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Once Again From the Beginning:
On the Relationship of Skepticism and Philosophy in Hegel's System

A Dissertation Presented

by

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation examines the relationship of skepticism and philosophy in the work of G.W.F. Hegel. Whereas other commentators have come to recognize the epistemological significance of Hegel's encounter with skepticism, emphasizing the strength of his system against skeptical challenges to the possibility of knowledge, I argue that Hegel develops his metaphysics in part through his ongoing engagement with the skeptical tradition. As such, I argue that Hegel's interest is not in refuting skepticism, but in defining its legitimate role within the project of philosophical science. Hegel finds that historical forms of skepticism have misunderstood their own activity and thus have drawn the wrong conclusions from the epistemological challenges that they raise. For Hegel, these challenges lead not to the suspension of judgment, as many skeptics have assumed, but to an insight into the fundamental nature of reality itself. For this reason, I argue that it is important to distinguish between historical forms of skepticism (e.g., Pyrrhonism) and the "self-completing skepticism" that Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is the latter sense of skepticism, I argue, that one finds at work in Hegel's own philosophical project at nearly every stage of his career.

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List of Abbreviations

- CPR Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- ENC Hegel, G.W.F. *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*. Translated by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- LHP I Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume I: Greek Philosophy to Plato*. Translated by E.S. Haldane. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- LHP III Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*. Translated by E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- LHP I 25-6 Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 1825-6, Volume I: Introduction and Oriental Philosophy*. Edited by Robert F. Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- LHP II 25-6 Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 1825-6, Volume II: Greek Philosophy*. Edited by Robert F. Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- LPWH Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Volume I: Manuscripts of the Introduction and The Lectures of 1822-3*. Edited by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- OS Sextus Empiricus. *Outlines of Scepticism*. Edited by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- PS Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- RSP Hegel, G.W.F. "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison to the Latest Form with the Ancient One." In *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of*

Post-Kantian Idealism, 311-62. Edited by George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985.

SL

Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*. Translated by George di Giovanni. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Introduction

The philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel is often suspected of an unrelenting dogmatism. It appears that Hegel continually refuses to take the necessary steps to justify even his core philosophical claims. For all of the effort that Hegel takes to construct his intricate philosophical system, it appears that he never seriously questions whether it has any bearing on empirical reality. Similarly, in his engagement with texts in the history of philosophy, Hegel seems unwilling to read these texts on their own terms, insisting instead on reading them in light of his own philosophical project. Indeed, it would appear that Hegel foists his philosophical system onto whatever object he examines, each laid to waste by his stubborn drive toward totality. As such, it can easily seem to readers that Hegel's philosophy lacks any sensitivity to the limits of human cognition and, therefore, marks an unfortunate regression to pre-Critical metaphysics.

This reputation, however, is undeserved. Upon careful examination of his work, one finds that Hegel takes questions of justification very seriously and indeed goes to great lengths to justify each part of his philosophical system. This is especially hard to miss when one considers Hegel's careful engagement with the traditional problems of skepticism which raise difficult questions about the possibility of knowledge. Indeed, in taking up the challenges raised by the ancient Pyrrhonists, Hegel takes on arguably the most radical form of skepticism to emerge within the Western philosophical tradition.

The most well-known of Hegel's treatments of skepticism can be found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel examines skepticism as one pattern of consciousness that spirit passes

through on its way toward absolute knowing.¹ Similarly, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, skepticism appears as a stage in the historical development of the concept of philosophy.² However, in this dissertation, I show that Hegel is in fact engaged with skeptical challenges to the possibility of knowledge at nearly every stage of his career. The seriousness of Hegel's concern with skepticism is already evident in the review he writes for the *Critical Journal* in 1802 about the neo-Humean skeptic, Gottlob Ernst Schulze, where he argues that "without the determination of the true relationship of skepticism to philosophy, and without the insight that skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy [. . .] all the histories, and reports, and new editions of skepticism lead to a dead end."³ It is here that Hegel first articulates what he sees as skepticism's legitimate role within the project of philosophical science. This becomes a guiding thread in the development of Hegel's philosophical project thereafter, as this dissertation aims to show.

Hence, one finds the topic of skepticism at issue throughout Hegel's corpus. This is, as I argue, because it is in part by grappling with the problems of skepticism that Hegel develops his system of philosophy.⁴ It is not simply that he subjects his system to skeptical challenges in order to demonstrate its legitimacy, nor that he perfects his system prior to his encounter with the

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 123-26.

² G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6, Volume II: Greek Philosophy*, trans. Robert F. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 294-316.

³ G.W.F. Hegel, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison to the Latest Form with the Ancient One," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 323. Hereafter cited parenthetically as RSP.

⁴ In *Philosophie des Remis: der junge Hegel und das 'Gespenst des Skeptizismus,'* Klaus Vieweg convincingly shows the significance of skepticism for Hegel's early intellectual development. The present treatment adds to Vieweg's important study by showing that skeptical concerns about the possibility of knowledge continue to influence Hegel throughout his career. See Klaus Vieweg, *Philosophie des Remis: der junge Hegel und das 'Gespenst des Skeptizismus,'* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1999).

skeptical tradition. Rather, I argue, his philosophical project develops as he thinks through skeptical challenges and grapples with the difficult questions these pose about the possibility of knowledge.⁵

Michael Forster argues in his popular study, *Hegel and Skepticism*, that Hegel specifically designed his philosophical system around the epistemological concerns raised within the skeptical tradition. While I agree with Forster that Hegel's system grew out of an attempt to think through these classic epistemological concerns, I find it misleading to suggest that Hegel's primary interest in considering these arguments was to construct "an elaborate network of defenses erected to protect his philosophical system against them."⁶ I take issue with Forster's claim for two reasons. First, to suggest that Hegel sought to protect his system from skeptical challenges is to suppose that he had already devised his system prior to his encounter with the skeptics. I find this claim to be untenable on both historical and philosophical grounds. Second, if Hegel was concerned to protect his system against skepticism, he was only able to accomplish this task through integrating skeptical arguments into his system. To recognize that Hegel's strategy for meeting the epistemological challenges raised by the skeptics involves the integration of these challenges into his system is, however, already to acknowledge that he was not simply concerned with overcoming these difficulties.

While Hegel's continual engagement with skepticism shows him to be deeply concerned with classic epistemological problems, this is not the only way that skepticism is relevant to his

⁵ In *Hegel's Epistemology*, Kenneth R. Westphal offers an instructive account of how Hegel develops a model of justification that is able to meet the challenge posed by Sextus Empiricus' Dilemma of the Criterion. Sextus' challenge, in brief, is to develop a non-dogmatic criterion for the evaluation of all claims to knowledge. Westphal shows in his study how Hegel attempts to answer this difficulty in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; however, in this project he does not acknowledge the important steps that Hegel takes to address this same difficulty in the *Science of Logic*. See especially Chapter Five in Kenneth R. Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003).

⁶ Michael N. Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 102.

philosophical project. One of the goals of this dissertation is to show how it is that the problematic of skepticism comes to hold important *metaphysical* ramifications for Hegel. These ramifications are two-fold. On the one hand, Hegel finds that although the skeptics are concerned to contest any claim concerning the fundamental nature of reality, a careful consideration of their arguments reveals certain basic metaphysical commitments implicit in them. On the other hand, Hegel finds that such commitments actually do tell us something true about the structure of what is. While many commentators are understandably reluctant to acknowledge the metaphysical dimensions of Hegel's philosophical project, I argue that his engagement with skepticism makes it quite clear that he does not think that the project of metaphysics, that is, the project of laying bare the fundamental nature of reality, is as hopeless as it seems – especially given the fact that it is through this engagement that he comes to deny the existence of any sort of mind-independent reality and to affirm the dialectical unity of thinking and being.

In this respect too, this dissertation offers a perspective on Hegel's engagement with skepticism that is in contrast to the one offered by Michael Forster in *Hegel and Skepticism*. Forster's concern is largely to show how Hegel's system has a built-in defense against skeptical challenges. While Forster recognizes the great epistemological significance that skepticism holds for Hegel, what he overlooks is the crucial role it plays in Hegel's speculative metaphysics. Forster's study includes a discussion of how Hegel is able to overcome the epistemological difficulties raised by the skeptics through the employment of his "dialectical method," but fails to address how Hegel's treatment of skepticism bears upon his articulation and development of the

three moments of the dialectic – three moments which, Hegel explains in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, pertain to "every concept or everything true in general."⁷

Moreover, I depart from Forster in arguing that Hegel is not actually concerned with *refuting* skepticism at all. Rather, his interest is in demonstrating its legitimate, if limited, role in the project of philosophical science. This is, in fact, what makes Hegel's exploration of skepticism so unique. While many philosophers have attempted to resolve skeptical problems and put skeptical worries to rest, Hegel is concerned to show that, while these skeptical challenges must be taken seriously, a true philosophy has nothing to fear from them.

In fact, Hegel shows, the traditional epistemological challenges raised by the skeptics are useful for combating dogmatism. By "dogmatism," skeptics have historically understood the holding of beliefs that lack proper justification. For Hegel, however, one contests dogmatic claims when one challenges "one-sided" thinking – a form of thinking that clings to the truth of a claim to the exclusion of its opposite.⁸ As such, the contestation of dogmatic claims is, for Hegel, necessary for the articulation of what is true. This is what Hegel finds so important about what Sextus calls "the chief constitutive principle of skepticism" – that is, the claim that "to every account an equal account is opposed."⁹ For Hegel, it is the enactment of this principle in the Five

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 125. Hereafter cited parenthetically as ENC.

⁸ As Hegel explains: "The essence of dogmatism consists in this that it posits something finite, something burdened with an opposition (e.g. pure Subject, or pure Object, or in dualism the duality as opposed to the identity) as the Absolute; hence Reason shows with respect to this Absolute that it has a relation to what is excluded from it, and only exists through and in this relation to another, so that it is not absolute, according to the third trope of relationship" (RSP, 335).

⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6.

Modes of Agrippa, the most radical skeptical challenges presented by the Pyrrhonists, that made these arguments so effective in contesting dogmatism.

But while Hegel finds skepticism useful – indeed necessary – in this way, it would be a mistake to say that Hegel is interested in skepticism only on account of its utility. Historically, skepticism has been regarded as a test applied to knowledge-claims. In Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, for example, the Meditator famously uses doubt as a methodological tool with which to arrive at a non-dogmatic metaphysics. Hegel argues, however, that what is and the method by which we grasp what is are one and the same. As such, he suspects a more intimate relationship between skepticism and the object of philosophical inquiry. Thus, Hegel does not simply accept skepticism's self-understanding *prima facie*, allowing, for example, its criteria to dictate what true knowledge consists in. In this way, Hegel's encounter with skepticism should be distinguished from skepticism's role in Descartes' project. For Hegel, skepticism is not simply a philosophical method, a procedure for safeguarding thought against the possibility of error. Understood properly, skepticism articulates an essential element in the fundamental structure of reality.

