Hegel's Critique of the Concept of Consciousness: Its Relevance to Contemporary Epistemology and Philosophy of Mind

by

Jay A. Gupta

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Graduate Department of Philosophy

University of Toronto

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Abstract

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Jay A. Gupta Ph.D., 2001
Department of Philosophy
University of Toronto

This study develops a particular interpretation of G.W.F. Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, and extends it to contemporary philosophical concerns.

I claim that the Phenomenology is a critique of an epistemic concept, ‘consciousness’, and that the Phenomenology should therefore be viewed generally as a critique of mentalism. ‘Mentalism’ refers to both a body of beliefs and certain habits of thought that presuppose the subjectivity of mind, and that picture mind and mental items as standing in a problematic relation to what is taken to be the objectivity of reality. I claim that the interpretation of Hegel as a critic of mentalism clarifies Hegel’s overall systematic intentions, and therefore clarifies the relation of the Phenomenology to the Science of Logic.

I argue that the reading of Hegel that is developed here is relevant to contemporary philosophy. I examine works by John McDowell, Robert Brandom, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I draw analogies between Hegel and the later Wittgenstein, who I claim was also a critic of mentalism. I argue that insofar as Hegel and Wittgenstein are critics of mentalism, it is a significant error to read either of them as espousing any form of idealism.
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And finally, I would like to strongly thank all of my undergraduate teachers, above all Professors Kenley Dove and Frank Farrell, for instilling in me the proper perspective and habits of thought that have allowed me to pursue philosophy productively. It is in retrospect that I have a clear view of how much I learned from them.
List of Abbreviations

[BR]: Robert Brandom, "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel’s Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms."

[HD]: Kenley Dove, "Hegel’s Deduction of the Concept of Science."

[PSP]: Kenley Dove, “Phenomenology and Systematic Philosophy.”

[PG]: G.W.F. Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes.

[PS]: G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit.


[A/B]: Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason.

[M]: John McDowell, Mind and World.

[McD]: John McDowell, “Wittgenstein on Following a Rule.”

[P]: Robert B. Pippin, Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness.

[S]: Jason L. Saunders, Greek and Roman Philosophy after Aristotle.

[SVF]: Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta.

[PI]: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations.
Table of Contents

Introduction 1

I. Background 1
II. Mentalism and Determinacy: Explication of Some Main Ideas 6
III. Argument-Structure of Each Chapter 27

Chapter One: John McDowell's Prolegomenon to the Reading of Hegel 38

I. Naturalized Platonism 41
   A. What is 'Nature'? 41
   B. Problems with Invoking Aristotle 47
II. Wittgenstein's Quietism 57
III. Towards a Critique of the Concept of Consciousness 65

Addendum: More Clues to McDowell's Modest Aristotelianism 70

Chapter Two: History of a Presupposition 77

I. Roots of a Sui Generis Concept of Mind 79
II. Descartes and Skepticism 89
III. Kant, Hume, and the Culmination of the Stoic Dichotomy 96
   A. Brief Background Excursus 99
   B. Appearance and Things in Themselves 104

Chapter Three: Hegel's Phenomenological Critique of the Concept of Consciousness 110

I. The Critique of the Concept of Consciousness 114
   A. The Determinacy of Consciousness 114
   B. An Equivocation in the Concept of Knowing 122
   C. Who are 'We'? 132
II. Force and the Understanding: Hegel's Phenomenological Method Applied 137
   A. The Appearance of Force 141
   B. The Syllogism 149
   C. Collapse of the Syllogism 173
Introduction

I. Background

In the course of becoming acquainted with contemporary epistemology and philosophy of mind, I, like many others, noticed something like a continuous oscillation in claims concerning the nature of ‘mind’, and its relation to reality. Internalist and externalist, realist and antirealist, materialist and idealist – in some sense any side taken in these familiar pairings seemed arbitrary, since it was possible to mount arguments for and against these positions with the same relative degrees of success. I became interested in the various critical, yet non-skeptical, approaches that were aimed at analysing the background assumptions involved in these kinds of debates, believing that this constant oscillation of opinion should not lead to a terminal “suspension of judgment”. I also was intuitively disposed towards getting beyond mentalist conceptions of ‘mind’ – “mentalist” being a term that roughly refers to those doctrines that picture an autonomous, interior mental domain that stands in a problematic relation to the rest of reality.

Gilbert Ryle was a great source of inspiration, specifically his thesis that much philosophical confusion about the concept of mind rests on a “category mistake”. If, said Ryle, we could get clear on the correct use of the concept of mind, the apparent force behind certain familiar debates, new and old, would simply fizzle into oblivion. I found particularly striking his comments concerning the “logical geography of concepts” (Ryle 7). Since, as he says, many people can talk sense with concepts, but cannot talk sense about concepts, it is desirable to draw a
"map" of certain conceptual "regions" in order to explode certain "myths" concerning their use. This map would be a chart of "logical types" or categories, each with concepts peculiar to it, and each forming a set of rules for the logically legitimate use of the concepts that fall within it.

The main myth in question is, of course, "Cartesian"; even though people, philosophers and non-philosophers alike, ordinarily use mental-conduct concepts (e.g. 'careful', 'stupid', 'witty', 'vain') in a perfectly adequate manner, if called upon to specify the logical regulations governing the use of these concepts, such specification typically betrays the operation of the Cartesian myth. This is the mentalist myth of a self-standing, "inner" mental region, with its own laws and processes, roughly parallel to the causes, episodes, laws, and processes of the "outer" world. Now, if only we could understand the logical geography of mental concepts, then we would understand the precise sense in which the Cartesian myth is indeed a myth, that is, the sense in which we are dealing generally and unconsciously with a faulty logical geography of concepts. Revealingly, Ryle says that "philosophy is the replacement of category-habits with category-disciplines" (Ryle 8); we must remove the habit of appealing to the Cartesian myth when called upon to explain our use of mental-conduct concepts, and replace it with a disciplined, ordered logical geography of mental-conduct concepts that displays for us the correct rules that regulate their ordinary usage.

Now, like many others, I was not happy with the specific logical geography Ryle presents; he dispenses with the logical geography of "ghostly" inner
processes, but replaces it with one of "dispositions and occurrences". This "behaviourist" scheme was not attractive, for the much discussed reasons concerning its inability to truly account for the sense that there genuinely is some kind of "inner" or subjective dimension to 'mind'. But the very idea of a logical geography, and its relation to certain habits of thought, encouraged me to rethink the teachings of an old philosophical friend, G.W.F. Hegel.

It is well known that Hegel wrote a book entitled the Science of Logic, but it is not very well known what precisely is its subject-matter. By the time I encountered Ryle, I had been familiar with the Logic (more with the Encyclopaedia version) for about four years, and had encountered several hypotheses concerning its subject-matter. Some called it a "theory of determinacy" (K.R. Dove), others the "ideal communicative structure of the human-scientific community" (H.S. Harris), yet others the "ideal reconstruction of our empirical concepts" (R. Brandom), and still others an "explanation of the possibility of the classical categories of philosophy" (T. Pinkard), to name only a few characterizations. However, it was Ryle's idea of logical geography that really helped my own interpretive efforts (ultimately I have come to accept the "theory of determinacy" view, which will be discussed in this study, and is closest to the idea of "logical geography").

A logical geography would allow us to know precisely what it is we mean when, to use an example from Ryle, we want to know how mental processes reduce to material processes, or want to know the answer to the ever-unpopular
(yet historically recurring) idealist inversion of this question. From a Hegelian perspective, we would mean, in short, nothing. The question commits a logical violation that our “map” would allow us to precisely diagnose. If we consider for a moment the Logic as being a map of this variety, it would allow us to determine the relation mental concepts such as ‘will’ and ‘perception’ that belong under the category ‘cognition’, have to concepts belonging to non-cognitive categories, such as ‘force’ and ‘magnetism’ that belong under the category ‘mechanism’. We would quickly see that the relation is non-reductive (the actual relation is “developmental”), and hence would be able to dismiss the question as meaningless; we would also be on the way towards minimizing or eradicating the theoretical habits that lead us to ask such reductive questions in the first place, replaced as they are by the “category-discipline” Ryle speaks of. According to this Hegelian scenario, once we properly consider the logical relation ‘mind’ or ‘cognition’ has to these other categories and concepts, then we can eliminate the habitual questions concerning reduction in philosophy of mind as meaningless, and go on to explicate what the correct non-reductive relation is.

Now, it will be immediately evident that this sort of “analysis” presupposes a great deal. It presupposes, for instance, that the relation of these categories and concepts to reality is unproblematic. That is, how do we really know that ‘mechanism’ is related to ‘cognition’ in the way Hegel says it is, especially simply by virtue of a categorial ordering of concepts? Isn’t this a question for science to answer? Isn’t this “logical geography of concepts” a typical idealist excess, a
preposterous example of non-empirical method? Enormous epistemic pressure is placed on Hegel’s categories: are they veritable? Are they justified? In short, what is their relation to reality? How do we know this “geography” isn’t simply one big subjective fantasy? The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Hegel says his “logic” is not a formal logic. What is it then? Popular philosophical opinion places Hegel’s thoughts on this matter somewhere between menacing (Karl Popper) and unintelligible (most everyone else).

In the face of such objections, I dropped my budding intention to explicate Hegel’s logical geography of concepts, and to outline its relevance to contemporary philosophy of mind. Even if I could properly explicate the Logic, I would still be a long way off from having provided a justification or a demonstration of its truth. I had to take seriously something upon which Hegel himself insisted: that a justification or “deduction” of logic had to precede the logic itself. The purpose of this deduction would be to eliminate the sort of misgivings outlined in the previous paragraph, misgivings that Hegel argues are generated by a presupposed picture of how consciousness relates to reality. To again put things in a Rylean idiom, the way we go from “category-habits” to “category disciplines” is to remove the mentalist habit of presupposing the Cartesian myth. Hegel’s term for this myth is ‘consciousness’, and the Phenomenology instructs us how to remove our habit of presupposing it.

In short, the following study examines Hegel’s phenomenological argument for eliminating the mentalist-Cartesian myth, and discusses how we must read Hegel
as having this kind of argument if 1) we properly consider the best scholarly
evidence available, and 2) we wish to correctly conceive how Hegel might be
relevant to contemporary philosophical concerns. By this latter, I mean “analytic”
concerns, since it is in this sphere that there is some contention concerning
whether Hegel is relevant at all. One way in which I show Hegel’s relevance is
by pointing to programmatic analogies between Hegel and the later Wittgenstein.
Ever since becoming acquainted with Wittgenstein I perceived that there were
potentially fruitful comparisons between him and Hegel to be made, and I hope
my perception will be borne out by this study. Along the way I became
acquainted with the work of others who also at least implicitly saw this sort of
connection, most notably Robert Brandom; and I became aware of how misleading
the comparisons could be if not informed by (what I regard to be) the proper
interpretation of Hegel. What I in effect discovered was that a consideration of
the competing interpretations of Hegel helped resolve some of the different
readings of Wittgenstein. I turn now to some more technical comments
concerning what follows.

II. Mentalism and Determinacy: Explication of Some Main Ideas

I would like to say a few things about two terms that will figure importantly in
this study, and something about how they relate: ‘mentalism’ and ‘determinacy’.
One way of characterizing what Hegel was up to, and how I see it relating to
Wittgenstein, is to talk about what must precede a post-mentalist conception of
determinacy. Hegel believed that philosophy has a vital, central role to play in theorizing about the world, but that certain habits of thought obscure this role and engender a high degree of skepticism concerning it. More specifically, Hegel believed that philosophy could answer the question “what is determinacy?”, and he believed that this fact would remain unclear unless certain “mentalist” habits of thought were eliminated. I have already said a few words about mentalism with reference to Ryle’s Cartesian myth – I will briefly expand on that before discussing what is meant by “determinacy”.

On the issue of what mentalism is, I offer the following summary (it will be replaced in Chapter Three by Hegel’s specific analysis). The ‘mental’ represents a broad conceptual frame that has several aspects: 1) there is something called the subject or ego that is apprehended from the first-person perspective; 2) the ego has direct and immediate epistemic access to a self-standing or independent “inner space” that is circumscribed by a boundary that divides the ego from what is outside or other to it; and 3) This inner space is home to special sorts of items that are metaphysically distinct from the items of external reality, e.g. intentional items such as beliefs, meanings, representations, and desires. This scheme sets up the general problem of how it is that the items of inner “space” relate to the items of outer space, paradigmatically seen in the epistemological problem of how the two domains relate to produce knowledge, and seen also in the practical sphere: the question arises as to how the two domains relate to produce various kinds of action.
The very general Hegelian idea is that it is possible to theorize the nature of reality (its "determinacy") without any mentalist presuppositions (or to put it more strongly, there can be no mentalist presuppositions in such theorizing). This is to broach the difficult topic of what Hegel means by 'determinacy'. ‘Determinacy’ (Bestimmtheit) (and its related forms) is among Hegel’s most frequently employed technical terms;¹ it is used by him in a bewildering number of ways in a countless number of contexts. But despite the term’s prodigious semantic range in Hegel’s work, he never uses it in a way that wholly departs from what might be considered its usual, core senses. The chief definition in the Oxford English Dictionary offers a good indication of these usual senses: determinacy is the quality of being definitely bound or limited, in time, space, extent, position, character, or nature; it is the quality of being definite or fixed, clearly defined or individualized, distinct – as opposed to vague, undefined, or indefinite. Or perhaps more concisely (and less misleadingly²) determinacy is, as Stephen Bungay says, “that in virtue of which anything is distinct from anything else” (Bungay 24).

Yet having said all this, it may strike some as strange to speak of “determinacy” as being a subject into which it is possible to specifically inquire; do we not speak of something being or not being determinate? I think we can get clearer on this issue if we take a brief look at Aristotle, someone Hegel took to be a kindred spirit. But we should not lose sight of the fact that this thesis is not a

¹ I believe ‘determinacy’ is an accurate rendering of Bestimmtheit, and that there is no substantial loss of meaning in concentrating on the English rather than the German term.

² The dictionary definition assumes the priority or primacy of ‘quality’ in “quality of-”.
Aristotle, in the course of indicating what is required of a “theory of being”, tells us in Book Γ of the Metaphysics that “Being is said in many ways, but always relative to a single principle”; I think Hegel would countenance the replacement of ‘being’ in that sentence with ‘determinacy’.

First, what does Aristotle mean? If we look into how ‘to be’ is variously employed, we might reasonably conclude that its use is entirely equivocal. Its use seems to include expressions of identity, predication (accidental and essential), existence, and subsumption. Jaakko Hintikka points out that it is indeed this

3 In the above quoted sentence, Aristotle uses phusis (nature) instead of arche (principle), but then later uses arche in the same sense; I have chosen what I believe is the less misleading term. A further note: readers may note an ambiguity in this and other Aristotelian formulations between what is distinctively semantic and what is ontic, that is, between what is peculiar to language and what is real. It is an aspect of this study to explore how this and other related distinctions arise from epistemological presuppositions foreign to Aristotle.
distinction in uses that motivated the Frege-Russell ambiguity thesis, i.e. the claim that this distinction in uses reflects an ambiguity in the verb ‘to be’, rather than that the distinction reflects e.g. different contexts of use (Hintikka 782). But Aristotle clearly believed that the distinction in uses did not reflect a genuine equivocation in ‘to be’; he believed rather that there is a multiplicity of senses that are related to what he calls a “single principle”. He tries to make this clear by analogy.

Aristotle chooses ‘healthy’ as his analogue: hence, the various senses of ‘is’ are related to a single, definite principle of being, just as the various senses in which something is said to be “healthy” are related to health. We can speak of e.g. “healthy habits”, “healthy food”, “healthy skin”, etc. and see that while there are multiple senses of ‘healthy’ that would be illegitimate to subsume under a single genus, the term is not entirely equivocal; each sense relates to this one thing we somehow recognize as “health”. Each sense of ‘healthy’ elicits a more or less complete concept of health, but none encompass the concept of health entirely. This analogue ‘health’ is a good one, because it is as diverse and seemingly equivocal as ‘is’. For example, Aristotle could not make his point by choosing the term ‘mammalian’. What distinguishes this latter kind of term is that it relates to a clearly defined universal or genus (‘mammal’), where in any specific instance that ‘mammalian’ is used correctly, that use must conform to the precise meaning of ‘mammal’. There is no ambiguity in how ‘mammalian’ or ‘mammal’ are used,
and hence they could not be mistaken for equivocal (does the object in question secrete milk from mammary glands to nourish its young? If so, it is a mammal.).

It seems that Aristotle thought his theory of being must be approached in much the same way as when we think about a concept like ‘health’. According to Aristotle, through a separate consideration of the various ways in which something “is”, it should be possible to elicit the one central, complete concept to which all the separate, less complete senses are implicitly related. I believe Hegel’s approach to the seemingly abstract concept of determinacy is similar. If we speak of a determinate ‘x’, a determinate ‘y’, and a determinate ‘z’, where these variables can stand for anything from qualities, to quantities, to entities, to processes, to abstract operations, to entire worlds, it stands to reason (at least on the Aristotelian analysis) that if the term ‘determinate’ is not entirely equivocal, yet is not subsumable under a genus with strict and stateable criteria for subsumption,⁴ each use should relate implicitly to a single, complete or explicit sense, of which the relata are less complete aspects.

I emphasized “individualized” in the Oxford definition of ‘determinacy’, because I believe ‘individuality’, at least in Hegel’s case, provides the best clue for what it might mean to develop a conception of determinacy in the above sense. Just as in Aristotle’s theory of being, where all the separate, less complete senses of ‘is’ relate to a single (or unitary), complete principle, that to which all the

⁴ This should not be confused with being able to give a general definition for a word (as I did above for ‘determinacy’), since definitions, the longer and more inclusive they get, the more equivocal (and even contradictory) they can become.
separate senses of ‘determinate’ implicitly relate is of a unitary nature. Hegel’s 
*Science of Logic*, what might be called his theory of determinacy, can be 
instructively regarded as a series of progressively more complete conceptions of 
individuality, a series that concludes with a complete conception, what he terms 
the “Idea”. Once this progression is grasped in thought, it allows for the 
identification and theorizing of determinate individuality (or some aspect of it) 
within the structures of reality. Hence, from the vantage of its conclusion, the 
*Science of Logic* is a theory of individuality insofar as we have apprehended the 
“Idea”, which then makes it possible to comprehend the nature of real individuals 
(and aspects of real individuals), in all their infinite variety. But before this 
conception is completed, a long series of less complete determinations is to have 
been considered, determinations that we can recognize, to put it negatively, as 
“not quite what is meant by ‘individuality’” (but which mark off determinate 
aspects of real individuals, for example, qualities and quantities).

For example, to say that ‘x’ is determinate only in virtue of its being not ‘y’, 
that is, determinate only in virtue of a contrast with ‘y’, is to say that ‘x’ falls

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5 I do not think that it is helpful or even possible to specify here in detail what Hegel means by 
the Idea, independent of a full exposition of the *Logic*, but here is a very general characterization: 
The Idea is the complete, self-relating process where ‘particularity’ and ‘universality’, as well as 
‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’, are organically united. The individuals we find in reality more or 
less manifest this process.

6 “Individuals” come in many forms, and are not limited to that which is numerically one and 
discrete; for example, the idea of individuality includes organized and dynamic systems of 
elements.

7 As well as retrospectively: Hegel forbids this kind of perspective in the “immanent 
development” of concepts. For now, I am avoiding any technical treatment of the *Logic* in 
favour of offering a more general description.
rather short of what it would have to be if we were to say that it is determinate as an individual.⁸ In this situation of contrast, we would have more appropriate ways of conceiving ‘x’, perhaps as a quality or a quantity of some kind, e.g., an area of land that is definite only insofar as it stands in a demarcated relation to another such area. Such determinations, though they occur in reality, are grasped in the Logic purely as thoughts, and form a self-developing system. At the point at which ‘x’ is determinate as an individual, we have reached the apex of the development. As distinct from the preceding examples, it is the most developed kind of determination, the crowning achievement as it were, of a series of more primitive determinations; and thus, the logic taken as a kind of map of progressively related determinations is in this sense more generally (than a “theory of individuality”) understood as a theory of determinacy. This sort of theory, in short, allows for a philosophical comprehension of different sorts of individuals, from atoms to minds, as they are discoverable in reality, which is to say this kind of theory provides a systematic, logical context within which we can grasp how the individuals discoverable in reality relate to one another, as more or less determinate. It will be evident then, that Hegel conceives philosophy as having a vital role to play in modern approaches to theorizing the world.

Now, to return to the problem of “mentalism”. Hegel believes that the single greatest obstacle preventing us from taking seriously the idea that the nature of

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⁸ For a more elaborated (yet still brief) reading of the Logic along these lines, see Kenley Dove’s “Phenomenology and Systematic Philosophy” (full citations for all footnoted references are listed in the bibliography).
determinacy can be comprehended purely as a logical matter, and then used to
grasp the nature of determinate individuals that are discoverable in reality, is the
presupposition that our thoughts, that is, our categories and concepts, exist in a *sui
generis* subjective isolation from the rest of the world. According to Hegel, we
must learn to view our thinking “objectively” as well as subjectively, as having no
less a real status than the sorts of things we normally accord the term ‘real’ to.
We have now arrived at the proper subject-matter of this study. We will be
examining Hegel’s criticism of the above stated presupposition in the
*Phenomenology*, and then extending it to more contemporary concerns. It was
necessary to say a few, possibly confusing, words about Hegel’s overall
philosophical program in order to make the motivation behind the fundamentally
*critical* dimension of his project intelligible. However, I believe the critical
dimension will be of independent interest to those who are generally dissatisfied
with the interminable debates of traditional epistemology, and more recently of
philosophy of mind.

I will now say more about the problem of subjectivity (or the problem of
mentalism). There are two ways of addressing this issue that reflect the overall
strategy of this study. One way is to consider matters from the vantage of what is
required for a theory of determinacy to be possible. That amounts to an inquiry
into *why* the problem of subjectivity must be *eliminated*, if the proposed theory or
conception is to be developed. Another way is to observe how these requirements
emerge as a result of the contradictory nature of the problem. That will entail an
account of how the problem is to be eliminated (but there will also be an element of necessity involved here too), and the manner in which this “elimination” is different from an ordinary solution. I will now expand on both approaches.

Perhaps it will be more intelligible why a post-mentalist conception of determinacy is desirable, if such a conception may be accurately described as the legitimate, theoretical confirmation of a certain kind of common sense, a sense that there is a genuine objective dimension to what we think and to what we do. I believe that Hegel would regard this as an accurate description of what a philosophical conception of determinacy can offer. Then it becomes reasonable to ask, what stands in the way of such a conception? I have said it is the “problem of subjectivity”, or mentalism. What is that problem? In Hegel’s idiom, it is the “problem of consciousness”.

Consider the following scenario. What if it is agreed that a philosophical grasp of determinacy is something desirable, but it is also assumed that such a grasp will always be conditioned by our particular standpoint, the standpoint of our consciousness? Then our so-called theory of determinacy will only be a theory of how it is possible to understand the determinate things of reality from a presupposed subjective standpoint. It will not be a theory of determinacy qua determinacy; it will be theory of determinacy qua epistemological perspective. The master explicator of the “conditioned” standpoint was Immanuel Kant. At the time he wrote the Critique of Pure Reason, the basic epistemic presuppositions he worked with had become the common sense of philosophy (see Chapter Two).
The central epistemic presupposition in this kind of philosophy is, according to Hegel, ‘consciousness’ (what above we in general terms described in terms of mentalism). What is ‘consciousness’? On Hegel’s analysis, the concept of ‘consciousness’ is a distinctively modern concept;\(^9\) it is a representation (Vorstellung) of how our thinking relates to the world: it divides reality into two spheres, concept and object, or ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’. Hegel calls these spheres the “abstract determinations of consciousness” (PS 52, PG 72). What, from the standpoint of consciousness, is actually determinate is taken to lie in the sphere of truth, a sphere that is independent of, yet somehow related to, the sphere of knowledge. According to Hegel, our thinking and our knowledge have a genuinely objective dimension (or better, are determinate in the specific sense I have tried to outline above), but the picture of reality represented through the concept of consciousness does not allow us to properly grasp how. That is because there is a contradiction at the heart of that picture, a contradiction between knowledge and truth. The contradiction can be stated as follows: if knowledge is taken to be something that belongs to and is for me, that is, something that belongs to and occurs within my mind, and truth is by definition taken to be something that exists independently of me, then how can truth be known as it exists in itself, in its independence, and yet be something for me, as the very concept of ‘knowledge’ requires?

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\(^9\) See Chapters One and Two for accounts of what goes into a “distinctively modern” perspective.
A collapse of the two spheres into one is disallowed by consciousness in principle; it is just what consciousness does to keep the two sides conceptually apart. Yet it is evident that what is required for a conception of determinacy that is not merely a conception of how our minds make the world intelligible and determinate, that is, not merely a conception of how we “carve up” and sort the world into kinds, species, and other categories, is, in some sense, a collapse of the two spheres. This kind of collapse would make it conceivable how determinacy does not necessarily belong to a sphere that stands in principled independence from (yet somehow is related to) ‘knowledge’. On this latter picture, any sense in which our knowledge is determinate, will be a derivative or secondary sense to one in which reality is determinate in itself, and hence, our conception of ‘determinacy’ will not be a conception of determinacy qua determinacy, but a conception of determinacy qua our comprehension, with the standpoint of consciousness built into the conception.

Or in a more explicitly dualistic scheme, two spheres of determinacy will be posited, one of mental and linguistic items, and another of extra-mental items. This scheme presents terminal difficulties for “content” theorists, who wish somehow within this scheme to make content rooted in an extra-mental source, but also be something with an epistemically immediate mental dimension. We can see also that on this analysis radical skepticism (i.e. a skepticism that doubts that any aspect of its beliefs are related to truth) is a logical possibility inherent to the structure of consciousness; it will always be possible to doubt wholesale the
veridicality of mental representations that are presupposed to stand in fundamental independence from and opposition to the world.

But what if our thinking does not actually stand in an oppositional relation to ‘truth’? What if there is a sense in which the way the determinate structures of reality develop is capturable precisely in the way the determinate structures of thought develop? What if it in fact turns out that the structures and motions of reality are really just more primitive versions of what occurs in thought in a more developed, dynamic, and internally self-complete way?

Hegel does not mean for this kind of position to be accepted at face value, or to even be initially intelligible. He believes that once the nature of thinking is properly considered in a non-prejudiced manner where thinking is allowed to develop freely (in the Logic), without any presuppositions concerning its “subjectivity” or how it may relate to “objectivity”, it will become apparent that the manner in which the categories of thought determinately develop captures the manner in which the structures of reality develop. This is just to say that the idea of ‘determinacy’ itself, without preconceived reference to ‘subjectivity’ or ‘objectivity’, undergoes a development; this development occurs in the absence of a presupposed distinction between subjective form, e.g. (to take the most sophisticated example:) the “transcendental ego”, and objective content, e.g. the material of the world, received by sensation as a Given. In other words, the development of the concept of determinacy proceeds in the absence of the structural presuppositions of consciousness, which again, always divides reality
into two determinations: concept and object, or knowledge and truth. It will be apparent then, that for the above kind of conception of determinacy to properly develop, both the structural determinations of consciousness and the traditional epistemological problems they give rise to must somehow be annulled. This "annulment" is precisely what it meant by "eliminating" the problem of consciousness. That is the work of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, at least on the reading advocated in this study.

These considerations represent the first angle of approach to the two issues stated above: what is the problem of subjectivity, and why must it be eliminated? For those not sympathetic to Hegel's manner of putting things, it will be the less appealing approach. This approach can be summarized simply as follows: if we are to put forth a genuine philosophical conception of determinacy, it cannot proceed with any assumptions as to what determinacy is. It may not begin with any determinate idea, for that would already presume some notion of determinacy. (See PSP 28). In short, it may not begin with a philosophical conception of how thought is determined to stand in relation to reality; it may not begin with 'consciousness'. Hence, the concept of consciousness must be eliminated as a presupposition if we are to genuinely consider the emergence of an alternative conception of determinacy that is not mired in or rendered moot at the outset by the traditional problems of epistemology.

But how is the concept of consciousness "eliminated"? This brings me to the second angle of approach, which will be more appealing to those who are not
happy with these initial characterizations of Hegel's theory of determinacy — if the theory sounds implausible, who is going to care what is required for it to be possible? ¹⁰

This other approach to the “problem of subjectivity” addresses what Hegel believed to be the self-defeating character of consciousness. This is, as I read it, the subject-matter of the Phenomenology of Spirit. I think this text can be appreciated simply at the level of being a special kind of critique; the reader does not necessarily have to keep in mind its intended preparatory role in relation to a “theory of determinacy”.

The manner in which consciousness is “self-defeating” is a complex issue, and can only receive its due consideration in the body of the thesis (Chapter Three). Perhaps we can put the central concern of the Phenomenology in question form: what is the ultimate result of employing ‘consciousness’ as an epistemic presupposition, or, what is the result of theorizing from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness? On the interpretation I defend in this study, the answer is: “thoroughgoing skepticism” (PS 50, PG 69). However, “thoroughgoing skepticism” does not describe Hegel’s stance as a philosopher; one would be hard-pressed to find a greater “realist” in the history of philosophy. Why then, is it the self-avowed result of perhaps his greatest book?

¹⁰ Part of my inquiry into Wittgenstein is designed to make the general idea of a philosophical conception of determinacy (and the critical conditions required for it) plausible, apart from the vicissitudes of Hegel’s system.
Hegel is not in the *Phenomenology* undertaking a critique of the epistemic and metaphysical pretensions of philosophical theory. He is undertaking a critique of that which *prevents* philosophical theory from yielding anything but interminable debate, and that is the presupposed epistemic standpoint from which philosophy is assumed to proceed, an epistemic standpoint that takes itself to be in opposition, yet somehow related, to truth. This structure, of what consciousness takes to be *for* it, its knowledge, and what it takes its knowledge to be related *to*, truth, represents for Hegel a contradiction that has a *dynamic* aspect, an aspect that Hegel calls "experience". Hegel attempts to show that in the experience of consciousness, every attempt by consciousness to grasp the nature of the object as it exists in itself results in an unwanted expansion of the dimension of what is *for* consciousness; that is, every attempt by consciousness to grasp the object as it exists in its pure independence engenders a progressive degree of awareness that the object as it exists in itself is only being known as it exists for consciousness. This process culminates (in each phase of consciousness) in a critical moment for consciousness concerning the determinacy of its knowledge, when, from the perspective of consciousness, a *new* object comes on the scene that satisfies its epistemic, criterial demand for independence. However, this new object will undergo the very same process. It is simply due to the *structure* of consciousness that it oscillates between certainty and skeptical crisis, between an uncritical affirmation of what it takes to exist in itself, and a critical awareness that what exists in itself is only known via the subjective apparatus of consciousness. But
the dynamic aspect of consciousness’ experience leads it to an eventual resolution of this structurally rooted oscillation. By the end of the book these momentary, critical crises of determinacy result in an overall posture of skepticism concerning the truth of phenomenal knowledge. The *Phenomenology* ends in a situation of pure indeterminacy. This is what we might say is the “ultimate” sense in which theorizing from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness is self-defeating: eventually there is nothing left to be theorized.

The manner in which consciousness determines itself in opposition to what it posits as ‘truth’ is revealed to depend on a purely optional structure, and this mode of determination amounts to little more than a kind of intellectual *habit*. This habit can be eliminated once we realize the self-defeating nature of theorizing in accordance with it. Hence skepticism is not the *point* of the *Phenomenology*, although it is the result. The point is to establish the critical conditions necessary for a post-mentalist conception of determinacy, and it is the total indeterminacy of the skeptical result that provides the best clue as to what these conditions are.

*Total* indeterminacy is the peculiar nature of this skeptical result; that is, the very structure on which the usual posture of skepticism stands, consciousness, has been dissolved. That is why, strictly speaking, the “problem of subjectivity” is not “solved”; the idea is rather that it has been eliminated as a problem that needs solving. I can do no more here than indicate that this is the nature of Hegel’s insight in outline, i.e., that consciousness is a self-defeating epistemic structure. Part of the work of Chapter Three will be to show as precisely as possible why
Hegel believed this, through an in depth explication of Chapter III of the *Phenomenology* which will demonstrate the dynamic character of the contradiction, a contradiction that moves towards its own dissolution.

I mentioned earlier that insofar as we can characterize Hegel’s critical project simply in terms of the self-defeating nature of consciousness taken as an epistemic presupposition, there is something here that I thought might have greater appeal for those who have doubts about my description of Hegel’s “theory of determinacy”. In Chapter Five, I try to increase this appeal by drawing what I believe are very striking analogies between the critical goals of the *Phenomenology* and the “therapy” of the later Wittgenstein. I argue that the rule-following and private language arguments are a two-pronged attack against one idea: the idiolectic standpoint. This standpoint posits a private, intrinsically individual epistemic access to “facts” of varying kinds, such as rules and semantic contents. I argue that this standpoint is the linguistic analogue to what Hegel calls “consciousness”, and the purpose of showing its intrinsic limitations as well as its unnecessary status as a certain habit of doing philosophy, is very similar to the purpose behind undertaking a “critique of consciousness”, namely, to enable a philosophical restoration of ‘determinacy’.

What is a “philosophical restoration of determinacy” from a Wittgensteinian vantage? I believe that to ask this question is to ask, in line with the universally recognized pragmatic dimension in Wittgenstein’s thought, what *purpose* a philosophical conception of determinacy serves. I believe that it serves, at a
philosophical level, to confirm and reinforce the objectivity we presume to be a basic aspect of our ordinary thinking and acting, as well as of all forms of scientific endeavor. I mean "objectivity" in terms of a conventional contrast with subjectivity: in the course of ordinary (specifically, "unreflective") life, we do not presume to be "subjectively" cut off from the reality of things, especially not (for example) our own bodies when we act.

That is to imply, perhaps somewhat contentiously, that doctrinal "skepticism" in all the many forms it has taken in the history of philosophy,\(^\text{11}\) is a kind of intellectual sport, the rules of which are only really intelligible in the halls of the academy, or anywhere things are said in the spirit of argument for argument's sake. I am taking for granted something that has been pointed out time and time again: no academic skeptic is actually a skeptic in the course of life. To take some Wittgensteinian examples: there is no "problem of meaning" in the course of any ordinary attempt at following an order or a rule; we presume to be able to understand or learn what is meant by some utterance if it is the case that we must obey it. Similarly with e.g. the written injunction to 'add 2'; if it is the case that I don't know how to add two, I can presumably learn. I won't concern myself with whether there is a viable epistemological account available of how it is possible that I can determinately learn this mathematical operation. And so on. It is simply the case that in the course of ordinary life we proceed as if there are things

\(^{11}\) I refer less to the ancient skeptics (whose skepticism was indeed a way of life), but more to their early modern counterparts, as well as to the more radicalized form we see skepticism take in some varieties of "postmodern" discourse, i.e. a discourse that doctrinally proceeds from the premise that 'truth' and 'reason' are philosophical myths.
that are meant, and that there are things to be understood. As someone who is sympathetic with Wittgenstein, I think there is a lot to be said for this "ordinary" attitude, one that has a certain unproblematic, objective sensibility built into its basic orientation. There is in the course of ordinary life no epistemological crisis of determinacy.

I believe, from a Wittgensteinian vantage, the purpose of philosophy is to restore this ordinary common sense attitude, that is, our ordinary sense of determinacy, via a critical, "therapeutic" approach aimed at disarming the puzzling allures of traditional epistemic assumptions, and forming a resistance to foundationalist urges to ground, for example, the concept of meaning in structures that somehow exist independently of our language, thought, and practices. Wittgenstein's effort is expressed in his own special semantic, pragmatic vocabulary, and it assumes a very different form than Hegel's: Wittgenstein's conception of determinacy is "quietistic", or non-theoretical in nature. I will describe what I regard as his conception of determinacy in terms of his "bedrock pragmatism" in Chapter Five.

To return to the general comparison between Hegel and Wittgenstein, I will show how it is tempting but mistaken to interpret either thinker as appealing to some form of idealism to solve the epistemic difficulties associated with mentalism. That is because idealism merely countenances an expansion and pluralization of the mentalist perspective that both thinkers find problematic. The idealist move epitomizes the difference between a would-be solution to problems
that arise within a mentalist framework, and the elimination of that framework as an epistemic presupposition or habit of thought. It is part of the argument of the *Phenomenology*, one that I hope to make clear, that mentalist solutions (to problems that arise within that framework) are impossible, due to the presupposed structure of consciousness. The problem must be directly addressed with a view towards eliminating it, for it is ignored, it simply expresses itself in unforeseen (and counterproductive) ways.

This situation is seen rather dramatically in Brandom’s analysis of Hegel’s pragmatism in terms of his putative idealism. Brandom’s Hegel’s account of conceptual determinacy suffers from an idealist intensification of the normative, the domain of what Brandom characterizes as reciprocal recognitive relations, in opposition to the non-normative, or the “world”. That is because any putative effort to answer questions and problems concerning the origins of conceptual determinacy that arise from a presupposed individualist epistemic perspective (the paradigm of mentalism) through an appeal to a multiplicity of such perspectives, i.e., through an appeal to “intersubjective idealism”, will encounter the structural difficulties inherent in the individualist perspective. The problem of consciousness must be directly addressed in preparation for alternative philosophical idiom for thinking about conceptual determinacy, one that does not merely reinstate a problematic mentalist perspective in disguised form (the hallmark of idealism). Even if Brandom were to claim that the perspective he attributes to Hegel is one that proceeds in the wake of the “elimination of
consciousness”, we would soon see that this cannot be the case, simply in virtue of the way that that perspective is articulated: in strict terms of what we do, what our language expresses, and the empirical content of our concepts. Such formulations serve to highlight the degree to which the presupposed opposition between the standpoint or perspective of consciousness and some independent domain of the non-ego or in-itself is still operative. I believe it is Hegel’s philosophical goal to advance a theory that does not proceed from the standpoint of such presupposed mentalist oppositions, and correlatively, it is Wittgenstein’s goal to at least get beyond such oppositions (again, in Wittgenstein there will be a kind of “restoration” of determinacy merely as a result of performing the “therapy” of the Investigations).

III. Argument-Structure of Each Chapter

Chapter One is an introductory discussion that uses John McDowell’s book Mind and World as a springboard into the major themes and issues of this thesis. This chapter is admittedly somewhat free ranging; its primary purpose is to “elicit” rather than to argue. The main ideas upon which I focus, and that are relevant to the reading of Hegel, are 1) the notion that there are habits of thought that are typical of traditional philosophy, and 2) the notion that there are certain structural presuppositions that encourage such habits of thought.

I read McDowell as showing us how certain habits of philosophical thought lead us into conceptual impasses that are hard, if not impossible, to see our way
out of. One such habit is viewing ‘nature’ as something radically different than ‘reason’ (known as the norm/nature dichotomy), such that there is a perceived necessity to build an epistemic “bridge” from one domain to the other. McDowell says that this and other similar “bridging” strategies are typical of “traditional constructive philosophy”; such strategies are essentially doomed from the start because of the predetermined conceptual incompatibilities of the two spheres that need bridging. If we alter our habits of thinking, habits that in the case under consideration encourage a strongly bifurcated picture of ‘reason’ and the causal order of ‘nature’, we can for example see that there is something called “second nature”, a perfectly ordinary and accepted idea, which mediates between them.

McDowell picks up the theme of thought-habits with reference to Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein teaches us how to recognize and resist the seeming strangeness of certain questions, questions that call forth philosophically extreme pictures. An example of this latter situation would be the seemingly mysterious capacity (from a philosophical vantage) of someone who has learned a mathematical operation to continue a mathematical series independently of the ratification of someone mathematically knowledgeable. This ratification-independence encourages what McDowell calls rampant platonistic pictures: philosophically extreme pictures of autonomous, transcendental conceptual structures.

So another sense in which we have certain unexamined habits of thought can be seen in the kinds of questions we believe it is legitimate to ask. We are in the habit of asking certain questions that encourage philosophically extreme pictures,
pictures that ultimately generate new and greater problems. This habit is ultimately traceable to structural presuppositions concerning the *sui generis* status of ‘mind’ in relation to the rest of nature, a current of thought that I have been referring to as “mentalism”. The idea of such structural presuppositions is the other main notion (in addition to the “habits of thought” thesis) I wish to elicit from McDowell’s discussion. We tend to presuppose a dualism between norm and nature, between the logical space of giving and asking for reasons, and the logical space of law-governed causality. To repeat what was glanced at above, this sort of dualistic picture encourages a familiar kind of philosophical activity, where we attempt to construct conceptual bridges from one side of an epistemic gulf to the other. According to McDowell, we must become accustomed to regarding this sort of picture as optional, despite its compelling nature. This is in effect the thesis I attribute to Hegel in his *Phenomenology*, examined in Chapter Three: the mentalist conception of ‘consciousness’ is optional.

The discussion thus far is of a somewhat abstract nature. I hope to mitigate this in Chapter Two with some examples of how the structural presuppositions and related habits of thought associated with “mentalism” have exerted a sustained influence throughout philosophical history. I start with the Stoics and examine the semantic and conceptual roots of mentalist notions that have remained important to epistemology and philosophy of mind into the present day, including ‘representation’, ‘receptivity’, ‘meaning’, ‘proposition’, and ‘intention’. I claim that the stress the Stoics placed on these notions, and most significantly the *sui*
generis status of ‘mind’ apart from the rest of reality, is alien to the approaches of Plato and Aristotle, and hence marks the beginning of a truly distinct epistemic current in philosophical history. The beginning of modern “dualism” is often attributed to Descartes, but in Section II I show how he merely radicalizes what the Stoics started: the sui generis mental interior of the Stoics becomes the foundational principle of Descartes – the abstract ego, or cogito. The explicit foundational significance of the ego is elaborated with unparalleled rigor in the system of Kant, which I argue in Section III. Hegel retains important Kantian conceptual demarcations such as ‘subjectivity’, ‘objectivity’, ‘appearance’, and the “in-itself” to demonstrate how the presupposed fixity of such demarcations is self-refuting; this demonstration constitutes Hegel’s phenomenological critique of the entire mentalist tradition.

That brings us to Chapter Three, where Hegel’s “phenomenological critique” is considered. Much of the work of this chapter (and Chapter Four) is to establish an accurate hermeneutical groundwork to make my further claims concerning Hegel’s relevance to contemporary concerns plausible. The “non-metaphysical interpretation” that I develop\(^\text{12}\) offers, I believe, the strongest grounds for regarding Hegel as being of significant interest to the ongoing concerns of epistemology and philosophy of mind (I should also say that I believe that this interpretation is the most accurate, independent of any novel application).

\(^{12}\) The essentials of the view have been well established by K. Hartmann, K.R. Dove, and William Maker, to name a few of its leading exponents (see Chapter Three).
Section I is an explication of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. It is in the Introduction that Hegel establishes the subject-matter and the method of argument his book is to follow throughout, and I think that not closely considering what Hegel says here has occasioned many misunderstandings and misleading interpretations. Hegel establishes in the Introduction that ‘consciousness’ is the subject-matter of his exposition, and that the elimination of the fixed opposition between ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’, i.e., the determinations of consciousness, will allow a genuine philosophical theory to emerge (i.e. the distinctive subject-matter of philosophy, rather than some form of mathematics, logic, or linguistics. Hegel regarded these latter as referring to and being based upon the merely formal operations of consciousness). The method that Hegel says is to be followed recommends a sustained consideration of consciousness as it conducts *its own* examinations into the truth of *its* knowledge according to *its own* presupposed, fixed separation between knowledge and truth. The reader is to achieve the insight that whatever and however consciousness theorizes, it will always lead to insoluble contradictions. This is the “self-defeating” nature of consciousness, taken as an epistemic presupposition of *thinking*. That is to say, “thought” is not the same as “consciousness”; the latter is a *habitual* self-assessment of the former, or we might say a *mode* of the former. Once thought is liberated from the presupposed notions and determinations typical of it in the mode of consciousness, a consideration of the true subject-matter of philosophy (“determinacy”) becomes possible. Or, to put it another way, once certain habits of thought become purged,
it is possible to consider in an unprejudiced manner how determinacy is thinkable, and what determinacy is.

How does consciousness prejudice a consideration of determinacy?

Consciousness is the mediating structure that determines some object; consciousness, minimally considered, is a structure of mediation that makes determinations. It reflectively determines an object in relation to itself as truth, and further thematizes this object as its knowledge, as for it (although it may take its knowledge to immediately reflect how the object is in itself). This structure, and its mediating activity, must therefore be that which is eliminated, if no determination whatsoever is to be admitted at the beginning of logic. The “presupposition” of logic is therefore entirely negative, entirely empty. It is the result of a long process of mediation, but is itself entirely immediate.

Section II is a consideration of Hegel’s phenomenological method as it is applied in his text. I offer a close reading of Chapter III, “Force and the Understanding”, to demonstrate how Hegel can and does remain true to the method he has outlined. Here I hope to make it plausible how Hegel shows that something as intuitively acceptable (to skeptics and non-skeptics alike) as the idea of attempting to “understand the inner nature of the world” (i.e. its causes and laws) brings with it scores of unanalyzed presuppositions that are ultimately rooted in the habitual, unrecognized operation of a single epistemic structure, “consciousness”. I hope to make it equally clear (by the conclusion of this study) that Hegel, by executing this critique, is not thereby “anti-scientific”. Hegel is not
a skeptic about scientific knowledge; he wants rather to clear the way for a coherent, comprehensive philosophical conception of how we are able to think determinately about everything from scientific subject-matters to various aspects of social interaction, and of how they all hang together.

Section III closes Chapter Three by outlining the significance of ‘self-consciousness’, the conceptual result of the contradictions found in ‘Understanding’. Getting clear on this point is important, because my reading is to be distinguished from various “idealist” readings that see ‘self-consciousness’ as implying a theory of intersubjectivity (which is then used to ground the Logic). I suggest that to read Hegel as advancing an idealist theory of intersubjectivity is not to grasp the full import of his “critique of consciousness”. Such theories take the mentalist paradigm, which pictures an individual, *sui generis* interior, and simply “spread” it out into a collective structure. However, the problems associated with mentalism remain, most notably the problem of how normative structures can have any contact with the rest of nature (as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Five). Such topics, characterized generally by the differences between the idealist and non-metaphysical readings, constitute a large portion of the remainder of this study in Chapters Four and Five, where I discuss the works of Robert Pippin and Robert Brandom.

**Chapter Four** begins with a quick scan of Chapter VIII of the *Phenomenology* for clues as to how Hegel’s critique of consciousness terminates. What is the terminus of the motion of consciousness? Hegel says that the opposition of ‘I’
and ‘object’ has been eliminated, and that consciousness has returned into the “Self”. This comment seems to portend problems for the interpretation I am advancing, insofar as “Self” seems to suggest a subjective structure. However, I argue that ‘Self’ as Hegel uses it (at the end of the *Phenomenology*) should be viewed as a kind of logical designator that indicates a specific kind of relation (on the order of ‘up’, ‘down’, or ‘before’), rather than a substantive or foundational term that refers to a subjective structure. It is a relation that incorporates and internalizes “otherness” and difference as dynamic, integrated elements within a single concept. For example, ‘self’-consciousness incorporates what, until that stage, had been standing in a relation of otherness to the Understanding, namely, the object. In this new conception (‘self-consciousness’) ‘self’ stands as a logical designator that indicates that ‘I’ and ‘object’ stand in a dynamic sort of relation that *incorporates* the dimensions of otherness and difference. I argue that ‘self-consciousness’ must be read this way if we are to comprehend how consciousness is to be eliminated as an epistemic presupposition, and comprehend what is required for Hegel’s proposed theory of determinacy.

If ‘self-consciousness’ is interpreted either substantively or foundationally, then the critical function of the *Phenomenology* is ignored. That is just what the idealist interpretation of Robert Pippin does. It is related to a kind of “linguistic idealism” articulated by Robert Brandom, which I discuss in Chapter Five. Prior to that discussion, I conclude Chapter Four with an examination of Pippin’s idealist interpretation in *Hegel’s Idealism*. The gravest flaw in what in many
other respects is an impressive study is the interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as advancing a theory of self-consciousness. This interpretation continues and develops an established tradition of construing Hegel as a kind of foundationalist, who uses the intersubjective structure of Spirit (constituted by the relations among self-conscious selves) to ground what is taken to be the metaphysical enterprise of the *Logic*. Pippin’s version of this is to claim that the “subjectivity presupposed by the *Logic*” is Spirit, which is a collective, socially self-realizing subject which in logic determines for itself its own fundamental Concepts. I urge that ‘self-consciousness’ cannot be read in this way, without ignoring entirely the critical aim of the *Phenomenology*, which is the to eliminate the concept of consciousness in all its forms, including ‘self-consciousness’. If this point is ignored, and the idealist interpretation pursued, “idealism” leads to systematically misleading accounts of ‘Spirit’ understood as “intersubjectivity”, a view Brandom develops at length, and which I discuss in Chapter Five.

The overall aspiration of Chapter Five is to determine the best way to bring Hegel into contemporary discussions, and I partly do this by developing analogies I see between Hegel and Wittgenstein. The method of Section I is *via negativa* – I examine an inadequate (or misleading) attempt to bring Hegel into contemporary discussions, that of Robert Brandom. Brandom’s discussion of Hegel is a detailed, highly sophisticated instance of an attempt to bring Hegel into the contemporary philosophical forum, but which runs aground (or at least is misleading) because it relies on an idealist reading. Brandom takes Hegel to be
offering a theory of intersubjective social relations as grounding an account of conceptual determinacy. For the general reason that Hegel’s Phenomenology does not have a foundational relation to the Logic, and for more specific reasons relating to Brandom’s idealist reading, I show why we must reject Brandom’s approach to bringing Hegel into contemporary discussions. I claim that any such attempt must be sensitive to the considerable evidence that Hegel was not an idealist, in any of the senses discussed in this study.

Section II opens my discussion of Wittgenstein using (once again) McDowell as a springboard into some of the familiar debates concerning Wittgenstein’s rule-following and private language arguments. I draw parallels here between antirealist, idealist readings of Wittgenstein and the idealist reading of Hegel. I suggest that these parallels point us towards what the correct comparison should be. I introduce what I believe is the correct programmatic analogy between the two thinkers: both point to a need for an alternative conception of determinacy that does not fall prey to presuppositions concerning the subjective nature of language or consciousness, which always implicitly or explicitly posits what we do and say in opposition to what reality is (or “does”) in itself. I give a detailed criticism of both the antirealist and the idealist (skeptical) readings of Wittgenstein, and point to his conception of “bedrock” as implying a “harder” conception of determinacy. The chapter ends with a reiteration and exploration of what I take to be the central analogy: both Hegel and Wittgenstein mount radical critiques aimed at dismantling heavily entrenched presuppositions concerning the subjectivity of
thought (for Wittgenstein more the subjectivity of “meaning”), in order for a kind of “reclamation” of the determinacy our common sense supposes to be fundamental to our thinking, action, and the world.
Chapter One: John McDowell’s Prolegomenon to the Reading of Hegel

John McDowell conceives his *Mind and World* to be a “prolegomenon” to the reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (M ix). I propose to use it as such. In doing so, I will elicit a number of issues that together will form the basic subject matter of this study.

Something that I take for granted, but that others may find, at least on the surface, controversial, is that Hegel was a kind of Aristotelian. What I mean by this is the relatively uncontroversial view that Hegel, like Aristotle, took ‘thought’ to be something richly determinate, i.e., (to put it at this point only negatively) something not merely formal, empty, or secondary to the contents of another domain called ‘world’ or ‘reality’. It would also be fair to say, apropos of this view, that both thinkers did not take thought to be something that is in principle metaphysically separate from, or stands in opposition to, reality, each with a determinacy that is metaphysically distinct from the other. There is an epistemic confidence that naturally accompanies this kind of metaphysical picture, a confidence that Hegel believed was essential to philosophy.

I believe that, in calling his book a kind of prolegomenon to the reading of Hegel, McDowell is trying to re-introduce a certain Aristotelian spirit into philosophy, but with all the advantages that the hindsight, and awareness of peculiarly “modern” problems a thinker like Hegel brings. This spirit involves a kind of epistemic confidence that, specifically in Aristotle’s case, attends the metaphysical conviction that there is a speculative identity between the determinacy of our concepts and the determinacy of the world, a confidence that has all but disappeared under the weight of highly sophisticated, modern forms of skepticism. For Aristotle, the process of knowing the world (and in the
ethical sphere, the process of interacting with other humans), is the same process through which we actualize our own rational natures. By raising to explicit universality the intelligible forms of things, we actualize our own thinking.\(^1\) There is no presupposed divide between thought and things that invites the picture, as Frank Farrell puts it, “that the mind is a realm of particulars situated in one place and the rest of the world a realm of particulars situated across from it, [where] the problem is to show why the former should be taken as giving us any information about the latter” (Farrell 18). For Aristotle, there is a kind of speculative identity between the form that is the principle of a thing’s actuality as it exists in the world, and the form that actualizes in thought when the thing becomes intelligible to a knower.

Hegel believed the kind of epistemic confidence that a metaphysical picture of this sort inspires is essential to any genuine philosophy; but he keenly understood the difficulties of re-introducing it\(^2\) into a modern philosophical climate. It has become second nature since Aristotle’s death, a time when, as Hegel describes it in the *Science of Logic*, “reflective understanding took possession of philosophy” (SL 45, WL I 38), to suppose that ‘thought’ inhabits its own, *sui generis* sphere apart from the rest of reality, a

\(^1\) For an excellent discussion that places this claim in context with Hegel, see Frank Farrell’s *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World*, Chapter One.

\(^2\) The *confidence*, not Aristotle’s metaphysics. It is essential to my argument that the price of such confidence is not that we embrace Aristotle’s metaphysics, but that we take seriously a kind of *critique* of certain long-standing presuppositions that automatically instill in us a sort of epistemic insecurity regarding the determinate status of our concepts. Regaining a kind of epistemic confidence also does not entail making unsubstantiated empirical claims such as “the universe circles around the earth” (something perhaps more associated with “Aristotelianism”), so the reader should ignore any alarms that may be sounding concerning a possible return to “pre-critical” metaphysics, or ancient natural philosophy.
sphere that we generally refer to as ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’.\(^3\) To reclaim the kind of Aristotelian confidence that attends the conviction that our concepts and judgments genuinely possess an objective dimension (the kind we presume in countless spheres of theory and action that proceed independently of philosophy), and perhaps more boldly, to reclaim the more explicit metaphysical confidence that in general, our “minds” not only have a deep, determinate relation to reality, but in a sense are a kind of high-level, thoroughly integrated actualization of it, would require a special kind of critique. This critique would engender a rigorous awareness of our habitual tendency as moderns to implicitly or explicitly posit the unique, almost always mysterious status of ‘consciousness’ as a fundamental epistemological condition in philosophy (most dramatically in philosophy of mind and philosophy of language).

I read the Phenomenology of Spirit as being this kind of critique. The diagnostic tenor of McDowell’s book suggests that he supports a similar reading; we are to become aware of the illusory nature of certain problems that seem to encourage a picture of an opposition, possibly insuperable, between scheme and content, or “mind and world”. A thorough critique of certain habits of thought that lead to this picture allow us minimally to recapture the kind of natural epistemic confidence it is reasonable to suppose Aristotle possessed. This minimal result of the critique leads to a kind of theoretical “quietism”

\(^3\) This claim applies to linguistic philosophy, even though it does not ordinarily employ such mentalist concepts. For example, linguistic philosophy takes for granted as a starting-point a kind of radical, unexplained subjective standpoint in the theory of meaning, dealing as it does with intentions, propositional attitudes, and even assertions; these latter are determined by whatever limitations or conditions apply to the individual who is engaged in the act of asserting, so that “subjectivity” as a fundamental epistemological condition is regarded as uncontroversial. I will deal more with this point in Chapter Five.
McDowell seems to have in common with Wittgenstein (my last chapter discusses how Wittgenstein shares the kind of critique mentioned above in common with Hegel, and how Wittgenstein undertakes it). Hegel however, is not satisfied with assuming a quietistic posture; a substantive “confidence” can only be restored after a fully developed theory of determinacy fills the void created by what we might call the critical “deconstruction” of the concept of consciousness. It is not my purpose here, however, to examine Hegel’s “theory of determinacy” (*Science of Logic*), only the peculiar kind of critique that Hegel sees as a necessary prerequisite to its development.

