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2016

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Hegel and the Given: A Phenomenological Interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Philosophy

by

Peter Yong

Committee in charge:

Professor Eric Watkins, Chair
Professor Rick Grush
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Professor Clinton Tolley

2016

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

To Absolute Spirit.

EPIGRAPH

Il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage.

Marcel Proust

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the professors who have helped me along the way: Gregg TenElshof for introducing me to philosophy, Nancey Murphy for showing me how to work synthetically in multiple research traditions, Joseph Prabhu for introducing me to Hegel's philosophy, David Pitt and Mark Balaguer for teaching me to read and write professional analytic philosophy, and Birgit Sandkaulen and Tobias Rosefeldt for hosting me during my stays in Germany and welcoming me into their research circles.

I would especially like to thank my committee members: Eric Watkins, Clinton Tolley and Rick Grush. Eric has been a dissertation chair of which none greater can be conceived. This dissertation would not be what it is without Eric's guidance. I have counted on his detailed feedback and support throughout every stage of this process. Clinton's expansive knowledge and Rick's encouragement to pursue Philosophy with a big "P" have also proved invaluable.

This dissertation has also benefitted from my many conversations with friends and colleagues over the years. My dialogues with Daniel Althof, Xavier Beteta, David Brewer, Claudi Brink, Max Edwards, Tim Jankowiak, Franz Knappik, Oliver Koch, James Messina, Marisa Peeters, Johannes Schuelein, Sebastian Speitel, Brian Tracz, and Achim Wamssler have sharpened my thinking and kept me sane.

Chapters 1, 3, and 5, in part, are currently being prepared for submission for publication. Peter Yong was the sole author of this material.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hegel and the Given: A Phenomenological Interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy

by

Peter Yong

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Eric Watkins, Chair

The study of Hegel has recently undergone a renaissance within contemporary analytic philosophy. For a range of thinkers (including Brandom, Pinkard, Pippin and McDowell), Hegel can be seen as offering a creative and powerful account of fundamental topics in the analytic tradition such as consciousness, justification, and semantic content. The dominant paradigm used to justify this return to Hegel has been to interpret his project in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as an anticipation of Sellars' critique of the myth of the given.

In my dissertation I argue that the new wave of interpreters are right to note that Hegel is concerned with questions central to the analytic tradition, but are wrong to

motivate the contemporary relevance of Hegel's work by appealing to its rejection of givenness. For I contend that Hegel actually accepts sophisticated versions of three forms of givenness: phenomenal, epistemological, and semantic. This can be seen by adopting a more phenomenological approach to Hegel's texts—an approach which takes seriously Hegel's claim that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is a self-examination of consciousness. Through this approach I show how an interpretation can be constructed which is not only more faithful to the textual evidence but also credits Hegel with what I argue is an ultimately more satisfying philosophical account of key issues in epistemology and philosophy of mind.

Introduction

1. The Neo-Hegelian Narrative

It is not unusual to hear that analytic philosophy has achieved its “Hegelian moment.”¹ Although the founders of the analytic tradition initially defined their approach to philosophy in opposition to Hegelianism, many notable analytic philosophers today are Hegelians, or at least neo-Hegelians.² This Hegelian renaissance has been largely the result of a new way of appropriating Hegel’s thought.³ For Hegel’s work to be taken seriously by a contemporary audience, recent interpreters have distanced themselves from the spirit monism⁴ attributed to him by many in the past, and have instead focused on his epistemological and semantic insights and attempted to ground these insights in the pragmatic dimensions of his philosophy. In virtue of these pragmatic features, Hegel’s system is said to offer a fresh and exciting perspective on contemporary debates about meaning, justification, and knowledge.

Specifically, contemporary interpreters have motivated their focus on the epistemological and semantic aspects of Hegel’s thought by appealing to a broadly

¹ Richard Rorty, “Robert Brandom on Social Practices and Representations” in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers vol.3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 124. For a discussion of this recent Hegelian turn see Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Tom Rockmore *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

² Perhaps most famous is the so called Pittsburgh neo-Hegelianism of Robert Brandom and John McDowell.

³ Simon Lumsden, “The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel” *Philosophy Compass* 3.1(2008): 51-65, 55. See also Paul Redding “Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/hegel/>

⁴ According to such a view, nature and history are said to be emanations of a (quasi) divine mind. Pippin calls this a Romantic Theology of Absolute Spirit. See his *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5. And Beiser calls it “supersubjectivism”. See his *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 70. Charles Taylor’s magisterial *Hegel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) is frequently cited as the canonical source of such an interpretation.

Sellarsian narrative according to which Hegel is said to reject “any idea of the given”¹ and to even abolish “the entire framework of givenness.”² Although Sellars himself often characterized “the given” in terms of particular empiricist dogmas such as the infallible awareness of sense data or the privileged status of observation vocabulary, Neo-Sellarsians have identified it with explanatory immediacy in general. According to this Neo-Sellarsian account of the given, all putative epistemic, semantic, or even phenomenological explanatory foundations ought to be rejected since they themselves can be accounted for only by a socially and historically mediated “game of giving and asking for reasons.” In other words, contemporary interpretations of Hegel claim that we ought to focus on the pragmatic features of his thought since, in general, these are the only features that can function in philosophical explanation, and are thus the only features capable of capturing Hegel’s epistemological and semantic insights. So, for instance, these interpretations claim that, unlike other modern philosophers, Hegel stepped outside the givenness of “the Cartesian theater” in which the mind knows only its inner experiences, and brought the mind back home to an external social world;³ that Hegel argued against classical foundationalism (i.e. the epistemological given) and set forth a fully coherentist account of the complex network of social practices constitutive of

¹ Lumsden, “The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel”, 52.

² Wilfred Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 14.

³ Willem De Vries *Hegel’s Theory of Mental Activity: An Introduction to Theoretical Spirit* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988).

justification;⁴ and that Hegel exposed “the myth of the logical given”⁵ by demonstrating that semantic content must be explained exclusively in terms of practical norms.⁶

Likewise, this Neo-Sellarsian narrative is itself motivated by the naturalistic tendencies of the analytic tradition. For instance, in the philosophy of mind, behaviorism, functionalism, and eliminative materialism have long insisted that “folk psychological” language about consciousness must be purged from any rigorous theory of mind. Similarly, Quinean pragmatism has claimed that the theory ladderness of observation discredits both epistemic foundationalism and semantic atomism. This perceived naturalistic orientation of the discipline has thus motivated the idea that the anti-giveness narrative is important for appropriating what is of lasting value in Hegel’s philosophy.

Yet this reason for adopting the anti-giveness narrative is not entirely compelling since the influence of extreme naturalism has waned dramatically. For instance, contemporary philosophers of mind have returned to the issue of phenomenal consciousness. Not only has the problem of phenomenal consciousness become entrenched in the contemporary discussion through the now standard zombie, twin earth,

⁴ See, for example, Robert Pippin’s *Hegel’s Idealism*; Kenneth Westphal’s *Hegel’s Epistemological Realism: A Study of the Aim and Method of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989) and *Hegel’s Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003); John McDowell’s, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) and *Having a World in View: Essays in Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Merold Westphal’s *History and Truth in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979).

⁵ Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, 56.

⁶ See, for example, Robert Brandom *Making it Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), and *Spirit of Trust*, http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/spirit_of_trust_2014.html.

and inverted spectra thought experiments, but also problems once taken to be solved have re-emerged as domains of inquiry in light of their intrinsic “phenomenal” components. For instance, the problem of intentionality is now being re-examined in the nascent phenomenal intentionality research program⁷ and there has been a spate of recent neo-phenomenological analyses of perception and action.⁸ So, far from being out of fashion, the givenness of conscious experience is again a pressing contemporary concern.

Once one no longer antecedently accepts the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation on philosophical grounds, one begins to see that it faces some serious problems as an interpretation of Hegel. For it has difficulties in accounting for the textual evidence at several key junctures. The anti-givenness reading has difficulty dealing with Hegel’s affirmation, made repeatedly in the introductions to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, and *Encyclopedia Logic*, that his arguments are meant to explicate the nature and structure of conscious experience and thereby to secure an epistemic foundation for the rest of his system. It has difficulty in accounting for Hegel’s praise of philosophers of

⁷ See, for example, Brian Loar, “Phenomenal Intentionality as the Basis of Mental Content” in *Reflections and Replies: Essays on the Philosophy of Tyler Burge*, ed. Martin Hahn and B. Ramberg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); David Chalmers, “The Representational Character of Experience” in *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. Brian Leiter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Terry Horgan and J. Tienson, “The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality” in *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. David Chalmers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Susanna Siegel, *The Contents of Visual Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Charles Siewert *The Significance of Consciousness* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); Galen Strawson, “Real Intentionality 3: Why Intentionality Entails Consciousness” in *Mental Reality 2nd ed.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010); Uriah Kriegel, “The Phenomenal Intentionality Research Program” in *Phenomenal Intentionality* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-26, *Subjective Consciousness: A Self-Representational Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), and *The Sources of Intentionality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸ See for example, Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004); Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Sean Kelly “Grasping at Straws: Motor Intentionality and the Cognitive Science of Skillful Action” in *Heidegger, Coping, and Cognitive Science: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus vol. 2*, eds. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

immediacy such as Jacobi and Descartes as well as the fact that he takes the philosophy of immediate knowing to be the philosophical position closest to his own in the Preliminary Conception of the *Encyclopedia Logic*.⁹ And it also has problems accounting for many of Hegel's claims in the *Philosophy of Spirit* where he appears to attribute phenomenal consciousness not only to individual subjects, but also to the world as a whole.¹⁰

So, now that the Neo-Sellarsian account is open to debate, it seems that the epistemological interpretation it was meant to support likewise becomes questionable. Since epistemological interpretations motivate their view by appealing to Hegel's criticism of the myth of the given and pragmatic account of meaning and justification, the fate of the epistemic reading appears to be tied to that of the Neo-Sellarsian narrative. And, since the Neo-Sellarsian narrative is no longer taken for granted, it appears that contemporary interpretations are left without adequate motivation for focusing on the epistemological and semantic aspects of Hegel's thought. Indeed, as metaphysics has come back into favor in the analytic tradition, a new style of metaphysical interpretation has emerged to challenge the epistemological reading. Though these new readings also distance themselves from the grandiose theories of spirit monism of the past, they maintain that Hegel was primarily concerned with providing a metaphysical account of

⁹ See *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), § 61-77 and "Review, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Works, Volume III" in *George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Heidelberg Writings*, trans. and ed. Brady Bowman, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ See *Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), §387-482.

the basic structural features of reality.¹¹ And, as a result, they claim that it was a mistake to read Hegel as an epistemologist and insist that he was instead, at his core, a metaphysician.

In light of these challenges, it is important to distinguish between the epistemological reading and the Neo-Sellarsian anti-givenness narrative used to support it. For, even if a Neo-Sellarsian reading of Hegel's project were to prove to be misguided, one could still contend that Hegel was concerned with fundamental issues in epistemology and semantics. Indeed, although contemporary epistemological interpretations have advanced Hegel scholarship both by focusing on previously neglected aspects of his thought and by providing sophisticated reconstructions of his arguments, they are, I want to argue, wrong to subsume these advances under the anti-givenness narrative. Contrary to these interpretations, I contend that specific forms of givenness do, in fact, play a central role in Hegel's epistemology and semantics.

I will do this by defending and developing a phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's philosophy which, I believe, can underwrite the epistemological and semantic insights of his project. While it had some supporters in the twentieth century (e.g. Heidegger, Fink, and Dove), the phenomenological interpretation has largely fallen out of favor.¹² To an extent, it is understandable that analytic accounts of Hegel would leave

¹¹ See, for example, Brady Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), James Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and Its Philosophical Appeal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹² See, Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience*, trans. Kenley Royce Dove (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) and *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); Eugen Fink, *Hegel: Phänomenologische Interpretationen*

behind the “givens” of the previous generation of interpreters since these more “continental” interpreters sometimes wrote in a free-floating and impressionistic manner that was useful in its day but now fails to satisfy contemporary standards of philosophical rigor. It was thus easy to abandon what seemed to be vague claims about consciousness in favor of a more serious discussion of social practice. But this abandonment was too hasty since the impressionistic style of these accounts was not necessary and the conceptual tools of recent philosophy of mind, language, and epistemology can now be brought to bear on these traditional accounts of givenness to provide a new rigorous formulation and defense of that doctrine.

In this manner, I will attempt to demonstrate that “the given” plays a central role in Hegel’s epistemology and philosophy of mind and language. But before this argument can be made, it is necessary to clarify what “givenness” means in this context. The next section will distinguish three forms of givenness to provide the framework necessary for specifying the precise role that “the given” plays within Hegel’s philosophy.

2. Three Types of Givenness

Though the literature has not been clear on the issue, one ought to distinguish between three types of givenness: phenomenal givenness (i.e., the way in which consciousness immediately presents itself to a subject), epistemic givenness (i.e. the way in which some beliefs are immediately justified), and semantic givenness (i.e. the way

der “Phänomenologie des Geistes” (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977); and Kenley Royce Dove “Hegel’s Phenomenological Method,” *Review of Metaphysics* 23.4 (1970): 615-641.

which some contents are immediately meaningful). I will provide a rough characterization of each of them in the following subsections, though more detailed definitions will be provided in the body of the dissertation.

2.1 Phenomenal Givenness

Phenomenal givenness is the immediate awareness necessary for any experience to count as a conscious experience. To get clear on the concept, imagine a scenario in which Kant has a zombie twin called Kanz. When Kant looks up at the night sky he undergoes a rich qualitative experience. He can see the stars shimmering in the heavens and feel the way that this vision inspires a deep respect for the moral law within him. This, however, is not the case for Kanz. When his eyes turn upwards, things remain dark. He has no qualitative experience at all. This fanciful example brings to light the essence of phenomenal givenness. Phenomenal givenness is the for-me-ness that characterizes any first person experience. Kanz's nervous system may well contain subpersonal representations of the starry heavens above, but he has no conscious awareness of these "representations" as present to him. The self-awareness constitutive of this for-me dimension of phenomenal givenness can be understood in varying degrees of strength. We can thus initially distinguish the following three forms of phenomenal givenness.

(PG₁) Implicit awareness of experience: In this form of phenomenal givenness, an experience E is phenomenally given to a subject S if (i) S is consciously aware of E even though (ii) E is not the explicit focus of S's attention. Though the subject has a sort of side-long awareness of being conscious, this experience is not itself the explicit object of

the subject's attention. Rather, the subject focuses on what the experience itself is directed toward. For example, when consciously looking at cinnabar, although one is implicitly aware that one is undergoing a first-person visual experience, this experiential character is not itself the explicit focus of one's attention. One is instead focused on the red cinnabar to which the experience is directed. Nonetheless this experience, simply in virtue of being an experience is given to one.¹³

(PG₂) Explicit awareness of experience *as* the experience that it is¹⁴: In this form of phenomenal givenness, an experience E is phenomenally given to a subject S if (i) S is consciously aware of E, (ii) E is itself the explicit focus of S's attention, and (iii) S grasps E as E. The subject is directly aware of his experience as being the kind of experience that it is. For example, when looking up at the starry heavens above and expressing one's thankfulness to the universe for not being a zombie, one is directly aware that one is experiencing a visual presentation intentionally directed toward the night sky.

(PG₃) Explicit awareness of an empirical psychological self with a distinct history and personality: In this form of phenomenal givenness, a subject S is phenomenally given to himself as a psychological self if, for some set F of experiences, goals, and values, S is immediately aware of himself as shaped by F. For example, someone might be

¹³ Dan Zahavi has this form of awareness in mind when he claims that "the self [...] is taken to be closely linked to the first-person perspective, and is, in fact, identified with the very first-personal givenness of the experiential phenomena. [...] The most basic form of selfhood is the one constituted by the very self-manifestation of experience. [...] The self referred to is not something standing beyond or opposed to the stream of experiences but is rather a feature or function of its givenness." *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 106.

¹⁴ Though (PG₂) is stronger than (PG₁), it is nonetheless an open question whether this form of phenomenal givenness is necessarily conceptual. Some philosophers claim that awareness *as* can occur only through concept application, while others, most notably Burge, have resisted this claim by noting that children and animals who lack concepts can nonetheless perceive objects in their environment as possessing determinate features. See, Tyler Burge, "Perceptual Objectivity" *Philosophical Review* 118(3): 285-324.

immediately aware of his experience of reading *Critique of Pure Reason* as holding a central significance in his life's story.

There are thus three distinct forms of phenomenal givenness. It is important to note that, since they are distinct, it is possible to accept one while rejecting others.

Some interpretations of Hegel explicitly deny all of these forms of phenomenal givenness (i.e. (PG₁ – PG₃)). Other interpreters, though not as explicit in denying every form of phenomenal givenness, blur its distinct senses into a single “critique of the phenomenally given”¹⁵ and thereby act as if Hegel’s alleged denial of one form of phenomenal givenness thereby undermined all forms of it. In particular, by failing to distinguish between these three kinds of phenomenal givenness, many take passages in which Hegel appears to reject (PG₃) as evidence that he denied (PG₁) and (PG₂) as well. Though Hegel may indeed have rejected the phenomenal givenness of the self as the locus of psychological identity (PG₃), I argue that he nonetheless accepts the implicit and explicit phenomenal givenness of conscious awareness (PG₁ and PG₂). In fact, I will contend that the relation between (PG₁) and (PG₂) is the hinge on which Hegel’s entire project turns.

2.2 Epistemological Givenness

Epistemological givenness concerns the immediate conferral of justification. The basic idea is that while some beliefs are justified by their inferential relations to other

¹⁵ Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, 74.

beliefs, others are justified apart from their inferential relations. As it relates to Hegel, epistemic givenness is usually formulated in one of two ways: one general and the other specific. Generally, epistemic givenness is equivalent to epistemological foundationalism—the claim that there are some first unmoved movers with respect to justification. We can thus formulate it as follows:

(EG₁) A belief B is epistemologically given to a Subject S if S is justified in believing B independently of its inferential relation to other beliefs.¹⁶

To accept (EG₁) is to accept a foundationalist theory of justification. Most interpreters claim that Hegel rejects this sort of givenness and instead advocates a form of coherentism.¹⁷

Epistemological givenness can also be understood more particularly in terms of the kind of justification a belief is said to possess—justification by acquaintance. On this view, a belief is epistemologically given if one is acquainted with its truth-maker. It can thus be formulated as follows:

(EG₂) A belief B is epistemologically given to a subject S if S is justified in believing B by being acquainted with B's truth-maker.

According to (EG₂), some beliefs are justified by immediately apprehending the truth-makers of those beliefs. Russell articulated this view in his doctrine of knowledge by acquaintance:

¹⁶ These beliefs are individuated through their attitude types (e.g. *memorial*-beliefs, *perceptual*-beliefs, *phenomenal*-beliefs, etc.) as well as their contents.

¹⁷ See, for example, Brandom, Bristow, Pinkard, Pippin, and Kenneth Westphal.

I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e., when I am directly aware of the object itself. When I speak of a cognitive relation here, I do not mean the sort of relation which constitutes judgment, but the sort which constitutes presentation. In fact, I think the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation.¹⁸

So, for Russell, a subject has knowledge (and hence justification) by acquaintance when he is immediately presented with the object of his belief. Many interpreters take Hegel's early arguments in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to constitute a reductio of this sort of model. Since Hegel argues that (i) sense-certainty cannot grasp objects apart from determinate perceptual attributes and that (ii) perception cannot discern objects without employing conceptual categories, he appears to reject the sort of purely receptive knowledge that Russell envisions. Willem De Vries thus claims that "we can understand Hegel's argument in the 'Sense-Certainty' chapter as an attempt to destroy the belief that there can be knowledge of particulars by acquaintance."¹⁹

I will argue that Hegel accepted (EG₁) and (EG₂). His methodology turns on the idea that our explicit grasp (PG₂) of what we are implicitly given in consciousness (PG₁) can epistemologically ground the rest of his philosophical system. As a result, he is committed to (EG₂) in that he claims that our acquaintance with consciousness justifies our beliefs about it. And, since he is committed to (EG₂), he is thereby also committed to (EG₁).

¹⁸ Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" in *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1912), 108.

¹⁹ Willem DeVries, "Hegel on Reference and Knowledge," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26.2 (1988):297-307, 298. Kenneth Westphal makes a similar claim in "Sense Certainty or Why Russell had No Knowledge by Acquaintance" *Hegel Society of Great Britain* 45/46(2002): 110-123.

2.3 Semantic Givenness

Semantic givenness concerns the constitution of meaning. It claims that some contents are meaningful apart from their inferential relations to other contents. It can thus be formulated as follows:

(SG) A content C semantically given to a subject S if C is meaningful to S independently of C's inferential relations to other contents.

Neo-Sellarsian interpretations have claimed that Hegel rejected semantic givenness, insisting that all meaning is socially constituted. According to such theories, concepts are identified with the holistically articulated norms that govern the social game of giving and asking for reasons. Robert Brandom's inferentialist theory of meaning is the most detailed and systematic of such accounts. On this view, meanings are defined in terms of their material compatibility and incompatibility relations which are themselves defined in terms of normative sanctions. So, for instance, <red> derives its content from the fact that when one makes the claim "that is red", one is entitled to make the claim "that is colored", but will be sanctioned if one claims "that is green."

In what follows, I will argue that, when the units of meaning are defined precisely, Hegel can be seen to uphold a form of semantic givenness. While interpreters are correct to note that Hegel adopts a holistic account of the meanings of some concepts, concepts Hegel associates with the Understanding (*Verstand*), they fail to note that Hegel accepts semantic givenness for other units of meaning. For Hegel accepts (SG)

concerning the ground of the totality of thinkable content, which he calls the Concept (*Begriff*) and associates with Reason (*Vernunft*). Unlike many contemporary philosophers, Hegel insisted that an adequate theory of meaning must account not only for particular contents, but also for the totality of all possible contents, since he took the former to depend upon the latter. Hegel attempted to provide such an account through his theory of the Concept. Since the Concept is meant to ground the totality of logical space, it cannot be reduced to the set of contents that make up that space. Rather, it is grasped through intellectual intuition and carries its meaning intrinsically. In what follows, I will attempt to show how Hegel's argument relies on all three forms of givenness. The next section sets forth the general structure of this argument

3. Outline of the Argument

The bulk of my argument in this dissertation takes the form of a close reading of the Introduction and the sections that fall under the heading of Consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (i.e. the sections entitled Sense-Certainty, Perception, and Force and the Understanding), though, near the end, it also makes a brief foray into the Absolute Knowing section of the *Phenomenology* and the opening arguments of *The Science of Logic*. Chapter one sets forth a phenomenological interpretation of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and argues that the solution to the problem of the criterion that Hegel provides therein turns on phenomenal and epistemological givenness. The problem of the criterion concerns an apparently vicious circularity implied by our claims to knowledge and justification. On the one hand, it seems that in

order for a particular knowledge claim to be warranted, one needs to have a criterion of knowledge which legitimates it. But, on the other hand, it seems that for a criterion of knowledge to be warranted, one must be able to demonstrate the reliability of that criterion by showing that it actually delivers particular instances of knowledge. So, it seems that having particular instances of knowledge requires first having criteria of knowing, but that having criteria of knowing presupposes first having particular instances of knowing. Neo-Sellarsian interpretations claim that Hegel solves this problem by adopting epistemological coherentism. In holding such a view, Hegel could accept that all claims to knowledge are circular, but deny that this is problematic by claiming that the circularity in question is virtuous rather than vicious.

But I argue that this interpretation is mistaken on both textual and philosophical grounds. Textually, it does not account for the fact that Hegel appeals to consciousness to solve the problem of the criterion. And philosophically, the coherentist solution appears arbitrary since it cannot adjudicate between various jointly incompatible yet internally consistent sets of particular knowledge claims and criteria for knowing. Instead, I argue that Hegel provides a phenomenal particularist solution to the problem of the criterion. Though we usually distinguish the way things appear to us in consciousness from the way things really are, when we look to appearance itself there is no longer gap between them. We could thus use a particular belief about the way things appear to us to solve the problem of the criterion. I argue that this solution requires both phenomenal and epistemological givenness. The way things appear to us is phenomenally given and this phenomenal givenness grounds a corresponding form of epistemological givenness since

we are directly acquainted with the truth makers of our beliefs about our own conscious states.

In chapter two I then examine the Sense-Certainty chapter. Neo-Sellarsians argue that Sense-Certainty sets forth an extended argument against epistemological givenness and so would constitute a decisive objection to my phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's epistemological project. But I argue that, when this section is read more closely, one can see that Hegel does not argue against epistemological givenness, but against one particularly narrow construal of the content given in consciousness—one that identifies the content of experience with simple particulars. I contend that rather than constituting an objection to my phenomenological reading, the argument of Sense-Certainty corresponds to the phenomenological method set forth in the Introduction.

Chapters three, four, and five then consider semantic givenness. In chapters three and four I argue that Hegel does deny two important forms of semantic givenness. Chapter three considers the Perception section of the *Phenomenology* and argues that it is best understood as a criticism of what today would be called a Russellian account of content (i.e. an account which identifies content with sets of objects and properties). And, in chapter four, I contend that Hegel's arguments in Force and the Understanding are best understood as a criticism of what we would today call Fregean content (i.e. an account that identifies content with abstract modes of presentation). But despite the fact that Hegel presents novel and interesting arguments against these two forms of semantic givenness, I contend in chapter five that Hegel's own account of content, set forth in the Absolute Knowing section of the *Phenomenology* and developed in the *Science of Logic*,

requires a form of semantic givenness. In this manner, by showing how his arguments in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* depend on phenomenal, epistemic, and semantic givenness, I intend to furnish the outlines of a phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's project capable of underwriting his epistemological and semantic insights.

Chapter One: Hegel's Phenomenological Solution to the Problem of the Criterion

0. Introduction

Hegel's rehabilitation as an epistemologist is no longer open to doubt in contemporary scholarship. While in the past analytic philosophers would have scorned the suggestion that he could contribute anything beyond confusion to epistemology, it is now not surprising to hear contemporary philosophers praise Hegel's epistemological insights and even to claim that analytic philosophy as a whole has entered its "Hegelian stage".¹ As noted by Ameriks in his influential essay "Recent Work on Hegel: The Rehabilitation of an Epistemologist", this sea-change in Hegel scholarship was initiated by the pioneering work of Pinkard, Pippin, and Westphal who argued both that epistemology occupies a prominent place within the Hegelian system and that the specific epistemological theory Hegel developed should be of interest to contemporary philosophers. The revolution they initiated has resulted in a flood of new research and has now matured into a sophisticated Neo-Sellarsian interpretation of Hegel's work (proposed, for example, by Brandom and McDowell). Indeed, the revolution has been so successful that this Neo-Sellarsian reading has become the dominant paradigm in contemporary Hegel studies.

¹ See Richard Rorty's Introduction to Sellars' *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* where Rorty describes Brandom's work as "an attempt to usher analytic philosophy from its Kantian to its Hegelian stage," 8-9.

According to the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation the primary philosophical attraction of Hegel's system lies in the fact that it provides a detailed and powerful critique of what Sellars calls "the myth of the given". Though the precise definition of this putative myth is notoriously ambiguous (both in Sellars' own formulation and in contemporary Hegel literature), it involves at least three components: i) phenomenal givenness (the view that subjects are immediately acquainted with the phenomenal character of experience), ii) epistemological givenness (the view that some beliefs are immediately justified), and iii) semantic givenness (the view that some contents are immediately meaningful apart from their inferential relations to other contents). The central contention of the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation is thus that Hegel, the "great foe of immediacy [*Unmittelbarkeit*]"², presented a compelling critique of each of these forms of givenness, and even undermined the very framework of givenness as such, well before Sellars did.³ In this manner, Neo-Sellarsian interpretations not only account for what they take to be Hegel's individual epistemological insights like his solution to the problem of the criterion or his complex account of coherentist justification, but are also able to situate these insights within an overarching framework and thereby show precisely how the study of Hegel contributes to contemporary philosophy.

Yet I contend that this Neo-Sellarsian account is misguided. Far from denying the entire framework of givenness, Hegel's philosophical project actually depends on three specific versions of phenomenal, epistemological, and semantic givenness. This

² Willfred Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 14.

³ This is an important respect in which Neo-Sellarsian interpretations of Hegel differ from Sellars himself who did not believe that Hegel went far enough in criticizing the entire framework of givenness.

chapter focuses on the phenomenal and epistemological given and argues that Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion in the Introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the methodology he develops therein depends upon unique forms of both phenomenal and epistemological givenness.⁴

The chapter proceeds in four sections. In the first section, I set forth the main features of the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation and define the concepts of phenomenological and epistemological givenness that it rejects. In the second section, I explain the standard coherentist interpretations of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion which are taken to support the Neo-Sellarsian claim that Hegel denied phenomenological and epistemological givenness and show how these interpretations not only fail to solve the problem of the criterion but also face difficulties in accounting for the textual evidence. Then, in the third section, I set forth and defend a phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion and show how this solution, which rests upon phenomenal and epistemological givenness, can avoid the problems that undermined the coherentist proposal. And finally, in the fourth section, I make a detailed textual case for such a phenomenological reading.

1. The Neo-Sellarsian Interpretation

According to the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation, Hegel's system is offered as an alternative to a traditional, broadly Cartesian, epistemology and philosophy of mind. On this traditional account, one's first-person knowledge of one's mental states is said to

⁴ The issue of semantic givenness is considered in chapters three, four, and five.

possess a particularly strong form of epistemic justification. For example, when I am in pain and form a belief that I am in pain on the basis of my awareness of how I feel (viz. painfully), this belief seems to enjoy a very strong form of justification. Indeed, it seems that my internal awareness of pain should allow me to overturn other people's judgments regarding whether or not I am in pain. This general account varies depending on how one fills in specific details such as which kinds of mental states are said to possess this strong justification (e.g. whether it extends to our beliefs and desires or is limited to sensory or quasi-sensory states) and how, precisely, the degree of justificatory strength should be construed (e.g. whether it involves a form of infallibility, indubitability, incorrigibility, etc.).⁵ But despite these important details, the standard account is nonetheless committed to a general view concerning the nature of epistemic justification—a view in which we are immediately acquainted with experience and in which this immediacy grounds a particularly strong form of justification for assertions we make about our experiential states.

Neo-Sellarsians oppose this position by claiming that it depends on “the myth of the given.” Unfortunately, the literature has been notoriously unclear as to what this myth is supposed to consist in. Yet, when one reads carefully, one can see that at least three forms of givenness are opposed by the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation: epistemological, phenomenal, and semantic (each of which is itself open to a variety of interpretations). Epistemological and phenomenal givenness will be clarified first. Then, in chapters three, four, and five, the issue of semantic givenness will be examined in detail.

⁵ For an excellent summary of the various options, see Alston “The Varieties of Privileged Access,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 8.3 (1971): 223-241.

To begin with, consider the epistemological given. Broadly construed, the epistemological given is synonymous with foundationalism—the view that some beliefs are justified independently of their inferential relations to other beliefs. More precisely, this general conception of the epistemological given can be stated as follows:

EG: There is a belief B such that i) B is justified and ii) there is no set S of beliefs G_1, \dots, G_n such that α) the elements of S are distinct from B and β) B has its justification solely in virtue of its inferential relations to the elements of S.

On this general construal, to maintain the epistemological given is to claim that some beliefs can be justified apart from their inferential relations to other beliefs. Again, returning to the example of pain, while my belief that I am in pain could be supported by the fact that my doctor, who I believe to be reliable, tells me I am in pain, my belief could also be justified without such inferential support. Namely, it could be justified by my awareness of the pain itself. This general construal does not specify the specific kind of belief forming process taken to be capable of such foundationalist support. Specific versions of the epistemological given can therefore be defined by delineating the precise kinds of processes said to result in foundationalist justification, e.g., memory, testimony, perception, rational intuition, etc. Though most interpreters claim that Hegel, as a coherentist, opposes EG in this general sense, the strongest case for the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation concerns a specific version of the epistemological given.

The specific version of the epistemological given that the Neo-Sellarsian interpretations reject is one in which beliefs about one's subjective mental states, formed on the basis of direct acquaintance with those states, possess foundationalist justification. This is often thought to be the most fundamental version of foundationalism, since if our

knowledge of our own mental states were not foundationally justified, it would be difficult to make another compelling case as to how any other sort of foundationalism could function.⁶ On this mentalistic conception of the epistemological given, one's first person knowledge of one's experiential states possesses foundationalist justification since the justificatory status of these beliefs does not depend on their inferential relations to other beliefs but is given in the experience itself. More precisely, the epistemological givenness of mental states can be stated as follows:

EG_m: There is a belief B and an experience E such that i) B is formed via first person acquaintance with E, ii) the content of B describes the character of E (i.e it describes the way things seem to one), iii) B is justified on the basis of one's acquaintance with E, and iv) there is no set S of beliefs G₁, ..., G_n such that α) the elements of S are distinct from B and β) B has its justification solely in virtue of its inferential relations to the elements of S.

The broadly Cartesian intuition motivating EG_m is that we have particularly strong justification for our beliefs regarding our own experiential states.⁷ For example, it is intuitive to think that, when one undergoes an experience of seeing a tomato, though one could be mistaken about whether or not the tomato is really red (since someone may be shining red light on an unripe green tomato or the tomato may be hallucination), the belief that one *seems* to see a red tomato remains epistemically secure. My experience of

⁶ See Ernest Sosa, "Privileged Access" in *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Smith, Quentin and Jokic, A, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.), 238-251.

⁷ This is meant to be a broad construal of experience which encompasses both cognitive states such as beliefs and desires and sensory states such as sensations and feelings.

seeming to see a red tomato is thus on better epistemic footing than my claim that there *is* in fact a tomato before me.

Sellarsians oppose this model citing Sellars' example of John the dutiful tie salesman as providing an alternative account of the alleged certainty of such "seems" claims. According to this story, John works at a tie shop and goes about each day selling ties and effectively sorting them by their color. Whenever a customer asks for a blue tie, John knows exactly where they are. The same holds for the green, red and yellow ones. But then one day electric lights are installed in the tie shop and pandemonium ensues. In these new lighting conditions John can no longer correctly identify colors. A customer asks John for a green tie and John responds by handing him a blue one. The customer goes outside and examines it and then returns complaining that he has been sold the wrong tie. John insists that the tie is green. The customer then takes him outside and shows him the tie. John is bewildered. He knows that neckties do not change their colors and that electric light does not have the power to change the actual colors of objects. Yet now, outdoors in natural light, he sees that the tie is blue. John continues to insist that they saw the tie to be green inside. But he remembers that "seeing F" is a factive statement and so would entail that the tie is green (which it isn't). He is thus at a loss for words until John learns the language of "looks". Rather than reporting on a more minimal kind of fact about the way things phenomenally seem to one (as EG_m maintains), Sellars claims that the language of "looks" consists in the withholding of one's ordinary endorsements. Using this new language John can see a tie as green in the shop but withhold his endorsement of the claim that "the tie is green" by uttering instead "the tie looks green". This parable is supposed to teach two lessons. The first is that the apparent

epistemic surety of “looks” or “seems” talk as opposed to ordinary “is” talk is based on the fact that “looks” claims endorse less content than “is” claims and not on there being mental seemings or lookings to which we have special epistemic access. The second lesson is that John’s warrant for claiming that the tie “seems green” is, in fact, inferential. It depends on his other beliefs such as the belief that physical objects like ties do not change their colors just by moving them to different locations and the belief that electric lights do not have the power to alter the actual colors of objects.⁸

According to Neo-Sellarsian interpreters, Hegel denied EG_m well before Sellars did and argued for a position similar to that articulated in the parable of John the tie shop worker in the Sense-Certainty chapter of the phenomenology. For example, Rockmore claims that:

Sellars’s attack on this myth [of the given] borrows Hegelian arguments in building on Hegel’s famous critique of so-called sense certainty at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel’s target is any claim for immediate knowledge that presupposes an epistemological given, in English empiricists such as Bacon and Locke, and in different, more sophisticated fashion in Kant’s critical philosophy [...] In restating Hegel’s argument in an analytical idiom, Sellars rejects the idea of direct givenness, in Hegelian terms immediacy, as no more than a myth, in favor of the justification of claims to know within the so-called logical space of reasons.⁹

Likewise, Brandom claims that Hegel denies that there is any epistemologically foundational layer of the way things “seem” to consciousness, which grounds our more ordinary claims about the way things are in the external world. Instead Hegel is said to

⁸ See Brandom’s “Study Guide” to *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* and “The Centrality of Sellars Two-Ply Account of Observation to the Arguments of “Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind” in *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 348-367.

⁹ Tom Rockmore, *Hegel, Idealism and Analytic Philosophy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 103.

claim in a Sellarsian manner that the language of appearances depends on the language of reality because the former is only a non-committal way of talking about the external world. On this view, to claim that something appears a certain way is simply to withhold a claim one is inclined to make about the way things stand in the ordinary physical world. Hegel is, in this manner, said to argue against EG_m in the *Phenomenology*. Specifically, Brandom claims that what Hegel “is objecting to is two-stage, representational theories that are committed to a fundamental difference in intelligibility between appearances (representings, how things are for consciousness) and reality (represented, how things are in themselves), according to which the former are immediately and intrinsically intelligible, and the latter are not.”¹⁰ Hegel is thereby said to argue against the view that “a foundation of genuine empirical knowledge” can “be secured by construing the immediate deliverances of sense experience as passive, in a way that contrasts with conceptual activity and allows no room for error apart from and in advance of such activity” in the Sense-Certainty chapter of the *Phenomenology*.¹¹ In place of the two-tiered structure which privileges knowledge of one’s own mental experience, Hegel is said to provide a model in which the justification for our claims about our mental states,

¹⁰ Robert Brandom, “Conceptual Realism and the Semantic Possibility of Knowledge” in *Spirit of Trust*, 8.

¹¹ Robert Brandom, “Immediacy, Generality, and Recollection: First Lessons on the Structure of Epistemic Authority” in *Spirit of Trust*, 3. See also Rockmore’s similar contention that “Sellars’s attack on this myth [of the given] borrows Hegelian arguments in building on Hegel’s famous critique of so-called sense certainty at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel’s target is any claim for immediate knowledge that presupposes an epistemological given, in English empiricists such as Bacon and Locke, and in different, more sophisticated fashion in Kant’s critical philosophy [...] In restating Hegel’s argument in an analytical idiom, Sellars rejects the idea of direct givenness, in Hegelian terms immediacy, as no more than a myth, in favor of the justification of claims to know within the so-called logical space of reasons.” Rockmore, *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy*, 103.

like our claims about ordinary physical objects, is mediated through a complex and revisable theory of the overall structure of the world.

This rejection of EG_m entails the rejection of another form of givenness that underwrites it: phenomenal givenness. The doctrine of the epistemological givenness of beliefs about one's own mental states presupposes that one's experiences (which are thought to be uniquely capable of providing epistemic support) are themselves given. The conceptual connection between the two doctrines can be seen in the fact that some contemporary philosophers define phenomenal consciousness (or "what-it's-like" character of experience) in terms of its ability to furnish a special kind of knowledge. Consider, for example, Frank Jackson's Mary thought experiment. In this thought experiment, Mary is said to be the world's leading color scientist. In fact, she knows every objective physical fact about color (e.g. the third-person facts that make their way into textbooks and articles). Suppose also that Mary has lived her whole life in a black and white room and so has never seen colors like red, blue, or yellow for herself. But then one fateful day she goes outside and sees a red rose and thereby learns a new first-person subjective fact about color (i.e. what it's like to see red). One important implication of this thought experiment is that learning such subjective experiential facts is grounded in having the relevant states of consciousness.

In light of such considerations, Charles Siewert defines the phenomenal or "what-it's-like" character of experience as follows:

There is something it's like for one to have a feature ϕ , just when one can either correctly claim to have, or sensibly want to have, a certain sort of knowledge of what feature ϕ is—i.e. a sort that is both: a) non-theoretical (i.e. it doesn't require one be able to explain what having ϕ consists in),

and b) subjective (i.e. it does require one have or be able to imagine having ϕ).¹²

Instead of taking the “what-it’s-likeness” as a basic notion or defining it only in terms of its role in generating the “hard” problem of consciousness, Siewert thinks that it can be clarified by the kind of knowledge that it provides. The knowledge in question is said to be non-theoretical since, in light of the Mary case and similar scenarios, the possession of this kind of knowledge is not a matter of explaining the phenomenon in question. Before her experience of actually seeing red, Mary could already explain the facts of color science and even go on to describe its role in evolutionary history. When Mary learns a subjective fact about what-it’s-like to see red, she does not thereby seek to explain anything new. This kind of knowledge is a matter of insight or elucidation rather than explanation. Second, the knowledge in question is said to be subjective because it involves actually undergoing (or imagining the undergoing of) the experience oneself. In order for Mary to know the “what-it’s-likeness” of seeing a red rose, she actually had to go outside and see it for herself.¹³ On the foregoing picture phenomenal givenness is the ground of epistemological givenness. The epistemological immediacy of my knowledge of my experiential states is grounded in the phenomenological immediacy of my acquaintance with those states. For instance, Mary’s knowledge that the rose looks red from a subjective point of view is immediate. She does not infer this bit of knowledge

¹² Charles Siewert, “Phenomenal Thought,” in *Cognitive Phenomenology* eds. Bayne and Montague, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 236-267, 246.

¹³ For more on the relation between phenomenal character and subjective knowledge see David Pitt’s “What it’s Like to think that P” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69.1 (2004): 1-36 which takes phenomenal character to ground a special kind of knowledge by acquaintance, and Fumerton’s *Knowledge, Thought, and the Case for Dualism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015) for a detailed discussion of the relation between the Mary thought experiment and a broadly Cartesian epistemology.

from any of the vast wealth of knowledge of color science that she possesses. Rather, her belief is justified in virtue of having the experience that she does. But there is also a sense in which her experience is itself immediate. Whereas the appearance properties of many objects are mediated by the essential properties of those objects, in the case of phenomenal experience there is no distinction between appearance and essence. For example, consider the case of perceiving a stick as bent when it is partially submerged in water. The stick's property of apparent bentness is mediated by the essential properties of the stick, the water, the light, the atmosphere, etc. This is not the case with experiential properties such as pain. Here all the experiential features of the pain, e.g. its painfulness, are immanent in the experience itself. The felt painfulness of pain is not mediated by some more fundamental essence that lies outside of experience. It is this phenomenological immediacy of certain forms of mental phenomena which supports the epistemological immediacy of our knowledge of those mental phenomena.

We can thus define the relevant notion of the phenomenal given as follows:

PG: For any subject S and experience E, E is phenomenally given to S iff i) E has a phenomenal character or "what-it's-likeness" PC for S (e.g. the phenomenal character of feeling pain, sensing red, tasting sweet, etc.), ii) E's PC is phenomenologically immediate i.e. the entire PC of E is immanent to E, and iii) E's PC is epistemologically immediate for S so that S can claim subjective non-theoretical knowledge in virtue of undergoing E.

Like EG, various forms of PG can be delineated according to the kinds of mental experiences they are meant to apply to. For example, empiricists might restrict it to sensory experiences, while rationalists might include non-sensory experiences (such as thinking or desiring). Likewise, further kinds of phenomenal givenness can be specified

by refining the relevant kind of experience in question. For example, experience could be identified with basic phenomenal consciousness (i.e. what separates normal conscious life from the life of a zombie), with taking experience as experience (and thereby differentiating one's perspective on an object from the object itself), with taking experience as a stable point of view in time and space, with the experience of a psychological subject with a particular history, etc.¹⁴ While it is uncontroversial to claim that Hegel, along with most contemporary philosophers, would have denied many of the stronger specific proposals about phenomenal givenness, Neo-Sellarsians make the more substantive and controversial claim that Hegel denied PG in the general (and more minimal) sense described above. They take Hegel to have wholly rejected phenomenal givenness just as Sellars is taken to have done. On the Sellarsian reading Hegel is said to unequivocally deny "the possibility of immediacy, whether in phenomenal givenness or the intellectual intuition of the rationalist tradition."¹⁵ For example, Robert Pippin advocates this position when he claims that:

I think that Hegel's position is that we misunderstand all dimensions of self-consciousness, from apperception in consciousness itself, to simple, explicit reflection about myself, to practical self-knowledge of my own so-called identity, by considering any form of it as in any way observational or inferential or immediate or any sort of two-place intentional relation. However we come to know anything about ourselves (or whatever self-relation is implicit in attending to the world), it is not by observing an object, nor by conceptualizing an inner intuition, nor by any immediate self-certainty or direct presence of the self to itself. From the minimal sense of being aware of being determinately conscious at all (of judging), to complex avowals of who I am, of my own identity and deep commitments, Hegel, I want to say, treats self-consciousness as [...] a practical achievement of some sort. Such a relation must be understood as

¹⁴ For a discussion of various forms of subjective experience see Dan Zahavi *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 13-17.

¹⁵ Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 105.

the result of an attempt, never, as it certainly seems to be, as an immediate presence of the self to itself, and it often requires some sort of striving, even struggle (and all of this even in accounting for the self-conscious dimension of ordinary perceptual experience). Self-consciousness, in all its forms, is some mode of mindedness that we must achieve (be continually achieving), and that must mean: can ultimately fail to achieve fully and once having achieved can lose. It is nothing like turning the mind's eye inward to inspect itself.¹⁶

According to Pippin, since self-consciousness in even its most minimal dimensions of apperceptive consciousness is, for Hegel, neither perceptual nor inferential and neither an implicit awareness nor an explicit two-place intentional relation, the phenomenal given can be nothing but a myth. Hegel is thus said to be an explicit opponent of PG since no experience could have the requisite forms of phenomenological and epistemological immediacy.

Another example can be seen in Pinkard's assertion that "self-consciousness on this Hegelian model is not the awareness of a set of internal objects (sensations, mental occurrences, representations, whatever). To use a metaphor, self-consciousness is at least minimally the assumption of a position 'in social space'."¹⁷ On Pinkard's view, as for Pippin's, self-consciousness is a kind of pragmatic commitment rather than an awareness of something that is phenomenally given. Pinkard explains this metaphor of social space as follows:

We locate ourselves in 'social space' when, for example, we reason in various ways; or where we assume various roles; or when we demand a certain type of treatment because of who we think we are; or when we see some types of behavior as appropriate to the type of person we think ourselves to be; or when we recognize others as having the right to make certain kinds of moves within their speech community; or when we give a

¹⁶ Robert Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 15-16

¹⁷ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology and the Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.

reason to another person to explain or justify what we are doing; or when we give an account of what we are doing to others that we think that affirms what we take to be a good reason for doing what we are doing.¹⁸

In this manner Hegel is portrayed as arguing for an especially radical form of pragmatism. To be self-conscious, even in a minimal sense, is to take up a particular kind of social role—one in which one is both held responsible and also holds others responsible in light of what one takes the relevant normative relations to be.¹⁹ This kind of reductive pragmatic account of phenomenal consciousness is again meant to contrast with the doctrine of PG since it seeks to eliminate the epistemological and metaphysical immediacy that PG is based upon.

One upshot of this dual rejection of EG_m and PG is that it allows one to portray Hegel as a stridently anti-Cartesian philosopher. And this portrayal, in turn, allows Hegel to stand out as a hero who repudiated the dogmas that held modern philosophy captive and thereby prefigured the course that contemporary analytic philosophy would take. Whereas Descartes is said to have ensnared modern philosophy in solipsistic skepticism, needing to find a way back to the external world via the cogito and controversial theistic proofs, Hegel can be said to offer an alternative picture that starts with a socially mediated external world and the demands it places on us to take a stand in a revisable social space of reasons. Pinkard, for instance, thus claims that “Hegel continues the Kantian shift away from Cartesian issues about certainty (from the kind of hold that we

¹⁸ Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 7.

¹⁹ For example, Pinkard claims that the Kantian dictum that the I think must be able to accompany all one's representations, must be understood not as “the awareness of oneself is thus not a monitoring of a special set of private entities. Rather, it is a way of taking a normative stance toward one's own experience that becomes articulated in statements that contrast the way things are with the way they seem to be.” *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46.

have on certain norms) to necessity (the kind of hold that certain norms have on us).”²⁰

Indeed, Pinkard even goes so far as to claim that, when rightly interpreted, Hegel is not only a post-Cartesian but also a post-Hegelian philosopher.²¹

Additionally, this Neo-Sellarsian interpretation not only shows how Hegel predated some of the concepts of some important analytic philosophers but it also reveals how Hegel’s system can avoid traditional objections raised against it. Against the stereotype popular in analytic philosophy that Hegel was a peddler of metaphysical obscurantism, Hegel can, on this reading, be shown to anticipate some influential critiques of modern metaphysics and epistemology; and against the stereotype popular in continental philosophy that Hegel is a totalizing thinker and an implicit advocate of totalitarianism, Hegel can be shown to deny that there is an overarching thread to history other than the fallible yet always revisable process of giving and asking for reasons. In this manner, the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation appears capable of extracting what is of lasting relevance in Hegel’s philosophy and defending it against some of its most influential objections.

Yet, despite the appeal of the Neo-Sellarsian reading, I contend that it is fundamentally misguided since EG_m and PG do, in fact, play a central role in Hegel’s argument in the *Phenomenology*. In what follows, I argue that Hegel’s strategy for solving the problem of the criterion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* consists in performing a phenomenological analysis of consciousness, a project which requires both

²⁰ Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 5-6. See also Pippin’s “On Being Anti-Cartesian: Hegel, Heidegger, Subjectivity, and Sociality” in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 375-394, 375-376.

²¹ See Pinkard, *Hegel’s Naturalism*, 173-196.

phenomenological and epistemological givenness. And, since the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation is meant to be an epistemological interpretation, it cannot simply ignore Hegel's phenomenological solution to the problem of the criterion or exclude Hegel's solution from its general interpretation of Hegel's system.²² The first step in my argument will be to show that the coherentist interpretations of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion which support the Neo-Sellarsian reading face serious difficulties. These difficulties will be set forth in the following section.

2. Problem's for Coherentist Interpretations

This section argues that the coherentist interpretation of Hegel's proposed solution to the problem of the criterion which is thought to support the Neo-Sellarsian reading faces several difficulties. The argument is presented in four subsections. Section 2.1 explains the problem of the criterion and shows how Hegel took himself to provide an answer to this problem in *the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Section 2.2 sets forth the standard coherentist interpretation of Hegel's proposed solution. Section 2.3 then argues that the coherentist interpretation is inadequate since it faces two major difficulties: (i) the kind of coherence Hegel proposes is different from the kind of propositional coherence put forward by coherentist interpretations and (ii) coherentism does not solve the problem of arbitrariness and so is no better off than standard methodist or particularist solutions to the problem of the criterion. Finally, section 2.4 considers whether the coherentist

²² See Karl Ameriks, "Recent Work on Hegel: Rehabilitation of an Epistemologist?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52.1 (1992): 177-202. The work of Forster, Westphal, and Pinkard did much to show that epistemology played an important role in Hegel's system and that the goal of solving the problem of the criterion was a fundamental feature of that account.

interpretation can be saved by introducing a realist component (as Kenneth Westphal's does) and argues that it continues to face serious problems even under this modification.

2.1 The Problem of the Criterion

Many, if not most, epistemological problems are motivated by the unfortunate fact that we humans are imperfect cognizers. Sometimes the way things seem to us is not, in fact, the way things are. The so called "problem of the criterion" is no exception to this rule. For example, Roderick Chisholm's classic formulation of the problem maintains that:

To know whether things really are as they seem to be, we must have a procedure for distinguishing appearances that are true from appearances that are false. But to know whether our procedure is a good procedure, we have to know whether it really succeeds in distinguishing appearances that are true from appearances that are false. And we cannot know whether it does really succeed unless we already know which appearances are true and which ones are false. And so we are caught in a circle.²³

This circularity arises from the fact that, on the one hand, the legitimacy of particular knowledge claims can be established only by first providing a criterion that grounds their legitimacy. So, for example, given a criterion establishing the epistemic legitimacy of the testimony of history textbooks, one could derive the legitimacy of one's belief that Gödel discovered the incompleteness theorem. But, on the other hand, the legitimacy of an epistemic criterion itself depends upon first furnishing a set of particular legitimate knowledge claims by which to evaluate its accuracy. Thus, for instance, one could establish the legitimacy of appealing to history textbooks only by first comparing their

²³ Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 62.

claims with particular instances of historical knowledge (that Bach was underappreciated in his day, that Hölderlin had problems with his mental health, that Russell was an influential philosopher, etc.) In this manner the justification for all knowledge claims appears to be viciously circular.