Moreover, Hegel rejects the conclusions that skeptics have historically drawn from their arguments. The Pyrrhonist who abides by "the chief constitutive principle of skepticism," for example, concludes from the application of this principle to specific knowledge-claims that we must suspend judgment on their truth on account of their "equipollence" – that is, on account of the equal persuasive power of opposing claims. For Hegel, this misses how the critique of dogmatism constitutes a positive advance in the development of knowledge. For the Pyrrhonist, the principle of skepticism leads inevitably to a "standstill of the intellect." For Hegel, however, this principle marks a positive development in the articulation of the true. In overlooking this

point, it turns out, skepticism itself remains beholden to the sort of dogmatic thinking which Hegel finds its greatest strength lies in contesting.

Hence, Hegel finds that skepticism is not opposed to philosophy as such, but only to the one-sided claims of dogmatic understanding. In its “inmost heart,” Hegel says, skepticism is “at one with every true philosophy.” This is why philosophy has nothing to fear from skepticism and needn’t rush to refute its claims, defending at all costs against them. At the same time, I hope that this dissertation makes clear that this statement should not be taken to mean that, for Hegel, the historical schools of skepticism are, in fact, the apogee of philosophical science. Hegel indeed reveals the limits of skepticism in the course of his investigation. In insisting that the equipollence of opposing claims should leave us in suspension of judgment and bereft of truth, skepticism fails to grasp the truth of its own activity as an aspect of true cognition. This point may be lost on skeptics of the past, but it is precisely what speculative philosophy recognizes to be at work in skeptical argumentation.

With this in mind, it will be helpful to clarify the use of the term “skepticism” in this project. Following Hegel’s own usage, I occasionally use the term to refer to historical schools of skepticism, particularly Pyrrhonism, since this is the historical form of skepticism that most interests Hegel. However, in both Hegel’s writing and in this dissertation, the term is used to refer not only to historical schools of skepticism or even the forms of consciousness at work in them, but also to skepticism understood from the standpoint of reason – a standpoint that none of these historical schools, including Pyrrhonism, themselves attain. This distinction is not merely a terminological one but a conceptual one that is crucial for the account in this dissertation. In arguing for the unity of skepticism and philosophy, Hegel is not arguing that ancient skepticism has an important role in the development of philosophical science, as Forster and others suggest.

What has an important role in this development is rather the “negatively rational” moment of the dialectic exhibited in the Logic. On my account, it is this that Hegel aims to retrieve from the skeptical tradition.

In sum, this dissertation examines Hegel’s persistent effort to comprehend the relationship between skepticism and philosophy. This effort involves, on the one hand, a critical appropriation of skepticism as a means of challenging dogmatism and, on the other hand, a reconstruction of the “chief constitutive principle of skepticism” presented but not fully grasped by Sextus and the Pyrrhonists. In this way, I hope to demonstrate that Hegel is indeed sensitive to the epistemological concerns cherished by philosophers through the ages but also to the metaphysical commitments that underlie these same concerns.

While the dissertation is primarily a contribution to scholarship on Hegel, I also see it as making an important contribution to the conversation about skepticism today. Philosophers today usually take one of two positions on skepticism: they regard it as either an insurmountable difficulty for human knowledge (motivating, for some, a turn to the necessity of faith or, for others, an embrace of irrationalism), or they regard it as a false problem that they can simply ignore without consequence. By contrast, in this dissertation I aim to show, first, that we cannot afford to ignore these pressing skeptical concerns but, second, that taking the problems of skepticism seriously need not lead us to abandon the traditional goals of philosophical thinking. Indeed, I argue that it is only through a thorough treatment of these concerns that philosophy can meet them, and thus arrive at a more adequate understanding of the world.

In the first chapter, I take up Hegel’s first sustained engagement with skepticism, the 1802 article that he wrote for the *Critical Journal*, on the “Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy.” Hegel writes this article as a review of neo-Humean skeptic G.E. Schulze’s *Kritik*

der theoretischen Philosophie, where Schulze accuses Kant of begging the question against Hume's skepticism regarding causality and thus contests the success of Kant's Critical project. I argue that Hegel's central objection to Schulze is that his critique of Kant rests upon a miscomprehension of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy, an error that Hegel sees as emerging from Schulze's presupposition of an opposition between thinking and being. Though Hegel's essay might be understood as a defense of the Kantian project, I argue that his objection to Schulze applies to Kant's Critical project as well. Though Hegel argues that Kant sublates the antithesis of thinking and being in the Transcendental Deduction, he finds that Kant is inconsistent on this point, upholding this same opposition in, for instance, his refutation of the Ontological Proof of God's existence. Above all, this chapter aims to show how the 1802 essay provides Hegel with an opportunity to develop the rudiments of a metaphysical project that takes the dialectical unity of thinking and being as its point of departure.

In the second chapter, I go on to describe how Hegel continues to grapple with skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is in this work, I argue, that Hegel clarifies the sense of skepticism that in the 1802 essay he claims is "at one with every true philosophy." While Forster and other commentators focus on the priority that Hegel gives to ancient skepticism over modern skepticism,¹⁰ I explain that it is not ancient skepticism that is "at one with every true philosophy," since Hegel calls attention to the persistence of dogmatism even in the Pyrrhonian tradition. At first, it would seem that the Pyrrhonists avoid the charge of dogmatism by adhering to the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism," which states that "to every account an equal account is opposed." Nevertheless, I explain, it is precisely this insistence on opposition that, for Hegel, makes Pyrrhonism dogmatic. This is because the Pyrrhonists assume the general validity

¹⁰ See Michael Forster, "The Superiority of Ancient to Modern Skepticism," in *Skeptizismus und spekulatives Denken in der Philosophie Hegels*, ed. H.F. Fulda and R.P. Horstmann, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996).

of the principle of non-contradiction by insisting that, of two opposing claims, only one but not both can be true. It is on the basis of this assumption that the Pyrrhonists argue, after all, that, faced with two opposing claims, one must suspend judgment. Thus, I argue that it is not Pyrrhonism that Hegel understands to be one with philosophy but rather the “self-completing skepticism” exhibited in the *Phenomenology* itself, since it rids itself of the dogmatism to which even the ancient skeptics had fallen prey.

In the third chapter, I attempt to shed light on the role of skepticism in Hegel’s metaphysics by exploring its role in the *Logic*, the most mature expression of his thinking. I approach this by exploring what Hegel means when he claims in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that the project attains a status of “total presuppositionlessness”(ENC, §78R). Richard Dien Winfield, William Maker, and others have interpreted this as meaning that Hegel has justified the starting-point of the *Logic* already in the *Phenomenology*, using skepticism, as it were, as a propaedeutic to philosophy.¹¹ Stephen Houlgate and Robert Stern argue, by contrast, that the *Logic* accomplishes this task immanently.¹² On this point, I agree with Houlgate and Stern. However, not one of these commentators has questioned whether Hegel actually regards the presuppositionless character of the *Logic* as a formal methodological requirement. This is crucial, however, since, were Hegel to regard it as such, then this requirement could clearly be no more than a presupposition itself. Thus, in this chapter, I make clear that Hegel does not consider the presuppositionless character of the *Logic* as a formal methodological requirement which this

¹¹ See William Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) and Richard Dien Winfield, *Overcoming Foundations: Studies in Systematic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Dietmar H. Heidemann agrees with Maker and Winfield that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is meant to justify the starting-point of the *Logic*, however, he denies that Hegel is successful in this strategy. See Dietmar H. Heidemann, "Doubt and Dialectic: Hegel on Logic, Metaphysics, and Skepticism," in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, ed. Nectarios G. Limnatis (London: Continuum, 2010).

¹² See Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), 27-42, and Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

investigation must satisfy in order to secure its own legitimacy, but rather as a unique accomplishment internal to the project of philosophical science itself. In order to clarify this, I examine the proof procedure at work in the *Logic* – a procedure which Hegel describes in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* as “rational proof.” Unlike in most arguments, in a “rational proof,” the result of an inquiry is not taken to depend upon certain presuppositions granted at the outset, whose validity is determined external to the inquiry itself. Rather, there is a reciprocal relationship between the presuppositions of an inquiry and its result. The presuppositions are, in some sense, derived from the result itself. It is in this sense, I argue, that the *Logic* is presuppositionless. In clarifying this, I hope to make clear that skepticism is not a propaedeutic to philosophy for Hegel but a moment through which philosophical science itself develops. This, I suggest, is what Hegel means when he claims that the second moment of the dialectic, “when taken in isolation by the understanding, constitutes skepticism” (ENC, §81R).

In the fourth chapter, I show how Hegel extends the conclusions he arrived at through his engagement with skepticism to defend the project of “philosophical history” from historicist concerns regarding the possibility of historical knowledge. The historicist’s insight is to recognize that all knowledge is a product of a particular historical age. But this insight gives rise to doubt about the historian’s ability to obtain an unmediated grasp of the past. This doubt mirrors the Pyrrhonian insistence that only knowledge that does not appear under particular conditions can be regarded as true. The chapter examines how this doubt may be raised against Hegel’s own interpretations of the history of philosophy. In his reading of Plato’s *Parmenides*, for example, Hegel interprets the work as an forerunner of speculative philosophy, prefiguring the account of speculative philosophy that Hegel himself develops later on. The historicist, however, will suspect Hegel of imposing his own particular philosophical perspective onto the

ancient text. I argue, however, that such doubts are misplaced, since the point of Hegel's "philosophical history" is not to recover the original intentions of past authors (e.g., Plato's intention in writing the *Parmenides*) but to grasp what is at work in the text as a moment in the historical development of the concept of philosophy. I clarify that Hegel's position here is not to deny that mediation is at work in historical knowledge, but to contest the historicist's claim that legitimate knowledge of the past can only come to light if the historian is able to transcend their own historical situation. Just as in Hegel's treatment of skepticism, Hegel's strategy here rests upon the insight that immediacy and mediation are not mutually exclusive, as the Pyrrhonists presume, but two sides of the same rational process. Thus, Hegel's response to the historicist's doubt about the possibility of historical knowledge mirrors his treatment of skepticism: in both cases, Hegel's aim is not to refute these doubts but to ground them and clarify their proper application.

Chapter One

Hegel on the Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Skepticism

Introduction

"It cannot be denied," Fichte once observed, "that philosophical reason owes every noticeable advance it has ever made to the observations of skepticism upon the precariousness of the position where it has for the moment come to rest."¹³ Although Fichte evidently had in mind Kant's famous confession in the *Prolegomena* that it was Hume's challenge to causality that roused him from his "dogmatic slumber,"¹⁴ his claim deeply resonates with Hegel's early confrontation with skepticism as well. If the problematic of skepticism provided Kant with an opportunity to achieve a "noticeable advance" in philosophical cognition by inspiring his restriction of metaphysics to objects of possible experience, it offered Hegel a similar opportunity – an opportunity to articulate a new vision of metaphysics which, ironically, would challenge the basic presuppositions of Critical Philosophy. In his 1802 article for the *Critical Journal*, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy," Hegel offers his first and most sustained treatment of the philosophical significance of skepticism. While the piece is ostensibly written as a review of Gottlob Ernst Schulze's newly published *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie*, a skeptical attack on Kant's Critical Philosophy, especially as it is presented by Karl Leonhard Reinhold in his "Philosophy of the Elements," Hegel's essay far exceeds this task, advancing the

¹³ J.G. Fichte, "Review of Aenesidemus," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 137.

