapter, I will discuss the rather recent revival in American political philosophy of an Hegelian solution to this dilemma. Briefly outlining Francis Fukuyama's reading of Hegel will set up the liberal distinction between the private sphere and the public sphere. Here I intend to show how Fukuyama, following Kojève's reading of Hegel, confuses Hegel's account of the state with a Hobbesian account. Then I shall briefly consider the insights and limitations of two Neo-Kantian responses to this question. For example, Hegel looms large in a 1995 debate between John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Finally, I shall consider how Hegel's own answer to this question brings to light yet another Socratic appropriation: the relationship between Socratic ignorance and Socratic irony. Hegel's version of irony serves as a foil to the kind of liberal irony advocated by Richard Rorty.

At stake throughout this discussion of ancient and modern liberty is how to understand the ambiguity of self-government. Just as Hegel's philosophical form of *Bildung* distinguished between abstract and concrete understandings of the individual, so too must we inquire into the nature of the 'self' that governs. Comparing and contrasting Hegel's views with some prominent liberal thinkers will help us better to understand what motivates his account of the state.

LIBERTY, ANCIENT AND MODERN

Hegel's philosophy of history seems to secure a criterion for determining whether a social and political order is worthy of reconciliation. It is through the

mutual recognition of the freedom of the individual that the state can claim superiority. Yet this criterion of free and reciprocal recognition has been interpreted in mutually exclusive ways. Michael Hardimon writes that "the tension internal to Hegel's view that the modern social world is both worthy of reconciliation and in need of reform is unusual and complex and leads to a natural tendency to push Hegel in one of two directions: *either* toward the extreme view that since the social world is worthy of reconciliation it does not need to be reformed *or* toward the extreme view that since the social world needs to be reformed it is not worthy of reconciliation."[2] Does freedom paradoxically result from abiding by my station and its duties, or does it require rationally reforming the social and political order?

Hegel's understanding of *Wirklichkeit* (as a kind of practical activity) reveals both of these views to be superficial: his political philosophy is *aporetic* in its refusal to posit some concrete criterion for determining when a political order is in need of reform. So the notion that freedom serves as a criterion for judging the legitimacy of a political order is misleading. Since the rational is the actual, and the actual is connected to the practical activity of the inquiring individual, the outcome of Hegel's political philosophy is the *Bildung* of one's self-understanding (which includes one's identity as a citizen of a determinate political order). Although it sounds like a grand metaphysical conclusion, claiming that freedom is the final criterion for judging the legitimacy of a political order is merely abstract and therefore misleading.

---

[2] Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge University Press, 1994): p. 27.

Some interpreters of Hegel have seized upon this criterion in order to identify humanity's perpetual progress. In American political thought Francis Fukuyama influentially revived a supposedly Hegelian understanding of the end of history and the inevitable victory of liberal democracy. He writes, "For Hegel, the embodiment of human freedom was the modern constitutional state, or again, what we have called liberal democracy. The Universal History of mankind was nothing other than man's progressive rise to full rationality, and to a self-conscious awareness of how that rationality expresses itself in liberal self-government."[3]

His reading of Hegel comes directly out of Alexandre Kojève's famous lectures, such that he even borrows the following phrase from Kojève in order to understand this liberal democratic state: ". . . the principles of liberty and equality that emerged from the French Revolution, embodied in what Kojève called the modern '*universal and homogenous state*,' represented the end point of human ideological evolution beyond which it was impossible to progress further."[4]

This reading not only suppresses Hegel's concern for the terror associated with the French Revolution; it also fails to inquire into the relationship between freedom and equality, presupposing instead that they are mutually reinforcing. The idea of liberal progress assumes that freedom for all is achieved by perpetually breaking down the borders that 'irrationally' divide us (i.e. rendering us unequal). This is how Fukuyama explains the logic behind Kojève's use of the phrase 'universal and homogenous state': "The liberal state . . . is rational because

[3] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harper Collins Press, 1992): p. 60.
[4] Fukuyama, 66, emphasis added.

it reconciles these competing demands for recognition on the only mutually acceptable basis possible, that is, on the basis of the individual's identity as a human being. The liberal state must be universal, that is, grant recognition to all citizens because they are human beings, and not because they are members of some particular national, ethnic, or racial group. And it must be homogenous insofar as it creates a classless society based on the abolition of the distinction between masters and slaves."[5]

Recall from chapter 3 that the cosmopolitan views expressed in Hegel's early writings eventually gave way to his emphasis on the determinate social and political order that produces the individual. Although he never denies the significance of the recognition of the humanity of the individual, he explicitly rejects the kind of cosmopolitanism that abstractly recognizes individuals as *Persons*. For instance, he writes the following in the *Philosophy of Right*: "It is part of education, of thinking as the consciousness of the single in the form of universality, that the ego comes to be apprehended as a universal person in which all are identical. A man counts as a man in virtue of his manhood alone, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc. This is an assertion which thinking ratifies and to be conscious of it is of infinite importance. *It is defective only when it is crystallized, e.g. as a cosmopolitanism in opposition to the concrete life of the state*."[6]

The mistake Fukuyama makes in his Kojève-influenced revival is to attribute to Hegel a politically homogenous view clearly at odds with Hegel's

[5] Fukuyama, 202
[6] PR §209, emphasis added.

view of the state. The state is the result of a proportionately organized set of estates and institutions that mediate and moderate an individual's self-interest. Hegel rejects the homogenous alternative that recognizes individuals as unmediated members of the polity, each enjoying their individual rights against the state. The organization of individuals into different estates is seen as mutually beneficial for the individuals and for the state itself.

For instance, Hegel writes, ". . . it is of the utmost importance that the masses should be organized, because only so do they become mighty and powerful. Otherwise they are nothing but a heap, an aggregate of atomic units. Only when the particular associations are organized members of the state are they possessed of legitimate power."[7] The failure of proper and proportionate organization results in a permanent underclass of an 'aggregate of atomic units.' These individuals gain legitimate membership by being organized, and, conversely, the state is not threatened by their illegitimate expressions of power.

The idea of a 'universal and homogenous state' is more Hobbesian than Hegelian. Hobbes inaugurates a long liberal tradition of attempting to reconcile freedom and equality in the manner Fukuyama attributes to Hegel. The social contract model of the state carves out space for individual freedom (i.e. Hobbes' 'freedom between the laws') while grounding the legitimacy of government on the consent of these same individuals. In other words, the act of giving consent (through the social contract) establishes the equality of consenting individuals, who are then permitted to pursue whatever conception of the good life they see fit (so long as it does not violate the equality established through the contract). In

[7] PR §290, addition

this way, Hobbes's social contract model of the state serves as an extended argument for the preservation of a distinction between the public and the private sphere.