Chisholm identified three possible solutions to this problem but found them all unappealing to varying degrees.²⁴ First, one might accept the vicious circularity of all claims to knowledge and embrace skepticism as a result. Since particular instances of knowledge depend on having prior criteria for knowledge and criteria for knowledge depend on first having particular instance of knowledge, knowledge is unattainable.²⁵ Second, one might reject the claim that particular instances of knowledge presuppose prior criteria for knowledge and thereby adopt what Chisholm calls “particularism”. Particularists break the circle by claiming to possess particular instances of knowledge that do not depend upon prior criteria of knowledge and then using the former to ground the latter. So, for example, common sense philosophers such as Thomas Reid and G.E. Moore claimed to have a stock of particular instances of knowledge (e.g. knowledge that I have hands, knowledge that the world is more than five minutes old, knowledge that there are other minds, etc.) by which to evaluate any putative epistemic criterion. Finally, one might reject the claim that criteria for knowledge presuppose prior instances of knowledge and thereby adopt what Chisholm calls “methodism”. Methodists respond to the problem of the criterion by claiming to possess an epistemic criterion that does not depend upon first having particular instances of knowledge and then using the former to

²⁴ Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, 61.

²⁵ The problem is here formulated in terms of knowledge, but the problem also arises for other varieties of positive epistemic status.

ground the latter. Thus, for example, empiricists such as Locke and Hume claimed to have an antecedent criterion for knowledge (viz. that all knowledge must be traced back to sense impressions) by which to evaluate particular knowledge claims. Although Chisholm endorsed a particularist response, he admitted that any choice between these three options would ultimately be question begging.²⁶

Though Chisholm's work is the most recent source of analytic philosophy's concern for the problem of the criterion, historians of philosophy are right to call attention to the fact that Hegel, in an attempt to address skeptical concerns initially raised by Sextus Empiricus, formulated a version of this problem over one hundred and fifty years before Chisholm did.²⁷ Hegel attempts to solve this problem in the Introduction to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. He begins by noting that if his project "is viewed as a way of relating Science to apparent knowledge [*erscheinenden Wissen*], and as an investigation and examination of the reality of cognition, it would seem that it cannot take place without some presupposition which can serve as its underlying criterion [*Maßstab*]" (PhG 81).²⁸ Hegel here observes that to examine the reality of cognition and distinguish the claims of genuine Science from claims that express merely apparent knowledge (*erscheinendes Wissen*), it is necessary to first apply a criterion to differentiate them. Just as Chisholm grounds the problem of the criterion in the need "to

²⁶ Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, 75. See also Robert Amico, *The Problem of the Criterion*, (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 1995), 86.

²⁷ See Hegel's *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy* and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. For a discussion of Hegel's interaction with Sextus Empiricus see Michael Forster's *Hegel and Skepticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²⁸ I follow standard practice and refer to paragraph numbers of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The Miller translation is used throughout but is adapted at points to better reflect the original text. In this case, I have changed "phenomenal knowledge" to "apparent knowledge" for consistency.

know whether things really are as they seem to be”²⁹, Hegel motivates the problem by pointing out the need to provide “an investigation and examination of the reality of cognition”. Both claim that this can be done only by first possessing an accepted criterion by which to evaluate the object under examination. Hegel thus explains:

For an examination consists in applying an accepted standard [*eines angenommenen Maßstabes*], and in determining whether something is right or wrong on the basis of the resulting agreement or disagreement of the thing examined; thus the standard as such (and Science likewise if it were the criterion) is accepted as the essence or as the in-itself (PhG 81).

But Hegel points out that this is problematic since we cannot possess this standard before knowing what genuine Science is. He observes that “here, where Science has just begun to come on the scene, neither Science nor anything else has yet justified itself as the essence or the in-itself; and without something of the sort it seems that no examination can take place” (PhG 81). Given that we are still trying to determine what legitimate Science is, no criterion has yet been justified. One is thereby caught in a circle. To distinguish genuine Science from merely apparent knowledge we must first have a criterion that functions as what Hegel calls the essence or in-itself by which to evaluate them. But to have such a criterion that functions as the essence or in-itself one must know cases of genuine Science to distinguish it from merely apparent knowledge.

Hegel takes himself to have a solution to the problem in that his own system provides what he calls “absolute knowledge” in which “appearance becomes identical with essence” (PhG 89). Specifically, Hegel seems to propose a solution to the problem of the criterion when he claims that:

²⁹ Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, 62.

Consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are for the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison [...] If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond [*entspricht*] to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform [*gemäß zu machen*] to the object. 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 of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge (PhG 85).

Here Hegel claims that a comparison of what consciousness takes to be true (i.e. criteria of knowing) with what consciousness takes to be its knowledge of the truth (i.e. particular cases of knowledge) will reveal whether or not they correspond. If they fail to correspond, they can be altered and the process can be repeated until they finally conform to one another.

2.2 The Coherentist Account of Hegel's Solution to the Problem of the Criterion

Because Hegel appeals to correspondence and conformity in the forgoing passages, recent interpretations of Hegel's work have identified his solution to the problem of the criterion with one offered by contemporary epistemological coherentists. Contrary to methodism, coherentists claim that possessing a criterion for knowing depends on already having particular instances of knowledge. And, contrary to particularism, coherentists maintain that possessing particular instances of knowledge depends upon having a prior criterion for knowing. Yet coherentists also reject skepticism since they do not assert that the circularity between criteria of knowing and instances of knowledge is vicious.

Coherentist interpretations thus claim that Hegel's solution is superior to particularism and methodism, since by rejecting the priority of either particular knowledge claims or methods of knowing, one allows for a kind of mutual reinforcement between the two which could offset the arbitrariness of giving only one of them ultimate priority.³⁰ Such interpretations are in keeping with the general Neo-Sellarsian reading of the Hegelian project since they require neither phenomenal nor epistemological givenness. They do not require PG since the coherence in question is thought to obtain between the various claims of a theory.³¹ To claim that two propositions A and B cohere with one another does not seem to entail anything about whether we are immediately acquainted with our conscious states. Likewise, these interpretations do not require EG_m or even EG since they advocate a coherentist account of justification. Claims are justified

³⁰ One could think of such a position as a version of meta-methodism since it provides a method for determining which first order epistemic methods and particular knowledge claims to adopt, viz. the ones that cohere with one another.

³¹ Analogies to a Kuhnian account of science are often invoked, identifying theories with scientific paradigms. The coherence between the claims of a theory constitutes periods of normal science, and the lack of coherence between the claims of a theory results in scientific revolution. For example, Jon Stewart claims that "the term 'Notion,' for Hegel, corresponds roughly to what Kuhn calls a 'scientific paradigm,' to what Davidson calls a 'conceptual scheme,' or to what Dilthey calls a 'worldview.' Each of these terms is meant to capture a network of beliefs that together provide us with the cognitive apparatus which makes the sum total of experience intelligible and thus possible in the first place. [...] This Notion is then examined until the internal contradictions are found in it, at which time a new Notion must be introduced to replace the old contradictory one. This movement corresponds roughly to the way in which one scientific paradigm replaces another after a period of scientific revolution according to Kuhn's theory of the development of knowledge in the sciences." Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Systematic Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 47-48. Likewise Kenneth Westphal claims that "Hegel adopts the 'form of consciousness' as a unit of analysis in order to have a general rubric for conceptual schemes [...] A form of consciousness comprises a pair of basic principles. One of these principles specifies the kind or mode of empirical knowledge of which a form of consciousness presumes itself capable. The other principle specifies the general structure of the kind of object that form of consciousness presumes to find in the world. [...] The rubric of 'form of consciousness' is neutral on the question of whether a particular individual's consciousness or a collective group's common outlook is under consideration. Similarly, this rubric is indifferent between historically identifiable views of, and summarily presented possible positions on, knowledge and its objects." Kenneth Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism: A Study of the Aim and Method of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 92.

by having the right kinds of inferential relations to one another and are not said to be justified when taken in isolation. The coherentist interpretation of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion is thus important for the overall Neo-Sellarsian reading of the Hegelian project since it shows how Hegel offers epistemic insights while avoiding commitments thought problematic by some contemporary philosophers. William Bristow, an advocate of the coherentist reading, expresses this sentiment aptly when he claims that Hegel's project "represents, not a return to Cartesian methodology, but a development of the [Kantian] critical turn."³²

Two kinds of coherentist interpretation can be distinguished in the literature by the stringency of their demands for coherence. The first form of coherentist interpretation attempts to solve the problem of the criterion by focusing on the strict coherence that obtains between criteria and particular knowledge claims. Call this strict coherentism. According to this model coherence is an all or nothing affair. No theory which lacks coherence between its criteria and its particular knowledge claims is epistemologically acceptable.³³ So, for example, the set of criteria of knowing and particular knowledge claims {C1: Only sensible objects can be known and P1: I know that I have hands} is epistemologically legitimate because its elements are coherent, whereas the set {C1: Only sensible objects can be known and P2: I know that numbers exist} is not since its constituents are contradictory. Bristow seems to offer such an interpretation when he claims that in the *Phenomenology*, "consciousness brings its criteria to bear in testing its

³² William Bristow, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 209.

³³ Naturally, it also assumes that the methods must cohere with one another and that the particular knowledge claims must cohere with each other.

knowledge claims. If these two elements fail to agree in the comparison, then both consciousness's criteria and its claims to know—the whole configuration—must change.”³⁴ Bristow here seems to claim that any lack of agreement between criteria and particular knowledge claims is sufficient to falsify a theory and should lead to positing an alternate one. On such a reading, only theories with strict coherence between criteria and particular knowledge claims are epistemologically acceptable.

The second kind of coherentist interpretation claims that the justification provided by coherence is a matter of degree. A theory will be justified to the extent that its criteria and particular knowledge claims correspond to one another. The more coherence a theory displays between its criteria and particular knowledge claims the more justification it will have. But a partially incoherent theory might still be justified to some extent. On this interpretation, theories aim to achieve an overall reflective equilibrium between their criteria and particular knowledge claims. So, for example, consider again an empiricist theory that holds as a criterion of knowledge C1: only sensible objects can be known. This method does well in accounting for particular knowledge claims such as P1: I know that I have hands, P3: I know there are pandas at the zoo, P4: I know my car is blue, etc. In virtue of this fact both C1 and P1, P3, and P4 get some support. But C1 cannot account for knowledge claims such as P5: I know that $7+5 = 12$ and P6: I know that people should be treated as ends in themselves rather than as means to an end. While P5 and P6 lose some justification by not cohering with C1, C1 itself also loses justification by not

³⁴ Bristow, *Hegel and Transformation*, 225. See also Forster's claim that Hegel's system faces no "competition from contrary positions because these all turn out to be self-contradictory. [...] All viewpoints within which other positions could be articulated [...] are self-contradictory." "Hegel's Dialectical Method" in *Cambridge Companion to Hegel* ed. Frederick C. Beiser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 135.

cohering with these particular knowledge claims. One could then argue that another method should be chosen which can account for these claims. It is through such a process of progressive theoretical adjustment that philosophical science emerges. Such a view is seen, for example, in Pinkard's claim that:

The certification of any claim to knowledge or any assertion of a binding practical principle depends on the ways in which it answers to the historical insufficiencies of previous accounts; this points to the idea that any allegedly final account can itself only be provisionally final, that it too must be expected to undermine itself as the conditions under which it is to be realized develop themselves (for example, that it will fail to accomplish the aims that it sets as definitive for whether it can count as a success).³⁵

Since every account is incomplete, provisional, and revisable in light of new data, the best that we can hope for would be to have the most coherent account on offer.

Justification in this case would be a matter of degree rather than an all or nothing affair.

Aside from general claims about Hegel's overall epistemological theory, coherentist interpretations of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion seem to be supported by two central passages in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The first passage contains Hegel's previously noted assertion that the objects of consciousness must change whenever the criteria for knowing them are altered. After asserting that the problem of the criterion can be overcome by examining consciousness since "consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself" (PhG 84), Hegel notes that the comparison results in a change both in consciousness' object and consciousness' knowledge:

³⁵ Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 339-340.

[1] If the comparison [between knowledge and object] shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. [2] 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 of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. [3] 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. [4] Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test; in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is (PhG 85).

In this passage, Hegel appears to offer a coherentist solution to the problem of the criterion by claiming that the objects of knowledge and the criterion for knowing those objects either mutually support or undermine one another. Hegel begins in [1] by noting that if a set of particular knowledge claims about an object does not actually conform to that object, then it seems that those claims must be “altered” (by either rejecting them outright or admitting that they have a diminished epistemic status). But he goes on to claim in [2] that such alteration would affect both the particular knowledge claims and the object allegedly known through those claims. Thus, he maintains in [3] that what consciousness thought to be an in-itself (viz. an object existing independently of knowledge claims about that object) turns out to be only an in-itself for consciousness (viz. an object that exists only in relation to a particular set of knowledge claims about that object). And in [4] Hegel then identifies this essentially relational object with a criterion of knowing and thus concludes that criteria and the particular knowledge claims of which they are criteria are mutually dependent. “The criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing

is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is.” Because of this mutual dependence, it is misguided to think that knowledge requires either independent knowledge of particular facts (i.e. particularism) or independent knowledge of a criterion of knowing (i.e. methodism). Rather, knowledge consists precisely in the coherence between particular knowledge claims and the criteria which govern them.

The second passage used to support the coherentist interpretation concerns Hegel’s remarks about forms of consciousness (*Gestalten des Bewußtseins*). In this passage, Hegel seems to identify various sets of claims about knowledge and claims about objects with forms of consciousness, maintaining that:

Since what first appeared as the object sinks for consciousness to the level of its way of knowing it, and since the in-itself becomes a being-for-consciousness of the in-itself, the latter is now the new object. Herewith a new form of consciousness [*Gestalt des Bewußtseins*] comes on the scene as well, for which the essence is something different from what it was at the preceding stage. It is this fact that guides the entire series of forms of consciousness [*Gestalten des Bewußtseins*] in their necessary sequence (PhG 87).³⁶

Interpreters claim that Hegel’s account of forms of consciousness proves that his solution to the problem of the criterion depends upon the nature of theoretical coherence.

According to these readings, one should understand a shape of consciousness as a theory or conceptual scheme which specifies both (i) the kind of knowledge that the theory is meant to exemplify and (ii) the kind of object that theory is meant to grasp.³⁷ When forms

³⁶ Miller’s translation has been altered from “patterns of consciousness” to “forms of consciousness” for the sake of consistency.

³⁷ For example, William Bristow claims that “Hegel refers to each stage of the dialectic as *ein Gestalt des Bewusstseins*, which I translated above [...] as a ‘configuration of consciousness’ or ‘of knowing.’ ‘Formation’ would perhaps better translate *Gestalt* than configuration. By the use of this word *Gestalt*, Hegel indicates that the particular stage consists of a complex formation composed of specific elements:

of consciousness are defined in this manner, it is plausible to conclude that Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion is grounded in the theoretical coherence between the various principles of a conceptual scheme.

Proponents of the coherentist interpretation not only take their view to be rooted in the text, but also claim that it is philosophically plausible. The problem for Chisholm's two traditional non-skeptical responses (i.e. particularism, which claims to possess particular instances of knowledge that do not depend upon criteria of knowledge, and methodism, which claims to possess criteria of knowledge which do not depend upon particular instances of knowledge) is that they appear to be entangled in an epistemologically vicious arbitrariness.³⁸ Traditional particularism seems arbitrary

namely, a conception of the object, of what we know; a conception of the criterion, of how we know, and a conception of the subject, of the subject's role in knowing." Bristow, *Hegel and Transformation*, 229. Or again, others such as Terry Pinkard provide a pragmatic account when they identify forms of consciousness with forms of life. For example, Pinkard claims that "A 'formation of consciousness' in Hegel's sense is composed both of the ways in which a form of life takes certain types of reasons (or, to put it more generally, norms) as authoritative for itself and the ways in which it articulates to itself why it is legitimate for those reasons to count for it as authoritative, non-optional reasons." Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 7.

³⁸ In contemporary discussions of the problem of the criterion this threat of arbitrariness has been labeled the problem of easy knowledge. See, for example, Stewart Cohen's "Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65.2 (2002): 309-329. The problem can be formulated in two different ways. According to the first formulation, the problem arises from the idea that that knowledge is closed under entailment. If I know that P, and I know that P entails Q, I can know Q on the basis of P and P's entailing Q. Now consider my perceptual belief that there is a blue book on the shelf. If the perceptual process that produces this belief is reliable (and there is, in fact, a blue book on the shelf), then I know that the book is blue. Furthermore, the fact that the book is blue entails that the book is not white with blue lights shining on it. So, if knowledge is closed under entailment, I can know that there are no optical illusions in the environment involving blue lights simply in virtue of the content of my belief that there is a blue book on the shelf. If my perceptual belief can count as knowledge without first knowing that the perceptual process which produces it is reliable, then I can thereby come to know a host of other facts about the environment without further empirical enquiry. But this is a counterintuitive result since knowledge should not be procured so easily. The second version of the problem involves bootstrapping our way to knowledge of the reliability of the sources of belief. For if beliefs can be known independently of knowing that their sources are reliable, then one can trivially infer the reliability of a source of belief from the very belief which it produces. I could, for instance, come to infer the reliability of perception from the fact that I know that there is a blue book on the shelf and that this belief is based on perception. Again, this is a counterintuitive result. We naturally feel that attaining knowledge of the reliability of our cognitive faculties ought to require more work.

because its initial selection of particular instances of knowledge is unconstrained by considerations of method. For example, if (with G.E. Moore) one were to take the claim that my hands exist independently of their relations to minds as a particular instance of knowledge, it would appear to beg the question against various forms of idealism and skepticism. When unconstrained by epistemic criteria, the decision regarding which particular knowledge claims are to be assumed looks to be arbitrary.

Likewise, traditional methodism is arbitrary because its initial selection of an epistemic method is unconstrained by particular instances of knowledge. For example, suppose one selected a method which claimed that only empirically verifiable claims could be known. Beginning with this method would beg the question against epistemologies which allow for knowledge of non-empirical truths.³⁹ Without being able to appeal to particular instances of knowledge by which to evaluate the various methods, the choice between rival methods seems to be arbitrary. This problem of arbitrariness drove Chisholm to claim that the problem of the criterion can be dealt with “only by begging the question.”⁴⁰

Yet, by utilizing the doctrine of coherence, recent interpretations appear to be able to overcome this threat of arbitrariness. Coherentist interpretations thus seem to have a philosophical advantage over Chisholm’s traditional solutions. Though the selection of particular knowledge claims and criteria for knowing may appear arbitrary when considered individually, when considered together, their mutual support provides non-

³⁹ One might object that this example is question begging because the method employed clearly rules out disputed knowledge claims and that the choice of a different criterion might not lead to such disputed consequences. But this objection can function only if one assumes instances of knowledge by which to evaluate the disputability of a criterion. Yet such an option is, in principle, not available to the methodist.

⁴⁰ Chisholm, *The Foundations of Knowing*, 75.

arbitrary justification. According to strict and degreed coherentism, “the epistemic goodness of beliefs and criteria of truth is to be found precisely in their interdependence,”⁴¹ and thus presents no threat of arbitrariness. Bristow characterizes this as a process in which every claim is put at stake and open to revision.⁴² Though any knowledge claim or method may be arbitrarily assumed, each is always open to rejection if it fails to cohere with other items in one’s conceptual scheme.

In this manner, recent interpretations claim that Hegel anticipated a promising contemporary solution to the problem of the criterion since epistemologists in the analytic tradition have only recently employed coherentist considerations to solve the problem.⁴³

For example, in his book, *Reflective Knowledge*, Ernest Sosa claims that:

The right model for understanding reflective justification is not the linear model whereby justification is a sort of liquid that flows through some pipe or channel of reasoning, from premises to conclusion. (Such flow is linear, unidirectional; the pipe or channel ‘transmits’ the justification—or warrant, or epistemic status.) A better model is rather that of the web of belief, whereby the web is properly attached to the environment, while its nodes can also gain status through mutual support. Any given node is thus in place through its connections with other nodes, but each of them is itself in place through its connections with the other nodes, including the

⁴¹ Andrew Cling, “Posing the Problem of the Criterion” *Philosophical Studies* 75.3 (1994): 261-292, 274.

⁴² For example, Bristow claims that:

Granted that the aim [...] is exactly to determine the criterion, and the criterion is itself the basis of judgment, the critical investigation must be one in which the criteria on the basis of which the inquiry is conducted can themselves be transformed as required by this investigation itself. If everything is at stake in this inquiry, then there can be no fixed standpoint from which critique occurs; rather the criteria of this investigation must be themselves open to transformation [...] Everything changes because everything is at stake; nothing has yet established itself as the ground upon which the investigation can take place. The critical investigation is exactly the one in which the criterion, and hence everything, is in question. Hegel has meant to define a method whereby our knowledge can criticize itself according to its own internal criterion. Through this critique, we can change our criteria of rationality—and, if the criteria, then the whole complex, the whole Gestalt—as required by reason itself. *Hegel and Transformation*, 229-230.

Thus, according to Bristow, this coherentist account allows Hegel to question every particular belief and criteria through a process of internal self-criticism. See also, Kenneth Westphal’s *Hegel’s Epistemological Realism*, 110-111 and *Hegel’s Epistemology*, 44 and Tom Rockmore’s *On Hegel’s Epistemology and Contemporary Philosophy*, (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1996), 29.

⁴³ Such as the ones offered by Sosa, Cohen, and, Cling.

original given node. By basing beliefs on other beliefs the rational weaver weaves a web each member of which is held in place in part (perhaps in miniscule part) through its being based on certain others, directly or indirectly.⁴⁴

Sosa claims to be able to solve the problem of the criterion by rejecting the idea of a one-way transmission of justification and accepting instead a theory of mutual support in which warrant emerges through internal coherence. Coherentist interpretations of Hegel are thus in a position to claim that Hegel thought of such a solution well before Sosa and developed it in greater detail. Indeed, it is now not uncommon for even contemporary epistemologists to claim Hegel as the historical source of this position. For instance, Crispin Wright speaks of “the kind of coherence conception of epistemic warrant [...] ultimately deriving from Hegel”⁴⁵ as if it were a matter of common knowledge. Coherentist interpretations thus appear to explain the *Phenomenology*’s crucial methodological discussions and to present a philosophically plausible account of Hegel’s solution to the problem of the criterion. Nevertheless, despite these seeming advantages, coherentist interpretations face substantial difficulties.

2.3 Problems for the Coherentist Interpretation

Coherentist interpretations face two major difficulties: One textual and one philosophical. The first difficulty is that when the passages that seem to support the coherentist reading are examined in context, the kind of coherence they describe is different from the kind of coherence advocated by contemporary epistemological

⁴⁴ Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Vol II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 239-240.

⁴⁵ Crispin Wright, “Frictional Coherentism? A Comment on Chapter 10 of Ernest Sosa’s *Reflective Knowledge*” *Philosophical Studies* 153 (2011): 29-41, 38.

coherentism. The coherentist interpretation thereby mischaracterizes the kind of coherence employed by Hegel. A coherentist solution to the problem of the criterion claims that the coherence between propositions which specify methods of knowing (e.g. that only claims that can be empirically supported are justified) and propositions which specify particular instances of knowing (e.g. that I have hands) provides an epistemically virtuous form of circularity that can solve the problem of the criterion. The relevant kind of coherence would thus be the coherence of a conceptual scheme. Call this propositional coherence. But the passages in question do not describe such general propositional coherence. To see this, consider first an overlooked point about the passages in question: when Hegel speaks of coherence he speaks specifically of the coherence of *consciousness*. For example, in PhG 85, Hegel claims that “since Notion (*Begriff*) and object (*Gegenstand*), the criterion and what is to be tested, are present in consciousness itself (*in dem Bewußtsein selbst vorhanden sind*)”, when consciousness “finds that its knowledge (*Wissen*) does not correspond to its object (*Gegenstand*), the object itself does not stand the test” (PhG 85). On a straightforward reading of the text, it would appear that Hegel here identifies the relation of the coherence relation not with general theoretical claims but with items that are present in consciousness itself (e.g. knowledge and object). It looks as though the reason Hegel introduces the coherence relation to solve the problem of the criterion is that consciousness can see when its knowledge and its object cohere or fail to cohere. Because the coherence in question is between items that are present in consciousness Hegel can describe the process of finding coherence a “dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge (*Wissen*) and its object (*Gegenstand*)” (PhG 86). One can thus argue that,

since the kind of coherence that Hegel appeals to in solving the problem of the criterion is specifically the coherence of consciousness, the kind of coherence that Hegel has in mind is not equivalent to the propositional coherence popular in contemporary epistemology. A similar point can be made regarding the second passage used to support the coherentist reading. For the passage does not speak of theoretical coherence in general but of the experience that a shape of consciousness undergoes when it learns that its way of knowing an object fails to match its object. “Since what first appeared as the object sinks for consciousness to the level of its way of knowing it, and since the in-itself becomes a being-for-consciousness of the in-itself, the latter is now the new object. Herewith a new form of consciousness [*Gestalt des Bewußtseins*] comes on the scene as well, for which the essence is something different from what it was at the preceding stage” (PhG 87). Once more, it seems that Hegel appeals specifically to the coherence of consciousness and not to general propositional coherence.

Naturally, advocates of the coherentist interpretation will object that we ought not to adopt a straightforward reading of Hegel’s use of the term “consciousness” in these passages. Hegel’s terminology is known for being obtuse and at points he objects to using the common meanings of words in philosophy, so it is not implausible to think that “consciousness” could be a term of art for Hegel and that, when properly interpreted, it is serves as shorthand for “theory” or “conceptual-scheme”. So, for example, Bristow proposes that we understand Hegel’s claim that both criterion and object are present in consciousness as consisting in the supposed fact that every claim to know presupposes (at least implicitly) a criterion of justification. He explains:

It will help to demystify Hegel's move if we illustrate it using more concrete terms than Hegel allows himself. I understand as follows the claim that 'consciousness provides its criterion from within itself', which is the claim that enables the investigation aimed at establishing the justified criterion for the first time to go forward. The subject's claim to know always carries with it, mostly implicitly, some conception of what the knowing subject goes on in making the claim, that is, an implicit conception of the criteria of justification. We must be able to reflect on the justificatory basis of our claims, for otherwise we make no claim at all.⁴⁶

On Bristow's reading, what is doing the epistemological work for Hegel is not some special feature of conscious experience as PG and EG_m would require, but rather the fact that every claim to know implicitly presupposes a criteria for knowing.⁴⁷ And since

⁴⁶ Bristow, *Hegel and Transformation*, 224.

⁴⁷ Pippin offers a similar interpretation when he claims: "Hegel has simply assumed what we described earlier as the Kantian thesis about the inherent and ineliminable reflexivity of 'consciousness' or empirical knowledge, although he is already expressing in his own terms that Kantian theory of apperceptive judging and what Fichte called the 'double series' (doppelte Reihe) character of experience. Those terms also indicate, however, that as with Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, this self-relational component of experience is not being treated as some species of self-awareness or some kind of attending to one's mental states. Hegel does *not* say that consciousness, in knowing an object, is also (or even 'really') aware of its mental states and activities. Although he does not clearly argue for the claim here, the passages [...] at least indicate that he holds that consciousness is indeed 'of the object,' as well as 'of itself.' Moreover, he parses 'of itself' as 'consciousness of its own knowledge of that truth,' not 'consciousness of its mental states, or subjective, constituting activity,' and so on. This is Hegel's way of making what is by now a familiar point, that in, say, assertoric judgments, we self-consciously assert; the act of asserting is complex, since it involves not only the representation of what we assert but our fulfilling a criterion for asserting, a component of experience that cannot be isolated from what it is we are asserting. Both what we take to be 'the truth' (in this example, the propositional content) and our taking it to be 'the truth' are involved." *Hegel's Idealism*, 103. Here Pippin maintains that Hegel's claim that both object and knowledge are present in consciousness does not involve some kind of awareness of one's own mental states (as in EG_m and PG) but rather in the fact that every assertoric judgment presupposes that the conditions for making an assertion are fulfilled (one of which presumably is having a criteria of justification for the assertion in question). And Pinkard expresses a similar view, although in a distinctively pragmatic manner when he claims that: "although it is still difficult to phrase in gentler terms than he himself uses, Hegel's point is that self-consciousness should not be understood, at least primarily, as an observation of oneself—again, not as one thing looking at another thing—but more in terms of an agent's making a commitment to something, or taking a stance toward some claim. To use non-Hegelian language, at one level, self-consciousness involves a kind of transparency toward itself. There is no distance between committing oneself to a claim and wondering if the claim is true. The distinction between me as aware of myself and me as the object of awareness is, as Hegel often likes to say, the distinction that is no distinction at all. (This distinguishes it from third-person accounts of taking a stance, where the claims that 'so-and-so believes P' and 'so-and-so thinks that P is false' pose no problem of internal contradiction.) The kind of self-presence in self-consciousness is thus bound up with the ability to be able, minimally, to undertake commitments. The difference between first-person and third-person points of view is more of a difference in the type of commitment one undertakes, as distinct from the commitments others might ascribe to you. It has to do, that is, with the stance one takes to oneself and on one's standpoints on other matters, and in that respect, such transparency often

particular claims implicitly presuppose criteria, both claims and criteria can be evaluated according to whether or not they cohere with one another.

Yet I contend that such an interpretation of Hegel's use of the term "consciousness" is misguided and that the straightforward reading can be defended by looking to the details of the text to see of how consciousness is meant to solve the problem of the criterion. But first, it is important to note that while such interpretations might appear more sophisticated than ordinary accounts, their analysis of consciousness does not contribute anything significant towards a solution to the problem of the criterion. Consider, for example, Bristow's thesis that every claim to know presupposes a criterion of knowing. Though coherentists take this as an obvious truth, in the context of the problem of the criterion, it is merely an assertion of methodism (i.e. that every particular instance of knowledge presupposes a prior method of knowing). It is precisely such a claim that particularists would deny. Particularists maintain that some claims to know, (e.g. that I have hands, that the world is more than five minutes old, that there are other minds, etc.) are justified without presupposing any prior criteria of knowing. One might contend that methodists are right and particularists are wrong in this regard, but one cannot merely accept it as an obvious truth that all parties in the debate would agree to.

evaporates. To know one's commitments, one must be able to interpret them from within the social space in which one moves, and thus one's stance toward one's own commitments may be relatively or even fully blind; in many cases, one will not be able to understand that to which one is committed until one knows the meaning of one's commitment, and one will not be able to know the concrete meaning of the commitment until it after it has been actualized. We will find ourselves to have commitments that are our own but that we can neither control nor completely survey." *Hegel's Naturalism*, 47. For Pinkard, not only do knowledge claims presuppose methods of knowing but such methods are implicit in a social practice to which one might not even be aware at the time.

The philosophical power of the coherentist approach lies in the claim that coherence can avoid the problem of arbitrariness and not their particular account of consciousness.

Moreover, when one looks to the details of Hegel's argument and acknowledges that he employs a specific technical vocabulary, this vocabulary supports the ordinary understanding of consciousness rather than the revisionist reading offered by the coherentists. Note first that when Hegel characterizes consciousness, he does so by the fact that "consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and at the same time relates itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists for consciousness" (82). So, for example, when I look at my desk and am conscious of my copy of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, my consciousness both distinguishes itself from the book laying before me and relates itself to it. My consciousness distinguishes itself from the book. The book, say, is brown, red, and lying on my desk whereas my consciousness is none of these things. But, when I do perceive the book, my consciousness is related *to* the book precisely through such features. The book is present to my mind as having a determinate size, shape, color, and location on my desk. Hegel calls this latter aspect—viz. "the determinate aspect of this relating, or of the being of something for a consciousness"—"knowing" (PhG 82). He thus identifies this technical sense of "knowing" with the determinate ways in which objects are presented to consciousness. To avoid confusing this specific sense of "knowing" with ordinary uses of the word, the German term *Wissen* will be used to designate Hegel's technical definition. In contrast, Hegel identifies "truth" with the object that is presented to consciousness. According to Hegel, "whatever is related to knowledge or knowing is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this [...] is called truth (PhG 82)." Again,

to avoid confusion with ordinary senses of “truth”, the German term *Wahrheit* will be used to designate Hegel’s technical definition of the word.

After providing these definitions of Wissen and Wahrheit, Hegel inquires, in PhG 83, into the question of the Wahrheit *of* Wissen and considers the possibility that that the problem of the criterion might arise in this case as it does in questions of the Wissen and Wahrheit of other entities. By its very nature Wissen “is our object, something that that exists for us.” But one might worry that its Wahrheit eludes our grasp since Wahrheit is outside of us. In this manner, one might worry that “Wissen would not be so much its Wahrheit but rather just our Wissen of it.” Because our Wissen of Wissen would not immediately secure the Wahrheit of Wissen, it appears that the problem of the criterion applies to the investigation of Wissen just as it applies to the investigation of our knowledge of other entities.

It is at this point, in the first sentence of PhG 84, that Hegel offers his solution to the problem of the criterion by proclaiming that the problem “is overcome by the nature of the object we are investigating” (i.e. Wissen). He notes that the “essential point” for his argument is that both “being-for-another” (i.e. Wissen) and “being-in-itself” (i.e. Wahrheit) both fall within that Wissen which we are investigating.” Since nothing could be presented to consciousness (Wissen) if consciousness were not in some sense aware of that presentation (Wahrheit), the nature of Wissen guarantees that its own Wissen and Wahrheit are inseparable. In short, an investigation of Wissen can be used to solve the problem of the criterion since the Wissen of Wissen guarantees the Wahrheit of Wissen. It is in light of this inseparability of the Wissen and Wahrheit of Wissen, when Wissen is taken as our object of investigation, “we do not need to import criteria, or to use our own

bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter in hand as it is in and for itself” (PhG 84). Hegel’s own explicit account of what he means by consciousness and its two essential features of Wissen and Wahrheit therefore does not fit with the coherentist identification of consciousness with a general conceptual scheme. Rather, consciousness is identified with phenomenal consciousness in the familiar sense of the term—something we are directly acquainted with in experience.

The second problem for coherentist interpretations is that they fail to present an adequate solution to the problem of the criterion. The chief philosophical advantage of coherentist interpretations is that they appear to avoid epistemological arbitrariness. Whereas traditional particularism looks arbitrary because it cannot justify its basic knowledge claims through the application of an epistemological method and traditional methodism seems arbitrary since it cannot justify its methods by verifying them against particular instances of knowledge, coherentism can appeal to internal coherence to justify both particular knowledge claims and methods. Coherentist interpretations can thereby honor the intuitions motivating both particularism and methodism. With particularists, coherentists can maintain that methods of knowing must conform to what we take to be particular instances of knowledge. And with methodists, coherentists can maintain our particular instances of knowing presuppose some criterion by which they are taken to be justified. The hope is that by abandoning the view that either particular instances of knowledge or methods of knowing should be given one way priority, one can overcome the problem of arbitrariness; since, regardless of the claims one begins with, coherent

theories will be epistemologically superior to incoherent ones. The coherentist interpretation thus appears to provide non-arbitrary grounds for epistemic legitimacy.

But, upon closer examination, coherentism does not, in fact, overcome the problem of arbitrariness. Epistemological coherentism remains only one possible non-skeptical solution to the problem of the criterion among others (viz. methodism and particularism). The problem of arbitrariness consists in the assertion that whenever a claim is set forth as a starting point for epistemology, precisely because it is such a starting point, there is nothing prior which might justify it. For instance, when a particular claim P is brought forward as an epistemological starting point, it seems to be arbitrary. It appears that one could just as easily begin with another particular claim P^* or with a method M each of which might entail $\sim P$. Or likewise, when a method M is set forth as an epistemic starting point, it seems arbitrary since one could just as easily posit another method M^* or particular claim P each of which could imply $\sim M$.

Coherentism seems to avoid the problem of arbitrariness since it posits a set C consisting of a particular claim P and a method M as the starting point for epistemology. The reason P is non-arbitrary is that it is supported by M and the reason that M is non-arbitrary is that it is supported by P . But this is not sufficient to avoid the problem of arbitrariness. For the problem emerges for the set C itself. What reason do we have to begin our epistemological inquiry with the assertion of C instead, say, of another coherent set C^* consisting of P^* and M^* which entails $\sim C$? The fact that the coherence of M & P supports C is insufficient to show that C is preferable to C^* since M^* and P^* are

also coherent.⁴⁸ The problem of arbitrariness thus arises for coherentism as well.⁴⁹ The coherentist interpretation thus not only fails to account of the specific kind of coherence that Hegel invokes to solve the problem of the criterion, but the solution that it offers also proves to be inadequate.⁵⁰ As a result, it does not provide the philosophical advantage that it was touted as having.

2.4 Westphal's Realist Proposal

⁴⁸ A further problem often brought forward against coherentism is that a theory might be consistent and yet false. So, again, coherence, by itself, will be insufficient as an account of knowledge.

⁴⁹ In addition to arguing that the coherentism is not sufficient to solve the problem of arbitrariness, one might also contend that it is also not a necessary epistemic virtue. One might contend that, all things considered, coherence might add to the positive epistemic status of a theory, but note that one theory might still be epistemically preferable to another even if it admitted to more incoherence. For example, perhaps by admitting a degree of incoherence one could gain an advantage in wider explanatory power or simplicity.

⁵⁰ The coherentist could respond by asserting that Hegel's system is, in fact, the only possible consistent theory. By interpreting Hegel's doctrine of negation through contemporary coherentism (i.e. by claiming that a theory is negated when its constituent assertions contradict each other) and by providing a detailed analysis of the arguments of the *Phenomenology*, coherentists can argue that there are no rivals to the Hegelian system. There can be only one consistent theory and so there is no danger of arbitrarily selecting that theory against its rivals. On this view, since a truly consistent theory will have no rivals, coherentism overcomes the problem of arbitrariness.

But this response fails to provide a satisfying solution to the problem of arbitrariness that undermines the coherentist response to the problem of the criterion. For, at best, such a response would promise a solution at the end of a long process of further argumentation by adopting the conditional *if C is the only possible theory then, C is non-arbitrary* and then arguing that the antecedent of the conditional is true. Since particularists and methodists are also capable of asserting similar conditionals (viz. if the set P of particular knowledge claims is the only possible theory, then P is non-arbitrary, or if the set M of methods of knowing is the only possible theory, then M is non-arbitrary), the philosophical dispute will consist in attempting to demonstrate the truth of the antecedent for each of the proposed conditionals. But, as Hegel notes, "one bare assurance is worth just as much as another" (PhG 76). The defender of a coherentist interpretation of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion would thus need to actually furnish the argument demonstrating that they possess the only possible coherent set of knowledge claims, and this proves problematic in two respects. First, many interpreters of Hegel's work are not convinced that this is, in fact, possible.[See Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 108 and Forster, "Hegel's Dialectical Method" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, 155-157.] And, second, even if it were possible to set forth this grand interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, it would not serve to motivate the Hegelian project in the way that coherentists and Neo-Sellarsians maintain. For it would not be coherentism as such that solves the problem of the criterion, but rather the refutation of every other philosophical system. It would thus not be Hegel's allegedly coherentist insight that does the epistemological work, but the completed argument of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

At this point Neo-Sellarsian interpreters might attempt to adopt instead Kenneth Westphal's more sophisticated coherentist account of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion. Westphal's account is more closely grounded in Hegel's claims about the role consciousness plays in solving the problem of the criterion and carefully distinguishes between four senses in which something can be an object of consciousness.⁵¹ Yet the solution Westphal proposes turns on realist commitments which Hegel is said to endorse (rather than on the nature of consciousness as such), and so appears to be compatible with the Neo-Sellarsian denial of PG and EG_m. What solves the problem of the criterion on Westphal's account is the reflexive self-critical structure of scientific investigation that is nonetheless open to input from the world, and not any form of phenomenologically or epistemologically privileged access to our own states of consciousness.

On Westphal's reading, Hegel distinguishes between four components of knowledge as a relation between consciousness and objects. The first component of the knowledge relation is "the object according to consciousness".⁵² Westphal identifies an object according to consciousness with consciousness' conception of what the object is. For example, the empiricist might claim that the objects of consciousness are composed of sense data and so the object according to consciousness of the empiricist would thus be a bundle of sense data. The second component of the knowledge relation is "the object for consciousness." This is the object as it appears to consciousness as exemplifying consciousness' conception of the object. For example, the empiricist might look at a

⁵¹ Kenneth Westphal, "Hegel's Solution to the Problem of the Criterion" in *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 5.2 (1988):173-88, 187-89.

⁵² Westphal, "Hegel's Solution", 189

tomato and see a cluster of sensible properties (e.g. redness and roundness). This cluster of features would be the object for consciousness. The third component is “the object to consciousness”. This consists of the aspects of the object which consciousness is only implicitly aware of, i.e. the features of the object that are not explicitly stated in consciousness conception of objects which nonetheless appear to consciousness. So, to continue with the empiricist example, the object to consciousness might be the substratum that underlies the sensible properties of the object or the causal powers that the object possesses. The final component of the knowledge relation is “the object itself”. This is the object as it is regardless of consciousness’ conception of it.

Westphal then claims that since Hegel maintains that consciousness is directed both toward its object and toward itself, this fourfold distinction applies both to consciousness conception of the world and to consciousness conception of its knowledge of the world. What results then is an eightfold model of the knowledge relation. Westphal enumerates these components as follows (with the first four listed as numerals (i.e. 1-4) and the last four listed as alphabetical characters (i.e. A-D)):

1. Consciousness’ conception of the world: the world according to consciousness.
 2. The world taken as instantiating consciousness’ conception of the world: the world for consciousness.
 3. Those elements of the world closely related to, but not included in, consciousness’ conception of the world: The world to consciousness.
 4. The world as it actually is, with all of its properties known and unknown: The world itself.
- A. Consciousness’ conception of knowledge: knowledge according to consciousness.

B. Knowledge taken as instantiating consciousness conception of knowledge: Knowledge for consciousness.

C. Those elements of knowledge closely related to, but not included in, consciousness' conception of knowledge: Knowledge to Consciousness.

D. Knowledge as it actually is, with all of its properties known and unknown: knowledge itself.⁵³

This eightfold distinction allows Westphal to provide a complex form of coherentism along these dimensions. The realist component (4 and D) is especially important for Westphal's proposed solution since it allows both the world itself and knowledge itself to enter into our accounts of them. Because the reality of the world and the reality of knowledge intrude on the conceptions of consciousness, Westphal suggests that Hegel can solve the problem of the criterion through a process of self-criticism using the standard of internal coherence. Westphal explains this solution as follows:

Because the world for consciousness and knowledge for consciousness (elements 2 and B) result from consciousness' application of its conceptions of the world and of knowledge (elements 1 and A) to the world itself and to knowledge itself (elements 4 and D), the world itself and knowledge itself figure centrally into the world and knowledge for consciousness (elements 2 and B). Because the world itself and knowledge itself figure centrally into the world and knowledge for consciousness, if the world and knowledge for consciousness coincide with consciousness' conceptions of the world and of knowledge, then these conceptions also correspond to their objects, the world itself and knowledge itself. Conversely, if consciousness' conceptions of the world or of knowledge do not correspond to the world itself or to knowledge itself, then the theoretical and practical inferences consciousness bases on these conceptions will result in expectations that diverge from the actual behavior of the world or from actual cognitive practices.⁵⁴

⁵³ Westphal, "Hegel's Solution", 181.

⁵⁴ Westphal, "Hegel's Solution", 182.

Given the realist commitments of the proposal, one appears to have reason to maintain that greater coherence indicates a degree of truth-conduciveness and that incoherence indicates a lesser degree.⁵⁵ “Hegel can reasonably contend that meeting the negative condition of the absence of a detected incoherence in the long run is a very powerful criterion for the positive condition sought, namely, for the correspondence of a pair of conceptions of knowledge and its objects with the actual structure of human knowledge and with the actual structure of the objects of human knowledge.”⁵⁶ The resulting picture is thus fallibilist since consciousness must always answer to the intrusion of reality into its conceptual schemes. Coherence is a good indication of truth, but there is always the chance that new evidence will emerge in the process of engaging with reality which will lead to a lack of coherence.⁵⁷

Westphal’s complex coherentist interpretation may seem promising for the Neo-Sellarsian reading since, though it is not clear whether Westphal’s account of the coherence of consciousness presupposes PG and EG_m, it is plausible to think that they are not essential to the account.⁵⁸ The central features of the account seem to be its

⁵⁵ Specifically, Westphal describes the demands of coherence as follows: “1 No detectable discrepancy between the world for consciousness and the world according to consciousness (between elements 1 and 2). 2 No detectable discrepancy between knowledge for consciousness knowledge according to consciousness (between elements A and B). 3 No detectable discrepancy between (1) and (2) (between the pairs of elements 1 & 2 and A & B). 4 A matched pair of accounts of the genesis and implementation of the conceptions of knowledge and of the world indicating how they were generated through the critical rejection of less adequate alternatives. 5 An account of how the conceptions of knowledge and of the world and their implementation can be learned, comprehended, and employed on the basis of those same conceptions and applications.” Westphal, “Hegel’s Solution”, 184.

⁵⁶ Westphal, “Hegel’s Solution”, 183.

⁵⁷ “Hegel’s criterion is thus a sine qua non for the truth of a pair of principles, and he adopts fallibilism” Westphal, “Hegel’s Solution”, 183.

⁵⁸ Such a view is bolstered by Westphal’s claim that “the recent wave of anti-Cartesianism in epistemology and philosophy of mind has much to learn from Hegel.” *Hegel’s Epistemology: A Philosophical Interpretation of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 4 and his aligning Hegel with Burge’s externalist account of mental content—an account not easily reconciled with either PG or EG_m. *Hegel’s Epistemology*, 75-77.

commitment to realism and the demarcation of eight dimensions of coherence pursued in the practice of self-criticism, neither of which obviously requires phenomenal or epistemic givenness. The Neo-Sellarsian might therefore attempt to adopt such a solution to the problem of the criterion and use it in their overall narrative in which Hegel denies all forms of givenness.

Yet Westphal's realist solution also faces problems. First, like the previous coherentist interpretations, it is not obviously rooted in the text. Though Westphal's version is indeed closer to the text than general coherentist interpretations, his account fails to find explicit support in Hegel's actual claims. Westphal himself admits that his eightfold analysis of the knowledge relation and its use in solving the problem of the criterion involve reading between the lines, conceding that "this double fourfold distinction of elements of consciousness as a cognitive relation to its objects is only tenuously indicated in Hegel's 'Introduction'."⁵⁹ Westphal's account therefore does not adequately avoid the textual difficulties presented earlier.

Furthermore, Westphal's account also fails to solve the problem of arbitrariness which undermines standard solutions to the problem of the criterion. First, the account simply asserts the doctrine of realism without providing a justification for this commitment. But such a claim, like other philosophical claims, remains a mere assertion insofar as it concerns the problem of the criterion and is thus something arbitrarily assumed. No reason has been furnished as to why it should be preferred over various anti-realist conceptions of knowledge. Second, even if one were to accept realism, this would

⁵⁹ Westphal, "Hegel's Solution", 181.

not be a sufficient justification for accepting coherentism since particularists, methodists, and skeptics could all also accept such a claim. Particularists could maintain that their knowledge claim corresponds to the way the world really is, methodists could say their method is the most justified because it is grounded in the nature of reality, and skeptics could accept there is a real world while maintaining that we have no substantial knowledge of it. Finally, even if one accepted both realism and coherentism, this would still not solve the problem of arbitrariness, since again it may be that there are rival coherent theories about the nature of reality. Even if we presumed to have direct contact with reality, it is still possible for there to be multiple incommensurable internally consistent accounts of that reality. Moreover, given that confrontation with the real is meant to provide new data and constrain our theories, it is possible that a more incoherent theory (which recognizes this data and the problems it brings) could be more justified than a more coherent one (which has not encountered this data). Thus, even in this more sophisticated model, the resulting coherentist picture fails to solve the problem of arbitrariness and thereby also fails to solve the problem of the criterion.

A final option open to the Neo-Sellarsian would be to modify Westphal's account by eliminating the realist component, and instead focusing exclusively on the claim that consciousness has a self-referential structure. One could then argue that problem of the criterion could be solved in light of consciousnesses' reflexive structure and not by any alleged phenomenal or epistemological givenness of consciousness. For example, a form of consciousness might have for its object a tomato and for its criterion the claim that consciousness is perceiving a tomato. Since the structure of consciousness refers to itself one can invoke the specific correspondence between the object of consciousness and the

criterion of consciousness to solve the problem of the criterion. But, according to the Neo-Sellarsianism, such a self-referential structure does not presuppose any mythical entities or accounts such as PG or EG_m.

Yet this option also faces difficulties since self-referential structure by itself is insufficient to solve the problem of the criterion. Consider, for example, the sentence “every sentence written in English is printed on blue paper.” The mere fact that the sentence, as a sentence of English, refers to itself is sufficient neither to make that sentence true nor to render belief in that sentence justified. So merely invoking self-reference will not suffice to solve the problem of the criterion. If self-reference is going to be used as the key to solving the problem, the relevant kind of self-reference must be specified so as to ensure that it has the requisite epistemic virtues. But when one seeks to provide such a specification, the most promising candidate is the self-reference of phenomenal consciousness. According to PG, phenomenal consciousness is marked by having a phenomenal or “what-it’s-like” character that is phenomenologically immediate (in that phenomenal character is wholly immanent to the experience it is a character of) and epistemically immediate (in that undergoing an experience with such a phenomenal character grounds a subjective non-theoretical knowledge of that character). One way to characterize these features is to claim that such an experience is self-referential. For example, Uriah Kriegel has offered a self-representational account of phenomenal consciousness.⁶⁰ Such a view would account for the phenomenological immediacy of phenomenal consciousness by noting that the experience represents itself within itself

⁶⁰ See Uriah Kriegel, *Subjective Consciousness: A Self-Representational Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

(and is thereby wholly immanent to itself) and this immediacy could in turn ground epistemological immediacy, since if the state were tokened, one would be aware of being in that very state. If one accepted such a model, one could thereby use this particular form of self-representation to solve the problem of the criterion in the way suggested by Hegel. But the problem for the Neo-Sellarsian is that such a model accepts, rather than rejects, PG and EG_m. Indeed, it relies on the intuitions undergirding these two forms of givenness in order to motivate accepting this form of self-reference as epistemically useful. The self-representational model of phenomenal consciousness thus cannot be used to motivate a Neo-Sellarsian reading of Hegel's argument.

The coherentist interpretation both in its simple and complex versions thus lacks philosophical and textual motivation. Given that coherentism fails to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of arbitrariness, the problem of the criterion remains epistemologically problematic. It is thus urgent that we find another solution beyond the traditional particularist, methodist, and coherentist proposals. Likewise, given that the textual evidence reveals Hegel's solution to turn on the unique features of phenomenal consciousness (i.e. its *Wissen* and *Wahrheit*), and thus on PG and EG_m, it is necessary to find another interpretation of Hegel's position that can account for these features. In what follows I will set forth a phenomenological interpretation which I believe can accomplish both tasks.

3. Hegel's Phenomenological Solution to the Problem of the Criterion

In light of the forgoing difficulties for the coherentist interpretation, it is necessary to find an alternative reading that can account for the fact that Hegel grounds his solution to the problem of the criterion in phenomenal consciousness and can show how he is able to do this without succumbing to epistemic arbitrariness. I contend that such an interpretation can be provided by focusing on the central role that phenomenology plays in Hegel's argument in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this section, I will thus set forth a phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's argument in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*.