¹⁴ "I freely admit that the remembrance of *David Hume* was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy." Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: That Will be Able to Come Forward as Science: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

bold claim that "skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy."¹⁵ At first blush, such a statement would hardly seem to set Hegel apart from the likes of Kant, for whom a certain brand of skepticism served the important critical function of curtailing the dogmatic excesses of classical metaphysics.¹⁶ Hegel, however, puts skepticism to a considerably different purpose, reserving a privileged place for the latter in a metaphysical framework which, as we will see, is decisively non-Kantian.

It is my goal in this chapter to demonstrate how Hegel's estimation of the philosophical significance of skepticism emerges as a central feature of the metaphysical account he develops in the course of his 1802 essay. Although Hegel's discussion of this relationship is ostensibly offered in this essay as a rejoinder to Schulze's Neo-Humean attack on Critical Philosophy, we will see that his account also has important implications for the project of transcendental idealism itself, suggesting that access to the supersensible remains possible despite Kant's protests to the contrary. While Hegel sees skepticism as occupying a legitimate role within the project of philosophical science, he explains that previous thinkers have failed to recognize this, viewing the relationship between skepticism and philosophy instead as an opposition between two conflicting epistemic positions. This error, he suggests, can be attributed to these thinkers' failure to grasp another, closely related relationship: the ontological relationship of thinking and

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison to the Latest Form with the Ancient One," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 322-23. Hereafter cited parenthetically as RSP.

¹⁶ "This is the great utility of the skeptical way of treating the questions that pure reason puts to pure reason; by means of it one can with little expense exempt oneself from a great deal of dogmatic rubbish, and put in its place a sober critique, which, as a true cathartic, will happily purge such delusions along with the punditry attendant on them." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A 486/B514. All references are to the Academy edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. These references follow the English translation provided by Guyer and Wood and are hereafter cited parenthetically as CPR.

being. For Hegel, this more basic relationship, upon which the epistemic distinction between skepticism and philosophy is grounded, is also a relationship of unity, as we shall soon see. It is from this standpoint – the standpoint according to which thinking and being form a dialectical unity – that Hegel articulates what he considers the "true relationship of skepticism to philosophy" (RSP, 322) to consist in, and accordingly, from this standpoint that he criticizes Schulze's dogmatic skepticism and contests the apparent success of Kant's critique of metaphysics. As we shall see, however, Hegel's case for the assumption of this standpoint – at least, at this stage in his thinking – is not invulnerable to skeptical difficulties. In Part One, I will show that Hegel's complaint that this "latest form" of skepticism offered by Schulze misunderstands its intimate place within philosophy takes its lead from Hegel's own emergent insight into the dialectical unity of thinking and being. Then, in Part Two, I will demonstrate that the heart of Hegel's objections to Schulzean skepticism can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to Kant's Critical Philosophy – a point of which Hegel was no doubt aware in penning his review of Schulze's *Kritik*. Finally, after considering some of the implications of this essay's portrayal of the relationship of skepticism and philosophy, along with that of thinking and being, for Kant's Critical Philosophy, I will conclude with an analysis of Hegel's argumentative strategy in the 1802 essay.

Part One: Hegel's Critique of Schulze

"Without the determination of the true relationship of skepticism to philosophy, and without the insight that skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy,

and hence that there is a philosophy which is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once, without this," Hegel cautions, "all the histories, and reports, and new editions of skepticism lead to a dead end" (RSP, 322-23). Though Hegel mobilizes a whole host of objections against Schulze's *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie*, his entire discussion in the Skepticism essay springs from this one basic point – that any account of skepticism will ultimately prove fruitless unless it comprehends the "true" relationship of skepticism and philosophy, which, as Hegel insists, is properly one of unity. This is a point, however, which Schulze – and many with him in the Western philosophical tradition – fails to appreciate. In Schulze's effort to resuscitate Hume's skepticism concerning causality in the wake of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, he is led to identify philosophy with dogmatism, so that he can only conceive of philosophy and skepticism as standing in a relationship of opposition, rather than in a relationship of unity. As we will see, however, Schulze's conflation of philosophy with dogmatism is the direct result of a deeper metaphysical commitment to the non-identity of thinking and being.

In his anonymously published 1792 work, *Aenesidemus, or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Professor Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defence of Skepticism Against the Pretensions of the Critique of Reason*, Schulze raised a number of skeptical objections concerning the success of Kant's Critical Philosophy and its elaboration by Karl Leonhard Reinhold – objections which Schulze would refine over the next nine years, culminating in the 1801 publication of his *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie*. Some of these objections were exclusively directed at Reinhold's attempt to ground Kant's Critical Philosophy on a universally valid, self-evident first principle, which according to Reinhold, philosophy requires if it is to aspire to the level of science. Reinhold locates this first principle in what he

calls the “proposition of consciousness,” which states that “in consciousness, the subject distinguishes the representation from the subject and the object and relates the representation to both.”¹⁷ It is the status of Reinhold’s proposition of consciousness as first principle that Schulze calls into question in his *Aenesidemus* and later in his *Kritik*. While Reinhold understood this proposition to concern the logical conditions of consciousness, Schulze takes the proposition as an empirical description instead. Finding this description to be arbitrary, he argues that it cannot constitute the self-evident first principle for philosophy that Reinhold was after.

In addition to the concern with Reinhold’s appropriation of Kant, Schulze’s more general concern is with the project of epistemology itself. For Schulze, the project of epistemology fails to live up to its own standards. It attempts to secure knowledge by ridding itself of all presuppositions. However, it fails to make good on this aspiration, since, it inevitably presupposes the category of causality in offering a causal explanation of the origins of our representations. Thus, as Frederick Beiser points out, for Schulze, “the whole enterprise of epistemology cannot get off of the ground because of Hume’s skepticism about causality.”¹⁸

This is one problem Schulze finds with Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant claims to have undercut Hume’s skepticism concerning the necessary connection between cause and effect. However, in relying upon the causal principle in order to establish the principle’s objective validity, Schulze argues, Kant ends up begging the question against Hume, presupposing precisely what he must prove. Moreover, Schulze finds that Kant violates his own critical method. For Kant, the category of causality can only be legitimately applied to

¹⁷ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen, Bd. 1*, ed. Faustino Fabbianell (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), 167.

¹⁸ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 281.

propositions about objects of possible experience. Schulze argues that Kant violates this rule, however, when he employs the causal principle in locating the ultimate causes of our representations of objects in the human mind.

However, for Schulze, a deeper, more fundamental problem remains – namely, the implication that we can know reality outside of how it appears to us. Kant's argument ascribes an ultimate, mind-independent reality to the principle of causality as well as those things that he argues cause our mental representations. Following Hume, though, Schulze insists that we cannot extrapolate from appearances to this kind of reality. To do so, in fact, would mean failing to make the most fundamental epistemological distinction – the distinction between thinking and being, conceptuality and objectivity. Kant's theoretical philosophy does just this, however, by attempting to speak to the cause of our mental representations, striving after, as Schulze says, the "highest and unconditioned causes of all conditioned things,"¹⁹ endeavoring to penetrate to the realm of the "in-itself" solely through the powers of the human intellect.

Schulze's description of a dogmatic mode of inquiry untroubled by the distinction between concept and object may be appropriate of Leibniz, Wolff, and some other of Kant's predecessors in the rationalist tradition. To continue to conceive of theoretical philosophy in this manner after the *Critique of Pure Reason*, however, is to fail to comprehend what was truly innovative about this project – its insistence that a cognition of objects only becomes possible once we renounce all hope of securing knowledge of a mind-independent reality, limiting our theoretical ambitions solely to objects of possible experience. Crucial to Kant's innovation was his notion of the "thing-in-itself." Rather than separate the subject from the object and regard the

¹⁹ G.E. Schulze, *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie, Bd. 1* (Hamburg: Bohm, 1801), 26-27.

impressions one encounters in sense experience as issuing directly from the thing, Kant subverted this view of human cognition by developing a model which distinguishes both the subject from her representations and these same representations again from the objects to which they presumably refer. On this model, the object of cognition is not regarded as something external to consciousness, upon which our concepts and judgments are arbitrarily superimposed, but rather is taken to be something which, though encountered within consciousness, is not reducible to the latter – something which we construct by combining what is given in intuition by an ostensibly exterior source according to the *a priori* rules provided by the understanding. It was this inscrutable source exterior to consciousness, which presumably supplies the matter for cognition, that Kant understood by the "thing-in-itself," and it was by positing this "problematic concept" in contradistinction to our objects of cognition that he was able to establish for metaphysics the "secure course of a science" (CPR, Bxviii). Unfortunately, Schulze seems to have misunderstood this all-important role of the "thing-in-itself" in Kant's revision of metaphysics. He mistook Kant's second-order investigation into the logical conditions for synthetic *a priori* propositions for a first-order inquiry into the causes of our mental representations. Schulze's fundamental mistake was in thinking that Kant regarded the "thing-in-itself" as the cause of our representations rather than as a limit concept that marks the bounds of human cognition. Hegel draws attention to precisely this error when he complains in the Skepticism essay that Schulze cannot conceive of the "thing-in-itself" in any other way than as "a rock underneath the snow" (RSP, 318). As he goes on to show, however, Schulze's inability to conceive of Kant's "thing-in-itself" in any way other than as the hyperphysical reality which while remaining inaccessible to our cognitive powers, nevertheless constitutes the true object of all our theoretical strivings is not only a misconception of Kant's "thing-in-itself" but is

ultimately rooted in a misguided conception of the relationship of thinking and being – one that, for Hegel, is reflective of a dogmatic form of skepticism.

Hegel never engages the details of Schulze's critique of theoretical philosophy. This is presumably because he thinks that only one of Schulze's objections is worth considering – an objection which, ironically, Kant had earlier used in the *Critique of Pure Reason* in order to refute the Ontological Proof of God's existence. Later on, when we consider the fate of Kant's critical project in light of Hegel's critique of Schulze, we will have occasion to return to this argument once more. For now, however, let us briefly examine the contours of Kant's objection to the Ontological Proof in order to illuminate the metaphysical presuppositions Hegel sees at work in Schulze's repetition of this argument. As we shall see, if the Ontological Proof constitutes for Schulze and Kant the paradigm of dogmatism, to the degree that it posits the identification of concept and object, in Hegel's estimation, Kant and Schulze's refutation of this same argument exemplifies dogmatic skepticism, insofar as it insists on the opposition of thinking and being.