Indivisible sovereignty and individual rights are mutually secured through Hobbes' metaphysical account of the origin of the state. The primary motivation for making sovereignty indivisible is the unacceptable alternative: the endless violence of civil war. Hobbes criticizes those in the classical republican tradition (Aristotle in particular) for "licentiously controlling the actions of their Soveraigns; and again of controlling those controllers, with the effusion of so much blood."[8] An infinite regress of authority results when sovereignty is divided, such that there is always another appeal to be made and nothing is ever definitively decided. To put the point more forcefully, divided sovereignty is oxymoronic: it is no sovereignty at all because its concept of authority is not in fact authoritative. It can always be overruled.

Absolute sovereignty is the condition of the possibility of individuals freely and privately pursuing their own conception of the good life. Yet through his analysis of representation, Hobbes can claim that, since the sovereign power is constituted through the contract, each individual is the author of every sovereign act. He writes, "A multitude of men, are made One person, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented; so that it be done with the consent of every one of that Multitude in particular. For it is the Unity of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented, that maketh the Person One. . . . And because the Multitude naturally is not One, but Many; they cannot be understood for one; but many

[8] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996): p. 150.

Authors."[9] In a clarifying remark, Hobbes states that "this is more than Consent, or Concord; *it is a reall Unitie* [sic] *of them all*, in one and the same Person, made by Covenant of every man with every man."[10]

If there were no metaphysical story of how the sovereign is invested with overarching authority, then Hobbes could maintain merely that each individual's will is conjoined contingently to the will of the sovereign and to the wills of other individuals. Hobbes distinguishes between mere concord (in which a plurality of wills happen to coincide) and a real unity (in which the wills necessarily coincide, or rather that they are already unified and are not brought together coincidentally). He realizes that the notion of self-authorization so crucial to his theory turns on the existence of a real unity of individuals embodied in the sovereign as representative.

In this way, the private freedom enjoyed by Hobbesian subjects is only half the story. On the one hand, it is true that the liberty of Hobbesian subjects consists in the cracks left between the sovereign's laws. Hobbes writes, "In cases where the Soveraign [sic] has prescribed no rule, there the Subject hath the Liberty to do, or forebeare, according to his own discretion."[11] However, to say that liberty exists merely where the law is silent would contradict the crucial insight that the commonwealth is founded on a voluntary contractual agreement. As every individual is necessarily the author of every sovereign act, it is simply not true that they are free only to the extent that the law is silent. Rather, the law is the expression of each individual's free will, having contractually transferred

[9] *Leviathan*, 114, emphasis added.
[10] *Leviathan*, 120, emphasis added.
[11] *Leviathan*, 152

their unlimited natural rights to the sovereign. In this way, it is possible to understand Hobbes claim that the "Law is the "publique Conscience"[12] "by which [a man] hath *already undertaken to be guided*."[13]

The law is a public standard by which to judge one's own actions and beliefs. It is more reliable than one's own private conscience (which is merely one man's subjective opinion) but no less free because its authority is derived from the voluntary consent of the people. So the establishment of the civil law in no way interferes with or impedes individual freedom. Rather, it is the condition of the possibility of true freedom, because the conflict of unlimited natural rights in the state of nature led to unlimited violence.

Hobbes attempts to account for both forms of autonomy (public and private) intimated in the conflict between ancient and modern liberty. Aside from his metaphysical account of representation, which locates the individual's will both in his personal choices and in the sovereign will formed through mutual consent, he deftly deals with the question of natural law. Hobbes does not deny that individuals in the state of nature are 'bound' in some sense by natural law (e.g. a principle of justice), but he claims that such a law is only binding in one's conscience, absent the sovereign authority that makes the public expression of such a law possible.

He allows for the existence of laws of nature that predate, in a special sense, the laws of the commonwealth. In the state of nature, absent an overarching authority, these laws of nature "oblige *in foro interno*; that is to say, they bind to a

[12] *Leviathan*, 223
[13] Ibid, emphasis added.

desire they should take place: but *in foro externo*; that is, to the putting them in act, not always."[14]

What was in the state of nature binding merely in one's private conscience must become binding as public law through the constitution of sovereign authority. With this distinction between natural and civil law Hobbes absolutely renders unto Caesar what is Caesar's. Violating the natural law that binds one's conscience might pose a problem for one's soul, but one must still act for the sake of self-preservation if there is no legitimately constituted sovereign authority.

This contrast between internal and external sources of authority enables Hobbes to exploit the privatization of conscience. The split between the private and the public culminates in the claim that the sovereign has authority over all public behavior, including religious expression. Hobbes writes, "But seeing a Common-wealth is but one Person, it ought also to exhibite to God but one Worship; which then it doth, when it commandeth it to be exhibited by Private men, Publiquely. And this is Publique Worship; the property whereof, is to be Uniforme."[15] Yet the uniformity of public worship does not violate the inner sanctum of conscience, since Hobbes distinguishes between internal and external sources of authority.

Rendering unto Caesar in this way inaugurates a long liberal tradition of reconciling the liberty of the ancients and moderns by finding their common root. The social contract simultaneously protects the inviolability of conscience and establishes a publicly verifiable, legitimate, and equally enforced rule of law.

---

[14] *Leviathan*, 110
[15] *Leviathan*, 252, emphasis added.

Hobbes' view is distinguishable from later liberal positions only with respect to what metaphysical entity has an absolute status. The indivisibility of sovereignty in Hobbes is preserved in later accounts of popular sovereignty, but it is transformed from the sovereignty of a single person (or a council) to the sovereignty of a people as a collective body. This collective body maintains its sovereignty in perpetuity, rather than investing it in an absolutely sovereign authority.

To his credit, Fukuyama does not blindly confuse Hobbes' and Hegel's political philosophies. Rather, he carefully distinguishes between the motivations behind Hobbes' and Hegel's respective liberal positions. He writes, "If Hobbesian or Lockean liberalism can be interpreted as the pursuit of rational self-interest, Hegelian 'liberalism' can be seen as the pursuit of *rational recognition*, that is, recognition on a universal basis in which the dignity of each person as a free and autonomous human being is recognized by all."[16] Fukuyama is correct to claim that the desire for recognition is a more subtle and sophisticated psychological motivation for a liberal state.