Before explaining Hegel's own distinctive solution to the problem of the criterion, it is useful to review the intuitions motivating the particularist, methodist, and coherentist proposals and the problem of arbitrariness that undermined each of them. The intuitive appeal of particularism lies in the idea that methods of knowing should not be adopted blindly but need to be evaluated according to evidence. Call this (PI). (PI) motivates particularism since particular knowledge claims could plausibly serve as a set of data by which to evaluate a putative method of knowing. For example, I could use the particular knowledge claims "that I have hands" and "that there is a tomato in front of me" to confirm the method "beliefs produced by perception are instances of knowledge." Methodism is supported by a parallel intuition that the endorsement of particular knowledge claims should not be made blindly but should be evaluated by data. Call this (MI). For example, it seems problematic to simply assert "I have hands" or "there is a tomato before me" as instances of knowledge without being able to offer any kind of evidence for these claims. It would be epistemologically dubious to propose a set of particular knowledge claims without being able to provide some sort of justificatory

ground for them. Methodists maintain that one can provide such evidence for particular knowledge claims by showing how they can be derived from a legitimate method of knowing. For instance, one could argue that the reason one knows “I have hands” or “there is a tomato before me” is that these beliefs are generated by perception which is a reliable method of knowing. But, as we have seen, the problem for methodism consists precisely in (PI), viz. the intuition that criteria for knowledge need to be evaluated by evidence. It would be arbitrary, and thus epistemologically inappropriate, to adopt a free floating set of criteria for knowing without evaluating it according to evidence.

This standoff between particularism and methodism makes coherentism an appealing option since it appears to be able to account for both (PI) and (MI) without succumbing to the problem of arbitrariness. The coherentist can agree both that our criteria for knowing and that our particular knowledge claims must be evaluated according to evidence and can identify this evidence with coherence. Methods of knowing are evaluated according to their coherence with particular knowledge claims, and particular knowledge claims are evaluated according their coherence with methods of knowing. But, as argued earlier, coherentism does not solve the problem of arbitrariness since the mere coherence between a set of methods of knowing and knowledge claims does not rule out cases in which the elements of the set are haphazardly assumed. Mere coherence does not provide the right kind of evidential evaluation required by (PI) and (MI).

Hegel’s account can do better in this regard. As noted previously, Hegel’s unique response to the problem of the criterion appeals to the *Wissen and Wahrheit* of consciousness and thus to PG and EG_m. This response has the resources to provide a

more adequate solution to the problem of the criterion: a solution which, like coherentism, can maintain both (PI) and (MI), but which, unlike coherentism, does not suffer from the problem of arbitrariness. Specifically, Hegel's phenomenological solution shows how the concept of a particular instance of knowledge is subject to an ambiguity and that (MI) conflicts with only one of the disambiguations. Hegel's account thus demonstrates that there is conceptual space for another kind of particularism which is not undermined by (MI) and avoids the problem of arbitrariness.

Hegel's solution turns on the claim that, given the nature of the *Wissen* (as the way things appear to consciousness) and *Wahrheit* (as the purported reference of consciousness), when *Wissen* itself is taken as an object of phenomenological investigation, its *Wissen* and *Wahrheit* cannot come apart. If one has *Wissen* of *Wissen*, one also has *Wahrheit* of *Wissen*. The intuitive support for such a view is that *Wissen* is immediate in the ways described by PG and EGment and so, because of *Wissen*'s immediacy, the way it appears to one (the *Wissen* of *Wissen*) cannot be metaphysically separated from what it purports to refer to (the *Wahrheit* of *Wissen*). Consider once more the definition of phenomenal givenness:

PG: For any subject S and experience E, E is phenomenally given to S iff i) E has a phenomenal character or "what-it's-likeness" PC for S (e.g. the phenomenal character of feeling pain, sensing red, tasting sweet, etc.), ii) E's PC is phenomenologically immediate i.e. the entire PC of E is immanent to E, and iii) E's PC is epistemologically immediate for S so that S can claim subjective non-theoretical knowledge in virtue of undergoing E. Hegel's account of *Wissen* satisfies all three desiderata for being phenomenally given. First, Hegel defines *Wissen* as the manner in which things appear to consciousness,

claiming it is “the determinate aspect of this relating, or the being of something for a consciousness” (PhG 82). Hegel thus identifies Wissen with what we would today call the phenomenal character of experience. Second, Wissen is immanent to the experience it is the phenomenal character of and is thus phenomenologically immediate. This is why Hegel’s proposed investigation of Wissen can give rise to the worry that it would not give us an adequate account of objective reality (PhG 83) and why Hegel responds to this worry by noting that “consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself” (PhG 84).⁶¹ Finally, Wissen is epistemologically immediate on Hegel’s account because it can be used as an instance of subjective knowledge where the “semblance of dissociation” between the way things appear to consciousness and the way things really are is overcome (PhG 84).

Likewise, since Wissen satisfies this third condition of (PG), it also constitutes a case of EG_m. As noted earlier, EG_m is defined as follows:

EG_m: There is a belief B and an experience E such that i) B is formed via first person acquaintance with E, ii) the content of B describes the character of E (i.e it describes the way things seem to one), iii) B is justified on the basis of one’s acquaintance with E, and iv) there is no set S of beliefs G₁, ..., G_n such that α) the elements of S are distinct from B and β) B has its justification in virtue of its inferential relations to the elements of S.

The subjective knowledge described in the third condition for PG satisfies the first condition of EG_m, since, in the case of such subjective knowledge, one has a belief that is

⁶¹ Hegel expresses this worry as follows: “The essence or criterion would lie within ourselves, and that which was to be compared with it and about which a decision would be reached through this comparison would not necessarily have to recognize the validity of such a standard” (PhG 83).

formed on the basis of first person acquaintance with experience. Second, on Hegel's account, the Wissen of Wissen is meant to characterize the the phenomenal character of one's experience and so satisfies the second condition for epistemological givenness. And finally, Hegel's account of the Wissen of Wissen satisfies the third condition of EG_m since it is justified on the basis of one's acquaintance with one's experience and not on inference from other beliefs.

Wissen, as phenomenally and epistemologically given, would thus constitute a particular instance of knowing. But it is a unique kind of knowledge since it is grounded in one's acquaintance with the 'what-it's like' character of one's experience. Call this phenomenal knowledge. The fact that Hegel appeals to phenomenal knowledge as a particular instance of knowledge reveals a crucial ambiguity in the formulation of particularism. Particularism maintains that the justification of particular instances of knowledge is prior to the justification of methods of knowing. Yet there is a subtle ambiguity in what it means to be an instance of knowing. On the one hand, in standard formulations of particularism, particular instances of knowledge are identified with detached knowledge claims offered in the context of an epistemological debate such as "I have hands", "the world is more than five minutes old", or "there is a tomato in the kitchen." These detached knowledge claims are called into question by (MI) since they are put forward in the context of a debate without providing their grounds. For example, suppose I encounter a strange looking man on the beach and he asserts that there is a tomato in my kitchen. In such a scenario, (MI) would undermine the stranger's claim

since I would have no idea what my interlocutor's grounds were for making the assertion.⁶²

On the other hand, Hegel's appeal to the *Wissen* and *Wahrheit* of consciousness shows that a particular instance of knowledge can mean something quite different. Instead of a knowledge claim made in an intersubjective debate, a particular instance of knowledge could be a first-person experience of knowing (i.e. what we have called phenomenal knowledge). Since phenomenal knowledge is immediate (in the sense defined by PG and EG_m), instances of phenomenal knowledge would comply with (MI)'s demand that particular instances of knowledge be evaluated in light of the evidence. They can do this because, unlike detached knowledge claims, instances of phenomenal knowledge contain their ground within themselves. Consider for example, one's phenomenal knowledge that one is in pain. This instance of knowledge is accepted on the basis of evidence (e.g. the painful phenomenal character of one's experience) but the evidence is internal to the instance of knowing. Thus, phenomenal knowledge allows one to formulate a version of particularism that can accept (MI) without accepting methodism.

Hegel's account of consciousness can thus provide a plausible particularist solution to the problem of the criterion. Yet, Hegel, unlike some analytic philosophers, is not content to merely solve individual philosophical puzzles, but aims for a much more ambitious goal. Not only does he want to furnish some particular cases of knowing that can solve the problem of the criterion, but he also wants to provide a systematic

⁶² Of course, if this stranger were to provide an evidential ground for his assertion, proving that he knew the layout of my kitchen, this would be even more disturbing in other non-epistemic ways.

philosophy (which he calls Science). This latter more ambitious goal requires that the strategy developed thus far be supplemented since the cases of phenomenal knowledge used to solve the problem of the criterion are ill suited to provide the content of a developed philosophical science. For it seems that the cases of phenomenal knowledge that have been appealed to thus far are not stable enough to be used to develop a robust philosophical theory. I may phenomenally know that I am in pain when I am currently feeling a painful sensation, but once the pain relents I can no longer claim this piece of phenomenal knowledge. Since the content and justification of an adequate philosophical science should not be in a perpetual state of flux depending on my occurrent experiences, something more than phenomenal knowledge will be required by which to construct such a science. In particular, we need to find a way to move from cases of phenomenal knowledge to kinds of knowledge that have more stable content and justificatory grounds.

One way of bridging this gap would be to appeal to introspection. On such a model, when one possesses a stable concept, one need only attend to the phenomenal character of one's experience to see whether or not the concept applies to the experience. So, for example, one could maintain that when one has the stable concept of pain P (e.g. <the kind of feeling that manifests itself in pain behavior in my community>) and is currently in the phenomenal state of feeling pain S, one can directly see, just by attending to the character of one's experience, that P applies to S. Such a model could explain how one can transition from the fleeting content of phenomenal knowledge to a more stable sort of content and one could then attempt to use such beliefs to provide a stable justificatory ground for philosophical science. But there are problems with such a

suggestion since it is by no means clear that we have such strong introspective powers. For example, consider a Mary style scenario in which someone has theoretical concept of pain, but has never themselves experienced pain. It is plausible to think that this person, when he experiences the phenomenal character of pain for the first time, would be unable to tell, solely on the basis of that phenomenal character, whether or not his theoretical concept of pain applied to his experience. Moreover, we don't even need thought experiments to show the problems with such an account. One only needs to point to borderline cases where one doesn't know exactly how to classify a feeling (e.g. whether a sensation is hot or cold) to show that the strong model of introspection is untenable.

Thankfully Hegel is not committed to such a strong model of introspection. Rather he provides a substantially weaker model which employs a sophisticated phenomenological method for moving from purely phenomenal knowledge to philosophical science. To use Hegel's terminology, he provides a procedure by which to mediate the immediacy of phenomenal knowledge. This procedure has two steps. The first step shows how one can derive stable content from phenomenal knowledge. The second step then demonstrates how one can derive philosophical science from the existence of such content. This second step employs some strong metaphysical principles (such as the claim that logical content as such requires a ground) that will most likely be rejected by contemporary philosophers.⁶³ But only the first step of this procedure will be elaborated here. The second, ontologically contentious, step will not be considered until chapter five (after Hegel's account of the content of experience has been provided).

⁶³ Yet Hegel's metaphysical principles are not without their philosophical advantages. In chapter five I consider this aspect of Hegel's argument in more detail and contend that contemporary philosophers should not be too quick to dismiss Hegel's argument.

Hegel calls this first step which allows one to extract stable content from phenomenal knowledge “determinate negation.” As noted earlier, Hegel, in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, distinguishes between true knowledge and merely apparent knowledge and contends that we can come to an adequate account of the former by examining the later, viz. by providing an “exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance” (PhG 76). Appearance plays a crucial role in Hegel’s solution to the problem of the criterion by showing how cases of phenomenal knowledge have their grounds within themselves and thus can satisfy the intuition that motivates methodism without actually requiring methodism. But Hegel, using a pun, also employs a second meaning of “phenomenal knowledge” when he claims that this exposition “has only phenomenal knowledge for its object” (PhG 77). For now “phenomenal knowledge” is used in the sense of false or merely apparent knowledge rather than the kind of knowledge delivered by PG and EG_m, claiming that:

Natural consciousness will show itself to be only the Notion of knowledge [*nur Begriff des Wissens*], or in other words, not to be real knowledge [*nicht reales Wissen*]. But since it directly takes itself to be real knowledge [*reale Wissen*], this path has a negative significance for it [...]. The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of doubt, or more precisely as the way of despair (PhG 78).

When Hegel here claims that natural consciousness reveals itself “to be only the Notion of Wissen”, he maintains that consciousness provides an inadequate characterization of Wissen and thus is not “real Wissen”. Because natural consciousness provides a false characterizations of Wissen, the process that natural consciousness undergoes is negative: it is a pathway of doubt or way or despair. Though Hegel’s doctrine of determinate negation are notoriously hard to understand, I suggest that it can be plausibly understood

as an articulation of a weak principle of introspection. Whereas the strong principle of introspection states:

SI: For any subject S and experience E, if E has phenomenal character PC and S has a stable concept C of that PC, then when S has E, S can tell directly by attending to E that C applies to E.

Hegel here suggests only the weaker principle,

WI: For any subject S and experience E, if E has phenomenal character PC and S has the stable concept C and the PC of E fails to satisfy C, then when S has E, S can tell directly by attending to E that C fails to apply to E.

Instead of claiming that people can immediately determine on the basis of introspection what the correct characterization of their experience is, WI is committed only to the weaker claim that one can immediately determine on the basis of introspection whether a given characterization of one's experience fails to adequately capture that experience. The hope is that this weaker characterization of introspection can avoid the problems that attend the strong version (e.g. that one might be genuinely confused about whether a stable concept adequately captured the content of one's experience).

As stated WI would still be problematic since one can imagine cases in which one might be confused as to whether a concept failed to characterize one's experience. Say, for example, that I have a visual experience of a geometrical figure with a thousand and one sides and also possesses the stable concept of a chiliagon. It is doubtful that I would be able to determine, solely by attending to the character of my experience, that my

concept failed to apply to my experience. But Hegel's subsequent argumentation in the *Phenomenology* makes clear that he has an even weaker principle in mind. Hegel does not begin by applying complex concepts such as <chiliagon>, but instead with very basic concepts such as <this>, <now>, <here>, etc. This suggests the yet weaker principle:

WI_{simple}: For any subject S and experience E, if E has phenomenal character PC and S has the simple standing concept C and the PC of E fails to satisfy C, then when S has E, S can tell directly by attending to E that C fails to apply to E.

WI_{simple} is more intuitively plausible than WI. Consider again the case in which I have a visual experience of a geometrical figure with a thousand and one sides. Though, merely by attending to my experience, I would not be able to determine that my concept of a chiliagon failed to capture the content of my experience, I would be able to determine that my concept <simple point> failed to apply to it. It is not implausible to claim that we have this more minimal kind of introspective power.

Hegel uses this weaker account of negative introspective knowledge as the mechanism that drives the process of determinate negation. He explains as follows:

The expression of the untrue consciousness in its untruth is not merely a negative procedure. The natural consciousness itself normally takes this one-sided view of it [...]. This is just the skepticism which only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that from which it results. For it is only when it is taken as the result of that from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a determinate nothingness, one which has a content. [...] But when, on the other hand, the result is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a determinate negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself (PhG 79).

Here Hegel distinguishes between a one-sided or abstract negation which proclaims that a given claim is false and stops there, and a determinate negation, which, since it reveals a specific way in which a claim is false, allows one to modify the content of one's claim so as to better characterize the phenomenon in question. For example, consider the case in which one has a visual experience of a triangle. First, one could attempt to characterize it as a single point. But one can see that the experience resists such a characterization since, given that the figure is extended in space, more is given than a simple point. One might then, in light of this failure, try to capture this feature of the experience by making the characterization more complex. For instance, one could use the concept of a single line. But again, one knows that this concept fails to capture the content of the experience because one sees that there is more than one line. One could keep adjusting one's concept meant to characterize the experience until it finally captured the content that was given to one. Though one might not be able to directly see by introspection whether a given concept corresponds to the content of experience, the hope is that by employing this negative procedure, one will eventually be able to generate such knowledge by attending to more and more determinate features of one's experience. This is the ultimate goal of the process of determinate negation. "The goal is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion. (PhG 80)." Hegel claims that this is a process that is generated internally by consciousness itself as it tries to find an adequate characterization of its own phenomenal knowledge:

Consciousness, however, is explicitly the Notion of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since the limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself. With the positing of a single particular the beyond is also established for consciousness, even if it is only alongside the limited object as in the case of spatial intuition. Thus consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands: it spoils its own limited satisfaction (PhG 80).

In this manner, consciousness not only provides us with cases of phenomenal knowledge, but it also enquires into what the correct characterization of such knowledge consists in.

This then, in outline, is the phenomenological method that Hegel employs in the arguments of the *Phenomenology*. Such a reading will be further supported in the following chapters by showing how this characterization of Hegel's project accounts for his arguments in Sense-Certainty (Chapter 2), Perception (Chapter 3), Force and the Understanding (Chapter 4), and Absolute Knowing (Chapter 5). But before such an examination is undertaken, a textual case must be made for the phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion. The next section will make this case by providing a detailed analysis of the relevant passages of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

4. Textual Case for a Phenomenological Interpretation

By focusing on the role that the phenomenal and epistemological givenness of consciousness plays in Hegel's account, the phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's argument allows us to do justice to the details of Hegel's text neglected by the coherentist reading. This section will provide a close reading and reconstruction of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion as it appears in the Introduction of the *Phenomenology*. The central role that phenomenal givenness plays in Hegel's solution can be seen in the

sentence immediately following his formulation of the problem of the criterion where he claims that the problem's "removal will become more definite if we call to mind the abstract determinations of truth [*Wahrheit*] and knowledge [*Wissen*] as they occur in consciousness" (PhG 82). According to Hegel, consciousness has an intentional structure: Consciousness "simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and that the same time relates itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists for consciousness" (PhG 82).

This intentional structure of consciousness is then analyzed in terms of *Wissen* and *Wahrheit*. *Wissen* is "the determinate aspect of this relating, or of the being of something for a consciousness" (PhG 82). *Wissen* thus involves two related features. On the one hand, *Wissen* is defined in terms of the for-me-ness of consciousness. It is the "being of something *for a consciousness*." When we are conscious we are aware of something "for us" (PhG 83). Such for-me-ness is essential to consciousness as such and accounts for why a conscious state is a conscious state at all. Call this *Wissen*_{basic}.⁶⁴ On the other hand, *Wissen* is also defined as "the determinate aspect" (PhG 82) of consciousness relating to its object.⁶⁵ When we are conscious of something, we are conscious of it in a determinate way. For example, when I look across my kitchen and see a tomato, it appears to me as red and bulgy; and when I hear the lawnmower outside my apartment, it appears to me as something hostile and annoying. Such determinacy

⁶⁴ Considerations of *Wissen*_{basic} give rise to the (in)famous thought experiments involving zombies in analytic philosophy. Zombies are said to be physical duplicates of conscious subjects who themselves lack this essential feature of consciousness. For a classic example see David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Contemporary philosophers have labeled this for-me-ness of consciousness "subjective character". See Kriegel, *Subjective Consciousness*.

⁶⁵ It is important to distinguish Hegel's account of phenomenal givenness from his later discussion of sense certainty as a specific (and ultimately defective) account of the content of consciousness which attempts to reduce it to simple concrete objects. Sense certainty allegedly represents its objects as an indeterminate "this". Sense Certainty might involve a kind of phenomenal givenness, but it should not be seen as providing Hegel's fundamental analysis of it.

accounts for a state of consciousness being the particular kind of conscious state that it is. Though my experiences of looking at a tomato and of hearing a lawnmower are both conscious states in light of their being-for-consciousness, they are distinct kinds of experience in virtue of their determinate characters.⁶⁶ Call this *Wissen*_{determinate}.

Because *Wissen* is analyzed in terms of both of these features, Hegel describes it as a form of self-consciousness.⁶⁷ Reiterating his characterization of consciousness in terms of *Wahrheit* and *Wissen*, he claims that “consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge [*Wissen*] of the truth” (PhG 85). *Wissen* is essentially a form of consciousness’ own “consciousness of itself” since it is identified with the way that things determinately are *for consciousness* and since, in this phenomenological sense, nothing can be for consciousness without consciousness thereby being aware of it. Since consciousness is aware of how things are *for it*, consciousness is in this regard consciousness of itself. If a state failed to present something for consciousness it would not be a conscious state at all.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Contemporary philosophers have labeled this determinate character the “qualitative character” of consciousness. See Kriegel, *Subjective Consciousness*.

⁶⁷ This is meant to be a very rudimentary form of self-consciousness. The kind of self-awareness associated with consciousness as such.

⁶⁸ Contemporary philosophers have labeled this immediate awareness “acquaintance”. See Richard Fumerton *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995) and William Alston “What’s Wrong with Immediate Knowledge” *Synthese* 55.1(1983): 73-95 and “Sellars and the ‘Myth of the Given’” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65.1 (2002): 69-86. In order to forestall a popular objection, it is important to distinguish between the minimal form of self-consciousness that Hegel is appealing to here from more robust varieties of self-consciousness. Hegel is here appealing only to the way in which things are immediately present for consciousness, and not to more complex forms of self-consciousness such as the conceptual awareness of the self as a self, the awareness of the self as identical through different experiences, the ability to take an objective perspective on oneself, the ability to recognize oneself in a mirror, or the conceptual awareness of experience as experience in contrast to reality. See Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 13-15. Because Hegel is operating with a very minimal form of self-consciousness, Hume style worries do not emerge since even Hume would agree to the presentation of determinate sensations.

In contrast to Wissen, Wahrheit is identified with *what* is presented to consciousness. Hegel notes “we distinguish this being-for-another from being-in-itself; whatever is related to knowledge or knowing is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this being-in-itself is called truth [*Wahrheit*] (PhG 82).” But Hegel notes that Wahrheit admits of two different forms. He observes:

Consciousness knows *something*; this object is the essence or the in-itself; but it is also for consciousness the in-itself. This is where the ambiguity of this truth [*dieses Wahren*] enters. We see that consciousness now has two objects: one is the first in itself, the second is the being-for-consciousness of this in-itself (PhG 86).

On the one hand, Wahrheit might indicate the object in-itself to which a conscious experience refers. For example, one might think that when I perceive a tomato, I perceive something that exists apart from my conscious awareness of it. My failing to perceive the tomato would not stop my roommate from putting it in a sandwich. Call this $Wahrheit_{\text{referent}}$. On the other hand, Wahrheit might indicate the being-in-itself *for consciousness* which constitutes the objective purport of my conscious experience. For example, imagine a case in which one hallucinates a tomato. Though there is no actual referent, the experience would still purport to refer to an object. Indeed, it is such objective purport which determines the success conditions of the representation. If there is actually a tomato on the counter, then the representation is successful; and if there is no tomato, then the representation is unsuccessful. This latter form of Wahrheit does not require the actual existence of its referent. An experience can purport to refer to an object even if it does not succeed in actually referring to it. Call this $Wahrheit_{\text{purport}}$.

In this manner, Hegel provides a sophisticated four-fold analysis of the structure of the intentionality of consciousness.⁶⁹ Consider again the example of my consciousness of a tomato. First, since it is a conscious state at all, it will involve *Wissen_{basic}*. The experience displays a form of for-me-ness. Second, since it is a determinate kind of conscious state, it will involve *Wissen_{determinate}*. This state determinately presents something red and bulgy. Third, in virtue of the presentation of these determinate features the state purports to refer to an object and thus involves *Wahrheit_{purport}*. Though only the redness and bulginess of the tomato are directly presented to consciousness, it

⁶⁹ Again such a distinction is in contrast to Westphal's analysis of the multiple aspects of consciousness since it avoids important realist commitments at the outset and characterizes consciousness in terms of the ordinary notion of phenomenal consciousness and rather than in terms of a theory. Likewise, by focusing on the immediate self-presenting nature *Wissen* and portraying Hegel as attempting to provide a descriptive phenomenology, my interpretation diverges from Dina Emundts' account. According to Emundts the experience of consciousness is important for Hegel's argument, but the role experience plays is as a kind of experiment to confirm or disconfirm various proposals of what knowledge is. Indeed, the very way she frames the project rules out the idea that Hegel could be trying to provide a descriptive phenomenology since she, like Westphal, claims that Hegel's definition of knowledge commits him to realism. She argues that "wenn eine Person etwas zu wissen meint, vertritt sie es mit dem Anspruch, dass es wahr ist. Dieser Anspruch ist nicht durch den Zustand des Fürwahrhaltens erfüllt, sondern muss sich durch etwas anderes erfüllen. Es muss etwas geben, das vom Fürwahrhalten so unterschieden ist, dass es eine von diesem unabhängige Bestätigung dessen, was für wahr gehalten wurde, geben kann. Hier liegt ein Problem, das man mit Hegel als Maßstabproblem formulieren kann: Wenn man prüfen will, ob eine Wissensbehauptung wahr ist, braucht man einen Maßstab. Man braucht etwas Objektives, Unabhängiges, anhand dessen man Wissen prüfen kann. Es darf also nicht selbst einfach ein Fall von Wissen oder Fürwahrhalten sein. Am besten wäre es, wenn man einfach den Gegenstand nehmen und ihn an die Aussage halten könnte. Aber dass es einen Gegenstand im Sinne von etwas Gegebenen gibt, der als Maßstab geeignet ist, ist eine Behauptung, die selbst einer Prüfung unterzogen werden muss. Wenn man wissen will, wann Erkenntnis vorliegt, muss man die Frage beantworten, was der Maßstab für wahr oder falsch ist." Emundts, *Erfahren und Erkennen* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2012), 105. Emundts thereby writes the demand for strict realism into any viable criterion of knowledge. Such a view rules out descriptive phenomenology as a viable solution since such phenomenology seeks to describe what is given in consciousness itself (bracketing concerns about seemingly external objects). But Emundts interpretation suffers from the same problems faced by Westphal's realist interpretation since it requires realist commitments which are not clearly rooted in the text. For example, when Hegel talks about the realist proposal it is only to characterize it as the natural assumption which is later to be denied in his own solution. Hegel notes that the natural assumption "takes for granted certain ideas about cognition as an instrument and as a medium, and assumes that there is a difference between ourselves and this cognition. Above all it presupposes that the Absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other, independent and separated from it, and yet is something real; or in other words, it presupposes that cognition which, since it is excluded from the Absolute, is surely outside of the truth as well, is nevertheless true, an assumption whereby what calls itself fear of error reveals itself rather as fear of the truth" (PhG 74).

nonetheless purports to refer to a tomato — an object which consists of more than redness and bulginess (e.g. having an unobserved back side). Finally, on this scenario, the purported reference is, in fact, a case of successful reference since an actual tomato is perceived. The state therefore involves $Wahrheit_{\text{referent}}$. We can thus represent the content of this state of consciousness as follows, abbreviating Wissen with WS and Wahrheit with WT:

C1: For-me_{WSbasic} <red and bulgy_{WSdeterminate}, tomato_{WTpurport}, tomato_{WTreferent}>

Yet some states of consciousness fail to have the second form of Wahrheit. For example, in cases of hallucination, consciousness might purport to refer to a tomato even when nothing is present. These states would thus have the content:

C2: For-me_{WSbasic} <red and bulgy_{WSdeterminate}, tomato_{WTpurport}, \emptyset _{WTreferent}>

Or again, in cases of illusion the actual referent of consciousness might be very different from what it is purported to be (e.g. one might refer to a plastic tomato instead of a real one). Thus, we would have the content:

C3: For-me_{WSbasic} <red and bulgy_{WSdeterminate}, tomato_{WTpurport}, chunk of plastic_{WTreferent}>

Consideration of such cases motivates the gap presumption which in turn motivates the problem of the criterion. Since, C1, C2, and C3 all appear identical from a first person perspective, the mere undergoing of an experience will be insufficient to distinguish between veridical experiences from cases of hallucination or illusion. This motivates the problem of the criterion since it seems that to legitimately claim that one's experience is veridical, i.e. that it constitutes a state of knowledge, one must first furnish a criterion by which to distinguish veridical (i.e. justified) and non-veridical (i.e. unjustified) experiences. Such a criterion would need to determine which belief producing processes

are veridical. But, in order to justify such a criterion, one needs to be able first to provide a set of veridical experiences by which to evaluate it.

But Hegel claims that a consideration of consciousness also holds the key to solving the problem. He maintains that paying closer attention to Wissen will reveal a domain in which its four component features are inseparable and thus in which the gap presumption is illegitimate. At the beginning of the paragraph following Hegel's initial distinction between Wissen and Wahrheit, he asks us to inquire "into the truth of knowledge [*die Wahrheit des Wissens*]" (PhG 83). In so doing he asks us to take up Wissen as the explicit object of our inquiry. Hegel notes that it is tempting to think that such an investigation would involve yet another distinction between appearance and reality and hence another iteration of the problem of the criterion. According to this worry, just as conscious experience is insufficient to distinguish between veridical and non-veridical experiences of tomatoes, so too is it insufficient to distinguish between veridical and non-veridical experiences of conscious experience. One would again need a criterion by which to distinguish the two cases. Hegel explains:

Now, if we inquire into the truth of knowledge; it seems that we are asking what knowledge is *in-itself*. Yet in this inquiry knowledge is our object, something that exists for us; and the in-itself that would supposedly result from it would rather be the being of knowledge for us (PhG 83).

Just as there is a distinction between the way a tomato is in-itself as the referent of consciousness (i.e. $Wahrheit_{\text{referent}}$) and the way it is presented to consciousness (i.e. $Wissen_{\text{determinate}}$), so too there might seem to be a distinction between the way Wissen is in-itself as the referent of consciousness and the way it is itself presented to

consciousness. We might have Wissen_{determinate} of Wissen without thereby having Wissen as a Wahrheit_{referent}. Thus, it seems that:

[1] What we asserted to be its [*Wissen*'s] essence would be not so much its truth [*Wahrheit*] but rather just our knowledge [*Wissen*] of it. [2] The essence or criterion would lie within ourselves, and [3] that which was to be compared with it and about which a decision would be reached through this comparison would not necessarily have to recognize the validity of such a standard (PhG 83).

In [1] Hegel claims that what seems to us to be the essence of Wissen might be a merely subjective Wissen of Wissen (i.e. a mere appearance of Wissen) and thus fail to capture its Wahrheit. Hegel then explains in [2] that in such a scenario we would employ a merely subjective criterion. And thus concludes in [3] that such a criterion would be inadequate because it is not necessary to recognize the validity of such a standard. In light of the apparent fact that the Wissen of Wissen is insufficient to legitimately establish the Wahrheit of Wissen, a further criterion, one whose validity would necessarily have to be recognized, is needed to justify such knowledge.

But, Hegel argues that this cannot, in fact, happen. He maintains that “this dissociation, or this semblance of dissociation and presupposition, is overcome by the nature of the object we are investigating.” By taking Wissen as its object, the dissociation between Wissen and Wahrheit is rendered impossible. This claim is grounded in the twofold nature of Wissen because any determinate way of consciously intending an object (Wissen_{determinate}) must, phenomenologically speaking, be something for consciousness (Wissen_{basic}). If it is to be a conscious state at all, any such conscious intending must also involve an element of self-consciousness. Therefore, Hegel goes on to explicitly identify Wissen with a form of self-consciousness:

But not only is a contribution by us superfluous, since Notion and object, the criterion and what is to be tested, are present in consciousness itself, but we are also spared the trouble of comparing the two and really testing them, so that, since *what consciousness examines is its own self*, all that is left for us to do is simply look on. For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, *consciousness of itself*; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are *for the same consciousness*, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not (PhG 85) [Emphasis mine].

Any conscious presentation of a content is such that consciousness is at least minimally aware of that presentation. If this were not the case, the presentation would not, in fact, be a conscious one. In this minimal sense, all consciousness is self-consciousness. Thus, since any state of Wissen will also be a state of self-consciousness, it is in the nature of Wissen to itself include both Wissen of Wissen and the Wahrheit of Wissen. But this means that, because of the immediate acquaintance one has with Wissen (specified by PG and EG_m), it can constitute a belief whose Wissen and Wahrheit admit of no gap.

This is why Hegel stresses the fact that “consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself; for the distinction made above falls within it” (PhG 84). Two sentences earlier, Hegel raised the problem of the criterion for an investigation of the Wahrheit of Wissen since “the criterion would lie within ourselves” in such an inquiry. But Hegel now contends that it is precisely this fact that the criterion is our criterion which will solve the problem in this particular domain. He argues that “the essential point to bear in mind throughout the whole investigation is that these two moments [...] ‘being-for-another’ [i.e. Wissen] and ‘being-in-itself’ [i.e. Wahrheit], both fall within that knowledge [*Wissen*] we are investigating” (PhG 84).” Since Wissen, as a form of self-awareness,

entails both the Wissen and Wahrheit of itself, an examination of Wissen would be an examination of a domain in which the presumption of a gap between appearance and reality could not apply.

This explains why Hegel would claim that the problem of the criterion can be solved simply by looking on when he states that:

Consequently, we do not need to import criteria, or make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter in hand as it is in and for itself (PhG 84).

When we look on at how Wissen presents itself we see that Wissen is both an in-itself (both as a purported referent, i.e. $Wahrheit_{\text{purport}}$, and as an actual referent of consciousness, i.e. $Wahrheit_{\text{referent}}$) and a for-itself (since Wissen is self-presenting). Thus, when one focuses on the immediate way in which Wissen is itself presented to consciousness one is also guaranteed to have a Wissen of Wissen that corresponds to the Wahrheit of Wissen. In this domain of investigation the gap between reality and appearance which motivates both the problem of the criterion and the problem of arbitrariness that afflicts standard answers to the problem of the criterion does not emerge. When one experiences a particular state of Wissen one can be justified in knowing it without needing to appeal to some further criterion by which to justify it. In this case one would provide a particular instance of knowledge that can both solve the problem of the criterion and avoid the problem of arbitrariness.

5. Conclusion

A close reading of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has shown the dominant Neo-Sellarsian interpretation of Hegel's project rests on a fundamental mistake. Far from denying phenomenal and epistemological givenness, Hegel's project is actually based upon them. But this does not mean that Hegel's work is without contemporary relevance. Rather, Hegel uses the phenomenological and epistemological immediacy constitutive of the phenomenally given to formulate a unique version of particularism which can solve the problem of the criterion without succumbing to the problem of arbitrariness. Whereas normal versions of particularism appear arbitrary because of the methodist intuition that particular knowledge claims ought to be evaluated in light of evidence, cases of phenomenal knowledge can avoid such arbitrariness by accommodating the intuition. Since instances of phenomenal knowledge are phenomenologically and epistemologically immediate, they bear their evidential grounds within themselves. Hegel's novel particularist solution thus has much to commend it to contemporary philosophers. But this is only the starting point for Hegel's project, for he hopes to develop a full blown philosophical science by (i) applying the method of determinate negation to phenomenal knowledge to secure a stable conceptual articulation of its content and then (ii) using this content to deduce the fundamental principles of philosophical science. The first characterization of the content to be determinately negated is presented in Sense-Certainty: the subject of the next chapter.

This chapter, in part, is currently being prepared for submission for publication. Peter Yong was the sole author of this material.

Chapter Two: The Phenomenology of Sense-Certainty

0. Introduction

The account of Hegel's phenomenological solution to the problem of the criterion set forth in the previous chapter conflicts with the dominant analytic interpretation of the Hegelian program. In the last chapter I argued that Hegel solves the problem of the criterion by appealing to phenomenal and epistemological givenness. Because we are immediately acquainted with our conscious states, these experiential states constitute a kind of knowledge. Yet Neo-Sellarsian interpretations maintain that this position is precisely what Hegel wishes to argue against. For example, Brandom claims that "it is this epistemological model that Hegel takes as his target in his opening remarks in the Introduction of the Phenomenology. What he is objecting to is two-stage, representational theories that are committed to a fundamental difference in intelligibility between appearances (representings, how things are for consciousness) and reality (represented, how things are in themselves), according to which the former are immediately and intrinsically intelligible, and the latter are not."¹ For such interpreters, the appeal and power of Hegel's philosophy lies in its rejection of such epistemological givenness.

Neo-Sellarsian interpretations commonly point to *Sense-Certainty* as the chapter in which Hegel decisively rejects the epistemological given. For example, Tom Rockmore portrays Hegel as criticizing epistemological givenness when he claims that:

¹ Robert Brandom, "Conceptual Realism and the Semantic Possibility of Knowledge" in *Spirit of Trust*, 9.

Sellars's attack on this myth [of the given] borrows Hegelian arguments in building on Hegel's famous critique of so-called sense certainty at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's target is any claim for immediate knowledge that presupposes an epistemological given, in English empiricists such as Bacon and Locke, and in different, more sophisticated fashion in Kant's critical philosophy [...]. In restating Hegel's argument in an analytical idiom, Sellars rejects the idea of direct givenness, in Hegelian terms immediacy, as no more than a myth, in favor of the justification of claims to know within the so-called logical space of reasons.²

Since the chapter on Sense-Certainty allegedly presents an argument against "any claim for immediate knowledge" or "direct givenness" that does not account for justification in terms of a Sellarsian "space of reasons", it is the natural to see Hegel as offering his critique of epistemological givenness in this section. By interpreting "immediate knowledge" as epistemological foundationalism and understanding Sense-Certainty as providing an argument against every kind of immediate knowledge, advocates of a Neo-Sellarsian interpretation can present a clear textual and philosophical case for Hegel's rejection of epistemological givenness.

Although it is frequently claimed that the arguments of Sense-Certainty are supposed to constitute an argument against the epistemological given, it is unclear how, exactly, this argument is supposed to function.³ I think that the best reconstruction of such an argument supplements a traditional transcendental interpretation of the argument of Sense-Certainty with a few additional premises to derive the claim that Hegel denies the epistemological given.

² Rockmore, *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 103.

³ According to my interpretation, which will be set forth later in this chapter, Hegel's argument is not meant to undermine immediacy as such (or phenomenal or epistemological givenness). Rather he argues against the claim that the content of experience should be identified with simple concrete individuals.

The standard transcendental interpretation of Sense-Certainty claims that Hegel seeks to show that the use of concepts (or at least proto-conceptual discriminatory capacities) is necessary for reference and knowledge.⁴ Specifically, the transcendental argument consists in two claims—one epistemic and the other semantic. The epistemic claim is that knowing an object by acquaintance depends upon the ability to demonstratively refer to that object.⁵ More precisely, the epistemic thesis is that:

(ET) For any subject S and spatio-temporal object O, if S knows O by acquaintance then S must have the ability to demonstratively refer to O.

For example, Pippin claims that an explanation of the ability “to establish a reference to this and only this object” is “the sine qua non of any ultimately successful epistemology [since] (no more complex account of our cognitive activity makes much sense unless it

⁴ See, for example, Robert Solomon *The Spirit of Hegel: A Study in G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 328; Charles Taylor, “The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology” in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. MacIntyre (New York: Anchor, 1972), 151-188; Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, (New York: Routledge, 1958), 83; Willem Devries “Hegel on Reference and Knowledge” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26.2 (1988): 297-307 and “Sense-Certainty and the ‘This-Such’” in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide*, eds. D. Moyar and M. Quante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 63-75; Kenneth Westphal, “ ‘Sense-Certainty’, or Why Russell had no ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance’” *Hegel Bulletin* 23.1-2 (2002): 110-123 and “Hegel's Phenomenological Method and Analysis of Consciousness” in *Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. K. Westphal (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 1-36; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology and the Sociology of Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20; Tom Rockmore, *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 103; Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 116-117; Katharina Dulkeit, “Can Hegel Refer to Particulars?” *The Owl of Minerva* 17.2 (1986): 181-194; Robert Brandom, “Immediacy, Generality, and Recollection: First Lessons in the Structure of Epistemic Authority” in *Spirit of Trust*, 33-34; Anton Friedrich Koch, “Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung: die Beiden Ersten Kapitel der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*” in *Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes—Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne*, eds. K. Vieweg and W. Welsch (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 135-152; and John McDowell, “Hegel and the Myth of the Given” in *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht*, eds. W. Welsch and K. Vieweg (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003): 75-88.

⁵ The intuition here is that if knowledge by acquaintance is going to do any justificatory work, one must at least be able to refer to the object of one's acquaintance. Without being able to refer to what one is acquainted with, even in thought, the state would no longer be an epistemological state at all.

can be explained).”⁶ Likewise, Taylor expresses (ET) when he claims that Hegel’s argument turns on the Wittgensteinian principle that if something is an item of knowledge “one must be able to say what it is”⁷ and that “the protagonist of sense certainty” answers “the request to say by pure demonstratives (‘this’ or ‘here’ or ‘now’).”⁸

The second claim made by the transcendental interpretation of Sense-Certainty is semantic. It insists that demonstratively referring to an object requires the conceptual (or proto-conceptual) ability to ascribe properties to that object. More precisely, the semantic thesis is that:

(ST) For any subject S and spatio-temporal object O, if S can demonstratively refer to O, then there exists a descriptive term t such that (i) S grasps the significance of t and (ii) S can apply t to O.

Pippin, for example, expresses (ST) when he claims that the goal of Sense-Certainty is:

To demonstrate that even the simplest form of demonstrative reference would not be possible without some describing capacity, a capacity that requires descriptive terms or predicates (and an internal complexity in the object), not merely deictic expressions and atomic objects.⁹

Likewise, Taylor claims that the argument of Sense-Certainty shows that “as we encounter and reach out for particulars [...] we discover that we can only really hold them through the mediating instruments of universal concepts.”¹⁰ Again, the claim is that reference to particulars is possible only through the use of concepts.

⁶ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 116-117.

⁷ Taylor, “Opening Arguments”, 162

⁸ Taylor, “Opening Arguments”, 163.

⁹ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 117.

¹⁰ Taylor, “Opening Arguments”, 168.

The standard interpretation thus portrays Hegel as making a transcendental argument in two respects. First, according to (ET), Hegel is said to argue that demonstrative reference is a necessary condition for knowledge by acquaintance. And second, according to (ST), Hegel is portrayed as contending that the ability to apply descriptive terms is a necessary condition for demonstrative reference. Because of the transitivity of the necessary condition relation, the standard interpretation, by endorsing both (ET) and (ST), argues that the ability to deploy descriptive terms is a necessary condition for knowledge by acquaintance. But, on some accounts, knowledge by acquaintance is *defined* as a kind of knowledge that can be possessed apart from the ability to deploy descriptive terms.¹¹ Thus, according to the standard interpretation, by presenting this multi-step transcendental argument, Hegel demonstrates that some seemingly plausible models of knowledge by acquaintance prove to be, in fact, incoherent.

With the addition of a few extra premises this interpretation can be used in an argument against epistemological givenness. In fact, two distinct arguments can be formulated depending on how one further disambiguates the concept of epistemological givenness. In the last chapter, I distinguished between a general version of epistemological givenness (EG) which was identified with epistemological foundationalism and a particular version of epistemological givenness regarding mental

¹¹ For example, Bertrand Russell famously defined knowledge by acquaintance as follows: “I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e., when I am directly aware of the object itself. When I speak of a cognitive relation here, I do not mean the sort of relation which constitutes judgment, but the sort which constitutes presentation. In fact, I think the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation.” “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11 (1910): 108-128, 108.

phenomena (EG_m). I now want to define a further specific form of epistemological givenness—one which maintains that non-conceptual content can contribute to the foundational justification of some beliefs. Call this (EG_{nc}) and let it be defined as follows: **(EG_{nc})** for any subject S and belief B, B is epistemologically given to S if (i) B is foundationally justified for S, (ii) the representational content of B includes a non-conceptual component, and (iii) this non-conceptual component plays a role in B's justification.

According to this view some beliefs are foundationally justified and non-conceptual content can play a role in conferring such justification. McDowell is a notable proponent of the view that Hegel is opposed to (EG_{nc}). He claims to follow Sellars who rejects the view that “operations of receptivity are conceived as yielding immediate givens. Conceptual mediation comes in only at a subsequent stage, at which those immediate givens are worked into conceptual shape in basic empirical judgments.”¹²

With the addition of two further premises, the transcendental interpretation of Hegel's argument in *Sense-Certainty* allows one to contend that Hegel presented an argument against (EG_{nc}). The first additional premise, call it A1, stipulates that (ST) be understood in terms of conceptual content. So, instead of (ST): For any subject S and spatio-temporal object O, if S can demonstratively refer to O, then there exists a descriptive term t such that (i) S grasps the significance of t and (ii) S can apply t to O, we have

¹² John McDowell, “Hegel and the Myth of the Given” in *Das Interesse des Denkens: Hegel aus heutiger Sicht* W. Welsch and K. Vieweg (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 75-88, 76.

(ST'): For any subject S and spatio-temporal object O, if S can demonstratively refer to O, then there exists some concept c such that (i) S possesses c and (ii) S can apply c to O. If the standard interpretation is to establish (EG_{nc}), the semantic thesis must be understood as claiming that demonstrative reference presupposes the ability to apply concepts to objects. The second assumption required for the argument, call it A2, is that demonstrative reference is the minimal unit of justificatory support. The intuition behind such a claim is that it is hard to imagine any more basic justification for an assertion than pointing to its truth-maker. For example, perceptual beliefs are thought to enjoy justificatory support because they relate a subject to an object in a particularly direct manner. When I see a tomato, I know that there is a tomato before me. With these additional assumptions we can argue that since demonstration is the minimal unit of justificatory support (A2), and demonstrative reference to an object presupposes the ability to apply a concept to that object (ST' by reading ST through A1), all justification is necessarily conceptual. While it is uncontroversial that most a priori knowledge would involve concepts, knowledge by acquaintance is often taken to be non-conceptual. But, if this argument is correct, then the only plausible candidate for non-conceptual knowledge is ruled out. And, if EG_{nc} is ruled out in this manner, the phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's project set forth in the previous chapter could be said to be a non-starter.

I believe that this argument is flawed on several levels. First, it is a mistake to think that the phenomenological interpretation requires EG_{nc}. The phenomenological interpretation is not committed to the claim that what is given in experience is non-conceptual. For example, consider the case in which I am aware of entertaining the thought that Proust is a great novelist. My awareness of this thought would satisfy PG

and EG_m (since I have privileged access to it), yet the content of the state would clearly be conceptual.¹³ Since Hegel's phenomenological method does not depend on the claim that what is given in experience must be non-conceptual, even if Hegel were to present an argument against EG_{nc}, this would not constitute a problem for the phenomenological interpretation.¹⁴

Furthermore, the additional premises needed for the argument against EG_{nc} are by no means uncontroversial. For example, one could contend that A1 is too stringent and is thus open to counterexamples. The advocate of A1 would be forced to claim that creatures without conceptual capacities would be incapable of demonstrative reference. But, as has been frequently pointed out, this claim is too strong. We can imagine possible beings capable of referring to their perceptual environment without having conceptual abilities.¹⁵ Moreover, both our everyday intuitions and empirical psychology confirm that

¹³ One might object that the very concept of givenness rules out conceptuality. But given the previous definitions of phenomenal and epistemological givenness, there is nothing to rule out that these givens being conceptual. For example, some contemporary philosophers attempt to define our awareness of the qualitative character of experience with the application of phenomenal concepts. See David Chalmers, "The Content and Epistemology of Phenomenal Belief" in *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Smith, Q. and Jovic, A. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 220-272 and Brian Loar, "Phenomenal States (Second Version)" in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Flanagan, O. and Güzeldere, G. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 597-616.

¹⁴ It is nonetheless worth noting that Hegel's argument in Sense-Certainty does not appear to be directed against EG_{nc}. First, since Perception, the model which follows Sense-Certainty, introduces sensible universals (such as the whiteness, cubicalness, and tartness of a piece of salt) rather than full blown conceptual determinations to solve the problems of Sense-Certainty, it does not appear that the argument of Sense-Certainty is itself sufficient to establish the impossibility of non-conceptual content. Second, in *the Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel's later account of the metaphysics of mind, Hegel seems to accept that some of our mental states have non-conceptual content and tells a story of how these contribute to justification. For further discussion see Stephen Houlgate "Thought and Experience in Hegel and McDowell" *European Journal of Philosophy* 14.2 (2006): 242-261

¹⁵ Galen Strawson gives the example of weather watchers. A kind of creature who never moves but simply observes the weather. See, *Mental Reality 2nd Ed.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 251-289.

this is actually the case for animals and children who have not yet developed conceptual abilities and are nonetheless capable of demonstratively attending to objects.¹⁶

One could respond by distinguishing two versions of the thesis that concepts are necessary for demonstrative reference: A thin version and thick version. According to the thin version, it is the minimal ability to refer which is said to require concepts. This is the version which seems open to problematic counter-examples. The thick version, however, seems immune to such counter examples. On the thick version, it is the ability to refer to objects *as objective* which requires the ability to deploy concepts. To refer to something as objective I need to be able to distinguish it from myself and to be able to conceptually distinguish between the way things appear to me and the way things are in themselves. Since referring to objects as objective is itself a conceptual determination, the thick conception does not appear to be open to the same range of counterexamples as the thin version was susceptible to.¹⁷ So one might be able to block the philosophical objection to the argument against (EG_{nc}) by attributing to Hegel a thick version of the claim that concepts are necessary for demonstrative reference.

But the problem with this response is that if one takes the thick interpretation of Hegel's claim, then one undermines A2. The reason that A2 seems plausible is that demonstration appears to be an extremely minimal ability and thus it is plausible to think of it as constituting the minimal unit of justification. We think, for example, that demonstratives are the minimal unit of justification because we can imagine even children or animals pointing to the truth-makers of their perceptions. In other words, we

¹⁶ Tyler Burge, *Origins of Objectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30-60.

¹⁷ See Burge, *Origins of Objectivity*, 156.

think that demonstration is the minimal unit of justification when we understand demonstratives weakly. However, once we employ a strong notion of demonstration which is unavailable to children, animals, or other sorts of conceivable beings, the idea that demonstration is the minimal unit of justification loses its intuitive support. For, once one considers full blown rational cognizers it is not clear that demonstrative reference to an object should be thought of as any more basic than knowledge of logical truths, moral truths, or facts about mathematics. The argument against EG_{nc} from the standard transcendental interpretation thus runs into problems since the additional premises it requires are controversial.

A second way of using the transcendental interpretation of Hegel's argument in Sense-Certainty to formulate an argument against epistemological givenness focuses on EG in its general sense as epistemological foundationalism. Things are even more difficult for this version of the argument, since it employs even further problematic assumptions in addition to those in the argument against EG_{nc} to substantiate the stronger claim that Hegel argued against foundationalism. The argument against EG requires two additional assumptions. The first assumption, call it A3, claims that conceptual content is holistically determined. On this view, the meaning of any concept is determined by inferential relations to every other concept in a system. The second assumption, call it A4, then maintains that if the meaning of a conceptual content C is holistically determined, then the justificatory status of any proposition of which C is a constituent must so also be holistically determined. One could point to Sellarsian considerations to motivate such a view. If the very meaning of a term is determined by its location in the holistically articulated space of reasons, it does not appear that anything outside of this

space of reasons could justify a proposition containing C. For example, McDowell claims that, for Sellars:

Even the most basic perceptual knowledge requires conceptual capacities, and conceptual capacities are not merely natural, but acquired along with acquiring mastery of a language, which must embody a familiarity with rational linkages between one concept and another, including materially sound inferential connections. To possess concepts at all, one needs already to have a great deal of substantive knowledge, embodied in knowledge of those material linkages.¹⁸

Similarly, Brandom maintains that:

The notion of immediacy presupposes determinateness of content but cannot by itself underwrite it. Determinate content must be articulated by relations of material incompatibility. That realization entails rejecting the semantic atomism that lies at the core of what Wilfrid Sellars would later call the “Myth of the Given,” in a work that opens by invoking ‘Hegel, that great foe of immediacy.’ The concept of immediacy can itself be made intelligible only against a background of mediating relations of exclusion. This is the conclusion of Hegel’s discussion ‘Sense Certainty’. Understanding determinate conceptual content in terms of relations of exclusion among such contents commits one, then, to some kind of semantic holism.¹⁹

As before one could argue that since demonstrative reference is the minimal unit of justification (A2), and concept deployment is necessary for demonstrative reference (A1), any justificatory ground must be conceptual. One could then stipulate that all concepts are holistically determined (A3). Thus any justificatory ground would contain a conceptual content that is holistically determined. But then, given the assumption that if a concept is holistically determined, then the justification for any proposition in which that concept occurs must be holistically determined (A4), one can conclude that the

¹⁸ McDowell, “Hegel and the Myth of the Given”, 76.