The Ontological Proof, at the most basic level, infers the existence of God from the concept of an absolutely necessary being – or, in Kant's language, it attempts to demonstrate that existence is a "real predicate" that is nevertheless analytically contained in the concept of the *ens realissimum*. The basic problem with such reasoning, Kant holds, is that "being is obviously not a real predicate" determinative of things, but is rather a logical function through which we posit a given predicate as belonging to a subject – that is, "merely the copula in a judgment" (CPR, A598/B626). Thus, the copula in the statement "God is omnipotent" expresses an objectively necessary connection inhering in the proposition between the concepts "God" and "omnipotence," but says nothing of whether there is in fact an object corresponding to the subject

in question to which the predicate "omnipotence" may be attached. Accordingly, Kant argues that while it may be impossible, on pain of contradiction, to demonstrate that the predicate "omnipotence" does not apply to the subject "God," since the former is analytically contained in the latter, no contradiction arises in saying "God is not," as the subject is cancelled along with all of its predicates, so that "there is no longer anything that could be contradicted" (CPR, A594/B622). It is easy to see here that Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof trades on the opposition of thinking and being insofar as it denies that we can ever establish more than the mere possible existence of an object through conceptual analysis and insists that knowledge-claims must be restricted to objects of possible experience. As we saw a moment ago, this restriction of knowledge to objects of possible experience was in part made possible by Kant's introduction of the "thing-in-itself;" interestingly enough, however, Schulze makes use of Kant's line of argument in his refutation of the Ontological Proof in order to charge Kant himself with confusing concept and object in his deduction of the categories as part of a larger strategy to show that Kant's response to Hume was simply a case of *petitio principii*. Schulze's basic argument runs as follows: (1) in the Transcendental Deduction, Kant strives to uncover the true ground of synthetic *a priori* judgments; (2) Kant concludes that the mind *is* the true lawgiver of nature since he finds that the mind *must* be thought of this way; (3) by "inferring from the constitution of something as it is in our representations its objective constitution outside us,"²⁰ Kant is guilty not only of violating his own central critical tenet that knowledge-claims can only legitimately be made of objects of possible experience, but also, in so doing, of begging the

²⁰ G.E. Schulze, "Aenesidemus or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Prof. Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defence of Skepticism Against the Pretensions of The Critique of Reason," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 113.

question against Humean skepticism. Now, there are several problems with Schulze's application of Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof to the Transcendental Deduction, but the problem with which Hegel is most concerned is the one we have already introduced above: Schulze's misinterpretation of the "thing-in-itself" as the transcendently real²¹ entity after which theoretical philosophy vainly strives. Hegel summarizes Schulze's critique:

To begin with, "things" are opposed to "cognition" within [the context of] Reason here; and secondly an explanation of its origin [is asked for], and therewith the causal relationship is dragged in; the ground of cognition, then, is something other than what is grounded, the former the concept, the latter the thing, and when once this basically false picture of rational thinking is presupposed, then there is nothing further to be done, except to repeat for ever that ground and grounded, concept and thing are different modes; that all rational cognition aims just to *pluck* a being *out of* thinking, existence out of concepts... (RSP, 341).

To "pluck a being out of thinking" in this context is to illicitly infer the existence of some object from a representation. This, of course, is to assume that objects are separate from representations. Thus, behind Schulze's misapplication of Kant's argument lies his inability to conceive of the "thing-in-itself" outside of the antithesis of thinking and being – precisely the antithesis that Kant sought to overcome in the Transcendental Deduction. While it is true that Kant appeals to the antithesis of thinking and being in his refutation of the Ontological Proof, the Transcendental Deduction is hardly guilty of the illicit inference from concept to object that Kant once imputed to Descartes. Indeed, the very point of the deduction is to show how *a priori* concepts can be referred to objects of experience without resorting to such apparently fallacious reasoning. Nevertheless, because Schulze holds the antithesis of thinking and being, concept and object, to

²¹ According to Kant, the transcendental realist regards space, time, and the objects of perception as things in themselves – mind-independent entities whose existence cannot be reduced to our powers of representation and which, for this reason, are thought to be located outside of us.

be absolute, he simply cannot countenance the possibility that "there is a philosophy which is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323).

We are now in the position to make sense of Hegel's complaint that Schulze fails to grasp the "true relationship of skepticism to philosophy." Because Schulze takes it as axiomatic that an unbridgeable gulf separates the order of thinking from the order of being and, accordingly, that any effort to join the two must proceed by way of the illicit (because merely conceptual) inference from concept to object, he can only echo the ancient skeptics Sextus Empiricus' apparently exclusive disjunction between dogmatism and skepticism,²² failing to grasp their unity in what Hegel alternately calls here "philosophy," "rational cognition," or simply "Reason." When we turn to our discussion of Kant in Part Two in order to show how Hegel's appraisal of skepticism leads him to depart from the Kantian framework, we will offer a sustained analysis of how Hegel envisages the unity of dogmatism and skepticism in "philosophy." At the present moment, however, we will limit our discussion of this relationship to what emerges through Hegel's criticism of Schulze's position.

In view of the fact that Hegel traces Schulze's opposition of skepticism to philosophy to his insistence on the antithesis of thinking and being, one might suppose that it is merely Schulze's misconstrual of this latter relationship that elicits Hegel's criticism. But this would be to overlook the fact that Hegel views skepticism – conceived here in terms of the antithesis of thinking and being – as occupying a legitimate place within genuine philosophical cognition. The problem is not that Schulze holds fast to the opposition of thinking and being, but that he fails to recognize how, in philosophy, this opposition is united with its opposite – that is, with the

²² Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically as OS.

identity of thinking and being. In attempting to justify the opposition of thinking and being which, as we have just seen, lies at the basis of his critique of theoretical philosophy, Schulze unwittingly presupposes their simple unity in the "facts of consciousness." This patent inconsistency, however, only confirms for Hegel that Schulze is incapable of grasping the "truth of Reason."

According to Hegel, Schulze's skepticism includes both a "negative" and a "positive" side – the former being concerned with the "destruction of the brain-children of the dogmatists, and their attempts to achieve cognition of the *existence of hyperphysical things*" (RSP, 318), and the latter with offering justification for the position from which this attack is undertaken. Rather than following the Pyrrhonian strategy of avoiding all knowledge-claims and reporting instead solely on how things appear, Schulze attempts to ground his position in apparently indubitable "facts of consciousness." Employing a line of reasoning that draws on Descartes' argument for the Cogito, Schulze contends that "the existence of what is given within the compass of our consciousness has *undeniable certainty*; for since it is present in our consciousness," he continues,

we can doubt the certainty of it no more than we can doubt consciousness itself; and to want to doubt consciousness is absolutely impossible, because any such doubt would destroy itself since it cannot occur apart from consciousness, and hence it would be nothing; what is given in and with consciousness, we call an actual fact of consciousness; it follows that the facts of consciousness are undeniably actual, what all philosophical speculations must be related to, and what is to be explained or made comprehensible through these speculations (Quoted in RSP, 318).

As we read on, it becomes clear that these facts, whose absolute certainty is evidently secured by the indubitable character of consciousness itself, pertain not to my existence qua *res cogitans*, but rather to the existence of external objects; indeed, from such facts we learn simply that sense experience provides us direct, unmediated access to the external world of things. This, of course,

stands in stark contrast to Descartes' line of argument in the *Meditations*, which begins by calling into question the "entire testimony of the senses" precisely in order to upset that practical certainty we ascribe to the judgments of everyday life – the very same certainty to which Schulze now appeals in order to contest the claims of theoretical philosophy. The "conscious-fact philosophy," through which Schulze attempts to ground his division between consciousness and what lies inaccessibly exterior to it, amounts, then, to little more than a form of naïve realism, which bluntly affirms the undeniable certainty of what is given through the senses. As Hegel points out, however, such a crude model of cognition will be at pains to countenance, let alone justify, the "negative side" of Schulze's skepticism: "in view of this absolute certainty that things exist (and certainty of how they exist) how," Hegel asks, "can it at the same time be the case that *it is not self-explanatory* that *they are* and that *they are* what they are?" (RSP, 319). Moreover, to the degree that it posits the unity of thinking and being in the "facts of consciousness" in maintaining that the latter make us immediately and undeniably aware of what we encounter in sense experience, Hegel contends in a line of argument presaging his later remarks on "sense-certainty" in the *Phenomenology* that Schulze's skepticism surreptitiously appeals to the very position it would like to rebuff:

Now what else does Mr. Schulze ground the indubitable certainty of the facts of consciousness upon, then, but the absolute identity of thought and being, of the concept and the thing? – and then again in an instant he explains that the subjective, the image, and the objective, the thing are of different species (RSP, 342).²³

²³ Cf. Hegel's strikingly similar remark in paragraph 109 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "It is clear that the dialectic of sense-certainty is nothing else but the simple history of its movement or of its experience, and sense-certainty itself is nothing else but just this history. That is why the natural consciousness, too, is always reaching this result, learning from experience what is true in it; but equally it is always forgetting it and starting the movement all over again. It is therefore astonishing when, in the face of this experience, it is asserted as universal experience and put forward, too, as a philosophical proposition, *even as the outcome of Scepticism*, that the reality or being of external things taken as Theses or sense-objects has absolute truth for consciousness. To make such an assertion is not to know what one is saying, *to be unaware that one is saying the opposite of what one wants to say.*" G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 64-65, my emphasis.

Nevertheless, this "complete contradiction" does not lead Schulze to reexamine his position concerning the relationship of skepticism to philosophy; indeed, in Hegel's estimation, this inconsistency only confirms the fact that "a true philosophy is infinitely more skeptical than this skepticism (RSP, 323)," since the latter flatly denies, against the "truth of Reason," that it bears any sort of relation to what it excludes – a move which Hegel at one point identifies as the very "essence of dogmatism."²⁴

I therefore take the core of Hegel's critique of Schulze to consist in the following:

if in any one proposition that expresses a cognition of Reason, its reflected aspect – the concepts that are contained in it – is isolated, and the way that they are bound together is considered, it must become evident that these concepts are together sublated, or in other words they are united in such a way, that they contradict themselves; otherwise it would not be a proposition of Reason but only of understanding (RSP, 324).

In other words, Schulze fails to recognize that philosophy (or "Reason") expresses the fact that skepticism (which is predicated upon the opposition of thinking and being) and dogmatism (which assumes their simple identity) are united precisely to the extent that they contradict one another. To recognize this fact – that is, that two terms within an opposition are not merely opposed to one another, but also united by virtue of this relationship – is what Hegel means here by "sublation."²⁵ We will return to Hegel's conception of contradiction later in Part Two. For

²⁴ "The essence of dogmatism," Hegel writes, "consists in this that it posits something finite, something burdened with an opposition (e.g. pure Subject, or pure Object, or in dualism the duality as opposed to the identity) as the Absolute; hence Reason shows with respect to this Absolute, that it has a relation to what is excluded from it, and only exists through and in this relation to another, so that it is not absolute..." (RSP, 335).

²⁵ Hegel offers a helpful explanation of this term in a remark on Becoming in the *Science of Logic*: "To sublata and being sublated (the idealized) constitute one of the most important concepts in philosophy. It is a fundamental determination that repeatedly occurs everywhere in it, the meaning of which must be grasped with precision and especially distinguished from *nothing*. – What is sublated does not thereby turn into nothing. Nothing is the *immediate*; something sublated is on the contrary something *mediated*; it is something non-existent but as a result that has proceeded from a being; it still *has in itself*, therefore, the *determinateness from which it derives*." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81.

now, let us recognize that already in his 1802 essay, Hegel sees more in contradiction than just an error of reasoning. The substance of Hegel's criticism of Schulze's skepticism is not simply that it harbors within itself the opposition of thinking and being, nor just that it fails to provide sufficient justification for this opposition – nor even that it is self-contradictory to the extent that it simultaneously affirms and denies the unity of thinking and being – but rather that because it takes opposition itself to be absolute, it can only see skepticism as the antithesis of philosophy, rather than recognizing the former as an indispensable moment within the latter.