Yet it remains an open question as to whether the kind of recognition obtained in a liberal state is ultimately satisfying. The neglected subtitle of Fukuyama's famous book ('The Last Man') refers to Nietzsche's criticism of liberal democracy. Even Fukuyama is concerned that this form of government will be ultimately unsatisfying, since the kind of recognition is grants is merely abstract. Fukuyama's failure is to pit Nietzsche versus Hegel on this point, instead of paying attention to the ways in which Hegel anticipates the dissatisfaction

[16] Fukuyama, 200

associated with merely abstract recognition.

It begs the question to rule out supposedly 'irrational' forms of recognition in favor of a liberal form of recognition that pertains only to the individual as such. One such irrational form amounts to seeking recognition ". . . not for oneself as an individual, but for the group of which one is a member."[17] Yet this view fails to inquire into the meaning of individuality, presupposing that it cannot be mediated by membership in a variety of groups. Nietzsche's criticism of liberal democracy is compelling only against the liberal view that endorses an abstract form of recognition.

In other words, it works against Hobbes' view but not Hegel's, because Hobbes relies upon an unmediated form of individualism that views the natural sociability of individuals as a potential threat to absolute sovereignty. On Hobbes' view, factions are formed through the association of like-minded individuals, and these 'factions' are viewed as 'worms in the commonwealth.' They threaten to divide the allegiance of individuals and undermine the absolute and indivisible authority of the sovereign.

While Hegel recognizes the risk involved in granting authority to quasi-independent associations, he inverts Hobbes' infamous position on the problem of factions. Hegel writes, "It is true that these associations won too great a measure of self-subsistence in the Middle Ages, when they were states within states and obstinately persisted in behaving like independent corporate bodies. But while that should not be allowed to happen, we may none the less affirm that *the proper*

[17] Fukuyama, 201

strength of the state lies in these associations."[18] Hobbes overreaches in his analysis of factions, confusing the need to keep them in check with the need to uproot them completely. Hegel likewise inverts Hobbes' position on the authority of the monarch: although this office is an important part of a well-organized state, the role of the monarch is merely to 'dot the i'[19] on legislation.

The Hobbesian privatization of the question of the good life is a consequence of his rejection of teleology in human nature and in politics. On his view, there is no longer an overarching good, found either in human nature or in human society, to be achieved. Yet one can reject the idea of an overarching good without reductively affirming that it is a merely subjective issue. Terry Pinkard writes, "[Hegel's] conception of *Sittlichkeit* does not outline any one overarching notion of virtue nor does it prescribe one preferred way of life to all citizens. In fact, the notion of modern, post-Kantian *Sittlichkeit* implies that there will be different virtues for the different mediating spheres (which Hegel thought would be captured in the 'estates') of a civil society."[20]

It might seem that the least dogmatic position available is to privatize the question of the good life, thereby avoiding any metaphysical claims about what ends human beings ought to pursue. But as we have seen, this merely begs the question of what individualism means in the first place. Hegel's decision to begin holistically with a state that is richly organized into a set of mediating spheres is an attempt to avoid begging the question that plagues other liberal views. Hegel

[18] PR §290, addition
[19] PR §280
[20] Terry Pinkard, "Virtues, Morality, and *Sittlichkeit*: From Maxims to Practices," *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1999): p. 228.

avoids making absolute and unexamined claims about the indivisibility of sovereignty and the rights of the individual, independent of the political context that give such claims meaning.

AUTONOMY, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

The conflict between the liberty of the ancients and the moderns brings to light two countervailing tendencies in liberal thought: the tension between preserving a sphere of individual rights and establishing the authority of a legal system whose legitimacy derives from the consent of the people. Hobbes reconciles this conflict through a metaphysical account of representation. Other liberal writers, as we shall see, attempt to avoid his absolutist conclusions. Yet Hegel provocatively associates views that draw strict distinctions between public and private forms of autonomy. Philosophers of this sort then attempt to show how the liberty of the ancients and the moderns come from the same root, such that public and private autonomy complement one another despite their differences.

We have already seen that Hobbes' version of the social contract is designed to do just this. Kant's own distinction between virtue and *Recht,* which motivates the division of his *Metaphysics of Morals,* would succumb to the same sort of Hegelian critique. This master work contains two distinct set of first

principles, those pertaining to the 'doctrine of right' and those pertaining to the 'doctrine of virtue.'[21]

Recall that Hobbes distinguished between internal and external sources of authority, such that the natural law which is binding *in foro interno* is distinct from the sovereign authority which governs all external behavior (including even uniform religious expression). Kant similarly draws an a priori distinction between the laws regulating one's external behavior and those for which "no external lawgiving can bring about someone's setting an end for himself (*because this is an internal act of the mind*). . . ."[22]

On Hegel's view, this 'good fences make good neighbors' approach to political philosophy never moves beyond conceiving of *Recht* as a set of restrictions on one's behavior. He writes, "The crucial point in both the Kantian and the generally accepted definition of right . . . is the '*restriction* which makes it possible for my freedom or self-will to co-exist with the self-will of each and all according to a universal law.'"[23] Indeed, the liberal attempt to reveal the common roots of ancient and modern liberty amounts to a merely abstract understanding of this relationship. For instance, Kant claims that the only 'innate right' is freedom, defined as "independence from being constrained by another's choice."[24] So freedom and equality abstractly correspond with one another: "This principle of innate freedom already involves the following authorizations, which are not really distinct from it (as if they were members of the division of some higher concept

[21] MM 6:205
[22] MM 6:239, emphasis added.
[23] PR §29
[24] MM 6:237

of a right): innate *equality*, that is, independence from being bound by others to more than one can in turn bind them."[25]

Hegel recognizes continuity and dialectical tension rather than a strict separation between moral and political philosophy. Unlike Kant, who perpetuates a split between the public and private spheres, Hegel pays attention to the ways in which political and legal institutions form (or fail to form) ethical individuals. For instance, law on Hegel's view is an ethical institution, rather than merely a set of enforceable prohibitions. Neither drawing an a priori distinction nor conflating moral and legal action, Hegel pays careful attention to the ways in which they are dialectically related.[26] Allen Wood claims that Hegel "does not always succeed"[27] in drawing the distinction between moral and legal culpability. Yet the fact that Hegel offers no fixed criterion for drawing the distinction says more about the complexity of human affairs than it does about Hegel's philosophical views.