¹⁹ Robert Brandom, “Holism and Idealism in Hegel’s Phenomenology” in *Tales of the Might Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 178-209, 182-183.

justificatory status of any potential justificatory ground is holistically determined.

Therefore, foundationalism is false and EG is shown to be mythical.

Yet both of the new premises are questionable. First, conceptual holism (A3) is a controversial doctrine and it is unclear that Hegel seeks to offer such a theory in the Sense-Certainty chapter of the *Phenomenology*.²⁰ Second, there is little reason to adopt (A4). Consider the case of the concept <2>. For the sake of argument we can concede that the meaning of this concept is due to its inferential relations to other concepts. However, it does not follow that my belief that $2+2 = 4$ is justified on the basis of these inferential relations. I might have a variety of grounds for believing it—some of which are justified and some of which are not. For example, my belief might be grounded on an a priori insight, on the testimony of my kindergarten teacher, on the desire not to look like an idiot in front of my peers, etc... These grounds upon which I base my belief are different from the inferential relations that constitute its content. Justification is one thing. Semantics is another. There is thus little motivation to adopt (A4). So there is little motivation to move from the standard interpretation of Sense-Certainty to the claim that Hegel denied EG. And thus, there is little reason to take the arguments of Sense-Certainty constitute a problem for the phenomenological interpretation.

Indeed one can contend that the phenomenological interpretation actually fairs better than the transcendental interpretation of Sense-Certainty. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to spell out this argument and, in the process, illustrate how Hegel's phenomenological method functions. Despite the strengths of the transcendental

²⁰ For some standard criticisms of holism see Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore's *Holism: A Shopper's Guide* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992). In the interpretation that follows it will be shown that Hegel does not seek to establish conceptual holism in Sense-Certainty.

interpretation, I argue that it is mistaken in claiming that Hegel sets forth a transcendental argument for (ET) and (ST) in Sense-Certainty. Rather, a closer reading of the text shows that Hegel does not seek to enumerate necessary conditions for our knowledge of (ET) and reference to (ST) particular spatio-temporal objects, but rather attempts to provide an adequate description of the content phenomenally given to us in experience. The argument will be spelled out in two parts. The first part sets forth some difficulties for the transcendental interpretation (i.e. that it can account neither for Hegel's metaphysical conception of sense-certainty and negation nor for why Hegel claims that beginning with immediacy is necessary to his project), and the second part argues that a phenomenological interpretation can solve these problems.

1. Problems for the Transcendental Interpretation

As noted in the previous chapter the standard interpretation of Sense-Certainty frames Hegel's argument in terms of (ET), i.e. that demonstrative reference is necessary for knowledge by acquaintance, and (ST), i.e. that descriptive terms are necessary for demonstrative reference. On this interpretation, Hegel is said to offer a transcendental argument from knowledge by acquaintance to the ability to use descriptive terms. This standard transcendental interpretation appears to be supported by three passages in the chapter. The first passage, call it T1, occurs at the very beginning of the chapter when Hegel claims that in immediate knowledge one must "apprehend" an object without "comprehending" it (PhG 90). Interpreters take this passage to be a description of sense-certainty's model of knowledge and maintain that such a model claims to possess a direct

non-(proto-)conceptual relation to objects. They thus take T1 as evidence for (ET) since it appears to target what would later come to be called knowledge by acquaintance.

The second passage appealed to by the standard interpretation, call it T2, makes a similar claim. It maintains that consciousness appears in sense-certainty “only as a pure ‘I’ [...] and the object similarly only as a pure ‘this’” and that “neither the I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation (PhG 91).” T2 appears to support the view that sense-certainty postulates an immediate acquaintance with objects (independently of a subject’s ability to distinguish objects from their properties and from each other).²¹ This passage thus looks to be evidence for both (ET) since it is said to posit an immediate kind of knowledge and (ST) since the model is defined in terms of the “significance” of the “I” and the “thing.”

The final passage that seems to support the standard interpretation is Hegel’s claim that the content of sense-certainty proves to be universal. He claims in this passage, call it T3, that the Now is:

Not immediate but mediated; for it is determined as a permanent and self-preserving Now through the fact that something else, via. Day and Night, is not. [...] A simple thing of this kind which is through negation [...]—such a thing we call a universal. So it is in fact the universal that is the true [content] of sense-certainty (PhG 96).

This seems to support the view that indexicals like “now” refer in virtue of their universal meaning (e.g. what Kaplan would later call their character). T3 thus appears to ground (ST) by maintaining that demonstrative reference depends on the ability to use concepts (or perhaps proto-concepts).

²¹ See Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 118

Yet, when read carefully, the textual support used in favor of the standard interpretation of Sense-Certainty proves to be inadequate. Consider first (T1) which reads as follows:

[1] The knowledge or knowing which is at the start is or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply is. [2] Our approach to the object must also be immediate or receptive; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In apprehending it, we must refrain from trying to comprehend it [*von dem Auffassen das Begreifen abzuhalten*] (PhG 90).

In [1] Hegel claims that the knowledge with which the *Phenomenology* must begin is immediate knowledge and identifies this immediate knowledge with knowledge of the immediate or “what simply is.” He then goes on in [2] to claim that our approach to this immediate knowledge must also be immediate. In this case, he associates immediacy with the receptivity of our approach. We are not allowed to alter anything in the object, but must simply apprehend (*Auffassen*) it without trying to comprehend (*Begreifen*) it.

Advocates of the standard interpretation see Hegel as asserting in [1] that the basic model of sense-certainty must begin with the ordinary world of particular spatio-temporal objects. For example, Devries claims that the inquiry begins “because the cognitive relatedness in sense-certainty is supposed to be pure immediacy, sense certainty must be a relatedness between individuals.”²² Likewise, they interpret the contrast in [2] between apprehending and comprehending as a contrast between non-(proto-)conceptual and (proto-)conceptual knowledge. On this reading, sense-certainty claims to possess non-(proto-)conceptual knowledge of objects. For example, Taylor claims that here sense-certainty maintains that we ought to “receive whatever impressions come our way,

²² Devries, “This-Such”, 69.

prior to any activity of the mind, in particular conceptual activity.”²³ Likewise, Pippin claims that “Hegel begins by assuming that there is no self-mediated, conceptual component required for experience, that the component minimally necessary for experience to be experience (relating to and distinguishing from its objects) can be accounted for without any such self-mediation.”²⁴ The standard interpretation thus sees this passage as supporting (ET) by identifying sense-certainty’s account of non-(proto-)conceptual knowledge of objects as the target theory to be refuted in the rest of the chapter.

But, when examined closely, T1 fails to support the standard interpretation. Though the standard reading claims that T1 sets forth sense-certainty’s model of knowledge, there is, in fact, little evidence for such a claim in the text. While the passage does describe the necessity of beginning the investigation with immediate knowledge, it does not identify this immediate knowledge with the model of knowledge offered by sense certainty. Indeed, sense-certainty is not even mentioned until the next paragraph.²⁵ Moreover, the identification of the distinction between apprehending and comprehending with the distinction between non-(proto-)conceptual and (proto-)conceptual knowledge is

²³ Taylor, “Opening Arguments”, 161.

²⁴ Pippin, “Hegel’s Idealism”, 117.

²⁵ Furthermore, there is little reason to identify the immediate knowledge described in (1) with knowledge of particular spatio-temporal objects. All that the passage states is that immediate knowledge is “knowledge of the immediate or of what simply is” and does not equate this knowledge with knowledge of spatio-temporal particulars. Devries argues that knowledge of the immediate would have to be knowledge of individuals since “relations to universals or among universals cannot have the requisite immediacy (for relations to or among universals are always mediated by relations to or among the particulars that realize universals).” “Sense-Certainty and the This-Such,” 69. Yet his argument is problematic on two grounds. First, nowhere in the passage does Hegel actually make such an argument. Second, even if Hegel were to make such an argument, it would contradict his prior methodological claims since it would rely on the substantive metaphysical assertion that universals are always mediated by the particulars which realize them. Invoking such a controversial principle would violate Hegel’s prior injunction that the argument of the *Phenomenology* must proceed without appealing to controversial presuppositions (PhG 84).

similarly unmotivated. When Hegel claims that in immediate knowledge “one apprehends without trying to comprehend” [*von dem Auffassen das Begreifen abzuhalten*] there is little reason to interpret Hegel’s use of “*Auffassen*” in this context as designating non-(proto-)conceptual grasping. Earlier Hegel uses the term “*Auffassen*” to describe grasping things in a general way through one-sided concepts of the understanding (PhG 2, 31,87), as providing a rough sketch before filling it out in detail (PhG 16), and the movement of the Notion (PhG 60). Rather than designating non-conceptual grasping, “*Auffassen*” denotes some form of conceptual apprehension in each of these prior occurrences.²⁶

Likewise, (T2) fails to support the standard interpretation when examined more carefully. Here Hegel claims that for the advocate of sense certainty:

[1] Consciousness, for its part, is in this certainty only as a pure ‘I’; or I am in it only as a pure ‘This’, and the object similarly only as a pure ‘This’. [2] I, this I, am certain of this thing, not because I, qua consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways; [3] and also not because the thing of which I am certain, in virtue of a host of distinct qualities, would be in its own self a rich complex of connections, or related in various ways to other things. [4] Neither of these has anything to do with the truth of sense-certainty: here neither I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation; the ‘I’ does not have the significance of a manifold of imagining or thinking; nor does the ‘thing’ signify something that has a host of qualities (PhG 91).

²⁶ Furthermore, Hegel also uses the term later to describe the way in which the model of Perception is thought to relate to its objects (PhG 116-118), and at the end of Force and the Understanding to describe how we philosophers apprehend infinity, the pure Notion, and the truth of the movements of consciousness (PhG 164). If Hegel had meant to use “*Auffassen*” as a technical term for the non-conceptual knowledge allegedly specified and refuted in Sense-Certainty, he would not subsequently use the term to characterize Perception or our correct philosophical apprehension of infinity at the conclusion of the Consciousness section.

According to this passage, the advocate of sense certainty maintains in [1] that consciousness is in the certainty described by the model only as a pure I or a pure this and that the object of consciousness can also be in this certainty only as a pure this. [2] and [3] then further define what is meant by this claim. [2] maintains that the I's certainty of a thing is neither due to the I's developing itself nor to the I's thinking about the thing in various ways. And [3] claims that the I's certainty is also neither on account of the qualities of the thing it is certain of nor because of the thing's relations to other objects. Finally, [4] then summarizes the claims made in [2] and [3]. In the truth of sense-certainty both the I and the thing are immediate. The I is not described in terms of a multiplicity of imaginings or thinkings and the thing is not described in terms of a multiplicity of qualities.

The standard interpretation of T2 reads [1] as claiming that since certainty can occur only when consciousness and its objects are taken as pure "thises," demonstrative reference must be taken to be a necessary condition for immediate knowledge. [2] and [3] then clarify the nature of demonstrative reference by distinguishing it from descriptive reference. Whereas descriptive reference is secured by an object's satisfying a description encoded in an expression, demonstrative reference involves the direct designation of an object. [4] then concludes that immediate knowledge has to be defined in terms of a demonstrative relation between a particular I and a concrete spatio-temporal object. For example, Robert Pippin interprets [4] as follows:

Sensory contact with a particular is assumed, all by itself, immediately (without what Hegel calls the 'complex process of mediation') to account for the relating of consciousness to this object. It is, supposedly, the immediate sensory event itself, not what I do and not any complex

property of the object, that establishes what is sought, the relation to the object.²⁷

The standard interpretation thus takes T2 as highlighting the semantic conditions of sense-certainty's model of knowledge. To know something in a sensory manner with certainty one must at least be able to demonstratively refer to it. In this manner T2 would explicitly support (ET) and would set up (ST) as the target for the rest of the argument.

But T2 does not, in fact, support such a reading. While in [1] the passage does use the word "this" to describe the way in which consciousness and its objects are present in sense-certainty, such a claim is not equivalent to ET's assertion that demonstrative reference is a necessary condition for sensory knowledge. Rather, the meaning of this claim is clarified in [2] and [3]. The certainty is not mediated by the I's various thoughts about the object [2] or by the objects various properties [3]. These points are then reiterated in [4] which denies that mediation plays a role in either the I or the object in this certainty. Hegel defines this model in terms of immediacy but does not identify this immediacy with the semantic phenomenon of demonstrative reference. Rather, in the next sentence Hegel to clarifies the nature of this immediate knowledge when he maintains that "rather [than something mediated], the thing is, and it is, merely because it is. It is; this is the essential point for sense-knowledge, and this pure being, or this simple immediacy, constitutes its truth" (PhG 91). And again, at the beginning of the next paragraph, Hegel notes that pure being "constitutes the essence of this certainty" (PhG 92). Thus, in T2, Hegel does not stipulate the semantic phenomenon of demonstrative

²⁷ Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 117.

reference as a necessary condition for the epistemic phenomenon of sense-certainty, but rather equates the essence of sense-certainty with pure being.

Finally, T3 also fails to support the standard reading. Here Hegel claims that:

[1] The Now does indeed preserve itself, but as something that is not Night; equally, it preserves itself in the face of the Day that it now is, as something that also is not Day, in other words, as a negative in general. [2] This self-preserving Now is, therefore, not immediate but mediated; for it is determined as a permanent and self-preserving now through the fact that something else, viz. Day and Night, is not. As so determined, it is still just as simply Now as before, and in this simplicity is indifferent to what happens in it; just as little as Night and Day are its being, just as much also is it Day and Night; it is not in the least affected by this other-being. [3] A simple thing of this kind which is through negation, which is neither This nor That, a not-This, and is with equal indifference This as well as That—such a thing we call a universal. [4] So it is in fact the universal that is the true [content] of sense certainty (PhG 96).

Hegel claims in [1] that the Now preserves itself but only as a negative in general (e.g. something that is neither Night nor Day). He then notes in [2] that a consequence of this negativity is that the Now is mediated rather than immediate. Hegel goes on to stipulate in [3] that anything mediated in this manner is a universal. And he can thus conclude in [4] that the universal is the true content of sense-certainty.

The standard interpretation takes [1] to articulate a distinction between the linguistic meaning (i.e. character) and the referent (i.e. content) of a demonstrative expression. For example, the word “now” uttered on one occasion might refer to night, but uttered on another occasion might refer to day. But the term still has a common linguistic meaning in both instances. [2] then points out that such meanings are cases of (proto-)conceptual mediation. And [3] notes that (proto-)concepts are universals. Hegel can then conclude in [4] that universals are the true content of sense certainty. The

standard interpretation thus takes T3 to support (ST) by showing that demonstrative reference depends upon the ability to grasp (proto-)conceptual contents.

Yet T3 resists such a reading. According to the standard interpretation, Hegel here argues for a distinction between the linguistic meaning of indexical expressions such as “now” and what they refer to when they are successfully tokened. But this interpretation does not account for the claim that the Now “is a negative in general” [1]. Hegel defines the Now’s negative nature in [2] when he claims that, on the one hand it “is determined as a permanent and self-preserving now through the fact that something else, viz. Day and Night, is not”, and that, on the other hand, “just as much also is it Day and Night.” And Hegel summarizes the nature of this negativity in [3] as that “which is neither This nor That, a not-This, and is with equal indifference This as well as That.” In his account of universality as negativity Hegel, on the one hand, makes the metaphysical claim that part of what it *is* to be Now is to *not be* day or night. The Now is a not-day and a not-night. But, paradoxically, on the other hand, he also maintains that the now is indifferently both day and night. Hegel here adopts a Kantian view that particular moments of time are “limitations of a single time” which is “given as unlimited” (KrV B48). Consider, for example, the now that occurs as I write this sentence. Part of what it is to be this precise moment of time is to be distinct from all other times. Part of what it is to be this now is to not be the day that Napoleon conquered Jena or the night when Wagner discovered the Tristan chord. But since this now is partitioned out of an intuition of the whole of time, my intuition of this now must indifferently include a time which encompasses Napoleon’s campaigns and Wagner’s compositions.

The standard interpretation cannot account for this stronger metaphysical claim. Though the linguistic meaning of an expression might, in part, be defined in distinguishing it from reference (e.g. I might distinguish the meaning “the morning star” from the planet it refers to), this is not sufficient to constitute the full meaning of the term. Specifically, the particular linguistic meaning of indexical terms such as “now” or “here” are not defined simply by negating particular referents. If one were merely handed a list of particulars that were not referred to by the term “now”, one would not therefore know what the term “now” means. Indeed, this is precisely what motivates a Kaplanian distinction between content and character. If one were to utter “now” at 6:00pm on April 15, 1812, there is one sense in which the content of <now> is captured by <6:00pm, April 15, 1812>. But there is more to the meaning of <now> than this specific content, since someone uttering “now” at 9:00pm on Oct. 31, 2016 would express a different content, viz. <9:00pm, Oct. 31, 2016>. Though <now> delivers different contents on different tokenings, there is some sense in which all of these tokenings have the same meaning. It is this further dimension of meaning that Kaplan calls character—the function that moves from a context of utterance to a particular content. Character is thus introduced as a further dimension of the meaning of indexical expressions precisely because their meaning cannot be accounted for purely in terms of the contents they refer or fail to refer to. But Hegel *does* make such a claim about the “Now” being a negative in general. Thus, it is more plausible to think that Hegel is not intending to account for the linguistic meaning of the term “now” but rather for a metaphysical fact about the experience of time. The standard interpretation’s distinction between linguistic meaning and reference is not metaphysically strong enough to capture the idea of the negativity expressed in T3.

Thus, the textual grounds offered in support of the standard interpretation prove to be inadequate.

Moreover, the transcendental interpretation faces a further problem. It is left with no account for why Hegel claims that it is necessary to begin his investigation where he does. It cannot explain the modal force with which Hegel introduces immediate knowledge as the only possible starting point for the *Phenomenology* when he claims that “the knowledge (das Wissen) [...] which is at the start or is immediately our object *cannot be anything else* but immediate knowledge (unmittelbares Wissen) itself, a knowledge (Wissen) of the immediate or of what simply is” (PhG 90). [Emphasis mine]. Since it identifies the immediate knowledge with which the chapter begins with demonstrative reference to particulars, the standard interpretation claims that it is necessary for Hegel’s project in the *Phenomenology* to begin with reference to particulars. Yet such a strong claim seems unwarranted. It is unclear how Hegel could justifiably claim that it is impossible to begin the investigation with some other feature of experience.

Transcendental arguments move from some accepted fact or feature, and then go on to show that some other fact or feature is a condition for its possibility. It is thus legitimate to ask why we could not begin with some other fact of consciousness (e.g. with the fact that we can think a priori conceptual truths) at the outset of the *Phenomenology*. Why *must* we begin with the ability to demonstratively refer to particulars?

One response that can be offered on behalf of the standard interpretation is (i) to claim that Hegel’s method begins by starting with the simplest feature of consciousness and then (ii) to identify immediacy as this simplest feature, and (iii) to contend that

reference to particulars is entailed by immediacy.²⁸ Since one must start with the simplest feature of consciousness and demonstrative reference is the simplest feature of consciousness, one must start with demonstrative reference. In this manner, one could argue that the standard interpretation accounts for Hegel's claim that our phenomenological inquiry must begin with immediate knowledge.

Yet this response is problematic, since it is not obvious that demonstrative reference to objects is entailed by immediacy. Why, for example, could immediate thought not proceed, as it does in the *Science of Logic* with the thought of pure being independent of sensation? Why could basic self-awareness or the ability to entertain a priori conceptual truths not be considered just as epistemologically immediate as the ability to demonstratively refer to particular objects? Indeed, Hegel himself lists several features of phenomenal awareness which he takes to be more basic than demonstrative reference in his later *Philosophy of Mind* (§391-408).²⁹ There is thus little reason to believe that epistemological immediacy entails demonstrative reference to particulars. Therefore, the standard interpretation cannot account for Hegel's claim that it is necessary to begin with immediate knowledge.³⁰ In light of these problems for the

²⁸ See, for example, Koch "Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung", 4-5; and Devries, "This-Such".

²⁹ A further problem is that if Hegel did begin in this way, he would fall back into the problem of the criterion. His selection of the claim that we know that we can demonstratively refer to physical objects would be arbitrary since other philosophical systems deny such a claim (e.g. skepticism and subjective idealism).

³⁰ Another possible response is to weaken the modal force of Hegel's claim. So, for example, Stewart understands the starting point to be "necessary" only from the everyday point of view of natural consciousness. He takes it to be a commonplace of folk wisdom that demonstrative reference to objects is the most basic form of consciousness. Or, again, Pippin seeks to soften the modal force of the dialectical project by claiming that every subsequent model in the *Phenomenology* resolves the inadequacies of the previous model and merely "issues a challenge to any potential objector to provide a better resolution." (*Hegel's Idealism*, 108). If Hegel is not concerned to preserve the strict necessity of the dialectical process, then it is not essential that the starting point of that process be necessary. But the problem with this style of response is that it conflicts with Hegel's earlier description of his project. For in the Introduction he claimed that the *Phenomenology* must proceed without presuppositions and by strict necessity.

standard interpretation it is important to find an alternate interpretation that is not subject to these shortcomings. Specifically, it is imperative that we find an interpretation that can textually account for the metaphysical claims made on behalf of sense-certainty (e.g. that it investigates pure being and that negation proves to be essential to its content) and for why Hegel claims that it is necessary to begin his phenomenological inquiry with immediate knowledge. In the next section I will set forth a phenomenological interpretation of the argument of Sense-Certainty which can satisfy these desiderata.

2. A Phenomenological Interpretation of Sense-Certainty

The previous section has demonstrated the importance of finding an interpretation of Hegel's argument that can avoid the problems of the standard view. In particular, we must find an interpretation that can account for Hegel's articulation of sense-certainty in metaphysical terms such as pure being and negation and for his assertion that it is necessary to begin with immediate knowledge. A phenomenological interpretation naturally suggests itself at this point since it can encompass both the epistemological and semantic issues addressed by the standard interpretation (i.e. the fact that we are dealing with immediate knowledge and that this knowledge is said to be expressed by terms like "this", "I", "here" and "now") and the more straightforwardly metaphysical claims which resisted such an interpretation. Furthermore, it can explain the necessity of beginning with immediate knowledge, since in phenomenology one must commence with the elucidation of what is immediately given in consciousness. I will set forth this interpretation in the next two subsections. The first subsection presents the general

argument of the Sense-Certainty chapter and the second subsection provides detailed reconstructions of the three specific models of sense-certainty.

2.1 The General Framework for the Arguments of Sense-Certainty

According to my interpretation of *Sense-Certainty* Hegel does not seek to defend either ET or ST. Rather, he attempts to provide an adequate description of the content phenomenally given in conscious experience (with the intent that such a description will provide us with genuine science) and shows that an adequate description of such content must include more than singular terms standing for simple concreta. In the previous chapter, I argued that in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel claims that the phenomenal givenness of consciousness provides a direct, non-arbitrary, and foundationally justified belief through which to overcome the problem of the criterion. Hegel's project is based on the idea that whereas our consciousness of some objects admits of a distinction between reality and appearance, phenomenal consciousness, at its most basic level, can admit of no such distinction. The way in which things appear to consciousness does not admit of a further distinction between appearance and reality. In Hegel's own more technical terminology, consciousness involves two aspects: Wissen and Wahrheit (each of which has two forms). On the one hand, Wissen is identified with the determinate mode of presentation of something to consciousness. It involves the basic way in which something is present to consciousness at all ($\text{Wissen}_{\text{basic}}$) and the determinate way in which something appears to consciousness in a particular manner ($\text{Wissen}_{\text{determinate}}$). $\text{Wissen}_{\text{basic}}$ is what distinguishes one's conscious experience from the non-conscious states of one's zombie twin. $\text{Wissen}_{\text{determinate}}$ is what distinguishes between

various determinate experiences (e.g. the experience of being appeared to redly and the experience of being appeared to bluey). On the other hand, Wahrheit is identified with *what* is presented to consciousness. It involves both the purported object of experience (Wahrheit_{purport}) and what is actually referred to in experience (Wahrheit_{referent}). In many cases it is possible for there to be a mismatch between the Wissen and the Wahrheit so that the way things seem to us is distinct from the way they actually are.

But Hegel argues that, in light of its phenomenal givenness, when Wissen is itself taken for an object, the Wissen of Wissen and the Wahrheit of Wissen cannot be separated. Phenomenal givenness can thus serve as a starting point for philosophical analysis. The rest of the *Phenomenology* consists in trying to specify the content of this instance of knowledge. It does so by proposing putative descriptions of the content of experience and seeing whether or not they adequately characterize it. When a proposed description fails to capture what we are actually presented with in consciousness, we become aware of the specific elements of our experience which were not captured under that description and can use these elements to create a new description. Hegel calls this kind of experience *Erfahrung*. I contend that Hegel uses this method in the arguments of Sense-Certainty. On this reading, sense-certainty is offered as a first putative description of what is given to us in consciousness. The argument progresses in two stages to show that sense-certainty fails to actually capture the content of consciousness. In the first stage, one specifies sense-certainty's model of the content of experience. In the second stage one looks to see whether what is given in experience actually conforms to the characterization provided by that model.

The text bears out this interpretation nicely. Sense-Certainty begins precisely as one would expect given the phenomenological project set forth in the Introduction. It commences by echoing the claim made in the Introduction that our investigation must begin with the phenomenological (and thus epistemological) immediacy of Wissen. Hegel here declares that “The knowledge (*das Wissen*) [...] which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge (*unmittelbares Wissen*) itself, a knowledge (*Wissen*) of the immediate or of what simply is” (PhG 90). This claim reiterates the contention of the introduction that the *Phenomenology* must commence by examining Wissen in its phenomenal givenness (i.e. the Wissen of Wissen) (PhG 83-84). The claim made at the outset of Sense-Certainty is thus that if one wanted to describe the nature of the Wissen phenomenally given to one, one would have to characterize it as a form of immediacy or acquaintance with existence. When one is consciously aware, one is aware of (i) something which, in some sense, *is* and (ii) one’s awareness is not mediated by some higher order act of awareness.³¹

Hegel then, in the next sentence, reiterates the methodology of the Introduction by claiming that we have to leave aside our own thoughts and contemplate the matter as it is in and for itself (PhG 84) by simply looking on at what presents itself (PhG 85): “our approach to the object must also be *immediate* (*unmittelbar*) or *receptive* (*aufnehmend*); we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In apprehending it (*Auffassen*), we must refrain from trying to comprehend (*Begreifen*) it” (PhG 90). Hegel here maintains that in our phenomenological investigation we must immediately or receptively

³¹ For more on the connection between immediacy and existence see Manfred Frank *Selbstgefühl: Eine historische-systematische Erkundung*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).

take up what presents itself and not add any of our own preconceptions or prejudices to what appears.

A careful reading of the first paragraph of *Sense-Certainty* (PhG 90) thus shows it to be a mere reiteration of the claim made in the Introduction that philosophy must begin with the phenomenal givenness of consciousness. It does not yet make any attempt to specify the content of such immediate states of consciousness. One of the fundamental mistakes of the standard interpretation is its identification of the immediate knowledge introduced in the first paragraph with sense-certainty's own particular model of that immediate knowledge. In identifying the two they saddle Hegel with defending the strong modal claim that the *Phenomenology* must begin with sense-certainty's particular model.

Rather, it is not until the second paragraph that Hegel sets forth sense-certainty's proposed specification of what is immediately given to us in consciousness. Specifically, the various proposals offered in *Sense-Certainty* identify the content of consciousness with a "concrete content" (PhG 91).³² According to such a proposal, I am immediately aware of my consciousness because:

[1] I, this I, am certain of this thing, not because I, qua consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways; and also not because the thing of which I am certain, in virtue of a host of distinct qualities, would be in its own self a rich complex of connections, or related in various ways to other things [...] [2] neither I nor the thing has the significance (*Bedeutung*) of a complex process of mediation; the 'I' does not have the significance of a manifold imagining or thinking; nor does the 'thing' signify something that has a host of qualities. On the contrary, the thing is, and it is, merely because it is. It is, this is the essential point for sense-knowledge, and this pure being, or this simple

³² In this respect Robert Stern is correct to observe that the primary claim of *Sense-Certainty* involves particularity, but he is wrong to explain this claim as chiefly an ontological one about the existence of "concrete, singular, entities." See his *Routledge Guide to the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge, 2002), 44-45. Rather, Hegel introduces particularity as an attempt to characterize the immediacy of consciousness and its relation to existence.

immediacy, constitutes its truth. [3] Similarly, certainty as a connection is an immediate pure connection: consciousness is “I”, nothing more, a pure ‘this’; the singular consciousness knows a pure ‘this’, or the single item. (PhG 91).

In [1] sense-certainty is said to maintain that the certainty of the I and of the thing involves neither the I’s thinking of the thing in various ways nor the thing’s manifesting itself to the I through various properties or relations. Therefore, in [2] Hegel claims that sense-certainty specifies the meaning of <I> or <thing> not in terms of complex properties or relations, but exclusively in terms of a simple concrete content. The meaning of <I> does not involve multiple ways of intending things, and the meaning of <thing> does not involve possessing multiple properties. Hegel, then concludes, in [3] that the certainty of sense-certainty is an immediate connection between the “pure this” of the I (the singular consciousness) and the “pure this” of the object (the singular item). In this manner, Hegel sets forth the basic theory advanced by the various models brought forward by the advocate of sense certainty. Each model will attempt to identify the content of consciousness with some sort of simple concrete item. In this respect the standard interpretation was correct in taking sense-certainty to involve singular content. But it was mistaken in taking the chapter to furnish the necessary conditions for singular (demonstrative) content. Rather, the question that concerns Hegel in Sense-Certainty is whether singular content adequately characterizes what is phenomenally given to us in consciousness.

Sense-certainty’s specification of what is immediately given to us in consciousness in terms of concreta is motivated by the fact that it appears to give us “the richest kind of knowledge” (PhG 91). Sense-certainty’s account seems to provide us with

“infinite wealth” since it could describe our consciousness of any concrete object (PhG 91). And it also seems to provide us with the “truest” account of the content of consciousness since “it has not yet omitted anything from the object, but has the object before it in its entirety” (PhG 91). By taking simple concrete items as the content of conscious experience, one seems to avoid the risk of inadequately representing an object by failing to specify some of its properties.

Yet Hegel argues that sense-certainty’s account of the content of consciousness proves to be inadequate. Following the phenomenological method of investigation developed in the Introduction which claims that all we need to do is “simply to look on [*nur das reine Zusehen bleibt*]” (PhG 85), Hegel now claims that “when we look carefully [*wenn wir zusehen*] at this pure being which constitutes the essence of this certainty, and which this certainty pronounces to be its truth, we see that much more is involved” (PhG 92). Hegel claims that when we attend to what is given to us in consciousness, we will see that it cannot be adequately identified with mere concreta. Throughout the chapter Hegel will present various thought experiments to help us see that the content of our conscious experience outstrips any specification that identifies it with simple concrete items.³³

³³ Hegel offers a preliminary argument against sense-certainty by noting that it contradicts the concept of consciousness set forth in the Introduction. He contends that “in sense-certainty, pure being at once splits up into what we have called the two ‘Thises’, one ‘This’ as ‘I’, and the other ‘This’ as object. When we reflect on this difference, we find that neither one nor the other is only immediately present in sense-certainty, but each is at the same time mediated: I have this certainty through something else, viz. the thing; and it, similarly, is in sense-certainty through something else, viz. through the ‘I’ (PhG 92).” Hegel here argues that sense certainty, in being an instance of consciousness, will always involve a relation between two things (i.e. an I and an object) and thus will require complexity. Given Hegel’s previous definition of consciousness, he can argue that the model of sense-certainty could not be correct. But Hegel claims that this style of argumentation is insufficient to carry out the project of the *Phenomenology* when he maintains that “it is not just we who make this distinction [...] on the contrary, we find it within sense-certainty itself, and it is to be taken up in the form in which it is present there, not as we have just defined it (PhG 93).”

From this general framework, we can see that how a phenomenological interpretation can satisfy the desiderata set forth in the previous section. First, it can account for why sense-certainty is concerned with pure being without denying that the model also has semantic and epistemological features. The phenomenal givenness of consciousness from which the investigation proceeds, must, at the very least, ensure existence. In order for something to be phenomenally given to consciousness, it must, in some sense, *be*. This is the intuition which underlies cogito style arguments. However, as critics like Sosa are quick to point out, things become controversial as soon as someone attempts to say more than this. “From the cogito not much follows logically about one’s nature. One could be a body, a soul, the World Spirit, whatever.” Thus, as an initial attempt to characterize what is phenomenally given in consciousness, sense-certainty attempts to non-contraversially characterize it in terms of pure-being. Moreover, it then more controversially attempts to characterize this pure being in terms of concreta. The phenomenological arguments that follow show that we can perceive that the pure being given to us in consciousness is not adequately characterized in terms of the concrete content specified by sense-certainty. This interpretation can thus explain the metaphysical role that pure being plays in the argument without denying the argument’s epistemological and semantic features (as an attempt to provide a justified account of the semantic content of consciousness).

Furthermore, a phenomenological interpretation can account for Hegel’s claim that the *Phenomenology* must begin with immediate Wissen (PhG 90). The reason that it is necessary to begin with immediate Wissen is the very reason set forth in the Introduction. The immediacy of our acquaintance with consciousness provides us with a

domain in which appearance and reality cannot come apart. The phenomenal givenness of Wissen allows us to offer it as a solution to the problem of the criterion. In short, Hegel does not make a new claim in the first paragraph of Sense-Certainty but merely reiterates the position he set forth in the Introduction. He does not make (and thus does not need to defend) the further claim that it is necessary to begin with sense-certainty's particular specification of the content of what is immediately given to us (which is not introduced until the next paragraph (PhG 91)). Furthermore, he can explain why the concrete content of sense certainty "immediately appears" (PhG 91) to be the best characterization of the content of this immediate Wissen.³⁴ Hegel's interlocutor in the *Phenomenology* is someone who takes up the perspective of "natural consciousness" (PhG 78). According to this common sense realist assumption, there is a difference between our cognition and the everyday objects which it cognizes. From this perspective it is natural to assume that the best way to characterize immediate knowledge would be through intuition which immediately acquaints one with concreta (PhG 93). Hegel could thus account for the naturalness of starting with sense-certainty's model of immediacy without making the stronger claim that it is necessary to begin with that model. Thus, we can see how a phenomenological interpretation can thereby solve the problems associated with the transcendental interpretation. But it is still necessary to examine in detail how the arguments of Sense-Certainty are supposed to unfold on this reading. We will examine this in the next subsection.

³⁴ Hegel here uses the term "immediately" rather loosely as when he previously claimed that an "empty appearance of knowing [...] vanishes immediately as soon as Science comes on the scene" (PhG 76).

2.2 The Specific Arguments of Sense-Certainty

This subsection reconstructs the three main arguments presented in Sense-Certainty. The first model attempts to specify the content of experience as a simple concrete object (2.2.1). The second model proposes a simple concrete I (2.2.2). And the third suggests a set containing a concrete I and a concrete object (2.2.3). These models will be examined in order.

2.2.1 The First Model: <Simple Concrete Object>

The first model of sense-certainty identifies the content of consciousness with a simple concrete object. One can think of this as a kind of truncated Russellian proposition. Whereas Russellian content is usually thought to consist in objects and properties, this model only employs objects. So, for example, whereas a standard Russellian account of my experience of seeing a red tomato would represent its content as <red, tomato> where “red” stands for the property of redness and “tomato” stands for the actual tomato before me, this model of sense certainty would represent the content as <tomato> or better yet <this>. According to this model the object of consciousness is posited “in the form of a simple, immediate being, or as the essence” (PhG 93). The object is represented as simple since only the object and not its properties factor into the representational content of the model. The idea is that such simple representational content can adequately express the existence that confronts us in (phenomenologically and hence epistemologically) immediate experience.

Hegel provides two grounds for the proposed identification of the content of consciousness with a bare concrete object when he claims that “The object is: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not; and it remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there” (PhG 93). The first ground is that it seems plausible to think that, when one is conscious of an object, it is the object which is responsible for one’s consciousness of it. For example, consider the case in which at T1 I perceive a laptop and at T2 I perceive a copy of the *Wissenschaft der Logik*. These two states will have different representational contents, and it is plausible to think that this difference in content is explained by the fact that at T1 there is a computer in front of me while at T2 there is a book in front of me. The second ground is that it seems plausible to think that the objects responsible for our representations can exist without our representing them. This is motivated by standard commonsense realist intuitions. My perception of the computer depends on actually seeing the computer, but the computer itself exists without my perceiving it. Stipulating that $X =$ a simple concrete object, sense-certainty’s first model of consciousness would go as follows: $X_{WSbasic}, \langle X_{WSdeterminate}, X_{WTpurport}, X_{WTreferent} \rangle$.³⁵

Hegel could simply reject this proposal by appealing to the fact that consciousness has been previously stipulated as possessing a complex structure (in which the I’s

³⁵ Upon seeing such a model one might contend that X’s playing four distinct roles conflicts with the claim that X is a simple concrete object. But this objection fails in two respects. First, it is not obvious that the simplicity of an object prevents it from entering into a plurality of representational contents. For example, suppose that two people look at the same concrete tomato. The tomato, though a concrete object, would be a constituent of two distinct singular thoughts. Second, even if the complexity of the model were to pose a problem for sense-certainty (as will be shown in what follows) this would not yet be a problem that one could immediately see by examining what is phenomenally given to one. And it is the latter phenomenological considerations that Hegel uses in his argument.

awareness (*Wissen*) is contrasted with the object of that awareness (*Wahrheit*) and then concluding that such a structure necessarily involves more than a single concrete item (PhG 92) (since it would have to involve both an I and an object), but instead he argues against sense-certainty's proposal by appealing to what immediately confronts us in consciousness. He claims that we must ask, "whether in sense-certainty itself the object is in fact the kind of essence that sense-certainty proclaims it to be; whether this notion of it as the essence corresponds to the way it is present in sense-certainty" (PhG 94). And he maintains that the only proper way of answering this question is through the method set forth in the Introduction. "To this end, we have not to reflect on it and ponder what it might be in truth, but only to consider the way in which it is present in sense-certainty" (PhG 94). In short, we need to look and see whether the content of our immediate experience, the kind of experience that sense-certainty takes itself to capture, is adequately described by sense-certainty. Sense-certainty, on this first model, identifies the content of our experience with a simple concrete object, but Hegel argues that that this is not how things actually appear in consciousness.³⁶

Such a phenomenological inquiry can be more easily conducted if the concrete content of sense-certainty is defined more precisely. Hegel maintains that the force of the argument will not be diminished by carrying out our investigation using two further specifications of the singular content of sense-certainty (i.e. the "this"): "Now" and "Here" (PhG 95). He claims that "if we take the 'This' in the twofold shape of its being,

³⁶ Though as noted previously, *Wissen* itself, when taken as an object of phenomenological investigation, includes both a dimension of *Wissen* (since it is present to consciousness) and *Wahrheit* (since it is always referentially successfully). In the process of undermining sense-certainty, Hegel will also provide a phenomenological argument for the earlier claim that consciousness involves a distinction between modes of presentation (*Wissen*) and what is presented (*Wahrheit*).

as ‘Now’ and as ‘Here’, the dialectic it has in it will receive a form as intelligible as the ‘This’ itself is” (PhG 95). Hegel’s claim that the “this” has a “twofold shape of being” as “Now” and “Here” is grounded in the Kantian tradition in which he was writing. In Hegel’s time it was generally thought that we are acquainted with singular objects (e.g. this) through intuition and that the forms of human intuition were time (e.g. now) and space (e.g. here).³⁷ In such a context, it would be natural to think that an investigation using the specific forms “now” and “here” would be at least as clear, if not clearer, than one that used the more general form of “this”.³⁸

Of the “now” and the “here”, Hegel begins by considering the “now.” According to this model, sense-certainty identifies the content of consciousness with the now which is itself identified with a simple concrete item. The question is whether the content of our consciousness can be adequately characterized in this way. Hegel constructs a thought experiment to help us answer this question:

‘What is now?’, let us answer, e.g. ‘Now is Night.’ In order to test the truth of this sense-certainty a simple experiment will suffice. We write down this truth, a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our preserving it. If now, this noon,

³⁷ See, for example, KrV B 38-40 and B 46-48.

³⁸ One might object that Hegel is unjustified in making this assumption since he has not ruled out a broadly empiricist theory according to which “this” in its most basic form refers to sense data rather than temporal moments or spatial points. But this objection fails for two reasons. First, it is not obvious that Hegel could not simply construct arguments against sense-data which parallel the arguments he offers in Sense-Certainty. Hegel has not claimed that it is impossible to formulate an argument against a model which identifies the content of our immediate Wissen with the “this” in general, but only that arguments framed in terms of the more specific “now” and “here” would be “just as intelligible” as such an argument (PhG 95). It is incumbent on the advocate of sense datum theory to furnish a reason for us to deny the plausibility of Hegel’s claim. As things stand, it is unclear how equating the “this” with a sense-datum would provide a model of sense-certainty that does not succumb to the problems that Hegel articulates for the models which use the specific forms of “now” and “here”. The second reason why the objection fails is that there is little ground for thinking that sense-data are more basic than our experience of space and time. Every sense datum we experience is spatio-temporally located. For example, whenever I experience a red sense-datum I experience it as occurring at a specific location in my visual field and as either simultaneous with, preceding, or succeeding, other experiences. Thus there is little philosophical motivation for adopting the empiricist inspired proposal in the first place.

we look again at the written truth we shall have to say that it has become stale (PhG 95).

Hegel here suggests we write down the singular item which sense-certainty identifies with our experience of the now as a kind of mark or tag to help us attend to the nature of our temporal experience. The model defines the content of our temporal experience as a simple concrete item. Thus, following this model, suppose we identify our experience of the now with a particular moment of time (e.g. a dark and stormy night) and label this experience α (or “Now is Night”). We can ask ourselves whether our current now experience, call this β , is identical to α . Hegel claims that we will see that they are not identical. In β I am confronted with a different particular moment of time (e.g. a sunny afternoon) than the one identified by α .³⁹

Moreover, we can see not only that sense-certainty has identified the content of our now experiences with the wrong concrete object (e.g. a dark and stormy night instead of a sunny afternoon), but that sense-certainty has employed the wrong kind of content altogether. Simple concrete items are not the right kinds of things to be temporal modes of presentation. Hegel argues that “The Now does indeed preserve itself, but as something that is not Night; equally, it preserves itself in face of the Day that now is, something that also is not Day, in other words, as a negative in general” (PhG 96). We see that both α and β can be now-experiences but only at different times. This means that the Wissen (mode of presentation) <now> constitutive of our now-experiences cannot be

³⁹ This thought experiment relies on features of our experience that are richer than those specified by the model under discussion at this point. We will likely perceive that α is not identical to β because the former is dark and tempestuous while the later is bright and relaxing. Thus, the thought experiment can also be used to show that even our ordinary experience of singular contents which the model takes to be constitutive of experience as such involves much more than is specified in the model.

identified with any one of the concrete instants presented through it. In our example, the Now as a mode of presentation is “a negative in general” since it cannot be identified with either the day nor the night which it presents. “This self-preserving Now is, therefore, not immediate but mediated; for it is determined as a permanent and self-preserving Now through the fact that something else, viz. Day and Night, is not” (PhG 96). This phenomenological analysis of the now shows it to be mediated in a metaphysically strong sense. On the one hand, our experience of the now preserves itself through the flow of instants which sequentially come to be experienced as now. The now cannot be identified with a particular day or a particular night because they are experienced as nows only as they slide from the future to the past. On the other hand, our experience of now is always of a distinct moment, and this moment is determined by partitioning a unit out of the whole of given time. The now is mediated by every other possible time given in intuition which determines its particular content. It is in this metaphysically strong sense that Hegel concludes that we can see that the content of our experience proves to be a universal rather than a concrete object. A mode of presentation is something “which is through negation, which is neither This nor That, a not-This, and is with equal indifference This as well as That—such a thing we call a universal. So it is the universal that is the true [content] of sense certainty” (PhG 96). Again this thus allows us to account for Hegel’s metaphysical claims without having to deny that the overall argument concerns epistemology and the semantic content of experience.

Hegel makes a parallel argument for <here>. According to this model the content of our immediate consciousness is identified with a here which is itself identified with a

simple concrete item. Hegel notes that if one attends to one's experience, one can observe that:

[1] 'Here' is, e.g., the tree. If I turn round, this truth has vanished and is converted into its opposite: 'no tree is here, but a house instead'. [2] 'Here' itself does not vanish; on the contrary, it abides constant in the vanishing of the house, the tree, etc., and is indifferently house or tree. [3] Again, therefore, the 'This' shows itself to be a mediated simplicity, or a universality (PhG 98).

In [1] he notes that, according to sense-certainty, one might on one occasion identify the content here with a tree. But then, turning around, identify here with a house. One is thus confronted with different concrete locations in these two experiences. But, in [2] he notes that neither the particular tree nor the particular house is exhaustive of the content of our here-experiences. Rather, our here-experience "abides constant in the vanishing of the house, the tree, etc." By highlighting the abiding constant of our here-experiences in the vanishing of the particular concrete objects Hegel draws attention to the fact that the mode of presentation <here> cannot be identified with a simple concrete item. Thus, Hegel concludes in [3] that the here like the now is mediated and universal. The here is mediated since each here experience is an experience of a determinate here only by carving out one particular point in the whole of space given to one in intuition and it is a universal since our experience of the here remains indifferent to which of the particular places it does, in fact, pick out. Again, in this manner the phenomenological interpretation can account for the metaphysical aspects of Hegel's argument that could not be captured by the standard interpretation.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ A further advantage of this interpretation is that it can explain Hegel's appeal to the nature of language in the argument without saddling him with the extremely strong epistemological claim that all knowledge must be linguistically expressible. For example, according to Taylor, "the underlying principle is [of Hegel's argument...] that if this is really knowledge, then one must be able to say what it is" ("Opening

2.2.2 *The Second Model: <The Simple Concrete I>*

The second model of sense-certainty identifies a simple concrete I as the content of consciousness. On this model:

The certainty is now to be found in the opposite element [i.e. the opposite of the object], viz. in knowing [*in dem Wissen*], which previously was the unessential element. Its truth is in the object as my object, or in its being mine; it is, because I know it. Sense-certainty, then, though indeed expelled from the object, is not yet thereby overcome, but only driven back into the 'I' (PhG 100).

Instead of identifying the content of consciousness with a concrete object, sense-certainty now equates it with a concrete subject. The fact that various nows and heres all appear *to me* might suggest that the content of consciousness could be identified with the I. Hegel explains, “the force of its truth thus lies now in the ‘I’, in the immediacy of my seeing, hearing, and so on; the vanishing of the single Now and Here that we mean is prevented by the fact that I hold them fast. ‘Now’ is day because I see it; ‘here’ is a tree for the same reason” (PhG 101). Sense-certainty hopes to avoid the universality and mediation necessary to the modes of presentation <now> and the <here> by appealing to a simple concrete I which anchors them. When indexed to a concrete I, one no longer has to pay

Arguments”, 162). Pippin tries to avoid this claim by maintaining that “the reference to language [...] plays an explanatory, not a justificatory role” (*Hegel’s Idealism*, 119). Yet Pippin provides no clear account of how language could play this explanatory role on his interpretation. In claiming that “it is as a universal too that we utter what the sensuous [content] is” and that “what we say is: ‘This’, i.e. the universal This” (PhG 97), Hegel draws attention to the fact that the meaning of linguistic expressions (like the mode of presentation <now> or <here>) is universal. Thus when he claims that “language [...] is the more truthful; [...] since the universal is the true [content] of sense-certainty and language expresses this true [content] alone” (PhG 97) he notes that language is more adequate than the description of the content of our spatio-temporal experience put forward by the advocate of sense certainty. Like the experience of our spatio-temporal location, the words “here” and “now” can refer to many different points in space and time respectively, but yet retain a single meaning. Likewise, since our experience is universal and language expresses the universal, language does a better job of expressing the content of our experience than the simple concrete items offered by sense-certainty. Hegel thus uses considerations of language not furnish a new premise in his argument, but to further illustrate the conclusion of the argument he has already made.

attention to the fact that the mode of presentation <now> is a universal, but can instead focus on a simple concrete I for whom “now is day.” Likewise, by anchoring the mode of presentation <here> to a concrete I, one no longer has to attend to the fact that our here-experiences are universal, but instead can target a particular concrete content (e.g. that “here is a tree.”) So, supposing that the I is a concrete particular, the second model of sense-certainty is as follows: $I_{WSbasic} \langle I_{WSdeterminate}, I_{WTpurport}, I_{WTreferent} \rangle$

But Hegel argues that this model fails for reasons similar to those that undermined the first model (PhG 101). Again, he argues by using the process of *Erfahrung* set forth in the Introduction. He claims: “we have now to see what experience shows us about its reality in the ‘I’ ” (PhG 100). We need to attend to our experience to see whether its content is adequately identified with a simple concrete I. Hegel contends that it is not. He observes:

I, this ‘I’, see the tree and assert that ‘Here’ is a tree; but another ‘I’ sees the house and maintains that ‘Here’ is not a tree but a house instead. Both truths have the same authentication, viz. the immediacy of seeing, and the certainty and assurance that both have about their knowing; but the one truth vanishes in the other (PhG 101).

Hegel notes that our I-experiences like our now-experiences and here-experiences refer to different simple concrete objects. For example, consider again two distinct experiences of seeing a tree and seeing a house. Call them E1 and E2. Since the model in question claims (i) that the content of experience is identical to the content I and (ii) that I content is simple and concrete, the difference between E1 and E2 can be accounted for only by a difference in their particular I content. The I involved in grasping a tree as here in E1 must be different from the I involved in grasping a house as here in E2. But this scenario fails to characterize the actual content of our I-experiences. When I have the experience

of reading under a tree and then walking inside my house the I content of this experience does not present itself as belonging to two distinct concrete objects, but as something that remains constant through the experience. The mode of presentation <I> is universal across these experiences. On the one hand, the perspective of the I is indifferent to the particular objects it confronts. I can see a house at one place and time, and a tree at another place and time. Both of these are equally experiences for me. On the other hand, as a particular perspective, the I is negatively defined by partitioning out a particular spatio-temporal location out of the whole of space and time given in intuition. In this manner, it is individuated through its exclusion of all other spatio-temporal locations. He notes:

What does not disappear in all this is the ‘I’ as universal, whose seeing is neither a seeing of the tree nor of this house, but is a simple seeing which, though mediated by the negation of this house, etc., is all the same simple and indifferent to whatever happens in it, to the house, the tree, etc. The ‘I’ is merely universal like ‘Now’, ‘Here’, or ‘This’ in general (PhG 102).

Whereas our different experiences may present different concrete objects (e.g. a tree vs a house), they are all nonetheless presentations for us. The mode of presentation <I> like those of <now> and <here> must therefore be universal.

2.2.3 *The Third Model: <Simple Concrete I, Simple Concrete Object>*

The final model of sense-certainty identifies simple concrete “I”s *and* simple concrete objects as the content of consciousness. In light of the failures of the previous two proposals, Hegel claims that:

We have to posit the whole of sense-certainty itself as its essence, and no longer only one of its moments, as happened in the two cases where first the object confronting the ‘I’, and then the ‘I’, were supposed to be its

reality. Thus it is only sense-certainty as a whole which stands firm within itself as immediacy and by so doing excludes from itself all the opposition which has hitherto obtained (PhG 103).