In the following discussion of McDowell’s “prolegomenon”, we will be attempting to elicit two main ideas. One is the idea that there are certain very strong habits in the way philosophy is traditionally done. These habits obscure philosophical alternatives that are available to us, but that are not recognized or considered, and that may suffer premature dismissal. Second, there is the idea that these habits are inseparably related to very strong structural presuppositions concerning the way our minds relate to the rest of nature. These presuppositions can generally be characterized as “mentalist”: the idea that there is a metaphysically distinct (sui generis) subjective space circumscribed by a boundary that demarcates what is other to it, the sphere of objectivity.

I. Naturalized Platonism

A. What is ‘Nature’?

McDowell is engaged in an attempt to overcome the structural presuppositions and deeply ingrained habits or patterns of thought that give rise to certain sorts of familiar
philosophical problems. The patterns of thought in question tend to take the form of one or another dualism, which McDowell says includes subject vs. object, thought vs. world, norm vs. nature. Independently of McDowell’s discussion, we might pose the general question: what sorts of problems do these and other dualisms give rise to? There is one central difficulty that binds together a number of seemingly disparate epistemic puzzles, and it is a characteristic of dualistic thinking in general: it is the question of how to connect two domains that have been established as logically or actually independent, but also as somehow mutually interpenetrating. To take a famous example from the history of philosophy, Descartes notoriously had no other recourse than to invoke God as the guarantor that two ontologically distinct substances, thinking and extended substance, could be coordinated. The extremism of his solution reflects his awareness of what was logically required to unite two spheres that were so rigorously defined in opposition to one another: something miraculous.

“God” has long ceased to have any explanatory or problem-solving utility in philosophy, so other “miraculous” solutions have been sought to reconcile a number of recalcitrant dualisms. A recognizable move in the history of philosophy is to absorb one domain into the other, as is the case with a vulgar idealism that absorbs all objectivity into subjectivity, or conversely a vulgar materialism that starts with a predetermined notion of what counts as “objective” (matter), and attempts to account for anything putatively subjective in material terms. These attempts are characteristic of what McDowell calls “traditional constructive philosophy”, although his central image pertains more to a “bridge” that is to connect two independently conceived spheres.
There is a position that typifies this constructive approach, that McDowell calls "bald naturalism". It is a position that is meant to be a solution to the sorts of problems that are generated by taking reason to somehow belong to a special faculty of spontaneity, which, in Kantian fashion, links reason to the idea of freedom, i.e., the capacity to choose and to judge in a strictly autonomous, self-willed manner. If 'reason' is in this sense taken to belong to a *sui generis* sphere of freedom, then it becomes a problem how it can connect to the rest of nature, which is taken to fall within the realm of law, the domain of causes. Hence, we can view this problem as an aspect of the above mentioned "norm/nature" dualism. The sphere of norms and rationally governed behavior is determined as having an element of spontaneity, whereas nature is determined as purely law governed. Indeed, the domain of spontaneity can come to appear "spooky" or "uncanny" when viewed through the spectacles of a naturalism that is based in the realm of law, even though our spontaneity in thinking and acting are absolutely commonsensical features of our every day lives.

The baldly naturalistic answer is to deny that the space of reasons is *sui generis*, and to say that the idea of the spontaneity of reason is ultimately capturable in terms that belong to the realm of law. But McDowell thinks that this solution depends on a conspicuously limited conception of nature, one that equates nature with the realm of law, as we will see in the following discussion. In the course of it, we will elicit an aspect of the target of Hegel's critique to be examined in Chapter Three, the idea or representation of a self-standing, *sui generis* subjective interior, with a status independent from the rest of reality.

Bald naturalism equates nature with the realm of law. But what about our own nature
as human beings? This is the question McDowell asks, and he suggests that it would be a cheat to exclude this kind of nature from any general conception. A general conception of nature should make room for spontaneity on the grounds that it appears to characterize fundamental aspects of distinctively human activity, and we as humans are no more nor less natural than anything else that occurs in nature. But this bit of common sense is not so easily accepted. That is because, according to McDowell, what is considered natural is firmly conceived within a modern scientific framework that equates nature with the realm of law. Therefore, on the one hand, humans presumably fit into this conception of nature insofar as they are animals. But on the other hand, since we are also insisting on the spontaneous or “free” aspect of certain human activities, most eminently reasoning, it can appear that we are refusing to admit that part of us is natural. In fact, we appear to be participating in a discourse that is associated with the less sober side of platonism, insofar as we appear to be claiming that part of ourselves is in contact with a superhuman space of reasons, standing above and beyond nature (McDowell terms this discourse ‘rampant platonism’). But this appearance is false, and it has a relatively simple cause: the new understanding of a distinct realm of law that is a product of the modern scientific revolution has been conflated with the concept of nature in general. That is, due to the spectacular success of discerning law-governed processes in nature, we have come to expect that anything that is to be regarded as “natural” should ultimately be law-governed, even if we have not yet discovered any such laws. Hence, certain of our activities which are second nature, for example, the kind of free, rational activity paradigmatically found in giving and asking for reasons, comes to have an “occult”
aspect, since it seems to have origins outside the law-governed, causal order of nature.

To speak of the modern scientific understanding of law and causality as having been conflated with the concept of nature in general amounts to a bold claim, and it is one that McDowell carefully argues for, so as not to alienate readers who might automatically assume that he is calling for a return to medieval superstition, pre-critical metaphysics, or some other form of philosophical atavism. McDowell believes that the concept of nature should extend past what is capturable in nomological terms ("realm of law" discourse). To make this plausible, he employs Aristotle’s notion of ‘second nature’, which we will now consider.

How does McDowell use Aristotle’s notion of ‘second nature’ to elaborate an “extended concept of nature” (a concept minimally defined as not equated with the realm of law)? Our nature involves a distinctively human capacity to be, as McDowell puts it, responsive to the demands of reason. Insofar as we are properly developed human beings, such responsiveness is a part of our ‘second nature’. Aristotle specifically discusses such responsiveness in his own ethical terms of ‘virtue’ and ‘practical wisdom’. The key feature of Aristotle’s notion for McDowell is that “ethics involves requirements of reason that are there whether we know it or not, and our eyes are opened to them by the acquisition of ‘practical wisdom’” (M 79). The acquisition of practical wisdom involves the shaping of an intellect over time. McDowell acknowledges that he may be taking interpretive liberties, but he nonetheless adds that once our eyes have been opened to the demands of reason through a “proper upbringing”, we must recognize a standing obligation to reflectively scrutinize our ethical thinking; we are under a standing
obligation to become more deliberate, more rational, in short, better human beings. That is the primary significance of Aristotle's practical notion of 'shaping one's intellect'; an intellect is not determined from some external cause such as parenting, that would in turn cause someone to be virtuous (although good parenting would be a key aspect of a good upbringing); rather, once one becomes responsive to the demands of reason as a result of a good upbringing, one becomes the shaper of one's own intellect. That is what it means to move within the space of reasons. McDowell puts it this way, "When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of reasons. Thereafter our appreciation of its detailed layout is indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking." (M 82). To actualize our rational natures is just what it means to become responsive to the demands of reason, to operate within a "rational space" wherein such demands are recognizable.

McDowell's invocation of second nature is meant to demystify how it is that we can preserve the sui generis character of reason, while also acknowledging that we are natural beings operating within the realm of law. The claim is that it is a part of our nature as human to become rational, to become responsive to the demands of reason, given certain favourable social circumstances. The idea of second nature contributes to McDowell's overall ambition to remove the space of reasons from a transcendental plateau that bears some mysterious relation to our otherwise animal natures, and to relocate reason as

\(^4\) Readers may be experiencing doubts that McDowell's appeal to second nature succeeds in demystifying free responsiveness to norms. We will examine this issue shortly.
something immanent within our “second” nature. However, there seems to be something missing here, between what we might call “first nature” (the domain of law) and ‘second nature” (the domain of reason). The words themselves seem to imply a radical bifurcation of some sort. I suggest that “habit” and “training” might be suitable conceptual links between the extremes of first and second nature. If we wish to describe “animal behaviour” as belonging to first nature, and therefore to the realm of law (I am not endorsing this view, but it is one that might be plausibly held), we have a sphere wherein the idea of training is comfortably applied – any pet owner knows this. But “training” is also relevant to one way in which very small children learn, through imperatives and pure repetition. Such repetition gives rise to habits, and since Aristotle it has become familiar to speak of reasoning and other intellectual abilities in terms of habit. So here we have a clue as to how something as “mysterious” as free, spontaneous reason might be linked to the causal order. At any rate, McDowell makes a rather strong appeal to “Aristotelian” common sense to make his claim about second nature. So I believe it is worthwhile to examine the nature of Aristotelian claims in general, which I will do in the next section.

B. Problems with Invoking Aristotle

Despite his best efforts, does McDowell adequately distinguish his position from the undesirable metaphysics of a “rampant platonism”? Aristotelianism itself involves a teleological metaphysics and cosmology that most would say has been discredited (see footnote 2). How then will invoking Aristotle allay any anxieties associated with an
extreme metaphysical picture?

It is not only McDowell’s explicit invocation of ‘second nature’ that would superficially align him with a modified Aristotelianism. It is his peculiar use of the term ‘actualization’ that implies something stronger. This is how McDowell delivers us from the conceptual impasse that appears to commit us to a “rampant platonism”: “Exercises of spontaneity belong to our mode of living. And our mode of living is our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. So we can rephrase the thought by saying: exercises of spontaneity belong to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals” (M 78). McDowell is obviously making reference to Aristotle’s well-known characterization of human beings as “rational animals”, and this means he is implicitly referring to the potential of every human being, given favourable circumstances, to actualize what ultimately characterizes an individual as human, her reason. On the one hand, to “actualize” some capacity or other is a fairly common sense use of that verb. On the other hand, it resonates, and I think intentionally, to Aristotle’s metaphysical terms of art, ‘actuality’ and ‘potentiality’, terms classically associated with his teleological perspective. Let me briefly indicate what this perspective implies.

Aristotle indicates a number of ways in which actuality relates to potentiality, but perhaps the most definitive discussion of these terms in the context of developing a teleological framework occurs in Book IX of the *Metaphysics*. The decisive formulation is that “actuality is prior to potentiality”.\(^5\) Actuality is prior in “substance” to potentiality

\(^5\) See Joseph Owens’ masterful explication of this formulation in Chapter 14 of *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*. 
because "everything which is generated moves towards a principle, i.e. its end...And the actuality is the end, and it is for the sake of this that the potentiality is acquired" (1050a5-10). Actuality precedes potentiality in all significant senses, and it is that for the sake of which a potential develops; actuality is the telos of a potential.

Many would agree that one of science's great achievements has been to liberate us from a superstitious, teleological way of viewing nature as "animated" with meaning – e.g. viewing it as animated by things with an implicit "desire" to achieve some end, as well as by the prior, actual existence of those ends themselves – and to have bequeathed to us the modern, "disenchanted" view of nature as governed by causal laws. Does using a loaded Aristotelian term such as 'actualize' imply something metaphysically untoward? I believe McDowell is careful about what elements he borrows from Aristotle to make his point, and how he uses them. He is explicit about using 'second nature' as a model for an extended conception of the natural, but merely suggestive in his use of terms such as 'actualization'. However, as one of the greatest systematic philosophies of all time, it is questionable whether Aristotelianism is the sort of thing that you can borrow (so to speak) part A from, and leave part B behind: i.e. can the elements of Aristotle's ethics be intelligibly detached from his metaphysics, from a full blown Aristotelian cosmology?

On the one hand, McDowell has to be careful not just with the project of extending the space of reasons past a sui generis (in the pejorative sense6), mysteriously circumscribed

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6 McDowell distinguishes between two senses in which the "space of reasons" may be conceived as sui generis. One is pejorative: it is the conception that pictures our rational faculties as belonging to a sort of super-natural, transcendent, platonistic sphere. The other is unproblematic: it is unproblematic after we realize we are entitled to a concept of our free, rational nature in the notion of "second nature".
domain into an elaborated concept of the 'natural', but also with invoking Aristotle as an ally in this project. Both aspects of his project may suggest to readers that he is encouraging a philosophically atavistic picture. On the other hand, I think McDowell can be construed as making strong claims about the relationship between reason and nature that may indeed have a teleological aspect. The question is simply whether these claims are incompatible with modern science.

One of McDowell’s careful distinctions, as we have seen, is between the concept of nature, and the realm of law. That is why he cannot be accused of a simple atavism, a call for us to return to Aristotelian physics. To see exercises of spontaneity as natural, they must be viewed within the context of human life. And the temptation to view that life as merely animal, in the sense that a bald naturalism might recommend, comes from an already embedded bias to equate the natural with the realm of law. I think that an unprejudiced consideration of these alternatives should lead to an acceptance of this central thread of McDowell’s argument. But the possibility of such a consideration is precisely what is at issue. As McDowell says, as educated individuals, we are compelled to recognize “that when the realm of properly scientific understanding came to be generally seen as disenchanted, that marked an intellectual advance” (M 181). This recognition has led to the automatic, or habitual, equation of nature with the realm of law. Anyone who denies this equation risks sounding occult, atavistic, or simply uneducated. But it is generally not any rigorous understanding of scientific principles that undergirds this habitual judgment. The fact that making the equation is an intellectual reflex of sorts rather than something that indicates specific knowledge, suggests that there is an
embedded scientism at work. That is, there is a *faith* that ultimately all natural
phenomena will be capturable in nomological terms, even if the current state of science is
such that no such accounts are presently available.

However, it is not reasonable to label anyone “scientistic” who is thus far not willing
to accept McDowell’s extended conception of nature, especially since it seems that
McDowell’s appeal to Aristotle to develop that conception may be suspect. Again, it is
worth investigating how far such an extended conception might press McDowell into the
metaphysics of Aristotle. There is a delicate balance to be maintained between the kind
of Wittgensteinian “quietism” (the “rejection of any constructive or doctrinal ambitions”
in philosophy (M 176)) McDowell takes seriously, and the robust ontological stances
implicit in any invocation of Aristotle. I will later develop what McDowell means by
this quietism, and the sense in which he himself adopts it, after we now attempt to discern
whether McDowell indeed distinguishes his own position from the metaphysical excesses
of a “rampant platonism”, given his reliance on Aristotelian notions. For by modern
standards, on the face of it, Aristotle’s metaphysical commitments are not any weaker
than those associated with the term ‘platonism’.

Is the status of ‘reason’ any less mysterious in McDowell’s account than in an extreme
platonist picture? McDowell cites Aristotle as someone for whom there is no problem
how the space of reasons connects to the rest of nature, because of the availability to him
of an extended concept of nature, ‘second nature’. To actualize rational potential for
Aristotle is unproblematic because he possesses an “extended concept of nature”; but this
“extension”, if properly examined, seems to extend right into a “final cause”
metaphysics. What is that? Historically, it is a conceptual framework that since Ockham has been progressively buried in favour of a more mechanistic, nomological perspective (in line with what we have said is specific to a "modern scientific understanding"). Aristotle's final cause framework represents the strongest sense of 'teleology', because it includes a cosmological dimension that posits an ultimate reality to which all phenomena are causally related via the operation at all levels of eros. That is, it is not improper to speak of the implicit "desire" of things to actualize their potential, though 'desire' is best understood as an aspect of cognition. While this metaphysics does not include a transcendentaldomain of forms, signified by McDowell's term 'rampant platonism' (the metaphysical outlook McDowell is rigorously distancing himself from), the aforementioned "ultimate reality" is said to be a fully actualized deity, that most perfectly embodies every lower form of actualization, including most significantly the human actualization of rational potential.\(^7\) There is no mystery for Aristotle how we can come to actualize our rational natures, because there is a perfectly actual deity that embodies everything that we strive, within our limited potential, to become. This is obliquely indicated in the principle "actuality is prior to potentiality". The deity motivates our desire to become better and more rational just by virtue of its

\(^7\) This is not the place to consider various interpretations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; it suffices for our purposes here that this is a reasonable, and more importantly, influential interpretation (the theological problems this "pagan" picture of God caused for Scholastic philosophers was a dominant concern). The manner in which the deity most perfectly encompasses every lower form of actualization is as pure noetic activity, or "thought thinking itself", which is asserted to be the best, most perfect activity in the cosmos. Hence, there is no vestige of potential in this activity.
eternal activity.⁸

McDowell’s assurances that Aristotle had a naturalistic outlook untroubled by modern philosophical anxieties is not so much the result of Aristotle’s pre-modern immunity to the requirements of a specifically “scientific understanding”; rather it is more positively the result of a conception of ‘science’ that includes a final cause: the eternal activity of a self-absorbed, perfectly actualized deity. It seems McDowell glosses over the stronger metaphysical aspects of the Aristotelian philosophy in order to borrow elements of it favourable to his argument,⁹ specifically as something that contrasts with “rampant platonism”. To quote McDowell,

Aristotle’s innocence consists in his not being subject to that intellectual pressure [identifying ‘the disenchanted’ with nature]. Certainly he is aware that it is possible to see nature, identified as the topic of the most fundamental understanding, in a way that disenchants it. But for him that reflects a merely optional – and, from his intellectual standpoint, not very well supported – view of the most fundamental understanding (M 182).

To put it this way does not reveal entirely what Aristotle’s unencumbered intellect is up to, and I think such a revelation is precisely what would make modern readers wary, especially since McDowell so forcefully appeals to an Aristotelian perspective.

McDowell is implicitly appealing to a variety of pre-modern metaphysics that is not, it is true, rampant platonism, but which, in a sense, contrasts even more notoriously with nomological conceptions: teleology.

⁸ See Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book XII.

⁹ It is far from illegitimate to do that; there is no agreement concerning the systematic unity of Aristotle’s philosophy. I do, however, think there is great evidence to suggest that Aristotle viewed all phenomena, from natural to human, through the lenses of a few, carefully worked out metaphysical principles. See John Rist, *The Mind of Aristotle*, for an account of how Aristotle’s philosophy developed into a coherent whole.
But perhaps this imputation of a teleological perspective is not cause for alarm. For on the one hand the term can imply a full blown final cause metaphysics, but on the other hand it can be used in a merely descriptive fashion, where e.g. it can be uncontroversially averred that the determinate end of an embryo is to become some kind of creature, based on our observation of what it is that embryos become. So it might be said that McDowell is maintaining a rigorously empirical attitude towards what it is that human beings, given certain favourable circumstances, do indeed become: rational. When called to answer an explicitly evolutionary question, where one might expect a strong teleological tendency to become obvious, McDowell does not waver from what we might call his descriptive empiricism. The question that is posed is “how has it come about that there are animals that possess the spontaneity of understanding?” (M 123). An evolutionary teleology might indeed speculate in an Aristotelian fashion that a prior actuality of reason somehow comes to be over time linked to a specific potential of members of our species to actualize themselves as rational animals (this is not McDowell’s example).

But McDowell feels no such speculative pressure. For him, reflection upon Bildung, the ethical formation of human beings within a culture, should suffice to answer any questions we might have about our rational potential. From this perspective, it makes sense to ask specific questions about particular norms within a culture, not general

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10 To be “rational” is here taken to be a kind of activity, an activity of critically assessing and re-assessing what counts as a reason for what, of reflecting upon the standards one takes oneself to be governed by, etc.; it is not one’s ability to recognize a pre-established, static set of “rational rules” stipulated by some institution or authority. So we should not worry, at least not in this context, about how “reason is grounded” and other related issues.
questions aimed at discerning the nature of norms as such, or the structure of the space of reasons. This is in line with what at the beginning we pinpointed as McDowell’s modestly diagnostic aims. The pressure to address the latter kind of question McDowell argues is illusory, in the sense that it is unnecessary. We can be content with a kind of empirical sensitivity to the fact that we do develop certain capacities to behave in a recognizably reasonable fashion. Once we have realized the illusory nature of such pressures, we become entitled to what we might call a sense of rich, Aristotelian determinacy, of being at home in the world, without thereby also being committed to a metaphysics we might regard as extravagant and implausible. The sort of specific question that asks about particular norms within a culture, is the very same sort of question we ask when fulfilling what McDowell calls our standing obligation to reflect on what we take to be imperative about our ethical standards, or what we take to be good reasons for acting.

We can legitimately avoid the temptation to spell out the “structure of the space of reasons” beyond our own activity of being reasonable. Therefore, there is no pressing need to ask the kind of speculative evolutionary question that wishes to know how it is possible that “reason as such” arose as a distinctive human capacity, or how it is that human beings came to be cultural entities, responsive to reasons and meaning. McDowell’s aforementioned descriptive empiricism is concerned with the fact that individual human beings do form themselves within specific cultural contexts, and that they do in certain favourable cultural circumstances become rational. If there remains an evolutionary aspect to be discerned concerning these sorts of facts, then McDowell has
no problem with it. He says, “if we do speculate about how animals may have evolved into a way of living that includes initiating their young into a culture, we must be clear that that is what we are doing. It would be one thing to give an evolutionary account of the fact that normal human maturation includes the acquisition of a second nature, which involves responsiveness to meaning; it would be quite another thing to give a constitutive account of what responsiveness to meaning is” (M124). I interpret McDowell as being sympathetic to the former possibility, and agnostic about the latter.

I think it is far less of a problem to distinguish McDowell’s position from a rampant platonism, than it is to distinguish it from some form of Aristotelianism. Indeed, McDowell is a self-described ‘naturalized platonist’, which I believe is a careful way of enlisting oneself as an Aristotelian. The key to making either distinction lies in McDowell’s essentially descriptive task. McDowell says, “Naturalized platonism is platonistic in that the structure of the space of reasons has a certain autonomy; it is not derivative from, or reflective of, truths about human beings that are capturable independently of having that structure in view” (M 92). McDowell is emphatically not making any claims about how it is that our spontaneity of reason manifests or is able to hook up to a super-human, transcendental rational structure in order to give an account of how it is that we are genuinely rational beings. He is claiming that, via his account of second nature, human beings do think and act in ways that ultimately require us to regard them as rational, and he is describing a natural process whereby individuals become sensitive to certain sorts of demands that can only be described in terms native to that process: rational terms. Further, there is no genuine reason to think there is anything
spooky or super-natural about this process. Insofar as McDowell’s argument remains on
the plane of pure description, and points to what is obvious about our second nature, it
would take an unreasonable level of reductive contortionism to deny it.

The pressures that make it seem as if a commitment to view ourselves as free, rational
beings implies either a commitment to a “rampantly platonistic” vision, or an implicit
renunciation of modern science, are illusory. Once we have seen that the force of the
modern scientific understanding of nature has led us to regard as problematic, as super-
natural, any sui generis sense of our free, rational natures, we become entitled to a
legitimate, and de-problematized reclamation of that sense, as embodied in McDowell’s
descriptive account of ‘second nature’.

II. Wittgenstein’s Quietism

We are entitled to what I have called a kind of Aristotelian confidence, without any of
the presumed metaphysical commitments, simply in virtue of becoming aware that
certain habits of thinking generate compelling, but nonetheless illusory problems. This
is the primary lesson of the foregoing discussion, and what I intend as a kind of
propaedeutic to our consideration of Hegel: that there are notions of ‘reason’ and ‘nature’
that seem to encourage an undesirable metaphysical picture that represents them as
mysteriously bifurcated, a picture that therefore generates familiar problems about how to
connect them; and that these problems, and the picture of ‘reason’ as cut off from ‘nature’
that generates the problems, are philosophically optional for us to embrace or ignore.

But we may remain unpersuaded that the problems McDowell has in mind, e.g. the
norm/nature problem just discussed, are illusory. We may be inclined to attribute genuine substance to them. If that is the case, nothing has been solved, and the diagnostic/critical approach has failed. So it is worth considering more specific requirements of the “therapy” McDowell has in mind. If the kind of “therapy” to ween us off certain habits of thinking has worked, it should result in a kind of Wittgensteinian quietism, and a restoration of epistemic confidence.

What is quietism? It is the rejection of constructive or doctrinal ambitions in philosophy (M 93). Precisely what doctrines are “constructive”? Ones that attempt to answer such questions as “How is meaning possible?”, or “What is the structure of the space of reasons?”. According to McDowell, such questions “express a sense of spookiness, and Wittgenstein’s point is that we should not indulge the sense of spookiness, but rather exorcise it” (M 176). What exactly is “spooky” about these questions? In certain circumstances, we conjecture about the very possibility of meaning, and this possibility can begin to look mysterious if considered in a certain way. McDowell gives a Wittgensteinian example. The instruction to “add 2” “determines the steps in advance” of an arithmetical series in such a way that what counts as a correct move in accordance with this operation at any point in the series does not depend on ratification by members of an arithmetically knowledgeable community. It is this independence from a community, perhaps even from the human world, that can make meaning appear magical.

On McDowell’s reading, Wittgenstein aims to resist the atmosphere of uncanniness that surrounds such considerations, but does not reject the specific considerations
themselves. This is an important distinction, because many, notably Crispin Wright, take Wittgenstein to be criticizing the considerations themselves. What exactly is the difference? According to McDowell, Wittgenstein would allow considerations that take seriously the idea that the operation "add 2" in some sense determines future points in the expansion of a series. His aim is not to cast doubt on the possibility of determinate mathematical understanding, or the possibility of determinate understanding in general (as the skeptical interpretation of *Philosophical Investigations* claims; see Chapter Five). His aim is rather to cast doubt on the atmosphere of uncanniness such considerations can give rise to. It is this atmosphere that inspires distinctively philosophical questions of a certain kind, namely the ones McDowell associates with traditional "constructive" philosophy: How is meaning possible? What is the structure of the space of reasons?

I will briefly elaborate on some points that are suggested by McDowell's reading of Wittgenstein's quietism, but not wholly articulated. The question that asks in what sense does the operation 'add 2' determine future instances in a series, has a platonistic bent. But this platonistic bent need not appear rampant, i.e., no autonomous, super-human, super-natural domain of mathematical meaning needs to be posited. It is the seemingly rampant aspect that is primarily responsible for any atmosphere of uncanniness. A sense of strangeness accompanies an extreme platonic picture, because of the implicit invocation of, or reference to, something super-natural. Therefore, any questions that seem to refer to this super-natural domain are bound to have a sense of mysteriousness intrinsic to the asking of them.

Questions about, e.g. mathematical determinacy do not in and of themselves subscribe
to an extreme platonic picture, and hence need not appear mysterious. However, questions that ask about the structure where meaning-as-such comes into view or is possible, questions inspired by the *seeming* strangeness of a particular problem such as how ‘add 2’ can have a dimension of ratification-independence, are by their very nature uncanny, because they seek or call forth answers that invoke a kind of extreme platonic picture. Here we cannot ignore the “atmosphere of uncanniness”, because we have surrounded ourselves with it, as it were. Indulging the sense of mysteriousness that seemingly attends certain problems is a slippery slope into the old problems of philosophy (and then we are entangled in structural difficulties that we will consider below).

McDowell has a fruitfully subtle reading of Wittgenstein that allows us to distinguish between the sorts of question that need not seem strange, questions that we can address using a familiar conceptual repertoire, and the sorts of question that encourage philosophically extreme pictures, where the very idea of ‘meaning’ can seem mysterious. This is the nature of Wittgenstein’s quietism: he wishes to deny a seeming uncanniness to certain thoughts, e.g. about mathematical determinacy, that generate fruitless, insoluble lines of questioning concerning the very possibility of ‘meaning’.

The feeling of “spookiness” arises when certain thoughts that come up in philosophy are pressed into a super-natural frame of reference, the characteristic move of what McDowell identifies as “rampantly platonistic” thinking. McDowell’s main thought is that what should be regarded within the compass of an extended concept of nature, e.g. human receptivity to meaning, instead gets pressed into a seemingly strange, extra-
natural sphere, an enchanted domain that exists apart from the rest of the recognizable world. We might add on McDowell’s behalf that this move is a structural feature of the kind of question asked. Certain questions call forth certain kinds of answers. Recall the “conjuring trick” Wittgenstein sees happening in philosophy.\footnote{See \textit{Philosophical Investigations} §308.} A way of speaking or thinking commits us to a certain way of looking at things. Apparently intractable problems can arise simply as a product of unanalyzed presuppositions as to what counts as an answer or explanation within the specifications of a particular inquiry. McDowell sees a very firm conceptual structure in place that is presupposed in questions concerning the place of meaning within the rest of nature. That structure is the misconstrued \textit{sui generis} space of reasons (or in this instance, we might say “space of meanings”). Questions aimed at resolving apparent difficulties about the placement of meaning within nature call forth a sort of answer that simply rehabilitates the original difficulty in revised form. McDowell discusses such structural presuppositions in Section 3 of Lecture V, again with fruitful reference to Wittgenstein’s quietism.

McDowell elaborates the conceptual structure that is presupposed in questions concerning the autonomy of meaning in relation to nature. The two parts of the relation (autonomy of meaning vs. nature) expresses the issue fairly straightforwardly: there is a dualism of what McDowell calls norm and nature. Constructive philosophy attempts to bridge this and other dualisms by occupying one side of the gulf, and building a bridge to the other side out of the conceptual resources found where it has taken its stand. This
directly pertains to one sense in which I believe McDowell's book is indeed a prolegomenon to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*; the subject matter of Hegel's book concerns epistemically proceeding from the *standpoint* of 'consciousness', and the insolvable contradictions that arise when what is to be known from that standpoint, is also taken to be something radically independent of it. McDowell cites "phenomenalism" as an example of traditional philosophical construction: it is an attempt to bridge a preconceived gap between experience and the world by constructing the world out of experience.

According to McDowell, a common misreading of Wittgenstein has him engaged in this sort of project. Norms are considered "spooky" when conceived platonistically. Therefore we should build a bridge to them out of what are reassuringly present, facts about a disenchanted nature. But it is just this structure that systematically assures the sense that norms are something uncannily distinct from the rest of nature; any bridge from one side to the other is bound to look revisionistic simply due to the fact that the two sides are conceived as rigidly distinct even when bridged. That is, it is in the very logic of bridging something that the two sides remain independently conceived, no matter how this fact may be concealed. This structure just serves to reinforce the original sense that there is something mysterious about norms, rather than resolving the problem.

Thus, through his consideration of Wittgenstein, we can discern what is required of the "therapy" to ween us off the habits of thinking McDowell claims are the motivation of traditional constructive philosophy. One, we must become aware of, and then strive to ignore, the seeming strangeness of our capacity to discern and manipulate, e.g.,
mathematical meanings, or more generally, the seeming strangeness of our capacity to engage in meaningful, rational discourse and behaviour at all. If we are philosophically struck by the seeming strangeness of such capacities, we may be then tempted to entertain metaphysically extreme pictures concerning the very possibility of semantics in nature, or reason in nature. And it is extreme pictures of this sort that generate compelling, but interminable epistemic puzzles. Why interminable? This pertains to a second requirement (of "Wittgensteinian therapy"), namely, that we become aware of the general structural features of traditional constructive philosophy, namely, its dualistic nature. "Dualism" has become a sort of bogeyman in recent philosophy, and I do not mean to merely join the chorus of nay-sayers who may not always have a clearly defined picture of their target (it is, after all, a rather general concept). However, I do think that there is a genuine insight behind all the recent suspicion concerning "dualism", and that is, as glanced at above, the futility of trying to join together two concepts that were originally conceived of in opposition to each other. I will say more about this in the next section.

What it is that characterizes the quietist stance that is to arise a result of McDowell's version of "Wittgensteinian therapy" is not merely negative in nature. That is, the quietist stance does not merely tell us what we should ignore, be it an "atmosphere of uncanniness", or epistemic puzzles with a certain familiar structure. "Quietism" also hinges more positively around what McDowell calls the naturalism of second nature. What does this extended concept of nature offer us? McDowell claims that it is to liberate us from any seeming demand that we construct a concept of meaning out of facts
about a disenchanted nature, such that the domain of meaning no longer appears strangely, super-naturally located. This liberation is possible because the domain of meaning, and the space of reasons, are not to be conceived of as any less "natural" than what is demarcated by the realm of law. The two spheres are to be collapsed (though 'reason' is to retain its *sui generis* character in a de-problematized sense) into the single category of 'human life', something that on the whole should be regarded as natural, and that means incorporating such social concepts as Bildung into what counts as 'natural' (without of course reducing the social, in the manner of bald naturalism, to some basic set of non-normative elements).

The beauty of this move is that there is nothing forced about it. McDowell says, "The bare idea of Bildung ensures that the autonomy of meaning is not inhuman, and that should eliminate the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason"; and: "Human life, our natural way of being, is already shaped by meaning. We need not connect this natural history to nature as the realm of law any more tightly than by simply affirming our right to the notion of second nature" (M 95). The discovery of meaning is no longer to be construed as a transcendental, possibly super-natural project beyond what comes into view within various forms of non-philosophical, yet rational, life.

If the reader has doubts about the ability of 'second nature' to quiet any lingering tendency to ask certain sorts of questions about the status of 'meaning' and 'reason', this is a genuine misgiving that pertains specifically to McDowell's view. However, I am not defending McDowell's view; I am merely using it as a springboard for addressing
distinctively Hegelian themes (as I believe McDowell intended). Though *Bildung* is of course a recognizable Hegelian subject, Hegel does not directly appeal to it for the kinds of answers McDowell seeks. What is mostly of interest for us are the kinds and structure of problems McDowell raises, and the possibility of coming to regard them as related to deeply rooted habits of thought.

III. Towards a Critique of the Concept of Consciousness

McDowell sees the quietist stance as asking us to refrain from the temptations of constructive philosophy, which that stance regards as structurally doomed from the outset, by ignoring the apparent mysteriousness of certain questions regarding the nature and possibility of 'reason' and 'meaning', as well as considering closely the possibility of an extended concept of nature. As we will consider in Chapter Five, Wittgenstein wants to restore a certain confidence that he believes we are justified in having, namely, the confidence that our pre-philosophical uses of 'meaning' and 'understanding' are determinate in the ways we generally take them to be. I will be arguing that for both Hegel and Wittgenstein, this restoration requires a special kind of critique, one that I will be attempting to characterize throughout the remainder of this study.

Thus far what we have garnered from McDowell is that a kind of restoration of our epistemic confidence hinges on a demystification of certain problems that can seem pressing, for both structural and psychological reasons. Insofar as we are using *Mind and World* as a prolegomenon to the reading of Hegel, we ought to pay more specific attention to the structural aspects of the aforementioned problems, because it is a certain
structure that Hegel aims to critique, insofar as it operates as a philosophical presupposition. That structure belongs to ‘consciousness’.

Kant’s philosophy provides a particularly lucid example of the kind of structure the critique is aimed at. He is the philosopher par excellence who precedes every other consideration, ontological, moral, or otherwise, with a transcendental picture of consciousness. By Hegel’s lights, that is exactly the wrong way to proceed. McDowell explicates this difficulty in his own terms in Section 9 of Lecture 2, although he wants to somehow subtract what he refers to as the transcendental framework from Kant’s account, so that more favourable, usable aspects remain. As I will argue in Chapter Three, Hegel wants to eliminate any presuppositions regarding this structure entirely.

In Kant, the transcendental domain of concepts is fundamentally opposed to (but directed towards) a supersensible reality, the sphere of things in themselves. A faculty of receptivity, however, somehow mediates between these two spheres, because we are able to take in representations that originate from this supersensible substrate, as they are given to us in intuition. Yet the supersensible domain is conceived as something radically distinct from the domain of concepts. That means that in Kant’s picture there are ultimately brute, causal, non-conceptual impingements from a “given”, which are somehow empirically constructed via the spontaneous, rational activity of concepts. To use language Hegel might use, this implies a conflict between two spheres of determinacy.

\[12\] In general, I read the word “transcendental” as referring primarily to pure concepts and intuitions as they occur in the a priori domain of ‘mind’, and the word “transcendent” as referring to what lies beyond the reach of the employment of concepts in experience. (See Critique of Pure Reason, B352-53, 383, 593, 671, 893-94.)
that are taken to be absolutely distinct: the inner transcendental domain of concepts, and the outer, transcendent domain of the supersensible. McDowell puts the problem like this: how can we make sense of a picture of something that is systematically beyond the domain of concepts that can also be rationally assimilable to concepts?

Hegel discusses Kant’s critical philosophy in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, and his comments well reflect McDowell’s misgivings.¹³ The critical philosophy falls under one of three positions Hegel claims that thought can take with respect to objectivity. That is, to put it in McDowell’s terms, it is one of three dualistic approaches characteristic of traditional constructive philosophy. (The other two, “naive metaphysics”, and “immediate knowing”, may be safely omitted for our purposes here.)

Hegel regards the critical philosophy as proceeding within an antithetical framework that places subjectivity in relation to objectivity. However, the antithesis is developed in such a way that all of experience, including objective experience, falls within the domain of subjectivity, so all that remains in contrast with subjectivity is the bare, transcendent specification of the “thing-in-itself”.¹⁴ The categories of the understanding on the one hand are what elevates our perceptions to the status of objective knowledge; but on the other hand, these categories remain subjectively bound by an intrinsically limited, or

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¹³ To avoid scholarly contention as to what Kant may or may not have said, it should be pointed out that Hegel is interested in outlining a certain position thought takes in relation to objectivity, which he interprets Kant as historically espousing; but it is the nature of the position that is ultimately of interest, not whether Kant espoused it. However, I do believe that Hegel’s attribution of this position to Kant is in essential points correct.

¹⁴ It is worth recalling that McDowell regards the aspect of Kant’s philosophy that “proceeds from experience”, an experience that does not take in ultimate grounds that can be appealed to beyond thinkable content, as the salvageable aspect of the critical philosophy. What must be discarded is the transcendent addition of the thing-in-itself (M 41).
conditioned, consciousness. The categories are constitutionally incapable of apprehending the transcendent thing-in-itself. But it is in the very nature of reason to wish to comprehend the determinacy of things in themselves, insofar as it desires genuinely objective knowledge. Unfortunately, according to Kant, all our reason has by which to comprehend this determinacy are the constitutionally limited categories of the understanding. Hegel believes that the ramifications of this view are that “cognition through the categories contains nothing objective, and that the objectivity that is ascribed to them is itself only something subjective...[this] idealism has nothing to do with the content, and has before it only the abstract forms of subjectivity and objectivity; and on top of that it sticks one-sidedly with the former, i.e., subjectivity, as the ultimate, and thoroughly affirmative, determination.”15 But this ultimate affirmation of subjectivity comes paradoxically as the result of making the mysterious substratum of reality, the thing-in-itself, the seat of a determinacy unassimilable to our concepts.

Determinacy is here regarded as systematically external to thinking. But this has the two-fold effect of making it mysterious how it is our concepts can provide genuinely objective knowledge, and renders reason or thinking an “indeterminate unity”, or as McDowell might put it, a “frictionless spinning in the void”.

Apart from the tremendous complexities of the transcendental philosophy, the key thought here is simple. The picture of an interior, ‘consciousness’, mysteriously circumscribed by what in the Kantian picture is the domain of the supersensible, is

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15 See The Encyclopaedia Logic, §46.
optional. Consider the manner in which Hegel describes it:

In any dualistic system, but in the Kantian system particularly, its fundamental defect reveals itself through the inconsistency of uniting what, a moment earlier, was declared to be independent, and therefore incompatible. Just as, a moment before, what is united was declared to be what is genuine, so now it is said that both moments (whose subsisting-on-their-own was denied by [asserting] that their unification is their truth) have truth and actuality only by being separate — and this, therefore, is what is genuine instead. What is lacking in a philosophising of this kind is the simple consciousness that, in this very to-ing and fro-ing, each of the simple determinations is declared to be unsatisfactory; and the defect consists in the simple incapacity to bring two thoughts together — and in respect of form there are only two thoughts present (Encyclopaedia §60R).

This passage suggests that getting away from the grip of the Kantian picture, or of any "dualistic system", is ultimately a matter of becoming aware of certain habitual conceptual moves that tend to go unnoticed. This is the main lesson I wish for us to carry over into the next chapter. McDowell takes aim at certain structural presuppositions and habits of thought that make it seem as if our thinking relates to reality in a manner that is both mysterious and problematic, and adds a seeming compulsion or necessity to addressing the problems these imagined relations generate.

Hegel focuses these considerations into the critique of a single structure, ‘consciousness’. The richness of McDowell’s discussion comes from his simultaneous effort to introduce the virtues of the “quietistic” stance and to expose various structural and psychological pitfalls that encourage us away from it. Part of my argument of Chapter Three is that there is no positive recommendation in Hegel’s Phenomenology analogous to the stance of quietism, only a certain kind of critique; but we nonetheless can retain McDowell’s rich picture of what we might ultimately reclaim as the result of such a critique.
Addendum: More Clues to McDowell’s Modest Aristotelianism

Since this chapter uses Mind and World as a propaedeutic, there is a wealth of interesting trains of thought in that book worth pursuing on their own account that I had to ignore. Even the topic that is prominent in my discussion, McDowell’s use of Aristotelian notions, could be more fully developed. I would like to now say a few things pertaining to that, specifically pertaining to how our reason is “actualized” in our second nature. Doing this will allow us to further grasp the nature of McDowell’s antimentalist critique, and will put us in a better position to consider Hegel.

The rational structure wherein meaning comes into view is not something independent or transcendent from the individual who gradually comes to have that structure in view through Bildung (M 92). Actualized rationality is embodied in a rational human being thinking and doing rational things; it does not exist as a transcendental superstructure of reason. Rational potential is immanent within a human being as that individual’s distinctive capacity to engage in the rational activity that is determinately instantiated by the activities of mature, rational human beings; not as her capacity to resonate to or employ a transcendental structure of reason, abstractly defined or posited. In another implicit nod to Aristotle, it is the activity of being rational that is stressed in rationality, not a transcendental scheme existing in some kind of mysterious independence from such activity. The activity of being rational is to be at each moment engaged in the actualization of that rational potential that is immanent within our nature, our second nature, as humans. And that is to be engaged in giving and demanding reasons, critically assessing and re-assessing what is a reason for what, either in the sphere of theoretical
inquiry or in the sphere of practical life.

This rational activity is *determinate*, that is, it is in some sense constrained or occasioned by one's encounters with people and things in the world, and it is actualized by means of such encounters. That is what makes such activity rational and not merely spontaneous, the latter pertaining to what McDowell terms a mere "frictionless spinning in the void". Hence, the implicit claim here is that humans possess a specific rational potential that is actualized and intelligible precisely as a result of interactions with the world; the world, far from being something that exists in some kind of mysterious opposition to it, is to be conceived as a *requirement* of reason (similar to the way, for example, a seed is required for there to be an oak tree). That is to posit a logical relation between the actualization of rational capacities and the objectively situated opportunities that provide the conditions for such actualization to occur. I think this relation is captured in Aristotle's use of the concepts 'actuality' and 'potentiality', which McDowell makes use of. I will elaborate.

When McDowell points to an aspect of genuine receptivity in our empirical concepts, that receptivity does not bring in something radically *alien* to our concepts. I think McDowell is trying to elaborate an essentially Aristotelian idea in Kant's language of spontaneity and receptivity, and as a result runs into some difficulties. Let us examine a difficult but revealing passage in McDowell that pertains to these issues:

*I have been urging that we must conceive experiences as states or occurrences in which capacities that belong to spontaneity are in play in actualizations of receptivity. Experiences have their content by virtue of the fact that conceptual capacities are operative in them, and that means capacities that genuinely belong to the understanding: it is essential to their being the capacities they are that they can be exploited in active and potentially self-critical thinking. But when capacities come into play inexperience, the*
experiencing subject is passive, acted on by independent reality. *When experience makes conceptual content available to one, that is itself one's sensibility in operation, not understanding putting a construction of some pre-conceptual deliverances of sensibility...* The position I am urging appeals to receptivity to ensure friction, like the Myth of the Given, but it is unlike the Myth of the Given in that it takes capacities of spontaneity to be in play *all the way out to the ultimate grounds of empirical judgments* (M 66-7, my emphasis).

Despite McDowell’s best efforts, insisting on preserving the language of receptivity makes him precipitously close to recommending a variant of the Given. That is because in that language there is a vestigial dualism of the traditional variety, the dualism he aims to bypass (in this instance it is the dualism peculiar to the transcendental framework, which, in its most extreme form, is a dualism of the conceptual and the supersensible). I think what he wishes to preserve in the language of receptivity is our intuition that there is a specific form of determinacy that comes to us through our senses; but he does not wish it to be conceived as something alien to the conceptual activity of comprehending it, otherwise there would be no sense in which the deliverances of our receptivity could be construed as a rational element in our overall view of the world. But the language of spontaneity and receptivity ultimately reinforces a bi-polar conception of the determinacy in our thinking and the determinacy of the world.

The language of “actualizing a potentiality” is meant to offset this difficulty. Aristotle is, with logical coherence, able to speak of actualizing within cognition the universals that exist potentially and actually in individual things. This is coherent because a potentiality is *logically related* to an actuality; spontaneity and receptivity are not so related. Rather, each term is the product of independently conceived capacities that are subsequently joined together. If spontaneity and receptivity possessed a logical
relation similar to that of actuality and potentiality, then it should be crystal clear how the two capacities co-operate, and this is precisely what is at issue. I think that if McDowell were to more explicitly develop the notion of actualizing a potential as an aspect of our second nature, the misleading language of spontaneity and receptivity could be set aside. This would require a better picture of how our encounters with the world, both with people and things, actualize our rational potentials. And of course, most philosophers would not be satisfied by a simple invocation of Aristotle’s metaphysical presuppositions to make the picture plausible, so considerable labour would have to be expended developing it without such presuppositions.

Let me develop further the Aristotelian thought McDowell is aiming at when he says, e.g., that the capacities of spontaneity are in play “all the way out to the ultimate grounds of empirical judgments.” I believe he means that there is potentially, and in principle, no metaphysical chasm between the determinacy presented in deliverances of sensibility and the determinacy of our conceptual activity. That is the significance of McDowell’s turn of phrase “actualizations of receptivity”. In what sense are they (“actualizations of receptivity”) becoming actual? As the concepts that constitute and are employed by our rational natures. But for this process to be correctly conceived, a radical distinction between the determinacy of the world as taken in by receptivity, and the determinacy of our concepts as applications of spontaneity, must remain unintelligible. Somehow, McDowell should make more explicit use of his suggestive invocation of the act/potency framework.

I realize that I may be moving into metaphysical territory that McDowell might be
unhappy with. But I believe that what I called McDowell’s “descriptive empiricism” (1.I.B) likely has the resources to better spell out the promise of his picture of second nature, without a terminal entanglement in strong Aristotelian presuppositions and commitments, or other philosophically extreme pictures. We can describe human, rational activity without being pushed into adopting a baldly naturalistic stance, or appealing to a transcendental space of reasons, or perhaps even without presuming a teleological aim. Nor must we assume that the deliverances of receptivity hail somehow from a conceptually unassimilable, supersensible domain of reality, which is yet somehow the substrate upon which empirical knowledge is constructed. These philosophically extreme pictures become optional once we become comfortable with treating ‘reason’, and the modes of spontaneity associated with actualizing it, as facts of experience, and as genuine aspects of our human nature.

Perhaps the most concise (and general) thing that can be said about McDowell’s picture is that it depicts reality as not located outside a boundary that encloses the conceptual. But to effectively advance this picture, some of the very terms McDowell chooses to elaborate it should be abandoned. One of the main ways in which his picture is formulated highlights its limitations: receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation of receptivity and spontaneity (M 9). The idea is that the deliverances of our receptivity “always already” involve our conceptual capacities; there is no extra-conceptual “brute given” that, after it has been received, then gets somehow conceptually worked upon or appropriated to produce knowledge. However, the terms ‘receptivity’ and ‘spontaneity’ are borrowed from a transcendental
framework that is not readily detachable from the terms’ employments. The terms thus borrowed serve to polarize the co-operation, such that it is difficult to resist the temptation to view genuine receptivity as pertaining to a sphere that is radically non-conceptual. It is difficult to suppress the question, “receptive of what?” if we are using the term to demarcate a capacity of sensibility. If we ask that question, we are likely searching for an answer that distinguishes itself from “the conceptual” in principle.

Again, the two terms have distinct logical applications within a framework that maintains a radically transcendent element alien to our concepts. The concept of receptivity is at once implicitly tied to this element by virtue of its characterization as sensibility, sensibility that is somehow related to the transcendent substrate, while also supposedly something that makes a “notionally inseparable” contribution to the co-operation of spontaneity and receptivity. But how can this latter be the case, if receptivity is logically tied to an alien, transcendent realm, while spontaneity logically pertains to the conceptual domain? There seems to be a basic logical conflict here that is difficult to suppress even in McDowell’s careful appropriation of the terms.

McDowell enriches his picture by incorporating the language of actuality and potentiality, in such phrases as “capacities that belong to spontaneity are in play in actualizations of receptivity” (see quoted excerpt above) (M 66). And here maybe Kant’s terms are salvageable in a sort of Aristotelian co-opting of Kantian concepts. But perhaps at that point it is time to seek new concepts altogether, as McDowell himself suggests when he says that he is in favour of “domesticating the rhetoric” of Hegel to advance his picture. Hegel in fact attempts to advance a strong Aristotelian picture of
determinacy in his *Logic*, but in what follows we will not be examining the success or merits of that attempt. We will be examining the kind of critique Hegel regards as necessary, analogous to the "diagnostic" aspect of McDowell's discussion, for the very possibility of the reclamation and restoration of a rich, determinate conception of thought that is not in principle cut off from the "world".
Chapter Two: History of a Presupposition

Thus far, the discussion has occurred at a fairly high level of abstraction, and I hope to mitigate that now with some more concrete considerations. This historically-minded chapter is somewhat wide in scope, but it has one primary goal: to give a concrete background to an abstract, and therefore perhaps unclear structure underlying the method Hegel outlines in the Introduction to his Phenomenology of Spirit. This structure and method involves what Hegel took to be the presupposition of modern philosophy, ‘consciousness’ (the principal idea of "mentalism"), and its proposed elimination as a deep-set idea or habit of thought. The elimination of the concept of consciousness is the primary condition under which Hegel’s proposed theory of determinacy is possible, an issue we will explore in Chapters Three and Four (see the Introduction for a brief characterization of that theory). But putting aside the specific requirements of that theory for the moment, we can see Hegel’s phenomenological project in light of a general motivation to demonstrate how it is that a certain epistemological structure, one that recurs again and again in the history of philosophy, is self-refuting. In a word, this epistemological structure is what Hegel calls ‘consciousness’, and theorizing from its presupposed standpoint amounts to a philosophical habit that Hegel believed it is possible to eliminate, and indeed, is eliminated via a self-refuting process considered in the Phenomenology.

This chapter therefore examines this long-standing philosophical habit of thought that
can be best\(^1\) viewed as beginning with the Stoics,\(^2\) and that still exerts an influence in epistemology and philosophy of mind. This habit involves presupposing a picture of ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ that represents an isolated, self-standing, abstract interior domain that stands over and against something broadly conceived of as “the world”. We will first consider the Stoics, then Descartes, and finally Hume and Kant. Each “chapter” of this selective history of mentalism will provide us with a distinct perspective on the principal idea of mentalism, ‘consciousness’.

The first section will partly be devoted to an examination of the birth of the concept of ‘representation’ in philosophy. Grasping it and its epistemic employment allows us to better consider certain concealed presuppositions about ‘mind’. For example, it was for a long time a sort of common sense that one of philosophy’s main quests was to determine whether, or how it is possible, “my” representations of reality are true. We can see that concealed in this sort of common sense is a presupposition about ‘mind’, one that encourages a systematically misleading inference from particular cases of considering whether what “I” believe is true, i.e., whether or not I know something, to a global epistemic conclusion concerning 1) a state of affairs where there are minds that represent, and objects which are represented, and 2) an implicit belief that their statuses are wholly

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\(^1\) I say “best” because although Stoic theory of knowledge has elements in common with the Cynics and Epicureans, these elements receive their most explicit, comprehensive expression with the Stoics.

\(^2\) I am taking up a suggestion of Kenley Dove’s, based on a reading of the Phenomenology of Spirit. Although Hegelian in spirit, this chapter is not a presentation of Hegel’s ideas in e.g. either Lectures on the History of Philosophy or the Phenomenology. It is a direct appraisal of primary, historical sources that I believe offer a relevant background to Hegel’s method in the Phenomenology, and that will help to render it more intelligible.
separate. This unquestioned inference is made again and again, from the self-evident premise that it is "I" who may or may not know something, to an abstractly reified mental interior wherein facts are received from an outer world, alien to my mind, that is somehow able to be mentally represented and retained as knowledge.

The perhaps irritating tag word for this picture is 'dualism', which I will frequently replace with 'mentalism', since 'consciousness' is Hegel's specific target. As we noted in the last chapter, Hegel says that dualism in general indicates a simple incapacity to bring two thoughts together, each believed to be equally indispensable. Thus far, McDowell's *Mind and World* has been useful in focusing the discussion; the title itself may be regarded as a very general guiding clue to what follows.

I. Roots of a *Sui Generis* Concept of Mind

The purpose of this section is to examine the historical roots of a certain kind of habit or pattern of thought which operates as an epistemic presupposition, one that I have been characterizing as "dualistic". It is a commonplace to view Descartes as the primary formulator of what Gilbert Ryle has called the "official theory": that there are minds, and there are bodies, bodies that taken in aggregate constitute what is generally referred to as the "world". The 'world' has become the object of what McDowell has called a modern scientific understanding, while the 'mind' has become either the perennially recalcitrant phenomenon that reductive theories attempt to minimize or eradicate, or a "spooky" domain that transcendental metaphysics presupposes and elaborates. But this kind of
explicitly formulated mind-world dualism began well before Descartes. While it would be incorrect to attribute such a doctrine to Aristotle, it is a matter of historical fact that his successors, the Stoics, held this sort of doctrine in a more or less complete form, despite their self-professed materialism. Along with the emergence of this doctrine came a new stress on philosophizing from an implicit first person standpoint, something that achieves explicit foundational significance with Descartes. Also, a new emphasis on meaning, propositions, and language emerges. We will briefly examine some significant passages from the Stoics to make this plausible. The purpose for doing so is to examine the degree to which a kind of mentalist philosophizing is a long-standing philosophical habit, a habit that both Hegel and Wittgenstein separately sought to eliminate.

One of the signature concepts of mentalist epistemology is representation. It is a feature of this epistemology to ask in one form or another how it is that our minds or concepts are able to represent the world adequately, so that we can be sure that we possess true knowledge of it. The Stoics introduced the forbear of this concept in their discussions of 'presentation' (fantasia). What is stressed in this notion is passivity or receptivity to an outer world, an important dimension of contemporary epistemology (see Chapter One). Hence, we see that Cicero reports that Zeno said presentation/perception is an "imitation, a seal, an impression from what exists just as it exists (S 62, SVF 159b).

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3 'Fantasia' is rendered 'visum' by Cicero, translated as 'perception' by Jason Saunders (see bibliography. I am examining his selections from Stoicorum Veterrum Fragmenta).

4 Much of what we know about the Greek Stoics is reported to us by Roman scholars.
Further, Diogenes Laertius tells us that it is

an *impression* on the soul, the name appropriately taken over from the imprint which a seal makes on wax. Presentations are either comprehensive or noncomprehensive. The comprehensive presentation, which they assert is the criterion of the existence of things, is that which is produced by a real object, resembles the object itself, and is sealed and stamped on the soul. The noncomprehensive presentation either does not come from a real object, or if it does, it does not resemble the object, — nor is it well formed or distinct” (S 63, SVF II 53; my emphasis).

Several things are going on in these passages. Most notably an idea of perception is being considered that says the objects of reality *impress* or *imprint* themselves on a soul that receives them, like wax receives a seal. There is also clearly a concern with veridicality here, when what counts as a *criterion* of a correct imprint is discussed. I will say a few words about this latter aspect before proceeding to the points concerning receptivity of something taken to be real. If there is a single most telling sign of a sudden shift to philosophizing from a first-person vantage, it is the new preoccupation with veridicality, and the search for and positing of criteria of veridicality. This mode of philosophizing must be emphatically distinguished from the Socratic demand for *adequate* premises that could be laid down in building a dialectical road to knowledge.

The very question of whether real, outer things that constitute the phenomenal world were being correctly presented to the mind according to a legitimate criterion would be unintelligible to Plato. For Plato, at least the Plato of the *Republic* where perhaps his most famous discussion of the Forms takes place, the entire domain of appearance is *defective*, along with the cognitive modes of apprehending it. It is not a question of whether what appears is being correctly cognized by the mind; the question of correct cognition is categorically irrelevant at a level of reality (appearance) that is intrinsically
deficient. The question of correct cognition is only relevant at the level of *nous*, whose corresponding “objects” are intrinsically intelligible: Forms.