We are yet to fully comprehend what Hegel takes the true relationship of skepticism and philosophy to consist in, and how his efforts to recast this relationship as one of unity is related to the development of an emergent post-Kantian metaphysics. It is in the hope of answering such enduring questions that we now turn our attention to Hegel's brief but provocative engagement with Kant in the 1802 Skepticism essay. As we will see, Hegel's complaints against Schulze are mirrored in a handful of scattered parenthetical remarks concerning Kant. It is my contention that the general thrust of Hegel's critique of Schulze's skepticism applies *mutatis mutandis* to Kant's critique of metaphysics and, accordingly, that Hegel's effort here to rethink the relationship between skepticism and philosophy constitutes an essential moment in the unfolding of a metaphysical framework that departs in significant ways from the Kantian problematic.

Part Two: Hegel's Critique of Kant

Schulze is undoubtedly the central target of Hegel's 1802 Skepticism essay, and though one might be led to suppose, given Hegel's concern over Schulze's misinterpretation of the

"thing-in-itself," that he is out to defend Kant against his would-be detractors, this would be a mistake – for Hegel's primary concern in this essay is to challenge certain metaphysical commitments underpinning *both* Schulze's critique of theoretical philosophy *and* Kant's revision of metaphysics.²⁶ As we will see, the main objection that Hegel puts to Schulze's skepticism – namely, that it is based on a fundamental misconception of the relationship of skepticism and philosophy whose roots lie in a similarly misguided understanding of the relationship of thinking and being – allows Hegel to articulate the limitations of Kant's Critical Project. Although for much of the essay Hegel remains conspicuously silent about this connection, considering that Kant's philosophy constitutes the principal object of Schulze's *Kritik*, the importance of Kant for Hegel's analysis of skepticism is nevertheless made clear in a handful of remarks such as: "[Schulze's] skepticism has in its game only one single move, and one turn altogether, and even that is not its own, but it has borrowed even that from Kantianism" (RSP, 341). Now, we have already seen that Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof provides Schulze with a blueprint for his skeptical attack on theoretical philosophy and that Schulze's erroneous application of this argument to the Transcendental Deduction betrays his inability to conceive of Kant's "thing-in-itself" outside of that antithesis of thinking and being which it was intended to disrupt. In what remains, we will consider how what Hegel perceives as an inconsistency between Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof and the Transcendental Deduction holds the key to understanding how the problematic of skepticism reveals for him the misguided character of Kant's critique of metaphysics as well as the basis for Hegel's own inchoate metaphysical system.

²⁶ In *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique*, William F. Bristow comes to the same conclusion: "Despite the fact that some of Hegel's main points against Schulze's skepticism recall those Fichte makes in his review of *Aenesidemus*, the main features of Schulzean epistemology that Hegel finds objectionable are ones he takes it to share with (or to have borrowed from) the critical philosophy." William F. Bristow, *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 134.

Again, it is only in brief parenthetical or otherwise undeveloped remarks that Hegel provides us here with a perspective on his appraisal of Kant's Critical project. In a passing comment, which seems more of an afterthought than a carefully considered piece of philosophical criticism, Hegel offers perhaps the most important clue for understanding how Kant fares with regard to the relationship of skepticism and philosophy. After explaining that it is Kant and not Schulze who deserves the credit "for having brought this antithesis [between thinking and being] home to the culture of our modern age" through his refutation of the Ontological Proof, Hegel observes that "the Kantian philosophy... from the limited standpoint from which it is idealism (its deduction of the categories) does indeed sublimate this antithesis, but... is otherwise inconsistent enough to make the antithesis into the supreme principle of speculation" (RSP, 340). Although Hegel does not elaborate on this point any further here, it is clear that he means to draw attention to what he perceives as an inconsistency in the way that the *Critique of Pure Reason* portrays the relationship of thinking and being: while Kant evidently "sublates" the opposition between thinking and being in the Transcendental Deduction, this same opposition is nevertheless preserved in his refutation of the Ontological Proof.²⁷ Since Hegel's criticism of Schulze hinges on the way that the latter conceives of the relationship between thinking and being, I submit that in the statement quoted above Hegel indicts Kant's critical philosophy on what are essentially the same grounds. Accordingly, in order to recognize how in Hegel's eyes Kant conceives of the relationship between thinking and being, we must come to grips with Hegel's suggestive comment – for doing so will allow us to shed light on what Hegel identifies as the specific shortcomings of Kant's critique of metaphysics. Let us turn then to the

²⁷ "The insistence on this antithesis," Hegel explains, "comes out most explicitly and with infinite self-satisfaction against the so-called 'Ontological Proof' of the existence of God, and as reflecting judgment against Nature; and especially in the form of a refutation of the Ontological Proof it has enjoyed universal and widespread good fortune" (RSP, 340).

Transcendental Deduction to consider how it could be said to "sublate" the antithesis of thinking and being.

To appreciate what Kant achieves in the Transcendental Deduction, it is helpful to keep in view the position it was partly designed to defeat: Hume's challenge to causality.²⁸ After distinguishing between "relations of ideas," "discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe"²⁹ and "matters of fact," brute empirical events which remain untouched by our human projections, Hume proceeds in Section IV of the *Enquiry* to argue that because "causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience,"³⁰ and since experience-based knowledge, in contrast to *a priori* reasoning, is incapable of yielding certainty, the causal principle is only a psychological projection arising from the constant conjunction of empirical events which, accordingly, holds at best only subjective validity, but cannot legitimately be said to pertain to actual objects. More generally, because Hume sees "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" as together comprising two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive spheres of knowledge – the former promising the possibility of certainty but being of limited application, the latter ranging over empirical objects but being incapable of securing certitude, he denies that that necessity which pertains to "relations of ideas" can be found in experience. While it is true that Hume's distinction between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" does not coincide with Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, it is nevertheless the case that Hume's argument against the

²⁸ Though the results of the Transcendental Deduction hold important consequences for Hume's challenge to causality, Kant never explicitly mentions Hume in the deduction itself. Hume is only mentioned briefly in the "Transition to the transcendental deduction of the categories" (CPR, A95/B127).

²⁹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

objective validity of the causal principle attempts in effect to rule out the possibility of what Kant calls synthetic *a priori* judgments.³¹ These judgments are necessary, but non-tautological – applicable to experience, but, emphatically, not derivable from it. And it was in hope of establishing the possibility of such judgments, and so, of demonstrating the objective validity of the causal principle, that Kant composed the Transcendental Deduction.

Kant's basic task in the deduction is to demonstrate that certain *a priori* concepts – for instance, that of causality – are indeed applicable to the objects we encounter in experience. As Kant himself puts it,

it [the Transcendental Deduction] is the exhibition of the pure concepts of the understanding (and with them of all theoretical cognition *a priori*) as principles of the possibility of experience, but of the latter as the *determination* of appearances in space and time in general – and the latter, finally, from the principle of the *original synthetic unity* of apperception, as the form of the understanding in relation to space and time, as original forms of sensibility (CPR, B168-69).

In order to accomplish this task, Kant engages in a transcendental inquiry that attempts to justify the objective validity of these concepts by demonstrating that they in fact constitute necessary conditions which enable our experience of objects. Taking as his point of departure the unity of self-consciousness – the fact that I am able to recognize all of the variegated representations I encounter in experience *as* my own – Kant proceeds to argue that this unity is the accomplishment of a prior activity of synthesis. Through this "original synthetic unity of apperception" what is given in the manifold of intuition is united in such a way that it first becomes intelligible as belonging to me, and it is precisely by organizing the manifold into such

³¹ Indeed, Kant suggests in the Introduction to the B edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that though Hume came closest to the "general problem of pure reason," that is, the problem of how synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible, he failed to conceive of this problem in terms of Kant's own distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. "That metaphysics has until now remained in such a vacillating state of uncertainty and contradictions," Kant writes, "is to be ascribed solely to the cause that no one has previously thought of this problem and perhaps even of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments" (CPR, B19).

discrete representations that the synthetic unity of apperception makes the "I think" itself possible. Although what is given in the sensible manifold must conform to the formal conditions of space and time, Kant explains that that unity which allows me to recognize any given object as my own cannot issue from sensibility (the way in which objects are given to us), but must originate in the understanding, for it is only with thought that the manifold becomes united for consciousness. While it remains the work of the concept to unite what is given in intuition so that through it we can think a given object, because the unity of self-consciousness qua the "I think" logically precedes any given thought, Kant argues that this unity can only be accounted for by the synthetic activity of certain *a priori* concepts. Such "ancestral" concepts not only allow us to recognize and determine specific objects, but to specify, moreover, the minimal conditions constituting objects in general. For this reason, the categories encompass everything that can be properly said of any possible object of experience. As it turns out, causality is one such concept, and since it, along with eleven others, provides rules for determining what is given in intuition so that it may become an object of thought for me, we are, Kant concludes, entitled in ascribing to it objective validity. The categories then are not merely superimposed on the sensible manifold, as Hume had thought, but in fact make experience itself possible.

Although Hegel offers no explanation of how the deduction "sublates" the antithesis of thinking and being, it is fairly clear what he has in mind. As we have seen, Hume's challenge to causality is grounded on the skeptical opposition of thinking and being: it is only by insisting on the exclusive disjunction of "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" that he is able to contest the objective validity of the causal principle. Now, if in the face of this challenge, Kant had resorted to the same illicit inference from concept to object which he criticized in his refutation of the Ontological Proof, Schulze would have been correct to charge him with begging the question –

for he would have provided no reason why we should accept his claim concerning the objective validity of the causal principle over Hume's opposing argument. But as we have seen, this is not Kant's strategy. Kant does not simply fail to acknowledge any distinction between thinking and being. His strategy is rather to show that our very ability to recognize this distinction at the level of experience is only made possible by an activity which unites thinking and being at the transcendental level: the unity of self-consciousness, as we have just seen, results from the fact that the manifold of intuition must stand under the spontaneous synthesis-function of the understanding. Thus, it would not be at all incorrect to say that in the Transcendental Deduction the antithesis of thinking and being is both "abolished" (at the transcendental level) and "preserved" (at the empirical level). Indeed, one may even be tempted to conclude on the basis of this apparent "sublation" of the antithesis of thinking and being that the *Critique of Pure Reason* embodies that unity of skepticism and philosophy which Hegel's review of Schulze has been striving to illuminate. Given, however, that Hegel's praise of the deduction is rounded out with a comment on how inconsistently Kant treats the relationship of thinking and being, this would not appear to be the case. However much he admires what Kant achieves in the deduction, we must nevertheless read this praise in light of Hegel's less favorable estimation of Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof.

Now, we have already seen above that Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof – as well as Schulze's recasting of this same argument – is grounded on the opposition of thinking and being: it strives to show that we cannot legitimately infer God's existence from the concept of a necessary being. We have also seen, however, that as misleading as this opposition may be, it is not ultimately what Hegel finds problematic about Schulze's account. Hegel's concern is not after all to reject this antithesis, which he sees as lying at the very core of skepticism, but to

reveal how philosophy in fact stands in a relationship of unity with the latter – how, that is, philosophy includes, but is not reducible to, the opposition of thinking and being. If this is correct, however, then I would suggest that we shift our attention away from Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof, and concentrate instead on the sense and significance of Hegel's claim that Kant is "inconsistent" in his treatment of the antithesis of thinking and being.