When the first model posited simple concrete objects—the here and the now—as the content of consciousness, its inadequacy was shown by noting that the modes of presentation <now> and <here> are universals and thus cannot be identical to simple concrete points of space and time. Likewise, when the second model posited a simple concrete I as the content of consciousness, it was shown to be inadequate by noting that the mode of presentation <I> is also a universal. The third model now maintains that it can account for the universality of such experiences by identifying the content of experience with sets that contain both concrete I's and concrete objects.

The proponent of sense-certainty can claim that by identifying modes of presentation with these two-membered sets, one can account for the sense in which modes of presentation are universal. One could thus maintain that:

I, this 'I', assert then the 'Here' as a tree, and do not turn round so that the Here would become for me not a tree; also, I take no notice of the fact that another 'I' sees the Here as not a tree, or that I myself at another time take the Here as not-tree, the Now as not-day. On the contrary, I am a pure [act of intuiting]; I, for my part, stick to the fact that the Now is day, or that the Here is a tree; also I do not compare Here and Now themselves with one another, but stick firmly to one immediate relation: the Now is day (PhG 104).

The idea is that the content of our conscious awareness could be adequately identified with a set containing two simple concreta, viz. an I and an object. Let *i* stand for a concrete I and *o* stand for a concrete object, and {*i*, *o*} as the set containing *i* and *o*. The third model of sense certainty identifies the content of consciousness with the following:

{*i*,*o*}_{WSbasic} <{*i*,*o*}_{WSdeterminate}, {*i*,*o*}_{WTpurport}, {*i*,*o*}_{WTreferent}.>

But Hegel once more argues that this model fails to capture the content of consciousness. Since the relevant sets stipulated by the model are constituted by different concrete I's and concrete objects, these sets must themselves be distinct. Consider again case of the tree and the house. These are two distinct objects. Hence, since sets are determined by their members, {I, tree} will be distinct from {I, house}. Call the first S1 and the second S2. If the model is to provide a specification of the content of consciousness, it must select which particular set is supposed to serve as the relevant specification. "We must let ourselves point to it; for the truth of this immediate relation is the truth of this 'I' which confines itself to one 'Now' or one 'Here'. Were we to examine this truth afterwards, or stand at a distance from it, it would lose its significance entirely; for that would do away with the immediacy which is essential to it. We must therefore enter the same point of time or space, point them out to ourselves, i.e. make ourselves into the same singular 'I' which is the one who knows with certainty" (PhG 105).

But Hegel argues that this very act of pointing out which of these sets is to be used itself proves the inadequacy of the model by demonstrating that the modes of presentation involved in our immediate awareness are too complex to be captured by these two-membered sets of concreta. Hegel asks, "let us, then, see how that immediate is constituted that is pointed out to us" (PhG 105). Hegel uses the experience of pointing to reveal that the modes of presentation <here> and <now> could not be sets of simple concreta. He considers <now> first, and then examines <here>.

In the case of pointing to the now, Hegel notes that the very experience of pointing is itself temporal and thus reveals the complex horizontal nature of our temporal experience. He observes that "the Now is pointed to, this Now. 'Now'; it has already

ceased to be in the act of pointing to it. The Now that is, is another Now than the one pointed to” (PhG 106). This manifests the fact that the sets of concreta specified by sense-certainty cannot capture the content of our experience. The now specified by such a pointing would be a now that has been and Hegel contends that “what essentially has been is, in fact, not an essence that is; it is not, and it was with being that we were concerned” (PhG 106). The very act of pointing thus demonstrates that the mode of presentation <now> involves more than the mere concatenation of concreta:

The ‘Now’, and pointing out the ‘Now’, are thus so constituted that neither the one nor the other is something immediate and simple, but a movement which contains various moments. [... It is] a Now which is an absolute plurality of Nows. And this is the true, the genuine now [...]. The pointing-out of the Now is thus itself the movement which expresses what the Now is in truth, viz a result, or a plurality of Nows all taken together; and the pointing-out is the experience of learning that the Now is a universal (PhG 107).

Since the now we experience is temporally complex, no set of simple I’s and a simple nows could capture the content of that experience. Hegel here makes the Kantian observation that we experience particular moments of time as “limitations of a single time” which is “given as unlimited” (KrV B48). The mode of presentation <now> cannot be identified with a set of two concreta since this mode of presentation involves a complex temporal horizon in which the current time is presented as having preceded from a past time and about to be succeeded by a future time. Hegel’s phenomenological investigation thus once more shows that the now is too metaphysically complex to be captured by sense-certainty.

Hegel makes a similar argument for the case of the mode of presentation <here>. The act of pointing illustrates the fact that our here-experiences involve a complex spatial

horizon. “The Here pointed out to which I hold fast, is similarly a this here which, in fact, is not this Here, but a before and behind, an above and below, a right and a left” (PhG 108). In this manner the content of our here-experiences is seen to be “a simple complex of many Heres” (PhG 108). Thus, the two-membered sets specified by this model of sense-certainty fail to capture the content of our actual experience:

The Here that is meant would be the point; but it is not: on the contrary, when it is pointed out as something that is, the pointing-out shows itself to be not an immediate knowing, but a movement from the Here that is meant through many heres into the universal here which is a simple plurality of heres, (PhG 108).

Any pointilistic “here” designated in experience would appear against a complex spatial background.⁴¹ But this means that our here-experiences contain a spatially complex content. One thus cannot capture the content of our experience through sets consisting only of concrete “I”s and concrete objects. The modes of presentation involved in our experience manifest a complex horizontal structure that cannot be identified with the primitive conjunction relations of sense-certainty.

After reconstructing the three arguments of Sense-Certainty, we can observe that they have all proceeded according to the phenomenological method he set forth in the Introduction. Indeed, at the end of the chapter Hegel observes that his arguments have all taken the following general form:

The truth for consciousness of a This of sense is supposed to be universal experience; but the very opposite is universal experience. Every consciousness itself supersedes such a truth as e.g. Here is a tree, or, now

⁴¹ Again, the Kantian background of Hegel’s discussion is illuminating: “One can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space. And these parts cannot as it were precede the single all-encompassing space as its components (from which its composition would be possible), but rather are only thought in it. It is essentially single; the manifold in it, thus also the general concepts of spaces in general, rests merely on limitations” KrV A 25/ B39).

is noon, and proclaims the opposite: Here is not a tree, but a house, and similarly, it immediately again supersedes the assertion which set aside the first so far as it is also just such an assertion of a sensuous This” (PhG 109).

Hegel claims that when we attend to our experience we do not find the simple concrete items specified by the various models of sense-certainty, but instead a content that is universal and possesses a complex horizontal structure. It is this more complex universal content that is proposed in the next chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Perception. The phenomenological interpretation has thus been able to make sense of the text of Hegel’s argument and its metaphysical assertions which could not be accounted for on the standard interpretation (e.g. that sense-certainty concerns pure being and that the now and here are negatives in general). Moreover, it has done so in a manner that does not deny the overall epistemological and semantic import of the argument (since it is an argument about the adequate description of the content of what is epistemologically given to us in experience).

Before concluding, I would like to return to the popular neo-Sellarsian claim that Hegel denies the epistemic given and that he presents an argument for such a denial in Sense-Certainty. Our investigation has shown not only that Hegel fails to provide an argument against epistemological givenness in Sense-Certainty, but also that the argument that he does present therein itself depends upon the reality of the epistemological given. Consider once more the Cartesian thesis which Brandom claims that Hegel is committed to denying:

If anything be capable of being known by being represented, some things (indeed, if even error is to be possible), representing, must be known otherwise, simply by being had. Knowledge of represented or representables mediated by representing, presupposes immediate

knowledge of at least some representings. Room opens up for error in our cognition just when we attempt to move beyond what we immediately have, our representings [...] knowledge we acquire just by having those representings, finding ourselves with them, by their being given to us.⁴²

In this manner, Brandom and many other contemporary analytic interpreters claim that Hegel denies EG and EG_m.⁴³

But the forgoing reconstruction of the arguments of Sense-Certainty reveals them to depend upon these theses. Hegel's arguments presuppose both (i) that we can directly see that the descriptions proposed by sense-certainty fail to capture the content of our experience and (ii) that this seeing is justified. But this is to treat our awareness of the content of experience as an epistemological given since it is our acquaintance with this content which justifies our rejection of the putative characterization of the content proposed by the advocate of sense-certainty. For example, when the advocate of sense-certainty identifies the content of consciousness with a concrete now, we can see that our experience resists such a description because our "now" experiences include an element of universality. But to be able to directly see that our experience resists the characterization offered by the advocate of sense certainty is to take our awareness of our experience as epistemologically given. Hegel's arguments assume that we can see the character of our experience simply by attending to it. Our acquaintance with the character of what is phenomenally given to us is thereby a foundationally justified item of knowledge which can be used to support or undermine other knowledge claims. In this manner, the argument presupposes that the phenomenal givenness of experience grounds

⁴² Brandom, "Understanding the Object/ Property Structure in Terms of Negation" in *Spirit of Trust*, 27-28.

⁴³ Brandom, "Theoretical Objects and the Supersensible World" in *Spirit of Trust*, 87. See also, Pippin, "On Being Anti-Cartesian: Hegel, Heidegger, Subjectivity and Sociality" in *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 375-394.

a corresponding epistemological givenness. And therefore, far from denying the epistemological given, Hegel's argument in Sense-Certainty actually turns on it.

3. Conclusion

This chapter shown how Sense-Certainty follows the phenomenological method of argumentation set forth in chapter one. The various models presented by the advocate of sense-certainty intend to capture what is phenomenally given to us in consciousness. Yet, when we attend to our experience, we see that what is immediately presented to us is not adequately captured by the concrete contents proposed in these models.

Not only does this reading support the interpretation of the Introduction provided in the last chapter, but it also can solve the problems associated with the standard interpretation of Sense-Certainty. The standard interpretation claimed that Sense-Certainty presents a transcendental argument for the semantic thesis (ST) that (proto) concepts are necessary for demonstrative reference and the epistemic thesis (ET) that demonstrative reference is the minimal unit of justification. But this interpretation was unable to deal with some of the stronger metaphysical claims presented in the text (e.g. that sense-certainty concerns pure being and that the now is a negative in general) and could not account for Hegel's claim that it is necessary to begin with immediate knowledge. The phenomenological interpretation, in contrast, can account for the stronger metaphysical claims by grounding them in the nature of phenomenal givenness and in the horizontal structure of experience. Furthermore, it straightforwardly accounts for the claim that it is necessary to begin with immediate knowledge since the very

project of the *Phenomenology* is meant to be an explication of what is phenomenally given to us in consciousness.

The last two chapters have shown Hegel's project to depend upon both phenomenal givenness and epistemological givenness. We must now examine whether he also holds to a form of semantic givenness. In the next two chapters I will argue that he does deny two specific forms of semantic givenness that are popular in contemporary philosophy of mind and language. In chapter 3 I will argue that, in Perception, Hegel provides a rich and sophisticated argument against Russellian content. And in chapter 4 I will contend that, in Force and the Understanding, Hegel also provides an insightful critique of Fregean content. But, unlike other interpreters, I contend that Hegel's final characterization of the content of consciousness, what he calls Absolute Knowing, does involve a form of semantic givenness. Thus, in chapter 5, I will argue that Hegel's ultimate account of the Concept presents a unique and powerful version of semantic givenness as it applies to intellectual intuition.

Chapter Three: Perceptual Negation and Russellian Content

0. Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have argued not only that Hegel accepts phenomenological and epistemological givenness but also that his overall anti-skeptical argument in *the Phenomenology of Spirit* depends upon them. Chapter one showed that, in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel's attempt to solve the problem of the criterion is grounded in the phenomenological and epistemological givenness of consciousness. Hegel's argument relies on the fact that, since the phenomenal character of experience is self-presenting, one has first person authority regarding the content of one's experience. Thus, according to Hegel, our awareness of consciousness provides an epistemic starting point from which to defeat skepticism and to construct a systematic philosophy. Chapter two then showed how the argument of Sense-Certainty, far from constituting an argument against epistemological givenness, actually relies upon it and follows the phenomenological method set forth in the Introduction.

The remaining three chapters of this dissertation consider the issue of semantic givenness and argue that it also plays an important role in Hegel's system. Semantic givenness is the claim that some contents are intrinsically meaningful (i.e. that their meaning does not depend on their relations to other contents).¹ According to the Neo-

¹ I use the term "semantic givenness" rather than Redding's similar "myth of the logical given" since his definition conflates semantic and non-semantic issues, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56-84. On Redding's account it is unclear

Sellarsian reading, Hegel denies semantic givenness by adopting a pragmatic theory of meaning in which content is constituted by the commitments one makes within a holistically structured game of giving and asking for reasons. In what follows I will argue that such an interpretation is misguided. Though Hegel does indeed reject some specific forms of semantic givenness, (i) his arguments against them do not rely on adopting a pragmatic theory of meaning, and (ii) his own positive account of semantic content, set forth at the conclusion of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and in more detail in *The Science of Logic*, relies on a form of semantic givenness.

In this chapter, I consider one specific form of semantic givenness, one which we would today identify with a Russellian theory of content, and show how Hegel's arguments in *Perception* offer a powerful criticism of such a theory. In the next chapter, I consider *Force and the Understanding* and argue that Hegel also rejects a form of semantic givenness associated with Fregean accounts of content. Finally, in chapter five, I argue that Hegel's own account of content is grounded in cognitive phenomenology and that this account requires a form of semantic givenness.

Let us begin by considering Hegel's argument in *Perception*. In general, interpreters agree that the model of consciousness initially adopted but then ultimately

whether the myth of the logical given is supposed to consist in: (a) the grounding of logical laws in ontological entities, 60, (b) our knowledge of such platonic entities through "intellectual intuition" (which, in my opinion, would be more aptly characterized by eidetic intuition), 58-59, (c) knowledge of such platonically grounded logical laws accounting for how we know the material rightness or wrongness of actions carried out in communal practice, 73, and (d) some contents having meaning intrinsically, 56-57. Not only are all of these independent issues conflated in Redding's discussion, but it is also hard to see how any of this relates to the historical material purportedly under discussion. For instance, what Kant means by intellectual intuition is a far cry from what Redding means by the term. Thus, I use the term "semantic givenness" to indicate that I am focusing only on (d).

rejected in the Perception chapter is one of ordinary empirical objects. They claim that in contrast to the extremely thin conception of objects in Sense-Certainty (i.e. “this”, “here”, and “now”), Perception introduces a thick conception of “the thing with many properties” (PhG 112). According to this thick conception, the objects of perception are empirical objects such as tables, chairs, rocks, and trees. They have multiple properties, abide through time, and are atomistically structured so that each object and property is what it is independently of its relation to anything else. In light of this atomistic conception of the objects of perception, the arguments of the chapter are taken as aiming to establish that a relational conception of objects is required, that is, that some variety of holism must be true (whether it be metaphysical or epistemological).

Yet interpreters disagree as to how this thick conception of objects factors into the arguments of Perception and, as a result, what kind of holism Hegel seeks to establish. As with Sense-Certainty, scholarship is divided between metaphysical and epistemological readings. Some interpreters, such as Hyppolite and Stern, adopt a metaphysical reading by maintaining that Hegel argues against the existence of certain individual objects and properties and for a relational ontology. In contrast, other interpreters, such as Brandom, Pippin, Pinkard and Westphal, hold to an epistemological interpretation claiming that, according to Hegel, if our conceptual scheme were to include only conceptions of sensible objects and properties, it would be impossible to refer to such objects and thus impossible to have perceptual knowledge of them. To refer to sensible objects, one needs to be able to deploy a range of holistically articulated concepts. Because the epistemological interpretation includes the conditions for reference, semantic considerations play a crucial role in an argument that has a basic epistemological origin.

So it is more aptly called an epistemological-semantic interpretation, or an ES interpretation for short.

Though the language Hegel employs about “the thing with many properties” was traditionally taken to support the metaphysical reading, the ES interpretation has become popular of late. Because it does not force one to defend the strong metaphysical claim that (various kinds of) particular objects and properties do not exist, the ES interpretation is an attractive option for those who want to adopt a common-sense realist ontology. Furthermore, the ES interpretation can avoid attributing positions to Hegel that do not appear to be adequately supported by the arguments he provides. For the relatively short arguments in Perception do not appear to rule out the variety of conceptions of singular objects they are said to preclude (e.g. Spinozistic substance, Leibnizian monads, Kantian things in themselves, bundles of properties, or bare substrata).² By portraying Hegel as presenting arguments that can be reasonably thought to establish their conclusions, the ES reading can seem to offer a more charitable interpretation.

However, the ES interpretation is not without its problems. First, when its textual grounds are examined more closely, difficulties emerge since Hegel does not define Perception’s “thing with many properties” as a thickly conceived empirical object, but rather as a perceptual object described in very minimal terms, viz. the simple “this”, “here” and “now” of Sense-Certainty with the addition of sensible qualities such as “red” or “round”. Perception considers claims like “there is redness and roundness here” rather than claims like “there is an apple on the tree”. These objects can be conceived of as thin

² See Jean Hyppolite’s *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. J. Heckman and S. Cherniak (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) and Stern’s *Routledge Guidebook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge, 2002).

in the sense that they are purely perceptual and need not persist through time or have other hidden perceptible properties (such as having an unobserved back side).³ Second, the arguments Hegel provides in Perception prove insufficient, on closer examination, to support the conceptual holism attributed to him by the ES interpretation. So in this regard the ES interpretation ends up being no better than the metaphysical interpretation.

In response to these difficulties, I offer a phenomenological interpretation according to which Hegel does not argue against *conceptual* atomism per se, but only against a much narrower thesis about specifically *perceptual* content. On this reading, instead of identifying Perception's model of content with empirical objects like tables and chairs, the model, in fact, has more minimal perceptual objects in view such as seeing a blue spot in one's visual field. As a result, what Hegel seeks to prove in the chapter is not that a holistic theory of conceptual content is required for reference to empirical objects but that minimal perceptual objects are given holistically in an experiential horizon. Hegel seeks to show that the content of even weak perceptual claims such as "there is something red and round here" cannot be accounted for using only an atomistic account of the most minimal sensible properties, since these properties are only perceived as determinate when perceptually given in a larger sensible field. As a result, if one wants to retain an atomistic conception of the objects of consciousness Hegel claims that an account of *conceptual* content must be introduced that employs universals beyond those that are conditioned solely by sensibility.

³ To use the Sellarsian terminology which is popular in much of the Hegel literature, the objects of perception are described using feature placing language rather than ordinary physical object language.

Consequently, Hegel argues for a form of *perceptual* holism in the Perception chapter of *The Phenomenology* (since perceptual content is rendered determinate by its relation to other elements in one's visual field), without thereby immediately arguing for a form of *conceptual* holism (given that conceptual content is not introduced till the end of the chapter and is evaluated only later in Force and the Understanding). Such a reading is not only more naturally supported by the text, but also, because it argues for a more modest position, can provide non-question begging arguments in support of its thesis. Additionally, this phenomenological reading is capable of preserving some of the insights of the traditional ES and metaphysical interpretations. With traditional ES interpretations it can affirm that Hegel's ultimate goal in Perception (and in the *Phenomenology* as a whole) is to provide an adequate theory of knowledge. And, since it takes Hegel to argue against the identification of perceptual content with a particular metaphysical conception of sensible objects, it can affirm with traditional metaphysical interpretations that Hegel's arguments have implications for our understanding of the metaphysical constitution of sensible objects.

This chapter proceeds in two parts. The first part sets forth the standard ES interpretation, which claims that Perception proposes an ordinary empirical conception of objects as a criterion for knowledge. It then shows how this interpretation fails to account for the text and ends up attributing question-begging arguments to Hegel in the desire to have him establish full-blown conceptual holism. The second part then offers a phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's argument in Perception that can better account for the text and that shows how Hegel provides a plausible argument when its target is more narrowly circumscribed. Though it does not (even attempt to) establish

conceptual holism, Hegel's argument is not without philosophical merit since it offers a novel criticism of Russellian accounts of perceptual content and, in the process, demonstrates the necessity of providing an account of exemplification. This second half of the chapter begins by explaining the basic Russellian model of content that the various arguments of Perception are intended to undermine. It then lays out three ways in which this basic model can be articulated, and reconstructs Hegel's arguments against each of them. By rejecting this Russellian model, Hegel rejects one important form of semantic givenness.

1. The ES Interpretation and Its Problems

1.1. The ES Interpretation

It is generally agreed that the argumentative strategy adopted in the Perception chapter is similar to the one used in Sense-Certainty. In both chapters Hegel sets forth three models of a form of consciousness, shows how these models fail, and then explains how a new more sophisticated form of consciousness is required to avoid these failures. What differentiates Perception from Sense-Certainty is the specific form of consciousness it proposes. Instead of the immediate "this" of Sense-Certainty, Perception offers "the thing with many properties" (PhG 112). This "thing with many properties" is defined in terms of two essential features: it must be a single thing (and so be what Hegel calls a "one") and it must have multiple properties (and so be what Hegel calls an "also"). Perception sets forth three models to account for these essential features of thinghood using only sensible features such as red, round, sweet, etc. The first model seeks to

account for the essential features of thinghood by locating them within the perceptual object (PhG 117), the second by distributing them between the subject and the object of perception (PhG 118-122), and the third by appealing to multiple objects (PhG 123-125). Yet, through the course of the arguments in Perception, Hegel contends that these models all fail as accounts of thinghood.

Interpreters have largely agreed in identifying Perception's "thing(s) with many properties" with ordinary empirical objects such as tables, chairs, and lamps. Pippin, for example, claims that the primary phenomenon that Perception seeks to explain is thus "the mutual inherence of many properties in one object."⁴ Likewise, Stewart claims that "the 'Perception' chapter continues the knowledge problematic that was initiated in 'Sense-Certainty' but with a different category [...] this time seeing the object in terms of a thing with properties or what in the history of philosophy is often referred to as substance and accident."⁵ And Brandom maintains that "the Perception chapter investigates what is implicit in the idea of sense universals, as articulating the contents of what would be expressed linguistically by observation reports codifying perceptual judgments."⁶ For example, whereas Sense-Certainty considered mere feature placing language such as "there is blue here" we could say that, Perception considers perceptual judgements like "there is a car in my driveway."

⁴ Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 126

⁵ Jon Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 65

⁶ Robert Brandom, "Understanding the Object/ Property Structure in Terms of Negation" in *Spirit of Trust*, 29

Yet interpreters disagree as to how this conception of ordinary empirical objects is meant to function in the overall argument of the Perception chapter. Some claim that the argument primarily concerns the metaphysical constitution of objects. So, on this metaphysical reading, Hegel seeks to demonstrate the incoherence of various philosophical accounts of particularity. Hyppolite, for example, contends that the Perception chapter argues against Spinozistic substance, Kantian things in themselves, and Leibnizian monads.⁷ Likewise, Stern claims that the difficulties encountered by Perception “lead it to lose faith in the very ontology of things and properties on which the conceptions based,”⁸ viz. bundle theory and bare substratum accounts.⁹ Others, in contrast, claim that the argument primarily concerns our *knowledge* of objects rather than their metaphysical constitution. Hegel’s argument, on this interpretation, is not against the existence of particular kinds of objects, but against the claim that a conceptual scheme restricted to simple sensible conceptions of objects and properties could serve as an adequate criterion of knowledge.

Specifically, this ES interpretation claims that Perception cannot offer an adequate criterion of knowledge because the conceptual scheme that it adopts would render even the mere reference to empirical objects impossible. Pippin, for example, maintains that the Perception chapter examines “the issue of how [...] a perceiver could be said to experience [...] qualities as properties of a thing”¹⁰ and claims that Perception adopts an associationist framework to account for this phenomenon. According to this

⁷ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 110-117.

⁸ Stern, *Guide to the Phenomenology*, 51.

⁹ Stern, *Guide to the Phenomenology*, 56-58.

¹⁰ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 126.

framework “I directly and immediately perceive a mere series of sense properties, but on the basis of repeated experiences of such series, I associate the properties as belonging together, as all properties of the same object.”¹¹ For Pippin, the arguments of Perception are meant to establish the untenability of associationism by demonstrating that “the original apprehension of the determinate properties already involves their being apprehended as properties of a particular thing.”¹² He maintains that “if this can be shown, then, since such an inherence cannot be immediately perceived, even though it is a condition of the possibility of determinate perception, the whole model of immediate sense experience must be seriously revised.”¹³ Hegel’s argument then, on this reading, does not focus on the question of the actual metaphysical constitution of objects, but on the question of how it is possible to refer to objects. Perception starts with the suggestion that an empirical object’s sensible properties could be sufficient to secure reference to that object. For instance, I might see a red round thing, and simply by seeing those properties, refer to the red round apple before me. But this view proves to be misguided since properties can be understood as determinate only if they are thought of as belonging to a particular capable of combining some properties and ruling out others.

Hegel’s argument, on the ES interpretation, is said to establish conceptual holism. To perceive a sensible property one must understand it as being compatible with some properties and incompatible with others. Redness, for example, can only be perceived as redness if one takes it as necessarily excluding incompatible properties such as blue and yellow but also possibly co-existing with compatible properties like being round and

¹¹ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 126.

¹² Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 126.

¹³ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 126.

sweet.¹⁴ But a property can include and exclude other properties in this manner only if it is instantiated by a particular. To say that one property excludes another is to say that no object that instantiates the one to be able to instantiate the other. Likewise, to say that one property is compatible with another is to say that it to be possible for them both to be co-instantiated in the same object. The resulting account of content is thus holistic in two regards. First, content is determined by compatibility and incompatibility relations among concepts.¹⁵ Second, we can think of properties as standing in relations of compatibility and incompatibility only if we think of them as being properties of a particular object. Neither the concept of a property nor the concept of an object is meaningful on its own. Thus interpreters claim that Hegel's argument in Perception results in the rejection of "atomism about the contents of immediate sensory experience." Instead, Hegel is said to affirm that each perceptual content "has the content it does only as a member of and in virtue of the role it plays in a constellation of interrelated contents"¹⁶ and to embrace "a kind of holism about what is immediately given in sensory experience."¹⁷

This ES interpretation appears advantageous in several respects. First, it can show how Hegel's argument in Perception flows from the conclusions reached in Sense-

¹⁴ Brandom, for example, claims that "The experiences we label 'red' and 'green, and those we label 'rectangular' and 'triangular' for him are experienced as incompatible, as ruling each other out (as simultaneously located), while those labeled 'red' and 'triangular' and 'green' and 'rectangular' are experienced as different, but compatible." "Understanding the Object/ Property Structure in Terms of Negation" in *Spirit of Trust*, 34.

¹⁵ Brandom calls these material compatibility and incompatibility relations to distinguish them from merely formal ones.

¹⁶ Brandom, "Understanding the Object/ Property Structure" in *Spirit of Trust*, 34

¹⁷ Brandom, "Understanding the Object/ Property Structure" in *Spirit of Trust*, 35. Pippin similarly claims that Perception thus "begins a decisive shift in the PhG, a shift in the understanding of a possible experience away from considering experience as essentially or foundationally the apprehension of objects and qualities toward a view of experience as originally the application of concepts and the mediation of theories." *Hegel's Idealism*, 126.

Certainty by giving a straightforward explanation of how the empirical objects of Perception relate to the simple singulars of Sense-Certainty. At the end of Sense-Certainty Hegel notes that, given only the minimal resources of that model, it is impossible to account for our knowledge of singular objects. “When I say ‘a single thing’, I am really saying what it is from a wholly universal point of view, for everything is a single thing; and likewise ‘this thing’ is anything you like” (PhG 110).” Perception then is introduced as a way of referring to singular objects. Because empirical objects have sensible properties, we can identify (and re-identify) them. In short, Perception attempts to overcome the problems of Sense-Certainty by moving from a thin conception of an object as a mere ‘this’ to a thick conception of an empirical object, something with multiple properties, that abides through time and is capable of identification and re-identification.

Second, the ES interpretation accounts for Hegel’s otherwise mysterious claims that “only perception contains negation, that is, difference or manifoldness, within its own essence (PhG 112).” By appealing to the notion of compatibility and incompatibility relations between concepts, one can give a philosophically clear account of what Hegel means here. The meaning of the concept <red>, for example, is defined by all the concepts it is incompatible with (e.g. <blue> <yellow>, <green>, etc). Far from presenting an obscure argument, Hegel can be portrayed as establishing an insightful form of conceptual holism.

Finally, the ES interpretation allows one to attribute philosophically plausible arguments to Hegel. One aspect that some find unsatisfactory with the metaphysical

interpretation is that Hegel does not appear to provide the kind of detailed arguments which would be necessary to undermine the vast variety of ontologies he is said to attempt to refute in this chapter (e.g. Spinozism, Kantian things in themselves, and Leibnizian monads). Instead of having to support the claim that some historically influential accounts of objects are incoherent, the ES interpretation provides a more modest, yet still substantial, proposal. Additionally, the interpretation allows one to go on believing in a common sense realist ontology if one wishes to, since it rejects only the claim that a conceptual scheme with only sensible concepts would suffice for an adequate criterion of knowledge.

1.2 Problems for the ES Interpretation

The ES interpretation has drawn increasing support in light of these advantages. Yet the view encounters serious problems when it is examined more closely. First, on closer inspection, the text does not support the contention that Hegel has a thick conception of objects in view in the Perception chapter. Consider again the passage thought to introduce a thick conception of objects. At the end of Sense-Certainty, Hegel notes that, given Sense-Certainty's meager resources, it is impossible to account for our knowledge of singular objects. "When I say 'a single thing', I am really saying what it is from a wholly universal point of view, for everything is a single thing; and likewise 'this thing' is anything you like" (PhG 110)." Sense-Certainty, helping itself only to the simple singular "this" cannot account for our thoughts about the singulars that actually confront

us in consciousness (viz. singulars that display some form of complexity).¹⁸ The truth of Sense-Certainty proves to be a universal: “I point it out as a ‘Here’, which is a here of other heres, or is in its own self a ‘simple togetherness of many ‘Heres’; i.e. it is a universal. I take it up then as it is in truth, and instead of knowing something immediate I take the truth of it, or perceive it” (PhG 110). The ES reading is correct to note that in this passage Hegel has in mind the ability to refer to singulars. But there is no specific textual evidence to identify the singulars in question with thick singular objects. What Hegel introduces here is not our ability to identify (and thus re-identify) a physical object at different times and locations, but rather with our even more minimal ability to refer to a perceptual singular at all. What consciousness perceives is not the simple atomic this of Sense-Certainty, a mere “here”, but a complex object “a here of other heres”. The object appears as having a certain shape. We can, for example, distinguish the object’s top from its bottom and its left from its right. Hegel identifies such a “simple togetherness of many heres’ as the object of perception. In other words, what Hegel has in mind is reference to simple perceptual objects such as red patch in one’s visual field. He wants to account for our ability to refer to any perceptual singular in our environment, rather than, as standard ES readings suggest, the much stronger notion of a thick particular. The textual evidence thus fails to support the reading that Hegel is concerned with our ability to refer to thickly

¹⁸ One might object by noting that Hegel uses the example of a piece of paper to make his point. Yet if one attends to the passage one can see that Hegel furnishes it only as an illustration, not as definitive of the model under consideration. The example is meant to show that the mere expression “this bit of paper”, considered only as a linguistic expression, would be unable to account for the reference to the particular bit of paper that the speaker intends. Rather, language must be helped out “by pointing out this bit of paper” and this, claims Hegel, reveals “what the truth of sense-certainty in fact is: I point it out as a ‘Here’, which is a here of other heres, or is in its own self a ‘simple togetherness of many ‘Heres’; i.e. it is a universal. I take it up then as it is in truth, and instead of knowing something immediate I take the truth of it, or perceive it” (PhG 110).

conceived empirical objects, but instead refers only to the weaker ability to attend to the purely sensible objects of perception.

Second, the text does not support the view that material incompatibility relations between concepts are required for *perceptual* determinacy. On closer inspection, the ES interpretation's account of negation does not follow from Hegel's use of the term in Perception. The texts in question focus on visual properties and how their determinacy requires their relations to one another in a visual field. It does not yet ascend to the conceptual level to show that all conceptual content is determined by its inferential relations. The point is not that there is nothing to the concept green besides its excluding all other color concepts (e.g., blue, red, yellow, etc.), but rather that, to perceive a particular shade of green it needs to be given within a larger perceptual field. A shade of green might, for example, appear differently if it surrounded by a light background than it would if it were surrounded by a dark one. Likewise, the lesson learned in Perception is not that singular reference is impossible without determinate conceptual content grounded in compatibility and incompatibility relations, but rather the weaker claim that perceptual content cannot be accounted for atomistically with purely sensible terms.

Consider the two key passages where Hegel explains the role of negation in Perception. In the first passage, Hegel claims that:

Since the principle of the object, the universal, is in its simplicity a mediated universal, the object must express this its nature in its own self. This it does by showing itself to be the thing with many properties. The wealth of sense-knowledge belongs to perception, not to immediate certainty, for which it was only the source of instances; for only perception contains negation, that is, difference or manifoldness, within its own essence (PhG 112).

Here Hegel defines what it means for negation to be the essence of the perceptual object by identifying negation with difference or manifoldness. Given this definition of negation, there is no reason to think that it, in this case, should be defined in terms of compatibility and incompatibility relations among concepts. Rather, Hegel merely claims that the object of perception contains difference or manifoldness within itself (e.g. it is red and round and sweet) and all of these are perceived as elements of a perceptual field.

In the second passage Hegel explains how the fact that an object is an exclusive one depends upon facts about negation. It reads as follows:

(1) If the many determinate properties were strictly indifferent to one another, if they were simply and solely self-related, they would not be determinate; for they are only determinate in so far as they differentiate themselves from one another, and relate themselves to others as to their opposites. (2) Yet; as thus opposed to one another they cannot be together in the simple unity of their medium, which is just as essential to them as negation; the differentiation of the properties, in so far as it is not an indifferent differentiation but is exclusive, each property negating the others, thus falls outside of this simple medium; and the medium, therefore, is not merely an Also, an indifferent unity, but a One as well, a unity which excludes an other. (3) The One is the moment of negation; it is itself quite simply a relation of self to self and it excludes an other; and it is that by which 'thinghood' is determined as a Thing. (PhG 114).

In (1) Hegel argues that the properties of an object of perception are determinate only in so far as they differentiate themselves from each other, and relate themselves to others as to their opposites. Hegel then in (2) defines this differentiation as a relation of exclusion. A perceptual object cannot merely be mere togetherness of properties, but must also account for the way that some properties exclude others. Then, finally, in (3) Hegel identifies this function of the One, or exclusion, with negation.

This passage does not identify negation with the particular kind of negation used by the ES interpretation. For it does not invoke the incompatibilities between concepts to

account for perceptual determinacy. Rather, as seen above, Hegel provides a specifically perceptual account of negation. Properties are “determinate in so far as they differentiate themselves from one another, and relate themselves to others as to their opposites” (PhG 114). Given that the overall question of perception is how we can attend to sensible objects, it is more natural to interpret this claim in simple gestalt terms. Take, for example, a grain of salt that is white and cubicle. For the properties of whiteness and cubicleness to be perceptually determinate they need to be differentiated from each other. The white color of the salt is distinct from its cubicle shape. Moreover, these perceptual properties must also “relate themselves to others as to their opposites.” So, for example, we see the white as white because we see it as distinct from the other colors in the background visual field. If the salt were on a brown table, the white would relate itself to brown as to its opposite. Similarly for the cubicle shape of the salt. We see it as cubicle only because it fills out space in a particular way, and thus negates the background in a specific manner. In order to discriminate its cubical shape there need to be borders which mark it off from the rest of the background. But the perception of borders requires contrast, and so, to perceive things determinately, we need to be presented with a complex perceptual manifold with distinct elements (i.e. elements that perceptually negate each other). There is thus little reason to adopt the stronger reading of negation employed by the standard ES reading.

Finally, the ES interpretation faces a problem in that it is forced to attribute a dubious argument to Hegel. To begin with, on the ES interpretation, Hegel appears to beg the question against accounts which take perceptual properties to be intrinsically determinate. Hegel is said to assert that perceptual determinacy is bestowed in virtue of a

property standing in incompatibility relations with other properties and to use this assertion as a premise in his argument. But no one adopting the initial model of Perception, i.e. no one who takes perceptual properties to be intrinsically determinate, would accept this claim. Hegel's argument would thus beg the question regarding whether perceptual determinacy requires conceptual negation understood in terms of material incompatibility. Pippin acknowledges that this is a "great problem" for Hegel's argument. Though Hegel relies on the claim that perceptual determinacy requires material incompatibility between concepts, "he does not argue that there is a problem. He just states that in the [... opposing] model, the properties 'would not be determinate.'"¹⁹ Furthermore, not only would Hegel be begging the question against his opponents on the ES reading, but the position he adopts would be counter-intuitive. Why should we think, for instance, that one cannot be perceptually aware of the visual presentation of red as determinate if one were not aware that the concept of red was incompatible with green, blue, etc? The claim seems implausible. Consider the case of infant perception. It seems that young children are aware of determinate colors even though they don't have the conceptual capacities to draw inferences about the incompatibility relations among those colors. Likewise, it seems possible that even adult cognizers might see a new color as determinate but not yet be able to subsume it under a concept and thus not be able to draw the relevant inferences regarding its incompatibility relations to other concepts.

Pippin's proposed solution to this problem is to argue that sensible properties cannot be immediately perceived as determinate since this would be identical to the

¹⁹ Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 128.

position advocated by sense-certainty—a position which Hegel has already taken himself to have shown to be philosophically inadequate. Pippin claims that if perceptual properties were immediately perceived as determinate, “I would be perceiving just ‘the single property by itself which however, as such, is neither a property nor a determinate being; for now it is neither a One nor connected with others’ (PhG, 74). This means [...] that such a sensory episode ‘remains merely sensuous being in general, since it no longer possesses the character of negativity’.”²⁰ According to Pippin, Hegel is neither begging the question against his opponents nor advocating a counter-intuitive view since he has already established his position through the arguments of Sense-Certainty. “If [...] the properties are just considered immediate sensory episodes, not instances of universals, [...] we are back at the problem of sense certainty all over again.”²¹ Hegel does not seek, in Perception, to account for what makes an instance of red in one’s visual field determinate, but rather for the determinacy of a red empirical object (e.g. a red apple). The determinacy of (and hence our ability to refer to) an empirical object could not be sensibly presented since it involves being conceived of as being the locus of compatibility and incompatibility relations (which are not perceptual). “A particular can be discriminated only by the apprehension of a property, a quality sufficiently like other such qualities to be an instance of a kind, to be capable of being discriminated as this-white, this-sweet, this-dense, this-shaped thing.”²² So, on Pippin’s reading, Perception proposes, in light of the failures of Sense-Certainty, that reference to a thickly conceived object requires conceptual determinacy and so, since conceptual determinacy is grounded

²⁰ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 129.

²¹ Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 129.

²² Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 129.

in the incompatibility relations to other concepts, reference to objects requires a holistic account of conceptual content.

Yet Pippin's proposed solution is unsuccessful for several reasons. First, if one looks more closely at the arguments of Sense-Certainty (as we did in the previous chapter), one can see that it does not consider perceptual properties at all (much less the grounds of their determinacy). Rather, perceptual properties are not introduced until the Perception chapter. Sense-Certainty considers only the pure particularity of the "this" under the forms of "here" and "now". Hegel thus does not provide an argument in that section as to why we could not, for example, immediately perceive a determinate shade of red. Second, even if Hegel did make this assertion in Sense-Certainty, it would not make it any more plausible. The resulting position would still seem counter-intuitive. And finally, even if one did focus on reference to empirical objects as Pippin suggests, there is still little reason to think that conceptual holism is required to account for this phenomenon. For, provided that I was immediately aware of determinate sensible properties, it seems plausible that I should be able to refer to empirical objects through those properties. For example, I could refer to a red apple through its redness. Indeed, this is the intuition which motivates the initial picture suggested by Perception. There is thus little to suggest that by merely framing the issue in terms of reference to thickly conceived empirical objects one would motivate a holistic account of content.²³

²³ There is thus little motivation for invoking an Evansian framework at this point as some interpreters do, claiming that Hegel adopted an early version of what Evans would later call the generality constraint on singular thought, viz. that entertaining the thought that *o* is *F* (where *o* is a singular object and *F* is a property) requires a joint operation of two capacities: a capacity to predicate other properties (e.g. *G* and *H*) to *o* and a capacity to predicate *F* to other singular objects (e.g. *p* and *q*). So, for example, Redding claims that the failure of sense-certainty establishes that "taken in isolation from their relation to any other category, the elements of any such field cannot be kept apart in thought—cannot be individuated, but

The ES interpretation thus faces substantial difficulties. It is not adequately rooted in the text and seems to attribute a philosophically dubious argument to Hegel. In light of these problems, it would be desirable to find an interpretation that (i) can account for Hegel's argument as operating only at a thinly conceived perceptual level, and (ii) can do so in a way that avoids attributing a question begging argument to Hegel. In the next section I will propose a phenomenological interpretation which can satisfy these desiderata.

2. A Phenomenological Interpretation of Perception

To avoid the problems of the standard ES interpretation, we need an account of Hegel's argument that can illuminate how Perception's conceptual scheme emerges from the meager results of Sense-Certainty and can explain how Hegel's argument concerns the determinacy of specifically perceptual content. In the process, it also needs to explain why negation is essential to the perception of sensible properties so as not to beg the question against rival views. In what follows, I will set forth such an account by focusing on Hegel's adoption of a specifically perceptual holism to account for the phenomenology of perceptual experience.

2.1 Perception's Basic Model Schema

rather 'pass over' into each other. That is, it is the very immediacy of these supposed phenomenal 'contents' that precludes any relations of identity or difference from being established among them. In Evansian terms, such 'objects' lack any 'fundamental ground of difference.'" *Analytic Philosophy*, 102).

To understand the overall theory of content presented by Perception one must note how it is introduced to account for the failures of Sense-Certainty. Sense-Certainty sought to characterize the content of consciousness as a simple singular <this> but such a model was incapable of accounting for the actual experience. Specifically, it failed to account for the fact that we are aware of more than simple particularity in conscious experience. Even when one is aware of a singular object, such as a piece of paper, Hegel argues that one is not aware of an atomic <here>, but rather a complex <here> “which is a Here of other Heres, or is in its own self a ‘simple togetherness of many Heres’; i.e. it is a universal” (PhG 110). In looking at a piece of paper, I am aware of something complex. For instance, I can distinguish between the top of the page from the bottom of the page, and the left side from the right side. Hegel uses the term “universal” to describe this complexity. The model of Perception is meant to account for such complexity and thus contains “difference or manifoldness, within its own essence” (PhG 112). The model introduces complexity in in two ways. First, consciousness is no longer portrayed as having the simple structure of a <this>, but is instead depicted in terms of an act object model. Hegel observes that “with the emergence of the principle [of perception], the two moments [...] come into being: one being the movement of pointing-out or the act of perceiving (*das Wahrnehmen*), the other being the same movement as a simple event or the object perceived (*der Gegenstand*)” (PhG 111). Instead of identifying experience with a mere <this>, it is necessary to distinguish between the act of pointing out an object, and the object that is pointed out. The resulting characterization of consciousness must thus take the more complex form of “*perceiving*: <p >” where “*perceiving*” stands for the act of perception and “<p>” for the content perceived. Second, the content of perception is

itself more complex than the mere <this> of sense-certainty since it is characterized as “the thing with many properties” (PhG 112). The content of perception would in this manner be portrayed along simple Russellian lines as <o, F, G> where “F” and “G” stand for sensible properties and “o” stands for the bearer of those properties.²⁴

Though everyday discourse frequently employs the terminology adopted by Perception, as evinced in claims like “I see something red and round” or “I see something white and square”, Hegel argues that rigorous philosophy must go on to clarify what exactly is meant by such claims. If perceptual things are meant to exhaust the content of consciousness as Perception suggests, it is necessary to understand what the bearing of sensible properties, which Hegel calls the “thinghood” of the perceptual thing, consists in (PhG 113).

Hegel observes that thinghood is marked by two features. The first feature of thinghood is its holding together of multiple properties. For example, consider a

²⁴ Russellian accounts of content are usually contrasted with Fregean accounts. According to Russellian theories, contents are identified with objects and properties whereas, on Fregean models, contents consist of senses, or modes of presentation, by which objects and properties are grasped. Consider, for example, the case of looking up and seeing that Mount Blanc is white and snowy. Russellians would identify the content of this perceptual state with Mount Blanc itself and the properties of whiteness and being snowy. In contrast, Fregeans would identify the content of this state with senses by which we grasp Mount Blanc and its properties of whiteness and snowiness. The standard arguments in favor of Russellianism appeal to simplicity, the unclarity of what, exactly, a Fregean sense is supposed to be, and, in the case of proper names, the intuition that we seem to be able to refer to people and objects without an intermediary sense (e.g. Kripke’s famous Gödel/ Schmidt case). Likewise, the standard arguments against Russellianism and in favor of Fregean content are that it seems to result in attributing irrationality to people who, by all other standards, would be considered rational (e.g. London/ Londres cases), and its inability to deal with cases of illusion or hallucination. But Hegel’s argument against the particular form of Russellianism advocated in Perception takes a different form, one which contemporary debates about content could be considerably enriched by attending to. That the content in question should be understood along Russellian lines is further suggested (i) by the claim made by this shape of consciousness that the object of perception is taken as “the essence regardless of whether it is perceived or not” (PhG 111), (ii) by the fact that the criterion of truth for these models is the self-identity of the object (PhG 116), and (iii) that it is contrasted to a more Fregean account of content which emerges at the end of the chapter—an account in which “the object is in one and the same respect the opposite of itself: it is for itself, so far as it is for another, and it is for another, so far as it is for itself” (PhG 128). Fregean senses function in this manner since it is of their nature to present objects and properties.

perceptual episode in which one sees whiteness, tartness, and cubicalness as belonging together. Hegel notes that “all these many properties are in a single simple ‘Here’, in which, therefore, they interpenetrate; none has a different Here from the others, but each is everywhere in the same Here in which the others are” (PhG 113). In perceiving this simple sensible object we do not see the whiteness, tartness, and cubicalness as isolated from one another, but as somehow interpenetrating and belonging together in the same location. Hegel calls this function of binding multiple distinct properties together the “indifferent also” (PhG 113).

The second characteristic of thinghood is its exclusive oneness. When we claim that thinghood is marked by the togetherness of multiple properties in the Also, we assume that there are multiple determinate properties to be held together in the first place. But Hegel claims that determinate sensible properties are “only determinate in so far as they differentiate themselves from one another, and relate themselves to others as to their opposites” (PhG 114). For example, Hegel could point out that the whiteness of the salt is only perceptually determinate as white by its contrast to the brown background of the counter that it rests on. The whiteness of the salt is rendered visually salient by appearing as distinct from the surrounding brownness. Since determinate sensible properties exclude others in this way, they must fall “outside of this simple medium; and the medium, therefore, is not merely an Also, an indifferent unity, but a One as well, a unity which excludes an other” (PhG 114). This exclusive oneness is necessary to account for the determinacy of perceptual properties and through them, the determinacy of perceptual objects. Consider again the example of perceiving a white piece of salt. For the salt’s whiteness to be determinate in one’s visual field it must exclude the other color qualities

one is presented with. Similarly, for the grain of salt to be a determinate perceptual object, we have to see it as excluding all the properties in one's visual field that do not belong to it. It must, for instance, exclude the brownness and flatness of the counter on which it rests. Hegel labels this function of excluding properties the "One". According to Hegel, "the One is the moment of negation; it is itself quite simply a relation of self to self and it excludes an other; and it is that by which 'thinghood' is determined as a Thing" (PhG 114).

Note that this account of negation avoids the standard ES interpretation's problem of attributing a question begging argument to Hegel. On the standard reading, Hegel's doctrine of negation relies on the principle that, to be determinate, a sensible property has to be conceived of as excluding all properties incompatible with it. According to this strong reading of negation, perceiving a blue patch would require subsuming it under the concept <blue> and taking the content of this concept as being determined solely by its inferential relations to other concepts. From the concept of blue, for example, we can infer that something is not yellow or red. But such an account seems to beg the question against those who think we can attend to blue sensations without needing to apply concepts at all (much less require that we adopt a holistic account of conceptual content in order to do so). Instead, on the reading I suggest, the notion of negation at play in exclusive oneness is considerably weaker. The argument of Sense Certainty has established that what confronts us in spatio-temporal experience is neither a simple spatial point nor an atomic temporal moment. Rather, the time we experience is divisible into multiple "nows" and the space we experience can be broken up into various "heres". The model of perception seeks to account for the determinacy of this content by

introducing sensible properties. So, for example, we might distinguish one “here” from another with regard to their color and shape properties.

Given this context, it is much more natural to think of the negation essential to the exclusive One as involving simple perceptual principles rather than a holistic account of conceptual content. Consider the case of perceiving a blue star surrounded by a red background. The determinacy of the blue star shape will involve seeing it as distinct from the red background and thereby negating it. If one perceived only a uniform shade of blue one would not see blue star shape, since one would not be aware of the borders in virtue of which it is star shaped. Furthermore, even if one were to concede that the determinate quality of blueness might be intrinsically determinate if one were confronted with a uniform blue visual field, this would not help in accounting for the complex structure of our experience of space and time, which the introduction of such qualities was meant to account for.²⁵ Since, on this scenario, every part of one’s visual field would be blue, the feature of <blue> could not distinguish one part of the visual field from another.²⁶ This

²⁵ One should also note that since the very shade of color given would look different against a different background, to stipulate that an experience of a particular color is uniform is not, in fact, a neutral specification. For it is specifying the horizontal conditions of viewing the property just as much as if one stipulated a different color for the background.

²⁶ Further examples of weaker form of perceptual negation can be seen in the Müller-Lyer illusion, White’s illusion, and the phenomenon of color constancy. In the Müller-Lyer illusion the perceived length of a line segment is determined by whether or not it is surrounded by arrows pointing inward or outward. The determinacy of how long the line segment appears is thus determined by the surrounding space (in this case the arrows) which it “negates”. Similarly in White’s illusion how dark a patch of gray looks depends on where it is placed with respect to horizontal black lines on the background. Again, the determinacy of gray will depend on the surrounding context which it “negates”. A gray patch that lies between the black lines appears darker than a gray patch that lies on top of the black lines. Finally, the phenomenon of color constancy illustrates the same principle. Color constancy refers to the fact that we perceive the colors of objects to be constant even when seen under different lighting conditions. Again, this shows that the determinate content of a part of one’s perceptual field is governed by other elements of that field which it “negates”. So, for example, the fact two parts of an apple are both perceived as red even though the light reflects off them differently is that they are seen as connected to the same object in an environment.

view thus does not beg the question against those who claim that we can attend to sensible properties without applying concepts and seems phenomenologically plausible.

The thingness of the thing of perception is thus characterized by the functions of both the Also (i.e. the holding together a multiplicity of properties) and of the One (i.e. the excluding of contrary properties). Rather than taking these functions to be self-evident, as do some contemporary philosophers who appeal to exemplification as a primitive notion, Hegel claims that we need to explain how the model of Perception can account for the One and the Also and how their relation grounds determinate sensible content. Hegel lists the elements in need of explanation as follows:

In these moments, taken together, the Thing as the truth of perception is completed, so far as it is necessary to develop it here. It is (a) an indifferent, passive universality, the Also of the many properties or rather ‘matters’; (b) negation; equally simply; or the One, which excludes opposite properties; and (c) the many properties themselves, the relation of the first two moments, or negation as it relates to the indifferent element, and therein expands into a host of differences; the point of singular individuality in the medium of subsistence radiating forth into plurality (PhG 115).

According to (a), any adequate model of Perception must account for the function of the Also by which the thing of perception holds a set of sensible properties together.