Aristotle also maintained that “form” is intrinsically intelligible, although for him forms do not exist separately from the individual things in which they are actualized. For Aristotle, *nous* is integrated into the world in such a way that there is no possibility of wholesale misinformation according to one’s presentations of it. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a kind of speculative identity between the form that actualizes in and makes an individual thing what it is, and the intelligibility of that form as it occurs in cognition. This latter is not a “reflection” or a “representation”, i.e., something secondary or imitative of an original object. The actual form is in some sense present in cognition qua original. It is because of this strong, naive realism that we can safely say that Aristotle was not primarily concerned with epistemic criteria. When Aristotle is searching for the first principles of his metaphysics, he is not searching for a criterion that will establish whether his representations of an outer world are veridical and justified. He is looking for the most reasonable way to account for and render intelligible the existence of individual substances in terms of the whole (*kosmos*).

The presence of metaphors of receptivity in the Stoic fragments may not seem so remarkable, especially in light of Aristotle’s discussion of perception as the reception of Form without Matter. But again, Aristotle conceives such “reception” very differently. There is no basic ontological distinction between form as it exists in an individual thing, and form as it is apprehended in cognition. This is the crucial difference that we will see
emerging in our examination of the Stoics: the status of the presentation is unclear. If presentation is a kind of "reflection" or "impression", it has a clearly secondary status to the real object that caused it. But what is this status? Is it in some sense "real"?

Aristotle was not burdened by this kind of question, because *nous* was for him paradigmatically actual. The Stoics were also not burdened by it, but that is because they deferred this question (a question that arises with specific reference to their doctrines) indefinitely, to the point where the Skeptics were able to turn this ambiguity against them (as we will later see).

The Stoics shift emphasis onto questions concerning whether a presentation has a veridical relation to the *real*, corporeal thing that causes it. In the passages above and numerous others like them, we see both a description of how objects imprint themselves on the soul, and a rudimentary attempt to establish a correct criterion for establishing and confirming the impression's veridicality. What ties these passages together and shows them as signifying a genuinely distinct epistemic direction, is contained in the following testament by Sextus Empiricus:

> ...the dogmatists...are accustomed to say that the external, underlying, sensible object is neither a whole nor a part, but it is we who add the predicate of whole or part to it. For whole is a term of relation, since a whole is considered such with reference to the parts. And the parts are also relative, for they are considered parts with reference to the whole. But relations exist in our recollection and our recollection is *in us*. Accordingly, the whole and the part are in us, and the external, underlying, sensible object [*hypokeimenon*] is neither a whole nor a part, but it is the thing of which we predicate our recollection" (S 67, SVF II 80).

As 'presentation' clearly marks a receptive element in cognition, so 'recollection' (*symmnemoneusin*) seems to mark what Kant will later call the spontaneous element in
our understanding. What is received from sensible, external reality is in itself neither whole nor part, but through an act of predication is determined as either, in accordance with an internal mental process here called "recollection". Again, it is helpful to indicate how markedly different this is from any Aristotelian conception. In that view concepts of 'whole' or 'part' are emphatically not a mere addition of mind to an otherwise undetermined, inert, sensible, external substrate. Their categorial status is only intelligible in light of the self-individuating character of reality itself, into various forms and substances. All "objects"\(^5\) are not created equal in the Aristotelian world. Rather, there is a hierarchy of individuals, of varying degrees of intrinsic value and perfection, related to a single principle, fully actual and perfect in and for itself. However, in the Stoic conception indicated in the above passage there seems to be a radical "egalitarianism" of objects; objectivity qua objectivity is taken to be undifferentiated until difference is added via a linguistic or conceptual act of predication, borne from an entirely different sphere: "us". An important equivocation becomes noticeable, and it is one that is a consequence of the epistemic structure we see emerging here. If "we" predicate and thus determine reality with our concepts, what is the determinate aspect of that which "impresses" onto our minds from the outside world in the form of a presentation? What is the purpose of talking about a "comprehensive presentation" as a criterion for what is in our minds perfectly resembling what is in the world, if we are adding important conceptual components foreign to the thing itself? To use Kant's

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\(^5\) There is no ancient Greek word for 'object'.

terminology, how is it that the spontaneous element of our understanding does not overdetermine what is received by our senses? Or conversely, how does what is received by our senses determine anything at all if essential relational components are added to it via acts of conceptual predication?

Predicates, and more generally concepts or notions, come to be seen as constituting a \textit{sui generis} sphere apart from the rest of reality. Stobaeus writes, “the Stoic philosophers say that ideas are unreal, and that we share in notions, but that we only chance upon their modifications which they call \textit{common nouns}” (S 67, SVF I 65a). The genuses of individual things are modifications of notions, unreal classificatory schemes belonging to our minds\(^6\) that are expressed grammatically in our language as nouns. These noun-notions are “image[s] of reason, neither a real thing nor a quality, but like a real thing and like a quality, as an image of a horse arises when no horse is present” (S 68, SVF I 65c (Diogenes Laertius)). The \textit{real status} of the mind is ambiguous. Here it is regarded as a special sphere wherein unreal images of what is taken to be real, the external world, come to us and inhabit. In some passages ‘mind’ is regarded as “corporeal”, referring specifically to the “ruling part of the soul”, in others some aspects such as \textit{meaning} (\textit{lekton}) are regarded in merely negative terms, as “incorporeal”.\(^7\)

This ambiguity is most manifest in the Stoic concept ‘\textit{lekton}’, translated variously as

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\(^6\) Notion = \textit{ennoema}, from \textit{nous}, mind.

\(^7\) Some of these differences are due to the different periods and hence “kinds” of Stoicism, from the early Greek practitioners, to the Romans. For an excellent overall look at how Stoic theory of knowledge evolved, see Eduard Zeller, \textit{The Stoics, Epicureans and Skeptics}, Part II.
'meaning' or 'utterance'.⁸ The concept is meant to indicate the distinct status of thought, apart from the external object to which thought refers, or the sound by which thought is expressed. Eduard Zeller states the problem nicely:

For this reason, they maintain that only utterance is not material; things are always material; even the process of thought consists in a material change within the soul, and an uttered word, in a certain movement of the atmosphere. A question is here suggested in passing, which should not be lost sight of, viz. How far was it correct for the Stoics to speak of thoughts as existing, seeing they are not material, since according to their teaching, reality only belongs to material things? (Zeller 92-94).

The seeds are here planted for a sui generis concept of the mental interior, and thus for a problematic dualism. There is an ambiguity in the concept of lekton, which on the one hand implies a physical, external manifestation as something uttered, and on the other hand something hidden and interior, as in a mentalist concept of 'meaning'. It is a linguistic concept that carries a recognizable ambiguity of language: is it something fundamentally mental, or something fundamentally physical that arises from the systematic usage of certain sounds within human communities, that are subsequently internalized? It appears that the Stoics wanted to confer the usual sense of 'real' as it is determined materially onto a domain that they generally denied to have reality, in order to render intelligible the many functions of the concept ('lekton').⁹

In the following strikingly modern passage, 'truth' is determined as external and corporeal; certain operations of the mind are characterized in merely negative terms, as an

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⁸ ibid., chap. 5.

⁹ Here we can see the structure emerging that can make meaning appear to be, as McDowell puts it, something "spooky".
absence of what is determined as definitely real, the corporeal:

...truth is corporeal, whereas the true is incorporeal. And quite plausibly so, they say, for the true is a proposition and a proposition is an intention of meaning and meaning is incorporeal (S 74-5, SVF II 132 (Sextus Empiricus); my emphasis).

‘Truth’ is something squarely located in the domain of the corporeal. However, knowledge of truth is expressed propositionally, propositions carry meaning, and meaning is incorporeal. A proposition can be true or false, depending on its relation to the truth.

This epistemological formulation in terms of language, intention, and meaning is recognizable to anyone familiar with 20th Century linguistic philosophy. I believe this and other Stoic formulations of a similar nature are to properly be regarded as marking the inception of a certain pattern of thought that has achieved highly sophisticated expression in contemporary philosophy. The structure of that pattern marks out two distinct epistemic domains (I am now considering all the above passages in aggregate): on one side we have an incorporeal sphere of meaning, predicates, concepts, propositions, and intentions, on the other side we have corporeal truth, or what is taken to be definitively real.

Given this basic epistemological structure, it would not be unreasonable to expect Stoic elaborations on it to resemble contemporary ones. The following passage confirms that expectation:

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10 I am not attempting to establish any specific causal connection between Stoic philosophy and the way philosophy has been practiced since; I am rather trying to draw attention to the genesis of a pattern of thought that is clearly exhibited in later philosophy. This pattern of thought is wed to an epistemological structure that I argue has become habitual to presuppose; an account of the reasons or causes for why it has become habitual to work within this epistemological framework would fall beyond the scope of this study (although we glanced at some of these issues in the first chapter).
The Stoics...[asserted] that there are three things joined together, the thing signified, the sign, and the existing object. The sign is the sound, for example the word “Dion.” The thing signified is the matter itself which is indicated by the sound and which we grasp as it coexists with our thought, but which the barbarians, although they hear the sound, do not understand. And the existing object is the external thing, as Dion himself. Of these three, two are corporeal, the sound and the existing object, and the one is incorporeal, the matter signified and the meaning, and it is this that is true or false. Not every meaning, however, is true or false, for some are incomplete and others complete. An illustration of the complete is what they call a proposition which indeed they define in the statement: a proposition is that which is either true or false (S 76, SVF II 166 (Sextus Empiricus)).

This three-part scheme is typical of what we might call “layered” epistemologies, which one and all contend with a fundamental dualism of inner and outer, or of mind in opposition to what is taken to be real. If the distinction between the two domains is presupposed, then the primary philosophical task is to bridge them together, often with layers of mediating categories and faculties. “Layering” tends to accompany any attempt to bridge the inner with the outer, and signifies a kind of philosophical unconsciousness. Why “unconsciousness”? Because the intelligibility of the simple and principle division of ‘inner’ defined in opposition to ‘outer’, or more generally the mental defined in opposition to something other than it that is taken to be the seat of reality, is never called into question; it acts as the most elementary of presuppositions upon which all other philosophical activity is conducted. Hence, a thought-sign-object structure is typical, not only of Stoic epistemology, but also of any epistemology that proceeds within this presupposed dichotomy.
II. Descartes and Skepticism

Before examining in detail one dramatic instance of a philosopher who proceeds within the aforementioned dichotomy (Kant) and the difficulties that result, I would like to say a few things about the perhaps enigmatic sounding statement I made earlier concerning “a new stress on philosophizing from an implicit first person standpoint, something that achieves explicit foundational significance with Descartes.” I mean to draw attention to an implicit logic involved in asking the sort of question the Stoics ask, about how my representations of reality can be correct. The implicit logic involves this: a mental interior is posited that is to constitute a kind of forum or tribunal wherein representations, concepts, and beliefs are deemed to be either true or false. This posit stems directly from the perception that these representations, concepts, and beliefs belong to me. The implicit logic therefore, of the kind of question the Stoics ask about how “my” representations of reality can be correct, is one that takes proceeding from a first-person standpoint to be self-evident. What Descartes makes explicit in his famous thought experiment involving the possibility of systematic and thoroughgoing deception, is precisely that the cogito should be philosophically self-evident in any epistemic scenario, and that it should therefore serve as a foundational principle upon which to construct a system of epistemically sound propositions about the world. A geometric analogy is apparent. The mind becomes analogous to a geometric point that serves as an axiomatic principle: as it is possible to construct lines and figures from points in reference to which systematically true propositions can be formulated, likewise the self-evidently
true principle of the cogito serves as the foundation upon which it is possible to construct a conception of the world, and what can be true or false about it.

The radical skepticism Descartes employs as a methodological device may be usefully interpreted as a logical possibility implicit in the epistemic structure he works within. During the course of his Meditations, he rehearses a dialectic that in the actual course of history is embodied by two philosophical camps, the Stoics and the Skeptics. Ancient skepticism arises directly as a reaction to the "dogma" of the Stoics. This imputed dogma in part concerns the legitimacy of the "comprehensive presentation" as a criterion for knowledge (see Section I). That which the Stoics take to guarantee the truth of one's knowledge, a criterion, is conversely also that which the Skeptics claim guarantees its inconclusiveness; this situation arises directly from a Stoic epistemic structure that posits a free- or self-standing mental interior, the status of which is unclear, in opposition to the outer reality of the world. A brief consideration of this "skeptical inversion" of the Stoic criterion will allow us to see the operation of a similar structure recapitulated in Descartes' Meditations, one that also yields skeptical results. The difference there is that Descartes uses his skeptical conclusion to reinforce what he takes to be the self-evident nature of the epistemic principle he introduces into the philosophical lexicon: the foundational cogito. Part of what I hope to make evident is that the dialectical swing from certainty to skepticism back to certainty is a movement intrinsic to the epistemic structure here under consideration.

We have already seen that the Stoics make a rudimentary attempt to distinguish
between the truth and falsity of what is *presented* to consciousness by introducing a criterion dubbed the "comprehensive presentation". Simply, a presentation is comprehensive and therefore veridical if it was produced by a real object, resembles a real object, and is "imprinted" on the soul. However, any claim to veridicality must of course be made from the *standpoint* of the mind that receives it as a presentation. Apart from calling the truth of any particular presentation to question, that is, calling to question whether the presentation is or is not produced by a real object, the more general worry arises as to whether any mind-bound criterion can serve as a criterion of what is real, given that what is real has been pre-thematized as standing *outside* of consciousness. And this is precisely where Sextus Empiricus ensnares the "dogmatists": any criterion that is posited is necessarily mind-bound, and is therefore posited dogmatically without a legitimate reference or relation to a real object. The skeptic turns the Stoic epistemic structure and its legitimating criterion against itself. In a long passage I believe is worth presenting here, Sextus says:

...he who prefers one impression to another, or one "circumstance" to another, does so either uncritically and without proof or critically and with proof; but he can do this neither without these means (for then he would be discredited) nor with them. For if he is to pass judgment on the impressions he must certainly judge them by a criterion; this criterion, then, he will declare to be true, or else false. But if false, he will be discredited; whereas, if he shall declare it to be true, he will be stating that the criterion is true either without proof or with proof. But if without proof, he will be discredited; and if with proof, it will certainly be necessary for the proof also to be true, to avoid being discredited. Shall he, then, affirm the truth of the proof adopted to establish the criterion after having judged it or without judging it? If without judging, he will be discredited; but if after judging, plainly he will say that he has judged it by a criterion; and of that criterion we shall ask for a proof, and of that proof again a criterion. For the proof always requires a criterion to confirm it, and the criterion also a proof to demonstrate its truth; and neither can a proof be sound without the previous existence of a true criterion nor can the criterion be true without the previous confirmation of the proof. So in this way both the criterion and the proof are involved in the circular
process of reasoning, and thereby both are found to be untrustworthy; for since each of them is dependent on the credibility of the other, the one is lacking in credibility just as much as the other. Consequently, if a man can prefer one impression to another neither without a proof and a criterion nor with them, then the different impressions due to the differing conditions will admit of no settlement; so that as a result of this Mode [leading to the suspension of judgment] also we are brought to suspend judgment regarding the nature of external realities (§ 172-3).

What is the reason for this infinite regress of the criterion? In a word, it is a presupposition, shared by both the Stoics and the Skeptics, namely, that “truth” must be routed through a subjective structure that stands in opposition to it, ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’. What is here presupposed is that any introduction of an epistemic criterion and the proof or evidence legitimating it will be mind-bound. This situation in itself is unremarkable, and implies neither certainty nor skepticism. However, what is included in this presupposition of mind-boundedness is what mind is opposed to, and that is a reality external to it, the seat of truth. For example, suppose that the criterion for the veridicality of a presentation is that it be “comprehensive”. What makes a presentation comprehensive? A real object must have produced it. But “real objects” by definition stand outside consciousness. Therefore, how can this criterion be legitimated? Perhaps with reference to something that proves or provides evidence of the criterion’s worth. But how can this proof or evidence escape the same dilemma as the criterion itself, being itself a posit of mind? And so on.

The logic and significance of the Stoic epistemic structure is that mind is presupposed to stand in metaphysical opposition to something taken to be real, yet is also believed to be capable of possessing correct concepts, representations, and beliefs about that reality. This involves a manifest contradiction that the Skeptics were able to easily exploit.
A natural question to ask given the skeptical result is whether *anything* can be known that can survive a skeptical attack. This is the question that begins Descartes' *Meditations*. The answer is what has been implicit in the Stoic structure all along, and which the Skeptics also implicitly take for granted: the 'I' is certain. The Skeptics do not question whether "I" can suspend my judgment as to the reality of things given that they appear (and they do not challenge that there are appearances, only whether we know anything about what appears); the non-controversial status of the 'I' is what makes the skeptical suspension of judgment intelligible at all: should I give assent to this impression, or should I suspend my judgment? The questions for the Stoics and the Skeptics are respectively how or whether I can build an epistemic bridge to a reality that is presupposed to stand in metaphysical opposition to what is uncontroversially given, and to what I am in natural possession of: my ego.

Descartes radicalizes these presuppositions into a foundational principle. To do this, he rehearses the dialectic we have just considered within a single thought experiment. The "naive" Descartes who gives habitual assent to things received through the senses is referred to by him in the past tense, and is analogous to the dogmatic posture of the Stoics. Admittedly, "sensation" is only an implicit criterion for the naive Descartes, whereas the Stoics explicitly posited a criterion believed to be epistemically sound. But what matters is that "sensation" effectively acted as a criterion and served a dogmatic function, before being hypothetically called into question. As a criterion for the veridicality of what Descartes calls "extended things", sensation meets with the same fate
as the comprehensive presentation. There is no guarantee that what *appears* in the mind has any connection to things as they may exist. In fact, anything that can be considered *other* than “me” in the thought experiment, including mental items, is brought under suspicion.

An “evil genius” is introduced as a methodological device to insure a thoroughgoing skepticism. To what end? After noticing that seemingly everything he formerly took for granted could be subject to doubt, Descartes asks whether it is possible to acquire genuine knowledge. Towards this end, he adopts a posture of rigorous skepticism to see, as it were, if anything certain can be strained through a sieve of total doubt.

What survives this process of skeptical elimination, the *cogito*, is an implicit feature of the Stoic and Skeptical positions: it is the standpoint from which *either* a posture of dogma or skepticism may be adopted. As such, it itself is not something the Stoics nor the Skeptics are concerned with calling into doubt; for Descartes it is not even susceptible of doubt; and the implicit reasoning here is that as something which may not be called into doubt, the *cogito* is a worthy foundational principle for knowledge. While this inference may appear to be sound, it is not if a certain familiar epistemic structure is presupposed. For although we are now in possession of something that survives skeptical attack, to what can the *cogito* be unproblematically extended so that it includes within its sphere of certainty something *other* than itself? The *cogito* seems to represent a hole from which escape is impossible. The *cogito* achieves its secure epistemic status by being the *sole* survivor of a skeptical attack. How can it then be used to re-secure
those things that were eliminated one by one (ultimately including the entire external world) by virtue of not being that *sui generis* thing which withstands skepticism? The certainty of self is bought at the expense of the entire world. Can the world be recovered?

Overall (including Section I), the pattern we see emerging is thus: 1) the Stoics, in an effort to affirm the existence and materiality of the world, willy-nilly introduce a concept of mind that has an implicit *sui generis* status apart from that world; 2) The Skeptics exploit the obvious difficulties intrinsic to an epistemic structure that implicitly posits both the mind’s metaphysical independence from the world, and its presumed epistemic relation to it. The skeptical stance draws attention to the implicit standpoint from which assent is either given or withheld, and from which judgment is suspended: the ‘I’ of consciousness; 3) Descartes makes explicit the implicit foundational role of this standpoint from which it is possible to doubt everything but that standpoint itself, and from this indubitable foundation he hopes to recover the world from skepticism. But this foundationalism backfires; absolute certainty of self (we have seen) implies an irreducible skepticism about the world to which self is related, but from which it is metaphysically distinct. What is implicit in the Stoic epistemic structure is now explicit: the mind has a *sui generis* status apart from the world. The world is now either to be reclaimed or lost from the standpoint of the *cogito*. Henceforth, the role this entity plays in philosophy, and its metaphysical status in opposition to the world, are fully ingrained presuppositions.
III. Kant, Hume, and the Culmination of the Stoic Dichotomy

Let us consider the most sophisticated practitioner in the history of philosophy of the kind of dichotomized thinking we have been considering: Immanuel Kant. Kant names ‘receptivity’ and ‘spontaneity’ as the two most basic capacities of our minds, which exercised in combination form knowledge. Our power of receptivity is termed sensibility while our power of spontaneity, the capacity to produce rather than receive representations, is termed understanding. Spatial intuition is said to be the subjective condition of sensibility, without which external intuition would be impossible. Another way of saying this (since sensibility names our capacity of receptivity) is that spatial intuition is the subjective condition of our capacity to receive representations from external reality. Both formulations make the following clear: that what is generally taken to be a defining aspect of external reality, space, is said to be something subjective that should only be understood as a mental condition for receiving representations from a transcendent, external reality. Nothing can be known about this latter domain as it stands in itself. Even space, which might be said to instantiate the non-mental domain par excellence, is sacrificed on the altar of subjectivity.

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11 *Critique of Pure Reason* B 42 (References demarcated by A/B editions).

12 I realize the following *reductio* could be stillborn at this point, if this Aristotelian style “generally and for the most part” premise is denied, that is, if the common sense view that ‘space’ is something generally regarded to be “objective” is not accepted. However, Kant himself does not deny its objective dimension; as we will see, Kant redefines the very concept of objectivity in terms of “subjective conditions”. (I would use the word ‘intuitive’ to indicate our “common sense” assessment of the objective status of ‘space’, as in “our intuitive notion of space”; but there are too many possibilities for confusion given Kant’s technical use of the term ‘intuition’.)
To what end? Certainly not in order to establish an exotic strain of idealism in the Berkeleyan tradition; as McDowell might say, the element of receptivity is meant to preserve hard, frictional contact with an independent, external domain. Oddly, Kant's subjectivization of space occurs in the service of developing a peculiar concept of objectivity. I will argue that it is the result of Kant's rigorous sense of what must belong distinctively to a transcendental conception of mind, as well as the presupposition of an unquestioned mentalist epistemic structure within which that conception operates, that has led to this problematic subjectivization of space, and ultimately of the entire objective domain.

The section from the *Critique of Pure Reason* we will examine is the Transcendental Aesthetic. What is under consideration is *intuition*. Intuition is said to be that through which our knowledge is in immediate relation to objects. It occurs only insofar as an object is *given* to us. We *receive* what is given to us by means of a capacity of receptivity termed sensibility. Sensibility marks a purely *receptive* capacity, which is further *related* to intuition. It is through sensibility alone that objects may be given to us, and it alone yields us intuitions. What is the difference between intuition and sensibility? Kant seems here to be elaborating a difference between form and content: "That in the appearance\(^\text{13}\) which corresponds to sensation I term its *matter* [*Materie*]; but that which so determines the manifold of appearance that it allows of being ordered in certain relations, I term the *form* of appearance" (B 34). Intuition in some sense provides the *form* of

\(^{13}\) Appearance: "the undetermined object of an empirical intuition" (B 34).
appearance, while sensation provides its "matter", or content. In fact, Kant calls the "pure form of sensibility" pure intuition.

Though Kant does not say so, it seems that insofar as intuition is distinguished from what is merely given or received in and as sensation, it in some initial way marks that element of spontaneity which finds its full expression in and as our mental capacity of understanding. Kant's discussion of 'intuition' is therefore a good place to bring into relief the difficulties involved in uniting the two central ingredients in Kant's recipe for objective knowledge, receptivity and spontaneity, because it can be said that intuition represents the most elementary point of contact between them. As discussed in the last chapter, the supposed reciprocity between these two capacities conceals what I argued amounts to a logical incompatibility: between a transcendent, unknowable sphere of things in themselves, and a mental sphere wherein our knowledge resides. As we will see, the presumed independence of these two spheres amounts to an unargued for presupposition, one that, due precisely to its status as a presupposition, can plausibly be seen to stem from a powerful habit of thought, one that I have argued has its genesis in Stoic epistemology.

Let us attempt to locate this alleged presupposition in the text. Kant wishes to show what strictly belongs to intuition, the point of contact between our minds and the objects of the outer world. His initial comments indicate that intuition is what provides the form of appearance. Appearance also has an unformed aspect, namely, the raw matter given to us in sensation. But nothing in sensation can give us what Kant says constitutes the a
Priori dimension of knowledge, necessity and universality. And here we should pause to
indicate Kant's own motivation behind writing the Transcendental Aesthetic, and which
he says governs the treatise as a whole: he wishes to provide an answer to the question
"how are synthetic a priori judgments possible?".

A. Brief Background Excursus

Kant isolates necessity and universality as being the two criteria of a priori
knowledge. Kant believes, against Hume, that a priori judgments genuinely pertain to
experience, because a priori elements in some sense constitute experience. With this in
mind, he wishes to show how it is possible that a predicate which is synthetically added
via experience to some concept can form a judgment that possesses the a priori aspects of
necessity and universality. In contrast, the presence of a priori elements in analytic
judgments is deemed unproblematic. To say that 'All bodies are extended' is simply to
state explicitly in the predicate something that is already in the concept of the subject.
'Extension' adds nothing to the concept 'body'. Therefore, to attach the universal
quantifier 'all' to the assertion 'Bodies are extended' is at best explicative, at worst
redundant, because the relation of 'extension' to 'body' is self-evidently a priori.

But Kant believes that the same a priori certainty found in analytic judgments can also
be found in synthetic judgments, of which judgments of experience are a species. The
latter are judgments where a predicate is synthetically added to the concept of the subject,
and where the predicate cannot possibly be derived from the subject through analysis.
So, as Kant says, “when I say ‘All bodies are heavy’, the predicate is something quite different from anything that I think in the mere concept of body in general; and the addition of such a predicate therefore yields a synthetic judgment” (B11). Now, Kant does not take this particular proposition to be a valid *a priori* synthetic judgment (it is a mere judgment of experience, and therefore contingent), but he believes that such judgments are possible. That is to say, he believes that some synthetic judgments can be asserted with *a priori* certainty. His question is therefore, how are they possible? E.g., how is the *a priori* synthetic judgment ‘Everything which happens has its cause’ possible? According to Kant, who is here in agreement with Hume, the concept of ‘cause’ is foreign to the concept ‘something which happens’, and must be synthetically added. But this synthetic addition does not come *wholly* by way of experience as a conventional empiricist doctrine might hold, because the judgment (‘Everything which happens has its cause’) has the *a priori* character of universality and necessity. Kant accepts that such *a priori* aspects are legitimate, and not merely, as Hume might insist, mere conceptual constructions that are habitually imposed on an intrinsically foreign empirical matter. Kant presupposes their legitimacy, and therefore seeks to give an account of how such judgments are possible.

The central mystery concerning such judgments is how an *a priori* element, something that belongs primarily to our minds, can be combined with something that comes to us from the outer world. Each domain is regarded as unproblematically and definitively distinct from the other. And this is a clue as to the nature of Kantian dualism; it is in the
first instance an accepted Humean premise, but in a deeper sense, and as a part of this acceptance, it is a piece of *philosophical* common sense, or as we have said a powerful *habit* of thought.

A possible rejoinder to this assertion concerning the Humean premise, is that in Hume we find a wide array of claims, perspicuous arguments, and lucid philosophical analyses that mostly accord with our common sense. To reduce these things to a concealed or latent dualism that *eo ipso* negates the validity of any particular consideration or argument is somewhat reckless. However, reduction is not my aim, nor is it to negate any of Hume’s many elegant insights. My aim is to draw attention to a current of thought that is traceable to the Stoics, and that operates as a largely unexamined premise in a philosophical heritage that continues right into the present day.

To give this claim some force with reference to the present considerations, let us take as our starting point the legacy of one particular Stoic concept that is reiterated in Hume, and unproblematically appropriated by Kant. That is the concept ‘*fantasia*’, translated above as ‘presentation’ (and ‘perception’), and which I have indicated (2.1) can be reasonably thought of as the ancestor of perhaps the most widely used modern epistemological concept, ‘representation’. A presentation is a kind of impression or copy in the mind, which has its origin in an external source that has its own status independent of the way it is received (2.1). Compare with what Hume regards as beneath consideration:

> These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man, who reflects, ever doubted, that the existences, which we consider, when we say, *this house* and *that tree*, are nothing but
Chapter Two

perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences, which remain uniform and independent.  

That the *mind represents* to itself a reality taken to be independent, and that these representations are "fleeting copies", i.e. that they have some kind of *secondary* status to the original, is considered to be an "obvious dictate of reason". However, if we pause to rethink things, what is it that is genuinely self-evident about an unspecified entity or domain called *mind* that is able to *represent* to itself content that is *received* from an outer world that has a wholly separate status? To savour the lack of necessity involved in presupposing this epistemic structure, contrast it (as we did above with the Stoics) with the naturalistic descriptions Aristotle gives of *psuche*, descriptions that do not presuppose any basic metaphysical distinction between the reality of nature and the reality of intellect. Such an account proceeds in a plausibly descriptive manner, and treats the sphere of intellect in naturalistic terms; the Stoic and early modern accounts of Hume proceed with the presupposed difficulty of how "I", with my perceptions, representations, and beliefs, can possibly connect to or represent an external world of objects. Hume further writes:

> It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must entirely be silent. The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connection with objects. The supposition of such a connection is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning (Hume 161-2).

What is really being supposed is not a *connection* between perception and object as Hume

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14 David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 161 (Section XII).
describes, but rather that they are somehow in principle separate. If it is true that this supposition or conviction reflects an epistemic pattern of thought that boils down to a long-standing philosophical habit, how does it retain and renew its vigorous hold on theorists’ minds, who lived centuries apart? I believe that the Stoic shift to first-person philosophizing, with its new concern with justification, and veridicality to the individual philosophizing (Is what I believe true? Do my thoughts correctly represent reality?) provides an instructive clue.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, concealed within the above-mentioned philosophical common sense that philosophy is primarily the endeavour to determine whether or how “my” representations are true, appears to be a systematically misleading inference from particular cases of ascertaining whether what “I” believe is true to a global epistemic conclusion concerning 1) a state of affairs where there are minds that represent, and objects which are represented, and 2) an implicit belief that their statuses are wholly separate. This unquestioned inference is made again and again, from the self-evident premise that “I” am philosophizing, to an abstractly reified mental interior wherein facts are received from an outer world, alien to my mind and its conceptual activity, that is somehow able to be mentally represented and retained as knowledge. It is a short path from talking about how the ‘world’ is represented in knowledge to adopting an uncritical posture as to what is representing the world, ‘mind’.

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15 We must here remain agnostic on the question of why this inference is so historically popular. I believe that there are complex philosophical and historical (pertaining to cultural and political life) reasons that fall outside the scope of this study.
Kant's entire *critical* method is very careful on this point; the transcendental method is in part designed to avoid any substantive characterization of the ego. Kant was well aware of what problems Cartesian naiveté could lead to. But while casting aside any presupposed substantial referent, Kant nonetheless found it necessary to preserve what we have here outlined as a basic Humean premise (with a prodigious philosophical heritage), that there is a mental activity of representing that is in principle different from that which it represents, the world in itself. The transcendental method avoids any *direct* substantive characterization of the ego; but according to Kant, a whole set of mental processes and categorial operations can be deduced as the necessary conditions for the possibility of experience. Kant ends up referring to *mind* with the same epistemic presuppositions as to what it stands *opposed* to as a more naive dualist who directly reifies 'mind' (e.g. as 'substance'). It is not simply that mental processes are referred to that subscribes Kant to a problematic dualism. It is also what such processes are fundamentally opposed to, and it is this aspect that we have yet to elicit in our discussion.

B. Appearance and Things in Themselves

We began by noting that what is usually taken to belong in a definitive way to the domain of objectivity, *space*, is described by Kant as being a *subjective* condition. What leads to this peculiar subjectivization, to a subjectivized concept of objectivity? One clue to this, as we have just discussed, may be found in the problem of synthetic *a priori* knowledge (or in Hume's terms, the problem of induction) Kant takes himself to have
inherited from Hume, along with all the hidden premises and presuppositions that come with it. The presupposition *par excellence* is that the *world* in some fundamental sense has a separate status (in ways that we have seen can be variously elaborated) from the *minds* that apprehend it. How does Kant spell this out, and how does it lead to “subjectivized objectivity”?

Kant believed that there exists something radically alien to knowledge, but which nonetheless constitutes the substrate of everything that can be known. His invocation of the “thing in itself” is meant to appeal at a philosophical level to one’s deep-seated sense that “things aren’t always as they appear”. But at the philosophical level this conviction takes on a less innocent shape: *the distinction between ‘things in themselves’ and ‘appearance’ is absolute.* I will not now rehearse all the historical facets of this philosophical common sense, let us simply observe how it arises in Kant via a close analysis of B42-B44. Kant says that “It is, therefore, solely from the human standpoint that we can speak of space, of extended things, etc. If we depart from the *subjective condition* under which alone we can have outer intuition, namely, liability to be affected by objects, the representation of space stands for nothing whatsoever.” It is important to know that by “human standpoint” Kant means “human mind” (*Gemüt*).16 Space occurs in the mind as a condition of our sensibility. Space is the subjective *form* of any content that may be received via sensation. As this condition, it constitutes the possibility for us,

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16 When talking about space, Kant is talking about what exists in “the mind” *a priori*: “the form of all appearances can be given prior to all actual perceptions, and so exist in the mind *a priori*...” (B 42).
that is our minds, to be affected by objects. Apart from that, 'space' represents nothing whatsoever.

So far, this does not explain, but simply reiterates what we have already deemed as strange about Kant's conception. In some sense, we are attempting to find the "cause" of this conception. And as briefly mentioned, it is this: the distinction between things in themselves and appearance is presupposed to be absolute. Let us proceed:

This predicate ['space'] can be ascribed to things only in so far as they appear to us, that is, only to objects of sensibility. The constant form of this receptivity, which we term sensibility, is a necessary condition of all the relations in which objects can be intuited as outside us; and if we abstract from these objects, it is a pure intuition, and bears the name of space. Since we cannot treat the special conditions of sensibility as conditions of the possibility of things, but only of their appearances, we can indeed say that space comprehends all things that appear to us as external, but not all things in themselves, by whatever subject they are intuited, or whether they be intuited or not (B 43; my emphasis).

The assumption, made with a breathtaking air of common sense, is that due to the fact that things appear to us, they also have some impenetrable epistemic status as they exist in themselves. This claim is very different from saying that things exist apart from us, or when we are not around, etc. It is saying that, due to the conditions of our sensibility, we are in principle forbidden epistemic access to things as they exist in themselves, the "real truth" as it were. Because this distinction is so firm for Kant, between what is and what is as it appears to us (as subjects with minds), he finds it impossible to say that even something that we take to be as "intuitively"\(^{17}\) objective as 'space' can be something that belongs to or "comprehends" things as they exist in themselves. Space clearly belongs to things as they appear, and it is claimed to be the very condition for their appearance.

\(^{17}\) As in "generally accepted". 
Because appearance is something fundamentally distinct from things in themselves, the very form of appearance, space, must be also. Appearance is, we might say, completely bound by ‘mind’. Space is a subjective condition that constitutes the form of all appearance. Appearance itself is something mental, and therefore something fundamentally distinct from things as they are in themselves. Space, as the condition and form of all appearance is therefore also something mental or subjective, and something fundamentally distinct from things as they are in themselves.

The subjectivization of space is due to the absolute rigour with which Kant forbids any knowledge of things as they exist in themselves. Behind the conviction that appearance is to be conceived in systematic contradistinction to things as they are in themselves, is the belief that ‘mind’ has a fundamentally separate status from the world. Therefore appearance, and whatever belongs to or constitutes it, most eminently space, must in essence be mental, because they are opposed in principle to what exists in itself, in accordance with a primary, presupposed dichotomy between mind and world.

But space, construed as the subjective condition of our sensibility and as the form of all appearance, is nonetheless said to have objective status. How? By making objectivity itself something that belongs to appearance, thereby making it something that belongs to our minds, and therefore making it something subjective, in absolute contradistinction to things as they exist in themselves:

If we add to the concept of the subject of a judgment the limitation under which the judgment is made, the judgment is then unconditionally valid. The proposition, that all things are side by side in space, is valid under the limitation that these things are viewed as the objects of our sensible intuition. If, now, I add the condition to the concept, and
say that all things, as [my emphasis] outer appearances, are side by side in space, the rule is valid universally and without limitation. Our exposition therefore establishes the reality, that is, the objective validity [my emphasis], of space in respect of whatever can be presented to us outwardly as object...We assert, then, the empirical reality of space, as regards all possible outer experience; and yet at the same time we assert its transcendental ideality—in other words, that it is nothing at all...(B 44).

"Objective validity" and "empirical reality" are simply defined in accordance with, we might say, where Kant places the 'qua' function. Things qua outer appearance, not qua existing in themselves, are what we mean by objectivity. But anything qua appearance means, as we have seen, something subjective. Objectivity is defined in subjective terms. That means what is genuinely real in itself is not, strictly speaking, an object of knowledge; what is in itself exists in principle as something non-mental, it therefore exists as something that cannot be known. Space is objective, but only qua a subjective condition.

Kant elaborates and systematizes with an unprecedented rigour what we have here been regarding as an age-old philosophical presupposition. Minds are fundamentally distinct from the world in itself; appearance belongs to minds/subjects, the world in itself has a separate status; space constitutes the very form of appearance; therefore space must be conceived to be something subjective (a "condition"). It would indeed be unremarkable to call 'space' something that conditions our sensibility. It is the manner in which Kant argues that it is a "subjective condition" that is truly innovative, and which on close inspection, seems to be a rather odd move. What prevents a straightforward slide into the absurd is to build the subjective limitation into the very concept of objectivity. What we are left with then is a concept of objectivity that is fundamentally detached from
reality as it is in itself. The concept of objectivity has been vitiated by a concept of subjectivity which has from the outset been presupposed to be something radically distinct from the world as it is in itself, a world with a metaphysical status that is separate from thoughts, concepts, and minds.

McDowell formulates nicely the problem that Hegel will take up:

Once the supersensible [things in themselves] is in the picture, its radical independence of our thinking tends to present itself as no more than the independence any genuine reality must have. The empirical world’s claim to independence comes to seem fraudulent by comparison. We are asked to suppose that the fundamental structure of the empirical world is somehow a product of subjectivity, in interaction with the supersensible reality, which, as soon as it is in the picture, strikes us as the seat of true objectivity. But how can the empirical world be genuinely independent of us, if we are partly responsible for its fundamental structure? It does not help to be told that it is only transcendentally speaking that the fundamental structure of the empirical world is of our making (M.42).

There is a “back and forth” between what counts as objective, what counts as subjective, and tremendous difficulties as to how there can be any truck between them, once the two domains have been presupposed as standing in opposition to one another. Insofar as the critical philosophy represents the culmination of an approximately 2000 year old habit of thought, on the assumption that any habit becomes more entrenched the longer it is allowed to “live”, perhaps it is wiser to look into the possibility of cultivating new habits of thought altogether. One way of reading Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is as an effort towards eliminating the epistemic habit of thought explored in this chapter. I will consider and elaborate this reading in the next chapter.
Chapter Three: Hegel's Phenomenological Critique of the Concept of Consciousness

In the last chapter we examined the likely origins of a *sui generis* concept of mind, and its operation as an epistemic presupposition in later philosophy. This will lend intelligibility to the claim, under consideration in the next two chapters, that in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel argued for the *elimination* of the idea of consciousness insofar as it operates as an epistemic habit of thought. This position neither portends a relapse into uncritical metaphysics, nor suggests an affiliation with those views in philosophy of mind known as “eliminative”. Hegel rather has a unique conception of philosophy as it develops in and from a *theory of determinacy*. This theory inquires into the nature of determinacy, and because it does, it cannot begin with any preconceptions as to what is determinate or how determinacy is to be thought. Hence, insofar as the concept of consciousness is a determinate idea, it cannot be presupposed at the beginning of this theory.¹

The theory of determinacy begins what we might call Hegel’s comprehensive philosophical theory of reality. However, the issue of whether or not the reader is sympathetic to the idea of either a theory of determinacy, or a “comprehensive philosophical theory of reality”, can be put aside; Hegel’s project can be appreciated simply via the examination of a critical claim that I will argue is central to the *Phenomenology*: that there is something unnecessary and ultimately self-defeating about

¹ This cluster of considerations will indicate an interpretative solution of a general and classic problem of Hegel study: how “phenomenology” (the science of the experience of consciousness) relates to “logic” (the science of determinacy).
doing philosophy with a presupposed idea of 'consciousness'.

It must be stressed that Hegel wished to eliminate the idea of consciousness *as a presupposition*; he did not wish to dismiss the possibility of a theoretical account of 'consciousness'. That is to say that the critique of the concept of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is not a *theory* of consciousness, and therefore there are no theoretical commitments ventured concerning its nature, limits, or reality, beyond what a phenomenological *description* can capture. I will clarify in the course of this chapter what is distinctive of this critical-descriptive enterprise, and hence why it should not be regarded as "theoretical" (more specific attention will be paid to this issue in Chapter Four, III.B).

We will begin with an explication of the Introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel outlines a specific method designed to produce a specific result (namely, the elimination of the idea of consciousness). However, while the method is relatively clear, the goal is only dimly indicated. We will therefore (in Chapter 4) consult the *Science of Logic* where Hegel makes some sparing but significant comments about the function and relation of his *Phenomenology* to the System,² a relation that depends on the aforementioned result. Along the way, we will have occasion to examine Chapter III of the *Phenomenology* and its transition to Chapter IV, in order to show that Hegel does in fact stick to the method he outlines. I believe that behind these rather technical considerations of Hegel scholarship lie issues of general philosophical interest.

² "The System" is Hegel's comprehensive philosophical theory of determinacy and reality, divided into "Logic", "Nature", and "Spirit".
and value, something that will become more apparent in Chapter Five when we put my interpretation to the test against Robert Brandom’s idealist interpretation, and compare their respective relevance to contemporary issues in epistemology and philosophy of mind. The reason for going through a rather close consideration of certain parts of Hegel’s texts is to provide us with a standpoint from which to assess the general philosophical value of Hegel’s work in light of more recent philosophy.

From the vantage of pure Hegel scholarship, the effort of the next two chapters may be regarded as an endorsement and development of what has come to be known as the “non-metaphysical interpretation” of Hegel, put forth independently by (with variations among them) K.R. Dove, William Maker, R.D. Winfield, and Klaus Hartmann. It is hoped that my effort will yield support to Dove’s (and fellow travellers’) conjecture that the negative purpose of the Phenomenology is to eliminate the idea of consciousness as a habitual posit of modern philosophical thinking, and that indeed, this is a necessary first step presupposed by what Hegel calls “logic” (what on this interpretation is his theory of determinacy), and by philosophical theory in general. Hegel’s own self-understanding of what he had accomplished in the Phenomenology and how he thought it related to his proposed “logic” form the backbone of this line of interpretation. It is evident that Hegel

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3 There are two full-length books in English devoted to elaborating this view of the Phenomenology and its relation to the System. See Richard Winfield, Overcoming Foundations: Studies in Systematic Philosophy, and William Maker, Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel. Klaus Hartmann is generally credited with having spearheaded the view of the Logic as a “category theory”, or a theory of determinacy (but with “transcendental” aspects; see Klaus Hartmann, “Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View”). K.R. Dove is the most original and clear-headed exponent of the view, with the most rigorous insistence that any vestige of idealism or transcendentalism must be eliminated. He is the Hegel scholar to whom I am most indebted.
believed a conceptually presuppositionless theory of determinacy was possible, and his comments in the introductory passages of that theory (Logic) indicate in fairly precise terms what he took to be the role of the Phenomenology in the elimination of the most tenacious epistemic presupposition of all: consciousness. But again, part of the aim of this chapter (in contrast to the next) is to show how Hegel’s argument can be appreciated more generally, beyond the Phenomenology’s specific relation to the Logic, as a unique kind of critique of epistemology, by showing how the central epistemic presupposition of modern philosophy, ‘consciousness’, is a self-refuting concept.

I believe that the interpretation being developed here offers the strongest grounds for regarding Hegel as being of significant interest to the ongoing concerns of epistemology and philosophy of mind (see Chapter Five). I say “strongest” because many commentators for many reasons have concluded that Hegel is permanently relevant to these (and other) spheres. Hegel’s writings have undergone a dizzying series of endorsements, appropriations, abandonments, and dismissals since his death in 1831, and often such partisanship or rejection has occurred as a result of what Hegel himself would call a “one-sided” reading: the picking out and isolation of some elements or aspects of Hegel’s philosophy, and their use in characterizing the entire system. It therefore hardly needs saying that, for many reasons, it is desirable to distinguish Hegel from the myriad strains of Hegelianism.

There is a fairly recent case in point. In the last fifteen years, Hegel has been perceived to be increasingly relevant to contemporary analytic concerns, and has enjoyed a revival of interest in part traceable to Robert Pippin’s influential book, Hegel’s
Idealism. The “neo-Hegelians” of Pittsburgh (dubbed thus by Richard Rorty), John McDowell and Robert Brandom, but especially Brandom, appear to owe quite a debt to, or at least be in tremendous sympathy with Pippin’s Kant-inspired reading of Hegel. Chapter Four will be partly devoted to contesting Pippin’s systematically misleading interpretation, and to show how it is related to a kind of “linguistic idealism” articulated by the “neo-Hegelian” theory of Robert Brandom (which in its own right, apart from any affiliation to Hegel, is a theory of breathtaking scope and accomplishment). As part of this effort, I will show in Chapter Five how this reading of Hegel is related to an idealist reading of Wittgenstein, whereas the reading of Hegel I endorse is related to a non-idealist reading of Wittgenstein. This process of clarification will involve visiting many general issues of perennial interest, including pragmatism, realism, anti-realism, and idealism.

I. The Critique of the Concept of Consciousness

A. The Determinacy of Consciousness

To begin with, we will outline the following view: that the subject-matter of the Phenomenology of Spirit is a representation or idea termed consciousness, and consists of an examination of the different shapes this idea takes before its own immanent elimination (Aufhebung)\(^4\) in what Hegel calls “pure knowing”, or “Spirit knowing itself

\(^4\) This may be perceived as a “stretched” translation of ‘aufheben’; however, the interpretation presented here does not rely on it; the translation is suggested by and is meant to aid in the comprehension of what Hegel appears to be arguing. For every translator who has ever tackled Hegel, ‘aufheben’ has been translated variously in different places as ‘suspend’, ‘sublate’, ‘supersede’, ‘cancel’, and ‘eliminate’, depending on the perceived meaning in a particular context. Such context is inseparable from Hegel’s
Chapter Three

Jay A. Gupta 115

as Spirit. I should say something about what is meant by “elimination of the idea of consciousness”. Most readings of the *Phenomenology*, in contrast with the view I am advancing, might justifiably be called “transformationist”. They in one way or another hold that consciousness is transformed from one shape to the next until it reaches its final form, in Absolute Knowing, i.e. a standpoint that by the end of the *Phenomenology* is a validated, grounded subjective structure from which it is possible to perform metaphysics. 5 This view marks Hegel as an *idealist* of some stripe, usually conceived in terms of a Kantian heritage. 6 However, the view I am advancing here holds that consciousness is eliminated as a habitual idea or posit, or as we have been saying in prior chapters, a presupposition, that precedes any kind of philosophical theory, in favour of a purified status Hegel calls “pure knowing” (Absolute Knowing). The eliminationist thesis might be called a negative or critical reading, insofar as the idea of consciousness is submitted to a radical scrutiny that it in the end does not survive. 7 The standard transformationist thesis may be viewed as positive, insofar as it takes the outcome of the *Phenomenology* to be one wherein consciousness has been grounded or validated such that its standpoint has achieved an absolute epistemic status, a standpoint from whence it

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5 For excellent lists and summaries of what William Maker calls the “received view”, i.e. the end of the *Phenomenology* interpreted as resulting in an absolute, grounded, valid subjective standpoint from which metaphysics is possible, see his *Philosophy Without Foundations*, Chapter 3, p. 255n6; and “Understanding Hegel Today” p. 344n4.

6 We will be considering the work of Robert Pippin, a very sophisticated representative of this line of interpretation, in the next chapter.

7 This outcome implies a different reading of Hegel’s *Logic* than is standard, an issue we will visit in Chapter Four.
is possible to perform ontology or metaphysics.

The immediate and most obvious objection to the negative, eliminationist reading is that no matter what you call the final stage, it still has to in some basic sense occur in and as consciousness, otherwise, what could Hegel possibly be talking about? Thought liberated from any particular standpoint? Even if this is admitted, an objector might maintain that Hegel must still be talking about a subjective structure, even if such a structure is conceived as entirely general, universal, or transcendental (i.e., not specific to this or that consciousness). This structure is still related if not opposed in some fundamental sense to what is conceived of as objectively real, and what can be thought within the subjective sphere is in some sense derived from that other sphere, the sphere of objective reality. This is even the case if we attribute the crude idealist view to Hegel that thought absorbs all of reality into itself, and this is what we mean by “objective”, or the Schellingian view that an identity pertains between subject and object. In both cases, the objector might continue, two terms of a fundamental relational scheme between concept and object have been preserved, and rightly so, because any alternative would be either a fudge or simply nonsense.

The reading I am developing here aims to show that the idea that a relational scheme is not to be preserved is neither a fudge nor nonsense. This reading is more radical than standard readings insofar as it holds that the two terms of the relation (subject/I/concept vs. object/reality/being) are 1) basic to consciousness in the sense that they are made by and within consciousness itself, and 2) to be eliminated via an elimination of the idea of consciousness, insofar as it operates as an epistemic presupposition. Hegel’s answer to
the above objection is, therefore, that any positive, theoretical characterization of the nature of consciousness must be deferred until the reader has worked through the System; the intuitive urgency with which the objector makes her appeal, i.e. that a subjective structure must be presupposed in some sense, is precisely what is at issue.

‘Consciousness’ in the Phenomenology is a technical term meaning minimally 1) a modern (as opposed generally to “ancient”) construct of thought that represents thinking as a subjective, interior activity that is related in some way to something other than it that is construed as objective, 2) something that posits the two terms basic to it, ‘I’ and ‘object’, and 3) something that posits epistemic criteria in an effort to unify its two terms into what can generally be called “knowledge of truth”.

A suggestive clue for the reading being defended here occurs in the first line of the Introduction: “It is a natural idea (natürliche Vorstellung) that in philosophy, before we start to deal with its proper subject-matter (die Sache selbst), viz. the actual cognition of what truly is, one must first of all come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded either as the instrument to get hold of the Absolute, or as the medium through which one discovers it” (PS 46, PG 45). The basic import of this sentence is clear, regardless of what is made of the reference to “the Absolute”. It is a natural idea, or representation, that prior to any philosophical discourse pertaining to “truth”, one must first come to some conclusions about the subjective instrument or medium through which the truth is to be grasped. I think this point is clear whether we regard the medium as “language”, “concepts”, or consciousness itself. Depending on the time period,

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8 I have occasionally amended A.V. Miller’s translation when I have found it misleading.
epistemology has concerned itself with each of these, interpreted either implicitly or explicitly as subjective, or as having a crucial subjective dimension.

This natural idea is an obstruction to the performance of philosophical theory (Wissenschaft). Attention is terminally diverted from the “cognition of what truly is” to the subjective medium within which truth appears, namely, consciousness. This redirection of emphasis is of course recognizable in the modern reductions of metaphysical problems to epistemological ones. Hegel recognizes that, if his proposed theory of determinacy is to proceed, he too will have to tarry with the modern epistemological imperative to turn attention to our subjective apparatus of knowing, not in order to ascertain its nature, limits, or function, but rather to eliminate it as a presupposition. Hegel’s aim is a radical purification of knowing via the elimination of the idea of consciousness (again, as a habitual epistemic posit; Hegel in contrast has a theory of ‘consciousness’ in his systematic philosophy). The reason why Hegel took this purification to be a requirement of his science is nicely stated by K.R. Dove: “I can think of no other [phrase] that accurately captures the requirement for the beginning of a logic whose basic question is: What is determinacy? This phrase...is: ‘logic may not begin with any determinate idea’” (PSP 28). If the nature of “determinacy” (and ultimately, “determinate individuality”) is what is under investigation in Hegel’s Science of Logic, it cannot begin with any determinate posit or principle, i.e. consciousness, otherwise the question will have presumably been settled at the outset. But again, apart from the positive aim of legitimately beginning a philosophical theory, I believe there is a self-standing critical dimension to Hegel’s Phenomenology, and that is to demonstrate the
self-defeating character of philosophical theory when it proceeds from the presupposed epistemic standpoint of consciousness.

On Hegel's analysis, consciousness is characterized by two elementary, abstract determinations through which it constitutes itself: knowledge and truth:

Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something, and at the same time relates itself to it, or, as it is said, this something is for consciousness; and the determinate aspect of this relating, or of the being of something for a consciousness, is knowledge. But we distinguish this being-for-another from being-in-itself; whatever is related to knowledge is also distinguished from it, and posited as existing outside of this relationship; this being-in-itself is called truth (PS 52-53; PG 72).

There is something that, in Hegel's special terminology, is for consciousness, and this is its knowledge. To say that something is "for consciousness" is to say that this something in some sense belongs to it. Knowledge falls within the self-conceived bounds of consciousness. But these bounds are demarcated by a basic contrast consciousness makes, between what is for it, what belongs to it as knowledge, and what is taken to exist independently of it, what exists in itself. The dimension of the object consciousness takes to be for it is knowledge, but the dimension of that same object that is taken to exist in itself is truth. Truth is therefore posited by consciousness as being related to, but also existing outside of its knowledge. However, and this is vital, truth is by definition not taken by consciousness to be a posit; it is taken to be that which exists in itself, independent of all knowledge.⁹

Now, if it is we the readers of Hegel's Phenomenology who are examining the truth of our knowledge, that is, performing a typical epistemological inquiry, a problem arises. It

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⁹ The importance of this point will be elaborated shortly.
is closely related to the "infinite regress of the criterion" (see 2.II) we observed in the skeptical challenge to Stoic dogmatism. Presuming that we are possessors of consciousness, and that we are conducting an epistemological inquiry into the truth of our knowledge, we naturally require a criterion (Masstab) with which to compare our knowledge to the truth. But since it could be argued that we would produce any such criterion ourselves, that is, any such criterion would be a product of our own consciousness, there would be a quandary as to how we could be sure this criterion has any legitimating relation to the truth. To be sure, this is the quandary of consciousness. However, we as readers of the Phenomenology are absolved of making any such distinction and related comparison at the outset, and what is more, absolved of making any kind of epistemic distinction whatsoever. That is because it is the subject-matter of the book, consciousness, that itself makes its own distinctions and conducts its own comparisons. This is the radical demand of the Phenomenology, and it hints at that mode of presuppositionlessness or "thoroughgoing skepticism" (see I.C below) that is to result from its argument: we are to presume nothing, apart from what is immediately being considered.

What is being considered? The determinacy of consciousness. What is this determinacy? It is the determinations of knowledge and truth, which, considered in more abstract, methodological terms, constitute a distinction between what is "for itself" (for consciousness) and what is "in itself". What is Hegel's method, and what role do these determinations of consciousness play in it? As just suggested, what is crucial for the procedure being outlined is that we the readers simply allow consciousness to make its
own distinctions, posit its own criteria, and conduct its own epistemic investigations.

But the quandary mentioned above does not now simply disappear; though we the readers are absolved from producing a legitimate criterion by which to determine the truth of our knowledge, this demand remains the basic task of consciousness. And the task follows from consciousness’ very determinations:

In consciousness, [something] is to it for another, i.e. consciousness regularly contains the determinacy of the moment of knowledge; at the same time this other is to consciousness not merely for it, but is also external to this relationship or is in itself, the moment of truth. Thus in what consciousness affirms from within itself as the in-itself or the True, we have the criterion which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows (PS 53; PG 73).

What is peculiar to the phenomenological method is that our investigation as readers of the Phenomenology consists of a consideration (Betrachtung) of another set of investigations, those of consciousness. What is simply required of us is restraint; consciousness brings its own criteria to its own epistemic investigations.