Kant's distinction between virtue and *Recht* has inspired other important liberal thinkers to offer political, rather than metaphysical, grounds for reconciling the liberty of the ancients and the moderns. John Rawls, for instance, confronts the 'fact of modern pluralism' by devising a hypothetical scenario meant to model the social contract. Rawls' 'original position' is designed to abstract from all 'natural and social contingencies' in order to arrive at an Archimedean point for political considerations of justice.

Yet despite his Kantian heritage, Hegel haunts Rawls's political philosophy at every turn. As early as *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls attempts to

[25] MM 6:237-8
[26] See especially PR §113
[27] Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990): p. 144.

balance the Kantian desire to secure an Archimedean point with the Hegelian recognition that any theoretical construction must be dialectically balanced with our fundamental intuitions. His doctrine of reflective equilibrium attempts to strike this balance by subjecting our theoretical conclusions to the crucible of experience, while employing the theoretical conclusions to scrutinize our intuitive assumptions.

Emphasizing the dialectical method of reflective equilibrium leads Rawls eventually to conclude that Hegel's desired end of reconciliation is an appropriate end for political philosophy. In *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, he adopts this Hegelian end, defining it as follows: "political philosophy may try to calm our frustration and rage against our society and its history by showing us the way in which its institutions, when properly understood from a philosophical point of view, are rational, and developed over time as they did to attain their present, rational form. . . . [Hegel] seeks for us reconciliation – *Versöhnung* – that is, we are to accept and affirm our social world positively, not merely to be resigned to it."[28] Yet it is only by distancing himself from the Kantian search for an Archimedean point that reconciliation in the Hegelian sense becomes a legitimate end. Reconciliation is possible only when political philosophy involves an immanent comparison of our theoretical concepts and our intuitions, instead of an attempt to use the theoretical conclusions to ground rationally our social and political experience.

Despite the noticeable move towards an Hegelian perspective (i.e. with an increased emphasis on reflective equilibrium), Rawls continues to use Hegel as a

[28] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Harvard University Press, 2001): p. 3.

foil in debates with fellow Kantians. For instance, he criticizes Habermas for immodestly endorsing an Hegelian project, rather than outlining principles which are merely political.[29] This accusation occurs in a spirited and illuminating debate in the March 1995 volume of *The Journal of Philosophy*.[30] The debate concerns the role of philosophical theory and its relationship to public discourse. Habermas calls his critique of Rawls 'immanent' because they both might be thought of as neo-Kantian, simultaneously embracing Kantian ethics and distancing themselves from Kant's metaphysical claims.

He shares Rawls' "intersubjectivist version of Kant's principle of autonomy" in which "we act autonomously when we obey those laws which could be accepted by all concerned on the basis of a public use of their reason."[31] This intersubjectivist approach is an attempt to combine Kant's universalization principle with the pluralism of modern society. It seeks an answer to the following question: How can individuals who have divergent and often incommensurable ideas of the good coexist peacefully in modern society?

Rawls and Habermas undertake different strategies in answering this question. Rawls is concerned to show pragmatically how an 'overlapping consensus' might be achieved amongst people with incommensurable conceptions of the good, so that they can live in peace and so that society can be stable. He employs a 'method of avoidance' in order to bring about this consensus. In

---

[29] John Rawls, "Political Liberalism: Reply to Habermas," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XCII, no. 3 (March 1995): p. 137.

[30] Excerpts from this section of the chapter were originally published in the January 2008 edition of *Practical Philosophy* under the title "Theoretical Modesty: Habermas and Rawls on the Role of Philosophy and its Relationship to Public Discourse" (vol. 9, no. 1). They appear here in a substantially revised form. The official policy of the journal is to grant permission to republish automatically, provided reference is made to the original publication.

[31] Habermas, JHP, 109

Rawls' words, his political project "leaves untouched all kinds of doctrines, religious, metaphysical, and moral, with their long traditions of development and interpretation."[32] The theorist is to remain agnostic with regards to the 'comprehensive doctrines' that individuals freely hold, focusing instead on how they can hold these disparate metaphysical beliefs and still be tolerant citizens in the public, political realm. Stability can be achieved if citizens can embed within their comprehensive doctrines a principle of tolerance. In this way, they can live out their rational life-plans, with their particular religious and metaphysical beliefs, while permitting others in society to do the same.

Habermas recognizes the need for intersubjective agreement but achieves it in a different, perhaps even opposite, manner. On his view, Rawls "neutralizes the multiplicity of particular interpretive perspectives from the outset."[33] Habermas' discourse ethics, on the other hand, "views the moral point of view as embodied in an intersubjective practice of argumentation which enjoins those involved to an idealizing enlargement of their interpretive perspectives."[34] Habermas' idealized enlargement of a perspective, attained through a process of argumentation in which individuals are open to new points of view, runs counter to Rawls' idealized narrowing of a perspective made possible by the original position.

Discourse ethics is purely procedural in the sense that it merely sets up the conditions for ideal communication and then leaves the results of the conversation undetermined. In other words, while it trusts that enlightened opinions will prevail

[32] Rawls, JHP, 134
[33] Habermas, JHP, 117
[34] Ibid.

by the force of the better argument, discourse ethics avoids positing determinate conclusions to the process of public argumentation.

Employing different methods for achieving intersubjective agreement leads to the interesting and ironic claim that Habermas' theoretical method is both more and less modest than Rawls', even as Rawls' is both more and less modest than Habermas'. As Rawls points out, his political, not metaphysical, conception is agnostic about which comprehensive doctrines are true and which are false; this is Rawls' 'method of avoidance.' He sees Habermas as advocating a more complete theory in the sense that comprehensive doctrines are assimilated to and seen in light of the presuppositions of rational discourse. This desire for a more complete theory that takes up (rather than bracketing) the question of comprehensive doctrines prompts Rawls to charge Habermas with an immodest Hegelian position. Rawls writes, "[Habermas] would appear to say that all higher or deeper doctrines lack any logical force on their own."[35]

On this view, comprehensive doctrines are subject to rational critique from the standpoint of the 'idealized enlargement' of perspectives. Here Rawls invokes the old liberal distinction between the public and the private: one is free to hold whatever comprehensive doctrine one wishes, so long as one operates with a political principle of toleration in the public sphere. Rawls' separation of comprehensive doctrines and public discourse is meant to preserve the integrity of each. Overlapping consensus amongst reasonable persons is to be achieved "without rejecting their deepest religious and philosophical commitments."[36]

[35] Rawls, JHP, 137
[36] Rawls, JHP, 146

Habermas, on the other hand, argues that Rawls achieves tolerance and stability by fiat, rather than achieving and earning them though a process of public discussion. He is right to criticize Rawls for raising the question of stability up front, rather than showing how stability can be generated by his theory: "Because Rawls situates the 'question of stability' in the foreground, the overlapping consensus merely expresses the functional contribution that the theory of justice can make to the peaceful institutionalization of social cooperation; but in this the intrinsic value of a justified theory must already be presupposed."[37] Habermas rejects the role that philosophical theory plays in determining the legitimacy of a political order. He views his project more as a reconstruction of the conditions under which individuals can freely participate in public discourse.