Let us return then to the comment in question: "as we all know," Hegel avers,

it is the Kantian philosophy – which from the limited standpoint from which it is idealism (in its deduction of the categories) does indeed sublimate this antithesis; but which is otherwise inconsistent [*inkonsequent*] enough to make the antithesis into the supreme principle of speculation; the insistence on this antithesis comes out most explicitly and with infinite self-satisfaction against the so-called "Ontological Proof" of the existence of God, and as reflecting judgment against Nature; and especially in the form of a refutation of the Ontological Proof it has enjoyed universal and widespread good fortune (RSP, 340).

Earlier, we saw that Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof appeals to the antithesis of thinking and being. We have now seen how the deduction could be said to "sublate" this antithesis. It should therefore be relatively clear at this point what Hegel means in saying that the Kantian philosophy is "inconsistent:" these two accounts offer apparently divergent conceptions of the relationship of thinking and being. I would add here, however, that in charging the *Critique of Pure Reason* with inconsistency, Hegel is not simply bringing to our attention the presence of one isolated mistake appearing in an otherwise unproblematic work. Rather, the apparent incongruity of these two accounts signifies for Hegel the existence of a greater difficulty – the same difficulty, in fact, which in Hegel's eyes prevented Schulze from comprehending the relationship between skepticism and philosophy.

The problem, once again, was not that Schulze conceived of the relationship of skepticism and philosophy – or the relationship of thinking and being – in terms of opposition,

but that he conceived of this relationship *exclusively* in such terms. Schulze failed to recognize that "there is a philosophy which is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323) because he could not countenance the notion that thinking and being are both united *and* opposed, identical *and* different. Kant seems at first sight to fare somewhat better than Schulze on this account. Evidently, Schulze was so committed to viewing the relationship of thinking and being as one of opposition that he was oblivious to the fact that the "positive" side of his skepticism – the "facts of consciousness" which in his mind justified his critique of theoretical philosophy – suggested, quite to the contrary, that thinking and being are in fact one. Kant, on the other hand, acknowledges in the Transcendental Deduction that though there is a sense in which thinking and being are opposed to one another (i.e., in empirical consciousness), there is another sense in which they are united (i.e., in the transcendental unity of consciousness). Nevertheless, even though Kant "sublates" the opposition of thinking and being in the deduction, in his argument against the Ontological Proof he refuses to acknowledge any legitimate sense in which concept and object stand together in a relationship of unity.

This is no mere oversight on Kant's part however. Indeed, Kant's inconsistent treatment of the relationship of thinking and being springs from the fact that his commitment to the principle of noncontradiction³² requires him to deny the unity of opposites. Even as Kant "sublates" the antithesis of thinking and being in the deduction, he still avoids embracing the manifest contradiction of holding thinking and being to be both opposed and united at the same

³² Kant identifies the principle of noncontradiction as the "supreme principle of all analytic judgments" and describes it in the following way: "Now the proposition that no predicate pertains to a thing that contradicts it is called the principle of contradiction, and is a general though merely negative criterion of all truth, but on that account it also belongs merely to logic, since it holds of cognitions merely as cognitions in general, without regard to their content, and says that contradiction entirely annihilates and cancels them" (CPR, B190/A151). Although Kant's adaptation of the principle of noncontradiction evidently differs from the classic version offered by Aristotle, he still appears to endorse the latter throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

time and in the same respect by distinguishing between the transcendental and the empirical. The principle of noncontradiction is, of course, also operative in Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof, where he argues that one can deny the predicate "existence" to the subject "God" without contradiction, in spite of the fact that this predicate has been traditionally thought to be analytically contained in the definition of God. In this respect, Kant is no different from Schulze or many other thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition. Hegel, however, has a markedly different conception of the principle of noncontradiction, and it is this conception, I argue, that ultimately allows him to recast the relationship of thinking and being as one of unity, and thus, to criticize those who have failed to achieve the insight that "skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23). It is also, as we shall see, the single most important way in which Hegel departs from the Kantian problematic.

That the status of the principle of noncontradiction is at stake in Hegel's account of the true relationship of skepticism and philosophy can be seen above all in the following passage:

The so-called 'principle of contradiction' is [...] so far from possessing even formal truth for Reason, that on the contrary every proposition of Reason must in respect of concepts contain a violation of it. To say that a proposition is merely formal, means for Reason, that it is posited alone and on its own account, without the equal affirmation of the contradictory that is opposed to it; and just for that reason it is false. To recognize the principle of contradiction as a formality, thus means to cognize its falsity at the same time (RSP, 325).

To appreciate the significance of the passage in question, it is important to recognize that Hegel's discussion of the principle of noncontradiction is offered in contrast to what in the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, the ancient Pyrrhonian skeptic, Sextus Empiricus, called the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism." This principle, which states that "to every account an equal account is

opposed,”³³ sits at the basis of the ancient Pyrrhonian practice. It is the principle that guides the Pyrrhonian response to any dogmatic knowledge-claim put forth. Following the principle, the Pyrrhonist demonstrates that, in the face of a knowledge-claim, there is no good reason for preferring it to its opposite. Such a realization leads to what Sextus describes as “the standstill of the intellect,” understood by the Pyrrhonist as a desirable state of mental tranquility (*ataraxia*).

Although Hegel fails to specify which version of the principle of noncontradiction he regards as “false,” it is nevertheless clear that he sees the principle of skepticism as superior to both Aristotle's classic articulation and Kant's modern adaptation of this basic principle of thought. While the principle of noncontradiction stipulates, in its classic form, that of two contradictory assertions at least one must be false and, in Kant's revision of this same principle, that no true judgment may be self-contradictory, the principle of skepticism merely states that “to every account an equal account is opposed.” Far from providing a “negative criterion of all truth” which would allow us to formally test the veracity of a given claim, the principle of skepticism simply expresses the fact that, for any claim, an opposite yet equally convincing claim can always be found. As such, it remains completely silent on the truth-value of contradictory or self-contradictory assertions, and this is, presumably, why Hegel prefers it to the principle of noncontradiction – because, in contradistinction to the latter, the principle of skepticism does not rule out in advance the truth of that class of self-contradictory claims that Hegel designates “propositions of Reason.” These propositions are those that concern infinite objects. One must rely upon propositions of Reason, for example, if one is to have an adequate comprehension of the mind, the world, or God – all of which are ways of conceiving the infinite, for Hegel. In

³³ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6. Hereafter cited parenthetically as OS.

attempting to think the infinite, of course, one may be tempted to understand it in contradistinction to the finite. This conception, which Hegel elsewhere refers to as the “bad infinite,” is the conception characteristic of the understanding, which, unlike Reason, is a finite mode of cognition. Abiding by the principle of noncontradiction, the understanding can only grasp the infinite as something opposed to the finite. For Hegel, however, a proper grasp of the infinite involves a violation of the principle of noncontradiction, for, to take the infinite as opposed to the finite is to consider it limited by the finite, which is to say as not truly infinite. Indeed, a proper grasp of any infinite object involves a violation of this principle. Because propositions of Reason are necessarily self-contradictory, they always violate the principle of noncontradiction, but remain true, for Hegel, nevertheless:

If in any one proposition that expresses a cognition of Reason, its reflected aspect – the concepts that are contained in it – is isolated, and the way that they are bound together is considered, it must become evident that these concepts are together sublated, or in other words they are united in such a way, that they contradict themselves; otherwise it would not be a proposition of Reason but only of understanding (RSP, 324).

Although Hegel evidently holds the principle of skepticism in higher esteem than he does the principle of noncontradiction, he never denies the general validity of the principle of noncontradiction. Nor does he deny the legitimacy of propositions of the understanding. Propositions of the understanding are true claims about finite objects. Indeed, without any comprehension of finite objects, one could never arrive at a comprehension of the infinite, since this involves a negation of those claims that elevate finite things into something infinite. Thus, Hegel does not diminish the status of the principle of noncontradiction. He merely denies that it holds for propositions of Reason, since “every proposition of Reason,” he writes, “must in respect of concepts contain a violation of it” (RSP, 325). When thinking about infinite objects, the principle of noncontradiction evidently does not hold.

Similarly, Hegel never offers an unrestricted affirmation of the principle of skepticism but only intimates that it accords with the general structure of rational propositions. Unlike the ancient thinkers who took “the chief constitutive principle of skepticism” to apply to any and all claims, Hegel argues that procedure of the understanding is only problematic when one attempts to use it in order to think about infinite objects. The principle of skepticism is, then, useful for revealing how finite claims are not absolute. However, it cannot be successfully extended to all claims – a point I shall return to later at the end of this chapter.

These qualifications are absolutely crucial for Hegel's argument. As we will see next, they allow us to comprehend how it is that Hegel understands thinking and being to comprise a unity. This, in turn, will finally make clear how Hegel's efforts to rethink the relationship of skepticism and philosophy lead him beyond the boundaries of the Kantian framework.

Hegel offers several examples of what constitutes a proposition of Reason – for instance, "God is cause, and God is not cause" and "He is one and not one, many and not many" (RSP, 325). He also gives at one point Spinoza's definition of *causa sui* in Part One of the *Ethics*. Given, however, that he equates the negation of this definition at one point in the essay with "the denial of the truth of Reason, and the transformation of the rational into reflection" (RSP, 339), I believe that this particular example warrants special attention. Spinoza begins Part One of the *Ethics* by defining *causa sui* as "that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing."³⁴ While it is not immediately clear how Spinoza's definition qualifies as a proposition of Reason in the Hegelian sense – how, that is, that it could be said to be both true and self-contradictory, Hegel offers us a clue when he explains that its "opposed

³⁴ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 31.

counterpart" insists that "what is *thought* of, since it is thought-object, does not at the same time involve a *being* in itself" (RSP, 339) – in other words, thinking does not imply being. If, however, the skeptical opposition of thinking and being constitutes the "opposed counterpart" of Spinoza's definition and if, as Hegel maintains, every proposition of Reason "permits resolution into two strictly contradictory assertions" (RSP, 324-25), it becomes clear that, for Hegel, Spinoza's *causa sui* names that in which thinking and being are both united and opposed, identical and different. A further clue as to how Hegel understands Spinoza's *causa sui* to qualify as a proposition of Reason can be found in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. "The cause of itself," Hegel writes, "is a noteworthy expression, for while we picture to ourselves that the effect stands in opposition to the cause, the cause of itself is the cause which, while it operates and separates an 'other,' at the same time produces only itself, and in the production therefore does away with this distinction."³⁵ Since, for Hegel, Spinoza's *causa sui* describes that in which the distinction between cause and effect is both dissolved and upheld, it must surely qualify for him as a proposition of Reason – a proposition that is true yet self-contradictory.³⁶

Once we recognize that Hegel identifies the positing of thinking and being (and of cause and effect) as unified in *causa sui* as a proposition of Reason which, as such, is both true and self-contradictory, it becomes apparent that it is Hegel's understanding of the principle of noncontradiction which ultimately allows him to recast the relationship of skepticism and

³⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 258.