How do consciousness’ investigations proceed? In what Hegel calls “the motion of consciousness” (Bewegung des Bewusstseins)10, consciousness conducts a series of comparisons based on what we have seen to be the determinations of its very structure, comparisons between what to it is the in itself or truth, and what to it is another moment, what for it11 is knowledge.12 Consciousness seeks a correspondence (entsprechen)

10 Hegel’s use of ‘Bewegung’ may strike contemporary readers as foreign. That is because ‘motion’ for us tends to connote loco-motion, physical movement between locations A and B, or perhaps less directed, but still physical. But like Aristotle’s concept of kinesis, Hegel’s use of the word Bewegung has an extended meaning that includes quantitative and qualitative alterations.

11 In a basic sense, as odd as it may sound to contemporary ears, the term “knowledge” as Hegel uses it must include the concept of mere “belief”. I will discuss this issue in Part B. Because of such comprehensiveness, from mere belief to knowledge, “for it” is a useful generalization of whatever consciousness takes to fall within its own bounds, in this case, its knowledge.
between these two "moments". What is not evident to consciousness is that the moment of truth \textit{itself} is a posit; it serves as the moment of criterial contrast with what \textit{is} taken to fall within consciousness, its knowledge. The distinction between knowledge and truth is \textit{made} from the standpoint of consciousness. But only one side of the distinction, knowledge, is taken by consciousness to fall \textit{within} consciousness. The other side, truth, is taken to exist independently, in itself.

But then what does Hegel mean by "motion" at all? The structural opposition between what is for consciousness and what is in itself seems static. In what sense is it dynamic? The lack of awareness by consciousness that in each of its investigations it is \textit{positing} the criterion of truth that is to serve as the \textit{external} standard for evaluating the legitimacy of its knowledge, may be viewed as the engine that drives the "motion of consciousness". \textit{Each} investigation is to be understood by us, the readers, as a transition between \textit{two} points, between what is taken to be \textit{for} consciousness, and what is taken to be the independent criterion of truth, the in-itself.

\section*{B. An Equivocation in the Concept of Knowing}

Let us see how this is so. If consciousness is conducting a comparison between these two "moments", it stands to reason that it may during the course of the investigation

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\textsuperscript{12} I am stressing this distinction between what \textit{to} consciousness is the in-itself, and what \textit{for} it is its knowledge, in order to be mindful of an accusative/dative distinction that K.R. Dove points out runs through the German text but is not preserved in either of the English translations. It is a grammatical distinction that reiterates each time it appears the essential \textit{structural} distinction between knowledge that is \textit{for} consciousness and what \textit{to} it is the in itself of truth, and that also indicates a \textit{dynamic} aspect Hegel calls the "motion of consciousness", where the distinction between the accusative and dative dimensions, the for itself/in itself of consciousness, is eventually eliminated. (see PSP 30-31).
discover a lack of correspondence between its knowledge and what it takes to be the
object of that knowledge. Such a discovery may come, for example, as the result of an
attempt to justify its epistemic certainty or conviction. At this point, on Hegel's analysis,
consciousness will attempt to alter its knowledge to bring it into conformity with its
standard, the object of truth. However, during the process of this alteration,
consciousness undergoes a crisis of objectivity. Since knowledge is always essentially
knowledge of something, any alteration of knowledge cannot leave the object untouched.
The very conception of the object must change: "as the knowledge changes, so too does
the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge" (PS 54, PG 74). The
objective criterion becomes subjectively tainted. This signifies an important
equivocation in the concept of knowledge taken as a determinate component of
consciousness. On the one hand, consciousness has an idea of "mere knowing" which
highlights its subjective side, as captured in the expression "it is true relative to the way
we know it." On the other hand, consciousness more naively takes its knowledge to be
knowledge of something, i.e., of something true. I take Hegel to be drawing attention to
this equivocation in the concept of knowing, taken as a determinate aspect of
consciousness, when he says: "[this] testing is not only a testing of what we know, but
also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is" (PS 55; PG 75; my emphasis). We will

\[13\] The entire quotation: "If the comparison 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.
But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters to it also, for the knowledge that was
present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it
essentially belonged to this knowledge. Hence it comes to pass to consciousness that what was to it
previously the in-itself is not an in-itself; or that it was only an in-itself for consciousness" (PS 54, PG 74).
return to this equivocation shortly.

In Hegel’s words, the transitional aspect of the motion of consciousness should be understood as this: “it comes to pass for consciousness that what to it was previously the in-itself is not an in-itself, or that it was only an in-itself for consciousness” (PS 54; PG 74). If we call what is for consciousness point A, and what is in itself point B, then we can see that the migration or expansion of what is merely for consciousness from point A, to point B of the in-itself, results in the invalidation of the criterion as an objective standard of truth. Therefore, from the standpoint of consciousness, a new object and criterion must be sought or discovered that can provide the ground of true knowledge.

However, it is the examination of this very standpoint that constitutes our “meta-investigation” as readers, the aforementioned investigation of the investigations of consciousness. It is the determinacy of the standpoint in question, that of consciousness, that is our subject-matter. What we are afforded insight into, something that as Hegel says, “proceeds behind the back of consciousness”, is how the structural dimension of consciousness, the opposition between what is for it and what is in itself, is preserved in the dynamic dimension of consciousness’ investigations. No matter how myriad and unrelated they may seem to consciousness, we are able to discern a single and sustained aspect of these investigations that is a product of the very structure of consciousness: the criterion of truth is posited and re-posited from the standpoint of consciousness, not simply discovered or happened upon externally. Consciousness plays an active role in what it allows and regards as truth.

At any rate, this is Hegel’s methodological claim: that what appears to consciousness
to be one kind of knowledge related to one kind of object, a “set” that consciousness would take to be unrelated to some other knowledge-object set, can be systematically comprehended by us, the readers, as related to a sequence of other sets through a single process, as determined by the structure and motion of consciousness. These knowledge-object sets are what Hegel calls “shapes of consciousness”. With each aforementioned “crisis of objectivity”, where what consciousness took to be something in itself is actually discovered to be merely for it, what may be called a “revolution” or inversion (Umkehrung) of the shape of consciousness occurs; in the process of what is taken to be in itself becoming something for it, a new shape of consciousness arises that is the determinate negation of the prior. Let us state how this is so in a bit more detail; we will then conduct an in depth examination (in Part II) of an example of this process from the text.

During the crisis consciousness experiences, Hegel says consciousness is confronted with two objects. The first is the in-itself that consciousness unproblematically took to be the criterion of its knowledge, and the second is that criterion now regarded as merely for consciousness, or what Hegel calls the “being-for-consciousness of the in-itself.” This latter has an important dual significance. The new knowledge that arises when consciousness makes its alteration to bring its knowledge into conformity with the object, determines a new object or in-itself in the process of invalidating the prior in-itself.

Consciousness always takes its knowledge to be knowledge of something. In the very

\[14\] My liberal translation of ‘Umkehrung’ is a deliberate allusion to Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; there are many fruitful comparisons that I encourage the reader to make, but that are outside the scope of the present discussion.
process of invalidating the criterial status of the in-itself as being merely something relative to the way in which consciousness knows it, i.e., something that is merely for it, consciousness also affirms what is naively implicit in the very concept of knowledge, that knowledge is knowledge of something true.

Again, knowledge understood as an abstract determination of consciousness has an important equivocal status. On the one hand it is mere knowledge, that is, something is said to be the case relative only to the way in which it is known by consciousness. On the other hand, knowledge is said to be essentially knowledge of something true, that is, it is said to be objectively related to the truth. So consciousness, without any perceived incoherence, refers both to mere knowing, perhaps as a product of reflecting about its subjective aspect, and also refers to what is more naively taken to be part of the concept of knowledge, its status as true. It is an equivocation that arises from the very concept of consciousness taken as a sui generis subjective sphere, a sphere that the world (what is taken to be in itself) must be routed through to become “knowledge”.

Let us see how this equivocation within one shape of consciousness determines a new shape of consciousness, a new “knowledge-object set”. We have seen how knowledge altered in the course of consciousness’ examinations results in a tainted criterion: what consciousness formerly took to be in itself, it now regards as merely for it, merely an aspect of its knowledge. This is the weaker sense of knowledge consciousness employs, one that it regards as intrinsically subjective. But at the same time consciousness has a stronger sense of ‘knowledge’, its knowledge must be knowledge of some true object. This knowledge determines a new object of consciousness, even as this knowledge
simultaneously possesses the weaker sense of the immediately prior mind-bound (for it) criterion: “[T]he first object [the in-itself], in being known, is altered for consciousness; it ceases to be the in-itself, and becomes something that is the in-itself only for consciousness. And this then is the True: the being-for consciousness of this in-itself. Or, in other words, this is the essence, or the object of consciousness. This new object contains the nothingness of the first, it is what experience has made of it” (PS 55; PG 75).

The “being-for-consciousness of the in-itself” is at once the weaker knowledge based on the tainted criterion, as well as the stronger knowledge that by virtue of consciousness taking it to be knowledge of something, determines a new object.

Hence, an entirely new shape of consciousness arises, which in “containing the nothingness of the first”, constitutes a determinate negation of the first. As Hegel says, normally our experience of the untruth of some concept comes by way of the emergence of some new object that we happen upon externally or by chance. We might then say this new knowledge negates the first. This should be familiar from the way the history of scientific discovery is popularly told, e.g. it was believed that organisms could spontaneously generate out of organic materials until Louis Pasteur came along and discovered the presence and activity of microbes. Or perhaps at a more mundane level, in the ordinary employment of empirical concepts, a very small child might believe the term ‘music’ refers holistically to jumping up and down, singing, and daddy playing a record, until all these things become more precisely differentiated, each with its own word or concept.

It is important that these sorts of examples of concept-rectification are not confused
with what Hegel means by "determinate negation", because Hegel is neither charting the development of consciousness along strictly historical lines, as in the history of philosophical and scientific "consciousness", nor is he charting the course of how the uses of ordinary empirical concepts change (we will discuss this interpretation when we discuss Brandom in Chapter Five). "Determinate negation" must here rather be understood strictly in light of Hegel's proposed phenomenological method (although it is also central in a different way to his later, non-phenomenological work). What Hegel means by something being determinately negated is that a new knowledge arises directly from a self-negating process within consciousness of some apparently unrelated older knowledge; this process of determinate negation as it occurs in consciousness is the proper subject-matter of the science Hegel calls "phenomenology". Ignorance of this point has occasioned many misunderstandings (as we will discuss in Chapter Four).

Above, I suggested that the manner in which determinate negation occurs has to do with an equivocation in the concept of knowing. It is the stronger sense of 'knowing' that posits a new object simultaneously with the discrediting of the old one as being merely "subjective", but it is in a sense one and the same content: "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" (PS 56; PG 76). I interpret this crucial comment to imply the simultaneous employment of both the weak and strong senses of 'knowing' by consciousness at the critical moment of "inversion"; consciousness is unaware that it is positing a new object simultaneous with its final rejection of the old one; this is tantamount to saying that the
structure of consciousness demands that it always has an object (consciousness is always consciousness of). It is this feature of consciousness that in effect allows for the phenomenological relating of the sequence of shapes. Unfortunately, these comments must remain at an unhelpful level of abstraction until we can examine a specific example of determinate negation in the text, which we will do in Section II.

One might say that the “motion of consciousness” is generally what is meant by ‘experience’, i.e., consciousness engaged in the open-ended process of examining what is “for it” and comparing that with what is objectively the case. But what makes the phenomenological consideration of the motion of consciousness a “science of experience” is precisely this dimension, contributed by us, of (if you will excuse my repetitiveness) considering how it is that a new knowledge arises directly from a self-negating process within consciousness of some apparently unrelated older knowledge (as opposed to some new knowledge having arisen indirectly through a process of “finding out” – a new knowledge that may or may not be related to the older knowledge).

Determinate negation and its role in the phenomenological method are crucial to understanding the Phenomenology as a work that is designed to persuade its reader that the common sense, habitual assumption of ‘consciousness’ in philosophical theory should be abandoned (I will say more about this in 3.I.C). The phenomenological method is designed to promote the reader’s gradual awareness that it is the structure of consciousness and its manner of conceiving the object in opposition to itself, that systematically undermines the possibility of philosophical theory and its classically stated aim of grasping the truth. As we comb some of the details of Hegel’s text, we should
never lose sight of Hegel’s intended purpose (which I will more explicitly state and argue for in Chapter Four) to persuade the reader that certain epistemic habits of thinking must be overcome for there to be any hope of a philosophical theory that can provide a genuine comprehension of reality. But again, if this implies an unappealing kind of grandiosity to some readers, it suffices to pay attention to the central claim internal to the *Phenomenology*, namely, that theorizing from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness is unnecessary and self-defeating.

Importantly, the process of determinate negation happens “behind the back” of consciousness. If consciousness understood that it was positing and re-positing the criterion of truth from its *merely* subjective standpoint, its sense of “experience” would presumably come to a halt. The subject-matter of *its* investigations is always some object in relation to it; the subject-matter of *our* investigation is this very process of relating and re-relating, of positing and re-positing, that occurs in a systematic sequence of shapes of consciousness, but always *qua* consciousness. Again, it is we who are afforded the insight that there is a single idea (‘consciousness’) that binds together all the myriad shapes and subject-matters of experience; it is this idea that allows us to see how each phase or “shape” of experience is systematically related to every other, and it is this idea that makes phenomenology a “science” of experience (as opposed to a general canvassing of epistemic and experiential possibilities). However, this should not be mistaken for a strategy that affirms and spells out the “transcendental conditions” for the possibility of all experience. If we are to put things in this manner, phenomenology is precisely an effort designed to show the *futility* of successive transcendental conceptions.
But this rather complicated point will have to wait until the next chapter to be worked out.

The necessary sequence of shapes of consciousness is the subject-matter of phenomenology, our subject-matter. There is both a structural and a dynamic aspect that allows us to view the sequence of shapes in what again, Hegel calls a “scientific” manner, that is, to view it as a progression of systematically related shapes of consciousness (and thus kinds of knowledge) and not merely as, from the standpoint of consciousness, one randomly or externally emerging concept or object after another. The structural aspect is the determinacy of consciousness as it breaks down into the abstract determinations of knowledge and truth, and the dynamic aspect is consciousness’ continuous effort to unite these determinations. That these two determinations occur within consciousness is systematically unrecognized by it, but recognized by “us”. It remains now to give an account of who “we” might be in relation to consciousness, and to indicate what the significance of its motion is, both “for us” and “for it”.

Unfortunately, there is no singularly persuasive account of our status as readers in relation to the subject-matter of the book, consciousness. I will therefore piece together an interpretation from various sources, in line with the “eliminationist” or “non-metaphysical” reading I am endorsing and developing.

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15 For a good survey and discussion of the literature, see Kenley Dove, “Hegel’s Phenomenological Method”.
C. Who are ‘We’?

We began by indicating that the Phenomenology might best be read as a critique, one in which a certain idea is to be eliminated as a result of that critique. That idea is, in a word, ‘consciousness’. What end does eliminating this idea serve? Insofar as this idea constitutes a habit of thought, and this habit leads to, on Hegel’s analysis, an insoluble contradiction between two determinations that are nonetheless taken to be irreducibly related, ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’, we are really talking about the elimination of a philosophical habit. Again, Dove formulates the point nicely:

Since the idea [of consciousness] had become virtually second nature to modern philosophy, Hegel knew that it would be difficult to eliminate. But if, on the other hand, he envisioned (as I believe he did) a conception of a systematic philosophy that must begin without any determinate idea [i.e. without presuppositions], it will be plausible to consider that he would formulate a manual of exercises designed to uproot this deep-set idea and habit of thought. It is as such a manual of exercises that we can, I believe, best read his first published book, The Phenomenology of Spirit (PSP 28).

If it is presupposed that it is we, the readers of the book, who possess such a habit, it is we who must purge ourselves of it. It is an automatic assumption, a “natural idea”, that we, as thinkers, proceed according to the structural determinations of consciousness, i.e., we presume ourselves to have consciousness, and insofar as we make theoretical assertions, frame hypotheses, or think about things in general, we presume to do so from that standpoint. So it is for us that the manual of exercises designed to uproot this most natural of assumptions is presented. This is what I take to be the primary significance of the repeated surfacing of the phrase and the perspective it indicates, “for us”, throughout the Phenomenology. If this point seems obvious to the point of pedantry, it will do to remind ourselves of the
tradition of interpreting ‘fur uns’, specifically “us”, as somehow already, implicitly or explicitly, dwelling within or possessing the “speculative” standpoint of Absolute Knowing. This view is related to the positive, transformationist reading that regards Absolute Knowing as a standpoint from which something more or less like traditional ontology or metaphysics may be performed. The standpoint is taken to be a validated, grounded subjective structure, e.g. the absolute structure of self-consciousness, from which it is possible to validly generate the categories of reality, because the absolute relation of thought to being has been established. But on our reading, this very dichotomy is a posit of consciousness, and far from the absolute relation of subject to object having been established, this very distinction is to have been eliminated along with every other presupposition that the abstract determinations of consciousness (knowledge and truth) may carry; the end of the Phenomenology is not a validation of consciousness, but rather the recognition of it as a self-defeating epistemic structure.

The motion of consciousness is therefore a process described by the Phenomenology that allows us to consider, in a systematic fashion, what happens to our natural assumption in every phase of its epistemic pursuits. It is a process that depicts a movement of immanent self-undermining or criticism undergone by consciousness,

16 ibid. 630-5.
which leads to a conscious insight (bewusste Einsicht)\textsuperscript{17} on our part, that the structural presupposition of consciousness is radically self-defeating, such that it systematically undermines the possibility of philosophical theory. We are able to see that this self-defeating process arises as a result of the very principles, posits, and concepts consciousness employs in each phase of its experience, as well as the overall structure that it retains and presupposes throughout all its investigations (the abstract distinction between knowledge and truth, or concept and object).

These considerations solve the dilemma of what this process might mean "for consciousness", the "protagonist" of the Phenomenology. It means nothing more, and nothing less than what it means "for us". The difference between "us" and consciousness is a certain kind of resolve and awareness: our resolve to undertake the phenomenology, and the "scientific" awareness of the process of determinate negation.

We at the outset presume to share the same cognitive structure as consciousness; again, if we did not, what would be the purpose of performing a phenomenology?\textsuperscript{18} Hegel says that the scientific aspect of considering the motion of consciousness as a sequence of epistemic "shapes", what we earlier referred to as knowledge-object sets, "proceeds behind the back of consciousness." But insofar as we the readers of the Phenomenology presuppose having the cognitive structure of consciousness, and presuppose that

\textsuperscript{17} "...this path is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, for which the supreme reality is what is in truth only the unrealized Concept" (PS 50, PG 69).

\textsuperscript{18} This question is ventured rhetorically on the assumption that the non-metaphysical reading is correct, which we are still in the process of arguing. There are of course all sorts of reasons for reading the Phenomenology of Spirit, but we are here entertaining the possibility and nature of Hegel's strict "scientific" reasons for doing so.
theorizing from that standpoint is systematically valid, the purpose and goal of the process in question must indeed be something for consciousness. It is we who must be persuaded, it is our habit that must be eliminated. Therefore, it stands to reason that there must be a terminal occurrence from the standpoint of consciousness, which would persuade us to abandon the very structure of consciousness as a legitimate theoretical presupposition. We will say more about this element of persuasion for us in the conclusion of this chapter.

William Maker, an advocate of the non-metaphysical view, advances a plausible interpretation of the terminus in Absolute Knowing from the standpoint of consciousness.¹⁹ Let us briefly consider it here. According to Maker, the final posit of consciousness, that which is taken to be in itself, is the structure of consciousness' own knowing of any object. This prevents any further "in-itself" from magically emerging once consciousness has undergone the by now (for us) familiar process of becoming dissatisfied with the object as being merely an object for consciousness. It is now not just an object that is known, but the knowing-of-an-object that is known; this knowing-of-an-object is both the object and the cognitive act of knowing. Hence, this new in-itself (the knowing-of-an-object) cannot undergo the usual process of coming to be merely an object for consciousness; there is now a transparent identity in the relation between what is in itself and what is for it. Nonetheless, the mere form of the distinction remains; consciousness is always consciousness of. The difference between knowing

¹⁹ We are here concerned with interpretations of the terminus from the so-called non-metaphysical perspective, i.e., the terminus interpreted as resulting in the elimination of consciousness. There is nothing approaching consensus concerning the interpretation of the final chapter.
and the object remains fixed, but there is nothing to distinguish one side from the other, and so no new in-itself can be conjured forth (since what is in itself is already for it, and vice versa). This state of affairs is both unintelligible and indeterminate, in the sense that there is nothing distinguishable as either knowledge or an object of knowledge. What logically results is the elimination of consciousness as a viable theoretical presupposition; there is no longer a fixed difference between consciousness and its object. As Maker says:

For, when knowledge and its object are at once both simultaneously identical to and different from one another, the fixed difference between knowledge and object which is presupposed by and definitive of consciousness is eliminated. That is, according to the principle or understanding of knowing being grounded in it, absolute knowing is not a knowing, just because in absolute knowing there is nothing determinate, distinguishable and identifiable either as knowledge or as the object of knowledge. The two poles which defined consciousness as a structure of knowledge and a principle of cognition come in absolute knowing to be indistinguishable from one another. For in a sheer identity in difference, nothing remains which can be said to be either identical to or different from anything else. Thus in absolute knowing the structure in terms of which absolute knowing subsists and is articulable as a determinate something and as a knowing eliminates itself (Maker, Philosophy Without Foundations 106).

This is a highly plausible interpretation of the terminus of the motion of consciousness, and it is lent support by both the demands of an indeterminate, presuppositionless beginning (see Chapter Four) that Hegel says is required of his "theory of determinacy" (see Introduction), as well as the general tendency of the process within the Phenomenology, which may be described, as Dove does, as the continually widening horizon of the in-itself to ultimately include what was systematically taken by consciousness to be merely for it, its own structure of knowing.20

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20 The horizon metaphor is particularly useful, because it favours neither the standpoint of consciousness, nor what is taken to be in itself. It is the boundary between them that widens to the point of indeterminacy.
II. Force and the Understanding: Hegel’s Phenomenological Method Applied

A crucial instance of this tendency in the Phenomenology is, I believe, the transition from Chapter III to Chapter IV, from “Understanding” to “Self-Consciousness”. This is where consciousness’ experience of the objectivity of things in the natural world widens to include our own objectivity as thinking, desiring, beings. It marks a decisive turn in the Phenomenology, from the abstract, naturalistic observation of things from a first-person standpoint, to the social reality of interaction, a structure Hegel calls ‘Spirit’. But here, as in the rest of the text through to the end, the abstract structure of consciousness is retained. Since we have been speaking in formal terms about the argument and subject-matter of this text, this is a good opportunity to examine some specific aspects of its content. In doing so, we will show how Hegel remains true to what he outlines as his method in the Introduction, and how he has the implicit but specific goal of eliminating the natural idea of consciousness as it divides “what-is” into the opposed determinations of knowledge and truth.

We have here (Chapters III-IV) one particular instance of the way the argument works as a whole, i.e. as it works to demonstrate the self-defeating character of consciousness as an epistemic presupposition. We will observe that it is by virtue of the very presuppositions, principles, and posits of ‘Understanding’ (the particular shape of

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21 Readers may wonder why I have not included more discussion of ‘Spirit’. Since it is my concern to elaborate how Hegel’s proposed method actually is borne out in the text, I have chosen an area where it is more easily discernible, an area where consciousness is considered by itself in its “abstraction” from Spirit. Once Chapter VI, “Spirit”, begins, consciousness is considered in its “concrete existence” in and as Spirit, and hence, via the totalities of the ethical, cultural, and moral worlds (see Hegel’s opening comments of Chapter VI).
consciousness under consideration in Chapter III) that its presumed object of knowledge, that which is to be understood, eludes it, and leads to the point where ‘Understanding’ entirely loses its distinctive epistemic status as a shape of consciousness. But in accordance with what was outlined in the Introduction, with the elimination of ‘Understanding’ as a viable epistemic standpoint there simultaneously emerges a new shape of consciousness, and the process continues (I will review in the next section what the criteria are for “us” to be thoroughly persuaded that ‘consciousness’ is a self-defeating epistemic presupposition in general, after having witnessed each particular shape undergo the systematic process of elimination).

As I read this section, Hegel, as is often the case, is describing the development of a contradiction. The specific contradiction under consideration is an instance of the general contradiction that I have argued is the subject-matter of the Phenomenology, the contradiction between consciousness’ abstract determinations: knowledge and truth. Here it shows up as: the contradiction inherent in understanding the objective world of nature without including ourselves as free, thinking beings within it. This theme should be familiar from our consideration of McDowell. Where do we, as natural beings, fit into a modern scientific understanding of nature as the domain of law, when it is clear that what is peculiar to “us” are aspects that are emphatically not law-like, for example, our “spontaneous” capacity to choose, reject, or apply certain concepts?

It will be important to keep in mind that although there will be very striking

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22 This explication will of necessity proceed largely without reference to secondary sources, since to my knowledge there is no explication of this section that honours what I have argued is vital to understanding the Phenomenology, and that is the role of the to it/for it distinction at the heart of Hegel’s method.
similarities here between what is being discussed and actual events in intellectual history (one may for example feel Newton looming behind each abstract formulation), what should rather be the focus of our attention is the peculiar epistemic logic this shape of consciousness called ‘Understanding’ employs in the course of its inquiry. Though there may be tempting similarities in the mode of the Understanding’s investigations to, e.g. Newtonian mechanics, and while such similarities may be helpful in grasping the particular features of this shape of consciousness, what is really under consideration are the problems anyone (regardless of specific doctrinal differences) theorizing from the particular standpoint of consciousness Hegel terms ‘Understanding’ would logically face in the course of her inquiry. So, for example, instead of viewing a particular moment as reflecting “that point in history when the concept of natural law emerges”, one should rather read it as “an instance of that peculiar epistemic logic from which it is possible for a concept of, e.g., natural law, to emerge.”

This is a good place to make some general comments on a dimension of the *Phenomenology* some readers may feel I am ignoring, namely, the variously celebrated and maligned historical aspect. As Hyppolite himself has pointed out (a commentator who places emphasis on the historical aspect, and who falls in the camp of “metaphysical” interpreters), the *Phenomenology* is not a “history of the world”; this is

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23 It may be helpful to compare this notion to what Ian Hacking has called a “style of reasoning” in his “Statistical Language, Statistical Truth, and Statistical Reason”. Also compare with its ancestor, the Kuhnian “paradigm”, and the idea of “revolution” in a paradigm shift (which is comparable to an “inversion of consciousness”): see Thomas Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

24 See Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 34. See all of Chapter Two (“History and Phenomenology”), Part I, for a useful discussion of the *Phenomenology’s*
easily seen in the discontinuity between shapes of consciousness, and in how each successive “in-itself” is thematized. However, it is simply a fact that there is a historical dimension to the Phenomenology. What then is the precise nature or purpose of the historical dimension? Someone might object to my approach in the following way: if Hegel’s purpose is indeed to shed light on certain structural presuppositions that lead to insoluble epistemic contradictions, what is the precise point of tracing the different historical manifestations or instances when such presuppositions were employed? Why in short adduce and develop historical instances of the “bad habit” of consciousness? Would not some sort of structural analysis be more appropriate?

Hyppolite asks, “Are these examples, these concrete illustrations of moments of the development of consciousness, chosen arbitrarily or do they absolutely impose themselves?” (Hyppolite 36). I believe that we must answer in the affirmative that there is a sense in which certain historical characterizations impose themselves upon our understanding of a particular shape of consciousness, even if we remain rigorously focused on the transformations of what I have urged are instances of specific modes of epistemic logic. After all, as Hegel says in his Preface, it is the history of the world and its cultures that first provide the conditions for the possibility of “Science” (see for example PS 7; PG 16-7). Often in the Phenomenology, a particular shape of consciousness is not merely associated with the thought of this or that philosopher, but with an entire way of life (e.g. Stoicism, the Unhappy Consciousness, Skepticism, etc.).
But this should not distract us from the fact that Hegel stressed a properly "scientific" aspect to the *Phenomenology*; it is this aspect we are trying to grasp. Hegel most likely believed that the historical dimension would do nothing but enrich, and not distract from, the subject-matter, even if that subject-matter has more to do with structural analysis than intellectual or world history.

A. The Appearance of Force

The shape of consciousness under consideration in Chapter 3 is called "Understanding". What is being understood? Or we may ask, what is the object for this shape of consciousness? It is to begin with, Force.\(^25\) What is Force? To get some perspective, let us formulate it and the immediately preceding chapter, Perception, in terms of the knowledge-object sets that we said above (3.I.B) constitute a particular shape of consciousness. Consciousness and its object in Chapter 2 are Perception and Thing, and here at the beginning of Chapter 3 they are Understanding and Force. Since Chapter 2 is not our focus, it unfortunately must suffice to say that Understanding has replaced Perception due to inadequacies\(^26\) in the way the object of Perception, the Thing, was being conceived. Consciousness in Perception took itself to be playing too much of a conceptual role in unifying the Thing and its properties as perceived; it found itself oscillating between concepts such as individuality (of the thing) and universality (of its

\(^{25}\) I am following A.V. Miller's capitalizations.

\(^{26}\) Though we are not performing this explicative task, it is possible to do with Chapter II what we are doing with Chapter III, namely, witnessing the "migration" of the for itself dimension of consciousness to the in-itself, to the point where an inversion of consciousness takes place.
properties) to make the thing intelligible, concepts which consciousness nonetheless took to be contradictory. Therefore, in this new shape of consciousness, "the movement which previously displayed itself as the self-destruction of contradictory concepts here has objective form and is the movement of Force..." (PS 83; PG 108). Understanding takes itself to have a new object, one that has a kind of unity intrinsic to it that is not provided or imposed via ad hoc conceptions (to make the thing intelligible as a unity) formulated from the resources of perception. We will see that what characterizes the Understanding at every phase of its development is its theoretical desire to get underneath or behind perceptual appearance, so as to witness the unified inner being or cause of things (das Innere der Dinge).

The movement and relations of Force (as opposed to the fixed determinacy of things and their properties as perceived) is therefore initially the object under consideration for the Understanding. Force is taken to have the character of universality and unity, and to constitute the inner being of the outer world. However, Force is still presented to the Understanding in the sensuous garb of perception, and as such, Understanding does not have its proper object, which again, is the inner being or cause of things. It is this sensuous aspect that is evident to the Understanding when Hegel speaks of the "play of forces". Force expresses itself through its "solicitation" by external "matters" (Materien) (or perceivable properties), which appear to have an independent existence.

27 There will unfortunately be grammatical violations of this kind, because often the singular "object" is characterized by a plurality of determinations.

28 Hegel’s use of "solicit" (sollzitieren) is now rare. It simply means to affect a thing (or person) by some form of physical influence or attraction.
However, *qua* independent, these matters seem to possess Force themselves, i.e. another Force seems to be required to actualize their *capacity to solicit* the expression of the initial Force. Are there *two* forces, one solicited, the other soliciting? This proposal collapses into unintelligibility: “The first Force has its determinacy only through the other, and solicits only in so far as the other solicits it to be a soliciting Force; and, just as directly, it loses the determinacy given to it, for this passes over – or rather has already passed over – to the other” (PS 84, PG 110); and “each *is* solely through the other, and what each thus is it immediately no longer is, since it *is* the other” (PS 86, PG 111).

Force and its expression, though it indicates an *apparent* duality of two independent forces, is now understood to be an “undifferentiated unity”, one that the Understanding supposed to pertain at the outset in the very concept of Force, but which *appearance* belied. So the original concept of Force as grasped by the Understanding is *recovered*.

This point is crucial in our explication; it indicates the initiation of what we called the “tainting of the criterion” (3.I.B) in Hegel’s method. Also, it is worth noting that this movement from the “difference” or “distinction” found in appearance, in this instance as a duality of Forces, towards unity, is recapitulated again and again throughout this chapter, in various phases of the Understanding’s experience.

During the process of this recovery both the Understanding and what is understood have altered *for consciousness*. That is to say, in accordance with what we have indicated in Hegel’s method above (3.I.A), consciousness “alters its knowledge to make it conform with the object.” The object as it is originally taken by the Understanding is a unitary force, but only as it *appears perceptually* in external matter. The true concept of
this unity, as constituting the "inner being of things", could only be genuinely grasped by
the Understanding if the semblance of its duplication into two forces, as indicated
perceptually in appearance, is overcome. A substantial concept of Force as it is
perceptually expressed in appearance is replaced with a "purer" concept, a concept of
"the inner being of things qua inner."

Consciousness takes itself to have correctly refined its original concept of "the inner
being of things" in accordance with the requirements of the object; the perception of
Force as it appears only obscures how this object is to be properly understood. The
manner in which the object is to be understood is the concept of Force qua concept, or
what the Understanding now takes to be the truth of its object. **It is the concept of Force pared of the dissemblance of appearance,** "the truth of Force remains only the thought of it" (PS 86, PG 111). This concept of Force qua concept, or the truth of Force being the
thought of it, has decisive consequences for the object; recall the next sentence in the
outline of Hegel's method: "But in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object
itself alters to consciousness also, 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" (PS 54, PG 74; my emphasis).

The rest of this chapter could be entitled "the Revenge of Appearance"; with each
attempt the Understanding makes in repressing the role of appearance in comprehending
its object, the more dramatically appearance reasserts that irreducible role. Why is the
Understanding "repressing" the role of appearance in the comprehension of its object?
The Understanding is what it is as a distinctive shape of consciousness, and therefore as a
distinctive epistemic standpoint, largely because of the conviction or certainty it possesses regarding the legitimacy of its criterion. The legitimacy of its criterion is taken to issue forth from the object, and the object is here taken to be the “inner being of things”. The very concept of the “inner being of things” is believed to require a particular mode of cognition to apprehend it, and that is understanding, as opposed to (as we have seen) sense-perception. Therefore, it is the nature of the object and the mode of cognition required to apprehend it (that Understanding takes itself to be) that precludes any appeal to appearance.

It might be instructive to recall what goes on in the famous “wax passage” from Descartes’ Meditations. There Descartes systematically rejects each faculty of mind (sense-perception and imagination) that is tied to a deceptive appearance. The deceptive appearance in question is the changeability of a piece of wax as it is placed near or far from the fireplace; what Descartes claims to know is its unchanging identity as the same piece of wax that has undergone alteration. The question Descartes asks himself is how he knows this given the reports of his senses, which if taken by themselves indicate two different objects with two different sets of properties. (Likewise with the faculty of imagination, which given the infinity of possibilities concerning the various shapes the wax might change into, could not have anticipated and therefore grasped by itself that the wax changed in this particular manner.) Descartes deduces by process of elimination that it must be through a distinctive faculty of understanding that the identity of the wax is known. Hegel characterizes ‘Understanding’ as the particular mode of cognition that takes itself to grasp the unchanging, inner essence of an object that lies behind changing
appearance. Similarly, in the example from Descartes, a *unified* essence is grasped that lies behind what the senses report to be two separate things.

What Hegel describes as the particular attitude of the Understanding versus any other shape of consciousness, is its conviction that it grasps or can grasp in principle the underlying *unity* of appearance, or the inner being of things. ‘Force’ is what Hegel names as the distinctive object of the Understanding; and it is here that the comparison to the faculty of mind Descartes’ isolates, with its capacity to discern inner essences, is sharpest. Descartes was partisan to the new mechanical science of his time, and the objects of such science were laws that could be formally expressed, and which articulated the underlying causal unity that governed disparate phenomena found in appearance. It could be said that Descartes performed an epistemological deduction of the peculiar faculty of mind that corresponded to such objects of scientific law. Paramount to this deduction is the systematic devaluation of *appearance* and the distinctive faculties that belong to its apprehension, most importantly sense-perception. Descartes’ ‘understanding’ affords insight into the utterly general substrate of physical extension that lies behind the multiplicity and particularity of appearance, a substrate that can be measured, quantified, and formulated into general laws of motion.

This should clarify what above I called the conviction of the Understanding as regards its criterion of knowledge: despite the appearance of Force duplicating itself within a multiplicity of “matters”, the Understanding maintains its conviction about what its criterion of knowledge *should* be, and that is one that provides direct access into the underlying *unity* that constitutes the inner being of things. However, what we dubbed
the “tainting of the criterion” in Hegel’s method has already begun. The criterion of the Understanding is believed by consciousness to be what it is in virtue of its systematic differentiation from appearance; but the Understanding found its comprehension of Force to be tied to its expression in the phenomena of matters soliciting themselves (that is, via a perceptual element). Therefore, the Understanding now states its conviction regarding its criterion in an explicit and principled manner; consciousness takes itself to have “a mediated relation to the inner being and, as the Understanding, looks through this mediating play of Forces into the true background of Things” (PS 86, PG 112). I will explicate this statement shortly; first, I simply wish to draw attention the fact that the Understanding has “altered its knowledge to bring it into conformity with the object”, as Hegel describes in his method.

From the outset the Understanding has taken itself to have, in principle, knowledge of a kind of underlying reality, characterized initially as an “unconditioned universality” that displays itself in the movement of Force. However, the Understanding becomes dissatisfied with its knowledge, because Force turns out to have a sensuous manifestation, a manifestation in appearance, that is not in accord with the concepts or criteria of universality and unity that consciousness takes to be essential to its object. As in the Descartes example, consciousness is convinced that, contrary to what it perceives, there is an underlying unity to the object that appearance distorts. So Understanding posits an undifferentiated unity that lies behind the play of Forces. Here, consciousness has altered its knowledge to bring it into conformity with the object, what it believes to be the true criterion of knowledge. In so doing, consciousness has subjectively “tainted” the
criterion by explicitly positing what the object should be, it has disturbed its objective ("given") status as the "in-itself", it has opened the floodgates towards a final dissatisfaction with its criterion, where "what it previously took to be the in-itself is not an in-itself, [but] that it was only an in-itself for consciousness" (PS 54, PG 74).

This is all a rather technical way of describing how something that is taken by consciousness to have an objective status, something which therefore can serve as a criterion of knowledge, becomes tainted with the subjectivity characteristic of the act of "knowing". An epistemic standpoint is here presupposed that posits a metaphysical divide between the subjectivity of knowing and the objectivity of what is known. But it is characteristic of consciousness, and here manifests itself in the particular shape called 'Understanding', to maintain with certainty its belief in its criterion; the first alteration of its knowledge reflects this, as well as its ensuing attempts to interpret the object in accordance with this alteration. But as said above, the floodgates have been opened, and any alteration in knowledge brings with it an alteration in the objective criterion.

Thus, to return to the matter at hand, once Understanding (in an attempt to bypass mere appearance) has altered its knowledge to bring it into conformity with what consciousness takes to be its distinctive object, the inner being of things, consciousness has implicitly destroyed this latter's status as an objective criterion. For the inner being of things is 1) posited, and 2) posited only as the result of consciousness' attempts to evade the role of appearance in the comprehension of its object. Therefore,

29 "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" (PS 54, PG 74).
unbeknownst to the Understanding, the inner being of things is known only negatively, as the shadowy, skeletal remains of purged appearance. The inner being of things is *posited* in support of the Understanding’s initial conviction regarding what its distinctive object *should* be, but this posit occurs from the standpoint of consciousness, and does not issue forth from the object itself. Hence, what consciousness takes to be the objective criterion in itself, the inner being of things, exists only as the result of a subjective alteration of its knowledge, in this case, as the result of its attempt to minimize the role of appearance. However, this attempt will backfire, and what is distinctive of appearance – movement, difference, and changeability – will come to thematize the object. This will result finally in an “inversion of consciousness”, a new shape of consciousness with a new object. Let us proceed then, with the explication of how this is so.

**B. The Syllogism**

To return to the quotation above: “consciousness has a mediated relation to the inner being and, as the Understanding, *looks through this mediating play of Forces into the true background of Things*” (PS 86, PG 112). I mentioned in the previous section that the Understanding takes a principled attitude towards its object, and that involves repressing the role of appearance. Hegel says that henceforth, appearance is merely a “vanishing” (*Verschwinden*) for the Understanding. Appearance is now significant only insofar as it *disappears*, and in that very act of disappearing, *reveals* the inner being of things: “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” (PS 87, PG 112). The negative movement of appearance, its “vanishing”, and the revealed truth of inner being, assume a single objectified form to consciousness: “qua consciousness...this truth [is converted] again into an objective inner, and [consciousness] distinguishes this reflection of Things from its own reflection into itself: just as the movement of mediation is likewise still objective to it. This inner is, therefore, to consciousness an extreme over against it...” (PS 87, PG 113). Despite the obscurity of this passage, I believe that what we should note here is that the negative, vanishing movement of appearance and its simultaneous revelation of the “inner truth of being” are thematized by consciousness as something occurring outside of it: “This...is to consciousness still the objective vanishing appearance, not yet its own being-for-self” (PS 87, PG 113). Hegel says “not yet” because the final outcome of the process here under consideration will be a new shape of consciousness that describes consciousness in a kind of self-relation, where consciousness becomes its own object, i.e. where consciousness becomes “self-consciousness”. That will be the subject-matter of Section C, below.

Hegel states clearly the present state of affairs for consciousness:

...there now opens up above the sensuous world, which is the world of appearance, a supersensible world which henceforth is the true world, above the vanishing present world there opens up a permanent beyond...(PS 87-88, PG 113).

What might immediately come to mind upon reading this passage is the Platonic distinction between appearance and the supersensible world of Forms, rather than a Cartesian epistemology that is tied to mechanistic science (as I suggested above). That this quotation and indeed the entire chapter is evocative of a great number of actual epistemic attitudes that have occurred throughout history is not an accident; as Gadamer
so succinctly puts it, "Indeed, the structure which Hegel is describing is that of an extreme conceptual abstraction, which...is characteristic not only of the Platonic and Christian position, but also of that of modern science." As I noted earlier, Hegel is attempting to draw attention to the particular epistemic logic characteristic of the shape of consciousness he calls 'Understanding'. Similarities to actual intellectual positions in history can be instructive, but they should not be interpreted as what "Hegel has in mind here". I read Hegel as attempting to remain rigorously focussed on the peculiar epistemic logic that is distinctive of this shape of consciousness, regardless of how it may have appeared in history.

In addition to what is described in the above passage as for consciousness, there is a dimension for us, the readers. It comes in the form of a syllogism:

Our object is thus from now on the syllogism which has for its extremes the inner being of Things and the Understanding, and for its middle term, appearance; but the movement of this syllogism yields the further determination of what the Understanding describes in this inner world through the middle term, and the experience from which Understanding learns about the close-linked unity (Zusammengeschlossenseins) of these terms (PS 88, PG 113).

Again, to remind ourselves, my interpretation of this chapter follows what Hegel outlines in his method, and thus follows what I have called the "migration" or "expansion" of the for itself (for consciousness) aspect of knowledge into the in-itself, culminating in what I have called the complete "tainting of the criterion". This process shows up here as the movement of the changeability of appearance into the stable, unchanging inner being of the world. The intelligible structure wherein this process becomes evident for us is what

Hegel now terms the syllogism, and it can be expressed as follows:

I-understand appearance;
Appearance vanishes to reveal the inner being of things;
Therefore, I-understand the inner being of things.

The syllogism suggests that the middle term, appearance, is a dispensable ("vanishing") device via which the Understanding achieves a grasp of its intended object, the inner being of things. And indeed, from the standpoint of consciousness, this is what occurs. However, from our standpoint, we will observe that the role of appearance remains equivocal; that is, despite the express intentions of the Understanding, appearance does not simply disappear in the cognitive act of grasping what is taken to be the inner being of the world. Rather, contrary to the intentions of the Understanding, aspects intrinsic to appearance, namely, various modes of motion, difference, and changeability, are retained in the comprehension of the inner world. This opens the door to the opposite of what the Understanding intends, namely, instead of appearance vanishing in the cognitive act of grasping the inner world (wherein the objectivity of the criterion of knowledge would presumably be retained), the inseparable relation of appearance with understanding rather “taints” the intended object – the static, unchanging inner world; and so: “that what [consciousness] previously took to be the *in-itself* is not an in-itself, or that it was only an in-itself *for consciousness*” (PS 54, PG 74).

From the standpoint of consciousness, appearance has a merely negative, vanishing relation to the inner being of things; but from our standpoint, we see that the original relation of appearance to the Understanding, though cast aside in principle, reasserts itself in the apprehension of the object, and thus taints its objectivity. Instead of the veil of
appearance being ripped aside to reveal the inner being of things to the Understanding, appearance rather "consumes" the object, and in doing so, destroys its objectivity for the Understanding. How and why is objectivity destroyed by appearance?

The main reason it is so urgent for the Understanding to subordinate and even eradicate the role of appearance in its comprehension of the world, is that appearance is taken to be irreducibly tied to the sensuous and perceptual, and hence subjective aspect of consciousness' knowledge. We have considered this subjective dimension of appearance in the last chapter in our discussion of Kant. It is now that we are able to fully appreciate what the consequences of this conception (of appearance) are: as long as appearance is equivocally tied to both the subjective dimension of knowledge and the in itself aspect of truth (what Hegel marks as its role as a "middle term"), it will be definitively neither, and this instability in its epistemic role will ultimately mark the termination of this shape of consciousness, Understanding. It is worth re-quoting the McDowell passage with which we ended Chapter 2:

Once the supersensible [things in themselves] is in the picture, its radical independence of our thinking tends to present itself as no more than the independence any genuine reality must have. The empirical world's claim to independence comes to seem fraudulent by comparison. We are asked to suppose that the fundamental structure of the empirical world is somehow a product of subjectivity, in interaction with the supersensible reality, which, as soon as it is in the picture, strikes us as the seat of true objectivity. But how can the empirical world be genuinely independent of us, if we are partly responsible for its fundamental structure? It does not help to be told that it is only transcendentally speaking that the fundamental structure of the empirical world is of our making (M 42).

What McDowell describes here, a tension between the subjective and putatively objective aspects of our empirical knowledge (appearance), is precisely the tension under consideration in the Understanding. Because appearance is tied to the subjective
dimension of knowledge, appearance has the potential to (as I said above) "consume" (completely thematize) the objective dimension. It is hence urgent for the Understanding to suppress the epistemic vitality of appearance in the course of its investigations.

Particular attention must now be paid to what is meant by the second premise ("Appearance vanishes to reveal the inner being of things"), at least from the standpoint of the Understanding. I refer specifically to the "vanishing" aspect of appearance, for this is what guarantees for the Understanding the objectivity of its knowledge. In a saying that seems to contradict the point I am pressing, Hegel says, "The supersensible [object of the Understanding] is...appearance qua appearance" (PS 89, PG 115). How can this be? Is not the object of the Understanding to be radically distinguished from appearance? Hegel goes on, "We completely misunderstand this if we think that the supersensible world is therefore the sensuous world, or the world as it exists for immediate sense-certainty and perception; for the world of appearance is, on the contrary not the world of sense-knowledge and perception as a world that positively is, but this world posited as superseded [my emphasis], or as in truth an inner world" (PS 89, PG 115). I have been using language such as "minimizing", "suppressing", and "eradicating" when I have spoken of the Understanding's attitude towards appearance, but now we are in a position to formulate with much greater accuracy this attitude: Understanding grasps the very idea of appearance to be that which vanishes to reveal the inner world, it is "posited as superseded"; it is, from the vantage of Understanding, just
what the concept of appearance is to be non-actual, to vanish, and to reveal to a consciousness that understands, the inner being of things. I have laid a great deal of stress on the manner in which appearance is posited, hence, (and it has shown up this way) I have taken the liberty of characterizing the Understanding’s attitude towards appearance in the explicitly subversive terms named above.

What is it then, in the bypassing of an intrinsically vanishing appearance, that is revealed to the Understanding: what is it that the Understanding understands? It is the law of Force; but to make this intelligible we have to see how Hegel leads up to it.

“What is immediate *for* the Understanding is the play of Forces [appearance]; but what is the True *to* it, is the simple inner world” (PS 89; PG 115; my “*”). The play of Forces constitutes for the Understanding the absolute flux of appearance; this flux mediates (as in the middle term of the syllogism considered above) the Understanding’s grasp of the inner world. Again, this mediation occurs as a simultaneous process of vanishing and revealing. The determinacy of the inner world is therefore thematized by the Understanding as that which successfully replaces the putative determinacy of appearance (in the very process of its vanishing), and as that which explains this apparent determinacy. The apparent determinacy in the play of Forces as it was observed by the Understanding was seen variously as 1) simply a monological “Force”; 2) the act of

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31 Hence, it is misleading to imagine the play of Forces literally disappearing to reveal the essence of the inner world; we are speaking about how things become intelligible to the Understanding, and it is the concept of appearance that is taken to have a transient relation to the permanent, stable being of things.

32 Here, as elsewhere, the accusative/dative distinction indicates what is for consciousness (appearance), and what consciousness takes itself to be in relation to (the in-itself of the inner world).
soliciting and being solicited of separate "Forces"; and 3) the determinacy of "being a
stable medium and a unity reflected into itself" (these are merely a recapitulation of the
various ways in which Force appeared to the Understanding earlier in the chapter, only
some aspects of which we considered). But what the Understanding understands is none
of these apparent configurations, neither Force taken singly nor in the form of one or
another opposition; rather, (and it is best to quote Hegel here and do our best at
interpreting him) "what there is in this absolute flux is only difference as a universal
difference, or as a difference into which the many oppositions have been reduced. This
difference, as a universal difference, is consequently the simplicity in the play of Force
itself and what is [taken to be] true in it. It is the law of Force" (PS 90, PG 116).

The flux of appearance, the "manifold of phenomena", is reduced to law. The various
modes in which Force appeared, and the relations it assumed, are now regarded as
"simple difference." What does this mean? "Difference", as it appears in the play of
Force, is found in the movement and flux of phenomena, and the relations such
phenomena assume. The Understanding now grasps such phenomenal difference in the
simplicity of a law, which formulates this difference in stable, universal terms. What
Hegel therefore calls "universal difference" is expressed in the law, "which is the stable
image of unstable appearance. Consequently, 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 immediate tranquil image" (PS 90-91,
PG 116).

From here on, Hegel will make the developing contradiction plain, and the
contradiction reflects precisely what is outlined in Hegel’s method: a contradiction between what is for consciousness (here expressed as appearance) and what is taken to be in itself (law). But how is there a contradiction if appearance has been “posited as superseded”? Does not appearance by definition vanish to reveal the world as it is in itself to a consciousness that understands? What I in the previous section referred to as the “revenge of appearance” is made explicit in the following: “...appearance retains for itself an aspect which is not in the inner world; i.e. appearance is not yet truly posited as appearance, as a superseded being-for-self” (PS 91; PG 117). Appearance has retained an independent dimension apart from the reality it “defers” to (the seemingly arbitrary assertion of this new point will be addressed in the coming paragraphs); but it also is, as we have seen, related to the inner world of law. Therefore, the truth for the Understanding is not entirely determined by a comprehension of the law simpliciter; the law itself is determined by differences found in appearance, which has retained an independent status apart from the inner world. An incompatibility between the simplicity of the law and the “differences” found in appearance shows up repeatedly in the process of explanation (to be considered shortly). However, it was posited by the Understanding that appearance has a merely “vanishing” relation to the inner realm of law; but the law, insofar as it has any explanatory significance at all, implicitly appeals to the independent determinacy of appearance. Appearance therefore does not merely “vanish”, it retains for itself a determinacy independent of the law; in fact, the determinacy of appearance implicitly determines the law, and hence there is an ambiguity in the explanatory vector: does the Understanding grasp appearance via the determinacy of the law, or is the law
comprehended via the determinacy of appearance? The latter will turn out to be truer than the Understanding had acknowledged, and the objectivity of its "criterion", the law, will be discovered to be subjectively tainted by the transitive relation the Understanding has to the law through appearance (see the syllogism).

Let us see precisely 1) how it is that appearance retains "for itself" an independent status in the process of explanation; 2) how appearance therefore determines the content of the law; and 3) how these two represent for the Understanding the destruction of its epistemic criterion.

Let us begin with a brief recapitulation: the shape of consciousness under consideration in this chapter is determined by three basic concepts which Hegel says have a syllogistic relation for us: 'Understanding', 'appearance', and the 'inner being of (outer) things'; this latter is also sometimes referred to as the 'supersensible beyond', which hosts the 'realm of law'. Hegel now describes how what is taken by consciousness to be the in-itself or truth, the realm of law (which is understood here to constitute the "inner being of things"), becomes progressively determined by what is taken to belong to the domain of appearance – which the Understanding takes to be subjectively rooted in sensation and perception, and therefore how 'law' loses its criterial status as the truth, i.e. as the criterion of knowledge, in the course of, in this case, naturalistic explanation. The concept of law comes to be regarded as a mere posit of consciousness as a result of its use in explaining the natural world. The process of explanation signifies what we have outlined in Hegel's method as the "expansion" or "migration" of the for itself aspect of consciousness into the domain of the in-itself, and therefore marks the process of the
subjective tainting of the objective criterion for consciousness.

The truth for the Understanding is, as we have seen in its various phases and attempts to correct its knowledge, something both universal and unified. We have therefore seen its concept of ‘Force’, tied as it is to the sensuous and perceptual elements of appearance, progressively modified into a purely intelligible concept of law. However, the Understanding first grasps the law as a “simple difference” (“simple” in the way that a formulated law is), thus violating prima facie its epistemic conviction and demand for unity. “Difference” shows up here as a multiplicity of laws formulated to accommodate a multiplicity of phenomena. Hence, ‘appearance’ finds its way into the very manner in which laws are formulated. The Understanding therefore, in keeping with its charter principle, lets “the many laws collapse into one law, just as, e.g., the law by which a stone falls, and the law by which the heavenly bodies move, have been grasped as one law” (PS 91, PG 117). This is the familiar move employed by the Understanding to bypass appearance, in this case, to bypass the plurality and difference found in specific laws: “plurality is... a defect; for it contradicts the principle of the Understanding to which, as consciousness of the simple inner world, the True is implicitly universal unity (PS 91, PG 117).

In this law of universal attraction, Hegel says nothing is expressed but the concept of law itself; it reduces to the formula “everything has a constant difference in relation to other things” (PS 91, PG 117). According to Hegel, this formula stipulates only that everything should in principle be conformable to a single, unified law; it fails to describe in one universal stroke all the manifold, particular relations of individual things that were
Chapter Three

more precisely captured in specific laws. The Understanding is content to pursue this formula as a kind of model for what 'law' should ultimately capture, and to relegate the determinacy of specific laws to the scrap heap of appearance. This kind of move should now be familiar; the Understanding repeatedly “alters its knowledge” to bring its concepts into conformity with what it takes to be the essence of its object (‘unity’).

Hegel says:

[T]he pure concept of law as universal attraction must, to get its true significance, be grasped in such a way that in it, as what is absolutely simple or unitary, the differences present in law as such themselves return again into the inner world as a simple unity. This unity is the inner necessity of the law (PS 92, PG 118).

The Understanding is now interested in the aspect of ‘necessity’ contained in the very concept of law, and the manner in which reality is governed by it. Necessity is the principle by which the difference expressed in a law must be absorbed into a simple unity, or to put it more generally, the principle by which apparent difference must be apprehended as a unity (perhaps something like the logical difference between A&B and A B). This aspect of law naturally interests the Understanding, because it is the aspect that guarantees the unity of its object. We might say the move here is a move away from

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33 Hegel claims that, for example, the one law that combines the laws of falling terrestrial bodies and the motions of heavenly bodies fails to capture what is specific to either law. I am not in a position to endorse or take issue with this obvious challenge to Newton. The epistemic logic of the claim is plausible, however. Progressive degrees of universal conceptual extension lose specificity in principle: ‘man’ does not have the specificity of ‘Socrates’, and ‘mammal’ lacks the specificity of ‘man’. Hence, we are a long way off from talking specifically about Socrates if we undertake to discourse on mammals. It is the peculiar epistemic logic of ‘Understanding’ that we are concerned with, not merely as it attempts to grasp the common dynamic of the heavens and the earth, but rather as it attempts to grasp any object at all. Ultimately, Hegel is out to discover an intellectually comprehensive theoretical standpoint (“Science”). The Understanding fails, like every shape of consciousness, to wholly embody and characterize this standpoint.
a merely *a posteriori* description of nature via the law, to what is *a priori* required by it. But necessity is, in the "pre-critical" sense, taken to inhere in the object itself, to be that element which guarantees its unitary nature. At this point, Hegel gives a number of examples of how the concept of necessity fails to meet the Understanding's requirements; I will briefly cite one such example.