Yet for all their methodological differences, Rawls and Habermas similarly seek to "preserve the intuition underlying the Kantian universalization principle."[38] They simply stress different sides of the conflict of the liberty of the ancients and moderns. Habermas accuses Rawls of neglecting the liberty of the ancients by downplaying the crucial role played by the collective will-formation of the members of a society: ". . . from their perspective all of the essential discourses of legitimation have already taken place within the theory; and they find the results of the theory already sedimented in the constitution. Because the citizens cannot conceive of the constitution as a project, the public use of reason

[37] Habermas, JHP, 121
[38] Habermas, JHP, 117

does not actually have the significance of a present exercise of political autonomy but merely promotes the nonviolent preservation of political stability."[39]

Rawls counters by accusing Habermas of forsaking the liberty of the moderns: the formation of a collective identity achieved through the 'idealized enlargement' of one's perspective cannot be purchased at the cost of the freedom of conscience. In other words, unless one's metaphysical beliefs are shielded from rational scrutiny, they risk being undermined.

The fact that Rawls and Habermas stress different sides of this conflict also reveals their shared presuppositions. They both seek a set of idealized conditions as a remedy for the contingency and arbitrariness that plagues ordinary political discourse. This set of conditions is required for obtaining intersubjective agreement. Yet the Neo-Kantian search for a universalizable principle begs the question of the role reason is to play in obtaining a consensus. It presupposes the desirability of an Archimedean point for politics, rather than seeing consensus as precariously obtained and the product of intersecting interests. On the contrary, Hegel's account of representation assumes from the outset a plurality of divergent interests that are brought together in the 'Estate Assembly.' Individuals charged with crafting legislation are ". . . representatives not of individuals or a conglomeration of them, but of one of the essential spheres of society and its large-scale interests."[40]

From Rawls' point of view, the idea of 'essential spheres of society' represents an immodest metaphysical view. Yet Hegel views this pragmatically as

[39] Habermas, JHP, 128
[40] PR §311

a way of avoiding the abstraction inherent in political theories that attempt to circumvent the contingency of political life. These assemblies represent the convergence of a plurality of interests that appear, from Rawls' perspective, to result from 'natural and social contingencies' (e.g. accidents of birth or upbringing that, on Rawls' view, play no role in considerations of justice). Hegel confronts the fact that this so-called contingency is the actual condition of political societies.

Protecting the plurality of individual interests means constitutionally protecting the groups with which they identify as members. So the idea of an 'essential sphere' must be understood in terms of Hegel's concept of *Wirklichkeit*: what makes the sphere essential is not that it corresponds to the nature of things, but that it represents the ways in which individuals practically identify themselves. The assemblies have an educative function as well, contributing to the political *Bildung* of the citizens: "Estates Assemblies, open to the public, are a great spectacle and an excellent education for the citizens . . . publicity here is the chief means of educating the public in national affairs. A nation which has such public sittings is far more vitally related to the state than one which has no Estates Assembly or one which meets in private."[41]

Rawls and Habermas both presuppose that reason has a leveling function in public life, insofar as it would undermine the comprehensive doctrines that deserve protection (on Rawls' view), or that it would force rational individuals to translate their metaphysical beliefs into terms suitable for public discourse (on Habermas' view). Rawls and Habermas merely disagree on whether reason's

[41] PR §315, addition

leveling function would have negative or positive effects. Hegel, on the contrary, offers an alternative to this shared presupposition of the role of reason in public life. His holistic account of political life does not assume from the start the position of the rational individual. As a consequence, he pays attention to the so-called contingent ways in which individuals are formed. A rational consensus, then, is achieved not by constructing or reconstructing the ideal conditions under which rational individuals act, but by balancing the interests of whole segments of society.

An idea of consensus that presupposes individuals as actors could systematically neglect the essential interests of large groups who are simply outvoted. On the contrary, a consensus formed through the convergence of these interests ensures the stability of the society as a whole.[42] By resisting the philosophical desire to attain an Archimedean point, Hegel's version of intersubjectivity has built into it a respect for the ineradicable pluralism of modern society. It reconceives the role of reason not as leveling out contingent differences, but rather as understanding how those differences can be fashioned pragmatically into a balanced whole. This is the motivation behind Hegel's critique of Hobbes, who views associations of individuals as factions rather than appreciating the ways in which groups with divergent interests sustain the life of the state.

[42] John C. Calhoun's distinction between absolute and concurrent majorities might be regarded as another example of this idea of consensus. See *A Disquisition on Government* (St. Augustine Press, 2007). In contemporary political debates, Fareed Zakaria has challenged the abstract understanding of democracy that emphasizes the right to vote. He stresses the significance of an institutional structure that enables a government to be democratic in more than name alone. See *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (W.W. Norton Press, 2003).

SOCRATIC IGNORANCE AND IRONY

Hegel's conception of the state, contra Kojève and Fukuyama, seems neither universal nor homogenous. Fukuyama's Nietzschean concern that liberal recognition will ultimately prove unsatisfying (due to its abstract character) was already anticipated by Hegel. Further, Hegel's view of the state, and his corresponding conception of consensus, allows us to avoid the all-or-nothingism so prevalent in contemporary political philosophy: Rawls' and Habermas' shared presupposition of the role reason plays in obtaining consensus sets up a target to be attacked by skeptics like Richard Rorty. On Rorty's view, consensus is constructed piece-by-piece, and reason offers us no Archimedean point for transcending contingency. He challenges both Rawls and Habermas on the validity of their Neo-Kantian projects.