According to (b), the model must account for the function of the One by which each sensible property excludes the other sensible properties in the perceptual field and by which each object in the perceptual field excludes all others. Finally, according to (c) an adequate model of Perception must account for the relation between the One and the Also which accounts the multiplicity of determinate sensible properties which appear in one’s visual field. Moreover, the model of perception needs to account for these features within its simple Russellian conception of perceptual content, viz. that we perceive the

sensory properties of a thing. More specifically, let o stand for a perceptual object and $p_1 \dots p_n$, stand for sensible properties. The naïve account of Perception would thus be stated as follows:

Perceives : $\langle o, p_1, \dots, p_n \rangle$.

Perception must thus, using only its basic Russellian framework, account for how the functions of the Also and the One and the relation between them gives rise to the set of determinate perceptual properties and objects in one's perceptual field. The rest of the Perception chapter consists in filling in this model schema in various ways to attempt to account for the One and the Also and showing that none of these further specifications correspond to the actual structure of our perceptual experience.

As in Sense-Certainty, Hegel claims that there are three ways of implementing the general model schema of Perception and contends that none of them adequately accounts for perceptual experience. The major difficulty that recurs for each attempt is that the model schema of Perception, by restricting itself to only sensible objects and properties, is unable to account for the functions of the Also and the One since these functions are not themselves sensible. The first model attributes the functions of the One and the Also to the perceptual object, the second model distributes these functions between the perceptual act and the perceptual object, and the final model attributes them to multiple perceptual objects. These models and Hegel's arguments against them will be examined in turn.

2.2 The First Model: Perceptual Object as Also and One

The general model schema of Perception claims that the content of consciousness can be adequately expressed in purely sensible terms and posits a distinction between the act of perceiving and the object which is perceived, characterizing this object as the thing with many properties. The general schema of perception is thus

Perceives: $\langle o, p_1, \dots, p_n \rangle$

Where “perceives” is a perceptual act, “o” is a sensible object, and “ p_1, \dots, p_n ” are sensible properties. But Hegel contends that the model needs to specify how o and p_1, \dots, p_n can together constitute a thing with many properties. Particularly, the model schema needs to account for the functions of the One and the Also and how the relations between them give rise to determinate perceptual content: It needs to account for the function of the One conferring determinacy on the object o and on each of the properties p_1, \dots, p_n , and for the function of the Also in making it the case that p_1, \dots, p_n are together in o.

It seems that the simplest way of accounting for these functions would be to locate them within the perceptual content itself. The first model of perception develops such a position. It claims that in perception one is aware of a sensible thing containing a multiplicity of sensible properties (i.e. of it playing the role of an Also) and excluding other sensible properties (i.e. of it playing the role of a One). Given the prior general model schema of perception,

Perceiving: $\langle o, p_1, \dots, p_n \rangle$

this model maintains that the functions of One and Also should both be located within the perceptual content, i.e. in the angle brackets “ $\langle \rangle$ ”.

Hegel argues that such an account is incapable of capturing the content of conscious experience. His argument proceeds in four phases, with each phase helping us

to attend progressively to what would be needed for such a model to be adequate to our perceptual experience. The first two phases set up simple cases in which perceptual content is characterized only as a One or only an Also, and show how our perceptual experience outstrips these simple descriptions.

The first phase of the argument ascribes the function of being a One to the perceptual object. This initial proposal portrays the object of perception purely as a one, not an also, and understands its oneness in terms of simple singularity. On this view, we perceive only a simple singular object such as an atomic spatial point or temporal moment. I look and see a singular object as a simple and unique “here” and “now” which excludes all others through the function of the One. So, it would claim that perceptual experience is structured as follows:

Perceives: <O_{one}>

But such a model is inadequate to our experience (and even to the general model schema of Perception) since we do not perceive only simple singular objects such as atomic “here” or “now” points, but rather complex objects with multiple sensible properties.

This was the very phenomenon that the model of perception was introduced to account for. The problem is thus that “the object which I apprehend presents itself purely as a One; but I also perceive in it a property which is universal, and which thereby transcends the singularity” (PhG 117). The construal of content as a simple singular was already considered in Sense-Certainty and shown to be inadequate since it failed to account for the fact that we are confronted not only by singular objects, but also by their properties. Thus, we can see that when Oneness is construed naively, “the first being of the objective essence [of the perceptual object] as a One was therefore not its true being” (PhG 117).

The second phase of the argument characterizes the content of perception solely in terms of the function of the Also. Since perceptual content does not present itself as a merely singular One, one might try to characterize this content in terms of the Also function. Hegel notes that “on account of the universality of the property, I must rather take the objective essence to be on the whole a community” (PhG 117). On such a view, the content of perception would be nothing but a community of distinct properties. The proposal is thus to describe perceptual consciousness as follows: Let “o” be a perceptual object, and “ p_1, \dots, p_n ” sensible properties, and “also” the function of aggregating properties into a community:

Perceives: $\langle O_{\text{also}}, p_1, \dots, p_n \rangle$

For example, when I look at a cherry, this sub-model would claim that I see redness and roundness together as a community and that the content of such a perceptual episode is exhausted by this community.

But Hegel argues that this sub-model fails to adequately express the content of perceptual experience since when one perceives properties as a community, one perceives each property “to be determinate, opposed to another and excluding it” (PhG 117). We see the properties of the object as determinate and, to be determinate, each property must be distinguished from other sensible properties in one’s visual field. For example, the redness of the cherry needs to be perceptually distinguished from the whiteness of the bowl on which it rests or the brownness of the table that upholds both the bowl and the cherry. To be determinate, perceptual properties need to be opposed to each other to be rendered salient in one’s visual field. In other words, perceptual properties must be subject to the function of being an exclusive One. The previous proposal presupposed

determinate sensible properties p_1, \dots, p_n while at the same time ruling out the very condition of their determinacy since each of these sensible properties can be determinate only by excluding others. Hegel can thereby conclude that “I did not in fact apprehend the objective essence correctly when I defined it as a community with others, or as a continuity; on account of the determinateness of the property, I must break up the continuity and posit the objective essence as a One that excludes” (PhG 117). Perceptual experience cannot be accounted for exclusively in terms of a community of properties but needs to contain relations of exclusion to other properties. Its content must include a “One that excludes.”

This leads to the third phase of the argument. One might think that in perception we are confronted with an object that excludes some of the sensible features in one’s perceptual field. On such a view, what it is to see a cherry as a single object, is to see it as excluding other properties in the visual field (e.g. the whiteness and hardness of the bowl in which it lies). More precisely, let $\{F\}$ be a subset of sensible features in one’s visual field, o be a sensory object, and the subscript “one” stand for the function of being an exclusive one. The sub-model of perception then takes the following form:

Perceives: $\langle o_{\text{one}}, \{F\} \rangle$

On this account, we see the perceptual object as excluding the sensible properties contained in $\{F\}$.

But Hegel points out that this characterization fails to conform to experience since we do not perceive objects as being merely exclusive. Rather, Hegel notes that “in the broken up One I find many such properties which do not affect one another but are mutually indifferent” (PhG 117). We do not, for instance, perceive a cherry as a mere

locus of exclusion that expels properties such as the whiteness and hardness of the bowl in which it rests. We also perceive it as holding some properties (such as redness and roundness) together in mutual indifference. It is thus necessary to include the function of the Also in the content of perception. The cherry is not just non-white and non-hard, but it is red and also round and also sweet, etc.

This leads to the final phase of the argument against the first model of perception which attempts to locate the two functions of perceptual thinghood, i.e. being a One and being an Also, in the content of perception. Since the object of perception must account for the fact that its properties are mutually indifferent to one another, it is now conceived as “a universal common medium in which many properties are present as sensuous universalities, each existing on its own account and, as determinate, excluding the others” (PhG 117). On this model each of the sensible properties is portrayed as playing the function of being an exclusive One, while the perceptual object plays the role of the Also as their common medium. Every property presented in one’s perceptual field is determinate and therefore excludes every other property in that field. The determinate redness we see in a cherry excludes not only the whiteness of the bowl that contains it but also the cherry’s sweetness and roundness. We see this feature as red and thus not white, or sweet, or round, or hard, etc. And we see the object as a common medium for such determinate properties (e.g. redness, sweetness, roundness, etc.). More precisely, Let o be a sensory object, p_1, \dots, p_n be a set of sensory properties, and the subscripts “also” and “one” stand for the functions of being a common medium and for being an exclusive one respectively. Then, on this model, consciousness is said to have the following structure:

Perceives: $\langle o_{\text{also}}, p_{1\text{one}}, \dots, p_{n\text{one}} \rangle$

This approach seems more plausible since it includes within its representational content both the Also and the One that Perception needs to account for.

But Hegel notes that even this account fails to adequately describe the structure of perceptual experience. The account fails in two fundamental respects. Indeed, it is these two problems that constitute the major difficulties for all the models of Perception that Hegel examines. First, given the overall restrictions of the model of Perception to include only sensible items in perceptual content, the object of perception cannot play the role of the also as a common medium since the function of being a common medium is not itself a sensible item. Hegel observes that when one attends to perception, what one sensibly perceives is “not a universal medium, but the single property by itself” (PhG 117). Strictly speaking, we sensibly perceive only sensible properties, and not more abstract properties such as being a universal medium. The account thus cannot characterize the object of perception as being a universal medium. Though we are indeed aware of the togetherness of these sensible properties, this togetherness is not itself a sensible property. So the model proposed cannot capture the content that we actually experience. This, in turn, leads to the second respect in which this sub-model of Perception fails to account for our perceptual experience. On this sub-model, sensory properties can be *properties* only by their relation to a common medium. We see a sensible feature as a property instance only by attributing the feature to something (even if just a region of one’s visual field). If, as specified by this sub-model, each feature is merely an exclusive one, then these features would be particulars rather than sensible properties. But on such a scenario the features in question would lose their perceptual determinacy. The sub-model intends for each feature to be an intrinsic and exclusive one, but it is incapable of

accounting for how this is so, since *every* feature is characterized in the same manner. The single property by itself “as such, is neither a property nor a determinate being; for now it is neither in One nor connected with others. Only when it belongs to a one is it a property, and only in relation to others is it determinate” (PhG 117). As argued in Sense-Certainty, to discriminate between various items one needs to appeal to something beyond mere particularity. In this manner, the model under consideration ends up collapsing back into the failed model of sense-certainty or “merely sensuous being in general” (PhG 117). We are therefore “thrown back to the beginning [i.e. Sense-Certainty] and drawn once again into the same cycle which supersedes itself in each moment and as a whole” (PhG 117). A different model is needed if Perception is to avoid the problems of Sense-Certainty.²⁷

2.3 The Second Model: Distributing the One or the Also to the Perceptual Act

An alternate way to implement the general model schema of Perception is to no longer attempt to locate the functions of the Also and the One in perceptual content, but rather to distribute one of those functions to the act of perceiving. Hegel explains that, for this model, “the behavior of consciousness which we have now to consider is thus so constituted that consciousness no longer merely perceives, but is also conscious of its

²⁷ At this point one might object that Hegel has failed to consider a scenario in which an object performs *both* the function of the Also and the function of the One. One might wonder why Hegel does not propose a model in which an object both holds together a variety of properties and excludes other properties. This is, after all, what comes to mind when we think of ordinary Russellian contents. The reason that Hegel fails to consider such models is that they involve attributing multiple functions to a single object. We are saying that the object is *both* One and Also. But we are offering these models as an account of how one thing can have a variety of features. No viable model of Perception can simply help itself to the phenomenon of multiple exemplification, since it is illegitimate to invoke exemplification to account for exemplification. This, I contend, is the reason that Hegel fails to consider any models which attribute the functions of the One and the Also to a single entity.

reflection into itself, and separates this from simple apprehension proper” (PhG 118). In allowing the act of perception to take on one of the necessary functions of perceptual thinghood, one might be able to avoid the problem that the general model schema of Perception restricts perceptual content to purely sensible items while the functions One and Also are not themselves sensible. The hope is that by placing one of these functions in the act of perceiving, one might be able to account for the other function in purely sensible terms. Since the model of perception constrains perceptual content to sensible properties and the functions of the One and the Also, the act of perception might take on one of these functions since the perceptual act is not limited to sensible properties in the model in the way the perceptual content is. It is plausible to think that the act of perception could play a non-sensible role and that this would allow the sensible content to play the other role. This model is worked out in two ways.

The first sub-model assigns the role of One to the content of perception and the role of Also to the act of perceiving. According to this account, “the Thing is a One, and we are conscious that this diversity by which it would cease to be a One falls in us” (PhG 119). So the Also—the function of perceptual thingness that is not One—belongs to our act of perceiving. Hegel develops this model as follows:

So in point of fact, the Thing is white only to our eyes, also tart to our tongue, also cubical to or touch, and so on. We get the entire diversity of these aspects, not from the Thing, but from ourselves; and they fall asunder in this way for us, because the eye is quite distinct from the tongue, and so on. We are thus the universal medium in which such moments are kept apart and exist each on its own. Through the fact, then, that we regard the characteristic of being a universal medium as our reflection, we preserve the self-identity and truth of the Thing, its being a One (PhG 119).

On this sub-model the content of perception is a simple one, and all the seeming diversity of perception is merely the result of the act of perceiving. Because we perceive in various ways (e.g. through seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching), we take responsibility for the seeming multiplicity of the sensory features of the object.

Perceptual content is simple, it only seems complex because of our various ways of grasping it. On the first construal then, we have the following account. Let “Fly”, “Gly”, and “Hly” stand for determinate ways of perceiving, “o” for an object, and the subscripts “also” and “one” for the functions of being an Also and a One respectively. The view is then that perceptual experience is captured as follows:

Perceives_{also} Fly, Gly, Hly: <O_{one}>

But Hegel argues that this sub-model is inadequate. When understood in this manner, the object of perception cannot be perceived as the exclusive one it is intended to be, since a perceptual object can be seen to exclude others from itself only through its sensible properties. Hegel observes that “the Thing is a One precisely by being opposed to others. But it is not as a one that it excludes others from itself, for to be a One is the universal relating of self to self, and the fact that it is a One rather makes it like all the others; it is through its determinateness that the thing excludes others” (PhG 120). Hegel here points out that one perceptual object excludes another only through its determinate properties. For example, we perceive a cherry as one thing and the bowl in which it rests as another because we see them as possessing different sensible features (e.g. redness vs whiteness). It is through the opposition of their sensible properties that we perceive the objects as distinct. But on the account under consideration, the perceptual object has no sensible properties. Rather the perceptual act takes responsibility for the multiplicity of the

sensory properties perceived. But if that is the case, we cannot experience that we, for example, perceive a cherry as an exclusive object. We can perceptually distinguish the cherry only through its properties as they oppose other properties in one's visual field, but on the current sub-model the properties do not belong to the cherry but merely to our acts of representing. Since the multiple sensible features of experience do not belong to the perceptual object, there is no way to perceive that object as an exclusive one. The account thus fails to capture the structure and content of perceptual experience. To be a One a perceptual object must be exclusive, and to be exclusive it needs to have sensible properties. We have to admit that "things are therefore in and for themselves determinate; they have properties by which they distinguish themselves from others. Since the property is the thing's own property or a determinateness in the thing itself, the thing has a number of properties" (PhG 120).

This suggests a second sub-model. Instead of assigning the Also to the perceptual act and the One to the perceptual object, one can reverse the assignment and attribute the One to the perceptual act and the Also to the perceptual object. According to this view "the thing is the also, or the universal medium in which the many properties subsist apart from one another, without touching or cancelling one another" (PhG 120). The content of perception is said to consist in a multiplicity of sensible properties. Hegel claims that in this manner the thing is "raised to the level of a genuine also, since it becomes a collection of 'matters' and, instead of being a One, becomes merely an enclosing surface" (PhG 121). A perceptual object is nothing more than an enclosing surface for a multiplicity of sensible properties. But the fact that sensible properties are attributed to a single perceptual object is said to be a function of the act of perceiving. "It is the unity

which consciousness has to take upon itself; for the Thing itself is the subsistence of the many diverse and independent properties” (PhG 121). The act of perceiving can be said to take up the function of unity (i.e. the One) in two ways. First, it unifies sensible properties into perceptual objects. For example, given a particular sensory array, consciousness might place the properties of redness and roundness together in a single object (e.g. in a cherry), whiteness and hardness together (e.g. in a bowl), and brownness and woodenness together (e.g. in a table). From the sensible properties of redness, roundness, whiteness, hardness, brownness, and woodenness, the perceptual act is responsible for creating the unified objects of a cherry, a bowl, and a table. In this manner the act of perceiving is responsible for the “oneness of the thing” (PhG 121). Second, the perceptual act’s role as the One is needed to bestow determinacy on of the sensory properties themselves. Hegel illustrates this kind of unification with the example of a grain of salt that is white, and cubical, and tart. He notes that:

But in so far as it is white, it is not cubical, and in so far as it is cubical and also white, it is not tart, and so on. Positing these properties as a oneness is the work of consciousness alone which, therefore, has to prevent them from collapsing into oneness in the thing. To this end it brings in the ‘in so far’, in this way preserving the properties as mutually external, and the Thing as the Also” (PhG 121).

According to Hegel, the determinacy of each of the properties is conferred through a perceptual act which distinguishes every property “in so far as” it is not another. So, for example, the redness of a cherry is determinate insofar as it is distinct from the cherry’s roundness or sweetness. This sub-model can thus be summarized as follows. Let “F” be a set of sensory properties given in experience, “Oly” be the perceptual act of grouping properties together into an object, “Ply” be the act of rendering each of the properties in F

determinate in so far as they are distinct from every other member of F, and “one” and “also” be the functions of One and Also respectively:

Perceives $Oly_{one}, Ply_{one}: \langle F_{also} \rangle$

But Hegel argues that this sub-model does not correspond to perceptual experience since it “contains in its own self an opposite truth” to the one it propounds (PhG 122). Though Hegel does not spell out this argument in detail, it follows from the same principles considered earlier. Specifically, the sub-model can account neither for the Also nor the One of perceptual experience. First, Hegel can argue that it fails to account for the Also because if the determinacy of sensible properties were grounded exclusively in the act of isolating one property “insofar as” it is not another, then the properties themselves that make up the content of perception would not be determinate. On such a view, the content of perception must then be said to be indeterminate. But the content must be determinate if it is to be an Also. A multiplicity of sensible properties can be a multiplicity only if those properties are distinct from one another. Second, the sub-model fails to account for the One both regarding determinate perceptual properties and regarding determinate perceptual objects. The ability to single out and focus on one sensible property “insofar as” it is distinct from others, presupposes that the property in question is determinate. It is the determinacy of sensible properties that is responsible for our ability to single them out, rather than our singling them out which is responsible for their determinacy. Likewise, as argued earlier, without determinate sensible properties, one could not single out particular perceptual objects. The second attempt at the One and the Also between the perceptual act and its perceptual object thus fails. If Perception is to

account for both functions, it requires different model. It seems that both functions need to be contained within the representational content of perception.

2.4 The Third Model: Ascribing the One and the Also to Distinct Perceptual Objects

The final model, like the first, locates the One and the Also in the content of perception. This account is motivated by the insight that the first model failed because it was not complex enough to capture the structure of perceptual experience. Specifically, it attributes the failure of the prior account to the fact that it contained only one perceptual object in its content. The thought now is that by adding an additional object one can account for the functions of the One and the Also by distributing them between the two objects. Hegel explains:

The Also, or the indifferent difference, thus falls as much within the thing as does the oneness; but since the two are different they do not fall within the same thing, but in different things. The contradiction which is present in the objective essence as a whole is distributed between two objects (PhG 123).

The hope is that the problems of Perception can be solved by including multiple objects in the representational content of perception and making each object responsible for a function of perceptual thinghood (i.e. the One and the Also). According to this model, one object holds together a multiplicity of properties and a different object excludes other properties. Let “F” and “G” be partitions of a set of sensory properties given in experience, “o1” and “o2” be distinct objects, and the subscripts “also” and “one” be the functions of Also and One respectively. This model claims that experience has the following structure:

Perceives: $\langle o1_{\text{also}}, F; o2_{\text{one}}, G \rangle$

By distributing the two functions of perceptual thinghood across two objects one might think the problems that afflicted the earlier models can be avoided. The proponent of such a view would, for example, claim that in the experience of seeing a cherry in a bowl, we see redness, roundness, and sweetness as together in light of one object, and as excluding whiteness and solidness through a different object.

But Hegel argues that this model is not successful. To function, the model requires two distinct perceptual objects, one grounding the One and the other the Also. Yet it cannot account for the distinction between these objects, since, as argued earlier, given the resources of the basic model schema of Perception (which limits itself to only sensible objects and properties), perceptual objects are rendered distinct only through their relations to sensible properties in one's experiential field. It is therefore illegitimate to invoke distinct objects to explain inclusion and exclusion relations among sensible properties, since the distinctness of these objects would itself depend upon the very phenomena it was being invoked to explain. In other words, to resolve the tension between the One and the Also of Perception, this model requires that each of things must be determined:

As being itself a different thing, and it has its essential difference in its own self; but all the while, not as if this difference were an opposition in the Thing itself. On the contrary, for itself it is a simple determinateness which constitutes the Thing's essential character, and differentiates it from others" (PhG 124).

The things must be different from one another to play the roles of the One and the Also without falling into the contradictions of the previous models. But with the resources provided by the general model schema of Perception, one cannot account for the difference between these objects in a non-question begging manner since objects are said

to be individuated only via their sensible properties. The core difficulty is that “the thing is posited as being for itself, or as the absolute negation of all otherness, therefore as purely self-related negation; but the negation that is self-related is the suspension of itself; in other words, the thing has its essential being in another thing” (PhG 126). To have two separate things capable of solving the contradiction between the One and the Also of perception in a non-question begging manner, these things would need to be intrinsically individuated (apart from any properties they might include or exclude). But, given the theoretical machinery allowed by the model, this would be to claim that the objects are simple atomic “here” or “now” points—a position already been discredited in the Sense Certainty chapter. Indeed, the whole point of Perception’s model schema was to account for the diversity of objects we encounter in experience by appealing to sensible properties. One cannot then merely posit the diversity of those objects to account for the presence of determinate sensible properties.

By explaining the failures of these three models Hegel takes himself to have shown that the model schema of Perception cannot provide an adequate description of conscious experience. We thus need to find another way of elucidating the unity and multiplicity of experience. The most straightforward way of doing so would be to adopt an account of content that is not restricted to the use of simple sensible properties. It is this proposal that is taken up and developed in Force and the Understanding.

Through this close examination of Hegel’s arguments in Perception, we can see that, in rejecting a Russellian account of content, Hegel does indeed reject one particular form of semantic givenness. But the Perception chapter does not commit him to rejecting all forms of semantic givenness by adopting a global conceptual holism as Neo-

Sellarsians suggest. So, given the arguments Hegel has provided so far, it is still possible for Hegel to accept some other form of semantic givenness even though he rejects the Russellian account of content provided in Perception.

3. Conclusion

Despite its popularity, the ES interpretation has been shown to encounter several problems. It cannot textually account for how Perception is said to arise from Sense-Certainty, does not pay attention to the specifically perceptual character of negation used in this chapter, and portrays Hegel as presenting a question begging argument against his opponents. But we have seen that a phenomenological interpretation can avoid these problems by narrowing the focus of Hegel's arguments to specifically perceptual content. This phenomenological interpretation has the additional advantage of being capable of uniting the insights of traditional ES and ontological interpretations. On the one hand, it acknowledges that Hegel's argumentative strategy is thoroughly epistemological. He attempts to describe the structure of perceptual experience and appeals to our knowledge of what confronts us in experience to discredit each of the various proposals in the Perception chapter. The series of arguments in the chapter are framed in terms of our epistemic access to the content of our experience and exploit this access to evaluate the various models of Perception. On the other hand, the arguments in Perception also concern the ontological constitution of objects since the content specified in the various models is identified with sensible objects and their properties. Because the content in question appeals to the constitution of perceptual objects as such, the forgoing interpretation can acknowledge that ontological interpretations have been correct to call

attention to Hegel's account of how the relation between sensible objects and their properties can be coherently understood. In this respect, Hegel's nuanced arguments in *Perception* also stand as a challenge to contemporary philosophers who often simply help themselves to the concept of exemplification in their attempts to solve the many-properties problem. Hegel's reflections here show that if such an approach is to be successful, the meaning of exemplification needs to be worked out precisely.²⁸

²⁸ Many philosophers today hold a representationalist account of perception that portrays content as consisting of objects and properties. One advantage to such a view is that it is thought to avoid the many properties problem taken to afflict versions of adverbialism which attempt to account for perception, not in terms of representational content, but in terms of ways of representing.

Adverbialism is motivated in part by the desire to provide a simple and unified account of perceptual content that applies to cases of veridical perception (e.g. I see a tomato as red and it is red), illusion (e.g. I see a tomato as red and it is green with red lights shining on it), and hallucination (e.g. I see what appears to be a red tomato, but there is really nothing there). Given that these cases can have the same experiential character even though the actual objects and properties they refer to vary, one is tempted to say that perception is best thought of as a way of representing. Such adverbial accounts would maintain that the above cases are cases of representing redly, rather than representing a red object. Just as dancing a waltz gives the illusion through its surface grammar that waltzes are objects, so our discourse about perception makes it seem as if one perceives objects. But in reality a waltz is a way of dancing, and red a way of perceiving. This strategy appears to provide a straightforward way of accounting for the phenomenology of perception.

However, such adverbial views face what is called the many property problem. Jackson articulated this problem by asking us to consider perceptual experiences that involve multiple features.²⁸ Consider, for example, the case of seeing a yellow triangle. It seems that the adverbialist has only two ways of accounting for this, either (1) the experience is compositionally structured (e.g. seeing yellowly and triangularly) or (2) it is not (e.g. seeing yellow-triangularly). If we adopt (2) (the non-compositional reading), then we cannot explain the validity of some common sense entailments. We think, for example, that the fact that (a) Schelling sees a yellow triangle entails that (b) Schelling sees yellow. Since the analysis is thought to be non-compositional (seeing yellow-triangularly is thought to be an irreducible content) it cannot explain why the entailment obtains. This problem can be avoided by adopting (1) (the compositional account). But this view also faces a problem. For it cannot explain the distinction between the following: (c) Schelling sees a yellow triangle and a red circle. And (d) Schelling sees a red triangle and a yellow circle. The adverbial interpretation of the content of both is that Schelling sees yellowly, triangularly, redly, and circlely. It is argued that one must introduce objects which exemplify the relevant properties to allow the compositional view to account for the difference of content between such states. (c) attaches yellow and triangle to one object and red and circle to another object. (d) attaches red and triangle to one object and yellow and circle to another. The many properties problem is one of the primary objections to adverbial accounts and leads philosophers to accept forms of representationalism, claiming that perception is a matter of having representational states whose content contains objects and properties.

Hegel's argument in *Perception* shows that contemporary philosophers cannot avoid the many properties problem so easily. Hegel can be seen as contending that views which appeal to contents containing objects and properties must still account for the many properties problem, since to simply stipulate that a certain set of properties go together in an object is not yet to explain what such going together amounts to. The exemplification relation itself needs to be accounted for if it is actually going to explain why a set of properties belongs to one object while, at the same time, this object excludes all other

This chapter, in part, is currently being prepared for submission for publication.

Peter Yong was the sole author of this material.

properties. Contemporary philosophers would do well to pay attention to Hegel's argument and provide an explanation of what they mean by exemplification and how it can successfully resolve the many properties problem.

Chapter Four: Hegel's Übersinnliche Bedeutung

0. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I argued that Hegel presents a powerful criticism of one specific form of semantic givenness—a form which today would be identified with a Russellian theory of content. Russellians hold to an atomistic conception of objects and properties in which objects and properties are said to be what they are independently of their relations. So, by equating content with these atomistically conceived objects and properties, Russellian theories commit themselves to a form of semantic givenness. For example, on a Russellian view, when one thinks that <Mont Blanc is white> one entertains a thought whose constituents are Mont Blanc itself and the property of whiteness. And since, for Russellians, Mont Blanc and whiteness can exist independently of their relations to other objects and properties, the thought that <Mont Blanc is white> of which they are constituents has the content that it does independently of its relation to other contents. In the Perception chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel rejects such an account of perceptual content, but not, as many contemporary interpreters claim, because he adopts conceptual holism (and thereby rejects all forms of semantic givenness). Rather, Hegel rejects this specific form of semantic givenness for phenomenological reasons and, in the process, adopts a perceptual rather than a conceptual holism.

Similar considerations hold for Hegel's criticisms of another popular account of content espousing semantic givenness—an account which we would today call Fregean.

Fregean theories of content are the traditional rivals of Russellian theories. They identify content not with objects and properties, as Russellian accounts do, but with the senses (e.g. abstract linguistic meanings or perceptual modes of presentation) by which one grasps objects and properties. So, for example, the Fregean holds that, in thinking <Mont Blanc is white>, neither Mont Blanc nor the property of whiteness constitute the content of one's thought. The content instead consists in the mode of presentation by which one grasps the mountain and its color. For instance, one could think of Mont Blanc through the linguistic mode of presentation as "the highest mountain in the alps" and white through the same visual mode of presentation as when one sees snow. In this manner, Fregeans, unlike Russellians, distinguish between sense and reference. Senses are what constitute the content of thought, whereas reference is what is grasped by entertaining that thought. Yet, despite being rival accounts, both Fregeanism and Russellianism are committed to semantic givenness, since they both take content to be atomistic. Russellians equate content with atomistically conceived objects and properties, and Fregeans identify it with atomistically conceived senses.

Brandom has recently argued that Hegel can be read as offering a criticism of Fregean theories of content. As with the accounts of content considered in *Sense-Certainty and Perception*, Brandom claims that Hegel's argument against Fregeanism turns on his commitment to a holistic theory of content grounded in social practice. By rejecting all forms of semantic givenness, Hegel would thereby reject the specific version of it required by traditional Fregeanism. In particular, Brandom claims that Hegel's holistic theory of content provides "a novel, interesting, and potentially valuable account

of the relations between the concepts of sense and reference”¹ — something which traditional Fregean accounts have long struggled to accomplish. Brandom takes Hegel to develop his account of the relation between sense and reference in *The Science of Logic*, beginning with the doctrine of Essence and culminating in the doctrine of the Concept.²

Unsurprisingly, Brandom claims that the key to this account is its holism:

Hegel is a holist about the conceptual contents we grasp in thought and express in speech and action... For Hegel conceptual contents are identified and individuated by their place in a network articulated by relations of material incompatibility and (so) material inference (determinate negation and mediation). Grasp of them consists in the capacity to move around in that network according to those relations, acknowledging their normative force in the experiential process of resolving incompatible commitments, both practical and cognitive, extracting inferential consequences of both sorts, and elaborating, pursuing, and adjusting plans in the cycle of action and judgment.³

Brandom claims that this holistic account of content is what allows Hegel to explain the relation between sense and reference.

Whereas traditional Fregeanism is often criticized for failing to explain what it means to say that referents are grasped through their corresponding senses (thereby leaving the relation between sense and reference mysterious), Brandom claims that Hegel can explicate this relation in terms of social practice. For, on Brandom’s pragmatist reading, grasping a sense is nothing but the ability to make appropriate inferences with it. For example, to grasp the sense “warm” is to be able to infer that if something is warm, then it is not cold. One thus does not need to claim, as traditional Fregeans often do, that the mind stands in a mysterious relation to abstract objects existing in an invisible “third

¹ Robert Brandom, “Recollection, Representation, and Agency” in *Spirit of Trust*, 64.

² Brandom, “Recollection,” 66.

³ Brandom, “Recollection,” 67.

realm”. The grasping of a sense can be accounted for purely in terms of one’s implicit knowledge of the rules governing rational discourse.

Likewise, Brandom claims that, on his pragmatist reading, Hegel can also explain how one refers to a referent by grasping a corresponding sense. For, on Brandom’s view, to take a sense to refer to a referent is nothing more than taking one’s claim to be answerable to the world. For instance, in making the claim that a particular stone has been warmed by the sun, I take the truth of my claim to be governed by the stone its properties and relations. If it has indeed been warmed by the sun, my statement is true. But, if it has not been so warmed, then my statement is false. Specifically, Brandom claims:

What establishes the relation between sense and referent is treating one’s current commitments as setting a normative standard that now governs (and implicitly already along did govern) one’s previous commitments. What one must do in order to thereby to be taking it in practice that one is talking or thinking about some way things are in themselves is to perform a recollection (*Erinnerung*) of the experiential process that yielded that result. This is a sort of rational reconstruction of the development of the conceptual contents one currently endorses. It is telling a certain kind of retrospective story about it: a story that exhibits it as the culmination of an expressively progressive trajectory selected from one’s actual experiential past. That is one in which the way things are in themselves—as one currently takes that to be—is presented as having been all along implicit in each of the ways things were for oneself, with each included transformation in response to the acknowledgement of incompatible commitments getting one closer to the actual conceptual contents.⁴

By providing what Brandom calls a “Whiggish history” of one’s current position, one takes the putative referent of one’s current conceptions to be what previous conceptions implicitly referred to all along. So, for example, we might take the sun, as we currently

⁴ Brandom, “Recollection”, 78.

conceive it, to be the actual referent of ancient accounts that mistakenly assumed that the sun was a god. In this manner, Brandom takes what he believes to be Hegel's holist account of content to be able to give a plausible analysis of the relation between sense and reference.

I believe that Brandom is right to note that Hegel offers a criticism of traditional Fregean accounts of content. But he is wrong about the location and nature of this criticism. He is mistaken about its location, since it can be found much earlier in Hegel's work than the places Brandom appeals to. Rather than having to wait for the doctrine of Essence, and ultimately the doctrine of the Concept, in the *Science of Logic* to find Hegel's criticism, it can be found in the Force and Understanding section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. While the Kantian dimensions of Hegel's argument in this section have been frequently discussed (especially as it relates to appearance and the supersensible world), I contend that interpreters have failed to notice that Hegel's argument also applies to Fregean accounts of content.⁵ Brandom is also mistaken about the nature of Hegel's objection to Fregean content. For Hegel's criticism does not turn on embracing a pragmatist and holist account of content as Brandom claims, but rather on phenomenological considerations. In this chapter, I will set forth Hegel's sophisticated argument against what we would today call Fregean content by providing a novel phenomenological interpretation of the Force and the Understanding section of the

⁵ For the Kantian dimensions of Hegel's argument see Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 131-142; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 42; Jon Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000); 88-90, Dina Emundts, *Erfahren und Erkennen* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2012), 219-295; and Eric Watkins, "Kraft und Gesetz: Hegels Kant-Kritik im Kapitel 'Kraft und Verstand' der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*" in *International Yearbook for German Idealism* 10 (2012): 228-250.

Phenomenology. One upshot of this reading will again be to show that though Hegel rejects a specific form of the semantic given, his arguments by no means depend on the rejection of semantic givenness as such.

This chapter will proceed in two sections. In the first section, Hegel's basic model schema of force is set forth in terms of Fregean content. Section two then examines Hegel's arguments against the three models of force and the understanding. The first model attempts to account for the relation between sense and reference in terms of the interplay of forces, the second model attempts to account for the relation in terms of laws, and the third model attempts to account for the relation in terms of contradiction or what he describes as the inverted world.

1. A Fregean Reading of the Model Schema of Force and the Understanding

The model schema of Force and the Understanding is meant to overcome the failures of the various models of Perception. The models of Perception, like those of Sense-Certainty, are conditioned by the sensible (PhG 129). Because they are conditioned by sensibility, they are formulated in terms of consciousness's awareness of singular objects (PhG 130). Both Sense-Certainty and Perception are thereby governed by the view that sensible intuition passively receives singular objects: Sense certainty representing these singular objects as pure *thises*, and Perception adding that the *thises* also have sensible properties. So, for example, what sense-certainty represents as a mere "this", or "here" or "now", Perception represents as red, round, and sweet. The problem for both of these sensibly conditioned accounts, however, is that they fail to capture the determinate content that confronts us in consciousness. Sense-certainty is unable to

account for how one “this” is distinct from any other “this” and Perception cannot account for how one thing can have multiple sensible properties. Hegel thus observes that “the truth which is supposed to be won by this logic of the perceptual process proves to be in one and the same respect the opposite and thus to have as its essence a universality which is devoid of distinctions and determinations” (PhG 130). The models of Perception were meant to secure the singularity of the perceived object by attributing distinct sensible properties to it, but through the dialectic of Perception, it was shown that the basic model schema lacked the resources to account for how such properties could be predicated to an object (in what Hegel called the relation of the Also to the One), and, as a result, was unable to account for the determinacy of either properties or objects.

The model schema of Force and the Understanding is introduced to solve this problem. The idea is that by appealing to universals which are not conditioned by sensibility, universals which display what Hegel calls “unconditioned absolute universality” (PhG 129), one might be able to account for the determinate content of consciousness. Hegel thus observes that “in the dialectic of sense-certainty, seeing and hearing have been lost to consciousness; and, as perception, consciousness has arrived at thoughts, which it brings together for the first time in the unconditioned universal.” (PhG 129). Through the failures of the various models of sense-certainty and perception we now come to a new model schema. This model schema, instead of including only perceptual episodes of seeing, hearing, etc. now involves thoughts which it relates to one another through an unconditioned universal. The universals of perception, because they

were conditioned by sensibility, were always related to a singular object.⁶ So, for example, the universal red was viewed only as belonging to one object (such as a cherry) or being excluded from another (such as a bowl). Sensibly conditioned universality was a “universality which is opposed to, and conditioned by singular being” (PhG 131). Such universals were thought of either as belonging together in an object (through the Also function) or excluding other universals (through the One function). And the models of perception were assumed to have “wholly substantial material and content” (PhG 131) since such content was identified with sensible substances and their properties. By extending the kinds of universals allowed in the model past those conditioned by sensibility, thereby entering “the realm of the understanding” (PhG 129), one can allow for universals to relate to each other in ways that extend beyond their mere co-exemplification or exclusion within a spatial location. For example, the universal *human* can be thought to contain the universals *rational* and *animal*. These universals are not related to each other as are sensible universals to particular space time instances, but relate in a more abstract way. It is not as if we see the concepts rationality and animality in the concept of human in the same way that we see that a cherry is red and round: The cherry *is* red and round but the concept of humanity is itself neither rational nor an animal. Concepts contain or encode their constituent elements rather than directly exemplifying them. The hope is that by allowing these mental entities (*Gedankendingen*), which he identifies with the “pure essences, absolute elements and powers” (PhG 131), and the new relations that they can bear to one another in the unconditioned universal

⁶ Though, as noted in the last chapter, these objects are taken to be extremely minimal.

into the model, one can account the functions of the One and the Also and thereby ground the determinacy of the sensible content given in experience. Hegel describes how these new thought entities are meant to capture the content of experience as follows:

But it is in fact these essentialities within which perceptual understanding runs to and fro through every kind of material and content; they are the cohesive power and mastery over that content and they alone are what the sensuous is *as essence* for consciousness, they are what determines the relations of the sensuous to it, and it is in them that the process of perception and of its truth runs its course. (PhG 131).

Hegel makes five claims about the new non-sensible essentialities here: (i) in them perception runs to and fro through its material and content (i.e. as things with properties), (ii) they are the cohesive power [*Zusammenhalt*] and mastery [*Herrschaft*] of that content, (iii) they are what the sensuous is as essence for consciousness, (iv) they determine the relations of the sensuous to consciousness, and (v) the process of perception runs its course in them.

Hegel's first claim is that perception's movement through its content, which it identifies with objects and their properties, occurs in thinkable essentialities. What Perception took for its immediate content is, in fact, mediated by non-sensible essentialities. Instead of perceiving sensible features directly, one thinks of them through non-sensible essentialities. For example, we now know that we do not perceive redness and roundness directly, but perceive them *as features of a cherry*. One does not perceive redness and roundness, but rather a red round cherry. But the essence of the cherry is not itself something sensible. For it has a particular genetic structure and evolutionary history which cannot be accounted for in simple sensible terms like "red", "round", or "sweet".

Hegel's second claim clarifies how these essences mediate the objects and properties of Perception. Essences do this by holding together and controlling the relevant sensible objects and properties. They play the role of the One and the Also, and thereby account for the exemplification relation between the objects and properties. The reason, for example, that redness and roundness belong to the same spatio-temporal location, is that they both belong to the essence of a cherry which manifests itself through those properties at that time and place.

The third claim is then that these essentialities are what the sensible is for consciousness. They are what consciousness is confronted with and thereby mediates the sensible singular object and its properties. The fourth claim is thus that the essentialities determine the relation of the sensible objects and properties to consciousness. The sensible thing can only appear to consciousness through the essentialities that consciousness is directly aware of. Hegel's final claim is the reiteration of the fact that these essentialities are posited in light of the failure of Perception to capture the content of consciousness. The process of perception, in truth, runs its course in them. So we now have a picture in which there is a layer of thinkable essences which mediates between sensible objects and the consciousness which perceives them. For example, through the essence <cherry> I can grasp the togetherness of redness and roundness at a location.

From a contemporary perspective, the forgoing transition from Perception to Understanding is best portrayed as a movement from a Russellian to a Fregean account of content. Whereas, on a Russellian view propositional content is identified with objects and properties, on a Fregean view it is identified with the senses through which objects and properties present themselves. So, for example, consider the case in which one learns

that Reimarus, the charming friend of Lessing, was the author of the Wolfenbüttel fragments (a brilliant and incendiary historical analysis of the gospel tradition). The difference between “Reimarus” and “the author of the Wolfenbüttel fragments” is cognitively significant. One could believe, for instance, that Reimarus was mild mannered while the author of Wolfenbüttel fragments was forceful and outspoken. It is difficult to account for this difference of cognitive significance if the content of both terms is the man Reimarus himself, since the identity statement would merely claim that Reimarus = Reimarus. To account for this difference, Fregeans distinguish between sense and reference. On this view, though the expressions “Reimarus” and “the author of the Wolfenbüttel fragments” have the same referent, viz. the man Reimarus, they nonetheless have different senses through which we grasp that referent. These different senses account for the differences in cognitive significance of the expressions associated with them.

The difference between Russellian and Fregean views can be further clarified using the perceptual examples of the previous chapter. Consider again the case of perceiving a cherry as red, round, and sweet. A Russellian would provide the following account of the content of this perceptual episode. Let “o” be an object, “P1” be the property of being red, “P2” be the property of being round, and “P3” be the property of being sweet. The perceptual episode could thus be captured as:

Perceives: $\langle o, P1, P2, P3 \rangle$

The cherry itself along with its sensible properties of redness, roundness, and sweetness constitute the content of the perceptual episode. The Fregean, in contrast, would hold that such a model is too simplistic. Instead of a one level account of content, we need to

distinguish between the levels of sense and reference. Let “o” and “P1”, “P2”, and “P3” be the same as in the previous model and let “So” be the sense under which o presents itself, “↔” be the presentation relation, and “Sp1”, “Sp2”, and “Sp3” be the senses in which P1, P2, and P3 present themselves respectively. The content of the episode would thus be:

Perceives: $\langle \text{So}, \text{Sp1}, \text{Sp2}, \text{Sp3} \rangle \leftrightarrow \{o, \text{P1}, \text{P2}, \text{P3}\}$

We perceive the various senses of the object and its properties (in this case the cherry and its particular shade of redness, the particular way its circularity looks, and the distinct taste of sweetness), and through these senses we grasp the referent (viz. the cherry with its properties). Although the property of red, for example, can manifest itself in different ways (e.g. it can appear differently from various angles and in various lighting conditions), it is nonetheless a single property. The hope is then that by adding the distinction between the multiplicity of senses that confront us in experience and the referents that manifest themselves through such senses, we will have a model sophisticated enough to account for the determinate content of consciousness.

As in the previous chapters, consciousness takes content to be external. Hegel notes that what has emerged for the understanding:

Is the Notion [*Begriff*] of the True—but only as the implicit being of the True, which is not yet Notion, or which lacks the being-for-self of consciousness, and which the Understanding without knowing itself therein, lets go its own way. This truth follows out its own essence, so that consciousness plays no part in its free realization, but merely looks on and simply apprehends it (PhG 133).

Here Hegel claims that we now have an account that actually corresponds to the content given in experience, which he calls the *Begriff*. But, since consciousness does not

recognize itself in this content, not realizing that it *is* the content which it confronts, it takes the content to be something external and independent, lacking “being-for-self”.

Though still conceived as external to consciousness, the content is now specified as something essentially relational. It is this relationality that governs the basic model schema of force and the understanding:

The unity of ‘being-for-self’ and ‘being-for-another’ is posited; in other words, the absolute antithesis is posited as the self-identical essence. [... .] In general, to be for itself and to be in relation to an other constitutes the nature and essence of the content, whose truth consists in its being unconditionally universal; and the result is simply and solely universal. (PhG 134).

Now what Hegel labels “being-for-self” and “being-for-another” are unified. Consider again the relation between the property of red and its various manifestations. What it is to be red is to be able to manifest itself as red in various circumstances and what it is to be a manifestation of red is to refer back to the property of red. Content now involves an internal relation between manifestation and what is manifested. In contemporary terms, content now is conceived of as consisting of both sense and reference and in maintaining that the two bear an internal relation to one another. To be a sense is to be a mode of presentation of or way of grasping a referent and to be a referent is to present itself or render itself graspable through various senses.⁷

There is hope that the model schema of force and the understanding can resolve the problems of the models of Perception and provide an adequate account of the determinate content of consciousness. By including a distinction between sense and

⁷ Hegel’s account concerns only what today would be called object dependent senses. Frege himself believed that there could be senses without referents.

reference one could attempt to account for the thinghood of the perceptual thing (in accounting for the roles of the One and the Also). But just as Perception needed to clarify what was meant by the exemplification relation by explaining how exactly the roles of the One and the Also could be satisfied by its models, so Force and Understanding must explain what is meant by the presentation or grasping relation. What does it mean to say that a referent presents itself in a sense or that the understanding can grasp a referent through a sense? In the rest of the chapter, Hegel presents three attempts of filling out this model schema and argues for their inadequacy. Yet he also shows how, when viewed from another perspective, the final model can provide a more adequate account.

2. Three Models and Their Problems

2.1 The First Model: Presentation as Force

The first model set forth to account for the presentation relation continues to conceive of content in terms of independent objects, only now the objects are taken to have non-sensible properties. Hegel defines these new objects with non-sensible properties in terms as “forces” and attempts to use them to explain the presentation relation. At the end of the dialectic of Perception we were left with a movement in which the function of the Also ended up collapsing into the function of the One, and, alternately, the function of the One ended up unravelling into the function of the Also. In Perception, we saw that “the ‘matters’ posited as independent directly pass over into their unity, and their unity directly unfolds its diversity, and this once again reduces itself to unity” (PhG 136). Hegel then stipulates that “this movement is what is called force.” (PhG 136).

According to Hegel, force thus has two aspects, which he calls force expressed and force proper:

One of its moments, the dispersal of the independent ‘matters’ in their being, is the expression of force; but force, taken as that in which they have disappeared, is force proper, force which has been driven back into itself from its expression. First, however, the force which is driven back into itself must express itself; and, secondly, it is still force remaining within itself in the expression, just as much as it is expression in this self-containedness (PhG 136).

Force expressed corresponds to the various sensible matters of Perception such as the redness and roundness we experience in the seeing a cherry. Force proper corresponds to that in which those independent matters disappear, or the force as it is driven back into itself. Force proper is the non-sensible ground that expresses itself in the sensible matters. In our example, it would be the non-sensible essence of the cherry which expresses itself as red and round. In this manner, force expressed can be understood as corresponding to sense, and force proper to reference. It thereby allows us to clarify the presentation relation between sense and reference in terms of the expression relation constitutive of a force. To successfully account for the determinacy of perceptual content, force would need to take on the functions of the One and the Also. Given the resources so far, viz. a single force which expresses itself, there are two ways that this can occur in the model: either force proper plays the role of the One and the force expressed that of the Also, or force expressed plays the role of the One and force proper that of the Also. But Hegel argues that both options lead to problems.

Suppose that force proper takes on the function of being an exclusive One. Force proper is here posited “as a substantial extreme” and “with the express character of a One” (PhG 137). Force expressed would have to take the role of the Also. “The many

subsisting matters are something outside the force and other than it. But force must be this subsistence and express itself” (PhG 137). So, on this account, force expressed would be the many subsisting matters. Consider again the example of seeing a red round cherry in one’s kitchen. In this case, the multiple sensible matters of redness and roundness are held together as an expression of force. And force proper, that which expresses itself, is responsible for the cherry’s exclusivity. The reason that the cherry does not appear to us as white or porcelain (as the bowl on which it rests does) is that its force proper excludes these expressions. In this manner, one could claim that this determinate perceptual content is grounded in the fact that an exclusive one (i.e. force proper) expresses itself in multiple matters (i.e. force expressed). The expression relation of a force might, in this manner, be sufficient to account for determinate content.

But Hegel argues that this theory does not account for the determinate content that confronts us in experience. The various arguments of the Perception chapter revealed that to be an exclusive One, something must simultaneously be an Also. So, in the case of seeing a cherry, for a force proper to exclude whiteness and being made of porcelain, it must include redness and roundness. But this means that force proper must itself play the role of the Also and cannot merely be an exclusive One, since force’s “expression is necessary, what is posited as another essence [viz. the Also of the various expressions of force] is in Force itself.” (PhG 137). Force proper thus cannot be defined as purely exclusive, but is essentially related to the multiplicity of expressed force. For force proper to play the role of the One it must also play the role of the Also.

In response one might claim that force proper plays the role of the Also, and that force expressed takes on the function of the One. On this account, “force is rather itself

this universal medium in which the moments subsist as ‘matters’ [...]. It exists, therefore, now as the medium of the unfolded ‘matters’.” (PhG 137) Force proper is now the common medium in which the particular unfolded expressions of force subsist. The idea here is that each expression of force is itself an atomic individual (each of which is its own distinct matter) and plays the role of an exclusive one. So, for example, red and round, as expressions of force, will each be a One that excludes all others. Force proper, in contrast, accounts for their togetherness. Red and round, in this case, would belong together since “force has expressed itself” in just this way (PhG 137).

But Hegel argues that this option also fails to account for the content of experience. Again, given the conclusions of the arguments in Perception, we have seen that whatever is perceived as an Also must likewise be perceived as an exclusive One. Thus, to be aware of force proper as an Also, or a common medium, one must be aware of it as an exclusive one. For example, when we are aware of the force proper of a cherry including redness and roundness, we also need to be aware of its exclusion of other matters such as whiteness and being made of porcelain. We are thus aware that force proper “equally essentially [...] has the form of the supersession of the subsisting ‘matters’, or is essentially a One” (PhG 137). Force proper must not only express itself through various senses but must also exclude the senses in which it does not express itself. Force proper then cannot play the role of the Also while its expression plays the role of the One. The roles of the Also and the One cannot be accounted for by distributing them between force proper and force expressed and the presentation relation thus cannot be explained in terms of the expression relation in a force.

Thus, in light of the failure of both of these attempts to distribute the function of the One and the Also between the two aspects of a single force, we must find a more sophisticated model. The simplest way of doing so would be to include multiple forces in the model. The One and the Also would then not be distributed among the two aspects of a single force, but would rather be played by two distinct forces, each of which has the aspects of being force proper and force expressed.

On this second way of implementing the model there are therefore two forces and the functions of the One and the Also are distributed between them. Hegel explains:

There are at the same time two forces present; the concept (*Begriff*) of both is no doubt the same, but it has gone forth from its unity into a duality. Instead of the antithesis remaining entirely and essentially only a moment, it seems, by its self-diremption into two wholly independent forces, to have withdrawn from the controlling unity. (PhG 138)

On this account there are two forces. Though both are conceived in the same way (i.e. the *Begriff* of both is the same), they are nonetheless numerically distinct. Instead of having the antithesis between the One and the Also as a moment distributed between force proper and force expressed, there are now two independent forces that stand opposed to one another. Since there are now two forces, one independent force can take on the role of the One and the other can take up the role of the Also. To illustrate once more with the example of seeing a cherry in a bowl, the fact that red and round go together is grounded in one force and the fact that white and being made of porcelain are excluded is grounded in another force.