On Hegel's analysis, the law of motion is thought to be necessarily split into time and space, or again into distance and velocity. Since motion is only the relation of these moments, it is in its essence divided. However, as thus conceived, these parts taken independently do not express their supposed origin in a unity (motion); space is thought of as able to be without time, and vice-versa. "...[M]otion is, therefore, only their superficial relation, not their essence" (PS 94, PG 120). Time and space, conceived independently, do not necessarily unite into motion. Therefore the unity the Understanding expects to find due to the necessity of the law is absent.

The Understanding concedes this. In another effort to preserve the unity it takes to be essential to its object, the Understanding now regards the concept of 'necessity' and the differences it is to unite, to be mere facets of its own comprehension (i.e., facets *for it*),

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34 Looming in the background here is the Humean claim that 'necessity' belongs only to mind and its "relations of ideas", not to the world and its "matters of fact". This is what the Understanding will concede, below.

35 Obviously, Hegel is analyzing the *understanding* of 'motion' current in his day, which is Newtonian. But that that concept of motion may have since been replaced by another concept does not matter to this analysis, since it is not motion that is being analyzed, but rather the epistemic logic of the Understanding in general.

36 Here occurs explicitly what was alluded to earlier, the Humean subjectivization of 'necessity'. 
facets that inhere only in the process of explanation rather than within the thing itself. So, as alluded to earlier, despite the Understanding’s attempt to, in a sense, define it out of the picture, ‘appearance’ will simply not go away, i.e., it again and again retains a dimension of independence despite its putative definition as inherently “vanishing”.

Here it shows up (alarmingly) as the subjective dimension of explanation. However, ‘explanation’ by definition is taken to have an objective relation to that which it explains; this is a particularly keen instance of what I described above as an equivocation in the concept of knowing (3.I.B). The process of explanation is supposed to render intelligible objective aspects of that which is to be known; yet it is admitted that the manner in which ‘explanation’ divides and distinguishes differences in the object, and the status of ‘necessity’, belong merely to the Understanding.

Hegel’s example here is the law of electricity. Any single occurrence of, e.g. lightning, is understood universally in terms of electricity in this law. Lightning as a natural occurrence is a force which, when it is understood universally in terms of the law of electricity, is divided into positive and negative charges. However, the Understanding equivocates about the real status of its intelligible divisions; the law is on the one hand supposed to reflect an intrinsically unitary reality, on the other hand the very manner in which the law is intelligible is via explanatory distinctions made by the Understanding, distinctions that are rooted in the law’s phenomenal aspect as this or that occurring force (e.g. lightning). I do not find Hegel’s example very clear, so I may have taken some interpretive liberty in explicating the passage. Regardless, there is ample evidence to
suggest that the overall point is this: the Understanding equivocates about the epistemic status of ‘explanation’; on the one hand consciousness freely admits that the explanatory distinctions it makes reside (subjectively) in the Understanding, on the other hand these distinctions are what render the objective reality of the law intelligible, and they must therefore have some kind of objective status. Appearance has maintained its independence as an explanatory feature of law, in this instance, in the distinctions made by the Understanding that are rooted in the phenomena the law is to explain.

But the law is still understood to be a simple unity, free of phenomenal differences. Hegel says:

...[T]he Understanding, as we have seen, sticks to the inert unity of its object, and the movement falls only within the Understanding itself, not within the object (PS 95, PG 121).

How does the Understanding reconcile the apparent contradiction between the manner in which it explains (which includes difference), and an inner reality that in itself is taken to be a simple, inert unity? The answer to this marks the explicit return of ‘appearance’ in the Understanding’s grasp of the object. The following passage is difficult, but I believe it is key to comprehending how appearance re-emerges to become the explicit principle via which the Understanding grasps the inner world, which is to say, it is key to comprehending how appearance comes to determine the content of the law. (Hence, we see here also an indication of how the Understanding’s specific epistemic conviction concerning simple unity will terminate, which will mark the eventual terminus of this shape of consciousness):

In the process, then, of explaining, the to and fro of change which before was outside the inner world and present only in the appearance, has penetrated into the supersensible
world itself...this change is not yet a change of the subject-matter itself, but rather presents itself as pure change by the very fact that the content of the moments of change remains the same. But since the Concept, qua Concept of the Understanding, is the same as the inner being of things, this change becomes for the Understanding the law of the inner world. The Understanding thus learns [through experience (erfährt)] that it is a law of appearance itself, that differences arise which are not differences...a permanence of impermanence [is now understood]" (PS 95-6, PG 122-23).

What is hidden but presupposed in this passage is the transitive relation the Understanding has to the inner world through appearance (expressed in the syllogism); that is how we are to understand that the “Concept of the Understanding, is the same as the inner being of things”, and it is in virtue of this transitive identity that the change found in appearance expands completely into the inner being of the outer world. This has happened because of the equivocal nature of explanation (ultimately rooted in the equivocal concept of knowing that belongs to consciousness in general (see 3.I.B)); on the one hand the Understanding admits that it makes distinctions in the course of explanation that do not belong to the object in itself, on the other hand the very intelligibility of the concept of explanation depends on a presupposed objective relation to truth. The Understanding therefore must, once again, change its knowledge to bring it into conformity with its criterion.

Now the Understanding explicitly grasps that the aspects of appearance – movement, change, and all difference in general – that it took such pains to isolate from what it took to be its proper object, the inert unity of law, rather are basic to its object, the inner world. But how does the Understanding grasp this? As sameness within difference, and difference within sameness, or self-relation within difference. This notion should be at least familiar (more generally as “identity within difference”) to anyone familiar with
Hegel, for it appears (in various formulations) frequently throughout his writings, especially when he is attempting to characterize at the outset what his aim is. It is what some have referred to as "speculative identity", as opposed to formal logical identity. I believe that it is helpful (but not necessary) to conceive of speculative identity as an identity that incorporates time as a basic element. For example, $S$ is $\neg S$ violates the principle of contradiction, but only under the formal, bivalent conditions of logic. In actuality, we can refer to $(S =) \operatorname{Sam}$ at age 9 and $\operatorname{Sam}$ at age 12, and if we choose to, we could (rather oddly) describe $\operatorname{Sam}$ as he exists in the present as "$\operatorname{Sam}$ is not $\operatorname{Sam}$", without contradiction. The difference in "Sams" can be captured formally by expressing time slices of ‘$\operatorname{Sam}$’ ($S_{11}$, $S_{12}$, $S_{13}$, etc.), such that we could say $S_{12}$ is not $S_{11}$. I do not think Hegel means anything more extraordinary than what is captured in this illustration, with the added caveat that he believes that the term ‘$\operatorname{Sam}$’, at least in ordinary language, can comprehend the whole individual $\operatorname{Sam}$ as he exists throughout time, with the "differences" that are formally captured in time slices, integrated in a dynamic, unitary conception. Hence, the concept can capture what goes on in "magnetism" (as we will see shortly), even though the relation of the poles is to be conceived in an entirely non-temporal manner. The idea is that something "identical" or self-same can dynamically contain difference within it. This idea emerges now as vital for preserving the unity of the object, while also acknowledging a dimension of "difference".

This concept is particularly important here, because self-consciousness is characterized more adequately by this concept than anything heretofore considered (in Chapter III), and it is precisely self-consciousness that is the new object emerging here.
The Understanding still believes that its proper object is the inner being of the outer world, but the manner in which it now characterizes this inner being, as a result of the equivocation within explanation, properly belongs to the determinacy of ‘self-consciousness’. The determinacy that was taken to be distinctive of appearance has gradually infiltrated the Understanding’s object to become a new object, self-consciousness. We must now make this clear by examining (unfortunately) the most difficult portion of this chapter.

The Understanding has before it what it takes to be a “second law”, what in the above passage was termed the “permanence of impermanence”. The Understanding now regards the manner in which (we have seen) the various phases of its knowledge establish, lose, and re-establish that unity taken to be intrinsic to its object, as something governed by a law of the object itself that had heretofore not been admitted, a law that is conceived of as sameness within difference, and difference within sameness.

For example, the play of Forces is now seen as a “selfsame which repels itself from itself, and therefore what is repelled is essentially self-attractive, for it is the same; the difference created, since it was no difference, therefore cancels itself again” (PS 96, PG 122). I hope to make the obscurity of this statement clearer as we progress. I believe that most basically it means that the movement (observed in Force) is now understood as a law of the object, rather than as something belonging merely to the sphere of appearance (the subjective aspect of knowing); it is a law that integrates the changeability of appearance within the original principle or criterion of the Understanding (unity and universality): “Consequently, the difference exhibits itself as difference of the subject-
matter itself (der Sache selbst) or as absolute difference, and this difference of the subject-matter is nothing else but the selfsame that has repelled itself from itself, and therefore merely posits an antithesis which is none” (PS 96, PG 123). Difference has found its way into the “subject-matter itself”; it is no longer conceived to be something added by the Understanding, and hence, no longer conceived as a mere defect of appearance. Why? What we are observing here is the result of multiple concessions the Understanding has made, given the progressive tainting of its objective criterion, but this process is also the simultaneous attempt to preserve the objective integrity of that criterion. For example, due to what the Understanding has been presented with throughout, it concedes that difference is an aspect of its object. However, this does not change the fact that for the Understanding, the very ideas of change and difference originated in appearance, and it is this defect of their birth so to speak, that will finally corrupt the Understanding’s object of knowledge. So again, the Understanding seems to have preserved its object through yet another concession; but really this is a final move that marks the terminus of this shape of consciousness.

A second supersensible world is posited in accordance with this second law (the law of “permanence within impermanence”), what has famously been called the “inverted world”:

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 (PS 96-7, PG 123-24).

The inverted world, as a posit of the Understanding, includes the world of movement and
difference that appearance had *retained for itself* in the process of the Understanding’s “purging” of its criterion. Now, the Understanding has conceded that movement and difference, tied as they are to explanation, play an irreducible role in its comprehension of the world. However, the Understanding has not yet realized that in this, its final concession, it has destroyed its own self-conception as “Understanding”. It has destroyed what is distinctive of this shape of consciousness and this epistemic attitude: to determine the inert unity that *lies behind* appearance, that which appearance is *in truth*. Instead, the determinacy of that which consciousness took to be merely *for it*, the determinacy of appearance with all its movement, multiplicity, and difference, is now thematized as something belonging in a basic way to the object in itself, the inner world. This results in the following equivocal state of affairs: what was merely for it, is now something in itself, but an in-itself only *for consciousness*. That is, the Understanding can no longer abstractly differentiate between the way it comprehends the object, and the object itself. But since the Understanding retains the structural presuppositions of consciousness, this means that the object has been corrupted by the subjectivity of consciousness, and hence, is only an “in-itself for consciousness”; this is what will now be gradually grasped by the Understanding.

The inverted world, and the moments that follow (captured in ‘infinity’, see below), may be construed as that point outlined in Hegel’s method as the “being-for-consciousness of the in-itself”. This is the most equivocal point in the development of the Understanding (see 3.I.B), in the sense that there is a critical equivocation between the subjective aspect of knowledge that is merely *for consciousness*, and the implicit
objective demand that knowledge be knowledge of some real object. This is an equivocation on the same content (as it occurs in consciousness); the latter objective demand results in the interpretation of the content as a new object of knowledge, and the emergence of a new shape of consciousness. However, to remind ourselves, this systematic transition is only witnessed by us, the readers. It is not something that occurs for consciousness. The "science of the experience of consciousness" allows us, the readers, to comprehend the systematic relation between kinds of knowledge that consciousness takes to be unrelated, kinds of knowledge that are bound together by a single principle and presupposition: the structural determinacy of consciousness itself.

What we are tracing is the transition to self-consciousness. For us to comprehend this transition, it is crucial to see how the Understanding really does terminate as a distinctive epistemic attitude, and how the epistemic stance that is emerging really does conflict with the Understanding's charter principles, those principles that define the Understanding as a distinctive epistemic attitude. To begin with, Hegel distinguishes the conception of the inverted world that has emerged from a more superficial conception. The more superficial conception arises in the course of the Understanding's attempt to work out the full implications of "inversion". This conception merely re-establishes the relationship of appearance to the inner world, and this time the inner world is conceived in itself as opposite to that which appears: "So...what tastes sweet is really, or inwardly in the thing, sour; or what is north pole in the actual magnet in the world of appearance, would be south pole in the inner or essential being..." (PS 97, PG 124). I think this is a particularly difficult section to makes sense of, because it is not clear why any actual
instance of the Understanding would mount these hypotheses. However, I believe these examples help to show, in a final way, the unintelligibility of the Understanding's stance. Here we see the Understanding making its customary distinctions (even though we are at an advanced stage of its dialectic). However, if the Understanding conceives ‘inversion’ in the way it conceives everything else, the result will be a manifest contradiction (as we will see). The Understanding does here, in a more absurd way, what it does at every phase of its epistemic undertakings by: “fixing the differences in a different sustaining element” (PS 99, PG 126).\(^{37}\) The clearest example of this polarizing act of Understanding, as we have seen, is its initial attempt to simply place the differences found in appearance on one side of a theoretical divide, place the “simple unity” of the law on the other, and then to seek some kind of explanatory correspondence between them. But at every turn the epistemic demands of the Understanding’s objective principles of unity and universality press it to minimize the conceptual role of ‘difference’, tied as it is to the subjectivity of ‘appearance’. Ironically, this movement merely intensifies the manner in which the determinacy of appearance (difference) re-asserts its epistemic significance for the Understanding.

The manner in which this polarizing activity of the Understanding is now superseded may be instructively related back to the explanatory equivocation of consciousness in the example of an instance of lightning and its relation to the law of electricity. The explanatory distinction made between positive and negative charges as truly separate

\(^{37}\) Full quotation: “From the representation, then, of inversion, which constitutes the essential nature of one aspect of the supersensible world, we must eliminate (entfernen) the sensuous representation of fixing the differences in a different sustaining element...” (PS 98-99, PG 126).
from one another, which *appear* in every instance of lightning, did not square with what was understood to be the simple unity of the law as it is in itself. That is because differences and divisions found in appearance must in principle be kept separate for the Understanding from the inner reality of the law. However, what is now being suggested in these final absurd “inversions” (e.g. the South Pole being the “inner” of the apparent North Pole) that occur as a result of the Understanding’s bi-polarizing activity is, contrastively, the necessity of a superior theoretical grasp of the object; and again, this grasp must go beyond the activity of “fixing the differences in a different sustaining element” and seeking their correspondence with a principle of unity, i.e. a law. What the Understanding polarizes into two distinct domains must now be grasped as a unity of sameness within difference. This must be the case because difference has been admitted into the unitary domain of law, and because this development is regarded as intelligible by the Understanding, the seeming *contradiction* must be resolved. Hegel’s choice of magnetism as an example of “superficial inversion” is a good one, because it readily resolves into the more comprehensive theoretical conception emerging here. H.S. Harris, in *Hegel: Phenomenology and System*, points out: “Attraction and repulsion are not really independent and separate concepts (as they appear to be in abstraction). The *North* pole of the magnet is the one that attracts its opposite (in this same magnet) and *repels* “itself” in any other magnet. The “self-sameness” that is universally attractive must equally be “self-repulsive” if there is to be a world at all.”\(^{38}\) Here it is clearly

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\(^{38}\) H.S. Harris, *Hegel: Phenomenology and System*, p. 31.
absurd to talk about one of these concepts being the "inner" reality of the other, they are mutually implicative and complementary. If consciousness really wishes to understand how the North pole conceptually contains the South pole, it must admit that an inner/outer dichotomy (as posited), with one side being the essence or "real nature" of the other, is insufficient for this task; the intrinsic unity of magnetism must be grasped as a "sameness" with a difference that is constitutive of that sameness.

The new conception emerging here from the "inverted world" is formulated thus:

[The] Concept of the difference must be exhibited and grasped purely as inner difference, a repulsion of the selfsame, as selfsame, from itself, and likeness of the unlike as unlike. We have to think pure change, or think antithesis within the antithesis itself, or contradiction (PS 99, PG 126).

This need not sound alarming; Hegel is not recommending that the principle of contradiction simply be violated. What is being said here is that for an opposite to be thought of as an opposite, it cannot be thought of in conceptual isolation from its counterpart. Opposites conceptually imply one another, and are not merely distinct, as they are thought to be in a relation of contradiction. Thus, the inverted world "is itself and its opposite in one unity. Only thus is it difference as inner difference, or difference in its own self, or difference as an infinity" (PS 99, PG 126). After the Understanding works out the full implications of "inversion", that is, works out what it means to think sameness within difference (as required by its admission of difference and change into the inner world), it must dispense with its cognitive scheme of bi-polarizing difference and unity into two realms. The Understanding must rather grasp difference as collapsed or dynamically integrated into a unity, a unity of sameness within difference. This unity
of sameness within difference is what Hegel here terms "infinity".\footnote{"Infinity" (Unendlichkeit) as Hegel uses it here, like "inversion", is not the usual sense. In the Encyclopædia Logic Hegel distinguishes between "good" and "bad" infinity. Bad infinity is what we normally associate with the term, i.e., an endless progression past fixed limits (simply the opposite of "finite"). The good infinity is what Hegel has in mind here, which is a mode of self-relation. Perhaps it is useful to think of two lines, one straight, and the other circular. The former is a bad infinite as it stretches out forever, the latter is a good infinite as it is "self-relating".} What this signifies for us is a collapse of the syllogism: Understanding-Appearance-Inner Being of (Outer) Things. The determinacy of appearance as it is related to the subjective aspects of the Understanding (the sensuous and perceptual elements of motion, difference, and change), collapse into the determinacy of the inner world (law-like stability and unity). This collapse marks both the terminus of the Understanding and the emergence of a new shape of consciousness. I will elaborate on this transition in the following section.

C. Collapse of the Syllogism

"We see that through infinity...all the moments of appearance are taken up into the inner world" (PS 99, PG 127). The result could not be more concisely stated. Hegel now recapitulates the examples taken from the natural world (space and time, positive and negative electricity), formerly regarded from the bifurcating spectacles of the Understanding, now regarded under the unifying paradigm of "infinity" (the unity of sameness within difference). The Understanding regarded each of these pairs as "unlike" and "indifferent" moments, moments which the Understanding nonetheless thought of as united within the unitary law-concepts (respectively) of gravity and electricity. Now, the concept of "inner difference", i.e., "infinity", just is the unity of
these moments that was before merely posited by the Understanding: “these unlike and indifferent moments...are a difference which is no difference, or only a difference of what is selfsame, and its essence is unity” (PS 99, PG 127). What was taken in conceptual abstraction by the Understanding, difference on the side of appearance, unity on the side of the inner world, is now a conceptual unity.

Again, this result may be seen as a collapse of what Hegel terms the syllogism: Understanding-Appearance-the Inner Being of Things. This is in keeping with what we have outlined in Hegel’s method: the for-itself (subjective) aspect of consciousness has “migrated” from the Understanding through appearance into the inner world, thus tainting the objectivity of the in-itself. We see that the collapse of the syllogism has unified what throughout the chapter had been taken (by the Understanding) to be two different spheres of determinacy, the sphere of appearance and the sphere of the inner being of the outer world. The Understanding however is experiencing the loss of its criterion, “law”, and therefore losing its distinctive epistemic status and stance.

Consciousness’ new status, emergent from the termination of the Understanding, is called “self-consciousness”:

Appearance, or the play of Forces, already displays [infinity], but it is as ‘explanation’ that it first freely stands forth; and in being finally an object for consciousness, as that which it is, consciousness is thus self-consciousness. The Understanding’s ‘explanation’ is primarily only the description of what self-consciousness is (PS 101, PG 129).

Here we have confirmation of what I said earlier marked the beginning of the

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40 Recall that “law” started out referring to the inert, stable unity that underlies the moving, changing things of appearance, and now has become by the end of the chapter something entirely different, something “inverted”: change, motion, and difference are now incorporated into and constitutive of inner reality.
Understanding’s equivocations (see 3.I.B, and 3.II.B). The movement from ‘explanation’ through the ‘inverted world’ to ‘infinity’ expresses the Understanding’s gradually developing awareness that the object the Understanding took to be something in itself, is becoming something merely for it. The movement from the ‘inverted world’ to ‘infinity’ together constitutes that *critically* equivocal moment Hegel in the Introduction terms the “being-for-consciousness of the in-itself”. Hegel, in an extremely abbreviated way in the above passage, is indicating that a process that began with the equivocal activity of explanation, where the Understanding is sensitive to both the subjective dimension of distinction-making and the demand that explanation have an objective relation to the *explicandum*, ends in the explicit awareness that the object, now thematized as ‘infinity’, is *for it* (for consciousness). That is, the determinacy of appearance – change, motion, difference, has definitively made its way into the object of the Understanding, insofar as that object is conceived as the unity of sameness within *difference*. But this collapse of two spheres of determinacy into one signifies a crisis for the Understanding. It cannot retain its charter principle that there is a “fixed unity” underlying apparent motion and difference, if motion and difference are now constitutive of the unity of the object. The determinacy of appearance, something taken to be merely for it, is now an aspect of the determinacy of what is in itself. But insofar as this is grasped, it is not grasped with the distinctive epistemic resources, and from the standpoint of, the Understanding. There is implicitly at hand a new object, and a new

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41 If it is helpful, the reader may recall the “unity of opposites” and use this as a kind of paradigm for understanding this phrase. However, the unity of opposites does not entirely encompass the meaning of the phrase, which has an important dynamic dimension.
shape of consciousness.

The “for-itselfness of infinity” is just what, Hegel now claims, describes self-consciousness, and is not something that is properly thematized by the epistemic logic peculiar to the Understanding. This is not to say that the Understanding now determines that the inner being of the outer world is really self-consciousness (this is in line with a crude idealism sometimes imputed to Hegel; we (the ‘Wir’ of the Phenomenology) do not make this determination either). The description of “self-consciousness”, and its systematic relation to everything that has led to it, is something for us, and it is crucial to say more about this perspective (the phenomenological perspective).

For the transition from ‘Understanding’ to ‘Self-Consciousness’ to be intelligible, it is important to take seriously the claim that the transition occurs “behind the back of consciousness”. In the actual course of some particular epistemic investigation determined by the logic of “Understanding”, the result of the inquiry (that which is to be understood) will never be “self-consciousness” in the sense given it here (i.e. as the systematic result of a peculiar epistemic logic). That result is for us, it is the subject-

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42 In the next chapter I will contrast this interpretation of the result of ‘self-consciousness’ with Robert Pippin’s idealist interpretation.

43 Again, it may need stressing that the point is not that either we or the Understanding realize that the “stuff” of the outer world is really self-consciousness. This may be a tempting confusion given that Hegel has been construed as a metaphysical idealist who holds that the substance of nature is ultimately constituted by thought-things (see for example Karl Marx’s “Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and General Philosophy”, found in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. In the next chapter, I will be considering a different sort of idealist reading, namely, Pippin’s construal of Hegel as continuing the project of transcendental idealism. This will involve an overall comparison between reading Hegel systematically in the way I have been advocating, and reading him as a “transformationist”. As part of this effort, we will revisit the transition from “Force and the Understanding” to “Self-Consciousness” in
matter of our phenomenological science. Our subject-matter is consciousness, and the various shapes it takes in the course of a series of experiences unified by the distinction it makes between knowledge and truth. From the standpoint of the Understanding, consciousness has experienced the loss of its object and its criterion (this is the merely negative significance of ‘infinity’ for consciousness); and, as something separate, consciousness is confronted with a new object (consciousness is now its own object: self-consciousness). This is for us two moments of one and the same process. As discussed earlier, the Phenomenology is utterly unintelligible as a document that reflects any actual historical progression of consciousness; i.e. the “history of consciousness” is not its subject-matter. The Phenomenology is rather a systematic exposition of a logic and the many forms it can take (perhaps found in history, but not necessarily), a logic constituted by the determinacy of consciousness – knowledge and truth.

The new shape of consciousness emerging here from the terminus of the Understanding is self-consciousness. The Understanding simply lacks the conceptual resources with which to adequately conceive ‘inversion’ and ‘infinity’ (even though these concepts have arisen immanently within the Understanding’s attempts to comprehend the world). It “apportions to two worlds, or to two substantial elements, that which is a difference in itself” (PS 102; PG 130; my emphasis). Difference has come to be an aspect of the in itself, through the gradual migration of what was taken to be merely for consciousness into the in-itself of the inner world. But insofar as this is admitted, the in-
itself can no longer be represented as an object for the Understanding, whose raison
d’etre is to look behind the difference and changeability of appearance, to the real,
unitary substrate that dwells beneath. The Understanding has worked itself into its
current position by gradually admitting epistemic aspects that it took to belong merely to
its own subjectivity (perceptual differences found in appearance), into its objective
assessments of the world, most crucially in its activity of explanation. It has thereby
worked itself into epistemic irrelevance by virtue of the rigorous requirements of its own
criterion: that the objective inner being of the outer world be kept distinct from the
differences and relations the Understanding took to belong to its own subjectivity. In
sticking to this paradigm, it could not accommodate a conception that has arisen
immanently within its own investigations: ‘infinity’. Why not? ‘Infinity’ is what Hegel
terms the concept of the unity of sameness within difference, or self-relation within
difference. This concept captures certain relations found in the natural world (e.g.
magnetism, electricity) that the Understanding could not think without contradiction,
given the bi-polar manner in which it understood its object. But even more significantly,
the description of infinity as self-relation within difference captures in a more complete
sense what is distinctive of another shape of consciousness: self-consciousness.

As a newly emerged shape of consciousness, self-consciousness is as ignorant of the
systematic relation it has to the Understanding, as the Understanding is to the relation it
has to self-consciousness. Each has its own distinctive object; the manner in which they

— If the reader still finds this notion obscure, this may partially be due to the fact that “self-relation” only completely applies to ‘self-consciousness’, in the way one relates to one’s own thinking: in the way ‘I’ relate to ‘my’ thinking. I will say more about this shortly.
Chapter Three

Jay A. Gupta 179

relate is only for us:

...consciousness, in the way that it immediately has this Concept [infinity], again comes on the scene as a form belonging to consciousness itself, or as a new shape of consciousness, which does not recognize in what has gone before its own essence, but looks on it as something quite different (PS 102, PG 130).

This passage, beyond what is specifically under consideration, describes a general feature of the Phenomenology, i.e. the “non-scientific” aspect of ordinary experience. In the course of ordinary experience we may not feel any particular pressure to relate our e.g. religious lives to our aesthetic lives. But these are all forms of experience according to Hegel, and as such, they can be systematically related (by us) insofar as they are all spheres that consciousness takes itself to have experience of. There is no necessary demand for experiential coherence by consciousness; it is content to grasp at least some of its experience as discontinuous. The formal continuity (rooted in the structure of consciousness) from shape to shape is something that the phenomenological observer grasps; this is really the essence of “phenomenological science” as Hegel conceives it.

So, in the specific case of ‘self-consciousness’ having emerged from the self-defeating efforts of the Understanding, ‘self-consciousness’ is, from the standpoint of consciousness, its own experiential sphere, with no necessary relation to the activities or attitudes consciousness may associate with “understanding” something.

To return to our exposition, how precisely does ‘infinity’ capture what is distinctive of self-consciousness? This is crucial to grasping how the Understanding and self-consciousness are systematically related, not from their own independent epistemic standpoints, but for us. Hegel offers this description of self-consciousness:

I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so I am immediately aware that what is
distinguished from myself is not different [from me]. 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 from me (PS 102, PG 130).

This passage in a dramatic way describes what up until now Hegel has somewhat obscurely been referring to as the unity of sameness within difference, i.e., "infinity".

What has thus far characterized the self-undermining movement of the later stages of the Understanding is precisely the manner in which 'infinity' as a kind of paradigm is able to descriptively capture crucial aspects of certain natural phenomena. However, what better instance of "self-relation within difference" can there be than the manner in which 'I' relate to myself in thought, i.e. the manner of relation distinctive of self-consciousness? This is precisely what Hegel is trying to show; the logic of the Understanding has been pressed to the point where what is being described adheres to a new logic, the logic of self-relation within difference. 'I' take myself to be a unity, one thing; yet in thought, there is clearly a sense in which 'I' relate to myself. In relating to myself, I relate to what is other, yet this other is me. More specifically, in thought I take myself to be an individual, yet clearly there is a sense in which 'I' relate to myself in e.g. acts of reflection and memory, which suggests some sort of multiplicity. 'I' can reflect on who 'I' am; 'I' can therefore make myself an object of inquiry. 'I' relate to myself insofar as 'I' can be an object for myself; this reveals a moment of difference. But insofar as that to which I am related is myself, 'I' and myself are an identity: an identity that maintains itself within a reflective structure of difference, or "self-relation within difference".

The logic of self-relation is so distinctive here, that clearly something other than what
we have observed to be logically the case in the characteristic moves of the
Understanding has come to light. This is Hegel’s point; a new shape of consciousness
has emerged with its own distinctive object, one no longer graspable via the distinctive
epistemic logic of the Understanding (the tremendous peculiarity here in self-
consciousness is, of course, that consciousness and object are at least implicitly the
same).

What follows is susceptible of significant misconstrual:

The necessary advance from the previous shapes of consciousness for which their truth
was a Thing, an ‘other’ than themselves, expresses just this, that not only is
consciousness of a thing possible only for a self-consciousness, but that self-
consciousness alone is the truth of those shapes (PS 102, PG 130).

This might be interpreted to mean that the correct comprehension of the structure of self-
consciousness grounds any proper theory of knowledge or metaphysics (we will consider
this position in the next chapter). However, on the non-metaphysical reading, this
passage is merely a comment on the systematic relation among shapes of consciousness;
it briefly calls attention to the methodological issue of “determinate negation”, or how
one shape of consciousness arises through the gradual termination of another. This is
corroborated in what follows, in what I have called the “collapse of the syllogism”:

Raised above perception, consciousness exhibits itself [syllogistically] closed in a unity
(zusammengeschlossen) with the supersensible world through the mediating term of
appearance, through which it gazes into this background [lying behind appearance]. The
two extremes [of this syllogism], the one, of the pure inner world, the other, that of the
inner being [the Understanding] gazing into this pure inner world, have now collapsed,
and just as they, qua extremes, have vanished, so too the middle term, as something other
than these extremes, has also vanished” (PS 103, PG 131).

There is a figurative quality to this passage that encourages an interpretive amnesia
regarding Hegel’s phenomenological method; but this passage nonetheless makes the
most sense when interpreted in light of that method. This passage is a reiteration of how the polarized structure of intelligibility for the Understanding, expressed for us as a syllogism, collapses so that what was for consciousness comes to thematize the domain of what was taken to be in itself. That is, those elements which constitute the determinacy of appearance – movement, change, difference, elements believed by the Understanding to have a status merely for it, gradually come to constitute the determinacy of the "inner world"; and when this has decisively happened, one might say a new "paradigm" emerges. The result of the self-defeating process of the Understanding describes a self-differentiating movement definitive of 'self-consciousness'. 'Self-consciousness' names a new shape of consciousness, a shape of consciousness that in its self-differentiating and self-relating movement, has itself for its object. But the structure of consciousness, that is, consciousness as it breaks down into the abstract determinations of knowledge and truth, is retained. Therefore, the dynamic effort at unifying these determinations, what Hegel refers to as the "motion of consciousness", is also retained.

III. Conclusion: “Who Are ‘We’?” Revisited

To conclude this chapter, we should understand two things: 1) why it is that the emergence of self-consciousness signifies a decisive turning point and direction in the Phenomenology; 2) why it is that the book does not end with the emergence of self-consciousness. For in regards to this latter point, there is at least a surface resemblance between the structure of self-consciousness and the structure Maker describes as the
actual terminus, where consciousness has its own structure of knowing in view (see 3.I.C.).

Hegel says:

A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much ‘I’ as ‘object’. With this we already have before us (für uns) the concept of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is – this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent (für sich) self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’. It is in self-consciousness, in the Concept of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind it the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present (PS 110-11, PG 139-40).

We will have made considerable progress in answering the two questions above if we can elicit the implications of this passage. Towards this end, I will focus on comments made by K.R. Dove in his essay “Hegel’s Deduction of the Concept of Science”. There he has made a plausible connection between the ‘we’ indicating our phenomenological perspective as readers, and the ‘we’ of Spirit.

I have argued that the Phenomenology begins with an absolute presupposition, consciousness, and the unity of its two basic determinations, knowledge and truth, or what we will here refer to (in accordance with both the passage and Dove’s discussion) as ‘I’ and ‘object’. *We* (the phenomenological readers) entertain the possibility of this unity; we in a sense *allow* consciousness its presupposed identity with the object. From its own standpoint, consciousness is absolutely certain of its knowledge and its identity with the object, but if called upon to justify its certainty or conviction, it must produce the criterion or truth conditions for its certainty (see 3.I.B.). The relation of ‘I’ to its object
implies a ‘we’; it implies, in a sense, a community between them.\(^45\) In effect, “the Wir’ is...pre-thematically posited by consciousness as the necessary condition of its claim to absoluteness” (HD 275). Consciousness, in an effort to demonstrate the ground of its knowledge, i.e., to produce its criterion, progressively thematizes this ground, i.e., progressively thematizes the ‘we’ (by “thematize” I mean to indicate that subjectivizing activity characteristic of consciousness as it “undertakes its investigations”, or goes through its experience). However, in the gradual elicitation of this ground (the implicit community of ‘I’ with ‘object’), the way is being paved for a final elimination of these terms in the complete emergence of the ‘we’. Rather than any particular knowledge being justified with reference to a particular in-itself (the task consciousness sets for itself), the final emergence of the ‘we’, or Spirit, signifies the elimination of this kind of opposition, i.e., the elimination of the determinacy of consciousness, which is always pre-determined as an opposition of ‘I’ and ‘object’ (even though their epistemic unity is presupposed in ‘knowledge’; consciousness at every turn attempts to justify its certainty of this unity).

This movement should be familiar from our discussion of the Understanding: the Understanding’s convictions had to be progressively modified to accommodate emerging contradictions, to the point where when the unity of the Understanding and the object was established, both the Understanding and its distinctive object were eliminated in a new

\(^{45}\) The relation between consciousness and an object construed as a “we” must here sound highly figurative; but it is precisely the strategy of the argument to show that such a notion only really begins to make sense when the “object” is another self-consciousness. This point will be brought out in greater detail.
shape of consciousness. The "unity" of understanding and object occurred in the complete collapse of the syllogism, i.e. the movement and difference characteristic of the subjective aspects of understanding collapsed into the independent, inert unity of the object. The result was a kind of self-objectifying movement, characteristic of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is, in a sense, a very literal combination of elements that were kept rigorously apart in the syllogism of the Understanding. Be that as it may, the point I am now trying to put forward is that in this collapse a 'we' emerges, i.e. the implicit 'we' grounding the Understanding's epistemic convictions, the implicit unity of 'I' and object. This particular transition in the Phenomenology is crucial, because 'self-consciousness' might be said to be the very form of 'we', the building block of Spirit.

Again, the final emergence of the 'we' in the Phenomenology is the emergence of the abstract structure of Spirit, a structure purged of the opposed determinations of 'I' and 'object'. The full structure of Spirit does not emerge with the emergence of self-consciousness, because the form of consciousness itself has not been eliminated; thus consciousness still takes itself to be related to some object (at first simply itself, and then other self-consciousnesses), and the journey continues.

Dove argues that the 'we' gradually emerging from the motion of consciousness in its final form is precisely that which Hegel refers to as "Spirit knowing itself as Spirit", the completed form of Spirit in which the form of consciousness ('I' and 'object') has been eliminated (in the complete emergence of the 'we' that unifies them). This result is therefore "a pure structure of interaction in which all members participate, not in virtue of any determinate characteristics they have as individuals and not in virtue of any claims
that they have to the truth, but purely and simply as members” (HD 277). From the standpoint of consciousness, the “spiritual unity” thus described is clearly incomprehensible. That is because it is an immediate unity whose emergence has logically entailed the elimination of the form of consciousness, and therefore of the manner in which consciousness makes things intelligible to itself, i.e. as concept in relation to object. This immediate unity, this “we” of Spirit, constitutes the complete elimination of the determinacy of consciousness, i.e. of ‘I’ and ‘object’, because the full implication of ‘we’, its complete emergence, renders any determination from the standpoint of ‘I’ relating itself to an object moot, i.e., that standpoint is no longer logically present. This result is also, on Dove’s reading, how what is for consciousness and what is for us meet, “we...come to see that we are the ‘Wir’ posited in consciousness’ absolute beginning” (HD 279). This realization will occur “only as the result of our detailed comprehension of how consciousness, our subject-matter, itself progresses from its absolute beginning to its final sublimation in the ‘Wir’” (HD).

With this reading in mind, particularly the motion of consciousness interpreted as the gradual emergence of a ‘we’, it is easier to spot how crucial the transition from ‘Understanding’ to ‘Self-consciousness’ is, or in other words, understand why Hegel says that for the first time we “have before us the concept of Spirit.” The “community” consciousness is attempting to establish between itself and its object, which in the Understanding is expressed in merely epistemic terms, decisively advances, because the kind of object consciousness now confronts is implicitly itself: another self-consciousness. However, this self-consciousness appears, in accordance with the
determinations of consciousness, as an object, and not merely as the conceptually transparent relation between ‘I’ and itself which came as the logical result (for us) of the Understanding’s termination. It rather comes on the scene, in accordance with what we have said about the difference between our phenomenological standpoint and that of consciousness, having no idea of its systematic relation to the shapes of consciousness which preceded it. That is to say, it comes on the scene with the implicit demand that its own self-relation (of ‘I’ to itself) become real in and through the recognition of another self-consciousness, which stakes just as much claim to its own reality as does the former. That is why the Phenomenology does not end merely with the systematic or logical emergence of self-consciousness; we must be persuaded in the way consciousness persuades itself of the spiritual reality of other self-consciousnesses.

The complete opacity and initial non-recognition of one self-consciousness in relation to another, that is of each taking the other as merely an object and not invested with the spiritual reality each is abstractly certain of having for itself, logically results in opposition and servitude of one to the other. It is only in the long process of such objectifying relations of self-consciousness (which in Chapter 5 includes an epistemic dimension of the sort found in the first three chapters) that the final community of “we” emerges. That is Spirit knowing itself as Spirit, no longer in the form of a bi-polarizing, objectifying consciousness, but as an immediate unity, with a content that is yet to be determined. This is implicitly the standpoint from which Hegel’s theory of determinacy
may be conducted, i.e. a standpoint that itself is yet to be determined.46

46 I realize that this final discussion concerning the expansion of the 'I' into 'we' has occurred at a rather condensed and high level of abstraction. I will revisit the issue at the outset of the next chapter.
Chapter Four: Science, Spirit, and Self-Consciousness

Chapter VIII ("Absolute Knowing") of the Phenomenology is exceedingly ambiguous. This is unfortunate, since it is there that we might expect firm pronouncements concerning the terminus of the motion of consciousness, and confirmation of the view I have termed "eliminationist". Thus far I have supported my claims concerning the subject matter and argument of the Phenomenology by examining both the method Hegel outlines in his Introduction, and an example of its application in the text. I have claimed that this example, the transition from Chapter III to Chapter IV, is particularly significant in that it suggests an overall tendency or direction the motion of consciousness takes on the path towards its terminus; but we have as of yet discovered no precise formulations in the text concerning such a terminus. Despite the overall ambiguity of Chapter VIII, it deserves close attention; in fact, there are several passages that offer fairly clear support for the eliminationist thesis. Hence, we will consider these in the first section before moving on in the second section to the more decisive comments Hegel makes concerning his self-understanding of the Phenomenology, offered in the Science of Logic.

I will not ignore the ample evidence for what at the outset of the last chapter I called the "transformationist" reading – that school of interpretation that understands 'Spirit' in terms of the structure of consciousness, and that believes this structure, now grounded or justified, is retained and carried over into the Logic. Below I will point to passages and discuss issues of translation that favour this reading. I will also consider in Section Three the work of a sophisticated representative (Robert Pippin) of the metaphysical/transformationist reading. I will argue that the solution to the interpretive
conflict between metaphysical and non-metaphysical readers is to consider closely what Hegel believes is \textit{required} in order to do philosophical theory, what Hegel calls “science”.

I. Absolute Knowing

I have stressed that there is a certain tendency to the motion of consciousness in the previous chapter, via an explication of “Force and the Understanding”, that lends intelligibility to what the terminus of that motion might be. I described that tendency as the movement from the ‘I’ of consciousness towards the ‘we’ of Spirit. The issue is how to understand the latter, the ‘we’ of Spirit. As noted at the outset of the last chapter, the concept of ‘Spirit’ seems to suggest the idealist picture of an enlarged or collective version of consciousness, the hallmark of the transformationist reading. In contrast, the interpretation under consideration here, what I have called the eliminationist thesis, takes the structure of “Spirit that knows itself as Spirit”, insofar as it is a \textit{result} of the motion of consciousness, to be a structure that has been \textit{purified} of the determinations of consciousness, namely ‘I’ and ‘object’, a result that Hegel terms an “immediate unity” (\textit{unmittelbare Einheit}) (PS 491, PG 564). The movement of the ‘I’ of consciousness towards the ‘we’ of Spirit should therefore, on this interpretation, be viewed as a movement towards an immediate unity that lacks the determinations, and therefore the structure, of consciousness. “Force and the Understanding” and its transition into “self-consciousness” is a particularly instructive microcosm of this overall tendency. Comments Hegel makes in Chapter VIII will help us to see why.
There Hegel says that "In itself, Spirit is that same movement which cognition is...the transformation...of the object of consciousness into an object of self-consciousness, i.e., into an object which is eo ipso eliminated, in other words into the Concept" (PS 488, PG 561).¹ What does this mean, "an object that is eo ipso eliminated"? We saw that when the Understanding passed into the pure structure of self-consciousness, there was what we might call a self-eliminating difference between the 'I' and its object, or in other words, between the 'I' and itself. This was, as Hegel says, the first appearance for us of the concept of Spirit. In this concept, we see for the first time a transparent community between 'I' and 'object', described as an identity that maintains itself in difference. 

Here is a short refresher concerning how self-consciousness is "identity that maintains itself in difference" (I am merely repeating some of what I said in the last chapter): In thought, I take myself to be an individual, yet clearly there is a sense in which 'I' relate to myself in e.g. acts of reflection and memory, which suggests some sort of multiplicity. 'I' can reflect on who 'I' am; 'I' can therefore make myself an object of inquiry. 'I' relate to myself insofar as 'I' can be an object for myself; this reveals a moment of difference. But insofar as that to which I am related is myself, 'I' and myself are an identity: an identity that maintains itself within a reflective structure of difference.

However, the manner in which self-consciousness appears on the scene for consciousness (as distinguished from "for us") is as follows:

Consciousness, as self-consciousness, henceforth has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however for self-

¹ I am making use of K.R. Dove's unpublished translation of Chapter VIII, but still referring to the Miller translation, and the Philipp Reclam text.
consciousness has the character of a negative; and the second, viz. itself, which is the true essence, and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object. In this sphere, self-consciousness exhibits itself as the movement in which this antithesis is eliminated, and the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit to it” (PS 105, PG 134).

Self-consciousness appears on the scene immersed in the world of sensation and perception, i.e. amidst a world of concrete objects that can be seen and felt, perceived and encountered. Among these, other self-consciousnesses appear in this objective form of sense-perception, as objects, and self-consciousness (considered as a shape of consciousness) does not grasp their spiritual unity with itself, i.e., it does not recognize that its own self-relation as a form of consciousness, of ‘I’ to ‘I’, can in principle be grasped in terms of the relation it has to an ‘I’ of another self-consciousness. The immediate unity of Spirit (the result of the Phenomenology) can only come as a result of a long process of mediation through the recognizing of and recognition from the definite-existence (Dasein) of others, otherwise self-consciousness “is only the motionless tautology of ‘I am I’” (PS 105); one might say it remains a “stillborn” abstraction.

Hence, the mere “objectness” of self-consciousness, in the form of another self-consciousness, is eo ipso eliminated once this self-relation within difference has been genuinely recognized, not merely as a formal certainty for us (at the beginning of Chapter IV), but as an actuality for consciousness, where the definite-existence of others is an internally mediated aspect of self-consciousness, and not merely something that stands in a relation of otherness to it (in Chapter VIII). But here the elimination of the object entails the elimination of the “subject”, since the subject is the object. In other words, the two terms of the relation, ‘I’ and ‘object’ have been eliminated in the emergence of
the ‘we’ they imply.

This state of affairs is called “pure knowing”, or “Spirit that knows itself as Spirit”. It is here (in Chapter VIII) that “Spirit has...terminated the movement of its development in Shapes, in so far as knowing is afflicted with that difference of consciousness which is now overcome. Spirit has attained the pure element of its definite-existence, the Concept” (PS 490, PG 564). The “Concept”, taken here as the entirely indeterminate result of the movement of consciousness, may now develop in the theory of determinacy (logic). This possibility is the result of the “difference of consciousness”, i.e., the bifurcation of knowing into the determinations of ‘I’ and ‘object’, having been eliminated. Hegel says:

In Science, the stages of Spirit’s movement no longer present themselves as determinate shapes of consciousness, but rather, since the difference of consciousness has returned into the Self, as determinate Concepts and as a movement of these Concepts which is organic and founded in its self. Whereas every stage in the phenomenology of Spirit is the difference of knowing and truth and the movement in which this difference eliminates itself, Science, on the other hand, contains neither this difference nor the eliminating of it (PS 491, PG 564).

In the next section I will comment upon the perhaps confusing use of the term ‘self’ in this passage and others, but the key notion for us here is that “Science” contains neither

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2 “Therefore when Spirit has attained the Concept, it unfolds definite-existence and movement in this ether of its life, and is Science” (PS 491, PG 564).

3 ‘Concept’ may also present confusions, because of its subjective connotations. Such connotations are precisely what the Phenomenology is designed to eliminate. But this is not license to infer that Hegel wishes to develop an idealist substance metaphysics. ‘Concept’ must be here considered as minimalistically as possible, without the determinations of subjectivity or objectivity attached to it. This is a tall order, but again, the hardest thing Hegel demands of his reader is restraint in the always-at-the-ready impulse to bring pre-established determinations and concepts to bear. ‘Concept’ can therefore at the outset be considered as a kind of indeterminate medium wherein determinacy becomes thinkable. Its “form” as Hegel says (see below) is the formal unity of cognition with truth, such that there are no lingering presuppositions concerning “where” knowing takes place in relation to some other domain,
the difference between knowing and truth, nor the elimination of it. The theory of determinacy does not proceed in the manner of what McDowell calls “constructive philosophy”, or to put in terms from the Phenomenology, it does not proceed from the standpoint of consciousness: “Science” does not attempt to give an account of how concepts connect with reality to form that hallowed epistemic status “knowledge of truth”, a unity both absolutely presupposed (by the ‘I’), and sought after in the same inquiry (see 3.III). A stage of “Science”, as distinguished from a stage of phenomenology, “has the form of the Concept, [i.e.] it unites the objectlike (gegenständliche) form of truth and the form of the knowing Self in an immediate unity (PS 491, PG 564; my emphasis). As immediate, the determinations of knowledge and truth do not retain their status as independent determinations, they are neither mediating nor mediated as two determinations;¹ they have collapsed into a non-determined immediacy. Whereas theorizing from the standpoint of consciousness always involves two determinations, knowledge and truth, “instead, the pure Shape of the scientific stage, liberated from its appearance in consciousness, i.e., the pure Concept and its progression, depends upon the pure determinacy of the stage and nothing else” (PS 491, PG 564-65).

These descriptions of “Science” may sound bewildering, so in the next section I will spend some time clarifying what Hegel means by the term, as well as (in accordance with what I have generally tried to draw attention to) show what Hegel believed was required

¹ This is what occurs at every phase of the Phenomenology.
II. What Is Required for Logic?

What does it mean to think “pure determinacy”, and to not think it from the standpoint of consciousness? We now have occasion to examine Hegel’s opening comments in the Science of Logic. It is here that Hegel speaks of what is required to do “logic”. It is in the analysis of these requirements that the eliminationist thesis acquires particular force.

A. Logic and Determinacy

To begin with, we should clarify what Hegel means by “logic”, and this in turn should clarify how it relates to what might seem to be a mysteriously resurfacing concept, ‘determinacy’. I have suggested that it is less misleading to refer to the Science of Logic as a theory of determinacy, rather than as a treatise on logic. That is because Hegel’s use of the term ‘logic’ is meant to be radical, in the double sense that it is revolutionary, and also rooted in the Greek concept of ‘logos’. ‘Logos’ in both Plato and Aristotle’s usages means both “Reason” in general (which should be construed not in merely mental terms, but as a metaphysical principle that governs all reality), and also “rational account”. This implicit identification of giving a rational account of something with ‘Reason’ (understood as a metaphysical principle), or to put it another way, this identification of the way in which things exist, with the manner in which they become intelligible, indicates for Hegel the special nature of the ancient’s conception of thinking: “this metaphysics believed that thinking (and its determinations) is not anything alien to the
object, but rather is its essence, or that things and the thinking of them...are explicitly (an und für sich) in full agreement, thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things forming one and the same content” (SL 45, WL I 38). Thinking is, on this conception, identified in principle with reality. There is no fundamental aspect of the world that remains forbidden to concepts, because again, there is a metaphysical identity between the very way in which things exist in the world, and the way in which things become intelligible to us (which is not to eo ipso make a substance claim; e.g., to infer that Plato or Aristotle were metaphysical “idealists” based on the foregoing would be invalid).

The modern conception of logic, taken as the science of thinking in general, rests upon what Hegel in the passage we are now considering calls the “reflective understanding”, but what in its more general form has become familiar to us in the preceding chapter as ‘consciousness’. The reflective understanding, which in our day shows up as “ordinary common sense”, or as what in the Phenomenology Hegel calls the “natural idea” (“natural” in the sense of “habitual”; see Chapter One.), takes it for granted that “truth rests on sensuous reality, that thoughts are only thoughts, in the sense that it is sense-perception which first gives them filling and reality and that reason, left to its own resources (an und für sich), engenders only mental fantasies” (ibid.). This conception of thinking as only thinking, takes on a systematic character when it is conceived as formal logic.

Hegel says, “it is understood that this thinking constitutes the mere form of a cognition, that logic abstracts from all content (Inhalte) and that the so-called second
constituent belonging to cognition, namely its matter, must come from elsewhere; and that since this matter is absolutely independent of logic, logic can provide only the formal conditions of truthful cognition and cannot in its own self contain any real truth...because just that which is essential in truth, its content, lies outside logic” (SL 43-44, WL I 36). The question of “content” is what is at issue. Formal logic, apart from the world that it symbolizes and represents, is conceived of as contentless, and in this respect it is indeterminate. However, if logic’s proper subject matter is thinking, then logic cannot be contentless: it is one of Hegel’s basic claims (insofar as it is admissible to state such claims prior to their exposition in “logic”) that it is incorrect to conceive of thinking, taken as a distinct subject matter, as essentially indeterminate with regards to its content.

Thinking is only conceived of as contentfully indeterminate when the conception is based on the bi-polar scheme of the “reflective understanding”, or consciousness. This scheme posits two spheres of determinacy, one formal, and the other contentful. Logic, understood as the science of thinking, rests

on the separation, presupposed once and for all by ordinary consciousness, of the content of cognition, and its form, or of truth and certainty. First, it is presupposed that the material of cognition is present in and for itself as a ready-made world apart from thought, that thinking for itself is empty and comes as an external form to the said material, fills itself with it and only thus acquires a content and so becomes real cognition (SL 44, WL I 36-7).

In the picture Hegel describes, ‘I’ is associated with form, and the objects of the world are associated with content or “matter”. In Chapter Two we traced this (“mentalist”) conception back to the Stoics, and saw it at work in the epistemology of Descartes, Hume, and Kant (which is really, in terms of the prevalence of this conception, to be very selective). This was to lend credence to Hegel’s claim that the conception amounts to an
unstudied, habitual assumption or idea (the "natural idea" (natürliche Vorstellung)). At any rate, Hegel, to state it in minimal terms, wishes to challenge the above conception in order to arrive at and develop a new conception of "logic".

That is indeed a minimal statement. For close attention to these opening comments of the Logic reveals that Hegel believes it is a requirement of "logic" that this presupposed epistemic division between form and content, as well as the concept of consciousness it rests on, be eliminated in order for Hegel's proposed logic to properly develop. Is such a requirement even possible? Hegel believes it is: "the contentlessness (Gehaltlose) of logical forms lies solely in the way in which they are considered and dealt with...If logic is supposed to be contentless, then the fault does not lie with its object but solely with the way this object is taken" (SL 48, WL I 41-2). This implies that logic (and hence thinking), taken as a distinct subject matter, is regarded as contentless solely because of the standpoint from which it is considered. It is at this juncture that Hegel reveals the proper standpoint from which the science of logic is to be considered, and he refers to the Phenomenology with reference to that standpoint:

In the Phenomenology of Spirit I have exhibited consciousness in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object to absolute knowing. The path of this movement goes through every form of the relation of consciousness to the object and has the Concept of Science for its result. This Concept therefore (apart from the fact that it emerges within logic itself) 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 through consciousness, all the shapes of which are eliminated (auflösen) in this Concept as in their truth (SL 48; WL I 42).

Here we have a fairly clear indication that the standpoint of science must be conceived

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5 "This reflection leads up to the statement of the standpoint from which logic is to be considered, how it differs from previous modes of treatment of this science which in future must always be based on this, the only true standpoint" (SL 48, WL I 42).
negatively, that is as a result of the elimination of every shape of consciousness. It may be helpful to recall that a shape of consciousness is to be conceived in terms of a knowledge-object set; that is, it is to be conceived not merely with reference to “knowledge” as it occurs in consciousness, but always also with reference to the object that consciousness thematizes in relation to itself as truth. The standpoint of science therefore is negatively conceived as that point where the relation of consciousness to an object has been eliminated.

There is unfortunately some ambiguity in Hegel’s choice of words to express this idea of “elimination.” In the above passage ‘auflösen’ is used in a way similar to that of ‘aufheben’. Compare what we just quoted, “all the shapes of...[consciousness] are eliminated (auflösen)” with a phrase quoted earlier from the Phenomenology, “every stage in the phenomenology of Spirit is the difference of knowing and truth and the movement in which this difference eliminates itself (sich aufhebt)”. The fact that auflösen can mean ‘resolve’ as readily as it can mean ‘eliminate’, raises a similar issue to the problem of translating (and understanding) aufheben: the terms occur at crucial interpretive moments, such that the translation of auflösen as ‘resolve’ and aufheben as ‘cancel’/‘preserve’ lend themselves to the transformationist reading, whereas the translation of auflösen as ‘eliminate’ and aufheben in the less technical senses of ‘abolish’, ‘remove’, or ‘eliminate’ lend themselves to the eliminationist reading. I believe the eliminationist reading prevails because of what Hegel claims is required for logic, a requirement that guides our translation, and an issue we will consider below.
Thus far we only have a description of the negative requirement; we now need an explanation of why it is required. To answer this, we shall need a more complete characterization of Hegel’s proposed theory. Specifically, we should ask where the content of logic or thinking issues from, if not the world? In a particularly illuminating passage, Hegel distinguishes the content of logic from two other ways of thinking (what may be construed as the approaches of ontology and epistemology):

What we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking about something which exists independently (für sich ausser) as a base for our thinking and apart from it, nor forms which are supposed to provide mere signs or distinguishing marks of truth; on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-determinations of thought are the content and the highest truth itself (SL 50, WL I 44).

Logic, if it were to proceed in the manner of traditional ontology, would be a thinking about Being; or, if we were to add a critical element, it would be about determining a valid or grounded subjective framework from which it would be possible to think about Being. Likewise, logic construed as an exercise in epistemology would examine or construct symbols and formal relations that are taken to have the capacity to reflect or represent truth, i.e. to represent the relations of actual things as they exist in reality.