Yet Rorty carries on the liberal legacy of preserving a distinction between the public and the private, differing from Rawls only in the way he justifies the distinction. The abstract character and unattainability of an Archimedean point motivates Rorty to embrace the contingency inherent in our political life and to reject any conception of the public good that purports to be grounded in reason. His recipe for attaining autonomy is to conceive of it as a private endeavor that individuals are free to accept or avoid. As Rorty writes, "The compromise advocated in this book amounts to saying: Privatize the Nietzschean-Sartrean-Foucauldian attempt at authenticity and purity, in order to prevent yourself from

slipping into a political attitude which will lead you to think that there is some social goal more important than avoiding cruelty."[43]

Despite the evident differences between Rorty and other liberal writers, the distinction between the public and the private remains the same. Yet this distinction once again fails to inquire into the meaning of individuality: If the self is defined at least in part by its membership in various groups, then the privatization of its ends (e.g. freedom, autonomy, authenticity, etc.) renders them either meaningless or unachievable. Rorty's abandonment of rational standards confirms his status as a self-professed sophist, while his compartmentalization of the self results in his defense of liberal irony.

Rorty writes, "I cannot imagine a culture which socialized its youth in such a way as to make them continually dubious about their own process of socialization. *Irony seems inherently a private matter*. On my definition, an ironist cannot get along without the contrast between the final vocabulary she inherited and the one she is trying to create for herself. Irony is, if not intrinsically resentful, at least reactive. *Ironists have to have something to have doubts about, something from which to be alienated*."[44]

If Rorty's version of irony means that one's self-understanding requires some critical distance from social norms, then it seems rather innocuous. Yet what is interesting in his account of irony is his defense of 'alienation,' in contrast to Hegel's desire for reconciliation (i.e. being *beisichselbst*). As Rorty stands to sophistic irony, Hegel arguably stands to genuinely Socratic irony. At issue is

[43] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989): p. 65.
[44] Rorty, CIS, 87-8

how the self stands to its object of inquiry and how we are to understand Socratic ignorance.

Three possible views suggest themselves: (1) Socrates was genuinely ignorant because there was no truth to be known. This might be regarded as the Sophistic interpretation of Socrates. (2) Socrates was genuinely ignorant in one sense but wise in some other sense. (3) Socrates' claim of ignorance was disingenuous, since he knew some esoteric truth never revealed in conversation with others. This project has defended the second view: Socrates was propositionally ignorant but existentially wise (cf. the introduction). Both the first and the third views imply forms of irony that Hegel would reject, because both play around with the object of inquiry and lack a properly philosophical self-understanding.

Hegel is suspicious of philosophers who falsely praise Socrates, alleging that he dialectically undermines rational standards in favor of 'ordinary ideas': "This would seem as if the best and truest Philosophy were only a domestic or fireside philosophy, which conforms to all the ordinary ideas of men . . ."[45] Bringing philosophy 'down from the heavens to the earth' means affirming a new kind of 'objectivity' in contrast to idle metaphysical speculation: the tenacity to follow a philosophical inquiry wherever it may lead. Gregory Vlastos stresses the conditioned nature of this form of inquiry, writing that "In elenctic inquiry nothing is ever 'known through itself' but only 'through other things' . . ."[46] Recall that the Socratic search for an absolute definition gives way to the concrete

[45] LHP, p. 389
[46] Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 138 (January 1985): p. 18.

comparisons of competing accounts and their relative success and failure. In this way, Socrates was propositionally ignorant but existentially wise.

Hegel's own account of autonomy models and mirrors this understanding of Socratic inquiry. In an early essay, Hegel writes: "In fact, nothing is unconditioned; nothing carries the root of its own being in itself. [Subject and object, man and matter] each is only relatively necessary; the one exists only for the other, and hence exists for itself only on the strength of a power outside of itself."[47] The alienation required for Rorty's account of irony is overcome only by making the conditioned nature of one's object of inquiry and one's self rationally intelligible. Hegel's dialectical method (i.e. his philosophical science) attempts to stave off the sophistic leveling of our ability to draw the fine-grained distinctions necessary for making experience intelligible.

Just as some prominent liberal thinkers attempt to reconcile freedom and equality by breaking down the 'irrational' differences that divide us, so too does the sophistic conception of irony purport to promote freedom and equality. Hegel writes, "For by pronouncing the knowledge of truth a wild-goose chase, this self-styled philosophizing has reduced all thoughts and all topics to the same level, just as the despotism of the Roman Empire abolished the distinction between free men and slaves, virtue and vice, honour and dishonour, learning and ignorance. The result of this leveling process is that the concepts of what is true, the laws of ethics, likewise become nothing more than opinions and subjective

[47] "Love," trans. T.M. Knox, in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Blackwell Publishers, 1998): p. 31.

convictions."[48] Abolishing the distinction between free men and slaves is, on Hegel's view, a clear sign of progress, so long as one does not naively regard the relationship between freedom and equality as so straightforward. The leveling of political differences taken to a sophistic extreme would result in the eradication of freedom.

Hegel stresses the difference between the Socratic and the Sophistic view when he writes, "Plato was so far from regarding the dialectical in itself, still less irony, as the last word in thought and a substitute for the Idea, that *he terminated the flux and reflux of thinking*, let alone of a subjective opinion, and submerged it in the substantiality of the Idea."[49] Yet there are two very different ways that thinking exhibits 'flux and reflux': the first is the idle and abstract form of argument exhibited by the Sophists. This form of argument, common in modern life,[50] never ceases because it does not purport to result in better or worse understandings of its object of inquiry. The second form is Socratic: its manner of thinking is also 'back and forth,' but this activity is always for the sake of a deeper understanding of oneself and one's object of inquiry. For instance, when Socrates returns to a preliminary definition at the end of a dialogue, its meaning is transformed due to everything that has preceded it.