For such a model to be successful it must account for how these two independent forces can be conceived of as independent. It cannot do so in terms of the perceptual matters that they ground, since we saw that such attempts were unsuccessful in the

dialectic of perception. Hegel suggests that though the needed independence cannot be accounted for through their content in non-question begging manner, one may be able to do so through “a difference of form” (PhG 140). The two forces might be distinguished in that “one solicits and the other is solicited, the former being active and the other passive” (PhG 140). The thought is that the solicitation relation can explain the expression relation. A force proper expresses itself in the way it does, because it is passively solicited to do so by another force, which in soliciting it acts actively upon it. So, for instance, the reason a force expresses itself as red and round in our experience is that some other force has solicited it to express itself in just that way.

The hope then is to distribute the functions of the One and the Also across two independent forces, each of which is distinguished as independent through the solicitation relation. In this manner, one could claim to have a non-question begging model of the determinate content that confronts us in conscious experience. Suppose there are two forces, call them F1 and F2 and that F2 solicits F1 to express itself as it does. The proposal is that F1 can play the role of an exclusive One and that F2 can play the role of the Also. According to this account “the second force appears as the one that solicits and, moreover, in accordance with its content, as the universal medium in relation to the force characterized as the one solicited” (PhG 138). F2 as soliciting force plays the role of the “universal” medium, the Also, in the content of experience. F1, as the solicited force, would then play the role of the exclusive One. Using our previous example, F1 is solicited to express itself in a particular way and this way of expressing itself excludes whiteness and being made of porcelain. F2, as soliciting F1, is responsible for the fact that redness and roundness go together in the experience.

But Hegel argues that this theory fails to account for the content of experience, claiming that the account faces two problems. First, we again have the familiar problem that to play the role of an Also the force must also play the role of an exclusive One. F2 is not only an Also but also “is a negative unity, i.e. it solicits the retraction of force” (PhG 138). To solicit F1 to be an exclusive One, F2 would itself need to be an exclusive One. Second, and perhaps more problematically for the theory, the independence of F1 and F2 cannot be accounted for through the solicitation relation. Hegel contends that “since the second force is essentially an alternation of these two moments [i.e. the moments of force expressed and force proper] and is itself force, it is likewise the universal medium only through its being solicited to be such” (PhG 138). If F2 is to express itself by soliciting F1, this expression must itself be solicited. So F2 must be itself solicited if it is to solicit F1. F2 therefore cannot be defined as merely soliciting but must itself also be solicited. But then it is not possible to individuate F1 and F2 by claiming that one is solicited while the other is not. Rather, if a regress is to be avoided, F1 and F2 must each be defined as both solicited and soliciting with respect to each other. Hegel thus concludes that “consequently, this distinction, too, which obtained between the two forces, one of which was supposed to be the soliciting, the other the solicited, force is transformed into the same reciprocal interchange of the determinateness” (PhG 138). The model cannot account for the determinate content of experience by appealing to two independent forces since it has no way of distinguishing between them. “Their essence rather consists simply and solely in this, that each is solely through the other, and what each thus is it immediately no longer is, since it is the other. They have thus, in fact, no substances of their own which might support and maintain them” (PhG 138). Since one cannot

distinguish between the two forces as soliciting and solicited force, the first model of attempting to distribute the functions of the One and the Also in a quasi-perceptual manner among forces thus fails. The functions can neither be distributed between the two aspects of a single force (i.e. force proper and force expressed) nor between two independent forces. If the basic model schema of force and the understanding is to succeed, a different model is required, one which does not conceive of force in quasi-perceptual terms.

2.2 The Second Model: Presentation as Inference to a Supersensible Realm

The first model attempted to define the presentation relation as one of expression: either as the expression relation between force proper and force expressed or between two independent forces. By defining presentation in terms of the expression of force(s), the model still largely functioned in a perceptual framework. Forces are conceived as perceptual substances which include non-sensible as well as sensible features. So, for example, the force which expresses itself as a cherry, though possessing non-sensible features as a force proper, nonetheless expresses itself in the sensible features of redness, roundness, and sweetness. The problem for such a model is that it is subject to the same difficulties that undermined the models of Perception. Specifically, the model cannot account for the determinacy of perceptual substances and their features. The model attempts to account for determinacy through the functions of the One and the Also, but its attempt to distribute these functions between (a) force expressed and force proper and (b) two independent forces, led to the same indeterminacy that resulted from the models of

Perception. In the first model, the moments of force, “their substances and their movement, collapse unresistingly into an undifferentiated unity.” (PhG 141).

One might think that the mistake of the first model is that it continues to account for the presentation relation in quasi-perceptual terms. A more successful model might abstract away from the perceptual realm. In particular, it seems plausible that even if perceptual substances were to collapse into an undifferentiated unity, we might still *think* of a referent as presenting itself through them. The presentation relation between sense and reference can be conceived of as a theoretical posit rather than as a force that expresses itself perceptually. On such a model, what presents itself is no longer viewed as something “immediate, which was supposed to be an actual object for consciousness, [... a force] that is objective to sense.” (PhG 142). Rather, the referent is conceived as “the true essence in which it exists only as an object for the understanding” (PhG 142). We no longer view the referent as “force as substance”, but instead conceive of it as “the inner being of things qua inner, which is the same as the notion of force qua notion.” (PhG 142). Such a model would no longer conceive of force as a perceptual substance, as something, for example that directly expresses itself in the sensible properties of redness, roundness, and sweetness. Instead it conceives of force as a concept. It is posited as the inner being of what appears to us and this inner being does not need to directly express itself in the sensible features through which we infer its existence on this occasion.

This model no longer conceives of what appears to us as a direct manifestation of force(s). For example, in the case of seeing a cherry, the model no longer claims that we see one force manifesting itself as red and round and another manifesting itself as white and looking as if made of porcelain. Instead, the model now claims that we are

immediately acquainted with the totality of the sensible features that make up the scene. We see red and round and white and seeming to be made of porcelain. We are immediately acquainted with “appearance, a totality of show” (PhG 143) and from this experienced totality the understanding then actively infers “the inner being” and “background of things” (PhG 143). According to this model:

The true essence of things has now the character of not being immediately for consciousness; on the contrary, consciousness has a mediated relation to the inner being and, as understanding looks through the mediating play of forces, into the true background of things (PhG 143).

Consciousness is immediately confronted with appearance and from this appearance mediately infers through the understanding that there is an inner being which presents itself in this way. The presentation relation is thus defined as an inferential relation.

Hegel claims that this model is structured like a syllogism which takes understanding and the inner being of things as extremes and appearance as the middle term between them (PhG 145). The second model would thus be characterized as follows. Let “appearance” be the set of sensible features given in experience, “inner being” be a posited ground of appearance, and “ \leftrightarrow ” be the inferential relation. The model is thus:

Understands \langle appearance $\rangle \leftrightarrow \{$ inner being $\}$.

Consciousness is immediately acquainted with a sensible totality and infers from it the existence of a ground for that manifold. Yet if such a model is to successfully capture the content of experience, it must further specify what exactly the inferential relation is supposed to consist in. Hegel examines two ways in which this model might be developed.

According to the first way of developing the model, the inferential relation is conceived as a simple negation. The inner world is defined as what is not immediately present in appearance. Given the failure of the previous accounts, the appearance that confronts us in consciousness is an unstable play of forces. In the dialectic of Perception, for instance, we see that “the things of perception are present for consciousness as [...] moments which immediately and without rest or stay turn into their opposite” (PhG 143). Without any way of securing the determinacy of sensible content, we are left with a flux of appearance. On the present model, the understanding can now infer a further referent by simply negating this flux. Hegel explains that “the being of this object for consciousness is mediated by the movement of appearance, in which the being of perception and the sensuously objective in general has a merely negative significance” (PhG 143). We negate the flux of appearance to arrive at the positive truth of the play of forces (PhG 143). This new truth, being a simple negation of the flux of the sensible world would be “a supersensible world” (PhG 144). The supersensible world is posited as “the true world, above the vanishing present world there opens up a permanent beyond [...] the pure element in which truth has its essence” (PhG 144). This account takes the changing and complex world of appearance which confronts consciousness and infers, by a crude negation, the existence of a simple and eternal supersensible world as the referent of appearance.

But Hegel argues that this account is inadequate. If we were to posit the supersensible world merely as the negation of appearance, we would have no account of how the supersensible world appears in the appearance. The supersensible is posited as the referent of appearance, but this proves to be impossible according to the model under

consideration. Because the supersensible is posited only as the simple negation of appearance, it can only be “a pure beyond.” As a result, the supersensible “is empty, for it is merely the nothingness of appearance, and positively the simple and unitary universal.” (PhG 146) When a referent is posited as the simple negation of everything which appears, the referent proves to be empty of content. The inner world would be “determined as the beyond of consciousness” (PhG 146) and would thus be unknowable since “in the void nothing is known” (PhG 146). Yet, without such minimal knowledge conditions, it is pointless to posit the supersensible world as the referent of appearance. “If no further significance attached to the inner world and to our close link with it through the world of appearance, then nothing would be left to us but to stop at the world of appearance” (PhG 146). Yet, the model was based on the assumption that an additional level beyond appearance is required to account for determinate content. The account of inference as a simple negation thus results in a contradiction, claiming “to perceive something as true which we know is not true” (PhG 146).

The supersensible referent of the model should thus not be conceived as a simple negation of appearance. Instead, it needs to be essentially related to appearance— it must appear in the appearance. Hegel thus contends that “the inner world [...] comes from the world of appearance which has mediated it; in other words, appearance is its essence and, in fact, its filling” (PhG 147). Appearance must be the essence of what appears if what appears is to be posited as a referent for consciousness that can secure the determinate content of appearance. In other words, “the supersensible is therefore appearance qua appearance” (PhG 147).

Thus the model might be developed in a second way in an attempt to account for the internal relation between appearance and what appears. Instead of conceiving of the supersensible world as the simple negation of appearance, one might conceive of it as a law which governs appearance. This account is motivated by the idea that laws are both cognizable and can plausibly account for the relation between appearance and what appears. We can learn, for example, the law of gravity and this law can account for why an apple falls from a tree.

On such a view “the connection of the understanding with the inner world through the mediation is [...] its own movement through which the inner world will fill itself out for the understanding” (PhG 148). The inner world needs to be filled out for the understanding rather than merely posited as the negation of appearance and such filling out can be accomplished by positing the inner world as a world of law. Law can account for “the absolute flux” of appearance “as a difference as a universal difference” and such universal difference “is the simple element in the play of force itself and what is true in it.” (PhG 148). In this manner, law would be “the law of force.” (PhG 148). Such a law could govern the flux of appearance since, rather than being the simple negation of appearance, it is “the outcome of flux itself, or the flux is its essence.”

After encountering the flux of appearance, the understanding posits a simple law which governs that flux. On this view, the law is thus “a flux that is posited in the inner world [...], and [...] is received in that inner world as equally an absolute universal difference that is absolutely at rest and remains selfsame.” (PhG 149) The law is a universal difference because it governs all the differences of appearance, yet remains selfsame since it is itself a single stable law. In this manner, “the law is a stable image of

unstable appearance.” (PhG 149). One might then hope that this version of the model can account for how the supersensible world can be conceived as appearing in appearance since, on this account, “the supersensible world is an inert realm of laws which, though beyond the perceived world—for this exhibits law only through incessant change—is equally present in it and is its direct tranquil image” (PhG 149).

But Hegel contends that this version of the model is also inadequate since the concept of law is not sufficient to capture the content of appearance. Although the realm of law is the proposed referent of the understanding, “this realm [...] does not fill out the world of appearance.” (PhG 150). The concept of law was posited to fill out the realm of appearance, but upon further reflection it is seen to be inadequate to the task. Hegel observes that “the law is present, but is not the entire presence of appearance [*Das Gesetz ist in ihr gegenwärtig, aber es ist nicht ihre ganze Gegenwart*]; with every change of circumstance the law has a different actuality [*es hat unter immer anderen Umständen eine immer andere Wirklichkeit*].” (PhG 150) The law governs appearance, and is thereby present in it. But it, being a theoretical posit, is not identical to the immediate presence of appearance to consciousness. It could account for the fact that in each particular circumstance appearance appears differently to us. Consider, for instance, the experience of hearing the prelude to *Parsifal*. One hears a succession of notes each of which is itself a distinct appearance. What it is like to experience the first note is distinct from what it is like to experience the second note, etc. The musical score encodes and governs how these notes unfold. So, in this manner, the score is a law which is in the experience. But, there is nevertheless a phenomenological difference between actually hearing a note and

thinking about the score which governs how each note is to be related. In this manner “appearance retains for itself an aspect which is not in the inner world.” (PhG 150)

Hegel examines three revisions to the model, each of which is supposed to bridge the gap between law and appearance, but he argues that none of them is successful. The first revision to the model attempts to account for the relation between appearance and law by claiming that there are multiple laws. The idea here is that by positing a distinct law for each aspect of appearance one could claim an isomorphism between the two realms. Likewise, by using the expression relation of the previous models, one might show how each law then is fully expressed in the appearance that corresponds to it. For example, on this account, one could posit a one to one correspondence between each note in the Parsifal prelude and a law that expresses itself in just that note. This seems to overcome the problem that the law was too indeterminate to account for the determinacy of particular experiences. The law was thought to be insufficient since “while it does contain difference, the difference is universal, indeterminate” (PhG 150). It was unclear how a universal law could account for a determinate experience and so it seemed that there was an element of the what-it’s-like of appearance that remained forever inexplicable by the concept of law. The proposed solution to this problem is now that “in so far as it is not law in general, but a law, it does contain determinateness; consequently, there are indefinitely many laws.” (PhG 150). There is now a multiplicity of laws and each necessarily expresses itself in just the experience that we have. So, for example, when hearing a particular note, there is no more to the law governing that experience than the rule that this (law) must unfold thusly (having this phenomenal character), while mentally ostending to the relevant auditory experience.

But Hegel argues that this revision is inadequate. He contends that the plurality of laws “is itself rather a defect; for it contradicts the principle of the understanding for which, as consciousness of the simple inner world, the true is the implicitly universal unity” (PhG 150). The model was posited to account for the multiplicity of appearance by positing a law that governed them, but according to the current revision, the model no longer provides a unifying law. The realm of law would be a mere repetition of the indeterminate multiplicity of appearances. It does nothing to account for the determinate content that actually confronts us in consciousness.

A second revision would further modify the account by accepting the previous view that there is a one to one correspondence between laws and appearances while adding that the multiplicity of laws is itself unified by a higher order law. In this manner, we would attempt to solve the problem by letting “the many laws collapse into one law” (PhG 150). Just as the particular law that governs the falling of a stone and the particular law that governs planetary motion can both be accounted for through the universal law of gravitation, so perhaps there can be a higher order law of appearance that governs all the specific laws that express themselves in particular experiences.

But Hegel argues that this revision also fails because the higher order unifying law would lose the specificity needed to account for appearance. He observes that “when the laws thus coincide, they lose their specific character. The law becomes more and more superficial, and as a result what is found is, in fact, not the unity of these specific laws, but a law which leaves out their specific character” (PhG 150). For example, the law of gravity as such would not be sufficient to account for the falling of a stone or the movement of planets without prior knowledge of the initial conditions to which the law

was to be applied (e.g. that there are stones and planets in the world). Likewise, by itself, a universal law of appearance would not be adequate to account for the multiplicity of particular appearances. At best, you would need to specify some specific initial conditions upon which to apply the universal law to generate the specific sub-laws. As a result, taken on its own, the higher order law would express “no other content than just the mere notion of law itself.” Instead of having a specific higher order law, you would just have the concept of lawfulness as such. But such a principle would be insufficient to account for the determinacy of specific laws since *every* specific law is lawful.

The final revision to the model attempts to use the concept of necessity to account for how a universal law could give rise to specific determinate laws. One might claim that it is the essence of the higher order universal law necessarily to manifest itself in the specific laws (which in turn account for the determinacy of appearance). On this view, “in contrast to specific laws, we have [...] the pure notion of law.” Yet “this pure notion is looked on as the essence, or the inner true being, the determinateness of the specific law itself still belongs to appearance, or rather to sensuous being” (PhG 151). The relation of the pure notion of law to specific laws is that the former is the essence of the latter. The essence of pure law necessarily expresses itself in the specific laws which manifest themselves in appearance. As such, this revision accounts for the relation between pure universal law and specific laws not in terms of law itself, but rather in terms of essence and the necessity of its expression. Hegel thus observes that “the pure notion of law transcends not merely the law which, being itself a specific law, stands contrasted with other specific laws, but also transcends law as such. [...] The notion of law is turned against law itself” (PhG 151). Instead of appealing to a further law to

account for the determinacy of a specific law, one now grounds the account in the inner necessity of the concept of law itself. “The pure notion of law [...] must, to get its true meaning, be grasped in such a way that in it, as what is absolutely simple or unitary, the differences present in the law as such themselves return again into the inner world as a simple unity” (PhG 151). By appealing to the necessity by which the essence of pure law manifests itself, one might attempt to account for determinate content.

But Hegel argues that this revision is unsuccessful since the concept of necessity is not sufficient to account for how a universal law can generate determinate particular laws. “Necessity here is an empty word.” Hegel contends that the concept of necessity can be defined in two ways, *de dicto* and *de re*, and that neither can account for how a universal notion of lawfulness can give rise to specific determinate laws.

First, the necessity in question could be identified with *de dicto* necessity. *De dicto* necessity is necessity that is predicated of a statement. So, for example, it is *de dicto* necessary that bachelors are unmarried and that triangles have three angles. *De dicto* necessary statements are analytic truths. So, to claim that specific determinate laws can be derived from the universal concept of law with *de dicto* necessity is to claim that the specific laws analytically follow from the definition of the pure notion of law. But Hegel argues that this form of necessity is not able to account for the relation between pure law and specific laws in a way that elucidates how this law grounds the determinate content of experience. If every specific law were to analytically follow from the definition of pure law, the pure law would have to be defined as the mere aggregate of the specific laws. So the “pure law”, masquerading as an explanation, would in fact just be the mere composite of specific laws. On such a view, the “definition does not contain the

necessity of its existence; it exists [because] we find it” (PhG 152). We would in fact start with the determinacy of experience, then posit specific laws to “explain” them, and then, in turn, aggregate those laws to “explain” them in a pure law. Such a process does nothing to provide an actual account for how determinate experience is generated. Therefore, the model fails when the necessity of the pure law is taken as *de dicto* necessity.

A second option would then be to taken the relevant necessity to be *de re* rather than *de dicto*. *De re* necessity is necessity that is predicated of a thing. So, for example, one could claim that that it is *de re* necessary that water is H₂O even if being H₂O is not analytically contained in the concept of water. On this view, one could maintain that the essence of pure law must express itself in the specific laws even though the expression is not analytically contained in the concept of pure law.

But Hegel contends that this approach also fails since it falls back into the model of the expression of force and thus succumbs to the same difficulties that undermined that model. The second model invoked the concept of law precisely to account for how a force could express itself. But now we once more have to explain the problem in accounting for how a pure law could express itself with *de re* necessity in specific laws. As before, it seems that one must claim that the pure law expresses itself in this manner because it is solicited to do so, and the only candidates we have in our model for what could solicit this law would be the interplay of forces that give rise to appearance. So, to account for the expression of pure law, we would need to have an account of determinate forces. Yet we do not have such an account. Indeed, the model of law was proposed to account for the fact that there are determinate forces. One could attempt to account for

the determinacy of forces by positing a realm of specific laws which are themselves manifestations of a pure notion of law. But if the manifestation relation is itself to be explained in terms of the interplay of forces, then the account becomes viciously circular. If the pure law were to exist “through, or by means of, other forces...” (PhG 152) then “in basing this necessity on the determinateness of being through another, we relapse again into the plurality of specific laws which we have just left behind in order to consider law as law” (PhG 152).

So, interpreting the necessity in question as de re necessity cannot save the second model. In both de dicto and de re readings the “necessity has shown itself to be only an empty word” (PhG 152). The second model, which attempts to account for the presentation relation through the inference to a supersensible ground, thus fails. This leads Hegel to consider the final model of the consciousness section of the *Phenomenology*: the inverted world.

2.3 The Third Model: Presentation as an Inverted World

The final model comes into view when we attend to our experience of the failure of the second model. The second model claimed that the determinate content of appearance could be accounted for by inferring a supersensible realm of laws that governed appearance. The model proved to be inadequate since the understanding could posit, at best, only a “merely verbal” necessity for such laws (PhG 154). For example, consider a case in which the understanding is confronted with the determinate features of redness and roundness and from this posits the law of the supersensible realm that something is manifesting itself as red and round. Hegel claims that “this process is called

‘explanation’. A law is enunciated; from this its implicitly universal element or ground is distinguished as *force*; but it is said that this difference is no difference, rather that the ground is constituted exactly the same as the law” (PhG 154). The understanding encounters a determinate appearance, or force, and posits a law to account for it. But the posited law is not, in fact, different from the appearance since it is a mere reiteration of the same content.⁸ “There is said to be no difference whatever between them. The differences are the pure, universal expression of law, and pure force; but both have the same content, the same constitution. Thus the difference qua difference of content, of the thing, is also again withdrawn.” (PhG 154). There is merely a tautological relation between the appearance and the law which is meant to ground the appearance. Indeed, Hegel argues that such an “explanation” not only fails to explain anything, but also fails to say anything. “It is an explanation that not only explains nothing, but is so plain that, while it pretends to say something different from what has already been said, really says nothing at all but only repeats the same thing.” (PhG 155). So, on the second model, the understanding merely repeated a given content without saying anything new.

But Hegel points out that this tautological movement is nonetheless a movement we are aware of. The movement “comes into consideration as a movement of the understanding.” We are aware of an appearance, posit a law to account for that appearance, but realize that the law is identical to the appearance because the explanation is merely tautological. Though the explanation fails, we are nonetheless aware of going

⁸ Hegel illustrates with the example of lightening: “the single occurrence of lightening, e.g., is apprehended as a universal, and this universal is enunciated as the law of electricity; the ‘explanation’ then condenses the law into force as the essence of law.” (PhG 154). The law of electricity in this case just *is* the fact that lightning appeared. Both the law and the appearance have the very same content.

through its various moments. What it is like to think the original phenomenon is distinct from what it is like to think of the putative ground of that phenomenon, even though the two prove to be identical. Hegel claims that our awareness of such movement is an awareness of an absolute flux. He observes that in this movement:

We detect the very thing that was missing in the law, viz. the absolute flux itself; for this movement, when we look at it more closely, is directly the opposite of itself. That is to say, it posits a difference which is not only not a difference for us, but one which the movement itself cancels as a difference. This is the same flux which presented itself as the play of forces (PhG 155).

In the positing of law to account for appearance and the seeing that the two are in fact identical, we become aware of a difference, viz. the difference between thinking the initial appearance and thinking of the law posited to account for it, which is in fact no difference since the appearance and the law prove to be the same. In this dialectical process we are aware of a motion from difference to identity and from identity to difference. The law posited as distinct proves to be identical to the appearance it was meant to account for and so collapses into unity. But we also know that sheer unity is an inadequate characterization of experience since we are aware of a difference of content, though without being able to adequately characterize what that difference consists in. So the unity moves back to difference. “What is present here is not merely bare unity in which no difference would be posited, but rather a movement in which a distinction is certainly made but, because it is no distinction, is again cancelled.” (PhG 155). The awareness of this flux, this difference which is no difference, allows us to formulate the third and final model of the chapter.

In the process of explanation one sees that the change is not merely confined to the activity of the understanding but that the flux occurs in the inner world itself. “In the process, then, of explaining, the to and fro of change which before was outside of the inner world and present only in the appearance, has penetrated into the supersensible world itself” (PhG 155). Indeed, this movement is posited as the law of the inner world. “Since the notion, qua notion of the understanding, is the same as the inner being of things, this change becomes for the understanding the law of the inner world” (PhG 156). The understanding is aware of a kind of motion in its own experience of explaining, and is aware of it as being generated by the notion (Begriff) which it posits to explain the determinacy of appearance. Since the understanding posits this notion as the inner being of things, and change is a feature of the notion, the understanding posits change as the law of the inner world.

Because it includes motion within itself, this law is different than the laws of the previous model. In the previous model, law was posited to account for fixed determinate contents. For example, one might have a determinate sensation of redness and then posit a law to account for why the sensation has just this determination rather than another. The principle governing the laws of the second model was that “difference constantly remains selfsame” (PhG 156). Each property or object remains what it is and is opposed to all others. Hegel labels this “the law of appearance itself” (PhG 156). But in being aware of the absolute flux that results in our trying to account for these determinacies, we are now in the position to posit a different kind of law. “We have a second law whose content is the opposite of what was previously called law, viz. difference which remains constantly selfsame; for this new law expresses rather that like becomes unlike and unlike becomes

like.” (PhG 156). Rather than attempting to account for the static identity of content, this law claims that content is itself a process of change in which “like becomes unlike and unlike becomes like.” This law of the inner world claims that it is the nature of determinate content to become its opposite (i.e. to be “an absolute difference” (PhG 156)). Hegel explains as follows:

(1) Through this principle, the first supersensible world, the tranquil kingdom of laws, the immediate copy of the perceived world, is changed into its opposite. (2) The law was, in general, like its differences, that which remains selfsame; now, however, it is posited that each of the two worlds is really the opposite of itself. (3) The selfsame really repels itself from itself, and what is not selfsame really posits itself as selfsame (PhG 157).

In (1) Hegel observes that, by shifting from the first to the second conception of law, the supersensible world is now conceived as the opposite of what it had been initially conceived as. He clarifies the nature of this change in (2) by observing that previously both the laws and the contents that they were meant to govern were conceived of as simple identities. Each remained “selfsame.” But now laws and the appearances they are meant to govern are posited as the opposites of themselves. They do not remain selfsame but instead change. This principle of change is then further clarified in (3) when he notes that the same repels itself from itself as different, and what is different posits itself as the same.

As a result of this new law, difference is now conceived not as an outer difference, in which two independent things or determinations are opposed to each other, but as an inner difference within a content itself. “It is only when thus determined that the difference is inner difference, or the difference in its own self, the like being unlike itself, and the unlike, like itself” (PhG 157). Hegel claims that this principle of inner

differentiation gives rise to what he calls “the inverted world.” The inverted world is a second supersensible world arising as the opposite of the first supersensible world (PhG 157).

The hope is that now with the inverted world we can fully account for the world of appearance. The advocate of this model claims that:

With this, the inner world is completed as appearance. For the first supersensible world was only the immediate raising of the perceived world into the universal element; it had its necessary counterpart in this perceived world which still retained for itself the principle of change and alteration. The first kingdom of laws lacked that principle, but obtains it as an inverted world (PhG 157).

With the previous model the supersensible world was posited as the ground of the world of appearance. The world of appearance proved to be in a state of change and this alteration was not captured by the supersensible world. But, now that the inverted world contains the principle of change within itself, it seems capable of accounting for appearance.

The simplest way of understanding the inverted world would be to conceive of it in empirical terms. So, for example, in common sense we think of white as opposed to black, south as opposed to north, or punishment as opposed to reward. The idea would then be that the inverted world would be an empirical inversion of the first world. For example, we see a white bowl, posit a law which manifests itself as whiteness, and then, according to the principle of the inverted world, claim that what is, in fact, manifested is in itself something black. So, according to the law of the inverted world, the bowl is really black even though it seems white to us. On this superficial reading, operating according to “the sensuous idea of fixing the differences in a different sustaining

element” (PhG 160), the inverted world and the actual world are actual opposites. Hegel explains:

Looked at superficially, this inverted world is the opposite of the first in the sense that it has the latter outside of it and repels that world from itself as an inverted actual world: that the one is appearance, but the other the in-itself; that the one is the world as it is for an other, whereas the other is the world as it is for itself (PhG 159).

On this view, what is white in the empirical world is black in itself, what is north in the empirical world is south in itself, and what is considered punishment in the empirical world is considered reward in itself.

Yet Hegel argues that this account is inadequate since it falls into the difficulties of the previous model. To account for the principle of inversion in empirical terms, the model needs to distribute the opposed determinacies in independent substances. But we have already seen that it is not possible to account for determinacy in this manner. Hegel argues:

(1) But such antithesis of inner and outer, of appearance and the supersensible, as of two different kinds of actuality, we no longer find here. (2) The repelled differences are not shared afresh between two substances such as would support them and lend them a separate subsistence: this would result in the understanding withdrawing from the inner world and relapsing into its previous position. (3) The one side, or substance, would be the world of perception again in which one of the two laws would be operative, and confronting it would be an inner world, just such a sense-world as in the first, but in the imagination; it could not be exhibited as a sense world, could not be seen, heard, or tasted, and yet it would be thought of as such a sense world (PhG 159).

In (1) Hegel observes that at this point in the argument we are supposed to have already moved past the antithesis between appearance and the supersensible that dominated the second model. It was just this external conception of antithesis that the inverted world was meant to avoid. Hegel expands this point by arguing in (2) that the distribution of the

opposed features within two substances would be a regress into the previous model and in (3) that both worlds would need to be conceived of sensibly. An empirical conception of the inverted world will thus not be adequate to explicate the kind of internal inversion required for the model.

Hegel argues that there is a more adequate version of the inverted world and that should lead us beyond the structures that have governed us so far in the consciousness sections of the *Phenomenology*. He claims that the internal difference posited in the inverted world can be accounted for as pure change, or what he calls contradiction. In inversion:

We have to think pure change, or think antithesis within the antithesis itself, or contradiction. For in the difference which is an inner difference, the opposite is not merely one of two—if it were, it would simply be, without being an opposite—put it is the opposite of an opposite, or the other is itself immediately present in it (PhG 160).

On this model, the opposition in question is not between two independent contents, but an internal contradiction or change within a single content. Such in inner contradiction or self-propulsion has the character of what Hegel calls infinity (PhG 160). Hegel claims that infinity can ground a different form of necessity and can account for the totality of appearance. “We see that through infinity, law completes itself into an immanent necessity, and all the moments of appearance are taken up into the inner world.” (PhG 161) In addition, Hegel also characterizes this phenomenon as the absolute concept, life, and even the world soul (PhG 162).

Hegel claims that we have now reached a point at which we can see the pure notion which can account for the content of conscious experience. “What is, for the understanding, an object in a sensuous covering, is for us in its essential form as a pure

notion.” (PhG 164). But consciousness has not yet reached the point where it can recognize this. Therefore, another set of models must be pursued for consciousness to see this content. These now take the form of self-consciousness. This transition to self-consciousness is motivated by the process of explanation which motivated the positing of the inverted world. “Appearance, or the play of forces, already displays it, but it is as ‘explanation’ primarily only the description of what self-consciousness is.” (PhG 163) When one thinks of the internal differentiation characteristic of infinity, Hegel claims that self-consciousness seems to be the most natural candidate for capturing such self-differentiating content. He observes:

The understanding’s ‘explanation’ is primarily only the description of what self-consciousness is. [...] The reason why ‘explaining’ affords so much self-satisfaction is just because in it consciousness is, so to speak, communing directly with itself, enjoying only itself; although it seems to be busy with something else, it is in fact occupied only with itself (PhG 163).

Explanation was able to afford self-satisfaction to consciousness even though it posited only a tautological repetition of sensible content, because in explanation consciousness was aware of itself. In self-consciousness, one is reflexively aware of oneself, but, to be reflexively aware, consciousness must at the same time be distinct from itself.⁹ Hegel explains that in self-consciousness:

⁹ These passages suggest that Hegel has a straightforward phenomenological account of self-consciousness in which the self is presented to itself. This runs against Pippin’s attempt to minimize Hegel’s concerns to the transcendental preconditions for objective representation. Pippin claims that “it is clear from the context of the discussion that Hegel is not claiming that, in any experience of an object, a subject ‘really’ experiences its own thoughts of an object. As the line of argument developed throughout the first three chapters, the issue has become the one I have used throughout as a focal issue for German Idealism—implicitly apperceptive subjective activity required for the discrimination of a sensible manifold, for the ‘unity’ of any diversity. And the transcendental dimension of that problem does not change now. This and other passages continue to pose the problem as the issue of ‘self-consciousness’ in the consciousness of

I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so I am directly aware that what is distinguished from myself is not different. I, the selfsame being, repel myself from myself; but what is posited as distinct from me, or as unlike me, is immediately, in being so distinguished, not a distinction for me. It is true that consciousness of an ‘other’, of an object in general, is itself necessarily self-consciousness, a reflectedness into self, consciousness of itself in its otherness.” (PhG 164).

The various models of Self-Consciousness will try to grasp the content that is presented in this manner. But at this point in the dialectic we have seen Hegel’s criticism of standard account of semantic givenness and the rudiments of what his own theory of content would have to account for.

3. Conclusion

In this manner, Hegel’s argument in *Force and the Understanding* can be interpreted as an extended criticism of what today would be called a Fregean theory of content. Traditional Fregeans identify content with senses and define these senses as abstract objects—they are supposed to be the abstract modes of presentation by which we grasp objects in the world around us. Yet Hegel notes that, for such an account to be philosophically satisfying, one would need to specify what exactly is meant by the presentation relation. Traditional Fregeans have not been forthcoming in this regard. Hegel, in contrast, offers several models of how the presentation relation could be accounted and shows that all but one of them fail. According to Hegel, presentation can

an ‘otherness’ or object, rather than to reduce the latter to a species of the former, and so cannot mean to interpret self-consciousness as direct self-intending.” *Hegel’s Idealism*, 140-141. But as we have seen in the forgoing reconstruction of the argument, the context does make clear that Hegel is *appealing* to the fact that consciousness is directly present to itself to provide an adequate account of the presentation relation. This is the core of his solution to the problem confronting the models of *Force and the Understanding*.

neither be accounted for quasi-perceptually, nor inferentially, nor via simple negation. But note that these are the precisely the metaphors that traditional Fregeans appeal to when they claim that senses are perceptual modes of presentation, theoretical definitions, or simply not referents. To this extent, Hegel's arguments pose a challenge to a traditional Fregean theory of content and to the form of semantic givenness they require. But it is important to note that, contrary to Brandom, Hegel's criticism does not depend upon adopting a pragmatist conception of meaning in which all content is determined holistically. Given Hegel's actual arguments, there is little reason to think that Force and the Understanding is meant to refute all forms of semantic givenness. Indeed, Hegel is sympathetic to the final account of the section which seeks to elucidate the presentation relation in terms of consciousness' presence to itself. While this account conflicts with traditional Fregeanism, since Fregeanism draws a sharp distinction between the abstract realm of sense and the entertaining of those senses by consciousness, it nonetheless allows for the possibility of a different form of semantic givenness. It is this possibility which will be explored in the next chapter in which I argue that Hegel accounts for content in terms of cognitive phenomenology and that such an account must presuppose a form of the semantic given, viz. the givenness of intuition.

Chapter Five: The Cognitive Phenomenology of the Concept

0. Introduction

In the last two chapters I have shown that the Perception and Force and the Understanding sections of *the Phenomenology of Spirit* argue against what we would today call Russellian and Fregean accounts of content. As a result, Hegel can rightly be said to reject two influential theories of semantic givenness. To this extent, my interpretation agrees with the Neo-Sellarsian contention that Hegel is a foe of some important forms of the semantic given. But I contend that Neo-Sellarsian interpretations are mistaken in extending this claim to a categorical rejection of all forms of semantic givenness.

They are forced to make this extreme claim because they take Hegel to adopt a holist account of content. For they identify Hegel's ultimate account of content provided in the Absolute Knowing section at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with a holist account of content grounded in social practice. Pinkard, for example, maintains that:

Absolute knowledge is the internal reflection on social practices of a modern community that takes its authoritative standards to come only from within the structure of the practices it uses to legitimate and authenticate itself.... This reflection is absolute in its being fully internal to this 'social space.' [...] The only things that could count for us as authoritative have to do with our understanding ourselves as historical, social beings.¹

¹ Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 262, 265. See also Robert Brandom, "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism" in *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 210-234 and Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Hegels Analytische Philosophie: Die Wissenschaft der Logik als kritische Theorie der Bedeutung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992) and "Kritik der

By adopting a holist account of content in which all meaning is determined by its position in social space, Hegel would be unable to accept any form of semantic givenness. Since every content depends on its relation to other contents in social practice, no content can be intrinsically meaningful.

But I contend that this is not how we should understand either Hegel's doctrine of absolute knowledge or the theory of content that it presents. If Hegel does not commit himself to a social holist account of content, then he would not be committed to a blanket denial of all forms of semantic givenness. Even from what we have seen so far, we have reason to suspect that the social holist account leaves out important aspects of Hegel's theory. For example, we have already seen in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, that absolute knowing is supposed to be arrived at when "consciousness itself grasps [...] its own essence" (PhG 89). Whatever absolute knowing turns out to be, it needs to be the explication of what is presented to us in consciousness. This was also seen at the conclusion of the dialectic of Force and the Understanding where Hegel claims that we are granted a "vision of the undifferentiated selfsame being, which repels itself from itself, posits itself as an inner being containing different moments, but for which equally those moments are immediately not different—self-consciousness" (PhG 165). Here Hegel maintains that the content given to us in consciousness proves to be self-consciousness. A phenomenological component thus appears to be necessary for any adequate account of Hegel's doctrine of absolute knowing.

Erkenntnistheorie" in *Philosophie des Selbstbewusstseins: Hegels System als Formanalyse von Wissen und Autonomie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 129-157.

This phenomenological component continues to be refined throughout the rest of the arguments of the *Phenomenology* (e.g. as moral and religious consciousness), and is retained throughout the subsequent models of consciousness. In fact, the phenomenological component is explicitly taken up in Hegel's description of absolute knowing at the end of the book. For example, Hegel defines absolute knowing as follows:

This last shape of Spirit—the Spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self [...]—this is absolute knowing [*absolute Wissen*], it is Spirit that knows itself in the shape of Spirit, or a comprehensive knowing [*begreifende Wissen*]. Truth [*Wahrheit*] is not only in itself completely identical with certainty [*Gewißheit*], but it also has the shape of self-certainty [*Gewißheit seiner selbst*], or it is in its existence in the form of self-knowledge [*des Wissens seiner selbst*]. [...] this identity is now a fact, in that the content has received the shape of the Self. (PhG 798)

He here defines absolute knowing, the true expression of content examined in the *Phenomenology*, as having the form of the Self. Truth [*Wahrheit*], or what experience refers to, proves to be self-certainty [*Gewißheit seiner selbst*]. What experience refers to is not something distinct from the subject of experience as was initially assumed at the outset of the *Phenomenology*. Rather, the content given in experience is now specified as one's own self—“it has received the shape of the self”.

In this manner, Hegel's definition of absolute knowledge remains phenomenological. This also explains why Hegel continues to claim that “nothing is *known* that is not in *experience*, or, as it is also expressed, that it is not *felt to be true*, not given an *inwardly revealed* eternal verity” (PhG 802) and that, in absolute knowing, we have arrived at a subject which is “just as much substance” (PhG 803). As a result of this continuing phenomenological component, Hegel's theory of content cannot be fully captured by its social features as the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation maintains. Admittedly,

Hegel's arguments in *Absolute Knowing* are notoriously cryptic, but his claims are sufficiently clear to call into question the dominant view that Hegel adopts a holist and socially grounded account of content. These passages make clear that Hegel seeks to retain the first-person and phenomenological perspective he set forth in the Introduction to the work. And, as a result, we are not forced to make the extreme claim that Hegel denies all forms of semantic givenness.

In this chapter I will argue that Hegel accepts a form of semantic givenness in his positive account of content which he sets forth in the *Absolute Knowing* section of the *Phenomenology* and develops more fully in his later work the *Science of Logic*. While Hegel does deny several forms of semantic givenness, all of which fall under the domain of what Hegel calls understanding (*Verstand*), his own positive account of content, which applies to the domain of what he calls reason (*Vernunft*), does allow for a form of semantic givenness. The argument of this chapter will proceed in three sections. The first section explains the historical background of Hegel's account of content. Hegel, along with the other German Idealists, formulated his theory of content in an attempt to solve a problem in Kant's account of the grounds of content—the problem of how to give an account of the fundamental ground of content without presupposing the very determinate content it is meant to account for. The next section then sets forth Hegel's cognitive phenomenological solution to this problem which he articulates in the opening sections of the *Science of Logic*. Hegel attempts to solve the problem by noting that if we attend to the experience of pure thinking, we can come to see how determinate content emerges from something indeterminate. The final section then shows how Hegel's cognitive phenomenological account of content requires a form of semantic givenness, since pure

thought must be given to us as something intrinsically meaningful if it is to ground determinate content.

1. The Grounding of Content and the Development of German Idealism

1.1. Kant's Only Possible Argument

To understand Hegel's account of content, it is necessary to place it in its historical context. The tradition of German Idealism, of which Hegel is a key contributor, developed to a large extent in the attempt to account for the grounds of content. While the question of the grounds of content is of perennial philosophical interest, the German Idealists focused particularly on Kant's formulation of the question. Due largely to Jacobi's influential interpretation, Kant's pre-critical *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* was seen as articulating the basic framework for subsequent theories of content in German Idealism.² This pre-critical argument attempts to establish the existence of a necessary *ens realissimum* from the fact that there is possibility and explains possibility in terms of the availability of thinkable content.

The central inference of Kant's argument is expressed in the following passage from the *Only Possible Argument*:

All possibility presupposes something actual in and through which all that can be thought is given. Accordingly, there is a certain reality, the cancellation of which would itself cancel all internal possibility whatever. But that, the cancellation of which eradicates all possibility, is absolutely necessary. Therefore, something exists absolutely necessarily (2:83).

² See Jacobi "Letters on Spinoza" in *The Main Philosophical Writings and Allwill*, trans. and ed. G. Di Giovanni (Montréal: McGill, 1994), 173-251; Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewusstsein: Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794-1795)* (Clett-Kotta, 2004) ; and Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. B. Bowman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

According to this argument, possibility presupposes actuality, and since absolute necessity is defined as something whose cancellation would also eliminate all possibility, the actual ground of possibility must also be absolutely necessary.³ The argument's central premise that possibility presupposes actuality is motivated by the demand that philosophy should account not only for facts about actuality (e.g. that Proust *was* a brilliant novelist), but also for facts about possibility (e.g. that Proust *could have been* a great philosopher).

Kant claims that there are two components of possibility that need to be accounted for. First, there is the formal component of possibility. Something is formally possible if the predicates which make up its essence are logically consistent. So, for example, one could explain the formal possibility of the fact that Proust could have been a great philosopher by pointing out that, using only the rules of formal logic, one cannot derive a contradiction from the predicates <being human> and <being a great philosopher>. Yet Kant observes that this formal component of possibility presupposes a second material component, since, to stand in relations of logical consistency or contradiction, there must *be* contents which stand in such relations. Kant uses the example of a quadrangular triangle to clarify this distinction. He notes that:

A quadrangular triangle is absolutely impossible. Nonetheless, a triangle is something, and so is a quadrangle. The impossibility is based simply on the logical relations which exist between one thinkable thing and another, where the one cannot be a characteristic mark of the other. Likewise, in every possibility we must first distinguish the something which is thought, and then we must distinguish the agreement of what is thought in it with

³ For detailed reconstructions of the argument see Mark Fisher and Eric Watkins, "Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility: From the Only Possible Argument to the Critique of Pure Reason", *Review of Metaphysics* 52 (1998): 369-395 and Allen Wood *Kant's Rational Theology* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 64-71.

the law of contradiction. A triangle which has a right angle is in itself possible. The triangle and the right angle are the data or material element in this possible thing. The agreement, however, of the one with the other, in accordance with the law of contradiction, is the formal element in possibility (2:77-78).

Though a quadrilateral triangle is impossible in the logical sense, since the claim that a quadrilateral is a triangle is logically contradictory, it is nonetheless materially possible since both <quadrilateral> and <triangle> are contents capable of standing in relations of logical consistency and contradiction.

Correspondingly, there are two ways in which something can fail to be possible. First, it could violate the formal condition of possibility by having an essence composed of logically contradictory contents (e.g. <quadrilateral> and <triangle>). But second, and more fundamentally, there could fail to be content at all. Without content there could be no logical consistency or contradiction since there would be nothing to stand in such relations. Kant then goes on to argue that, to account for the material component of possibility, one must posit the existence of an *ens realissimum* that grounds it.

1.2 The Problem of Accounting for Determinate Content

There are three primary ways to understand Kant's claim that God grounds the material component of possibility. First, one could adopt a broadly Spinozistic interpretation of the manner in which God is said to ground the material component of possibility. On this reading, God grounds content by exemplifying properties. Recently, Andrew Chignell has provided a particularly powerful version of this interpretation by

focusing on what he calls real harmony.⁴ He claims that the material element of possibility consists, not only in the availability of thinkable content, but also in the fact that such contents can stand in relations of real harmony or repugnance.⁵ According to Chignell, two predicates are really harmonious if it is possible for them to be co-exemplified in an object, and really repugnant if they cannot be co-exemplified. So, for example, the predicates <being human> and <being shrewd> are really harmonious while the predicates <being human> and <being made of ice> are really repugnant.⁶ Chignell claims that such facts about possible co-exemplification are accounted for through their actual co-exemplification in the divine nature. On this model, the material element of possibility is secured by God's exemplification of every possible predicate.⁷

In contrast, one could adopt a Leibnizian interpretation by claiming that God grounds the material element of possibility by entertaining it in thought. On this view, the fact that a content P is available to stand in relations of logical consistency or contradiction is grounded in God's entertaining P and thereby schematizing it in his intellect. Advocates of this view contend that it better comports with the textual evidence

⁴ For different formulation of the Spinozist interpretation see Robert Adams "God, Possibility, and Kant" in *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (2000): 425-440. One advantage of Chignell's version of a Spinozistic interpretation is that it can account for why there must be a single ground for possibility. See Andrew Chignell "Kant, Real Possibility, and the Threat of Spinoza" *Mind* 121.483 (2012): 635-675.

⁵ It is worth noting that it is not obvious that these are, in fact, distinct conditions. For, although real harmony and repugnance are distinct from logical consistency and inconsistency, they nonetheless parallel the material inferential relations of between conceptual contents. So, for example, from the claim that Proust is a human, one may infer that Proust is not made of ice. These inferences are material since they follow from the determinate contents themselves and thus cannot be captured by merely formal inference rules. See, Robert Brandom, *Making it Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 94-115.

⁶ Chignell thus sees Kant's argument as relating to contemporary Kripkean accounts of metaphysical possibility.

⁷ Chignell notes that on this view the divine nature needs to be furcated to avoid real repugnance. Distinct aspects of the divine nature need to be separated from each other so as to secure the correct harmony relations and stave off real repugnance in its own case. So, for example, one will exemplify <being a glacier> and <being made of ice>, whereas another will exemplify <being a human> and <being wise>.

(e.g. that Kant explicitly repudiated Spinozism throughout his career), and point out that it allows God to ground the material element of possibility without having to actually exemplify it, thus preserving the intuitive distinction between possibility and actuality which is threatened by the Spinozist model.⁸

Finally, one could adopt a Cartesian style of interpretation in which the material component of possibility is grounded in the divine will. Though careful to distinguish Kant's position from strict Cartesian voluntarism, Stang, pointing to the influence that Crusius' account of possibility may have had on Kant's argument, has offered an interpretation in which possibilities are grounded in God's fundamental powers.⁹ On this reading, the fact that P is possible is grounded in the fact that God could bring it about that P. This view also appears to have the advantage of freeing Kant from the charge of Spinozism and allowing for the fact that there are some predicates which are not exemplified.

But a problem emerges for Kant's argument in that this dispute appears to result in a stalemate since none of these interpretations seems to be able to furnish an adequate justification for accepting their preferred ground of possibility as metaphysically basic. Consider, for example, Chignell's claim that his Spinozistic account is superior to its

⁸ It has also been argued that this style of interpretation has the advantage of providing resources to answer the plurality objection, viz. that though there must be some ground for each possibility, that is no reason to think that there is a single ground for possibility. By appealing to the divine mind as establishing the relations between each individual possibility, one can note that there could be only one ground for the totality of possibility because it would need to maintain the relations between each of the contents. See my, "God, Totality, and Possibility in Kant's *Only Possible Argument*" *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014): 27-51. For further virtues of a Leibnizian interpretation see Samuel Newlands "Leibniz and the Ground of Possibility" *Philosophical Review* 122.2 (2013): 155-187.

⁹ See Nicholas Stang, "Kant's Possibility Proof" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27.3 (2010): 275-299, 280.

rivals since it is “clearly preferable for an explanatory regress to stop in the extra-mental, non-intentional predicates of a necessary being, rather than in its thoughts. [...] If you are looking for some bedrock, there is surely none so solid as the essential attributes of an absolutely necessary being.”¹⁰ To those not already committed to a Spinozistic interpretation, such a claim will be unconvincing since it is not obvious that the exemplification of non-intentional predicates in a necessary being is a better regress stopper than intentional ones. For example, the Leibnizian might think that since the goal is to account for determinate thinkable content, the regress would most naturally terminate in the mental activities of an absolutely necessary intellect. The Leibnizian could thus maintain that it is preferable for this particular explanatory regress to bottom out in something mental rather than something non-mental. Yet the Leibnizian would have similar difficulties if he were to attempt to persuade his opponents that the regress must stop with divine thought. For the Spinozist could insist that thought itself must be grounded in a being that exemplifies non-intentional properties and the Cartesian could contend that thought is a kind of activity and is thus fundamentally rooted in the powers of a substance.¹¹ Of course, the partisan of each model could simply pound the table and maintain that their own ground should be assumed as fundamental, but such a situation is particularly unsatisfactory since similar dogmatic assertions are also available to modal primitivists who deny that facts about possibility need to be accounted for at all. The

¹⁰ Andrew Chignell, “Kant and ‘the Monstrous Ground of Possibility’” *Kantian Review* 19.1 (2014): 53-69, 19

¹¹ Likewise, a similar difficulty occurs for the Cartesian who claims that the regress must obviously terminate in the powers of a divine substance since the Spinozist can argue that powers have their base in the non-dispositional properties of a substance and the Leibnizian can argue that powers can only be conceived *as* powers by thinking of them.

resulting interpretive standoff thereby threatens to undermine the very motivation for offering the possibility argument in the first place.

This standoff is rooted in a deeper problem for all three formulations of Kant's possibility argument: the *kind* of explanation that they offer is incapable of accounting for the phenomenon they seek to explain. These interpretations all portray Kant as seeking to ground facts about possibility in some class of facts about actuality (e.g. facts about the divine nature, mind, or will). It is natural to understand the argument in this way since, in contemporary philosophy, the grounding relation is thought to obtain between sets of facts. So, for example, contemporary philosophers debate whether mental facts are grounded in physical facts, semantic facts are grounded in normative facts, or legal facts are grounded in social facts. Gideon Rosen aptly summarizes this standard view of grounding when he defines it as follows:

The grounding relation is a relation among facts. We may say that A is F in virtue of B's being G, but this is shorthand for the claim that the fact that A is F obtains in virtue of (is grounded in) the fact that B is G. [...] Facts are structured entities built up from worldly items—objects, relations, connectives, quantifiers, etc.—in roughly the sense in which sentences are built up from words.¹²

Given this understanding of the grounding relation, it is natural to see the possibility argument as seeking to ground facts about possibility in facts about actuality.¹³

¹² Gideon Rosen, "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction" in *Modality, Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 114. For a similar account see also, Paul Audi "Grounding: Toward a Theory of the In-Virtue-Of Relation", *The Journal of Philosophy* 109.12 (2012): 685-711. See especially Audi's claim that "I take grounding to be a relation between facts, where a fact is something's or some things' having properties or standing in relations", 686.