³⁶ Paul Franks offers an alternative interpretation: "The suggestion is that insofar as one tries to understand Spinoza's definition of 'cause of itself' in abstraction from the totality of which the absolute is the first principle, one inevitably finds that one can think only of a mere form that cannot be applied to any object. For one seeks to apply the form in question to objects within the totality, among which the absolute is not to be found." Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 192.

philosophy as one of unity, and to criticize Kant and Schulze for failing to achieve this insight. It is only because he maintains that there are some cases in which the principle of noncontradiction does not apply that he is able to countenance the truth of a proposition that contradictorily asserts the identity *and* difference of thinking and being and, for the same reason, one that asserts the unity *and* opposition of skepticism and philosophy.

To be clear, Hegel does not conceive of the relationship of thinking and being – or that of skepticism and philosophy – as a simple unity. In both cases, the kind of unity at issue is one that encompasses both the identity and difference of the related terms – a "dialectical" unity which becomes possible only once we grant that there is a class of true propositions which nevertheless violate the principle of noncontradiction. Once again, this is not to reject the general validity of the principle of noncontradiction, but only to acknowledge that this law must fall silent where propositions of Reason are concerned. This is a point, however, which neither Schulze nor Kant were willing to concede. To affirm the principle of noncontradiction as a "negative criterion of all truth" is, as we have seen, to deny the truth of any self-contradictory proposition – regardless of its content. Accordingly, because neither thinker was willing to entertain the notion that the principle of noncontradiction may be less than universally binding, neither were capable of viewing the relationship of thinking and being as one of unity *and* opposition. Kant came close to endorsing this view in the Transcendental Deduction, but his understanding of the principle of noncontradiction prevented him from consistently embracing the truly contradictory unity of opposites. Since, moreover, neither Kant nor Schulze could countenance the "dialectical" unity of thinking and being – the notion that being and thinking are both united and opposed to one another – neither was capable of achieving the Hegelian insight that "skepticism is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322). They failed to see, in other words, that

skepticism (conceived in terms of the antithesis of thinking and being) is not simply opposed to philosophy, but, that to the extent that the latter expresses the "dialectical" unity of thinking and being, philosophy also already encompasses the claims of the former. On the other hand, because Hegel makes this insight his point of departure in the Skepticism essay, and because, as we have seen, it is bound up with his understanding of the validity of the principle of noncontradiction, it becomes evident that the latter helps lead Hegel to metaphysical conclusions that Kant's critical philosophy could never support. To present Spinoza's definition of *causa sui* as a proposition of Reason – that is, to assert that thinking and being are at once identical and different in the infinite – is, after all, quite different from arguing, as Kant does in the Transcendental Deduction, that thinking and being are one in one sense (at the transcendental level) but two in another (on the level of experience). To see what is at stake in the difference between these two arguments, however, one need only consider Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof of God's existence. Because Kant held the principle of noncontradiction to be a "negative criterion of all truth," he could only regard the inference from concept to existence as an illicit move resulting from what could only be the dogmatic conflation of thinking and being – even when the concept under consideration is that of the highest being. If, however, we grant Hegel that there are some instances in which the principle of noncontradiction does not determine what can be counted as true, instances in which, for example, thinking and being are evidently identical and different, the inference from concept to existence begins to appear less problematic – especially once we recognize that this concession entails that the skeptical opposition of thinking and being on which Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof is based is united in "every true philosophy" with its opposite.

In this chapter, I have offered a reconstruction of Hegel's argument in the 1802 Skepticism essay in order to clarify the sense of his claim that "skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23). To this end, I have argued that to see how Hegel regards the "true relationship of skepticism and philosophy" as one of unity, one must grasp how he understands the relationship of thinking and being and, further, that this requires an understanding of Hegel's conception of the principle of noncontradiction. Given, however, that so much of Hegel's argument in the Skepticism essay rides on his understanding of the principle of noncontradiction, one might well wonder at this point what proof he offers in support of his contentious claim regarding the "falsity" of this principle for propositions of Reason – for Hegel knows as well as anyone that "one bare assurance is worth just as much as another."³⁷

Unfortunately, Hegel never directly addresses this issue in his essay, and while it may be true that the principle of noncontradiction itself famously defies demonstration,³⁸ recognizing this point still leaves us with no reason to accept Hegel's account over the traditional conception of this principle. As I see it, there are two ways that Hegel attempts to address this concern in the Skepticism essay and to demonstrate the dialectical unity of thinking and being, neither one being ultimately satisfying.

First, Hegel attempts to show that propositions of Reason are impervious to traditional skeptical challenges, notably, to the Five Modes of Agrippa. The Five Modes of Agrippa are a series of ancient skeptical arguments, presented by Sextus Empiricus in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, designed to undermine any given knowledge-claim (OS, 40-43). The first argument in the Five Modes is what Sextus calls the "mode deriving from dispute." When someone makes

³⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 49.

³⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV 3 1005b15.

a knowledge-claim, the skeptic uses this argument to point out that there are differing opinions on the matter. In light of this, it becomes clear that the person making the claim must now explain why their claim is preferable to the others. When one tries to explain this, however, one soon faces the challenge of the other modes. After one tries to provide evidence supporting their claim, the skeptic can then point out that additional justification is now needed to support this new claim. When additional evidence is provided to support it, the skeptic can then ask for further evidence, and so on. This second argument is called the “mode throwing one back *ad infinitum*.” In the third mode, the “mode deriving from relativity,” the skeptic demonstrates how any knowledge claim offered is relative to the subject making the claim. Thus, the skeptic points out that the object is not known immediately but only through numerous mediating circumstances. For example, the skeptic points out that, although it appears to us that honey is sweet, one must suspend judgment about whether it is sweet in itself, since it appears sweet only to the palate of a healthy human being. (The Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, are all versions of this third mode, the “mode deriving from relativity.”) The fourth argument is the “hypothetical mode,” which challenges a knowledge-claim for which no evidence is offered by asserting that any other claim, including a conflicting claim, can then be accepted with equal legitimacy. The Pyrrhonian skeptic uses this mode in conjunction with the second mode, for when one finds oneself faced with the “mode throwing one back *ad infinitum*” and consequently gives up on offering any justification for their claim, the skeptic then points out that a conflicting claim can be asserted with equal validity. The final argument in the Five Modes of Agrippa is called the “reciprocal mode.” This occurs “when what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation needs to be made convincing by the object under investigation” (OS, 41). The challenge here is that one’s knowledge-claim rests upon a circular argument.

After demonstrating how each of the five modes can be successfully used to combat the claims of dogmatism, Hegel nevertheless goes on to show that "these tropes are completely useless against philosophy" (RSP, 335). That is, the ancient arguments do not successfully undermine all claims. They do not undermine propositions of Reason, which Hegel regards as self-contradictory yet true, although they effectively call into question the one-sided claims of the understanding.³⁹ Since this account is intended to demonstrate that skepticism's strongest weapons "fall apart internally" when applied to Reason, it can plausibly be construed as an attempt to justify Hegel's position on the relationship of thinking and being. If this is Hegel's strategy, however, it is surely unsuccessful, for it is only by virtue of certain special properties that Hegel ascribes to Reason that he is able to dismiss the force of each of these skeptical arguments. This is especially clear in the case of the fourth mode, which insists on the hypothetical – and hence tentative – status of every unproven claim: "the rational," Hegel writes,

is not an unproven assumption, in accordance with the fourth trope, so that its counterpart could with equal right be presupposed unproven in opposition to it; for the rational has no opposed counterpart; it includes both of the finite opposites, which are mutual counterparts, within itself (RSP, 336-37).

If Hegel had already established the fact that "the rational has no opposed counterpart," then he would be right to reject the effectiveness of the fourth mode against propositions of Reason. As it stands, however, if Hegel is advancing claims such as this in order to demonstrate the truth of rational propositions, he is obviously guilty of begging the question. In other words, the argument appears to be no more than a bare assurance – just what the fourth mode of Agrippa is meant to bring to light. I would also add here that even if Hegel were able to decisively refute

³⁹ As Michael Forster puts it, Hegel's claim in the 1802 Skepticism essay is that "his own system, the Rational, does not fall victim to the version of the equipollence problem found in the fourth trope of Agrippa, which holds that an ungrounded presupposition faces the difficulty that its opposite may be presupposed in an ungrounded way with equal right, because the claim of his own system or the Rational 'has no opposite.'" Michael Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 107-08.

each of the five modes when applied to Reason, this would still presumably leave him open to the claims of modern skepticism and, at any rate, be far from establishing that dialectical unity of thinking and being which serves as the starting point of the Skepticism essay.

One possible strategy remains. After offering a survey of ancient skepticism, Hegel returns to Schulze's account in order to demonstrate its inferiority. At one point, Hegel employs a *reductio ad absurdum* to undermine the opposition of thinking and being which grounds Schulze's account; however, insofar as this argument is designed to reveal the absurdity of the skeptical opposition of thinking and being, I would suggest that it too could be construed as an attempt to demonstrate the dialectical unity of thinking and being. "According to this latest skepticism," Hegel writes

the human cognitive faculty is a thing, which has concepts, and since it has nothing but concepts, it cannot go out to the things that are outside it; it cannot neither *search them out* nor *reconnoiter* them – for both of them (Vol. I, p. 69) are '*specifically* distinct; [...] no rational man will be under the illusion that in *possessing the image* of something he also possesses that thing itself.' Nowhere is this skepticism outwardly disposed to be so consistent as to show that no rational man will be under the illusion that he *possesses an idea* of something; for certainly since the idea is also a something, the rational man can only have the illusion of possessing the idea of the idea, not the idea itself; and then again not that either, since this idea of the second power is again a something, but only the idea of the idea of the idea; and so on *ad infinitum* (RSP, 341-42).

While this argument shows that Schulze's crude opposition of thinking and being inevitably results in an infinite regress whereby cognition itself becomes impossible – a conclusion which, presumably, even the most staunch skeptic would be reluctant to affirm – it nevertheless falls short of demonstrating the dialectical unity of thinking and being. One might be willing to concede on this basis of Hegel's argument that the very idea of cognition is ruled out on Schulze's conception of the relationship of thinking and being, but this says less about the truth of Hegel's position than it does about the falsity of Schulze's. This argument would be less than

conclusive, for instance, to a Kantian or a direct realist, neither of whom would accept where Schulze's account of cognition begins and who would thus not be persuaded by Hegel's reductio argument. In other words, so long as one refuses to accept a model of cognition according to which our concepts are held to be absolutely distinct from those things they are thought to represent, one will have absolutely no reason to accept the dialectical unity of thinking and being. To Kant, Hegel's argument would appear as a mere regression to dogmatic metaphysics.

Thus, it appears that in his 1802 essay, Hegel is not able to justify his argument for the dialectical unity of thinking and being. However, as we shall see, Hegel remains quite committed to this task throughout his career. Before looking to the arguments that Hegel develops to this end, however, we would do well to clarify how the skepticism that Hegel speaks of, for example, in the 1802 essay, relates to historical manifestations of skepticism. To this end, we will need to follow Hegel in the distinction he draws between the idea of the skeptical and the historical schools of skepticism. With this clarification, we will be better able to understand and evaluate Hegel's claims concerning the relationship between philosophy and skepticism.