Both approaches should be familiar to us by now as the approaches of philosophers of the “natural idea”, i.e., the approaches of those who theorize from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness. The first approach straightforwardly regards the content of thought as originating elsewhere, the second takes thought itself to be its object, but takes it to be something contentless in itself. That leaves Hegel’s third option: the necessary forms

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6 The sense of ‘necessity’ Hegel has in mind is peculiar to his Logic. It is not what is ordinarily understood as “formal necessity”; it is perhaps better understood as “teleological” necessity. But Hegel is not endorsing a method that arbitrarily posits a telos, and then observes how the development of
and self-determinations of thought are the content. Thought taken from this standpoint is no more nor less real than anything else. There is no presupposed sense in which thought must receive its content from some source other than itself to be regarded as determinate. This at least provides a clue as to why Hegel’s "science of logic" should be conceived as a theory of determinacy; this theory is to proceed as a pure categorial development where any concept of what is determinate develops within it, with no prior ontological or epistemological commitments or determinations as to what counts as real, or "mental". The removal of any such commitments and determinations is the task of the Phenomenology, and, as I have argued, this task is realized in the elimination of the concept of consciousness.

Hegel recognizes that there is a strong tendency to regard 'thought' as something essentially subjective. However, a review of the ordinary common sense that undergirds even the most sophisticated of scientific enterprises reveals that "inasmuch as it is said that understanding, reason, is in the objective world, that mind and nature have universal laws to which their life and changes conform, then it is conceded that the determinations of thought equally have objective value and existence" (SL 51, WL I 45). Hegel wishes to make this bit of common sense, which again, is presupposed by even the most arcane categories conforms to what is required by it. The "necessary" development of the categories is an immanent process, which can only be grasped by undertaking it. Such assurances would not amount to much if our task was to exposit the Logic, and surely detailing what Hegel means by "immanent necessity" is one of the great tasks an expositor of the Logic is faced with. For the purposes of this study, it must suffice to outline what Hegel believes to be required for the "science of thought" or theory of determinacy, with the idea that this theory might become more plausible with an accurate rendering of what is required for it. What is required for it happily corresponds with, as I argue throughout this study, contemporary anti-mentalist trends. I believe that this should, if I have succeeded, increase the appeal and plausibility of Hegel's "science".
and counterintuitive of scientific theories, philosophically plausible. But this presupposes having overcome a great obstacle, namely, the regarding of thought as essentially subjective, and as having in itself no objective significance. It presupposes having overcome the "opposition of consciousness": "the liberation from the opposition of consciousness which the science of logic must be able to presuppose lifts the determinations of thought above this...incomplete standpoint and demands that they be considered...in their own proper character, as logic, as pure reason" (ibid.). To regard thought as something primarily subjective, as something essentially (in itself) indeterminate with regards to truth content, generates insoluble contradictions on those occasions when it is asked how thought is able to represent, reflect, or grasp reality. That is in effect what the Phenomenology seeks to demonstrate. And insofar as this demonstration succeeds, and insofar as "liberation from the standpoint of consciousness" must be presupposed in order for the science of logic to proceed, logic itself begins with a presupposition: that all presuppositions have been eliminated, i.e., that any determinations made from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness concerning what is subjective, what is objective, what is real and what is not, have been eliminated. That is why the initial requirement for Hegel’s logic must be construed negatively, and further, why an overall interpretation of the Phenomenology should be “eliminationist”.

To hammer home the point, let us consider the following:

The Concept of pure science and its deduction are 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 brought out, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the object from the certainty of its self is completely eliminated (aufgelöst): truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth (SL 49, WL 43).
The *Phenomenology* is the "deduction" of pure science. This deduction primarily consists of one thing: the elimination of the separation between the object and the certainty of its self. What precisely does this mean? I believe that this formulation is a telling inversion of the usual manner of speaking of a concept in relation to its object, i.e., of speaking and proceeding resolutely from the standpoint of the 'I'. The above passage is rhetorically urging the reader to not comprehend the result (of the *Phenomenology*) as a new configuration of subjectivity or consciousness, i.e. one where certainty from the standpoint of consciousness has been achieved. The attitude of "certainty", far from having to be justified with reference to some object, is ultimately unintelligible without its presupposed separation from objects having been eliminated.

The usual conception is rather different. We see that from particular cases where some epistemic conviction or certainty must be justified, there is in the history of philosophy a general epistemological inference being made again and again concerning the principled separation of 'consciousness' from 'objects of truth', which in turn reinforces the epistemological decree that 'knowledge' must be understood as certainty or belief which has received some kind of outer (or "otherly") justification, presumably via a connection to truth (see II.3.B). The *Phenomenology* can be viewed as an attempt to show that 'certainty' and 'truth', determined from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness, have become abstract concepts in the service of a certain epistemological scheme. This is of course not to imply that wherever there is 'certainty' there is 'truth'; these terms have a perfectly natural employment in ordinary language with reference to,
again, *particular* cases where someone may be asked to justify why they "feel so certain" about something. We are talking about the inference from such particular cases to the existence of a general epistemological scheme that divides reality into two essential, opposed determinations, and that understands things accordingly. There is no epistemic situation in which the scheme is taken to have no application by those who implicitly or explicitly adhere to it. It is a presupposed framework with universal epistemic application. But Hegel's claim is that its universal applicability is spurious. In a sense, Hegel can be viewed as trying in the *Logic* to establish what the appropriate universal framework of intelligibility is, from the ground up, with no epistemic presuppositions.

By the end of the *Phenomenology*, no epistemological priority is to be given to either 'certainty' or 'truth'. The result of the *Phenomenology* renders such prioritization epistemically moot; that is what we are to understand by these determinations as having been "eliminated". Consider:

> Thus pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the subject matter in its own self, or the subject matter 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 being in and for itself is the known Concept and the Concept as such is being in and for itself" (ibid.).

'Thought' here is not to be regarded in terms of the subjectivity of consciousness. And that is to say, thought is not to be distinguished from the subject matter, in its own *self*. 'Self' is here no longer a term that is to be taken as belonging to a consciousness that takes itself to stand in opposition to some object, some subject matter. As we discussed with reference to the prior passage, this formulation (under consideration) also suggests that the subject matter, construed as some object, is not to be distinguished or conceived
apart from *its* self, suggesting a radical departure from the usual epistemic procedure of beginning from the standpoint of an ‘I’ that makes a connection with *its* object.

Nonetheless, does the formulation above with its reference to “self” not suggest the subjectivity of consciousness? What does ‘self’ mean here? I suggest that it does not refer to the structure of consciousness, but rather to the “immediate unity” of Spirit that is the result of the *Phenomenology*. As an immediate unity, Spirit is not simply the structure of consciousness writ large. It is a (presumed) structure that, as of yet, thoroughly lacks any determination whatsoever. But what does ‘self’ mean with regards to such a structure? Rather than being a determination of consciousness, which refers to *its self* in opposition to some object, it rather signifies a mode of pure relation\(^7\) that we saw formally completed as ‘self-consciousness’. As a term of relation, it does not refer primarily to consciousness and its specific determinations of ‘I’ versus ‘object’. If it must be taken in any preliminary way (and Hegel says that all of these characterizations are merely preliminary to the science, and have their proper exposition in the science itself), ‘self’ is a logical designation for a kind of relation, epitomized by the relation of “identity within difference”\(^8\) which we saw emerge from the contradictions of the Understanding to describe ‘self-consciousness’. Pure “self-relation” is therefore another way of characterizing the terminus of the *Phenomenology*, as long as ‘self’ is understood not in terms of the subjective structure of consciousness, but rather as a logical prefix that

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\(^7\) Terms of relation: ‘up’, ‘left’, ‘before’ etc. I believe ‘self’ is to be similarly construed.

\(^8\) Again, if this phrase presents a difficulty, it is always useful to remember what it paradigmatically describes, the relation of an ‘I’ (an “identity”) to itself as it engages in various forms introspection (a reflective structure of “difference”).
characterizes a mode of relation. This relation would be one that incorporates and internalizes "otherness" or difference as dynamic, integrated elements within a single concept. For example, 'self'-consciousness incorporates what, until that stage, had been standing in a relation of otherness to the Understanding, namely, the object. In this new conception ("self-consciousness") 'self' stands as a logical designator that indicates that 'I' and 'object' stand in a dynamic sort of relation that incorporates the dimensions of otherness and difference. But not such that 'objectivity' has been absorbed into a subjective realm; that is precisely why, I believe, it is a logical designator and does not imply something substantive, like 'consciousness'.

This reading is substantiated by the last line of the above passage ("As science, truth is pure self-consciousness in its self-development and has the shape of the self, so that being in and for itself is the known Concept and the Concept as such is being in and for itself.'), which takes care not to prioritize either "Concept" or "Being" in relation to one another. They have rather collapsed into an identity of self-relation; Hegel here uses the technical terms of the Phenomenology (what is in itself vs. what is for itself), to indicate that the distinction has collapsed, and I believe we can rightly say, that which makes the distinction, consciousness, has collapsed with it.

Even though passages such as the ones above can be interpreted to support a negative, eliminationist reading of the Phenomenology, it still may not be evident that this interpretation is required for "logic", which would greatly strengthen the appeal of this reading of the Phenomenology. The relevant passages (quoted above) are admittedly ambiguous, and Hegel does not apologize for this; Hegel frequently indicates that any
preliminary characterization of “logic” will of necessity be inadequate. The negative requirement becomes clearest in the actual attempt to begin the logic, which we shall consider next.

B. With What Must the Science Begin?

1. Two Senses of ‘Beginning’

Following Dove’s suggestion, we may best understand the negative requirement by remembering that a logic whose central question is “what is determinacy?” may not begin with any determinate idea. This question is to be progressively answered, not by bringing to bear arbitrarily posited criteria, determinations, or principles – be they construed as a given, generated via some external method, or imported from some other sphere (e.g. mathematics); rather, the question is answered from the self-determining nature of the subject matter itself. This movement which, “in its simplicity, gives itself its own determinacy and in its determinacy its equality with itself, [i.e.]...the immanent development of the Concept, this movement is the absolute method of cognition and at the same time is the immanent soul of the content itself” (SL 28, WL I 17). “Logic” is a theory of determinacy, because it is the very idea of determinacy itself that undergoes development, a development that occurs (as we have seen above) in the absence of a distinction between cognitive form imposed from without (qua method), and some content, taken as, e.g., originating from a brute given. This distinction must have been eliminated for the theory to proceed.

In this respect, though logic must begin without any presupposition, without any
determinate idea, there nonetheless does appear to be a presupposition, namely that the distinction, arising as it does from the "opposition of consciousness", has been eliminated. How can Hegel have it both ways? The answer provides the most lucid indication of the negative requirement.

Hegel says that there is a sense in which the beginning of logic, the "indeterminate immediate", the starting point from which every determinate concept is generated, is also mediated. That is because the "element" in which the logic develops is "pure knowing", what we saw to be the result of the Phenomenology. Pure knowing, Hegel says, is the final, absolute truth of consciousness. Is pure knowing then not the final form of consciousness, and therefore to be conceived as an absolutely validated subjective structure? Not according to Hegel:

Pure knowing as having gone together (zusammengegangen) into this unity [of the in-itself and for-itself] has eliminated all reference to an other and to mediation; it is without any distinction; and as thus distinctionless, ceases to be knowing; what is present is only simple immediacy (SL 69, WL I 68).

Pure knowing is simple immediacy, and as such, is really a misnomer. It is, as Hegel says, not really anything recognizable as 'knowing': there is no reference to any object, no distinctions employed, in short, no mediation of any kind. This is the standpoint, completely purified of all determination, out of which logic develops. As thus purified, logic begins without any presupposition. But insofar as this process of purification has taken place in order for logic to proceed, "logic, then, has for its presupposition the

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9 This word is a central Hegelian concept with characteristically wide senses. It refers most basically to that which is "non-immediate", i.e. that which is in some sense complex, determined, developed, characterized, or possessing distinctions.
science of manifested spirit [phenomenology]” (SL 68, WL I 67). However, it will be evident that this presupposition must be entirely negative in nature: it lacks any determinacy whatsoever. Insofar as logic must begin without any determination whatsoever, and insofar as the Phenomenology is presupposed by it, the Phenomenology must be read as having a purely negative result, namely, that all determinacy has been eliminated.

Consciousness is the mediating structure that determines some object; consciousness, minimally considered, is a structure of mediation that makes determinations. It reflectively determines an object in relation to itself as truth, and further thematizes this object as its knowledge, as for it (although it may take its knowledge to immediately reflect how the object is in itself). This structure, and its mediating activity, must therefore be that which is eliminated, if no determination whatsoever is to be admitted at the beginning of logic. The “presupposition” of logic is therefore entirely negative, entirely empty. It is the result of a long process of mediation, but is itself entirely immediate:

Here the beginning is to be made with being which is exhibited as having come to be through mediation, a mediation which is also an eliminating of its self; and there is presupposed pure knowing as the outcome of finite knowing, of consciousness...[On the other hand] 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. Consequently, it must be purely and simply an immediacy, or rather only immediacy itself. Just as it cannot have any determination against an other [as in the opposition of consciousness], so too it cannot contain within itself any determination, any content; for any such would be a distinguishing and an interrelationship of distinct moments, and consequently a mediation (SL 69-70, WL I 68-9).

I read Hegel as employing the word “presuppose” with reference to two distinct senses of ‘beginning’. In one sense Hegel is speaking about actually beginning the logic, in the
sense of doing it; it is in this sense that it "begins" without any determinate principles, ideas, or posits, i.e., without any presupposition. In another sense, Hegel speaks of beginning in terms of preparation, so one "begins" by eliciting and adopting the purified stance Hegel calls pure knowing, which includes a long process of negatively purifying any mediating factors or determinations that might be claimed as epistemic principles. It includes, in short, the process by which the structure of mediation and determination is eliminated, consciousness; it is this negative, preparatory process taken as a "beginning", that is presupposed.

Hegel confirms this dual sense of 'beginning' in the following passage. The content of pure knowing, the result of the Phenomenology, is an...

...absolute immediacy [that] has the character of something absolutely mediated. But it is equally essential that it be taken only in the one-sided character in which it is pure immediacy, precisely because here it is the beginning. If it were not this pure indeterminacy, if it were determinate, it would have been taken as something mediated, something already carried a stage further: what is determinate contains an other to a first (SL 72, WL I 72).

The beginning, taken as the actual starting-point of doing logic, must be grasped in the "one-sided" character of pure immediacy. This is simply a requirement of a logic that must begin without any determinate idea. But if logic must begin without any determinate idea, then it stands to reason that one must "begin" logic by ridding oneself of all determinate ideas whatsoever. This is the only sense in which it can be said that there is a presupposition involved in the beginning of logic.

10 A reasonable reservation one might have concerning the eliminationist reading is that it is too "one-sided". But here Hegel is saying that there is indeed an all-important sense in which the beginning is one-sided, insofar as it must be genuinely immediate. There must be a sense in which mediation has been eliminated from the beginning in principle.
2. Why Shouldn’t the Beginning Be Made from the Standpoint of ‘Consciousness’?

Above, we briefly indicated that the “self”-determining development of the subject matter of logic must be conceived such that ‘self’ is not taken to refer to the structure of consciousness. It is crucial to think of the self-determining development of logic without specific reference to the determinations of consciousness. The determinacy of the ‘I’ will emerge in due time, but as a determinate concept that has developed within the logic, that is, as something that can be theorized, and not as a habitually posited epistemic framework. To posit it as a foundational presupposition poses insuperable obstacles, of which the Phenomenology is a demonstration. In the present discussion, Hegel offers a number of reasons why the ‘I’, i.e. the standpoint of consciousness, should not have any foundational significance for philosophy.

a) It is both unnecessary and misleading.

In accordance with our thesis that theorizing from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness is nothing more than a habit, Hegel says the following:

When pure knowing is characterized as ‘I’, it acts as a perpetual reminder of the subjective ‘I’ whose limitations should be forgotten, and it fosters the representation that the propositions and relations resulting from the further development of the ‘I’ are present and can already be found in the ordinary consciousness – for in fact it is this of which they are asserted. This confusion, far from clarifying the problem of a beginning, only adds to the difficulties involved and tends completely to mislead...(SL 76-7, WL I 77).

To characterize the standpoint of pure knowing as ‘I’ is to willy nilly stress a subjective aspect that is to have been abandoned. The motivation for such a characterization is that there is something putatively clearer about proceeding from the familiar, ordinary region of the “self”. Far from this being the case, it encourages the “cruelest
misunderstandings", all rooted in the presupposed, but suppressed, subjective aspect. Therefore, since this standpoint is neither necessary nor helpful, it should be abandoned.

b) **It is superfluous and self-defeating.**

The whole point of the "deduction" of "pure knowing" in the *Phenomenology* is to free "the 'I' from the restricted significance imposed on it by the insuperable opposition of its object; but for this reason it would be superfluous at least to retain this subjective attitude and the determination of pure knowing"\(^{11}\) as 'I'" (SL 77, WL I 77). Retaining the subjective attitude only adds an unnecessary ambiguity into pure knowing, which should be conceived as wholly indeterminate, neither with reference to what is "subjective", nor with reference to what is "objective". But this superfluous conception (of subjectivity) does more than simply create ambiguity, it ultimately comes to characterize the standpoint of pure knowing, which is entirely self-defeating:

This determination [of pure knowing as 'I'], however, not only introduces the disturbing ambiguity just mentioned, but closely examined it remains a subjective 'I'. The actual development of the science which starts from the 'I' shows that in that development the object has and retains the perennial determination of an other for the 'I', and that the 'I' 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, WL I 77-8).

On Hegel's analysis, a philosophy that begins with the 'I' as a presupposition will never attain a truly objective content, because the "object" will always remain in principle something other to the presupposed subjective standpoint. *Or*, we might say here on Hegel's behalf, insofar as the object is something thematized by the 'I' as knowledge, the

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\(^{11}\) The *Logik* has 'Wesens' here rather than 'Wissens'; I do not know if Miller took the liberty of changing the word, but if he did, I agree with the emendation; 'Wesens' does not seem to make sense here.
object is something merely for consciousness, and hence something irreducibly subjective. In either instance, to regard pure knowing from the standpoint of the ‘I’ defeats the entire purpose of ‘pure knowing’s’ phenomenological deduction.

Starting with Chapter 3, I have tried to make it plausible that the eliminationist reading most closely reflects Hegel’s intentions by examining Hegel’s methodological claims, and how the development of the subject matter of the Phenomenology and the structure of its argument work together to substantiate those claims. Now in what follows (from here through Chapter Five) I wish to say that not only is this reading the most accurate, it is also the most interesting, useful, and relevant way of construing Hegel’s project.

III. The Metaphysical Interpretation and Its Consequences

In this section I propose to examine Robert Pippin’s impressive, but ultimately misleading, study of Hegel in Hegel’s Idealism. Pippin is useful to consider because he presents a very sophisticated case for the metaphysical-transformationist view, but nonetheless regards himself as forwarding a “non-metaphysical” interpretation (working through these sorts of complexities will allow us to better grasp the force of what I regard to be the genuine non-metaphysical interpretation that we have outlined above.). Pippin presents his interpretation as “non-metaphysical” because by ‘metaphysics’ he means the traditional claim that there can be a priori knowledge of substance. However, I believe the non-metaphysical interpretation is to be distinguished from a somewhat different

12 Robert B. Pippin, Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness, p. 5.
conception of ‘metaphysics’, namely, a conception where it is presupposed that ‘reality’ stands in opposition to a subjective structure that retains its own status and houses its own peculiar items (concepts, meanings, intentions), and where ‘reality’ is a putatively legitimating objective structure for the epistemic claims that proceed from the standpoint of the aforementioned subjective structure (called ‘consciousness’ in Hegel’s analysis). So the metaphysics in question is to be more directly conceived in structural terms as a dualistic or mentalist presupposition, rather than formulated merely in terms of what it is possible to know.

A. Pippin’s Genealogical Prism

But the reasons for Pippin’s curious hermeneutic mixture run deeper than an ambiguity in the employment of the term ‘metaphysics’. It is not clear in Pippin’s study to what degree he would like to account for Hegel’s thought in terms of its genetic influences, vs. to what degree he would like to simply explicate Hegel’s speculative attempt on its own terms. I will argue that from Hegel’s standpoint, the two are incompatible. When Pippin does the latter, he comes close to advancing central tenets of the non-metaphysical view; when he does the former he presents a systematically misleading interpretation based on an intellectual genealogy of Hegel’s “idealism”, as rooted in and responsive to the Kantian transcendental project. Hence, as intellectual genealogist, Pippin believes that the common theme inaugurated by Kant and inherited by Hegel is that “any subject must be able to make certain basic discriminations in any experience in order for there to be experience at all. Accordingly, such basic conceptual
discriminations cannot be derived from experience and, if it can be shown that such
distinctions are constitutive of the possibility of experience, cannot be refuted by
experience" (P 7-8). This is a "subject-centered" philosophical question, i.e., one posed
from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness, that I have argued is systematically
antithetical to Hegel's intentions.

Pippin continues:

Thus the formula for getting Hegel from Kant would be: Keep the doctrine of pure
concepts and the account of apperception that helps justify the necessary presupposition
of pure concepts, keep the critical problem of a proof for the objectivity of those
concepts, the question that began critical philosophy, but abandon the doctrine of "pure
sensible intuition," and the very possibility of a clear distinction between concept and
intuition, and what is left is much of Hegel's enterprise" (P 9).

However, as we have seen, according to Hegel we are not to "keep" anything when
commencing science, much less an "account of apperception". I am not being
unnecessarily contentious by stressing this. Though at every turn it is tempting to
construe what Hegel is doing in light of something more familiar, I believe we go wrong
by not strictly adhering to what we may call Hegel's "purity requirements" for his logic,
and those as we have seen require the elimination of every determination. Hegel's
project cannot be formulated from the putatively clearer standpoint of consciousness,
because then the answer to the question "what is determinacy?" (a question I take the
Logic to be answering\[13\]) will at the outset be destined to face the fundamental conceptual
impasse of epistemology: the determinations of 'I' remain in insoluble opposition to the

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13 Answering, but not explicitly asking. "What is determinacy?" can only be taken as a clue to the Logic; again, it is the great peculiarity of the system that it begins from thoroughgoing indeterminacy, so presumably to begin even with a question is to begin with too much. See Section I of the Introduction for a brief list of other characterizations of the Logic. Interpreting the Logic as a theory of determinacy is the hallmark of the non-metaphysical view.
alien determinacy of the ‘object’, and any apparent answer to the question *must* terminate in a subjectively bound aporia (see 3.I.B). The *Phenomenology* is precisely the demonstration of the self-defeating character of consciousness that, when taken as a kind of epistemic presupposition, leads to this aporia.

To begin with, we should point out a frequent move made by Pippin to justify his genealogical approach that aims to clarify Hegel’s “idealism”, and we must dismiss this approach as a viable alternative to the study of Hegel’s methodology as Hegel presents it. Pippin often isolates passages from Hegel that underplay the significance Hegel clearly places on his method, and that emphasize a more conventional notion of “intellectual indebtedness”, i.e., a notion of Hegel as involved in a philosophical conversation with his predecessors (mainly Kant) in an effort to clarify and improve upon certain concepts. A case in point is ‘apperception’. Pippin points to a section of the *Science of Logic* as clarifying “the magnitude of Hegel’s debt to Kant”, and as unequivocally setting “out the specific terms within which Hegel wants his own position to be understood” (P 17). He quotes Hegel as saying “It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the unity which constitutes the nature of the *Notion [Concept (Begriffs)]* is recognized as the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, as the unity of the *I think*, or of self-consciousness” (SL 584, WL II 254). To characterize Hegel’s discussion in the way Pippin does encourages readers to ignore the non-foundational role ‘consciousness’ is to play in Hegel’s science, whether ‘consciousness’ is construed as “transcendental”, “empirical”, or otherwise. Pippin seems to be persuaded that Hegel’s “position” is the result of an attempt to more adequately answer
the Kantian question "what are the conditions for the possibility of experience?"

Rather, Hegel's preliminary discussion of the Concept in the passage in question is sprinkled with reminders as to its specific mode of "deduction" which is emphatically non-transcendental. Any mention of the "original synthetic unity of apperception" with reference to the Concept should not be construed as evidence that Hegel is interested in answering Kantian questions, or in adopting a kind of Kantian position, however modified. How then should it be construed?

Hegel (in the area in question) acknowledges that the Concept, as the result of the foregoing immanent deduction of the logic, may remain obscure to his readers. It may require a more familiar mode of characterization, in the manner of what Hegel elsewhere calls the representations of "ordinary consciousness". Indeed, the determinations of the logic in general should not be foreign to the reader, they are the very thought-forms employed in ordinary consciousness in an infinity of ways; but in logic these thought-forms are presented in what Hegel claims is their pure, necessary self-development. Because of the fundamental familiarity of the thought-forms, Hegel says that the Concept (as one such thought-form) as "deduced" must "of course, be recognizable in principle in what is elsewhere presented as...the Concept" (SL 583, WL II 252). But this fact is

14 The Concept is, on the reading I endorse, the categorial structure wherein determinacy becomes thinkable as individuality, as a result of the dynamically integrated and properly grasped dimensions of universality and particularity.

15 For example, the thought-determination of 'quality' develops out of its own immanent logic into the thought-determination of 'quantity'. Both categories are employed in countless ways in our ordinary empirical concepts (and it is Hegel's radically realist claim that both categories as they determine themselves in thought actually parallel and recapitulate certain aspects of the way reality exists and determines itself).
emphatically not license to forget that “in the Science of the Concept its content and
determination can be guaranteed solely by the immanent deduction which contains its
genesis and which already lies behind us” (SL 582, WL II 252; second emphasis mine).
That is to say that while ordinary representations of what is meant by the “Concept” may
be helpful heuristically, they cannot replace a genuine comprehension of it, a
comprehension that can only come as a result of grasping the Science in the way that
Hegel says it must be grasped, as a kind of immanent development of thought-
determinations as they originate and arise within the Logic.

When Hegel makes the comment Pippin quotes about apperception, Hegel must be
read there as indulging his reader in characterizations culled from “ordinary
consciousness” in order to help clarify the nature of the thought-determination under
consideration (in this case the Concept). The passage should not provide support for
the claim that Hegel’s questions, approach, or position is a modified or evolved form of
Kantianism. To claim the former is simply to take Hegel seriously at his word, as in the
above quotation and elsewhere, where he talks about the genesis and unfolding of
determinacy in its own necessary self-development, and as having begun in pure,
indeterminate immediacy. He does not speak of the genesis and unfolding of
determinacy in terms of a modified Kantian principle. The possibility of the latter would
not make sense if my reading of Hegel’s methodological remarks is correct.

We should therefore be wary of any suggestion that Hegel is continuing or

16 Hence, Hegel continues, “it is not so easy to discover what others have said about the nature of the
Concept”, and “I will here confine myself to a remark which may help one to grasp the concepts here
developed and may make it easier to find one’s bearings in them” (SL 582, WL II 253; my emphasis).
completing, like Fichte, an essentially Kantian project; and we should likewise be wary of passages taken in isolation that seem to support this suggestion. The genealogical attempt to relate Hegel back to Kant raises a deeper interpretive concern than the mere propriety of making certain conceptual comparisons based on certain conceptual similarities. As hinted at above, we should infer nothing about Hegel’s intentions based on such similarities or occasional endorsements of this or that philosopher. We should rather be very attentive to what Hegel says about the peculiar nature of his project.

It is the constant attempt to construe Hegel’s words in light of the Kantian project that points to something systematically misleading in Pippin’s study (and in general what is systematically misleading in many metaphysical-transformationist interpretations); it is that Hegel is taken to be advancing a theory of self-consciousness in the Phenomenology, which somehow grounds or guides the development of the Logic. Hence Pippin states, “The subjectivity presupposed by the Logic, the subject presumably determining for itself, in Hegel’s ideal reconstruction, its own fundamental Notions [Concepts] is supposedly the Spirit introduced and developed in the PhG, a collective, socially self-realizing subject” (P 170). That Hegel is saying this is uncontroversial to Pippin; Pippin merely wonders if, given that this is Hegel’s position, Hegel can escape a number of difficulties raised by subsequent commentators. Pippin in the next chapter states:

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a Notional [Conceptual] “foundation” (Grundlage) of actuality refers to the conceptual conditions required for there to be possibly determinate objects of cognition in the first place, prior to empirical specification, and that the key element in such an investigation will continue to be a focus on the self-reflexive character of any possible judgment and what that condition requires (P 176; first emphasis mine).
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Pippin takes Hegel’s focus in the Logic to be, as carried over from the Phenomenology,
the irreducibly self-conscious character of judgment, and the conditions for its possibility.

It is for this reason that Pippin perceives a dilemma, stated a few lines down:

The PhG may have established the necessary role of "Spirit's spontaneous self-determination" in the possibility of cognition and purposeful action, but trying to determine the "logical requirements" of such determination, which "thought determinations," as Hegel calls them, are necessary for there to be such conditions, seems quite a difficult task. According to Hegel, such required Notions [Concepts] are "identical with" (in his speculative sense) "what there is in truth." This means that he has to be able to distinguish between, to use Kantian language, a condition merely necessary for a subject to make judgments about objects and conditions necessary for objects to be objects at all, and to explain why he is not presenting an unusual version of the former..." (P 176).

This passage reflects the tension in Pippin's study between his genealogical agenda and the requirements of an unbiased explication (he is sensitive to the latter). Self-consciousness, or what is found in "Spirit's spontaneous self-determination", is taken by Pippin to be a subjective structure, albeit communal, and he raises (on Hegel's behalf) the possibility of a skeptical aporia concerning how it is that logical concepts can maintain their objective validity when they are assimilated to or are the conditions of such "spontaneous self-determination". Pippin acknowledges Hegel's speculative claim concerning the moot distinction between thought and being in logical concepts ("Concepts are 'identical with'... 'what there is in truth'"). But this must appear to be a rather arbitrary claim if Hegel's Phenomenology is taken to be anything other than the deduction of that moot distinction. If it is taken to be a demonstration of the irreducible role of self-consciousness in the possibility of cognition and purposeful action, the problem will of course be carried over into the Logic. And this renders the Logic to be at best, an aporetic rehearsal of our empirical concepts in ideal form, rather than an account of determinacy qua determinacy.
B. Force and the Understanding Revisited

The interpretation Pippin gives to the transition from Chapter III to Chapter IV in the *Phenomenology* directly contrasts with the one I have given, and dramatically highlights the overall, systematic differences in our readings that I have indicated above. We will now examine Pippin’s discussion to better elicit these differences.

Pippin believes that Chapter III of the *Phenomenology* “completes what Hegel regards as the first and most significant stage in his *phenomenological justification of idealism*” (P 131, my emphasis). Pippin clearly thinks Hegel is out to justify the standpoint of “idealism”, the question is how Pippin believes Hegel effects this justification.

As a preliminary point I would like to emphasize that Pippin does not believe Hegel is adopting that complete attitude of “restraint” Hegel says is necessary for the phenomenological consideration of each shape of consciousness; Pippin at every turn attributes an argument to Hegel that helps along the self-eliminating path each shape takes. According to Hegel, consciousness makes its own distinctions and posits its own criteria in its own examinations. What is left for us is the pure phenomenological consideration of how from its own standpoint, utilizing its own presuppositions, consciousness “suffers violence at its own hands”, i.e. eliminates itself. Pippin’s non-acceptance or non-recognition of this essential point is evident in the interpretation he gives to crucial methodological points Hegel makes in the Introduction.

For example, consider Hegel’s statement that “consciousness simultaneously distinguishes itself from something and at the same time relates itself to it, or, as this is expressed, it is something for that consciousness” (PS 52, PG 72). Pippin takes this
quotation as evidence that Hegel,

again appropriating a good deal from Kant...can make this claim because he regards consciousness as judgmental, as having a ‘relation to objects’ by establishing one through its active judging. Consciousness relates itself to objects. And, I am claiming, it is because Hegel assumes that it does so apperceptively that he can also claim that consciousness distinguishes itself from its objects; it has established this relation, and so must hold in mind the object’s possibly being other than it has been construed to be for consciousness (P 104).

I want to claim that Pippin has gone considerably overboard in this characterization. To begin with, he diverts attention away from the essential methodological point that the kind of distinction-making described above is to proceed from the standpoint of consciousness by stressing rather that Hegel claims it does, and that this claim is laden with a Kantian influence. The obvious reply to my objection is that Hegel had to have literally made the distinction along with the claim in committing both to paper, and thus brought with them scores of his own presuppositions, specifically of an idealist variety, as Pippin argues. However, I believe that Hegel is simply describing what ‘consciousness’ in fact does (in a more general sense than Kantian apperceptive consciousness), which is to make certain kinds of distinctions from its own presupposed standpoint; this is crucial to the phenomenological method on my interpretation.

Further, I think it is the result of a rather forced reading to say that the determinations consciousness makes between knowledge for and within it, and truth as it exists independently in itself, come as the result of specifically Kantian presuppositions about the nature of consciousness, rather than that these determinations reflect an extremely distilled, abstract characterization Hegel has formulated of various epistemic distinctions "philosophical consciousness" has made in one way or another, not merely since Kant,
but since the death of Aristotle. But ‘Consciousness’ as Hegel describes it in the
Introduction is no more “Kantian apperceptive consciousness” than it is Cartesian or
Stoic consciousness. The description is meant to be general enough to encompass all of
these. And insofar as it is thus general, it should be enough justification for Hegel to
believe that, because he has provided an accurate description of distinctions
consciousness itself makes, he can remove himself from the picture, and let
consciousness proceed with its own examinations.

Pippin brings his methodological interpretation into his explications of Chapters I
through III. For example, Pippin speaks of Hegel’s “I must be able to say what I mean
condition” as operating in Chapter 1 (“Sense-Certainty”), which Pippin says repeats the
Kantian insistence on the apperception condition (P 132). This is a misleading way of
characterizing the self-refuting process ‘sense-certainty’ undergoes. The only thing that
Hegel supposes is that this shape of consciousness may be called upon to justify its
certainty (and it is entirely reasonable to assume that consciousness may require this of
itself); from there it is consciousness that proceeds with its own examination into the
truth of its knowledge, which it is at first certain of, but whose certainty becomes
weakened with each attempt at justifying this certainty. Admittedly, the only way we

17 See my second chapter for an argument to this effect; I view Kant as merely the keenest representative
of what started as the hallmark of Stoic philosophizing.

18 The general plight of consciousness in ‘Sense-Certainty’ is that it wishes to ground its knowledge in the
rich particulars it receives through sensation, but is only able to refer to them using universal indexicals
such as ‘now’, ‘here’, and ‘this’; consciousness is thus unable to say in particular what it means. But this
latter is a condition for epistemic justification, so consciousness is unable to justify its certainty, its
“sense-certainty”.

can be assured of Hegel’s authorial non-intervention into the proceedings is that the manner of consciousness’ justification accords with what we must reasonably expect a justification in this instance to resemble, or what we would require of a justification.

As unusual as it is, the Phenomenology is a work of philosophy written in the third-person. It differs from other narratives written from the same perspective insofar as the “protagonist”, consciousness, is presumed to have placed rigorous epistemic constraints on itself, and to thus proceed in accordance with them. Insofar as Hegel is performing anything, he is simply allowing the implications of particular modes of epistemic logic (“shapes of consciousness”), in general formulated in terms of a contradiction between knowledge and truth, to elaborate themselves. Hence, “I must be able to say what I mean” should be viewed as a condition consciousness itself introduces into its process of justifying its certainty; and we can be assured that this condition would be stipulated by consciousness and not merely insisted upon by Hegel, since the stipulation of this condition is simply an expression of what a justification would reasonably look like in this instance, with reference to this kind of certainty – sense-certainty.

Pippin continues the pattern of interpretation where Hegel is viewed as the central claim-maker of the Phenomenology, into his reading of Chapter III. Pippin believes that Hegel, with a heavy debt to Kant, is advancing a theory of ‘self-consciousness’, a theory that differs from Kant’s transcendental theory not in respect of goal or motivation, but in strategy and approach. Hence, according to Pippin, “they both assume...that the results of any natural or causal relation between an object and a sensory episode in me could not count as my representing the object unless I take myself to be representing that object,
unless the object is ‘for me' the object of my representing activity, and this self-conscious activity requires an account of its conditions” (P 132). According to Pippin, as Hegel develops his theory in Chapter III, he will, like Kant before him, center on the problem of unity and diversity, a set of considerations that leads Kant to deduce the operation of pure concepts of the understanding as conditions for the possibility of experience, and analogously, a set of considerations that leads Hegel to explicitly characterize the nature of ‘self-consciousness'. Our interpretation by contrast does not conflate the theoretical motives of Hegel with those of the theorizing consciousness under consideration, which in Chapter III is the Understanding. It is the Understanding that takes the “problem of unity and diversity” to be its problem, and it is we who consider the methods and procedure the Understanding employs in the course of resolving this problem. It is also we who observe the eventual elimination of this shape of consciousness: it does not survive the insoluble contradictions that arise as a result of adhering to its standards of objectivity (of ‘unity’ and ‘universality’).

The termination of this shape of consciousness is, as we saw in the last chapter, a “determinate negation”, which means that its elimination necessarily results in the emergence of a new shape of consciousness. ‘Understanding’ gives way to ‘self-consciousness’. On Pippin’s interpretation, ‘self-consciousness’ is the answer Hegel gives to the Kantian problems he is putatively addressing. On our reading, ‘self-consciousness’ is the immanent outcome of the gradual, determinate self-negation of the
Understanding. Therefore, the only sense in which Kant figures into Hegel’s phenomenological consideration of consciousness in Chapter III, is that like many other thinkers and theorists, Kant is an example of someone who utilized an aspect of the epistemic logic characteristic of ‘Understanding’ in the course of solving his own set of problems. In this respect, Hegel is no more addressing specifically Kantian problems than he is Newtonian or Cartesian ones. Pippin acknowledges that the scope of ‘Understanding’ includes “various themes in Aristotle, Leibniz, Newton, and, finally Kant” (P 133), but his error is to add Hegel to this list of philosophers trying to solve within a shared paradigm (‘consciousness’) “the common problem all of them...face – that the nonsensible/sensible duality we now find is required for there to be experience at all results in...a paradox” (P 133). This problem is merely a species of the more general “problem of consciousness”, which I have argued is the subject-matter of the Phenomenology as a whole. And the “problem of consciousness” is solved not by discerning the correct way in which a subject organizes reality to render its experience of it intelligible, but rather by eliminating a presupposed idea of what ‘subject’ in opposition to ‘object’ must mean. This is why the phenomenological distance we retain in our consideration of the subject-matter, ‘consciousness’, is so important. We, along with Hegel, are not attempting to solve a set of problems from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness for that standpoint, we are considering how problems addressed from that standpoint eventually result in the elimination of that standpoint as a legitimate epistemic

\[19\] I will say more about this difference below.
Hence, the following characterization of what Hegel is up to in Chapter III is highly misleading:

Since he [Hegel] also accepts, and will try to establish in this chapter, that there must be nonempirical principles for the unification and so discrimination of objects of experience, and that such rule-governed unification is effected by a subject spontaneously, that these principles are the results neither of empirical experience nor of intellectually intuiting what is "behind" such experience, he will have to provide some alternative account of the basis for a subjective determination of a possible experience (P 133-4; second emphasis mine).

Since Pippin believes that Hegel endorses and wishes to retain essential aspects of Kant’s transcendental idealism (minus the doctrine of pure intuitions), it follows that Hegel is also interested, as Pippin says, in providing an account of the basis for a subjective determination of a possible experience. This leads to Pippin’s systematically misleading account of the singularly crucial transition from Chapter III to Chapter IV, from ‘Understanding’ to ‘self-consciousness’:

What Hegel suggests, in the most famous section of the PhG, is that to understand any such self-legislated condition [for a possible experience], we must understand the requirements for a self-conscious subjectivity, and the issue of the objectivity of those requirements, in a much broader way, a way that takes account of the impossibility of grounding a subject’s spontaneous, transcendentally required constitution of experience in pure intuition. We must understand what a subject desires in its interchange with the world, and the way in which its satisfaction with its desires and strategies for satisfying them are mediated by its experience with other subjects (P 134).

It is of course correct to stress the role of ‘desire’ in this new section, but it is incorrect to attribute Kantian motives to Hegel in the introduction of this concept. To do the latter is to ignore the intended rigour of Hegel’s method. I sought to demonstrate in the last chapter that the development of “Force and the Understanding” is only properly

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20 We are in agreement that it is crucial.
intelligible in light of that method: 1) We saw the immanent emergence of a new object for consciousness from the gradually increasing skepticism surrounding the Understanding’s criterion of truth; 2) The description of the final stages of the old object turns out to describe the new object: the self-relating, “for-itselfness” of ‘infinity’; 3) This stage marks and describes the Understanding’s final conceptual incapacity to grasp its object on its own stipulated terms, and turns out to be the very same description of a new object and shape of consciousness, ‘self-consciousness’ (see 3.II.C).

Again, in accordance with Hegel’s methodological comments in the Introduction, and in accordance with their evident application in the text, I believe that a genuinely instructive reading of the Phenomenology must remain constantly sensitive to two levels of “narrative” that occur simultaneously: one is the level of phenomenological description that is “for us”, the other is the vantage point of consciousness as it proceeds with its experience. If the reader is not attentive to this distinction, the transitions between shapes of consciousness will not be intelligible without ad hoc “encouragement” from a sympathetic audience eager to reach the finish line. In such cases it is more than likely that many ideas will be brought to bear that are, as Hegel suggests, “superfluous” to the considerations of consciousness itself. The “restraint” Hegel requires of his readers is necessary for it to become at all apparent that Hegel’s claims to

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21 That is just to say that I think the Phenomenology is only truly intelligible as a continuous document from start to finish in the precise way Hegel meant it to be, if it is read in the way I am recommending.
"science" have any legitimacy; otherwise the *Phenomenology* stands simply as a monument to the philosophical imagination.

So, if we were to exercise the requisite restraint when considering the transitional moments of Chapter III, we would have to be attentive to two things. Firstly, from the internal vantage point of the Understanding, there is the critical moment of "being-for-consciousness of the in-itself" that results in a final skeptical abandonment of its epistemic criteria. The paradoxes of the inverted world lead the Understanding to accept that the objective criteria of unity and universality as they exist in themselves have been tainted by the resources of perception, that their apprehension includes an irreducible subjective dimension of appearance. Hence, according to the stipulated criteria of the Understanding, its object is not properly being "understood". We can imagine then, some actual instance of a theorizing consciousness characterized by this onset of skepticism regarding what can be properly "understood" about the world. It has realized that its efforts at explaining the natural world include the subjective dimension of "explaining-activity" that is foreign to the objective integrity of that which is to be explained. Now at this critical juncture, the shape of consciousness in question can be considered in light of what is ordinarily meant by "experience", which would be for us to adopt its perspective. We can imagine this shape of consciousness, in a real philosophical setting, going on to adopt a skeptical stance in general; or it may, as Hegel says in the Introduction, come upon a new object "by chance and externally" that allows

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22 I think the term can be understood in the following general sense (i.e. the term was not idiosyncratically selected by Hegel to describe his System): an inquiry is "scientific" if it is devoted to discovering the way things truly are, and seeks to limit or eliminate arbitrary or capricious elements that hinder such inquiry.
it to re-assert its old epistemic attitude with renewed confidence. These and other scenarios (as they occur from the standpoint of consciousness) are easily imaginable as regards an internal, skeptical crisis of consciousness in regards to some object that it takes itself to have knowledge of. The "inversion of consciousness", that which the phenomenological reader is on the lookout for, is not something that is experienced directly by consciousness itself. Experience in general proceeds according to its own, non-systematic logic.

This brings me to the second aspect that requires our attention, and it is this aspect that is vital for us as "scientific" readers of the Phenomenology. *We are to notice in the skeptical moment (an aspect of what Hegel terms the "being-for-consciousness of the in-itself") which includes the final rejection of the criterion, that the structure of consciousness is retained.*\(^{23}\) It is this structure that taken in one sense includes a skeptical rejection of some object, but taken in another *demands* that there be some object it has knowledge of. This was what I referred to as an equivocation in the concept of knowing (3.1.B), that leads to what Hegel refers to as an "inversion of consciousness". Viewed naturally, that is, from the standpoint of consciousness, the epistemic demand that knowledge be of something can show up in any number of ways, as we discussed above; but viewed "scientifically", this dual, equivocal aspect of the concept of knowing is the phenomenological principle that allows us to see how every shape of experience is

\(^{23}\) It is this aspect that makes it so tempting to conclude that Hegel is indeed interested in describing some variety of transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience, since it here appears that consciousness, in one form or another, is precisely such a condition. It is because of such temptations that makes it all the more urgent that the reader consider carefully the view I am advancing.
systematically related to the others, in a serial development. Now it is this aspect of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* that is so hard to grasp, and that makes it genuinely unique. It involves the claim that what characterizes each terminating shape of consciousness, somehow by virtue of that termination, establishes the content of a new shape of consciousness. Again, as I argued in Chapter Three, the only way to really make this plausible is to carefully examine the transitions in the text. As an abstract proposal, some may find it unappealing at best, unintelligible at worst.

In any case, it is the successive inversions of consciousness, that occur according to a process of determinate negation, that allow us as scientific readers of the *Phenomenology* to observe how discontinuous epistemic and experiential attitudes (from the particular standpoint of this or that consciousness that takes this or that object to be the in-itself) that are employed variously, often simultaneously, are systematically related to one another by a single presupposed structure, consciousness. It allows us to see, e.g. in “Force and the Understanding”, how what is described in the penultimate moments of the Understanding’s investigations, captured in the paradigm of ‘infinity’, also describes a new object, with a new epistemic attitude that attends it. We see then in this instance, how the self-relating aspect of ‘infinity’, of the retention of sameness within difference, a relation that can no longer be accommodated by the paradigm of the Understanding, *also describes* self-consciousness, a new object and shape of consciousness.

“Phenomenology” as Hegel conceives it refers primarily to a consideration of a series of *descriptions*, descriptions of how some shape of consciousness relates to something taken to exist in itself, and how these descriptions systematically relate to one another.
Hence, insofar as these description add up to a "critique" of consciousness, it does not represent "criticism" in any ordinary sense. Hegel says in his lectures on aesthetics that criticism generally involves (he is speaking specifically about "irony") a "puffed up" (not Hegel's term) subjective attitude, that is, the arbitrary perspective of the critic (Hegel, *Aesthetics* 69-75). Hegel's meticulous attempt to remove himself from the phenomenological proceedings is a highly singular feature of his "criticism". The criticism ends up being a kind restraint as "we" observe consciousness hang itself by its own rope, and as we withhold any principles, posits, or ideas we may believe are relevant to the proceedings. The critique relies on the "self-defeating" or "self-refuting" dimension of consciousness Hegel has discovered, when consciousness is considered as an epistemic presupposition.

The critique occurs with reference to a structural dimension, the determinations of consciousness, as well as a dynamic dimension, the motion of consciousness. It should be clear by now that if our interpretation is correct, any talk of Hegel's Kantian intention to provide an alternative account of a "subjective determination of a possible experience" is misleading. But this is precisely the line Pippin pursues.

As a conclusion to the paradoxes of the inverted world, Pippin attributes to Hegel the following: "The required link between the nonsensible and the sensible, or, put another way, between pure concepts and the sensory manifold, is supplied by the understanding itself" (P 138). Since, according to Pippin, Hegel asks Kantian questions, the answer he supplies is also recognizably Kantian, but with important differences. The Understanding does not merely supply the nonsensible ground for sensible intuitions,
rather, there is no possible determinacy in any manifold of appearances whatsoever unless already thought in certain nonsensible ways. That amounts to a nonsensible condition that differentiates the manifold without reliance on an empirically or intellectually intuited ground. This means, according to Pippin, "that the only possible ground for that required prior differentiation by the understanding...is 'thought itself'" (P 139). This is, on Pippin’s analysis, an important moment insofar as Hegel introduces here key features of his "idealism".

Hence, Pippin reads such locutions as "repulsion of the selfsame, as selfsame, from itself" as the introduction of subjective conditions, and as indication that Hegel is promising "an a priori account of various possible different unifying functions...required for there to be possible experience" (P 140). In contrast, our interpretation views that same locution as a description of both the object of the Understanding in its last phases, and the new object and shape of consciousness that has emerged, self-consciousness. They are linked together phenomenologically by us, the readers, who are able to comprehend how every negation or termination of a shape of consciousness is a determinate negation, and therefore how in each instance a new shape of consciousness arises from the elimination of one that has traveled the "way of despair."\(^{24}\)

It is very tempting to do what Pippin does, that is, try to render the transition between Understanding and self-consciousness intelligible by attributing a philosophical motive to Hegel beyond phenomenological description; but again, to do so is misleading. That is

\(^{24}\)"[T]his path [of consciousness] has a negative significance for it, and what is in fact the realization of the Concept, counts to it rather as the loss of its own self; for it does lose its truth on this path. The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of doubt, or more precisely as the way of despair" (PS 49, PG 69).
because ‘self-consciousness’ is not meant to be the answer to a philosophical problem posed in the traditional manner. ‘Self-consciousness’ must rather be seen as the determinate outcome of a negative process of examination undertaken by the Understanding, which exposes the inherent limitations of that shape’s particular epistemic logic in the course of its employment. But isn’t that the same thing, expressed in an unnecessarily arcane way? No, and the reason why may best be viewed in terms of the consequences implied by each view. To take Pippin’s position means to view ‘self-consciousness’ as a more adequate “subjective condition” that renders the possibility of experience intelligible. Our interpretation rather takes the phenomenological emergence of ‘self-consciousness’ to be one more step in the process of critiquing the very idea of a “subjective condition” as a habitually justified philosophical presupposition. To do the former makes Hegel out to be a very sophisticated (and obscure) transcendental philosopher; the question of how the categories in the *Logic* will have any bearing on reality can here at best have a kind of transcendental solution, and this is precisely Pippin’s approach. Our reading is more radical insofar as any presupposition concerning ‘subjectivity’ is to have been dispensed with, the primary reason being, insofar as the *Phenomenology* is conceived as a “preparatory” science, that all determinate ideas or representations are to have been dispensed with; *that* is the “condition for the possibility” of a theory of determinacy (vs. the subjective condition for the possibility of experience). However, the *Phenomenology* is not only intelligible as an anticipatory document; it stands alone in its critical capacity. What if Hegel had died before he wrote the *Logic*?

The *Phenomenology* would still be (aside from its astonishing erudition and philosophical
creativity) an impressive, suggestive, and quite possibly persuasive demonstration of the self-defeating character of consciousness when understood as a kind of epistemic presupposition.
Chapter Five: In What Sense Is Wittgenstein a Neo-Hegelian?

In this chapter I seek to do two things, one general, another more specific. The general aim is to investigate how Hegel may be relevant to contemporary philosophy. I propose to accomplish this goal partially in the course of developing the second, more specific goal: to explore connections and analogies that I believe exist between Hegel and Wittgenstein. Here is what I think the main connection is: both thinkers point to a need for an alternative, post-mentalist conception of determinacy that does not fall prey to presuppositions concerning the subjective nature of language or consciousness, which always implicitly or explicitly frames what we do and say in opposition to what reality is (or how it behaves) in itself. This connection can be explicitly seen via a programmatic analogy: both Hegel and Wittgenstein mount radical critiques (Hegel in his *Phenomenology*, Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*) aimed at dismantling heavily entrenched presuppositions concerning the subjectivity of thought (for Wittgenstein more the subjectivity of “meaning”), in order for a kind of “reclamation” of the determinacy that our common sense supposes to be fundamental to our thinking, action, and the world.

I will launch the “general” aim of this chapter with a consideration of a recent paper by Robert Brandom, called “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism.” Competing interpretations of Hegel’s ongoing significance to philosophy will of course rely more basically on overall interpretations of Hegel. Establishing how Hegel should be understood was the work of the last two chapters. How he is predominantly understood can be instructively observed in Brandom’s paper, which does the two things I am doing:
Chapter Five

1) it develops an interpretation of Hegel (Pippin’s idealist reading), and 2) claims that we have much to learn from Hegel regarding contemporary philosophy, specifically according to him, contemporary semantic issues “that we by no means see our way to the bottom of otherwise” (BR. 164).

Brandom is useful to consider, because he provides the link between Pippin’s reading of Hegel as an idealist,¹ and what this might mean for the pragmatism that is almost universally associated with the later Wittgenstein. A consideration of Brandom’s paper in Section I, including some of the general themes Brandom has imported from his Wittgenstein-inspired “pragmatic semantics” of Making It Explicit, will put us in a position in Section II to consider the analogous consequences of reading a kind of idealism into Wittgenstein. There are programmatic similarities between Hegel and Wittgenstein based on the reasons each prioritizes a “critique of consciousness” (there will of course be a special semantic vocabulary Wittgenstein uses that is different from Hegel’s vocabulary to express this critique), and there is an analogous temptation to resolve the difficulties discerned through these critiques with a certain kind of idealist move. I believe that Wittgenstein’s sustained attack on “idiolects” is the semantic analogue of Hegel’s critique of consciousness. Both critiques focus in part on eliminating a picture of what might be called “epistemic individualism”, the doctrine that, as a self-standingly intelligible starting-point,² an individual mind can have a private

¹ Brandom explicitly acknowledges his debt to Pippin in Footnote 9: “The origins of this way of thinking [Brandom’s] about Hegel’s problems lie in Robert Pippin’s pathbreaking work Hegel’s Idealism...”

² This is McDowell’s turn of phrase from his interesting critical comments on Brandom’s Making it Explicit. See John McDowell, “Brandom on Representation and Inference”, p. 158.
relation to a determinacy-conferring fact (a relation usually conceived as some species of representation), such that mental content, e.g. a meaning or an intention, is determinate. There is a temptation to construe both thinkers as appealing to "community" to somehow settle problems associated with the idiolectic or subjective dimension of consciousness. This idealist solution involves an appeal to communal normativity to ground an alternative notion of semantic or conceptual determinacy. That is, there is an idealist attempt to read both Hegel and Wittgenstein as appealing to the norm and meaning-conferring powers of the community to re-instate the kind of determinacy that is lost in the critique of idiolectic conceptions of meaning and understanding, or of the idea of sensation as "private". McDowell persuasively shows how it is an error to read Wittgenstein as making this kind of magical appeal to the putative meaning and determinacy-conferring powers of the community, by revealing the idealist "solution's" kinship to antirealism and skepticism, neither of which is correct to attribute to Wittgenstein.

In short, (and perhaps at this preliminary stage, this is an unhelpful level of specificity), Wittgenstein is open to a set of opposed readings that are roughly parallel to what I have termed the "eliminationist" (non-metaphysical) vs. the "transformationist" (idealist/metaphysical) interpretations of Hegel's Phenomenology. The analogy lies specifically in whether the "critique of consciousness" is taken to imply an idealist solution, or whether it points to some other conception of determinacy. The two analogous readings of Wittgenstein are respectively advanced by McDowell (non-
antirealist) and Wright/Kripke (anti-realist/skeptical) on Wittgenstein’s rule-following arguments (and in an auxillary sense, his private language arguments).

McDowell provides the link here between the curious mix of pragmatism and idealism that is at the center of Brandom’s reading of Hegel. McDowell illuminates a direct connection between idealism and skepticism, and thus shows how ruinous idealism is to a realist pragmatism. Taking McDowell’s cue, I show how Brandom’s reading of Hegel is related to a skeptical, antirealist reading of Wittgenstein that problematizes semantic and conceptual determinacy. The difficulty with Brandom’s reading of Hegel is that the idealist solution conceals rather than explicitly recognizes what I have called the problem of consciousness or subjectivity, by expanding the ‘I’ of consciousness into the ‘we’ of Spirit. This problematizes rather than solves the question of how Spirit is related to reality, because ‘Spirit’ is on this interpretation merely the final permutation of consciousness, which as we have seen (Chapter Three), always divides reality into what is for it, and what is in itself. This epistemic division, if treated as a natural presupposition in philosophy, will always yield the sceptical problem of whether or not whatever is understood to exist in itself must be irreducibly cast in terms of what exists for consciousness. The strategy of illuminating “pragmatist themes” with reference to an idealist structure can lead to the very kind of skepticism that pragmatist approaches are often motivated to bypass.

The division (between what is for consciousness and what is in itself) also at least implicitly takes a norm/nature divide as irreducibly given, insofar as norms belong to “us”, i.e. belong to what we say and do, and pertain to how we acquire and apply
concepts and make judgments, and "we" because of such spontaneous, self-determining conceptual capacities are to be systematically distinguished from the causal processes of law-governed nature. This state of affairs pertains even if the normative is explicitly expanded to encompass and characterize the epistemic horizon of what can be said or known. Such an expansion merely buries the question of "independence", which generally is a question about the objective status of what is, but which within the norm-nature framework becomes: what is the state of things independent of our normative activity, and how does such activity relate to it? The general question of independence is legitimate, but when asked from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness, the question will always take the epistemological form of: how can what exists in itself relate to what is for us? We will explore how this question can be recast in a non-mentalist manner when we discuss McDowell and Wittgenstein.