¹³ For example, Chignell describes Kant's argument as resting on the claim that "modal facts have their ultimate explanation in actuality, and thus that fundamental modal truths have what we now call truthmakers—i.e., actual, concrete particulars that ground or explain their truth." "Kant, Modality, and the Most Real Being" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 91.2 (2009):157-192, 158.

Yet such an explanatory strategy is incapable of accounting for the feature of possibility that Kant wants to account for, viz. the availability of content. Since facts presuppose the contents which compose them, they cannot be used to explain such contents. Suppose, for instance, that I wanted to explain the content <fiery body> by appealing to the fact that God entertains the thought <fiery bodies are hot>. Such a strategy would fail since God's thought of a fiery body itself presupposes, rather than explains, that <fiery body> is a determinate content. Moreover, the problem also obtains if one seeks to account for the content <fiery body> by claiming that God exemplifies the property of being a fiery body or has the power to bring about a state of affairs in which there are fiery bodies since these strategies also presuppose the determinate content they are supposed to account for. Such considerations bring to light the following principle: For any determinate content F, one cannot explain F by appealing to something that exemplifies F, thinks F, or is able to bring about F since these facts presupposes the very determinate content in question.¹⁴ Since the standard interpretations of the possibility argument make use of the determinate content they are meant to ground (whether through exemplification in the divine nature, contemplation in the divine mind, or in the powers of the divine will), they cannot account for the contents of possibility and thus cannot fulfill the aspirations Kant expressed in the possibility argument. Yet this situation is not solely the result of a lack of faithfulness to the text on the part of contemporary

¹⁴ This principle was noted by Hegel when he argued for the explanatory inadequacy of traditional metaphysics. Metaphysicians take determinate contents "to be valid on their own account" and capable of explicating God as absolute ground by predicating these contents to him. (EL, §28).

interpreters since the confusion is present in Kant's own account of the grounding relation.¹⁵

Kant attempts to set forth the relevant concept of grounding in the *Nova Dilucidatio* version of the possibility argument. In it he defines a ground as "that which determines a subject in respect of any of its predicates" (1:391) and he distinguishes between antecedently and consequentially determining grounds. According to Kant, an antecedently determining ground, also called a ground of being or becoming, renders what it grounds intelligible by providing the reason why a subject has a given predicate (1: 392); and a consequentially determining ground, also called a ground of knowing, is one that would not be posited unless what it grounds were already grounded in something else (1: 392). In both cases Kant maintains that:

The concept of a ground [...] establishes a connection and a conjunction between the subject and some predicate or other. A ground thus always requires a subject; and it also requires a predicate, which it can unite with the subject. If you ask for the ground of a circle I shall not at all understand what you are asking for unless you add a predicate, for example, that it is, of all the figures which have a perimeter of the same length, the one which embraces the greatest idea (1: 392).

So Kant here claims that only entities composed of determinate subjects and predicates can be grounded and that, consequently, it makes no sense to apply the notion of ground to entities without this structure. Specifically, Kant claims that a ground is what determines a subject to have the predicates that it has and to exclude all contrary

¹⁵ Because Kant's argument is formulated in terms of the grounding of the material element of possibility, one cannot attempt to avoid the problem as some contemporary philosophers do by distinguishing between grounding and essential connection; and claiming that, though some facts about grounding are themselves ungrounded, the properties involved in these facts are nevertheless essentially connected to those facts in that "it lies in the nature of certain properties that their instances should stand in grounding relations." Audi, "Grounding", 695. One can also question whether such a distinction can actually solve the problem since it appears ad hoc and it is not clear what the essential connection relation is supposed to amount to.

predicates (1: 393). So Kant, like contemporary philosophers, conceives of grounding as a relation that obtains only between complex entities that already consist of determinate contents (viz. subjects and predicates).

But, when formulating the possibility argument, Kant shifts from considering the grounds of subjects having predicates “to the grounds which determine existence” (1:394). The problem is that Kant does not define what this sort of grounding is supposed to consist in. The argument proceeds as if the grounding relation was still construed as obtaining between entities with a subject predicate structure, but, as noted previously, such an argument would be unable to account for the availability of thinkable content (since these entities would need to presuppose the very determinate content they were meant to account for). Thus, without a different conception of grounding, Kant’s argument appears to rest on a fundamental confusion.¹⁶ In the next section I will argue that the German Idealists were not only aware of this problem, but also attempted to solve it.

¹⁶ Lest one object that this difficulty is confined to *the Nova Dilucidatio* formulation of the argument, it is worth noting that Kant uses a similarly problematic strategy in *The Only Possible Argument*. This version of the argument is framed in terms of positing. For example, the crucial contention of the argument is stated as follows “Now, if all existence is cancelled, then nothing is posited absolutely, nothing at all is given, there is no material element for anything which can be thought; all possibility completely disappears.” (2:78). But such absolute positing is conceived of as the positing of “the thing itself, together with its properties.” Though such absolute positing goes beyond what Kant calls relative positing by claiming that the object judged actually exists as specified by the judgment. Yet, since absolute positing occurs only as a determinate judgment (which has a subject predicate form), it cannot be used to account for determinate content as such. Furthermore, Kant’s claim in his various lectures on logic that the concept of representation is a basic and cannot be further elucidated leads one to think that a solution to this problem is not available to him. “Representation is an elementary expression which cannot be further analyzed” (*Dohna-Wundlacken Logic*, 752). And again, “we will not investigate how representations arise. Logic deals with cognition too, to be sure, because in cognition there is already thought. But representation is not yet cognition, rather, cognition always presupposes representation. And this latter cannot be explained at all. For we would always have to explain *what representation* is by means of yet another representation.” (*Jaesche Logic*, 34).

1.3 Grounding Determinate Content in German Idealism: Hölderlin and Fichte

To formulate an adequate account of the fundament grounds of content, we need to find an account of grounding that does not already presuppose the availability of content. As noted in the previous sub-section, conceptions of grounding as a relation holding only between structured entities such as facts will therefore not be suitable. Even if the fact that x is F were to ground the fact that y is G , we would still need to account for the contents x , y , F , and G . What is required is thus an account of grounding that operates at a pre-predicative level. We need an account of a ground of determinate content which itself does not presuppose determinate content. Kant's possibility proof thus leads to a very deep and difficult metaphysical problem. Yet the philosophers who came after Kant were aware of this problem and attempted to provide a solution to it in their work. In what follows, I will sketch how the three traditional interpretations of God's grounding of possibility can be supplemented by the work of some of the philosophers who came after Kant. In this subsection, Hölderlin will be seen as supplementing the Spinozistic model and Fichte as modifying the Cartesian model. Then, in the next section, Hegel will be shown to offer a cognitive phenomenological account of content which strengthens the Leibnizian model.

Hölderlin's attempted solution to his problem can be seen in his early fragment *Judgment and Being*. In it, Hölderlin contends that every judgment (*Urteil*) is a division. For example, when I judge that "the rose is red" I distinguish the rose from the redness which is predicated of it. But Hölderlin maintains that our ability to divide things in this

way presupposes a prior unity. He notes that this prior unity is required by the very idea of judgment:

Judgment in the highest and strictest sense, is the original separation of object and subject which are most deeply united in intellectual intuition, that separation through which alone object and subject become possible, the arch separation. In the concept of separation there lies already the concept of the reciprocity of object and subject and the necessary presupposition of a whole of which object and subject form the parts.¹⁷

It is the separation of judgment which makes possible determinate contents, but judgment itself requires a prior unity in which subject and object form a whole. Hölderlin calls this prior unity Being:

Being expresses the connection between subject and object. Where subject and object are united altogether and not only in part, that is, united in such a manner that no separation can be performed without violating the essence of what is to be separated, there and nowhere else can be spoken of *Being* proper, as is the case with intellectual intuition.¹⁸

In Being there is a complete unity between subject and object. If they were to be divided at all, this would contradict what we mean by the concept of Being as a primordial unity.

Hölderlin can here be seen as articulating a pre-predicative version of the Spinozistic account of how God grounds possibility. On this view possibility is grounded in the divine nature. But, unlike the standard Spinozistic model, the divine nature is not thought of as exemplifying a set of already determinate properties. Rather, Hölderlin argues that the exemplification of properties by a subject itself presupposes a prior unity which accounts for why those properties can be distinguished by thought. On such a model God's nature, as primordial Being, could be the source of all possibility without

¹⁷ Hölderlin, "Judgment and Being" in *Essays and Letters* trans. Adler and Louth (New York: Penguin, 2009), 37.

¹⁸ Hölderlin, "Judgment and Being", 37.

having to think of God as exemplifying all fundamental properties. Rather, God's nature would be thought of as a fundamental pre-predicative unity out of which determinations can later be separated out in an act of judgment.¹⁹

In contrast, Fichte can be taken as representative of a Cartesian account which grounds possibility in divine power. According to Fichte, philosophy's first absolutely unconditioned principle must be seen as an act [*Tathandlung*]. This absolutely unconditioned principle of human knowledge cannot be proved (*beweisen*) or determined (*bestimmen*) since, if it were, it would fail to be unconditioned.²⁰ Rather, it "is intended to express that act (*Tathandlung*) which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible."²¹ Fichte then goes on to specify how this unconditioned activity might go on to produce determinate content. Fichte claims that it does this through positing. At its most fundamental level, content is generated through the I's positing of itself and the world which opposes it. This is carried out in the famous three first propositions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*: $I = I$, $I \neq \sim I$, and $I = \sim I$.²² In this manner, the Cartesian interpretation might articulate a concept of an unconditioned power which grounds thinkable content.

While both Hölderlinian and Fichtean theories provide interesting models for how determinate content might be grounded in a non-circular manner, Hegel contends that

¹⁹ This view was also adopted and made popular by the early Schelling.

²⁰ Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Heath and Lachs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 93.

²¹ Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, § 93.

²² See Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, §1-3.

neither of them is adequate. Against Hölderin, Hegel notes that it is philosophically unsatisfying to claim that the ultimate ground of content can never be grasped by reason. By claiming that Being, as the ground of content, always transcends what can be rationally judged, we are left with a view in which content is ultimately inexplicable. We might have an intellectual intuition of it, but only so long as intellectual intuition is defined in such a way that it forever eludes our rational grasp. As Hegel remarks in the *Phenomenology*, in such a scenario we would be left in a “night in which... all cows are black” —a position which reduces reason “to vacuity” (PhG 16). If our reason can only proceed by way of judgement, and judgement can never articulate the grounds of content, then we can never cognize the nature of such an ultimate ground. Such a position, claims Hegel, is philosophically unsatisfying.

Against Fichte, Hegel notes that Fichte’s starting point does not, in fact, begin with something indeterminate since it presupposes a distinction between an I and its objects and it thereby requires determinate contents of <I> and <object>. Such an account would thus not provide an ultimate explanation of the grounds of determinate content.

Hegel contends:

The actual development of the science which starts from the ego shows that in that development the object has and retains the perennial character of an other for the ego, and that the ego which formed the starting-point is, therefore, still entangled in the world of appearance and is not the pure knowing which has in truth overcome the opposition of consciousness.
(SL, 77)

Here Hegel argues that if we proceed from the concept of an I, as Fichte does, we must assume a distinction between the I and its object. It does not proceed from an indeterminate beginning, which Hegel here calls pure knowing, but rather helps itself to a

pair of opposed concepts: ego and object. Such an account thus could not provide the ultimate account of the grounds of determinate content.

2. Hegel's Cognitive Phenomenological Account of Content

Hegel sets forth his own account of the ground of determinate content in his logical writings. In the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel reiterates the contention of Kant's possibility argument when he argues that logic is not merely a formal enterprise:

It is quite inept to say that logic abstracts from all content, that it teaches only the rules of thinking without any reference to what is thought or without being able to consider its nature. For thinking and the rules of thinking are supposed to be the subject matter of logic, these directly constitute its peculiar content; in them, logic has that second constituent, a matter, about the nature of which it is concerned (SL, 44).²³

Hegel here argues that even if logic were merely the examination of the formal rules of thinking such as the law of identity, $A = A$, and the law of non-contradiction, $\sim(A \ \& \ \sim A)$, such rules would nonetheless constitute the content of this investigation. For there is surely a difference between thinking $A = A$ and thinking $\sim(A \ \& \ \sim A)$ or between thinking either of them and failing to think at all. Logic thus has a content, and this content needs to be accounted for both in terms of its being (i.e. that there is content) and in terms of its determinacy (that each determinate content is the content that it is). For Hegel, the application of principle of sufficient reason to logic implies “the requirement that the necessity of its content should be shown, and the very being, as well as the

²³ Pagination refers to the Miller translation of *The Science of Logic* which will be used throughout.

determinations, of its objects should be proved” (EL §1).²⁴ The upshot of this argument is that logic, in its most fundamental sense, cannot be understood in a purely formal manner, since its content must be accounted for as well. Indeed, “far from being formal, far from standing in need of a matter to constitute an actual and true cognition, it is its content alone which has absolute truth” (SL, Introduction, 49-50). Hegel calls such content “the Notion” (*Der Begriff*) which is “an object, a product and content of thinking, and is absolute self-subsistent object [*Sache*], the logos, the reason of that which is, the truth of what we call things” (SL, 39).

Hegel thus shares Kant’s view that the material component of possibility must be accounted for. Moreover, like Kant, he also claims that any such account will have to appeal to God. This background helps to explain Hegel’s otherwise bizarre claim that:

Logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and finite mind. (SL, 50).²⁵

Logic includes not only a formal, but also a material component, and in explaining the latter it is necessary to appeal to the eternal essence of God.

2.1 Hegel’s Phenomenological Method

Hegel’s own approach to the grounding of content appeals to the phenomenology of thinking or, in contemporary parlance, cognitive phenomenology—the attempt to

²⁴ Citations from the Encyclopedia Logic come from Geraets, Suchting, and Harris’ translation.

²⁵ It is worth comparing Hegel’s view here with the telling slip Kant made in his *Nova Dilucidatio* version of the argument. “Of all beings, God is the only one in which existence is prior to, or, if you prefer *identical with possibility*” (1:396. [Italics mine]).

elucidate the experiential character of thought. While some contemporary philosophers have limited the qualitative features of experience to sensible properties (e.g. feeling pain or seeing red), others have noted that our cognitive experiences also have a qualitative character (e.g. thinking that $7+5=12$ or desiring that there be a Fregean third realm).²⁶ Hegel, like many past philosophers, fell within the latter camp.²⁷ To see this, it is important to note that Hegel's project in the *Science of Logic* begins with the absolute knowing attained at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He calls this perspective "pure knowing", claiming, for example, that "the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the science of consciousness, the exposition of it, and that consciousness has for result the Notion of science, i.e. pure knowing" (SL, Begin, 68). In the *Phenomenology* "consciousness, as spirit in its manifestation which in its progress frees itself from its immediacy and its external concretion, attains to...pure knowing" (SL, Preface I, 28). It is thus with the pure knowing attained at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the project of the *Logic* begins.

In this manner, the *Science of Logic* presupposes the result of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Likewise, since, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, the project of the *Phenomenology* is phenomenological, the *Logic* will thereby begin from a phenomenological starting point. Hegel explains:

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have exhibited consciousness in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the

²⁶ See the introduction to Bayne and Montague's *Cognitive Phenomenology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4-7. In addition, contemporary philosophers of mind have also cited a range of cases in support of the existence of a purely cognitive phenomenology: i) when things come to mind too quickly to be associated with further sensible features, ii) in the experience of thinking a sentence with understanding in contrast to thinking the same sounds without understanding, and iii) in our ability to introspectively determine what we are currently thinking.

²⁷ A diverse group containing figures such as Descartes and Hume, and Husserl and Moore.

object to absolute knowing. The path of this movement goes through every form of the relation of consciousness to the object and has the Notion [*Begriff*] of Science for its result. This Notion therefore [...] needs no justification here because it has received it in that work; and it cannot be justified in any other way than by this emergence in consciousness, all the forms of which are resolved into this Notion as into their truth...A definition of science—or more precisely of logic—has its proof solely in the already mentioned necessity of its emergence in consciousness (SL, Intro, 48-49).

Hegel here reiterates that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* progresses from its initial perspective, in which consciousness seems to face an irreconcilable opposition between itself and the objects that confront it, to its final standpoint of absolute knowing, where such an opposition is done away with. In absolute knowing, consciousness comes to an adequate characterization of itself and this characterization does not involve an opposition to an external object. Through this process, we finally arrive at what Hegel calls the *Begriff*, which he takes to be the subject matter of the *Science of Logic*. This *Begriff*, claims Hegel, can only be justified by its emergence in consciousness as set forth in the *Phenomenology*.

Hegel then clarifies the nature of this justificatory support that the *Phenomenology* provides the *Logic*:

The Notion of pure Science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than the deduction of it. Absolute knowing is the truth of every mode of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the object from the certainty of itself is completely eliminated: truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth. [...] It contains thought in so far as this is just as much the object in its own self, or the object in its own self in so far as it is equally pure thought. As science, truth is pure self-consciousness in its self-development and has the shape of the self, so that the absolute truth [in and for itself] of being is the known Notion and the Notion as such is the absolute truth of being. (SL, Intro, 49)

Hegel here claims that the Begriff to be examined in the *Science of Logic* presupposes the standpoint of absolute knowing attained in the *Phenomenology*. The *Phenomenology* concludes with absolute knowing where there is no longer a distinction between what consciousness is aware of and consciousness' own certainty of itself. As noted in chapter one, the *Phenomenology* began with the natural assumption that there is a fundamental rift between consciousness' Wissen and Wahrheit. On this view, Wissen (knowledge) is identified with the modes of presentation by which objects are given to us, while Wahrheit (truth) is identified with the objects themselves. The initial worry that this position invites is that it appears we can have certainty only of Wissen and not of Wahrheit, since things may not be as they appear to us to be. However, if we take Wissen itself as our object, we examine something in which truth (Wahrheit) is equated with certainty and certainty with truth. And, in absolute knowing we are given an adequate description of the content confronting us in Wissen: It is "pure self-consciousness in its self-development" and has "the shape of the self." It is this domain of absolute knowing that the *Science of Logic* sets out to explore. It begins with the adequate characterization of the content immediately given to us in Wissen and, thereby, continues the phenomenological project of the *Phenomenology*.

Not only does the *Science of Logic* begin with the phenomenological standpoint arrived at in the *Phenomenology*, it also proceeds by a phenomenological method. Though there are important differences between the projects of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Logic*, Hegel claims that their underlying method is the same. He notes that "in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have expounded an example of this method in application to a more concrete object, namely consciousness" (SL, Intro, 53-54). Though

both works share the same method, the *Logic* applies this method to the domain of pure thinking, while the *Phenomenology* applies it to a concrete case of consciousness (i.e. a consciousness that takes itself to be confronted by a self-standing world of external objects). So, though there is an important difference between the two projects, this difference concerns only the perspective the method is applied to, not the method itself.

Interpreters of the *Science of Logic* have tended to overlook Hegel's discussion of method in the Prefaces, Introduction, and section entitled "With What Must the Science Begin", preferring instead to focus on his account of the transition from Being to Nothing to Becoming or even the Doctrine of Essence or the Doctrine of the Concept which are found much later in the book. As a result, interpreters have failed to observe that the argumentative structure of the *Science of Logic* is meant to be phenomenological. That Hegel intends to use a phenomenological method in the *Science of Logic* can be seen in two primary ways.

The first is the identification of the method and the content of logic. Hegel claims that, philosophically understood, the Logic "can be only the nature of the content itself which spontaneously develops itself in a scientific method of knowing, since it is at the same time the reflection of the content itself which first posits and generates its determinate character" (SL, Preface I, 27). Here Hegel identifies his method with the content to be examined in the Logic as it develops itself. The method will simply be to follow the content as it reflects on itself and gives itself determinate character. This method of attending to content as it develops itself is best understood phenomenologically, since the content to be considered is none other than the pure

thinking attained at the end of the *Phenomenology*. On this reading, the method will be to attend to our own awareness and see how it unfolds to produce determinate content.

Hegel makes clear that the content of the Logic is not to be understood as a realm of self-standing abstract concepts to be examined in a mathematical manner by stipulating definitions and deriving consequences from those definitions. “Science cannot [...] borrow its method from a subordinate science like mathematics” (SL, Preface I, 27).²⁸ Rather than being some pre-fashioned abstract object waiting to be examined, Hegel identifies the content of Logic with thinking itself. For example, Hegel claims that “it is essentially within the science that the subject matter of logic, namely, thinking [...] is considered” (SL, Intro, 43) and that “as thinking and the rules of thinking are supposed to be the subject matter of logic, these directly constitute its peculiar content [*Denn da das Denken und die Regeln des Denkens ihr Gegenstand sein sollen, so hat sie ja unmittelbar daran ihren eigentuemlichen Inhalt*].” (SL, Intro, 44). In these passages Hegel claims that, in thinking, Logic has its content immediately. Likewise, he maintains that “what we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking about something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it [...]; on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-determinations of thought are the content and the ultimate truth itself” (SL, Intro, 50). Thus, for Hegel, the content of logic is thinking itself.

So, to summarize the argument thus far, Hegel identifies the method of logic with its content, and identifies the content of logic with thinking. So, by the transitivity of identity, the method of logic will be thinking itself. Moreover, Hegel holds to a

²⁸ See also SL, Intro, 44-45 and EL §19.

phenomenological conception of thinking. He claims, for example, that “thought is an expression which attributes the determination contained therein primarily to consciousness” (SL, Intro, 51). Thought and its determinations, which we have seen to be the content and method of the logic, is here said to pertain to consciousness. Although it also has “objective value and existence” (SL, Intro, 51), thought is something that nonetheless primarily concerns conscious experience. Likewise, we have already noted that thinking is supposed to be the pure knowing which was the result of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. “The beginning is logical in that it is to be made in the element of thought that is free and for itself, in pure knowing.” (SL, Begin, 68). This pure knowledge is “the certainty which has become truth, the certainty which [...] no longer has the object over against it but has internalized it, knows it as its own self” (SL, Begin, 69). It is this phenomenological conception of thinking, arrived at via the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that Hegel has in view in the *Logic*. And so, since Hegel identifies the method of the *Logic* with a phenomenological conception of thinking, the method of the *Logic* is thus best understood phenomenologically.

The second reason why Hegel’s method should be understood phenomenologically is that he frequently and explicitly grounds the method of the *Science of Logic* in conscious experience. For example, Hegel claims that “the exposition of what alone can be the true method of philosophical science falls within the treatment of logic itself; for the method is the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of logic” (SL, Intro, 53). Here Hegel identifies method not just with the movement of content, but with the consciousness of the form of this movement. Contents do not merely move in the sense that conclusions can be deductively derived from

definitions, but their movement is something that we can be conscious of. This point is reiterated by Hegel's identification of method with the inwardness or rhythm of the content. He claims:

This is self-evident simply from the fact that it [the method] is not something distinct from its object and content; for it is the inwardness of the content, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which is the mainspring of its advance. It is clear that no expositions can be accepted as scientifically valid which do not pursue the course of this method and do not conform to its simple rhythm, for this is the course of the subject matter itself (SL, Intro, 54).

In light of the background Kantian assumption that time is the form of inner experience, Hegel's identification of method with the inwardness and rhythm of content ties his method to conscious experience. The innerness and rhythm of content is something that can make sense only as occurring for consciousness.

Given that the method of the Logic is grounded in consciousness, it is understandable why Hegel would claim that the only way that the Logic can proceed is for us to look on at our own thought:

Now starting from this determination of pure knowledge, all that is needed to ensure that the beginning remains immanent in its scientific development is to consider, or rather, ridding oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever, simply to take up, what is there before us (SL, Begin, 69).

Here Hegel claims that what is needed to make a proper beginning is to simply take up what is before us. In the *Phenomenology* we were made aware of pure knowing, and all that we need to do is attend to this pure knowing to see how it unfolds in the *Logic*.

Again:

All that is present is simply the resolve [...] that we propose to consider thought as such. Thus the beginning must be an absolute, or what is

synonymous here, an abstract beginning; and so it may not presuppose anything, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science (SL, Begin, 69).

The method begins, claims Hegel, simply with the resolve to consider thought. In this manner it will not presuppose anything since we will simply examine what is before us in thought. Such a beginning will not be mediated by anything further or itself have a ground. Rather, it is this consideration of thought which is the ground of the entire science as we aim to construe the content given in it. In this manner, Hegel describes the method of logic as one of self-construal:

This spiritual movement which, in its simple undifferentiatedness, gives itself its own determinateness and in its determinateness its equality with itself, which therefore is the immanent development of the Notion, this movement is the absolute method of knowing and at the same time is the immanent soul of the content itself. I maintain that it is this self-construing method alone [*auf diesem sich selbst konstruierenden Wege allein*] which enables philosophy to be an objective demonstrated Science (Preface I, 28).

Hegel's method is thus best understood phenomenologically. We begin with the resolve to consider pure knowing, and then try to construe what is given to us therein. As we reflect on our experience, we will come to see how determinate content develops. The goal will be to try to capture the content of pure thought, and, as in the *Phenomenology*, progress will be made by negation as we see how various putative accounts fail.

2.2 Generating Determinate Content: Being, Nothing, and Becoming

The cognitive phenomenological method set forth above allows Hegel to provide an interesting account of how to ground determinate content without presupposing that very content. This lets him solve the problem of Kant's *Only Possible Argument* by adopting a phenomenological version of the Leibnizian account of the grounds of

content. By beginning with pure thinking, Hegel takes up a starting point that is wholly indeterminate and thereby avoids presupposing any determinate content. Hegel begins by arguing that pure knowing is most naturally characterized in terms of simple immediacy. As the absolute knowing in which appearance and reality are identical, pure knowing should be construed as a unity which has “sublated all reference to an other” (SL, 69). So, when we examine pure knowing, “what is present is only simple immediacy” (SL, 69). Hegel then argues that this simple immediacy is more adequately characterized as pure being since “simple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection and contains a reference to its distinction from what is mediated” (SL, 69). The concept of immediacy makes sense only in relation to the concept of mediation: To be immediate is to be something which is not mediated. A simpler first characterization would thus be pure being. “Just as pure knowing is to mean knowing as such, quite abstractly, so too pure being is to mean nothing but being in general: being, and nothing else, without any further specification or filling” (SL, 69). Pure being seems to capture the abstract and indeterminate nature of pure knowing and so can be “taken as the content of pure knowing”. When we do this, we will need to stand back and allow the content of pure knowing “to have free play [...] not determining it any further” (SL, 73).²⁹ We need only observe whether pure knowing is adequately characterized in this manner.

²⁹ A further argument is that since pure knowing has sublated all difference to its object, it is best described as pure being, viz. “the unity into which knowing has collapsed at the extreme point of its union with its object.” Pure being is a plausible characterization of pure knowing since there is not “anything else present, any content which could be used to make the beginning more determinate” (WL, 73).

In the first movement from Being to Nothing, Hegel argues that, by its very nature as indeterminate and immediate, the thought of pure being can have no determinate feature to distinguish it from other thoughts. He argues as follows:

Being, pure being, without any further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself. It is also not unequal relatively to an other; it has no diversity within itself nor any with a reference outwards. It would not be held fast in its purity if it contained any determination or content which could be distinguished in it or by which it could be distinguished from an other. It is pure indeterminateness and emptiness. There is nothing to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting; or, it is only this pure intuiting itself. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only this empty thinking. Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing (SL, 82).

Hegel here claims that pure being can have no “determination or content which could be distinguished in it or by which it could be distinguished from another” (SL, 82). So, for example, my thought that Santa Clause is fat can be distinguished from my thought that Sherlock Holmes is skinny by way of their determinate contents (e.g. <fat> and <skinny>). However, one cannot distinguish the thought of pure being in this way because this brute, indeterminate, and immediate awareness is present in every conscious thought and so there is no way to individuate it by way of its contrast relations with other contents. But, precisely because it is empty and indeterminate, it is a thought of Nothing. “There is nothing to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting; or it is only this pure intuiting itself. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, it is equally only this empty thinking” (SL, 82). It, like the thought of Nothing, cannot be used to individuate any determinate content. So the initial characterization of pure knowing as pure being proves to be equivalent to characterizing it as Nothing. “Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing” (SL, 82).

Hegel then observes that we experience a similar inversion when we contemplate Nothing. Hegel points out that to think of Nothing is to think of no determinate content:

Nothing, pure nothing: it is simply equality with itself, complete emptiness, absence of all determination and content—undifferentiatedness in itself. In so far as intuiting or thinking can be mentioned here, it counts as a distinction whether something or nothing is intuited or thought. To intuit or think nothing has, therefore, a meaning; both are distinguished and thus nothing is (exists) in our intuiting or thinking; or rather it is empty intuition and thought itself, and the same empty intuition and thought as pure being. Nothing is, therefore, the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, pure being (SL, 82).

Here Hegel claims that Nothing “is simply equality with itself, complete emptiness, absence of all determination and content— undifferentiatedness in itself” (SL, 82). Such thought represents nothing determinate. But, because the concept of Nothing is meant to be a characterization of what is presented in pure knowing, it must in some sense have being. “Nothing is (exists) in our intuiting or thinking [...] it is empty intuition or thought itself” (SL, 82). In this manner, Nothing proves to have the same descriptive content as the thought of pure being.

Hegel then argues that in this transformation we have experienced the emergence of a new determinate content: Becoming.

Pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same. What is the truth is neither being nor nothing, but that being—does not pass over but has passed over—into nothing, and nothing into being. But it is equally true that they are not undistinguished from each other, that, on the contrary, they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet that they are unseparated and inseparable and that each immediately vanishes in its opposite. Their truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: becoming, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself” (SL, 82-83).

Here Hegel notes that, in light of the preceding observations, we are forced to say that Being and Nothing are the same with respect to their indeterminacy. When we start with the thought of pure Being, we are led to say that it is equivalent to the thought of Nothing. And when we start with the thought of Nothing, we are led to say that it is equivalent to the thought of pure being. Their equivalence occurs because they contain no determinate content by which to distinguish them.

However, Hegel also notes that we are aware that these two thoughts are “absolutely distinct” (SL, 83). The what-it’s-like of thinking Being and discovering it to be equivalent to Nothing is distinct from the what-it’s-like of thinking Nothing and discovering it to be equivalent to Being. Hegel contends that in our awareness of this very process we come to see the generation of the determinate content Becoming. This awareness of the motion of thought as it shifts from Being to Nothing and Nothing to Being is determinate and thus distinct from conceiving of Being or Nothing in their immediacy. We are now considering what confronts us in pure knowing *as* changing.

In this manner, Hegel can account for the grounding of determinate content without presupposing the very content he is supposed to account for. Moreover, unlike Hölderlin’s solution this account can allow for the ground of content to be accessible to reason, since we can grasp how thought develops by looking on and seeing it unfold. And, by beginning with pure knowing, it, unlike Fichte’s account, begins with something truly indeterminate. It does not have to presuppose a determinate conception of the I, its object, and the relation between the two. So Hegel’s phenomenological account of thought in the *Science of Logic* can thereby solve the problem of the grounds of content which undermined Kant’s solution in the *Only Possible Argument*. This

phenomenological interpretation of the opening arguments of the *Logic* also has further advantages which will be elaborated in the next subsection.

2.3 Further Advantages for a Phenomenological Interpretation of the Logic

2.3.1 It solves the problem of the Logic's beginning

Interpreters have long noted that the opening arguments of *The Science of Logic* appear to rest on two incompatible claims. On the one hand, Hegel claims that the *Logic* can begin only with immediate determinations. These immediate determinations are non-relational in that they “cannot possess any determination relatively to anything else” and thus “cannot contain any content” (SL, 70) and must be “free from determinateness in relation to essence and also from any which it can possess within itself” (SL, 81).³⁰ “Being, pure being, without any further determination” (SL, 82) is then introduced as the first concept to be considered in the *Logic*, since it, in its “indeterminate immediacy” (SL, 82) is the only concept which can satisfy this desiderata. On the other hand, the opening arguments of the *Logic* claim to demonstrate that the immediate determinations with which they begin are related to each other. Specifically, Hegel seeks to derive (i) Nothing from Being, (ii) Being from Nothing, and (iii) Becoming from the relations between Being and Nothing.

These two assertions are not consistent. On the one hand, if one begins with relationless immediacy, then there can be no relations between the concepts of Being, Nothing, and Becoming. But without relations between these concepts, there can be no

³⁰ The pagination and citations are from the A.V. Miller translation of the *Science of Logic*. (New York: Humanity Books, 1969).

derivation relations between them as the opening arguments of the *Logic* require. The dialectic would stall out in the identity of Being and Nothing without being able to transition to Becoming. Being would be posited with no determinations and could thus be shown to be identical to Nothing, since Nothing is also defined as having no determinations. However, given only this relationless immediacy, there is no reason to move on from this identity claim. If we only consider relationless immediacy, there is no reason to think that Being and Nothing are nonetheless distinct, and thus no reason to posit a transition from one to the other as Becoming.

On the other hand, if one begins with a set of relational concepts, then one can account for the derivation relations that obtain between them. If Being and Nothing are both posited so as to stand in relations to each other, e.g. as being distinct, then we have grounds to posit becoming. We would see that by defining Being and Nothing in terms of a total lack of determination, they would have to be identical concepts. But, on this proposal, we would also know that they are not supposed to be identical and so would posit Becoming as a way to account for their difference. Here we could account for the transition from Being and Nothing to Becoming. Yet, on this scenario, we would not be able to begin with relationless immediacy. So it seems like Hegel faces a dilemma.

The standard solution to this problem eliminates the inconsistency by rejecting the claim that the *Logic* begins with relationless immediacy. To do this interpreters maintain that Hegel's claims about "indeterminate immediacy" should not be taken at face value, but understood in light of the "mediated" concept of immediacy set forth in the *Logic* of

Essence.³¹ In this manner the Logic of Essence is taken to contain the true methodological core of the *Logic*. As a result, the two dominant interpretations of *The Science of Logic* have both sought to establish their reading by appealing to the method set forth in the Logic of Essence. Some, like Henrich, take a neo-metaphysical interpretation by understanding the absolute negativity set forth in the Logic of Essence as a self-referential ontological structure.³² Others, like Theunissen, take a pragmatic interpretation by interpreting absolute negativity as an attempt to replace metaphysics with a theory of communicative freedom.³³

Though the standard solution is correct in denying that the opening arguments of *The Science of Logic* begin with relationless immediacy, it is incorrect in claiming that, as a result, the true method of the *Logic* is to be found in the Doctrine of Essence. Not only is such an interpretation needlessly complicated, claiming that Hegel stated his arguments in such a way that their success could be understood only by invoking considerations stated much later in the book, but it also contradicts Hegel's claim that the starting point of the logic must be "free from determinateness in relation to essence" (SL, 81). Rather, as I have shown in this chapter, Hegel's method is stated early on in the Prefaces, Introduction, and section entitled "With What Must the Science Begin?" rather than later in the Doctrine of Essence. These passages make clear that the *Logic* is not meant to begin with pure being in its relationless immediacy, but rather with the pure knowing

³¹ See, for example, Dieter Henrich's "Anfang und Methode der Logik" in *Hegel im Kontext*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 73-94.

³² See his "Hegels Logik der Reflexion" in *Hegel im Kontext*, 95-157. Other advocates of this view are Horstmann and Bowman.

³³ See his *Sein und Schein: Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980). Other advocates of this view are Habermas, Brandom, and Pinkard.

achieved at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Only then is pure being postulated as an attempt to articulate the content of such pure knowing. It is in this manner that Hegel introduces a mediated concept of immediacy. Indeed, he states it explicitly as follows:

This pure being is the unity into which pure knowing withdraws, or, if this itself is still to be distinguished as form from its unity, then being is also the content of pure knowing. It is when taken in this way that this pure being, this absolute immediacy has equally the character of something absolutely mediated (SL, 61).

As pure knowing, the starting point is immediate. Pure knowing does not grasp itself through some external object but is given directly to itself. But pure being, posited as the content that is given in pure knowing, is something mediated. For, as a content, it is meant to express something and hence to stand in relation to it. The beginning is thus immediate in starting from pure thought's awareness of itself, but mediated insofar as it tries to express the content of that awareness as pure being. A cognitive phenomenological interpretation therefore has the advantage of giving a plausible answer to the traditional problem of the beginning of the *Science of Logic*.

2.3.2 *It avoids further problems that afflict the standard interpretations*

A cognitive phenomenological interpretation has some further advantages over the dominant pragmatist and neo-metaphysical interpretations. On the one hand, pragmatist interpretations claim that Hegel's arguments are grounded in the social practice of giving and asking for reasons.³⁴ On this view, Hegel accounts for the progressive determination of logical content in terms of the social norms by which we

³⁴ This style of interpretation is represented, for example, by the work of Brandom, Pinkard, Pippin, and Stegler-Weithofer.

hold one another accountable for our rational commitments. So, for example, the meaning of uttering “x is (completely) red” in English consists of being held responsible for denying “x is green”, “x is blue,” “x is yellow”, etc. when questioned by other speakers. Neo-metaphysical interpretations, on the other hand, though they distinguish themselves from older metaphysical interpretations by denying that Hegel was interested in traditional questions of philosophical theology, nonetheless maintain that Hegel’s project is deeply metaphysical.³⁵ Specifically, neo-metaphysical views identify Hegel’s central thesis with the claim that reality has a self-referential structure and maintain that determinate content emerges only within this self-referential structure.

Both of these interpretations encounter problems that do not arise for a phenomenological interpretation. The difficulty for pragmatic interpretations lies in accounting for the necessity of logical content. It is intuitive to think that logical content is necessary. But if, as pragmatist interpretations suggest, the content of logic is socially instituted, then it cannot be absolutely necessary. Social practices are contingent (both in the sense that it is possible for different human social practices to have evolved and in the sense that it is possible for there to have been no humans at all), and so the content that is instituted by them would also have to be contingent. It is thus difficult to see how the pragmatic interpretation could account for the seeming necessity of logical content.

The phenomenological interpretation can avoid this difficulty. First, it is intuitive to think that the structure of pure thought as such is not contingent in the way that social practices are. Furthermore, Hegel could account for the necessary existence of such

³⁵ This interpretation is represented by the work of Bowman, Henrich, and Horstmann among others.

thinking by equating it with some sort of divine mind. Though Hegel distinguishes his conception of God from some traditional theistic conceptions (which he criticizes as displaying what he calls bad infinity), at points he makes strong metaphysical claims about the necessity of mindedness in the universe.³⁶

The other standard interpretation of the *Logic* currently gaining ground in the literature is a neo-metaphysical reading which identifies what Hegel calls the Concept (*der Begriff*) with a kind of self-referential structure. Though correct to note the important role that reflexivity plays in Hegel's system, neo-metaphysical interpretations fail to specify the relevant kind of reflexive structure and how such a structure could ground the determinate content of the *Logic*. Not all forms of self-referentiality are sufficient to ground determinate content. For example, the sentence "all sentences on this page are in English" refers to itself. Yet this self-reflexive expression could not be used to account for the origin of logical content as such since the sentence itself contains determinate content (e.g. <sentence>, <page>, <English>).³⁷ The phenomenological interpretation thus provides a necessary supplement to such neo-metaphysical readings, since it can specify the precise kind of reflexivity at play in Hegel's account of the ground of logical content. According to Hegel, it is not reflexivity in general that is responsible for the

³⁶ For example, Hegel famously claims that the realm investigated in the *Logic* "is the truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of the world and finite mind" (WL, 50). The resulting panpsychist view of reality would admittedly be metaphysically controversial today. Yet such a view has not been without contemporary defenders of late. See for example, David Chalmers, "Panpsychism and Panprotopsyism" (forthcoming) and Galen Strawson, "Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 13.10-11 (2006): 3-31.

³⁷ Additionally, this sort of reflexivity would not be sufficient to provide the kind of certainty that Hegel requires for the beginning of the *Logic*.

determination of logical content, but the specific reflexivity presented in pure knowing as it reflects on itself in an attempt to adequately characterize its own nature.

3. Hegel and the Semantic Given

There are thus several advantages to a cognitive phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's account of content. It solves the problem of how to ground content without needing to presuppose that very content, it accounts for the opening arguments of *The Science of Logic*, and, unlike the standard interpretations, it can ground the necessity of logical content and explain what it means for the *Begriff* to have a self-referential structure. There is therefore much to recommend a phenomenological interpretation of the *Logic*. But it is important to note that this interpretation requires a form of semantic givenness.

On a phenomenological reading, Hegel's account of content presupposes semantic givenness in two crucial respects. First, his theory that content is grounded in the phenomenal character of thought requires a form of semantic givenness. As argued above, Hegel appeals to the what-it's-like features of thinking to ground determinate content. One begins by attending to the phenomenal character of pure knowing and attempting to characterize it. Because of its immediacy, pure knowing first gives rise to the content <pure being>. But, because of its emptiness, pure knowing also generates the content <nothing>. And because both <pure being> and <nothing> are extremely general characterizations of pure knowing there seems to be no way to distinguish them. Yet we do. And we do so by noting a difference in phenomenal character between thinking <pure being> and seeing it to be equivalent to <nothing> and thinking <nothing> and seeing it

to be equivalent to <pure being>. It is then this difference in phenomenal character that gives rise to the determinate content <becoming>. But if cognitive phenomenology is to ground content in this manner, one must accept a form of semantic givenness. For, on such a model, the meaning of a content would be determined by its corresponding phenomenal character and not by its relations to other contents. As a result, Hegel would be committed to a form of semantic givenness in that the meanings of some contents are what they are independently of their inferential relations to other contents. Moreover, there is reason to think that phenomenal character is itself something intrinsic. Consider, for example, the phenomenal character of pain. All that is required for a subject to undergo pain is to feel pain. To count as an instance of pain, nothing else is needed in addition to its phenomenal character. So, not only are the meanings of contents not determined by their relations to other contents on Hegel's view, but it seems that they are determined by features which are themselves intrinsic.

The second respect in which Hegel's account requires semantic givenness concerns the particular kind of holism it espouses. To see this, we must distinguish two varieties of holism: horizontal and vertical holism. Horizontal holism claims that each particular content is determined by its relation to other particular contents and, as a result, is determined by the whole of content, since, on this view, the whole of content is nothing but the set of all particular contents and the relations that obtain between them. In contrast, vertical holism claims that particular contents are determined by their relation to an antecedently given whole. Kant, for example, claimed that our experience of space and

time is structured in this way.³⁸ We experience a particular location in space as being a limited part of the whole of space, and we experience a particular moment of time as being a limited part of time as a whole. In each case, parts are determined in relation to a whole, but the whole is itself given antecedently to the parts. Divine cognition is another example of this kind of holism. Kant and the German-Idealists believed that, as an intuitive understanding, a divine mind would grasp a whole prior to its parts. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, for instance, Kant claims that “we can [...] conceive of an understanding which, since it is not discursive like ours but is intuitive, goes from the synthetically universal (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts” (5:407). So, whereas for a horizontal holism a whole just is a set of relations between parts, for a vertical holism parts are each defined via their relation to an antecedently given whole.

These two forms of holism have different consequences for the doctrine of semantic givenness. On the one hand, if one adopts a horizontal-holist account of meaning, then one is forced to deny the semantic given. For example, consider the Neo-Sellarsian view in which the meanings of contents are determined by their inferential relations to one another. The meaning of the concept <2>, for instance, is determined by

³⁸ For example, Kant claims that “Space is not discursive or, as is said, general concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition. For, first, one can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space. And these parts cannot as it were precede the single all-encompassing space as its components (from which its composition would be possible), but rather are only thought in it. It is essentially single; the manifold in it, thus also the general concept of spaces in general, rests merely on limitations. From this it follows that in respect to it an a priori intuition (which is not empirical) grounds all concepts of them” (KrV A25/B40). Likewise, in the case of time, Kant claims that “time is no discursive or, as one calls it, general concept, but a pure form of sensible intuition. Different times are only parts of one and the same time. That representation, however, which can only be given through a single object, is an intuition. Further, the proposition that different times cannot be simultaneous cannot be derived from a general concept” (KrV A32/ B47).

its relation to the concepts <1> and <3>. If one claimed that there were two apples on the table, one could infer that there is more than one apple on the table and less than three apples on the table. In this manner, the meaning of contents would be determined by their specific relations to all other contents. And this would imply the denial of semantic givenness since no contents could have their meanings independently of their relations to other contents.

On the other hand, if one adopts a vertical holist conception of meaning, one is required to accept a form of the semantic given. For, on this view, the meaning of a whole must itself be given antecedently to the meaning of its parts. The meanings of the parts of a whole are determined by their relations to that whole, but the whole must itself be intrinsically meaningful. For example, consider the experience of time and space. While the meaning of a particular moment of time is determined by cordoning off a section of the whole of time, this nonetheless presupposes that the meaning of time as a whole is antecedently given. The same holds for our experience of space. While the meaning of an experience of a particular location is determined by placing limits on the whole of space, this nonetheless presupposes that the meaning of our representation of space as a whole is antecedently given. So, on a vertical holist view, there must be a kind of content that derives its meaning independently of its relations to other contents, viz. the content of an antecedently given whole.

I contend that Hegel adopts such a vertical holist account of meaning and is thereby committed to a form of semantic givenness. Hegel's adoption of vertical holism can be seen in three main ways. First, Hegel describes the *Begriff*, or the ground of content, as apprehended in intuition. For example, in the opening arguments of the

Science of Logic Hegel equates pure knowing with intellectual intuition. When describing pure being as the content of pure knowing, he identifies it with “this pure intuiting itself” (SL, 82). Likewise, when describing Nothing, Hegel claims that “to intuit or think nothing has, therefore, a meaning; both are distinguished and thus nothing is (exists) in our intuiting or thinking; or rather it is empty intuition or thought itself, and the same empty intuition or thought as pure being.” (SL, 82). So, since intuitions are representations in which wholes are given antecedently to their parts, in claiming that pure knowing (which is ultimately articulated as the *Begriff*) is an intellectual intuition, Hegel is claiming that its meaning is antecedently given. Second, when Hegel describes the relation between the *Begriff* and its parts, he does not claim the *Begriff* is an aggregate of its parts. Rather, he maintains that the individual parts are what they are because the whole incarnates itself in them. For example, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel explains sensible consciousness, Nature, and History as incarnations [*Entäußerungen*] of the *Begriff* (PhG 806-808). And finally, Hegel explicitly characterizes the *Begriff* as intrinsically intelligible. For example, at the conclusion of the *Science of Logic* he maintains that “all else is error, confusion, opinion, endeavor, caprice and transitoriness; the absolute Idea alone is being, imperishable life, self-knowing truth, and all truth.” (SL, 824). As self-knowing truth, the *Begriff* is intrinsically meaningful. It does not require some further relation to something outside of itself to gain meaning. So, contrary to the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation, Hegel accepts a vertical holism of meaning, and, as a result, must also accept the semantic givenness of the *Begriff*.

4. Conclusion

Viewed historically, Hegel's account of content is meant to solve the Kantian problem of the grounds of possibility. It invokes cognitive phenomenology to explain how one could go from something absolutely indeterminate to ground something determinate. This cognitive phenomenological account of content also has additional advantages over the standard reading in that it can accommodate the necessity of logical content and can provide a worked out theory of how self-reflexivity can be thought to ground content. But one upshot of this attractive interpretation is a commitment to semantic givenness. Thus, contra the Neo-Sellarsian interpretation, there is reason to think that Hegel does not reject all versions of the semantic given.

This chapter, in part, is currently being prepared for submission for publication. Peter Yong was the sole author of this material.

Conclusion

I have argued for a phenomenological interpretation of Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On this reading, Hegel seeks to solve the problem of the criterion by adopting a form of phenomenal particularism. When making a knowledge claim about how things directly appear to us in consciousness, we are acquainted with the truth-maker of our belief and so do not need to appeal to some further criterion to legitimate our claim. This solution requires both phenomenal and epistemological givenness, since consciousness must be phenomenally given to us and it must justify some of our beliefs about it. The rest of the *Phenomenology* then attempts to provide an adequate characterization of the content that confronts us in consciousness. The initial models proposed in Sense-Certainty, Perception, and Force and the Understanding all prove to be inadequate. When we attend to our experience, we see that it cannot be fully captured by simple particulars, Russellian sets of objects and properties, or Fregean senses. In this regard, Hegel can be seen as rejecting some important versions of semantic givenness. However, when Hegel provides his cognitive phenomenological account of content, claiming that the content of our thought proves to be our own thinking, his account relies upon a different version of the semantic given—one in which the meanings of wholes are given antecedently to their parts. As a result, contrary to the dominant Neo-Sellarsian interpretation, Hegel's *Phenomenology* project proves to depend on phenomenal, epistemic, and semantic givenness.

I would like to conclude by briefly considering three areas in which this research program can be further developed. First, I believe that a phenomenological interpretation

is capable of unifying the insights of the traditional epistemological and metaphysical readings. We have already seen how the epistemological aspects of Hegel's work can be retained even when a Neo-Sellarsian framework is abandoned. For a phenomenological reading can reveal how Hegel provides a sophisticated solution to the problem of the criterion, furnishes important criticisms of two dominant theories of content, and sets forth a detailed account of the grounding of content in cognitive phenomenology. Yet none of this requires adopting a Neo-Sellarsian narrative in which meaning, knowledge, and justification are grounded in a social game of giving and asking for reasons. I believe that a phenomenological interpretation is also capable of unifying these insights with those of metaphysical interpretations. For a phenomenological interpretation can motivate the ontological aspects of Hegel's project that recent metaphysical interpretations rightly emphasize. For instance, by appealing to the self-awareness of consciousness it can explain why Hegel would say that the universe is structured by a self-referential process of absolute negativity.¹ Likewise, in appealing to pure thought as the ground of content, it can motivate the claim that Hegel is concerned with providing a fundamental metaphysical explanation of reality.² The hope then is that, when developed, a phenomenological interpretation would synthesize the insights of both the epistemological and metaphysical readings.

A second area in which this interpretation can be developed concerns recent work in the continental tradition. The anti-givenness narrative has not been confined to the

¹ Brady Bowman, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

² James Kreines, *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and its Philosophical Appeal*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

analytic tradition, but has emerged in the continental tradition as well. In an attempt to defend Hegel from objections that his philosophy, by claiming that reality is rationally explicable, ends up protecting the dominant ideology of a culture and, in this manner, can be used to justify oppression, recent continental interpretations have attempted to show the essential role of irrationality and contingency of in his work.³ By focusing on the role of plasticity in his thought and his supposed renunciation of “the big Other”, Hegel is portrayed as denying the rational explicability of reality and thereby avoiding the standard continental criticisms of his position. I believe that the phenomenological interpretation can challenge this reading of Hegel’s project along the same lines as it does the Neo-Sellarsian one. For it shows that Hegel attempts to provide a rational account of fundamental issues in epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language. Yet, it is also important to note that, though it may criticize the recent turn the continental tradition has taken, the phenomenological interpretation is itself rooted in that tradition through the work of philosophers such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.

Finally, the phenomenological interpretation of Hegel’s work can also be developed in reference to contemporary analytic philosophy of mind. For I believe that the insights found in Hegel’s cognitive phenomenological account of content can contribute to the phenomenal intentionality research program within contemporary philosophy. The main difficulties besetting this burgeoning research program are (i) that

³ For some continental criticisms of Hegel see Theodor Adorno *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1987), Jaques Derrida *Glas*, trans. J.P. Leavey and R. Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), and Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005). For alternative irrationalist reconstructions of Hegel’s project see Slavoj Zizek *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012) and Catherine Malabou *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. L. Doring (New York: Routledge, 2005).

it relies on intuitions flowing from the standard thought experiments taken as evidence for the 'hard problem' of consciousness and is thereby subject to the same sorts of conflicting intuitions that afflict other debates about phenomenal consciousness, and (ii) that it has no detailed methodology and so appears to be governed by an arbitrary and amorphous set of intuitions. Hegel's account may have the resources to remedy this situation by showing how pure thinking can be used to develop more robust theories of phenomenal intentionality and cognitive phenomenology and to illustrate how such theories can be defended from their detractors.

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