The alienation that the Rortian subject feels with respect to his 'inherited final vocabulary' is only the first step of a long process of inquiry. While Rorty's

---

[48] PR, Preface
[49] PR §139, emphasis added
[50] "In our time, rich as we are in reflection, and given to abstract argumentation, someone who does not know how to advance a good ground for everything, even for the worst and most perverse views, cannot have come far. Everything in the world that has been corrupted, has been corrupted on good grounds. When an appeal is made to 'grounds' people are at first inclined to give way to them; but if they have had experience of this procedure, they will turn a deaf ear and not let themselves be imposed upon any further" (EL §121).

view depends upon a permanent condition of distrust and skepticism toward inherited views, Hegel's view acknowledges the partial and provisional criteria that emerge when one attempts to articulate the views one has inherited. Making explicit one's own presuppositions establishes a methodological middle ground between the affirmation and denial of our ability to transcend contingency. For instance, John Russon shows how Hegel's much-maligned conception of spirit is more of an emergent truth than a dogmatic first principle. He writes, "It is this experience of ourselves as participating in a world already organized by such duties – a world in which we are subject to the governance by laws of human action that are not themselves the product of human rational judgment – that Hegel studies under the name of spirit."[51]

Hegel associates sophistic irony with a moral worldview that refuses to acknowledge its roots in a particular context. Recall from chapter 1 that Hegel's deeper and more interesting criticism of Kant turns on the deficiencies of the Kantian moral subject. Existential disorder results from the 'endless oscillation' between an immanent and a transcendent standard for moral conduct. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel reiterates this criticism of the moral worldview and associates it with a false form of irony: "A contradiction must be a contradiction of something, i.e. of some content presupposed from the start as a fixed principle. . . . The further antinomies and configurations of this never-ending ought-to-be, in which the exclusively moral way of thinking – thinking in terms of relation – just

[51] John Russon, *Reading Hegel's Phenomenology* (University of Indianapolis Press, 2004): p. 137.

wanders to and fro without being able to resolve them and get beyond the ought-to-be, I have developed in my *Phenomenology of Mind*."[52]

The moral worldview deals with the difference between what is and what ought to be, while the ironist deals with the gap between the actual and the ideal (or rather between what is affirmed to be the case and what one truly knows to be the case). The moral worldview and the Sophistic form of irony are similarly deficient, since each fails to result in a deeper understanding of oneself and one's object of inquiry (cf. chapter 2). Instead of being sufficiently skeptical, they both presuppose a subjective starting point. Hegel diagnoses each as resulting in alienation rather than the reconciliation that allows the inquirer to be 'at home in the world.'

Yet one final point must be made: recall that reconciliation connotes a transformative relationship between self and world, rather than a tacit acceptance of the status quo. The training of one's judgment that constitutes one's philosophical *Bildung* leads not to Nietzsche's 'last man' (who is 'at home' by being part of a herd) but rather to the kind of substantive ends endorsed by pre-critical speculative philosophers (e.g. Stoic *ataraxia* and Spinozist blessedness). Philosophical *Bildung* overcomes a Sophistic form of the 'flux and reflux' of thinking, but it requires a Socratic version of the same activity. As noted at the end of chapter 2, one's self-formation is an ongoing activity that requires recollection, retrospection, and repetition. So Hegel's version of being 'at home in the world' and *beisichselbst* is just as transformative as his understanding of

[52] PR §135

reconciliation. Hegel addresses the ambiguity inherent in training one's judgment in the following passage from the *Philosophy of Right*:

> . . . habit is part of ethical life as it is of philosophic thought also, since each thought demands that the mind be trained against capricious fancies . . . *It is true that a man is killed by habit, i.e. if he has once come to feel completely at home in life, if he has become mentally and physically dull, and if the clash between subjective consciousness and mental activity has disappeared*; for man is active only in so far as he has not attained his end and wills to develop his potentialities and vindicate himself in struggling to attain it. When this has been fully achieved, activity and vitality are at an end, and the result – loss of interest in life – is mental or physical death.[53]

The difference between a true and a false form of habituation is the difference between a true and a false form of being 'at home in the world.' Hegel's account of *Bildung* as an ongoing philosophical activity requires the adoption of Socratic, rather than Sophistic, form of irony. It acknowledges the gap between what one affirms to be the case and what one discovers upon retrospection to have actually been the case. Yet this form of irony always attempts to achieve a deeper understanding of oneself and one's object of inquiry.

It confronts the fact that experience is a 'Bacchanalian revel,' both precarious and stable. While neither assimilating itself to the 'inherited final vocabulary,' nor viewing itself as purely and privately autonomous, Hegel's moral subject acknowledges that philosophical progress is always made in fits and starts. It recognizes that progress is made not by securing a stable philosophical foundation, but by working through the genuine conflicts of experience and giving the dogmatic and skeptical elements of experience their rightful place.

[53] PR §151, addition, emphasis added.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY TEXTS OF HEGEL AND KANT:

Hegel, G.W.F, *Die Philosophie des Rechts,* Vorlesung von 1821/22 (Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt, 2005).

--*Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox (University of Philadelphia Press, 1971).

--*Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris (State University of New York Press, 1977).

--"Fragment of a System," trans. Richard Kroner, in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

--*Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Prometheus Books, 1989).

--*Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Hackett Publishing, 1988).

--*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. E.S. Haldane (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co., 1892).

--"Love," trans. T.M. Knox, in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

--*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Werke 3 (Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt, 1986).

--*Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977).

--*Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford University Press, 1967).

--*Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

--*Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, trans. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (State University of New York Press, 1985).

--"The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism," trans. H.S.

Harris, in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

--*The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraets (Hackett Press, 1991).

--"Who Thinks Abstractly?" in *Hegel: Texts and Commentary*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Anchor Books, 1996): pp. 113-118.

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

--*Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

--*Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

--*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

--*On the Common Saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

--*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, second ed., trans. James Ellington (Hackett Publishing, 2001).

--*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

--*The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

OTHER SOURCES:

Ahlers, Rolf, "History and Philosophy as Theodicy: On 'World History as the World's Judgment,'" *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3 (Fall 2000): pp. 159-172.

Allison, Henry, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (Yale University Press, 2004).

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, second edition, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Press, 1999).

--*The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (University of Chicago Press, 1984).

--*Magna Moralia*, in *Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1971): pp. 1868-1921.

Aurelius, Marcus, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (Modern Library Press, 2003).

Beiser, Frederick, *The Fate of Reason* (Harvard University Press, 1987).

Berkeley, George, *Principles, Dialogues, and Philosophical Correspondence*, ed. Colin Turbayne (Bobbs-Merrill Press, 1965).

Berthold-Bond, Daniel, "Hegel's Eschatological Vision: Does History Have a Future?" *History and Theory*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1988): pp. 14-29.

Bouwsma, O.K, "Descartes' Evil Genius" in *Twenty Questions*, third edition, ed. G. Lee Bowie (Harcourt Brace Press, 1988).

Bristow, William, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique*, (Oxford University Press, 2007).