This chapter on the whole employs what may be called an "inductive" strategy of progressively eliciting, through a consideration of several specific issues in Hegel and Wittgenstein, more general parallels between them concerning what I have generally called the "critique of 'consciousness'".

I. Brandom's Idealism

A. The Social Constitution of Selves

Brandom believes Hegel's idealism structurally illuminates features of his pragmatism: "the idealist thesis is Hegel's way of making the pragmatist thesis workable" (BR 164). Firstly, what is meant by 'idealism' and 'pragmatism' respectively?
Brandom offers the following definitions that will serve for the purposes of his paper (he admits that these terms encompass several distinguishable theses; he is focussing on two in particular). First, "The idealist thesis is that the structure and unity of the concept is the same as the structure and unity of the self" (BR 164). As we saw in Chapter Four, this "idealist" thesis is marked in general by the foundational role 'self' plays, taken individually or collectively, in illuminating or grounding some other item or items, in this case, "concepts". But what is peculiarly the case here is that there is a kind of identity between the foundational self and the grounded items, concepts. Brandom's entire effort is in a sense aimed at dispelling the initial opacity of this formulation, so it will necessarily receive its due consideration during the course of my explication.

Brandom states the second thesis: "The pragmatist thesis (what I will call "the semantic pragmatist thesis") is that the use of concepts determines their content...a commonplace of our Wittgensteinean philosophical world" (BR 164). This thesis is considerably more straightforward, and refers to the notion that the content of concepts arises entirely through their use. Brandom also identifies Hegel as being concerned with the nature and origins of determinate empirical concepts. He claims that Hegel addresses this concern by showing how the idealist thesis relates to the pragmatist thesis, or in other words, by showing how the idealist thesis that the structure and unity of the concept is the same as the structure and unity of the self, makes the pragmatist thesis that the use of concepts determines their content, workable. Brandom says his general aim is "to show how the idealist thesis...contributes to the working out of Hegel's pragmatist
strategy for understanding the nature and origins of the determinateness of the content of empirical concepts" (BR 168). By simply stating that Hegel is concerned with the latter, Brandom reveals at the outset an important way in which he follows Pippin. I will now briefly discuss the consequences of taking Pippin’s lead in this matter, before explicating Brandom’s argument.

We saw that Pippin took Hegel to be offering an alternative framework via which to understand the subjective conditions for the possibility of experience. This is to speak of Hegel’s idealist intentions in introducing the notion of ‘self-consciousness’ as the new and improved “subjective condition”. However, this move makes the categories of the Logic transcendentally “needy”; insofar as Hegel’s alternative transcendental formulation preserves a mentalist epistemology, the categories of determinacy require the filling of the ‘world’ in order to be determinate. The determinacy of the logical categories on this reading is really an auxiliary question to the determinacy of empirical concepts, or as I discussed in the last chapter, the Logic on this reading is at best a rehearsal of our empirical concepts in ideal form. Brandom is happy with this: “the point of developing an adequate understanding of these categorial concepts is so that they can then be used to make explicit how ordinary empirical concepts work” (BR 165). It is evident, then, that Brandom conflates the issue of ‘determinacy’ in general with what it means for an empirical concept to be determinate (or perhaps he simply ignores the former). The former is what I have suggested is the genuine subject-matter of Hegel’s Logic, the latter

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3 Brandom has chosen ‘determinateness’ for Bestimmtheit, whereas I have been using ‘determinacy’.
is a conventional epistemological issue that Brandom claims is, despite much evidence to the contrary, one of Hegel’s primary concerns (insofar as this concern is not an incidental topic in Hegel’s two main books, the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*).

I think it is fair to say along with Brandom that Hegel regarded his system as something that, when properly grasped, supports “common sense”, or what contemporary philosophers like to call our “intuitions”. But to allow this is very different from endorsing a “metaphysical” reading of Hegel. We have therefore already parted ways with Brandom’s reading, insofar as he ignores the possibility that the *Logic* should be read as a theory of determinacy (see Introduction), and not as a complex, transcendental heuristic for grasping the employment of empirical concepts. The reason this latter is unacceptable has to do with the prioritizing of one half of Hegel’s concept of experience, which we have seen (in Chapters Three and Four) is an essentially *subjective* structure that Brandom’s Hegel, like Pippin’s, calls “Spirit” – a collective version of the structure of consciousness wherein “empirical concepts” are acquired, instituted, and applied. The other half, the *problematic* relation of the for itself with the in-itself, i.e. the dimension of objectivity that is *for* consciousness vs. the dimension that is taken to exist in itself, is obscured and even ignored on this interpretation.4

To continue with Brandom’s argument, the nature and origins of the determinacy of empirical concepts are to be clarified with reference to the fundamentally *normative*  

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4 Brandom rarely reveals whether he is speaking specifically about the *Phenomenology* or the *Logic*, so I am attributing a “holistic” interpretation to him that makes global points about the subject-matters of both texts taken together (e.g. concerning Hegel’s “idealism”), and I am interpreting the textual evidence that he periodically cites to be in support of these global points (rather than in support of e.g. some particular point relating to one or the other of the texts).
character of concepts, an "insight" Brandom says Hegel inherited from Kant. (The "realm of the normative" is what Hegel means by 'Spirit', on Brandom's reading (BR 173)). This means that judgment and action, which Brandom takes to be (the) two species of conceptual application, are to be thought of in terms of the language of commitment and responsibility to norms that settle the correctness of what we think and do. But (Brandom's) Hegel believes Kant does not say enough about the conditions for the possibility of the determinacy of such conceptual commitments, responsibilities, and obligations, or the determinacy of the rules we bind ourselves to in judgment and action (BR 165-7). That is, according to Brandom, Hegel's problem with Kant is a Wittgensteinian one: how and why do we bind or commit ourselves to one rule rather than another? It is Hegel's idealism, an idealism that is informed in a specific way by pragmatic considerations, that is to provide an answer to the issue of the determinacy of conceptual normativity.

In Brandom's particular language, understanding the determinacy of conceptual normativity means understanding the relation between the institution and the application of conceptual norms. When conceptual norms are instituted, they determine what counts as correct and incorrect uses of linguistic expressions. When conceptual norms are applied they are used in determinate judgments. According to Brandom, Kant provides a two-phase account of how this works: first there is one sort of activity of instituting conceptual norms, then there is another sort of activity of applying those concepts.

5 Kripke's Wittgenstein (I apologize for the somewhat absurd proliferation of "interpretive personae" here).
Brandom's Hegel was not satisfied with this picture, because it did not satisfactorily answer the question of what conditions there are for the possibility of the determinacy of our conceptual commitments, i.e., the question of which rules we choose to bind ourselves to and why. Brandom's Hegel believed that the relation between the institution and application of conceptual norms is to be understood in terms of a single process of how concepts are used. Brandom calls this Hegel's "monistic" account, in contrast to Kant's "two-phase" account of the institution and application of conceptual norms. The premium Hegel places on "use" in answering the Kantian dilemma constitutes the pragmatic dimension Brandom sees in Hegel. But this pragmatic dimension is to be illuminated by features of Hegel's idealism. In fact, Brandom claims that Hegel's idealism is the core of his response to the issue of how we are to understand the relation between the institution and application of conceptual norms, and Brandom claims to be following Pippin in developing this insight (acknowledged in footnote 9 of Brandom's essay).

Brandom takes the very same passage as Pippin from the Science of Logic concerning the "unity of the I think" to be proof of Hegel's "idealism" (See 4.III.A for a refutation of this approach). He also takes 'self-consciousness' to be Hegel's key amendment to the Kantian idealist strategy of taking the unity of the "I think" to be the framework wherein it is possible to determine the conditions for the possibility of experience. Hence, the structure and unity of self-conscious selves is to be the "fixed end" of an idealist analogy.

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6 After having studied Brandom's article in some detail, I must conclude that there is an ambiguity in how he wants to articulate the relation between the structure and unity of the self and the structure and unity of
by which it is possible to understand the structure and unity of concepts (i.e., possible to understand the pragmatic relation between the institution and application of conceptual norms).

Brandom claims that Hegel's concept of 'self' is a kind of "normative center", i.e. a locus of conceptual commitment and responsibility. Even granting the obvious distance from Hegel's texts at which Brandom's reading takes place, the justification for viewing Hegel's concept of 'self' in this manner is obscure. I presume that since Brandom accepts the Kantian genealogy of Hegel's idealism, we must essentially look to Kant, rather than Hegel, to find out the nature of this claim. Brandom says, "Hegel takes over Kant's fundamental idea that to call something a self, to treat it as an 'I', is to take up an essentially normative attitude toward it...to treat it as the subject of commitments, as something that can be responsible – hence as a potential knower and agent" (BR 169). According to Brandom, the manner in which Hegel appropriates this Kantian scheme, that is, the manner in which he understands the nature of normative attitudes and statuses, is to view them in social terms: "Normative statuses are a kind of social status" (BR 169). Hence, on Brandom's analysis, Hegel offers us a self-standing account of the social constitution of selves.\(^7\) It is this account that will be used as a basis for making a pragmatic interpretation of concepts workable. We are now in a position to more concepts (which is inseparable from their institution and application). In different places he calls the relation "analogous", "modeled" (where the latter is modeled on the former), and "identical" (in a "speculative" sense). Despite Brandom's obvious desire to make these terms more or less interchangeable, their usual meanings (which are distinct) force themselves onto and obscure his reading.

\(^7\) This is John McDowell's way of putting things, which I find useful. See John McDowell, "Comment on Robert Brandom's 'Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism'", p. 191.
explicitly formulate a problem glanced at above.

It appears that the subjectivity characteristic of the ‘I’ or consciousness, which on our reading Hegel takes such great pains to eliminate from “the concept of science” (see 4.II.B.2), is going to carry over into Brandom’s notion of the “normative”. And since, as we have seen, the “realm of the normative” is what Brandom claims Hegel calls ‘Spirit’, the subjectivity characteristic of the ‘I’ is going to have a merely enlarged, or collective status as the communal ‘we’ of Spirit. We can already see a Wittgensteinean slant emerging here, but one that has an *idealist* implication. It is precisely Brandom’s belief that the pragmatic interpretation of the relation between the institution and application of concepts can be understood in terms of idealism. But reader be warned: this means that the subjective aporiae which the *Phenomenology* documents as issuing from the structure of consciousness, instead of being resolved, is going to be concealed in an idealist interpretation of communal association amongst “self-conscious selves”, or what we might call “intersubjectivity”. The problem of consciousness (which in Chapter Three I argued is the subject-matter of the *Phenomenology*), far from being resolved via the introduction of an expanded, collective version of it called ‘Spirit’, will simply be carried over into (and operate within) this structure.

Nonetheless, with the invocation of the Kantian ego, Brandom believes he now has the resources to give an interpretation of Hegel’s “self-conscious selves” as “centers of normativity”. Again, Brandom takes Hegel to have given the Kantian idea of conceptual normativity a specifically *social* significance. Kant believed that normativity is intelligible only by appeal to “something beyond or behind our empirical activity” (BR
According to Brandom, there is no such transcendent ground outside of the "social" in Hegel.

Brandom says that the key concept for understanding the fundamentally social significance of conceptual normativity is 'recognition'. Recognition is a kind of social process wherein selves are "synthesized": "to be a self – a locus of conceptual commitment and responsibility – is to be taken or treated as one by those one takes or treats as one: to be recognized by those one recognizes" (BR 169). Both selves and the communities they constitute are synthesized via the same process of recognition: "Both selves and communities are normative structures instituted by reciprocal recognition...This is a social theory of selves in the sense that selves and communities are products of the same process, aspects of the same structure" (BR 169).

'Recognition' does a lot of philosophical work for Brandom's Hegel. Firstly, it tells us something specific about the structure and unity of "self-conscious selves": they do not arise nor develop independently of the communities they constitute, and that in turn constitute them, because recognition amongst selves within communities is the principle of "synthesis"; selves must recognize and be recognized by other selves to become what they are, which requires, in principle, more than one self, i.e., which requires in a minimal sense, a "community". But secondly, 'recognition' is also going to tell us something about the structure and unity of concepts, in fact, the recognitive structure found in selves and communities is going to be used as a model for understanding

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8 This implies that, like many commentators since Kojève, Brandom thinks that the subject-matter of Chapter IV, Section A of the Phenomenology, "Master and Slave", is the key to understanding Hegel's "theory" in that book.
concepts; this is what the idealist thesis on Brandom’s reading proposes.

Brandom here implicitly invokes the tri-partite structure of the Concept, elaborated in Hegel’s *Logic*: the syllogistic relation of the categories of universality, particularity, and individuality. This is how Brandom describes recognition using these categories: “In recognizing others, I in effect institute a community – a kind of *universal* common to those others, and if all goes well, to me to. If they recognize me in turn, they constitute me as something more than just the particular I started out as – a kind of *individual* (self), which is that *particular* (organism) as a member of the community, as characterized by that universal. The (recognizing) particular accordingly exercises a certain sort of authority over the universal, and the universal then exercises a certain sort of authority over the individual” (BR 170).

This passage is a good indicator of some serious problems arising from the “idealist” interpretation of Hegel. One of the more obvious flaws is taking Hegel’s developed categories of determinacy, the syllogistic relation of universal—particular—individual, as belonging *primarily* (“the fixed end of the idealist analogy”) to the structure and unity of self-consciousness (as it constitutes itself within a community), and then using it as a *model* for understanding the structure and unity characteristic of concepts. This is in a sense (discounting the idea of “modelling”, which has its own problems (see below)) to get things *exactly backwards*, at least on our reading (although strictly speaking it would be erroneous to assign a foundational status to the *Logic* as a basis for understanding ‘self’). Taking the recognitive structure of self-consciousness beginning in Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology* as the key to understanding the rest of the System has a venerable
place in Hegel scholarship, beginning with Alexandre Kojève.⁹ But the problem with that interpretation and others like it is the *auxillary* status assigned to the *Logic*. Interpretive problems aside, this goes against the numerous comments Hegel straightforwardly makes (many of which we considered in the last chapter) concerning the relation of the *Phenomenology* to the rest of the System, which if anything, are clear about the former’s merely preparatory status.

There is a powerful response available to the Pippin camp, and it is an issue of interpretation. The idealist might say that she recognizes the preparatory role of the *Phenomenology*, but interprets it to be precisely the *grounding* or *justification* of self-consciousness, the “Concept of Science”, that is to be carried over into reading the *Logic*. However, I have tried to make it plain (partly through an alternative interpretation) that Hegel could not have meant this, if only because of the *requirements* of beginning a conceptually presuppositionless logic.¹⁰ (I will be repeating some familiar claims from Chapter Four here): To begin the *Logic* with the presupposed structure of self-

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⁹ See Chapter One of: Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.

¹⁰ Readers who have charitably followed my argument to this point may no longer be able to ignore a mounting feeling of irritation concerning my repeated reference to Hegel’s “presuppositionless theory”. What exactly is this theory, and how is it supposed to work without *any* presupposition? Although a specific treatment of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* falls outside the scope of this study, I have tried to make it plausible that the possibility for a theory of determinacy that does not fall into the familiar traps of epistemology requires a certain kind of radical critique, one that Hegel mounts in the *Phenomenology*. I wish to generalize this point past Hegel’s project by considering Wittgenstein in the next section; i.e., we are not merely talking about Hegel’s conceptually presuppositionless theory of determinacy and what *it* requires, but more generally, we are considering what is required for *any* would-be theory of determinacy that claims to transcend the presupposed limits of traditional epistemology. I therefore remain agnostic concerning the relative virtues of “post-critical” or post-mentalist accounts of determinacy, but I urge the reader to remain focussed on what the specific nature of the critique must be for any such account to proceed.
consciousness (with the intent to “solve” Kantian problems), is to begin the *Logic* with a presupposed idea of determinacy, and this is precisely how the *Logic cannot* begin. Brandom’s reading takes the structure of consciousness, expanded into the collective mode of Spirit (the community of self-conscious selves), to be the idealist *grounding* for understanding the structure and unity of concepts. In a sense, this reading simply ignores “the problem of subjectivity” inherent to it. But we have pegged this as the preliminary problem of Hegel, who thought of its subject as the natural idea of modern thinking (‘consciousness’); this problem must be resolved prior to developing a conceptually presuppositionless theory of determinacy. The point and promise of such a theory is to develop a legitimate way of doing philosophy without becoming mired in the familiar traps of epistemology. And as we have seen, on Hegel’s analysis, the familiar traps of epistemology are rooted in a single idea, ‘consciousness’. Any philosophy that proceeds in ignorance of this basic critical requirement, i.e. that the problem of consciousness have been recognized and dealt with (i.e. eliminated as a habitual presupposition), is doomed to repeat past failures, albeit in perhaps novel and baroque ways.

Aside from these difficulties associated with the idealist interpretation, there is the more specific problem with saying that Hegel uses one idea as a *model* for developing some other idea; this goes completely against Hegel’s central thought on philosophical *method*: the thought that it is possible to let the subject-matter of logic develop out of its own immanent necessity, without the help or intervention of “us”, who bring superfluous, arbitrary, and hence misleading ideas of what may be required. “Modelling” is a case in
point. This is a good example of a philosophical device employed by "philosophers of the natural idea (consciousness)" who have not dispensed with what they intuitively or "naturally" take to be determinate starting-points for philosophical inquiry. John McDowell, in his comment on Brandom's paper, expresses related worries with Brandom's reading of Kant, and believes that such an approach is even less appropriate with Hegel: "it replaces what in Kant is a single unity ['I think' with the unity of conceptual consciousness] – not intelligible except in both its guises, subjective and objective – with a supposed opportunity for linear explanation [from the fixed end of the idealist analogy], in which the 'relatively problematic' is explained in terms of the 'relatively unproblematic'. To me this sort of thing seems even less characteristic of Hegel than of Kant" (M2 191). I am in full agreement with this assessment, even though McDowell's criticism has more to do with the correctness of citing a Kantian filiation in this sort of "modelling". I would further add that it is rather misleading to enlist Hegel in a conventional tradition of e.g. "modelling", "demonstrating", "analyzing", etc., when what is central to his approach is a dismissal of all such conventional concepts of "method". Far from offering a self-standing account of the social constitution of selves, and using it as the basis for an account of concepts (as McDowell formulates it), the former is eliminated along with the "natural idea" (consciousness) in a phenomenological "purification", so that the method appropriate to an account of concepts, where a distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' is moot, may proceed.

Construing the determinacy of the content of concepts in light of the idealist interpretation of the "social" is a highly problematic feature of Brandom's reading, and it
is the problem that will focus our consideration of Wittgenstein. Brandom acknowledges a potential problem by tracing this social conception of the normative to what he calls Kant's "autonomy thesis" – that one's commitment or responsibility to a concept or rule consists in acknowledging or endorsing its authority over oneself. This is how a normative attitude (endorsing, acknowledging) institutes a normative status (commitment, responsibility). However, if what makes a rule or concept binding is that one takes it to be binding, then it becomes unclear in what sense it is in fact binding: "If whatever I acknowledge as correct – as fulfilling the obligation I have undertaken – is correct, then in what sense is what I did in the first place intelligible as binding myself?" (BR 171).11 Brandom concedes that a distinction is needed between the force of a concept or rule, and its content. The authority of one who takes a rule to be binding is what governs its force, but this must not be taken to mean that it also determines its content, i.e. what is and is not correct according to the rule one has endorsed (BR 171). Brandom acknowledges then, that a rule or concept that one chooses as binding must have a certain independence of the choosing of it. (In a sense, this is simply a reiteration of how Brandom sets up Hegel's problem with Kant: Kant has not said enough concerning the determinacy of conceptual norms; see above).

It may appear that, by being committed to a view that says "undertaking commitments" is what determines the content of concepts, a view that Brandom calls his "semantic pragmatism", he has sacrificed the aforementioned "independence" (here as

11 Brandom here encourages us to compare this with Wittgenstein's claim that "where whatever seems right to me therefore is right, there can be no question of right and wrong." This issue will figure in our discussion of Wittgenstein on rule-following.
elsewhere, Brandom’s discussion seems to detach itself from being a specific consideration of Hegel, and becomes more a development of themes in Brandom’s *Making It Explicit*). The question is whether Brandom’s (Hegel’s) invocation of the “social” is going to purchase that independence (this is in part the question that McDowell poses to the “skeptical” reading of Wittgenstein, to be considered below). Brandom says: “Hegel’s idea is that the determinacy of the content of what you have committed yourself to — the part that is *not* up to you in the way that whether [pertaining to what you choose] you commit yourself to it is up to you — is secured by the attitudes of *others*, to whom one has at least implicitly granted that authority” (BR 172).12 Hence, having a determinate commitment is intelligible only in the context of what Brandom calls a “division of labour”, between one who undertakes the commitment and those who attribute it and hold the undertaker to it. Undertaking and attributing commitments is seen as a process of *negotiation*, again, between those who *attribute* the commitment, and the one who *acknowledges* (has or undertakes) it.

Brandom says,

> What the content of one’s claim or action is *in* itself results both from what it is *for* others and what it is *for* oneself. I see the account Hegel offers of this process of normative negotiation of reciprocally constraining authority by which determinate conceptual contents are instituted and applied as his main philosophical contribution, at least as assessed from the frame of reference of our contemporary concerns. This process of negotiation of competing normative claims is what Hegel calls ‘experience’ (*Erfahrung*) (BR 172-3).

Since Brandom formulates his thoughts here with reference to what is in itself vs. for

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12 Brandom mentions in footnote 20 that “secured by others” does not mean “fully determined by others”. He appeals to two other *recognitive* dimensions involved in the determinacy of concepts that he will elaborate: the inferential and the historical. But by calling these dimensions “recognitive”, he has merely enlisted them as aspects of the “social”. See below.
itself (Hegel’s central methodological categories for rendering the experience of consciousness phenomenologically intelligible (see 3.1)), I think it is possible to infer how he reads the “motion of consciousness”. Conceptual contents are both instituted and applied in a process of negotiation between what is for oneself and for others, and this means that what is in itself (the determinate content of the rule or concept independent of its being chosen) is determined or instituted immanently within and as a result of this social process. Brandom reads this insight as Hegel’s main philosophical achievement, i.e. the insight that the determinacy of contentful conceptual commitments arises immanently via the recognitive and negotiatory resources of consciousness taken as socially constituted (i.e. taken as self-conscious selves) in a community. That is also to say that the dimension of the in-itself is instituted via recognitive and negotiatory processes amongst self-conscious selves.

However, on our reading, that the in-itself (or the “independent” dimension of a concept) is discovered to be a mere posit (or in Brandom’s language, “institution”) of consciousness (or self-consciousness) at each stage, ultimately yields the situation of pure indeterminacy that Hegel also refers to as a state of “thoroughgoing skepticism” concerning the truth of phenomenal knowledge (see 3.I.C). This situation arises in conjunction with a final insight concerning the structure of consciousness, whether taken singularly as an ego, or collectively as intersubjectively related self-conscious selves that together constitute the normative realm of “Spirit” (i.e. Brandom’s characterization of ‘Spirit’). That insight, the goal of the Phenomenology, is the realization that the fixed opposition between the structure of knowing and the object
known is moot. But if this insight is truly achieved, there will be no vestigial
temptation to preserve *either side* of the opposition in a grounding or justificatory
capacity. This latter is precisely what the idealist interpretation does, no matter how
disguised; it preserves the structure of *subjectivity*, i.e. the dimension of what is for
itself, in a foundational capacity. I think this goes strictly against Hegel’s intentions.
Hegel would view the idealist interpretation of ‘Spirit’ as a case where the in-itself has
been smothered by a total expansion of the subjective for-itself. This notion would, if
anything, count as one of the several instances in the *Phenomenology* where it is shown
how radical skepticism is a structural consequence of consciousness.

We might generally ask how it is that the social constitution of selves is able to
purchase that independence which is an aspect of genuine conceptual determinacy, if a
single “self” (as conceived by the autonomy thesis) cannot? What is it about simply
pluralizing the structure of consciousness, i.e. enlarging the structure of subjectivity and
then perhaps parsing it into “intersubjectively related selves” that can do what one
“self” cannot? This quandary expresses the core of the interpretive conflict between
the idealist view and the view I am recommending. What Brandom takes to be an
*affirmation* of Hegel’s (i.e., the self-standing account of the social constitution of
selves), and understands to be the ground for a doctrine of the *determinacy* of concepts,
is precisely what on our reading characterizes an eventual, total *indeterminacy* or
skepticism yielded by the *Phenomenology*. On our reading, ‘Spirit’ (understood as the

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13 It is ironic that Habermas attributes a species of this defect to Hegel himself. I believe that this
attribution does not do justice to Hegel’s full awareness of the precise nature of the “problem of
subjectivity”. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Lectures I and II; and
his “From Kant to Hegel and Back Again: The Move Towards Detranscendentalization".
result of the *Phenomenology*) is an immediate unity (see 3.III) that signifies the complete elimination of consciousness and its determinations (i.e. of the subjective aspect of knowledge and concepts that are taken to stand in fixed opposition to an objective realm of truth). On Brandom’s reading, ‘Spirit’ is a social structure (and hence, implicitly subjective, though “collective”) that grounds the determinacy of the content of concepts. Hence:

Hegel thinks of Spirit – the realm of the normative – as produced and sustained by the processes of mutual recognition, which simultaneously institute self-conscious selves and their communities. I have presented this picture as motivated by the problem of how to construe autonomy in a way compatible with the determinateness of conceptual contents, while seeing those conceptual contents as instituted in the same process of experience in which they are applied (the pragmatist’s fundamental commitment) (BR 173).

Brandom takes the *Phenomenology* to provide the idealist backdrop or foundation that provides the basis for understanding the determinacy of conceptual contents, a determinacy that arises in a single process of institution and application (of conceptual contents). But again, the general problem we see emerging here is how it is possible that an idealist structure, something that, if anything, has traceable affinities to skepticism, can ground (or “model”) conceptual determinacy. The recognitive structure of Spirit is meant to solve this. But we will require of Brandom considerably more detail regarding how this works, such that the problem of “independence” seen in the autonomy thesis (referring to how ‘I’ bind myself to a concept) is not also a feature of a “heteronomy thesis” – that is, how does a mere multiplicity of ‘I’’s add the ingredient of “independence” if it is absent in a single ‘I’?

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14 This point will be developed in Section II.
For Brandom, answering this means seeing how processes of recognition not only provide the *context* within which concepts are both instituted and applied, but also provide the *model* for their structure, unity, and determinacy. At this point, it appears that Brandom attributes a kind of "irreducibility thesis" to Hegel, in that Hegel putatively believes that "Wherever a norm can properly be discerned, there *must* be distinct centers of reciprocal authority and a process of negotiation between them...this is the nature of the normative as such, the *only* way in which determinate contents can be associated with norms according to the conception of norms embodied in the autonomy thesis" (BR 173-4). I can only read this as saying that the irreducibly social nature of conceptual normativity *somehow* guarantees conceptual content (an issue associated with the "independence" of the concept), given the acceptance of 'normativity' embodied in the autonomy thesis (the manner in which 'I' bind myself to a rule is a matter of *acknowledging* or *endorsing* the rule's authority). A "distinct center" (presumably some 'I'), interpreted extra-socially, is susceptible of the independence problem in the autonomy thesis (again, the problem being: if what makes a rule or concept binding is that I *take* it to be binding, in what sense is it in *fact* binding?). But if we say that these distinct centers are *necessarily* and *irreducibly* distinct centers of reciprocal authority, engaged in a process of negotiation between them, then this *somehow just means* that an element of conceptual contentfulness is generated that avoids the independence problem of the autonomy thesis.

But Brandom gets more specific. As mentioned before, Brandom distinguishes three forms the structure of reciprocal recognition takes, of which the first form, the social, is
paradigmatic (BR 178). The other two, the inferential and the historical presumably help to confer contentfulness in ways that we now suspect the merely social does not. But insofar as the inferential and the historical are two more axes of a cognitive structure, it is hard to see how they escape the idealist predicament of the social. Let us see whether the “inferential” dimension can escape the difficulties noted thus far.

B. Perception

Brandom’s Hegel’s doctrine of the inferential articulation of concepts is modelled on a self-standing (i.e., not grounded in something other than itself) account of the social constitution of selves. As in social recognition amongst selves, the structure and unity of concepts may be understood in terms of relations of reciprocal authority where particulars are related to universals, and universals to other universals. The relation of universals to other universals is fairly unproblematic; its paradigmatic form is inference, as in when we make a judgment as a result of inferring from applications of other concepts in judgments we have already made. However, perception is confusingly integrated into Brandom’s account at this point, when he speaks of the “authority” of particulars over universals. “Immediate” judgments, that involve the “authority” of the particular, “are noninferentially elicited, paradigmatically perceptual judgments or observations” (BR 175). Perhaps this is a promising solution to what we have increasingly pegged as a problem in Brandom’s (and any idealistic) interpretation: how is a self-contained, self-standing sphere of the “social” related to anything outside itself (and likewise with the concepts instituted and applied within the sphere of the social by
self-conscious selves)? Perhaps it can be penetrated by a kind of given, non-inferential element, and so some sort of “outer ground” in relation to the normative realm of Spirit, can play an epistemic role in judgment. But in footnote 30 Brandom insists that even perceptual judgments are inferentially articulated (i.e., they are applications of concepts and can therefore serve as premises for inferences), and so he avoids quandaries associated with an appeal to the “Given”.

But whether or not there is some equivocation here about how or whether perception “grounds” certain kinds of judgment (“immediate” judgments), and how or whether these judgments are “always already” somehow inferentially articulated, it is misleading on our reading to talk this way with reference to the Phenomenology. This is not merely a minor point of scholarship. It strikes right at the heart of what one takes Hegel’s project to be in toto. On our reading, insofar as ‘perception’ is one of the many shapes of consciousness considered in the Phenomenology, it is eo ipso disqualified as a candidate for playing any kind of foundational role (in the sense of being an unproblematic starting-point or resource) in a philosophical theory, especially a theory that purports to be giving an account of conceptual determinacy. A reading that takes Hegel to be using ‘perception’ as a resource for making theoretical statements concerning the structure and determinacy of concepts, is a reading that ignores entirely Hegel’s attempt to overcome the structural presuppositions of traditional epistemology that attend the foundational

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15 This is presumably non-problematic in a post-Sellarsian world – Brandom refers us to Wilfred Sellars’ “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind”, and equates one of its central lessons with Chapter II of the Phenomenology, “Perception”. The lesson is that the only sense in which judgments can be noninferential is that they are undertaken not as the result of a process of inference. Unfortunately, an examination of the complex argument of Sellars’ work falls outside the scope of this study.
employment of ‘consciousness’. This is so even by the standards of interpretations with less stringent requirements than ours. It is hard to see how Chapter II, “Perception”, on any reading could be mistaken for anything other than some kind of critique, most generally (that is, insofar as this critique is not tied to any specific overall interpretation of the Phenomenology) of a subject-centered picture of concept acquisition and application, that is, a picture of the ego taken in a kind of epistemic isolation with some kind of immediate access to particulars. But it is this picture that Brandom seems to smuggle into his account of conceptual determinacy, even though it is modeled on the cognitive exchanges of “reciprocal authority”; and what’s more, he appeals to Chapter II of the Phenomenology as his justification for doing so.\(^{16}\)

Whatever the emergent structure of Spirit is meant to resolve, on Brandom’s reading it requires a much earlier, more “abstract” (in Hegel’s methodological sense) shape of consciousness to be workable. ‘Perception’, at least according to the generally agreed upon view that the early chapters of the Phenomenology have an essentially critical capacity, is one of the earliest epistemic options to be discarded. Hence why would Hegel, even on an idealist reading, appeal to it to make the more developed structure of Spirit an epistemically viable solution to questions concerning the determinacy of

\(^{16}\) The quotation in question: “Their [perceptual judgments] immediacy consists in their being noninferential only in the sense that commitment that is the judgment was not undertaken as the result of a process of inference. That this is the only sense in which judgments can be noninferential is one of the central lessons of the Perception section of the Phenomenology, and Wilfrid Sellars’ seminal essay ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’” (BR 186-7n30). I am claiming two things: 1) that the attribution of this position to Hegel is incorrect, and 2) it disguises a deeper problem with Brandom’s position, that there seems to be an appeal to an “individualist”, mentalist conception of perception to make his social account of conceptual determinacy workable, when the latter is precisely what is supposed to make the former kind of appeal unnecessary. I will be developing these issues in the coming paragraphs.
conceptual content? If he is making this kind of appeal, why not simply proceed with an extended account of perception, and perhaps elaborate its "social dimension"? Why, in short, craft a "phenomenology of Spirit"?

Even if we grant the main thrust of the idealist reading, it is unlikely Hegel would accept a sudden, adventitious re-introduction of 'perception' as a tool to ground contentful determinacy in the employment of empirical concepts, once socially constituted self-conscious selves have been introduced precisely in that capacity, i.e., in the capacity of providing a model for the institution and application of concepts. That would be to appeal to the resources of an earlier shape of consciousness qua that unsublated shape to make a later stage workable; if there is any general rule common to most interpretations of the Phenomenology, it is that later stages make earlier ones intelligible, not vice versa.

Brandom's idealist reading makes Hegel out to be a very complex version of a traditional philosopher, one who takes for granted a scheme-content dualism that is somehow resolved in a self-standing account of the social, "Spirit". The problems inherent in how an individual consciousness, with its own mental scheme, with what is "for it", relates meaningfully to the determinacy of the world "in itself", are somehow "sublated" in the collective structure of Spirit, where consciousness is really "self-consciousness", and hence socially constituted. However, it is not at all evident how this structure is not merely an expanded version of the structure of consciousness, and why whatever epistemic problems pertain to an 'I', do not also pertain to a 'we'. An appeal to perception is meant to offset this difficulty, by re-establishing a kind of immediate
contact with the world. But this indicates a rather extreme misreading that turns the *Phenomenology* on its head. As a general consideration, the critical function of the chapter “Perception” is to show how a picture of private, immediate epistemic access of an ego to the particulars of reality is useless to a theoretical account of the determinacy of concepts. To briefly indicate the precise nature of this criticism: it is that perception makes uncritical use of *thoughts* and concepts (such as ‘individuality’, ‘essence’, ‘universality’; distinctions between primary and secondary qualities, etc.) to make its presumed “common sense” characterization of reality complete. Perception takes itself to be a concrete, individual form of *immediate* cognition that eschews “abstract” thinking, and therefore takes itself to be able to achieve a clear, correct apprehension of things as they exist in themselves, without the cognitive distortions of thought: “It has only to *take* [the object], to confine itself to a pure apprehension of it, and what is thus yielded is the True” (*PS* 70, *PG* 93). But it turns out to rely on the conceptual distinctions that it forbids in principle for its peculiar mode of cognition to be possible. Hence, this kind of epistemic “denial” is not useful for grounding an account of the determinate status of our concepts.

With more specific reference to our interpretation, the reason why ‘perception’ is eliminated as a viable epistemic stance is because very early on (it is the second “shape of consciousness”) it embodies the central contradiction of the *Phenomenology*, between what is for consciousness and what consciousness takes to exist in itself, and so thus collapses and gives rise to ‘Understanding’. It is a failed candidate for grounding a viable theoretical stance, because despite its particular epistemic character or
determinacy, it is structurally just another shape of consciousness, and hence an example of the central contradiction of the *Phenomenology*, between knowledge and truth as thematized from the mentalist standpoint of consciousness.

In addition to these methodological and interpretive objections, the appeal to perception reveals a problem in the analogy central to Brandom’s argument. Brandom betrays a typical worry associated with coherentist systems, that genuine contact or “friction” with the world will be lost if inferential relations are construed to be the primary ingredient in conceptual determinacy. So an ingredient of “immediacy” is introduced into our judgments, paradigmatically occurring as perceptual judgments. But now we are entitled to ask of Brandom’s Hegel, how is it that recognitive relations amongst self-conscious selves provide a *model* for the employment of concepts, if there is a conspicuously disanalogous element at the conceptual end, namely the element of immediacy? As far as I can see, there is nothing in the recognitive relations of reciprocal authority that corresponds to the “immediate” authority a particular exerts over a universal in a perceptual judgment. According to Brandom, the dimension of particularity in recognitive relations pertains to one’s authority to recognize the authority of others in constituting oneself as an individual member of a community (BR 170). For example, I, a particular, in recognizing others, institute a community, a universal common to those others that I in turn can be recognized by. I have the authority to not recognize these others as a legitimate group, and can therefore deem their recognition worthless. But the authority the particular exerts in the social sphere of recognitive relations is already by definition recognitive. Presumably, the noninferential role of the
“world” in our judgments does not include its recognition of us as we apply our universals to it. But absent this obviously absurd requirement, it is hard to see where the points of contact in the analogy are. There seems rather to be something overtly disanalogous in the way we recognitively relate to each other, vs. the way we conceptually relate to the world.

In a sense, this is precisely the problem Hegel is trying to overcome. It is the problem of ‘thinking’ conceived as being primarily a subjective feature of consciousness, and its nonetheless posited determinate relation to the world. But this just means that Hegel is far from setting up the kind of analogy Brandom sees him as making. The interaction of self-conscious selves does not suddenly get a purchase on the kind of objectivity that eludes consciousness in the first three chapters.

Apropos of this issue of the “motion of consciousness”, Brandom draws an entirely different lesson than the one I have drawn concerning the crucial methodological statements Hegel makes in the Introduction about what is taken to be in itself vs. what is for itself, and the moment of their perceived incompatibility that leads consciousness to “alter its knowledge”. Brandom sees it like this:

Evidently, the two sorts of authority [of inferentially and non-inferentially elicited judgments] may collide. One may find oneself immediately with commitments [particular perceptions] incompatible with those to which one is inferentially committed. Then one must alter some of one’s commitments — either those that are authorized by the particulars (immediately) or those that are authorized by the universals (mediately). This necessity is normative: one is obliged by the incompatibility of one’s judgments, by the commitments one has oneself undertaken, to adjust either the authority of the particulars or of the universal. Making an adjustment of one’s conceptual commitments in the light of such a collision is what is meant by negotiating between the two dimensions of authority. The process of adjusting one’s dispositions to make immediate and mediate judgments in response to actual conflicts arising from exercising them is the process Hegel calls ‘experience’. It drives the development of concepts. It is the process of determining their content. It is how applying conceptual norms is at the same time the
process of instituting them. Conceptual contents are determinate only because and insofar as they are the products of such a process of determining them by applying them in inferential concert with their fellows (BR 175).

This passage concisely expresses where our interpretations diverge. On my reading the terminal conflict between knowledge and the in-itself ultimately produces a situation of pure indeterminacy, making it possible to give an unprejudiced account of determinacy (in the Logic). Brandom rather sees Hegel as giving an account of conceptual determinacy in the Phenomenology, through the development of concepts in experience, through their institution and application. But this simply ignores the problem we have attributed, I believe rightfully, to Hegel, i.e. that there is an insoluble contradiction in positing something in itself that stands over and against what is for consciousness. Neither side is to remain, according to the argument of the Phenomenology; the distinction collapses into indeterminacy, and the concept of consciousness is eliminated as an epistemic presupposition. Brandom appears to believe that the argument of the Phenomenology points rather to the dynamic preservation of consciousness as socially constituted in its various experiential relations. But this is to misconstrue the purpose of a “phenomenology of experience”; the purpose is not to confirm or elaborate the nature of our empirical concepts, either determined within a recognitive, normative structure of “Spirit” or not. The purpose is to eliminate them from prejudicing a non-empirical account of determinacy. Hegel does not simply recognize and then ignore a conflict between consciousness and “reality” by making them both dynamic constituents of a

\[17\] This may unfortunately imply to some readers the speculative excesses of a priori substance metaphysics, but Hegel’s work is emphatically distinct from any such reading. We will shortly consider what metaphysical claims, if any, are to be attributed to him.
"single-level"\textsuperscript{18} concept of experience\textsuperscript{19} (as much "idealistic" as it is "pragmatic"
according to Brandom), he rather tries to eliminate our habit of presupposing this
bifurcated structure of experience (which is a posit of consciousness) as a necessary idea
in philosophical theory.

Hegel was not a Kantian. He was deeply unhappy with what he took to be a terminal
opposition or contradiction between knowledge and truth (what is in itself) in traditional
epistemology, an opposition that he took the critical philosophy to epitomize. But the
removal of this contradiction entailed not simply \textit{enlarging} the structure of consciousness
into a communal structure by claiming that the experience (in the institution and
application of concepts) of socially constituted self-conscious selves is determinate,
because somehow the recognitive logic of this structure makes it so. This move, as far
as I can make out, serves to merely reinforce (by concealing) the epistemic problems
associated with a subject-centered epistemic standpoint by pluralizing that standpoint;
and so, if this is the case, there is a problem with attributing that move to Hegel if the
non-metaphysical interpretation is in essential points correct. For reasons that I have
presented throughout this study, I think it is more likely that Hegel, after having
diagnosed the contradiction between knowledge and truth as the defining feature of
traditional epistemology, sought to eliminate the habits of thought associated with its
continued appeal. That meant devising an argument that would persuade its reader to

\textsuperscript{18} "Single-level": where instituting and applying concepts are aspects of a single process. Brandom calls
this Hegel's "monistic" approach, in contrast to Kant's "two-phase" approach, discussed above.

\textsuperscript{19} Brandom claims that Hegel and Quine share a kind of pragmatic monism (BR 7).
give up presumably one of her most natural assumptions, the idea of thought's essential subjectivity as it stands in an oppositional relation to truth. This was an idea that Hegel believed stood in the way of a genuine philosophical account of determinacy. The manner in which consciousness fixes the idea of its own subjectivity in opposition to the sphere of objectivity is to be shown as unjustified and untenable through a phenomenological consideration of every attempt by consciousness to grasp the truth (or in the moral/action sphere of its experience, to become good).

These considerations allow us to make one last observation concerning 'perception' that unfortunately can only act as a foreshadowing of what will be addressed more explicitly in our discussion of Wittgenstein in Section II. There are significant resemblances between the way 'consciousness' is overcome in the first three chapters of the Phenomenology, and Wittgenstein's rule-following and private language arguments. If something can be said overall concerning these resemblances, it pertains to a series of arguments against a certain epistemological picture that is used as a self-evident starting-point for theories of meaning, concept-use, and determinacy: that of an individual 'mind' (or language-user) which, via a private relation to the 'world', is able to make sense of it, be it through individual 'perception' or 'understanding'. We will refer to this position, insofar as it is the target of separate critiques by Hegel and Wittgenstein, as "epistemic individualism". Hegel's rejection of any appeal to individual perception or understanding as playing an elementary or grounding theoretical role in an account of conceptual determinacy is similar to Wittgenstein's general rejection of what McDowell calls the "idiolectic" conception of understanding. These conceptions are unable to
purchase a grip on the putative determinacy of the world, for a complex of reasons, some
of which we will address in Section II. Let it suffice to say that Hegel would not add an
unaccounted for element of perception in an account of conceptual determinacy that can
only proceed on the assumption that the essentially “private”, subjective standpoint of the
‘I’ has been eliminated as a genuine candidate for a theoretical foundation – standing
alone, or assimilated within an intersubjective system of ‘I’ s. This latter is
representative of the temptation to view the critique of epistemic individualism as
implying an idealist solution. We are in the process of examining how that move gets
Hegel wrong; in Section II we will examine an analogous error in the way Wittgenstein is
read.

C. Empiricism, Idealism, and the Structure of Consciousness

Let us conclude our exposition of Brandom’s essay. We are at a point where we may
consider his main claim, that Hegel’s idealism illuminates his pragmatic commitments.
Grasping this will allow us to better grasp a problematic interpretation of Wittgenstein’s
“pragmatism”, one that also may fairly be called “idealist”, as we will consider in Section
II.

Brandom enlists himself in the idealist tradition of those who interpret ‘Spirit’ to be an
enlarged or collective kind of “self”\(^{20}\). He understands this “self” to mean “the realm of
conceptually articulated norms, of authority and responsibility, commitment and

\(^{20}\) See Chapter Four, Section II.A for a criticism of this view, and an alternative explanation for what
Hegel means by ‘self’ (as it pertains to Hegel’s final claims in Chapter VIII concerning ‘Spirit’).
entitlement" (BR 177). And here is how he makes the leap from idealism to pragmatism:

Spirit as a whole is the recognitive community of all those who have such normative statuses, and all their normatively significant activities. It is, in other words, the topic of the pragmatist’s inquiry: the whole system of social practices of the most inclusive possible community. Claiming that Spirit has the structure and unity of the self is another idealist thesis, and it, too, should be understood in terms of Hegel’s pragmatism (BR 177).

Idealism illuminates pragmatism and vice versa, as they share in a common structure, “Spirit”, or the realm of the normative.

The final ingredient in this picture is what Brandom locates as the historical dimension of recognitive reciprocal relations, a dimension that gives intelligibility to the claim that Spirit as a whole has the structure and unity of a self-conscious self. Spirit as a whole becomes “self-conscious”\footnote{It is unclear whether Brandom subscribes to the extreme metaphysical interpretation of ‘Spirit’ as a supra-individual self-conscious entity which possesses the same structure of an individual self-consciousness, or that he merely means by the self-consciousness of Spirit a collective capacity, via recognitive relations, of generating self-conscious selves. Or perhaps he means something else.} via recognitive reciprocal relations of authority among different time slices of Spirit; past, present, and future institutions and applications of concepts by individual self-conscious selves exert upon one another the same kinds of reciprocal relations of authority we saw developed in the accounts of social recognitive relations, and inferential conceptual relations. I am not going to specifically critique the historical dimension as I did the social and inferential dimensions; I believe it is susceptible of the same sorts of problems we have already considered (see also John McDowell’s criticism in his comments (cited in footnote 8) on Brandom’s paper). I will now assess these problems more generally in the context of Brandom’s idealist commitments, and conclude with some thoughts concerning the relation such
commitments have to “pragmatism”.

Even with the addition of the historical dimension to Brandom’s Hegel’s account, the pitfalls of a professed idealism must still pertain. The question of the determinacy of concepts, which Brandom says arises because of Hegel’s dissatisfaction with Kant’s “two-phase” account of the relation between the institution and application of conceptual norms, is answered by appeal to a complex and dynamic unification of empirical elements (insofar as the account in some sense relies on a primitive component of perception) and social interaction that leaves what we have pegged as Hegel’s central concern in the *Phenomenology* untouched, namely, that the insoluble contradictions involved in theorizing or thematizing what is in itself from the standpoint of consciousness must be overcome before a legitimate account of determinacy (qua determinacy, not qua the determinacy of the content of empirical concepts) can proceed.

Hegel’s account of determinacy, the *Logic*, is seen by Brandom as a rational *reconstruction* of determinate *empirical* concepts (BR 188n39). In fact, according to Brandom, Hegel would regard the phrase “determinate empirical concepts” to be pleonastic; a determinate concept *is* an empirical concept. Hegel’s “logical concepts” by contrast, according to Brandom, have a merely explicitating function; they get *their* content from their use in making ordinary empirical concepts (i.e. “determinate concepts”) explicit (ibid.). Otherwise, logical concepts are merely formal, i.e. contentless.

I have tried to make it evident in Chapter Four through an examination of Hegel’s opening comments to the *Science of Logic* how absolutely antithetical the above view of
conceptual determinacy is to his project. Brandom’s use of the term ‘logical’ corresponds precisely to the target of Hegel’s criticism of that term’s employment in “ordinary thinking”: “it is understood that this thinking [logic] constitutes the mere form of cognition, that logic abstracts from all content and that the so-called second constituent belonging to cognition, namely its matter, must come from elsewhere” (SL 43-44, WL 36). At first sight, Hegel’s use of the term ‘matter’ might seem to constitute evidence that his target is not what Brandom means by ‘logic’. However, Brandom speaks of “material incompatibility relations”, a phrase that he believes describes what Hegel means by “determinate negation”. Brandom’s belief is consistent with the meaning he attributes to ‘determinate’ in the phrase “determinate concept”, i.e. to be a determinate concept is to be an empirically determinate concept. So, in an effort to explain ‘determinate negation’ as a relation of material incompatibility, Brandom says “calling a patch of paint ‘red’ precludes calling it ‘green’. Formal or logical negation...is definable from the determinate or material version” (BR 174, my emphasis). This latter assertion would certainly serve to illustrate what Hegel means by the ordinary conception of logic, but just as certainly, it would not serve to illustrate what Hegel means by his conception of logic. That is because Hegel would not attach an essentially empirical significance to ‘determinate’ in the phrase “determinate concept”. But that is what Brandom does in his empirical reading of Hegel’s account of the determinacy of concepts.

In a related point (I will make the relation explicit below), Brandom’s account focuses on the determinacy of what we say, and the concepts we use, i.e. what goes on in the reciprocal recognitive relations that define and constitute the normative structure of
Spirit. There is nothing left for a theoretical account of concepts to do but spell out these reciprocal recognitive relations; as Brandom says in *Making it Explicit*, it is "norms all the way down". But this misses radically Hegel's intention to exit the epistemic impasse of speaking solely about *us*, i.e. our language, our cognitive operations, our concepts, and *then* trying to give an account of how what *we* do in our linguistic and practical relations *generates* or yields conceptual determinacy (the more traditional model attempts to locate a *relation* between what we say and do and some determinacy-conferring source, but the difficulty is the same). The problem of consciousness lurks in the background: neither consciousness, nor its pluralized and expanded version Spirit, can serve as the self-standingly intelligible starting-point, i.e. the *foundation*, for an account of conceptual determinacy, without running afoul of the very problems charted so exhaustively in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

This issue of a misplaced foundationalism relates to the misreading of 'determinate' as 'empirically determinate' in the following way. As we have seen, Brandom locates Hegel's account of determinacy (however understood) as occurring in both the *Phenomenology and the Logic*, and that what Hegel means by "determinate concepts" are *empirical* concepts, the contents of which have been acquired in the single process of their institution and application. However, this view makes an empirical dimension *basic* to the determinacy of concepts, such that it is difficult to distinguish this view, at least in this fundamental respect, from more traditionally espoused foundational

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empirical views. As initially implausible as the following suggestion might seem, I nonetheless maintain that on a genuine Hegelian analysis, Brandom’s view flirts with a kind of empirical foundationalism. How so? Insofar as Brandom claims that a concept is only determinate as empirically determinate, and logical concepts have a merely secondary, explicitating function, Brandom subscribes to the view of logic Hegel targets in the *Science of Logic* as belonging to “ordinary thinking”, or what in the *Phenomenology* is called “natural consciousness”. That view regards the logical forms of thought as empty before they are somehow “filled” with content, paradigmatically through sense-perception. But if this structural distinction between the empty form of thought and the material of the world that is perceptually translated into “content” is so much as implicit in Brandom’s account, that account is vitiated by the structural presuppositions of the “natural idea”, or the idea of consciousness as an epistemic presupposition.

That is to say, the equation of conceptual determinacy with empirical conceptual determinacy presupposes precisely that separation of concept and object posited by ‘consciousness’ that we have seen Hegel take such great pains to dispel. As such, i.e. as a concept of consciousness, ‘empiricism’ in any guise, even in the complexly elaborated system of reciprocal recognitive relations, is an inadequate starting-point for an account

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23 Compare with Hume’s straightforwardly foundational view, where he maintains that ‘ideas’ are simply less “lively” “perceptions of the mind”, the liveliest sort of perception called “impressions” originating in sensation or affective “movements” (“And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any...sensations or movements...”) (Hume 27 (Section II); my emphasis)).
of determinacy. 24 "Thought" pre-thematized in subjective opposition to the objectivity of
the world is, on Hegel's analysis, what is meant by 'consciousness'. However, 'thought'
should not be pre-thematized in any sense in the theory of determinacy, neither as an
empirical receptacle, nor as a mental a priori domain. To do so establishes an arbitrary
foundation or starting-point it is the purpose of the Phenomenology to remove.

Hegel is not indiscriminately or dogmatically casting away 'empiricism', at least not
in the sense that the term refers to experience having a kind of determinate content when
we in ordinary communication speak of our "experiences". That would represent the
weakest sense possible, and certainly does not represent a theoretical doctrine. But it is
theoretical doctrines Hegel is concerned with, and insofar as Brandom's (Hegel's) theory
makes an essential appeal to an empirical element to account for conceptual determinacy,
that theory has a structural kinship with a full blown empiricism. It is 'empiricism'
construed as a theoretical doctrine that is Hegel's target, along with anything else that
smacks of foundationalism. 25 The purpose of targeting various species of
foundationalism, or what is the same, theories developed from the presupposed
standpoint of consciousness, is to clear the way for an account of determinacy that does
not rely on, inevitably upon inspection, an arbitrary set of posits or principles.

If the subsequent (to the Phenomenology) account of determinacy succeeds, it is that

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24 That is what the chapter "Perception" (and the one preceding it, "Sense-Certainty") is meant to indicate; it is not meant to establish a latent resource for later application in the self-standing account of the social.

25 In that sense (and this has been implicit all along), we need not single out Brandom's reliance on a dubiously accounted for perceptual element in his reading. To speak in any sense about a self-standing sphere of the social grounding an account of conceptual determinacy is incorrect on our reading. Brandom's account ends up being an extremely sophisticated version of the "received" idealist view.
theoretical conception, if anything, that allows us to comprehend the nature and origin of empirical content. But this way of putting things is misleading, because it naturally brings to mind the Kantian way of looking for conditions for the possibility of making empirical judgments, and it encourages idealistic readings such as Brandom’s. Hegel believes that to focus on how we make judgments implies the epistemic foundationalism of proceeding from the presupposed standpoint of consciousness. It is Hegel’s very strong, and perhaps unappealing claim that it is possible to embark on a categorial consideration of ‘determinacy’ without necessary reference to a presupposed subjective standpoint. But on my reading, that is precisely the lesson of the Phenomenology (and it is likely that it would take an effort of nothing less than that undertaken in the Phenomenology to even approach support for that lesson). If a concept of determinacy is allowed to develop without the adventitious application of principles, posits, procedures, etc. from its own, immanent resources, the theorist will be afforded a genuine theoretical grasp of the determinate processes through which real, individual things develop.

Brandom’s account is entirely focussed on “us”, i.e., the realm of the normative, and how certain operations and relations (reciprocal recognizable) within this realm somehow

26 The “free” yet determinate manner in which thought may be allowed to develop in Hegel’s philosophical logic is in principle no different than the way an oak tree develops from an oak seed. I can offer a psychological example. Consider how unnatural it would feel to say the tree can be “deduced” from the seed, with the idea that such a phrase captures all that is essential to tree growth. I believe that according to Hegel, when we conceive of the categories of ‘thought’ or ‘logic’ solely on a deductive model (inference by reasoning from universals to particulars, where the universal is posited), we ought to feel that we are making this same sort of violation. Our feeling would reflect an actual state of affairs, i.e., we would be misconstruing the true nature of thought.
generate determinate (empirical) contentful conceptual commitments. Brandom seems
to attribute to Hegel a dichotomy between the normative, which is the sphere of our
human interaction, and whatever may be said to stand outside it; but he also attributes to
Hegel a rejection of conventional relationships of reference and representation in
describing conceptual contentfulness. Somehow the determinacy of contentful
conceptual norms is to be yielded through the complex interaction of social, inferential,
and historical relationships. But the complexity of these interactions boils down to a
fundamental idealist commitment concerning the foundational function of ‘Spirit’, which
in a dramatic way intensifies the dichotomy between Spirit and those modes of
determinacy that may be said to lie outside it, usually associated with ‘nature’, or perhaps
more abstractly, the “in-itself”. I say the dichotomy is intensified because the more
defined the structure and operations within Spirit become, the more stark is the contrast
with what someone might insist lies outside and apart from it; and here we merely find
ourselves back in old, familiar epistemological territory. I have attributed an awareness
of this problem (the problem of what we might call intersubjective idealism) to Hegel, the
resolution of which, as the more generally formulated “problem of consciousness”, is the
purpose of the *Phenomenology*.

The idealist intensification of the dichotomy between the realm of the normative and
anything non-normative (the “world”) is ruinous to the goals of a realist pragmatism.
This does not present a problem if the pragmatism in question is antirealist (I am not here
endorsing antirealism) where the objective or theoretical determinacy of the “world”
drops out as irrelevant. But Brandom says that Hegel’s pragmatism “consists in his
commitment to understanding determinately contentful empirical conceptual norms as instituted by *experience*” (BR 182), which suggests that Brandom (rightly) takes Hegel to be a kind of realist, insofar as “experience” (in an epistemically relevant sense) is a term that is only properly intelligible in light of a presumed *relation to reality*. But Brandom seems to be unaware of the other half of Hegel’s concept of experience, which sees its idealist dimension, the subjectivity of consciousness or what is merely “for it”, as a problem. Brandom, like many interpreters, seems to think Hegel’s “idealism”, in a complex variation of Kant, in some sense *grounds* the content of experience. Hence, Brandom says that in pragmatic terms “experience” is the process of using concepts by applying them in practice, of making judgments and performing actions, and this concept of experience is intelligible in light of a fundamental idealist commitment that sees the process of experience as “exhibiting a constellation of reciprocal authority whose paradigm is mutual recognition: the structure and unity of the self-conscious individual self” (BR 182). But Hegel would regard this analysis as involving not an idealist *resolution* (which is systematically impossible), but rather an idealist *expansion* of the for itself dimension of consciousness into the in-itself, into reality; here the expanded structure of the self, demarcating the realm of the “normative”, has obliterated rather than incorporated the in-itself. It is precisely this kind of idealism that is to be *eliminated*; it certainly does not guarantee the *determinacy* of pragmatic content.

We have at hand now, via a contrast of two competing interpretations of Hegel, a general sense of how a certain brand of idealism is lethal to pragmatism (which is precisely contrary to the aim of Brandom’s essay). If we bear it in mind, we can see
analogous issues at work in McDowell’s critique of two influential readings of Wittgenstein, and how the “non-idealist” reading outlined by McDowell relates to the non-idealist reading of Hegel. There is an idealist tendency parallel to the one concerning Hegel to read Wittgenstein as appealing to the norm and meaning-conferring powers of the community to re-instate the kind of determinacy that is lost in the critique of idiolectic conceptions of meaning and understanding, or of the idea of sensation as “private”. McDowell persuasively shows how it is an error to read Wittgenstein as making this kind of magical appeal to the putative meaning and determinacy-conferring powers of the community.

What has preceded and what follows forms what I earlier referred to as the “inductive” route to outlining more general parallels I see between Hegel and Wittgenstein concerning what I have called the “critique of consciousness”.

II. Subjectivity, Idiolects, and the Restoration of Determinacy

In this section I will use John McDowell’s analysis of some debates surrounding (mostly) Wittgenstein’s rule-following and private language arguments in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and present some of my own exposition of the same arguments, in an effort to criticize what I will refer to as “idealist” readings of that text. We will then be in a position to consider analogies that I see between Hegel and Wittgenstein.
A. McDowell on Rule-Following

In "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule", McDowell criticizes an influential reading of Wittgenstein advocated by Crispin Wright (and a related view advanced by Kripke). The thrust of Wright's reading is that the application of a concept or rule is not independent of our investigations or ratifications. If Wright's reading is correct, then "a familiar intuitive notion of objectivity" must be denied (McD 325). It is a notion that involves what in the last section we termed "independence", that things are thus and so independently of how we choose to investigate the matter in question. Brandom formulated the question of independence in terms of a potential problem with he calls Kant's autonomy thesis: even if it is I who take a rule to be binding, that is, it is I who acknowledge its authority over me, this cannot also mean it is I who determine the correctness or incorrectness of its application. According to Brandom's Hegel, the determinacy of the content of a rule is secured by the attitudes of others; somehow the cognitive, negotiatory dimension of the "social" is determinacy-conferring. We observed that one of the defects of this view is that it is difficult to see how the problem with "autonomy" does not merely transfer over to "heteronomy"; how is the dimension of independence added by a multiplication of 'I's if it is absent in a single 'I'?

McDowell claims that a pattern of application when a rule or concept has been properly grasped must be in some sense investigation-independent if the familiar notion of objectivity is to be preserved. This claim in a sense precludes Brandom's extended arguments for the determinacy-conferring nature of the social, insofar as such determinacy is to be considered "objective". The determinacy of the content of a rule is
presumably independent of our negotiatory, investigative activities and judgments.

According to McDowell, positions that hold that such content is not thus independent may fairly be regarded as a species of idealism, and I believe our examination of Brandom confirms this remark.

Wright’s Wittgenstein is an idealist in the above sense. According to Wright’s reading, “there is in our understanding of a concept no rigid, advance determination of what is to count as its correct application” (McD 325). Things are not “thus and so” independent of how we choose to investigate the matter in question, nor of our ratifying the judgment that that is how they are. McDowell claims that this kind of idealism, purged as it is of the intuitive notion of objectivity, cannot be used to support a genuinely recognizable picture of meaning and understanding, and thus should not (insofar as Wittgenstein is advancing a picture of meaning and understanding) be attributed to Wittgenstein.

In reference to issues we raised in our discussion of Brandom, we can see that the kind of idealism McDowell locates in Wright’s interpretation sits well with the minimal “meaning as use” definition of pragmatism, and thus why it may be tempting to view Wittgenstein in this manner. But as we previously concluded, this idealism-pragmatism link is antirealist in nature, because of the unaddressed problem of subjectivity it conceals; I have argued that this problem is the genuine target of Hegel’s phenomenological argument. We will now examine how McDowell elicits and

identifies the antirealist element in the picture of Wittgenstein as "idealisty"; it will be left for us to consider whether there is a similar "problem of subjectivity" at issue here.

According to McDowell, Wright shares the idea in common with Kripke that Wittgenstein preserves an "intuitive" notion of meaning and understanding while dispensing with what we have called the dimension of "independence", through appeal to a collective or communal concept of "membership in a linguistic community". The intuitive notion of meaning and understanding is based on a "contractual" model; we learn the meaning of a word and hence acquire an understanding that obliges us on future occasions to use that concept in certain determinate ways. In a sense then, to learn the use of a word is to sign a semantic contract that obliges the user to apply the concept in question correctly; what this implies is a kind of "law" of usage that regulates correct application; the user has the sense that she is committed to obeying the dictates of a rigid, advance determination of what is to count as a correct application. The idea that the correct use of a concept involves this aspect of rigid, advance determination, indicates that we are inclined to credit the intuitive, contractual picture of meaning and understanding with a certain kind of substance. This substantive dimension is believed to provide the element of independence that is crucial to our familiar notion of objectivity, that things are thus and so independent of our investigations. Wright thinks that Wittgenstein is able to subtract the substantive dimension of independence while preserving the intuitive notion of meaning and understanding as contractual, by appeal to membership in a linguistic community.

McDowell argues that there are two things wrong with this picture. One, far from
preserving the intuitively appealing contractual picture of meaning and understanding, the subtraction of ‘independence’ does not leave a picture recognizable in any sense as a picture of meaning and understanding (even though it is correct to reject the picture of independence qua rigid, advance determination); two, appeal to a linguistic community does not suffice as a surrogate for the missing dimension of independence, and hence does not suffice to preserve the contractual picture. Further, attribution to Wittgenstein of either the attempt to purge the dimension of independence from the intuitive contractual conception of meaning and understanding, or the appeal to an idealist solution to replace the missing dimension of independence, is incorrect.

Wright takes Wittgenstein to be attacking the notion of an “idiolectic” understanding of a rule or its expression – that one has some sort of privileged access to the character of one’s own understanding. The presumed ground for any such idiolectic understanding would be a kind of ratification-independent fact of the matter that determines whether one’s understanding is correct. We realize in the course of the *Investigations* that there could be nothing like an essentially personal understanding of e.g. a rule in the form of an order, if that order is to impose genuine constraints on what I do in the execution of it. That is because anything could seem to me to accord with my understanding of the order if I sincerely undertake its execution, and therefore any act in principle could appear to conform to my understanding of the rule, if acts based on such an understanding are accompanied by a certain feeling of “doing it right”. But if this is the case, how do we make room for the view that a correct understanding of an expression is the result of a conceptual commitment to a ratification-independent pattern or fact of the matter?
Since this critique of the idiolectic conception of understanding figures so importantly, but is nonetheless only adumbrated in the course of McDowell's larger argument concerning the vacuity of appeals to the "community", it may help to flesh the former out a bit further. The famous discussion of §293, located in the midst of the private-language arguments, I believe epitomizes Wittgenstein's critique of the very idea of an idiolectic stance (taken generally), be it with reference to rule-following, sensation, or language. It provides a good focus, because in addition to illuminating what is presently under consideration, it also at least implicitly speaks to the problem of theoretically grounding the determinacy of our concepts in the idea of individual perceptual access to "facts", an issue we raised in the last section regarding Brandom's suspect appeal to "immediacy" (see 5.1.B). The passage is as follows:

If I say to myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word "pain" means — must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the one case so irresponsibly?

Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is only from his own case!—Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as a the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a something: for the box might even be empty.—No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.

That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant (PI §293).

The concept here in question is 'pain'. Does one know what the word means only from one's own case of having pains? Wittgenstein proposes an analogy. Suppose that everyone in a hypothetical community has a box with something in it, what is collectively called by this community 'beetle'. One may look into one's own box, but not the box of
any other. Now if a member of this community is asked (presumably by a philosopher) how she knows the meaning of the term ‘beetle’, she would reply that she knows it because of her direct acquaintance with her own beetle, through peering into her box. If all the above conditions pertained, Wittgenstein claims that it would then be possible for everyone to have something different in their boxes. Further, suppose the term ‘beetle’ has a use in this community’s language. If that were the case, then the term would not be used to name a thing at all, because there might even be nothing in the box; to alter an expression from section 304, it is a “something” that may as well be a “nothing”: here “a nothing would serve just as well as something about which nothing could be said.”

Wittgenstein employs a mathematical metaphor of “cancelling out” to explain why it is that the “thing” drops out of consideration. One can imagine different kinds of acts, utterances, and uses that surround the fact that each individual possesses a box that contains something that is meant by ‘beetle’. But if in the midst of such activity, it is rigorously maintained that each individual only knows what ‘beetle’ means through private inspection of his or her own box, then meaningful interactions amongst community members that involve the boxes will proceed regardless of what the true nature of the things in the members’ boxes might be.\(^{28}\) The actual fact of what the thing is that occupies each box drops out as irrelevant to the public meaning of ‘beetle’. Even

\(^{28}\) It seems the metaphor has a limit here – what of descriptive comparisons the members of the community might make concerning the contents of the boxes? However, we can say that even descriptive comparisons amongst members would be subject to a regress if we include perceptual contents among those things individuals have only private access to. Then the perceptual terms used in such comparisons would themselves have only private meanings.
if ‘beetle’ is sincerely meant each time it is uttered by a member, on this idiolectic conception of meaning, the actual fact of what the thing in the box is becomes a secondary, or even irrelevant consideration to the *community* usage of the term ‘beetle’.

Wittgenstein spells out the analogy specifically with reference to the meaning of the term ‘pain’, but the analogy works just as well to illuminate what is wrong with the idiolectic conception of understanding. Again, on this conception, *any* sincere execution of, e.g. an order, can be made to accord with one’s own understanding, such that the presumed fact of the matter that is to determine what it is that the order actually demands accomplished, drops out of consideration, is “cancelled out”. No genuine comparison between the fact of the matter concerning the content of the order and its execution can be made, if the only criterion for the comparison is my private understanding of the fact. For whatever I do will accord with my understanding of the fact, heedless of the fact itself. And now the only criterion of success becomes the approval of whoever made the order. Presumably, if we are to keep the idea of ratification-independence in the wake of this criticism of a private, idiolectic grasp of some fact of the matter, then somehow we will have to locate the element of independence in these acts of approval and assent.

Hence, perhaps we can appeal to membership in a linguistic community to rehabilitate the dimension of independence that is lost with the critique of a private epistemic standpoint. But the linguistic community only establishes patterns of “going in step” with one’s fellows; one is only “wrong” if one falls out of step, not if one goes against a ratification-independent pattern that the collective follows or antecedently understands. Say the community approves the action of some member in the attempted fulfilment of an
order. This approval is not secured as the result of the community having collectively recognized the conformity of the action to an antecedent communal understanding of the order (McD 334-5). This places the communal understanding in exactly the same position as the idiolectic understanding: here, instead of the action itself being made to conform with a private understanding, it is the approval that conforms with a collective understanding. In either case, there is no direct comparison with a ratification-independent pattern or fact. So the upshot of Wright's reading is: "None of us unilaterally can make sense of the idea of correct employment of language save by reference to the authority of securable communal assent on the matter; and for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet" (McD 328). For Wright, these considerations are enough to preserve the contractual picture of meaning and understanding (insofar as "contracts" are made among members of a community), while dispensing with what he considers to be the superfluous dimension of independence.

There are precise parallels here with Brandom's discussion of the defects of Kant's autonomy thesis. Taking oneself as being bound by a rule does not guarantee that one in fact is. The determinate content of a rule is secured through the administration of others who attribute a conceptual commitment to one who acknowledges and undertakes it. Brandom's Hegel avoids the idiolectic conception of understanding found in the autonomy thesis by making it heteronomous, by making the determinate content of conceptual commitments a matter of negotiation amongst normative centers of recognition, i.e., amongst a multiplicity of self-conscious selves. However, we saw that the "social" by itself did not purchase the kind of conceptual content that was sought
McDowell claims that appeal to the linguistic community, once the element of independence has gone missing, can only be vacuous if the contractual picture of meaning and understanding is nevertheless maintained. However, one should not conclude that Wittgenstein’s attack on the idiolectic conception of understanding entails a skeptically compromised appeal to communal assent. In a particularly illuminating comparison, McDowell takes a passage where Wittgenstein is clearly attacking the idiolectic conception of understanding, and alters it to give it a communal character, to see if anything is thereby resolved. The passage in question is PI §460; here is the original version:

Could the justification of an action as fulfillment of an order run like this: “You said ‘Bring me a yellow flower’, upon which this one gave me a feeling of satisfaction; that is why I have brought it”? Wouldn’t one have to reply: “But I didn’t set you to bring me the flower which should give you that sort of feeling after what I said!”?

This is clearly an attack on the idiolectic conception of the understanding; something is missing in the account of the nature of the order if the only thing appealed to in its “justification” is the kind of feeling it creates in the executor. But McDowell claims that it would have been fully in character for Wittgenstein to write a similar passage that replaces the idiolectic feeling of satisfaction with communal approval:

Could the justification of an action as fulfillment of an order run like this: “You said ‘Bring me a yellow flower’, upon which this one received approval from all the bystanders; that is why I have brought it”? Wouldn’t one have to reply: “But I didn’t set you to bring the flower which should receive approval from everyone else after what I said!”?

While it is generally correct and illuminating to interpret Wittgenstein as mounting a sustained attack on idiolectic conceptions of meaning and understanding, it does not
license the inference that he is appealing to a model of communal assent that will somehow preserve the “contract” picture, and therefore some measure of “objectivity”.

Such a reading leaves mysterious the difference between the significance of “This is yellow” and the significance of, e.g., “This would be called ‘yellow’ by most English speakers.” Wittgenstein was interested in differentiating between meaning and consensus, but Wright’s reading essentially ignores this.

In a footnote McDowell refers us to passages in *Zettel* for confirmation that Wittgenstein did not support a conception of meaning as consensus; we will briefly consider two. Wittgenstein says:

*Colour-words are explained like this:* “That’s red” e.g. – Our language game only works, of course, when a certain agreement prevails, but the concept of agreement does not enter into the language-game. If agreement were universal, we should be quite unacquainted with the concept of it (*Zettel* §430).

In the prior section, Wittgenstein entertains the possibility that “human agreement” may decide whether an utterance such as “That is red” is correct. But in the above passage he appears to conclude that a certain level of agreement is a *condition* for the meaningful utterance of “That is red”, rather than something that belongs to the “concept” of the assertion’s meaningful employment, in a way that would presumably *decide* the correctness of such employment. In the following section Wittgenstein says,

> Does human agreement *decide* what is red? Is it decided by appeal to the majority? Were we taught to determine colour in *that* way? (*Zettel* §431).

It is a well known claim of the Dummett-Wright reading that Wittgenstein replaces a truth-conditional conception of meaning with one based on “assertibility conditions”; this

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29 See Michael Dummett, “Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mathematics.”
reading seems to receive support from what appears to be a comment about the conditions for a meaningful utterance in §430. However, what do we then make of the following comment that the concept of agreement does not enter into the language-game, or Wittgenstein’s incredulity at the idea that the correctness of the type of assertion in question can be decided by any such appeal to the majority? Wittgenstein here clearly takes the determinacy of our colour concepts to be a separate issue.

The implied antirealism of the Wright reading is related to Kripke’s famous claim that Wittgenstein has accepted a “skeptical paradox”, that there is nothing that could constitute my understanding a rule or an order in a determinate way; and since “no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule...there would be neither accord nor conflict” (PI §201).

According to Kripke, Wittgenstein introduces a “skeptical solution”, a solution that concedes that the points raised by the skeptic are unanswerable. The two-step solution involves 1) disposing with the truth-conditional conception of meaning and replacing it with something like “justification conditions”, and 2) (in the kind of move we have been considering), making sense of meaningful utterances in terms of their use in recording acceptance of individuals into a linguistic community. But as McDowell points out, the skeptical concession makes it sound as if Wittgenstein is denying that it is possible to genuinely understand something to mean one thing rather than another, independent of investigation or ratification. If this is actually Wittgenstein’s position, where so much is conceded to the skeptic, then “it is quite obscure how we could hope to claw ourselves back [from meaninglessness] by manipulating the notion of accredited membership in a
linguistic community" (McD 330).

McDowell shows that it is seriously misleading to view Wittgenstein as satisfied that, after having conducted a sustained attack on the idiolectic conception of meaning and understanding, he has preserved the intuitive "contractual" conception of meaning and understanding via an appeal to the etiolated determinacy-conferring powers of a linguistic community. McDowell suggests that such an appeal would be nothing short of magical. It is this reading of Wittgenstein that runs into the same difficulties that we saw plagued the idealist reading of Hegel. A pragmatism based on the idealist supposition that conceptual determinacy can somehow be generated through modes of community assent, or even "negotiation", stripped of the dimension of "independence", ends up being a variant of antirealism. From our discussion of Brandom, we saw that at the core of this kind of antirealism is an unaddressed "problem of subjectivity", which was Hegel's target in the *Phenomenology*. When Hegel is interpreted as an idealist, it is natural to see him as making an appeal to "Spirit" as the collective, normative realm that grounds, as Brandom puts it, the determinacy of contentful conceptual commitments. But as I read Hegel, 'Spirit' thus interpreted is merely an expanded version of consciousness, and hence continues in collective form the basic problem of subjectivity. That problem is expressed in Hegel's Introduction to the *Phenomenology* as a contradiction between a dimension that is *for* consciousness, and a dimension posited by consciousness as existing in itself, that is in principle something *other* than consciousness.

Wittgenstein's sustained attack on "idiolects" is the semantic analogue of the problem of subjectivity or consciousness in Hegel; we will explore the former in greater depth.
shortly. But I would first like to note that the analogy continues in an interesting way. There is a sense in which these thinkers are, at least programmatically, so similar, that they are open to parallel misreadings that cast them as offering "idealist" solutions to their respective critiques. There is a temptation to construe both thinkers as appealing to "community" to somehow settle problems associated with the idiolectic or subjective dimension of consciousness. However, I believe neither thinker makes this sort of appeal, at least not in a way that merely allows the problem of subjectivity to go unrecognized or ignored. Rather, and here I think this is the right way of construing the programmatic analogy, both thinkers point to the need for an alternative conception of determinacy that does not fall prey to presuppositions concerning the subjective nature of language or consciousness, which always implicitly or explicitly posits what we do and say in opposition to what reality is (or "does") in itself.

B. Skepticism, Antirealism, and Wittgensteinian Bedrock

We might say generally that the rule-following arguments are concerned to diffuse the temptation to philosophically posit what we might call "inner determiners", and the idiolectic conception of meaning attached to them, that would allow us to say with certainty that the application of a rule or concept is correct. Wittgenstein's interlocutor comes up with countless instances of what appear to be unique and essential inner events or accompaniments that would presumably decide the determinacy of a "rule's" (the term is intentionally used in a broad, somewhat equivocal manner) application; take for example the "rules of reading". There are so many acts and attendant subjective feelings
that accompany them that may be interpreted as ‘reading’, that the very concept loses any presumed univocal sense. Wittgenstein says “we...use the word ‘to read’ for a family of cases. And in different circumstances we apply different criteria for a person’s reading” (PI §164). This can be construed as one instance in an entire battery of arguments that suggest that Wittgenstein is positing “criteria of justification” that ultimately receive their determinacy from arbitrary communal standards. As we saw before, this reading encompasses both Wittgenstein’s critique of univocal, idiolectic “inner determiners”, and his attempt to preserve an intuitive conception of meaning via some kind of appeal to the community. We have considered the antirealist implications of this latter move, and why it is problematic to attribute it to Wittgenstein, especially if we deny that he endorses some species of skepticism.

But we should note that the absence of some internally accessible, univocal criterion, the “superlative fact” of §192, that will determine e.g. whether some act is an act of ‘reading’ neither means the concept of ‘reading’ is indeterminate, nor requires anything like the “skeptical solution” to make it meaningful in some etiolated sense. This is important to note as a general point apart from Wittgenstein’s approach here, and it will also help to specifically illuminate his approach. To spell out this general point, let us revisit Aristotle’s discussion in Book Γ of the *Metaphysics*, which I discussed in the Introduction (this will in turn broaden the overall link to Hegel). Aristotle speaks of a

30 “You have no model of this superlative fact [that allows the grasp of the whole use of a word in a flash], but you are seduced into using a super-expression. (It might be called a philosophical superlative.)"
term being used in many ways, *yet not equivocally*. A term that is used in an entirely equivocal manner would mean at least two entirely different things. But there is a kind of concept that is determinate in virtue of its *relation* to something that is taken to, at least implicitly, have a single nature. One of Aristotle's examples of such a concept is 'healthy'. This term is used in different senses, but not equivocally. For example, something is healthy if it preserves health, as in "healthy activity", or it is healthy if it is a sign of health, as in "healthy attitude", or it is healthy if it is receptive to health, as in "healthy circumstances". The concept 'healthy' is used in several senses, but they are related; they all relate implicitly to health. But 'health' itself is not something that can be univocally stated as that which is *common* to all the related uses of 'healthy'; Aristotle stresses that he is *not* talking about a kind of genus-species relation where all that is healthy is *named* in accordance with a single, stateable concept or nature that is *common* to all the instances. The concept of 'health' itself can only be *elicited* bit by bit via a grasp of all the genuinely *different* but *related* uses of 'healthy'.

This doctrine of Aristotle's has been called "*pros hen* equivocality"; 'pros hen' means "towards one"; we move towards grasping a single nature or sense by eliciting it from the different but related uses of a term. But this nature can never be univocally at hand such that it could, via some common essence, determine all the different senses and uses of the term. Now compare this passage from the *Investigations*:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or

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these relationships, that we call them all “language” (PI §65).

The example here is ‘language’. The term is used determinately, yet in many different senses. The term is not determinate in virtue of a common feature to many separately distinguishable instances of its application; we can only make sense of the term via how it is related to its numerous uses. Only in this way is there any hope of eliciting an overall grasp of the concept ‘language’.

Wittgenstein poses a question in this regard. If we cannot come up with a univocal definition of e.g. ‘game’ that is strictly common to all games, does that mean we do not know what a game is? Absolutely not:

One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way.—I do not, however, mean by this that he is supposed to see in those examples that common thing which I—for some reason—was unable to express; but that he is now to employ those examples in a particular way. Here giving examples is not an indirect means of explaining—in default of a better. For any general definition can be misunderstood too” (PI §71).

The concept ‘game’ is not determinate in virtue of a univocally expressible or inexpressible essence that is common to all games. Yet it is determinate. The question is how. The usual interpretation is that Wittgenstein’s master thought pertains to “meaning as use”, and certainly the fact that he is urging his hypothetical student of games to learn how to employ examples of games in a particular way supports that reading. But any “language as use” thesis must not be taken to imply, in the sense we have seen, a mere appeal to community standards, whose objective status is unclear (or denied). As I have been suggesting, there is a “harder” conception of determinacy lurking here, but one that nonetheless does not resort to an illusory conception of privately accessible semantic universals, or the myth of the “superlative fact”.
What is this conception? Kripke reads Wittgenstein as making a skeptical concession that involves an appeal to a weak "normativity": meaning is something that consists of no more than an aggregate system of linguistic behaviours in a community. But in the passages we have just considered, and in the ones leading up to the famous "paradox" of §201, I suggest that Wittgenstein is trying to de-problematize our notion of conceptual determinacy by in effect showing that even as we appear to be confronted with some sort of abstract problem that de-stabilizes our sense that we may know or understand a rule or concept, the fact remains that we can still think and use it in determinate ways. I would now like to develop more explicitly how the "problem of subjectivity" shows up, and what the precise nature of Wittgenstein's critique of it is; we have generally seen it at work in the critique of idiolects, now we can more precisely address it with reference to the question of interpretation.

While it is correct to reject the picture of a superlative fact that would ground our understanding, it is not Wittgenstein's conclusion that understanding is therefore merely interpretation, in an "unmasked" sense. What I mean by "unmasked" is this: "interpretation" is at first understood to refer, by Wittgenstein's interlocutor, to the manner in which we try to answer a philosophical question that asks e.g. what would constitute my understanding of the 'plus' sign in a way with which only certain answers to given addition problems would accord? (McD 331). The tempting answer is that I look for a specific fact that would constitute my having put an appropriate interpretation on what I learned when I was told how to do arithmetic. But we realize that any such putative fact is itself capable of interpretation, and even if we produce such an
interpretation, it has the same status as the others: "any interpretation still hangs in the air along with what it interprets, and cannot give it any support" (PI §198). What this metaphor vividly suggests is that the ground has been pulled from under our feet; we ordinarily expect that an interpretation can be correct (and thus that we possess understanding) if it has an appropriate relation to the relevant fact. But Wittgenstein here seems to suggest that neither can a fact confirm an interpretation, nor can an interpretation "reach out" to the relevant fact. This seems to be the thrust of the skeptical reading, i.e., that Wittgenstein endorses the idea that there is nothing (no fact of the matter) that constitutes one’s understanding an expression in a determinate way. This is in effect interpretation “unmasked” of its realist presumptions, and shown its (I would like to say) irreducible subjective nature. But as McDowell points out, Wittgenstein goes on to say that what these considerations show is that there is a way of understanding a rule which is not an interpretation, as when we obey or go against it in actual cases.

We are not to simply concede that, to put it in terms that Wittgenstein might be unhappy with, various affects and modifications of subjectivity (e.g. the psychological sensations that attend reading, or the sincere sense that I am properly executing an order) forever preclude access to a fact-based understanding of a rule or concept’s application (for example, conceding that every rule is subject to an infinite regress of subjective interpretation), and then to opt for a “skeptical solution” that appeals to a weakened concept of normativity. Wittgenstein instead bypasses the problem altogether. We are “always already” in possession of the kind of determinacy that seems to elude us if we first picture, and then subtract, the idea of a “superlative fact”. This bypassing of the
problem in effect involves rejecting the philosopher’s presupposed notion of subjectivity that generates at the outset the problematic relation an individual’s understanding would have to a determinacy-conferring fact. “Understanding” pictured as an interpretive relation a language-using subject has to a concept or rule, creates that moment of ineliminable distance between a rule and the understanding of it that generates “one interpretation after another; as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it” (PI §201). Wittgenstein, again as McDowell points out, regards this regress as built on an error: “What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call ‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases” (PI §201). Affirming the conception of understanding as necessarily interpretation is tantamount to affirming, in a terminal way, that understanding can never come into contact with the presumed determinacy of what is to be understood.

“Interpretation” (unmasked)\(^{32}\) is one of the aspects of the idiolectic standpoint, or what I am calling more generally “subjectivity”, that generates the kind of indeterminacy that, here at least, everyone agrees Wittgenstein is trying to avoid. It is hardly a solution to expand the idiolectic standpoint into a community; “interpretation” then becomes a collective matter. The indeterminacy of interpretation, taken individually or collectively, will not be a problem for someone who takes it for granted, in a robust Nietzschean sense, that e.g. all societies are driven by their values and myths, and all “great” wars for

\(^{32}\) I will from here on use this convention to indicate the “post-critical” sense of interpretation, i.e., the subjectivist sense after it has been realized that interpretation does not have an unproblematic relation to a fact in an act of understanding.
example, reduce to a competition between interpretations of existence. This kind of perspective makes the implied relativism of "interpretation" basic to all thought and action. Such an example maybe takes the implications a bit far, but the basic point stands if we take seriously Wright's point, that "for the community itself there is no authority, so no standard to meet." To reduce understanding to interpretation makes a casualty of, as McDowell puts it, a familiar, intuitive notion of objectivity.

What is implicitly under attack then, is a presupposed, inabrogable subjective distance between the act of understanding (whether taken idiolectically or collectively) and that which is to be understood, a distance that is the very lifeblood of the "skeptical paradox", one that makes "interpretation" a basic feature of any attempt to determinately grasp e.g. a rule. However, if McDowell is right, and I believe he is, Wittgenstein's point is precisely that there is a way of construing 'understanding' that is not interpretation, and hence Wittgenstein in a sense bypasses the problem that arises after we come to our skeptical conclusions concerning the nature of interpretation, and we make our peace with the subjective distance that precludes contact with "facts" (or with the idea that there are no facts). Wittgenstein's critique is rather aimed towards showing how the entire problem of subjective distance is moot.

There are related difficulties with the antirealist reading of Wittgenstein, which I will now explore. I will use McDowell's characterization of antirealism and its motivations, and what he calls his transcendental argument against antirealism, to clarify these difficulties. But before I do, I will briefly indicate where the argument is headed.

The antirealist seeks to replace a subjective, idiolectic realm of an interior,
propositional domain of meanings with what we might term a “surface” conception of meaning. The idea of an abstract interior domain of propositions is in a sense collapsed and thinned out in favour of a “surface” semantics. But this surface semantics is contaminated with traces of the interior it seeks to bury, such that the latter ultimately determines a move away from a conception of meaning as grasped, a conception that involves genuine understanding. That is, any inclination to construe understanding in terms of a grasp of a network of determinate patterns (e.g. of behavior) must be eliminated, because it leaves open the possibility that we might extrapolate along the pathways of the network to some meaning, which would make that meaning by definition “hidden”. But this elimination of the network idea determines a move away from a conception of meaning as grasped in any sense. It merely invites the picture of external behaviors moving or sounding off in concert, and then, what has happened to meaning? We are not left with a picture of meaning at all.

To state this argument in more specific terms, McDowell characterizes a basic antirealist thesis as holding that “people’s sharing a language is constituted by appropriate correspondences in their dispositions to linguistic behaviour, as characterized without drawing on command of the language, and hence not in terms of the contents of their utterances” (McD 347). This thesis is a fuller characterization of the fundamental antirealist thesis, as Wright puts it, that we have understanding only of concepts of which we can distinctively manifest our understanding. These theses are motivated by a rejection of the idea that assigning a meaning to an utterance by a speaker of one’s language is forming a hypothesis about something concealed behind the surface of his
linguistic behavior (McD 347). This rejection also forms the basis of the critique of the idiolectic conception of meaning and understanding, and what Wright perceives to be an attendant commitment to the idea of ratification-independence. The antirealist wants to bring meaning to "the surface", as it were. But in so doing, as McDowell points out, the antirealist retains the picture of a "surface" that is basic to the rejected picture of meaning. That picture holds that what occurs on the linguistic "surface" is the expression of an inner semantic item, e.g. the privately accessible propositional content of some speaker's utterance. The antirealist in a sense wants to keep the idea of a behavioral, expressive surface, but subtract the inner semantic dimension that it putatively expresses. The retention of this picture of the surface will come back to haunt the antirealist, because, in a sense, the logic of "expression" entails that something is there to be expressed, prior to any expression (Hegel refers to this as the "logic of essence"). So simply removing the inner dimension will "logically" have undesirable consequences for the antirealist.

The rigorous antirealist insistence on staying on the surface entails a particular sense of what "manifesting our understanding" can consist. Such behaviour as assenting to a sentence in certain circumstances is paradigmatic. It can be characterized, says the antirealist, without command of the language in question, and so putatively, without grasp of the content of any utterance of that language. But what exactly is manifested by a piece of behaviour described in accordance with the requirement that the interpreter lack command of the language in question? We can search for or attribute a disposition, but McDowell points out that the antirealist picture lacks the resources for us to
extrapolate a determinate conception of what the disposition is a disposition to do. All we seem to be confronted with, in effect, is a brute, indeterminate, "sounding-off". We can take a more charitable stance, and say that we are confronted with a "network of determinate patterns" that may be suggestive of some set of meanings that I am able to recognize or determine, but as McDowell says, any extrapolation from such patterns to something meaningful, can here only be inductive. If meaning is a matter of induction, it remains hidden, i.e. we must inductively infer what is not directly manifested on the surface, and the original and fundamental antirealist requirement is violated: the requirement that understanding be fully manifested in behaviour. So Wright, staying true to the antirealist premise, will say that strictly speaking, no extrapolation is licensed at all. As McDowell puts it, "the 'anti-realist' requirement of manifestation precludes any conception of understanding as a grasp of a network of patterns. And this is precisely the conclusion Wright draws" (McD 347).

But here we can begin to see that the effort to flatten the picture of meaning onto the "surface" destroys meaning altogether. We are left with a picture of the relation between a communal "language" and the world that has been leached entirely of determinacy. This picture of meaning is, as McDowell puts it, "norm-free", so it is not a picture of meaning at all. A picture of meaning that includes the genuine operation of norms requires an element of answerability to a state of affairs or patterns that maintains a dimension of ratification-independence that can in some sense be grasped. This dimension tells us what ought to be understood by some statement (the issue of, as both Brandom and McDowell separately put it, being "contractually bound" to a concept).
Mere communal assent cannot supply this "ought". If all we are left with is a series of "surface" movements that achieve a level of concert with one another, as in the picture of a collective "going in step", meaning is at best illusory.

The antirealist effort to repress any vestige of a linguistic "subject" backfires in the initial acceptance of a dichotomy between the "surface" of linguistic behavior, and a "meaning-interior", taken e.g. as the domain of propositional content. The antirealist tries to expand the surface to encompass the totality of anything possibly meaningful. But in doing so, she is in danger of importing the very picture of meaning she is critiquing into her alternative. That is because when we ask how we are to make sense of the "manifesting behaviour" in question, either by appeal to "dispositions" or even to a network of patterns, in the absence of any understanding of the meaning of the language, it is unclear how we are to make any kind of extrapolation as to what such dispositions or patterns might be. If the extrapolation of meaning becomes a matter of induction, something remains hidden. So to completely divest her picture of "hiddenness" she commits to a picture that has been leached of meaning entirely, that is, a picture where members of a linguistic community are merely "going in step". Not only is there no grasp of "patterns", there is no grasp of anything.

I suggest, and I believe McDowell does also, that Wittgenstein's actual position involves rejecting the dichotomy from which the antirealist's notion of the "surface" is descended. The "surface", because it is defined negatively in relation to a picture it hopes to replace, a picture of rich semantic interiority, ends up being thinned out to the point where it is not recognizable as a sphere of meaning. In this "norm-free" picture,
we are left with a mere aggregate of individuals, who, in the absence of the genuine possibility of meaningful understanding, remain opaque to one another (although they may "walk in step"). But if we reject the antirealist "surface" restriction on what counts as manifesting one's understanding, and implicitly the dichotomy of a meaning-interior in relation to a behaviour-exterior from which the surface restriction is logically descended, I think we can still hope to (and I believe this is Wittgenstein's hope) rehabilitate a concept of independence, and the determinacy it purchases, without falling into the exaggerated picture of the "superlative fact". Steering clear of the myth of the superlative fact (and the picture of understanding as interpretation) is what leads to an embrace of the "skeptical paradox". To resolve the difficulties of such a view, the idea of accredited membership in a linguistic community is invoked, where meaning is a thoroughly behavioral, "surface" affair. But the attempt to purge this conception of any vestigial "inner" dimension, leads to a picture of external, concerted behaviours that does not appear to have room in it for a genuine conception of meaning at all.

Wittgenstein wants to rehabilitate a conception of determinacy that neither falls into the mythology of the superlative fact, nor resorts to an *ad hoc* conception of a surface "community semantics", an untenable response to the indeterminacy of the conception of understanding as interpretation (unmasked). And here is the upshot of our rather complex discussion: Wittgenstein's conception of the determinacy that he finds naturally belongs to our thinking and acting (which we will discuss shortly) is possible, if and only if, a certain, presupposed picture of thought and action as proceeding from an essentially subjective standpoint is discarded. This is how I read the sustained attack on idiolectic
stances that spans both the rule-following and private language arguments. The strict condition of “if and only if” is meant to indicate that not only the obvious critique of *individual* idiolectic stances must be heeded, but also their enlarged, community variant.

The skeptical reading takes the subjective vision of understanding as interpretation (unmasked) as given, and this leads to the problematic picture of participants in a community semantics without any standards independent of a kind of “going in step”, with no accountability to any authority beyond what may be arbitrarily stipulated within the linguistic community. Linguistic communities are in this vision like unmoored, self-contained semantic balloons, each as hollow as the next, forever sailing past one another, with nothing in common except the measureless, empty aether they inhabit (this is a metaphor concerning the absence of genuine conceptual determinacy in the skeptical picture). In a somewhat different but related way, the antirealist vision of a community “surface” semantics runs afoul of that which it aims to criticize: the idea of a sphere of individual semantic *interiority*.

We are now in a better position to consider what my argument stresses overall: a *critical* aspect common to both Hegel and Wittgenstein. Both regard what may be generally called a thoroughgoing “critique of consciousness” to be a *necessary* precursor to introducing alternative conceptions of determinacy that are not grounded in that standpoint. If the problem is not truly addressed (and for both it is a matter of acquiring new *habits* of thinking), there will be an *idealist* temptation, at least by their readers, to make “community” somehow the seat of determinacy; but this will have been rendered impossible by the way this “community” is conceived, i.e. either as a kind of collective,
intersubjectivity, or more specifically to Wittgenstein’s case, a collective “going in step” that has been leached of anything recognizable as meaningful interaction. Since the purpose of this study has been to locate and elaborate this critical dimension, I will not spend a great deal of time discussing Wittgenstein’s alternative, post-mentalist conception of determinacy. It will suffice to draw attention to McDowell’s outline of it as located in “practice”. The analogy with Hegel ends with the programmatic scheme of attaching a preliminary purging of certain natural (habitual) philosophical ideas to the possibility of outlining an alternative, post-mentalist conception of determinacy.

McDowell provides us with a battery of textual support (which I will intersperse with my own selections) for what Wittgenstein’s alternative conception of determinacy is based on: communal practices, or customs, that at the “ground level” include our intuitive notions of rule-following or concept-applying as involving the dimension of answerability or independence.\(^{33}\) Wittgenstein’s position avoids “understanding as interpretation” by speaking of “‘obeying the rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases”, but also avoids the brute, meaning-free picture of action and linguistic behavior without norms. This is possible because “following according to a rule is FUNDAMENTAL to our language-game”,\(^ {34}\) that is, meaning is inscribed at a basic level into our practices; the basic level is not a meaning-free surface of concerted linguistic behaviors.

\(^{33}\) I believe the position that McDowell outlines here has a great deal in common with his conception of ‘second nature’ (See Chapter One). Therefore, unfortunately, the position being attributed to Wittgenstein here suffers from some of the same unanswered questions we had concerning whether “free responsiveness to norms” had truly been demystified.

Wittgenstein’s critical aim is not to dismantle the determinacy we usually accord to concept-use or following a rule, it is to rid ourselves of the idea that apprehension of such determinacy proceeds from an essentially idiolectic standpoint, which leads to the skeptical scenarios discussed above. To eliminate the concept of an idiolectic standpoint is not to *eo ipso* to reject independence. It is, according to the way I read Wittgenstein, to eliminate a preconceived subjective barrier, to make “contact” with what is determinate by making it *integral* to shared practices, to make determinacy fundamental to thinking and acting within a context of such shared practices, to make it fundamental to our “language-game”.

Our preconceptions concerning the subjectivity of meaning stem from taking seriously an aura of uncanniness that surrounds certain typically philosophical considerations.

Consider:

“This queer thing, thought”—but it does not strike us as queer when we are thinking. Thought does not strike us as mysterious while we are thinking, but only when we say, as it were retrospectively: “How was that possible?” How was it possible for thought to deal with the very object *itself*? We feel as if by means of it we had caught reality in our net (PI §428).

We regard our thinking as unproblematically determinate until we shift focus onto how it is possible that it *can* be determinate. Wittgenstein’s answer is that at the ground level, there is a kind of determinacy that must be presupposed for the games of e.g. “justification” and “reporting” to be intelligible as activities in any sense. Consider the next section:

The agreement, the harmony, of thought and reality consists in this: if I say falsely that something is *red*, then, for all that, it isn’t *red*. And when I want to explain the word “red” to someone, in the sentence “That is not red”, I do it by pointing to something red (PI §429).
The so-called "agreement of thought and reality" is to be taken as something basic; that is the condition for the very possibility of rendering and assessing opinions, or "getting it wrong". However, this basic level, the level of "bedrock", even if it is prior to justification – a bedrock which makes justification intelligible as a "language-game" at all, is not norm-free; we (that is, creatures who are responsive to norms) are still engaging in concept-use and rule-following. McDowell points to this passage: "To use a word without justification does not mean to use it without right" (PI §289).

All of this in a sense points to a non-theoretical presumption that our thinking and action are "always already" determinate at the level of bedrock, but in a way that countenances as basic, our freedom of thought. It takes a purely "deconstructive" kind of theorizing to reclaim this presumption, but once it is reclaimed, there is, strictly speaking, nothing positive for philosophical theory to accomplish. This non-theoretical aspect signals the end of the analogy to Hegel. The analogy is strongest when we consider the very idea of requiring a critique of the concept of consciousness as a necessary prerequisite to framing an alternative conception of determinacy; but as far as a comparison of the development of Hegel and Wittgenstein’s alternative conceptions go, there is dramatic deviation. However, despite radical differences in approach, I think one thing is safe to say concerning the very idea of reclaiming ‘determinacy’ as a result of a critique of consciousness: what is reclaimed is a kind Aristotelian confidence, intrinsically immune to radical skepticism, that the structures of thought do not dwell in a kind of *sui generis* isolation from the rest of reality (i.e. in an unaccounted for or posited
subjective structure), but are included in any philosophically significant concept of 'reality'. This inclusion does not thereby "subjectivize objectivity", a move we see in Kant (see 2.III). It is the radical nature of this kind of critique to eliminate our presuppositions concerning the manner in which these domains stand in relation to one another (i.e. to render such presuppositions moot), and thereby to show that inclusion of the structures of thought in a philosophical conception of reality does not subjectivize objectivity.

Wittgenstein subscribes to a non-theoretical quietism that takes effect once we have become clear that there is a kind of determinate bedrock to our thinking and acting. In this sense, Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is all about “getting clear”: “Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything” (PI §126). And again, “the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear” (PI §133). What confuses us, I have argued, are certain preconceptions about the possibility of meaning and understanding, preconceptions that posit the intractability of various idiolectic stances, and how these stances lead to a conception of the world as purged of determinacy. Once we become clear that there is no "problem of meaning" as such, that such problems are factitiously generated from presuppositions concerning how it is we think and understand (usually on an "idiolectic" model), then a restoration of determinacy is possible, that is, a philosophical restoration of our common sense disposition to believe that e.g. rule-following and concept-using have a determinacy prior to and independent of the manner in which they are conceived as subjective, mental activities.
Like Hegel, Wittgenstein believes that certain presuppositions and the philosophical problems they generate issue from certain habits of thought. "The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (PI §109). Knowing is something that belongs to us by right; we must fight a constant battle against a philosophical disposition to regard it as problematic. The temptation is to place 'knowing' and 'thinking' into a separate, sui generis sphere, a sphere that I suggest is, in line with Hegel's critique, conceived as an irreducibly subjective sphere. Once this natural move occurs, all kinds of pseudo-problems pertaining to the possibility of determinacy and meaning are generated: "Language (or thought) is something unique—this proves to be a superstition (not a mistake!), itself produced by grammatical illusions" (PI §110). There is a standing temptation to search for and grasp the essence of words like 'knowledge', 'I', 'object' (PI §116), especially when they are conceived as standing in mysterious relations to one another. This signifies a philosophical habit that must be eliminated: "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (PI §116).

III. The Central Analogy (Conclusion)

It is hardly controversial to talk about "Wittgensteinian therapy", a therapy aimed at eliminating certain unproductive habits of thought. It is more controversial to view the Phenomenology in the same way. Nonetheless, I have argued that the Phenomenology is a systematic effort of this kind. Even if this is not admitted, the programmatic analogies
between the two thinkers are difficult to ignore (whether they (the thinkers) are interpreted in the way I have urged, or as idealists). As a final attempt at arguing in this direction, "non-metaphysically" rather than idealistically, I would like to explicitly state by way of summary a unified manner of viewing the central analogy I have been developing between the two thinkers’ critiques and related efforts at framing alternative conceptions of determinacy, what may have only been implicit in the separate analogies I have considered in this chapter. Once again, we will revisit the transition from "Force and the Understanding" to "Self-Consciousness", which in a sense, serves as the cornerstone of this study; reflection upon it has allowed us to survey a number of philosophical issues related to pragmatism, idealism, individual and communal modes of ‘understanding’, and the norm-governed self vs. law-governed nature.

There is an idealist move we considered in this chapter that, in one stroke, rejects a picture of idiolectic understanding and embraces a picture of communal assent; the latter, it is hoped, will preserve our intuitive notion of meaning and understanding as in some sense “contractual”, that is, regulated by a kind of agreement to use a concept or rule, once it has been acquired, in certain determinate ways. To recapitulate briefly, on Wright’s conception, the aporiae of the idiolectic understanding can be resolved by an appeal to “going in step” with the community; the semantic determinacy lost in any putative individual understanding is regained in a conception of community-established norms. McDowell shows us how this idealist appeal to the community turns out to be hollow; the problems with the idiolectic stance are carried over into the community. Despite the appeal to the latter, there is no clear sense in which the community can
establish what is absent in the idiolectic conception, namely, an authoritative relation to something determinate apart from various linguistic behaviours, either occurring together in concert, or not. Once the dimension of independence has gone missing, in what sense does concerted linguistic behaviour have any kind of objective, meaningful significance, as opposed to being a mere "brute sounding off"?

Now consider the idealist interpretation of the transition from 'Understanding' to 'Self-Consciousness'. On Pippin's reading, a picture of self-consciousness in relation to other self-consciousnesses is able to establish what mere understanding could not, namely, the genuine subjective conditions for the possibility of conceptual determinacy. Or, in Brandom's idiom, in lieu of a defective notion of Kantian autonomy, somehow the reciprocal, recognitive relations amongst self-conscious selves is able to establish the determinacy of contentful conceptual commitments. In both cases, the move away from what we might call a "subject-centered" understanding of the world towards a recognitive model of intersubjective relations is meant to solve the problem of how it is possible concepts can be contentfully determinate. However, we saw that if 'Spirit' is merely conceived as a collective structure that, now in an aggregate rather than an individual sense, has simply retained the structure of consciousness, the "problem of subjectivity" remains unaddressed. This is the problem of how what is thematized to exist in itself as truth is yet somehow also conceived as the foundation of what occurs in consciousness as knowledge. What exists in itself is meant to provide the dimension of

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35 Readers may have already detected the influence in my choice of terms and argument style of Jürgen Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, so I would formally like to acknowledge that debt.
“independence” necessary to what McDowell calls our intuitive notion of objectivity; however, if ‘consciousness’ taken as representative of an individual standpoint of perception or understanding swallows up the in-itself into what is merely ‘for it’, it is difficult to see how an aggregate of such entities, admittedly involved in a highly complex, dynamic set of social relations to one another that simultaneously constitute them, somehow does not.

In both scenarios, in the Hegelian transition from ‘understanding’ to ‘self-consciousness’ and in the putative Wittgensteinian move away from the idiolectic standpoint into communal assent, what appears to be a natural solution to epistemic problems generated from a presupposed, abstract individual standpoint, turns out to be a hollow appeal. This is because the problems both thinkers have targeted have in a sense been “under-conceived” by their readers. Both have been thought to offer idealist solutions (in Wittgenstein’s case, one that concedes defeat to the skeptic) to what we might term “epistemic individualism”, the doctrine that, as a self-standingly intelligible starting-point,36 an individual mind can have a private relation to a determinacy-conferring fact (a relation usually conceived as some species of representation), such that mental content, e.g. a meaning or an intention, is determinate. The idealist solution involves an appeal to communal normativity to ground an alternative notion of semantic or conceptual determinacy. I claim rather that both thinkers need to be conceived as mounting more radical critiques, critiques aimed at dismantling heavily entrenched

36 See footnote 2.
presuppositions concerning the subjectivity of thought and meaning in general, in order
for their “reclamation” (of determinacy) projects to have any sense at all.

Thought and meaning as preconceived in subjective opposition to some extra-mental
standard of objectivity determines from the outset the epistemological direction of any
philosophical attempt operating under such assumptions. This is even the case, as we
saw, if “subjectivity” is denied as a premise, if we are committed to staying rigorously
focussed on the objectivity of “linguistic behaviour” in assertions, i.e. the semantic
“surface”. Here we saw that if the problem is merely ignored rather than addressed we
end up with a theory of meaning that does not include ‘meaning’ in any recognizable
sense, i.e. as genuinely understood or grasped (see 5.II.B). Both Hegel and Wittgenstein
wish to show us how a very strong, tempting, and natural picture of subjectivity leads us,
upon philosophical reflection, to regard conceptual and semantic determinacy as
problematic; each thinker seeks to demonstrate the structural and psychological
mechanisms that make the problems seem compelling. If we are not attentive to the
demands of this more basic, radical kind of critique, we find ourselves in a kind of
double-bind where such presuppositions concerning the subjective character of thought
and meaning are carried over into the putative solutions to problems concerning
conceptual and semantic determinacy, thereby merely modifying, perhaps even
intensifying, the original problems.

Specifically concerning this latter point, consider PI §308:

How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about
behaviourism arise?—The first step is the one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of
processes and states and leave their nature undecided. Sometime perhaps we shall know
more about them—we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent.)—And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thought falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don’t want to deny them (PI §308).

This passage describes a multi-layered path of error. I believe the first move corresponds to what I have been urging is the most natural presupposition of all, namely as regards the subjective, “inner” character of the ‘mental’. That is not what is regarded as problematic, it is rather the presupposed starting-point for what is taken to be the difficult task at hand, namely, to characterize and understand the nature of mental processes. But our habitual ideas concerning the subjectivity of the mental (they are so natural that they are beneath notice) do not square with our very developed, scientific notions of what it means to know a “process”; for example, we have very deep, but undetected intuitions concerning the oxymoronic character of talking about a “mental process”. What is “mental” implies our natural, unexamined ideas concerning the subjectivity of thought; what is a “process” implies our equally entrenched intuitions, generated from modern science, concerning objective measureability, quantification, observability, etc. The very idea of a ‘process’, something objective, observable, and measurable, conflicts with our notions concerning the subjective character of the mental.

In the above passage, the side that wins this tug of war of mutually incompatible intuitions, is the idea of a ‘process’. We are led to discard the very possibility of discerning the nature of a ‘mental process’, because our idea of a ‘process’ cannot be

37 The justification for this reading comes later in the passage: “the yet unexplored medium.”
made compatible with our natural presuppositions regarding the subjective character of
the mental. A behaviourist would presumably be happy with simply speaking of
"processes" in the usual sense, and this would include linguistic behaviours and other
"surface" phenomena. However, it is a recoil from the very idea of the 'mental' that
generates the exaggerated behaviourist position "where it looks as if we had denied
mental processes", which in a sense is the chiastic, mirror image of the position it recoils
from. We can therefore see how the behaviourist "solution" comes as a result of an
insufficient critical awareness of its own presuppositions regarding the subjective
character of the mental; the very motivation of behaviourism is a reaction against an
unnecessary, but habitually entrenched, picture of thought as having a mysterious,
"inner" status, defined in systematic opposition to the usual senses of 'objectivity'. It is
this habitual picture we have of our own thinking that Wittgenstein aims to criticize.

We can also see what I above called the "double-bind" occurring as a result of the
idealist interpretation of Hegel, where presuppositions concerning the subjective
character of thought and meaning are carried over into the putative solutions to problems
concerning semantic and conceptual determinacy, thereby re-establishing the original
problems in modified, perhaps intensified, form. This happens as a result of taking
Hegel to be offering an idealist solution to what I above called "epistemic individualism",
the doctrine that a private, representational relation to some determinacy-conferring fact
can be a self-standingly intelligible starting-point for an epistemological understanding of
conceptual determinacy. This is again, to "under-conceive" Hegel's project. His target
is our presuppositions concerning the subjective nature of thought, embodied in our
concept of 'consciousness'; therefore, the idealist expansion of consciousness into 'self-consciousness', the building-block of 'Spirit', cannot provide any substantive insight into the nature of conceptual determinacy. It rather simply re-articulates in a mysterious, extravagant way the difficulties associated with the very idea of asking "what are the subjective conditions for the possibility of experience?" (see 4.III) (An example of such mysterious re-articulation is the Brandomian "what are the conditions for the possibility of the determinacy of conceptual commitments?" (see 5.I.A.).)
Conclusion

Section III of the last chapter is in a sense the proper conclusion of this study, as it occurs within the body of the argument. What follows is more of a brief, external recapitulation of the road we have traveled. I will merely point to major themes that have arisen that the reader should part with.

We began by suggesting, via McDowell, that certain structures and habits of thought, associated with traditional episternology, are terminally aporetic. The villain is a certain picture of mind that has a *sui generis* status in relation to the rest of nature, a picture that I refer to as “mentalist”. It is the operation of this mentalist picture in traditional epistemology that renders it self-defeating. We saw more explicitly how this is the case when we looked at Hegel.

Before I turned to Hegel however, I thought it important to provide actual historical instances of traditional epistemology, or what McDowell calls “traditional constructive philosophy”, in order to show how the *sui generis* picture of mind operates, and to clarify the target of Hegel’s critique in the *Phenomenology*. The Stoics first give clear expression to the idea of a mind that has its own peculiar status in relation to the rest of reality; Descartes turns this idea into a foundational principle; and Kant systematizes it to a degree unrivalled in the history of philosophy.

Hegel undertakes a critique of mentalism. The specific target of his critique is what he calls “consciousness”, a mode of thought that is constituted by two basic determinations: knowledge and truth. It is the manner in which consciousness
keeps these two determinations in a fixed, opposed separation to one another, which constitutes the self-defeating mechanism of philosophy done from its standpoint. Mentalism prevents us from truly considering what Hegel claims is the proper subject-matter of philosophy, the determinacy of what is. This is an ambitious claim for philosophy that some may find implausible or unappealing. I suggest that Hegel still has something to offer such people, insofar as he attempts to mount an exhaustive critique of epistemology, in terms that are ultimately not that foreign to our own.

It is a significant error to interpret Hegel as an idealist. To do so ultimately enlists him in a mentalist tradition as an extremely sophisticated exponent of it. I argue that the best available evidence strongly discourages the allying of Hegel with any species of mentalism, which I claim idealism is.

We can see the consequences of this sort of alliance in Robert Brandom’s attempt to spell out Hegel’s significance to contemporary semantic issues. We are left with a theory that is lethal to the kind of realism (a theory of determinacy) that Hegel espoused. I outline what I rather regard to be the appropriate manner of conceiving Hegel’s relevance to contemporary concerns. I do this by spelling out connections to Wittgenstein, ultimately with reference to one basic analogy: both thinkers offer mentalist critiques in the hopes of recovering a conception of determinacy that is vital to our common sense. Philosophy must never stray far from this kind of common sense, an epistemic common sense that is not plagued by the possibility of radical skeptical crises, even if philosophy is permitted to
assume novel and complex forms. If philosophy does so stray, it will fail to account for elements and aspects that are basic to our lives, and then, philosophy simply fails. I suggest that Hegel offers a promising philosophical vision that gives theoretical substance to basic epistemic common sense.
Bibliography