Calhoun, John C., *A Disquisition on Government* (St. Augustine Press, 2007).

Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (Doubleday Press, 2000).

Descartes, René, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald Cress, third ed. (Hackett Press, 1993).

Dudley, Will, "Ancient Skepticism and Systematic Philosophy," in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. David Duquette (State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 87-105.

Eliot, T.S, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Harcourt Brace Press, 1934).

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, "Self-Reliance," in *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Modern Library, 2000).

Esposito, Joseph L, "Hegel, Absolute Knowledge, and the End of History," *Clio*, vol. 12, no. 4 (1983): pp. 355-365.

Findlay, J.N, "Foreward," in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977).

Forster, Michael, *Hegel and Skepticism* (Harvard University Press, 1989).

Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harper Collins Press, 1992).

Giovanni, George di and H.S. Harris, eds. *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism* (State University of New York Press, 1985).

Guyer, Paul, "Absolute Idealism and the Rejection of Kantian Dualism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge University Press, 2000): pp. 37-56.

Habermas, Jürgen, "Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls' Political Liberalism," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XCII, no. 3 (March 1995): pp. 109-131.

-- Habermas, Jürgen, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (MIT Press, 2001).

Hadot, Pierre, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Blackwell Publishing, 1995).

Hardimon, Michael, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Hill, Thomas, *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory* (Cornell University Press, 1992).

Hobbes, Thomas, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Houlgate, Stephen, *Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

--"World History as the Progress of Consciousness: An Interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy of History," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Fall 1990): pp. 69-80.

Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, second edition (Oxford University Press, 1978).

Hyppolite, Jean, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Northwestern University Press, 1974).

Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Cornell University Press, 1980).

Korsgaard, Christine, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Long, A.A, "Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy," *The Classical Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1988): pp. 150-171.

Longuenesse, Beatrice, *Hegel's Critique of Metaphysics*, trans. Nicole Simek (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Löwith, Karl, *Meaning in History* (University of Chicago Press, 1949).

Mabile, Bernard, "Is Hegel Dogmatic?" *The Philosophical Forum*, vol. XXXI, nos. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2000): pp. 261-297.

MacIntyre, Alasdair, *A Short History of Ethics* (Macmillan Publishing, 1966).

--"Does Applied Ethics Rest on a Mistake?" *The Monist*, vol. 67, no. 4 (October 1984): pp. 498-513.

--*After Virtue*, second ed. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

Magee, Glenn Alexander, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Cornell University Press, 1989).

Maker, William, "Hegel and Rorty, or, How Hegel Saves Pragmatism from Itself," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 37, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2006): pp. 99-125.

Makkreel, Rudolf, "Reflective Judgment and the Problem of Assessing Virtue in Kant," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 36 (2002): pp. 205-220.

Matz, Lou, "Hegel's Missing Moral Virtues?" *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1997): pp. 321-338.

Milton, John, *Areopagitica* (H. Regnery Co., 1949).

Murdoch, Iris, *The Sovereignty of Good*, second ed. (Routledge Press, 2001).

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1966).

--*The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1974).

Pinkard, Terry, "Virtues, Morality, and *Sittlichkeit*: From Maxims to Practices," *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1999): pp. 217-238.

--"Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Logic*: An Overview," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge University Press, 2000): pp. 161-179.

Pippin, Robert, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

--"On Giving Oneself the Law," *Logos and Eros: Essays Honoring Stanley Rosen*, ed. Nalin Ranasinghe (St. Augustine's Press, 2006): pp. 190-210.

Plato, *Crito*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997).

--*Euthyphro*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997).

--*Sophist*, trans. Nicholas P. White, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997).

--*Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997).

Popkin, Richard, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (University of California Press, 1979).

Posner, Richard, *The Problematics of Moral and Legal Theory* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

Rawls, John, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

--"Political Liberalism: Reply to Habermas," *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XCII, no. 3 (March 1995): pp. 132-180.

Robinson, Jonathan, *Duty and Hypocrisy in Hegel's* Phenomenology of Mind (University of Toronto Press, 1977).

Roosevelt, Theodore, "The Man in the Arena," Speech at the Sorbonne (Paris, April 23, 1910).

Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

--*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1979).

--*Philosophy and Social Hope* (Penguin Books, 1999).

Russon, John, *Reading Hegel's* Phenomenology (University of Indianapolis Press, 2004).

Scarfe, Adam, "The Role of Scepticism in Hegel's 'Doctrine of the Concept,'" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2003): pp. 77-91.

Schiller, Friedrich, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Continuum Publishing, 1965).

Schopenhauer, Arthur, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Hackett Publishing, 1995).

Scruton, Roger, "Kant," in *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

Sedgwick, Sally, "Hegel's Treatment of Transcendental Apperception in Kant," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Spring 1992): pp. 151-163.

Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Shepherd, Jessica, "I Think, Therefore I Earn," *The Guardian* (November 20, 2007).

Shklar, Judith, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's* Phenomenology of Mind (Cambridge University Press, 1976).

Singer, Peter, "Hegel," in *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche* (Oxford University Press, 1983).

Smith, Steven B., *Hegel's Critique of Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press, 1989).

Spinoza, Benedict de, *Ethics*, trans. G.H.R. Parkinson (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Staehler, Tanja, "The Historicity of Philosophy and the Role of Skepticism," in *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. David Duquette (State University of New York Press, 2003): pp. 107-120.

Stepelevich, Lawrence, ed, *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (Humanities Press, 1983).

Velkley, Richard, "On Possessed Individualism: Hegel, Socrates' Daimon, and the Modern State," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 59, no. 3 (March 2006): pp. 577-600.

Verene, Donald Phillip, *Hegel's Recollection* (State University of New York Press, 1985).

Vlastos, Gregory, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 138 (January 1985): pp. 1-31.

Voegelin, Eric, *Anamnesis* (Notre Dame University Press, 1978).

Walsh, W.H., *Hegelian Ethics* (St. Martin's Press, 1969).

Westphal, Kenneth, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989).

Williams, Michael, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism* (Blackwell Press, 1991).

Williams, Robert, "Hegel and Skepticism," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Fall 1992): pp. 71-82.

--"Hegel's Critique of Kant," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 38, nos. 1-2 (2006-07): pp. 9-34.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (Routledge Press, 2001).

Wood, Allen W, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Zakaria, Fareed, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (W.W. Norton Press, 2003).