Chapter Two

Hegel's "Self-Completing Skepticism"

Introduction

In Chapter One, we saw that Hegel's early confrontation with skepticism in his 1802 article for the *Critical Journal* provided him with an opportunity to engage the metaphysical presuppositions at work in both Kant's *Critical Philosophy* and its reception by the neo-Humean skeptic, G.E. Schulze. Neither of these thinkers were able to attain to the speculative standpoint from which the unity of thinking and being is manifest, Hegel argues, because they failed to appreciate that "skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy."⁴⁰ If it is true, however, that skepticism in some sense belongs to all genuine philosophical cognition, one is nevertheless left wondering whether there is some particular form of skepticism which Hegel has in mind. While it is evident in the *Skepticism* essay that Hegel considers the antithesis of thinking and being to be somehow emblematic of the sort of skepticism with which he is concerned,⁴¹ this characterization raises more questions than it answers. If it is Kant who

⁴⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison to the Latest Form with the Ancient One," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 322-23. Hereafter cited parenthetically as RSP.

⁴¹ Hegel's characterization of skepticism in terms of the antithesis of thinking and being can be seen throughout the *Skepticism* essay, but is expressed perhaps most explicitly in the following remark: "What then is left of skepticism in this latest version of it, which places its truth and certainty in the most blatant limitedness both of empirical intuition, and of empirical knowledge, which transforms empirical intuition into reflection, and pretends only to analyze it, *not* to add anything to it? Nothing at all, of necessity, except the denial of the truth of Reason, and the transformation of the rational into reflection, (or of the cognition of the Absolute into finite cognition) to that end.

deserves credit for "having brought this antithesis home to the culture of our modern age" (RSP, 340), one might well wonder the extent to which this antithesis can be considered unique to skepticism at all. Moreover, even if it were seen to be unique to skepticism, it remains unclear whether Hegel thinks that this antithesis has the same role to play in *every* form of skepticism or whether there is not one specific brand – say, Pyrrhonism – that puts this antithesis to special use. As we will see, there is, in fact, one particular form of skepticism that Hegel exalts as the "free side of every philosophy" (RSP, 324), but it cannot be confined to any given historical epoch. Although Hegel evidently holds ancient skepticism in higher esteem than its modern counterpart, this must not lead us to identify the skepticism which he sees as belonging to all genuine philosophical cognition – that is, the negative side of his own emergent philosophical system – with that of Sextus Empiricus or the New Academy. In fact, we run the risk of missing Hegel's insight into the relationship of skepticism and philosophy entirely if we fail to recognize that the mode of thinking at issue here has no true analogue in the history of skepticism. Thus, while the distinction between ancient and modern skepticism remains an important one for Hegel, the more important distinction for his appraisal of the philosophical significance of skepticism is the one he draws between Pyrrhonism and the "self-completing skepticism" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As I will argue, it is only the latter form of skepticism which can properly be said to belong to the philosophy which, Hegel claims, "is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323). Ultimately, I hope to show in this way that Hegel's early confrontation with the problematic of skepticism in his review for the *Critical*

The basic form of this transformation, however, which is everywhere prevalent, consists in this, that the opposed counterpart of Spinoza's first definition, which was quoted above (which explains *causa sui* as that whose essences involves existence at the same time) is made into a principle and asserted as an absolutely basic proposition, to wit *that what is thought of, since it is thought-object, does not at the same time involve a being in itself*" (RSP, 339, my emphasis). As this passage shows, Hegel identifies the antithesis of thinking and being with a certain form of skepticism, for example, the skepticism of G. E. Schulze.

Journal already marks a significant step toward the development of the philosophical itinerary of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Part One: The Dogmatic Character of Modern Skepticism

If Hegel's primary goal in the Skepticism essay is to expose the metaphysical presuppositions basic to the self-understanding of both modern skepticism and the philosophy it sought to denounce, as part of a larger strategy to propound Hegel's own inchoate metaphysical vision, then crucial to this end is his discussion of the superiority of ancient to modern skepticism. It is through exhibiting the "dogmatic" character of the modern skepticism of G.E. Schulze⁴² that Hegel is first able to give determinate shape to the skepticism that is one with philosophy – the latter being something of an articulation of the speculative standpoint which Hegel proposes in the Skepticism essay. Given that the dogmatic character of Schulze's project emerges within a discussion of the superiority of ancient skepticism, one might suspect that it is the latter which, for Hegel, constitutes the "free side" of philosophy. This would be a mistake, however. In Hegel's discussion, ancient skepticism serves primarily as a foil which allows him to articulate the limits of Schulze's approach, but which he nevertheless subordinates to the

⁴² While Hegel acknowledges the skepticism of Descartes and Hume in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he has very little to say about their status as modern skeptics. In his lectures on the history of modern philosophy, Hegel argues that Descartes' skepticism differs from that of the ancients in its basic aim: "[Descartes] thus makes the abolition of all determinations the first condition of Philosophy. This first proposition has not, however, the same signification as Scepticism, which sets before it no other aim than doubt itself, and requires that we should remain in this indecision of mind, an indecision wherein mind finds its freedom." G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 224. In this statement, Hegel offers no comment, however, on the apparent superiority of ancient skepticism over its modern counterpart.

skepticism that is one with philosophy. This becomes clear as soon as we recognize that even Pyrrhonism – by all accounts the most radical form of ancient skepticism – remains dogmatic on Hegel's account. To recognize the dogmatic character of Pyrrhonism, however, we must attend to Hegel's characterization of "dogmatism" in the Skepticism essay. Above all, we must recognize that, for Hegel, dogmatism expresses a substantive problem concerning the nature of truth – not a merely formal concern regarding epistemic justification. Only then will it be evident that Pyrrhonism, though superior to Schulze's modern skepticism, is not the specific form which Hegel sees as one with philosophy. Let us turn then to Hegel's review of Schulze to see precisely what the superiority of ancient skepticism might be said to consist in.

In the previous chapter, I cast Hegel's review of Schulze's *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie* in light of the latter's apparent inability to grasp the "true relationship of skepticism to philosophy" (RSP, 322). In the present section, I would like to briefly revisit Hegel's estimation of Schulze's philosophical project. This time, however, my analysis will attempt to set the dogmatic character of Schulze's skepticism into sharp relief, for this is ultimately what prevents Schulze from grasping the unity of skepticism and philosophy. In "Aenesidemus," Schulze infamously argued that Kant begged the question against Hume in his deduction of the categories: "the *Critique of Pure Reason*," Schulze writes, "tries to refute Humean skepticism by assuming as already unquestionably certain the very propositions against whose *legitimacy* Hume directed all his skeptical doubts."⁴³ For Hegel, though, Schulze's own skeptical argument against Kant signals a regression to the very dogmatism it seeks to denounce in taking the

⁴³ G.E. Schulze, "Aenesidemus, or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Prof. Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defence of Skepticism Against the Pretensions of The Critique of Reason," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 112-13.

antithesis of thinking and being to be beyond question. In an iconic passage which encapsulates Hegel's objection to Schulze, Hegel explains that recently skepticism has "sunk so far in company with dogmatism that for both of them nowadays the facts of consciousness have an indubitable certainty . . . so that, since the extremes now touch, the great goal is attained once more on their side in these happy times, that dogmatism and skepticism coincide with one another on the underside, and offer each other the hand of perfect friendship and fraternity" (RSP, 330). For Hegel, if anyone is guilty of begging the question, it would seem to be Schulze himself, whose critique of Kant offers little more than a "bare assurance" of the non-identity of thinking and being.⁴⁴

As we saw previously, Schulze's basic objection to Kant – that the Transcendental Deduction attempts to establish the objective validity of the causal principle by illicitly "inferring from the constitution of something as it is in our representations its objective constitution outside us"⁴⁵ – only makes sense on an erroneous conception of Kant's basic philosophical project.⁴⁶ On Schulze's interpretation, the deduction aims to prove that the "original determinations of the human mind are the real ground or source of the synthetic judgments found in our knowledge,"⁴⁷ but can only do so by presupposing the correspondence of concept and object. This was, however, precisely the presupposition which Kant had argued metaphysics must leave behind if

⁴⁴ "So," Hegel writes, "Mr. Sch[ulze] has done nothing except pick up this recent and most excellent discovery of Kant's [the antithesis of thinking and being], just as countless Kantians have done. He brings this supremely simple stroke of wit to bear left and right, in all directions, even against the father of the discovery himself" (RSP, 340).

⁴⁵ G.E. Schulze, "Aenesidemus," 113.

⁴⁶ See Chapter One. George di Giovanni also has a helpful discussion of this point in "The Facts of Consciousness," his introductory essay to *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*.

⁴⁷ G.E. Schulze, "Aenesidemus," 113.

it is to advance beyond the "groping among mere concepts"⁴⁸ which had hitherto characterized this enterprise. Convinced that Hume was correct to deny that any necessary connection between concept and object could be established by the mere operations of thought, Kant sought to develop an account which would demonstrate the "objective validity" (*objektive Gültigkeit*) of *a priori* concepts by exhibiting their constitutive role in human experience. Hence, in the Transcendental Deduction, Kant famously undercut Hume's challenge to causality by demonstrating that the causal principle, as one of the twelve "true ancestral concepts of pure understanding" (CPR, A81/B107), subtends the unity of self-consciousness and, for this reason, makes our experience of objects possible in the first place. If Kant had taken this argument as proof that our concepts legitimately apply to some mind-independent reality, then Schulze's objection would no doubt carry some weight. Of course, this was not at all Kant's intention, and if Schulze could not see this, Hegel argues, it was because he could not bring himself to question the "indubitable certainty of the facts of consciousness" which assured him of the non-identity of concept and object:

To begin with, 'things' are opposed to 'cognition' within [the context of] Reason here; and secondly an explanation of its origin [is asked for], and therewith the causal relationship is dragged in; the ground of cognition, then, is something other than what is grounded, the former the concept, the latter the thing, and when once this basically false picture of rational thinking is presupposed, then there is nothing further to be done, except to repeat for ever that ground and grounded, concept and thing are different modes; that all rational cognition aims just to *pluck* a being *out* of thinking, existence out of concepts, (as it is put in words that are likewise Kantian) (RSP, 341).

One might gather from this that modern skepticism can be considered dogmatic to the extent that it relies upon beliefs which it leaves insulated from criticism and, therefore, that the

⁴⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxv Hereafter cited parenthetically as CPR.

superiority of ancient skepticism consists, for Hegel, in the fact that it is able to dispense with all such presuppositions. To get a better idea of why the difference suggested here would seem to elevate ancient skepticism above its modern expression in Schulze, recall Sextus Empiricus' discussion of the difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism. Sextus first draws this distinction at the beginning of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* where he offers a comprehensive taxonomy of the basic forms of philosophy. Sextus observes that, "When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation" (OS, 3). The first group, those claiming to have made a discovery, are the "dogmatists." Those who deny that a discovery has been made Sextus identifies with the Academic philosopher, that is, the Academic skeptic. While those who neither affirm nor deny that a discovery has been made but persist in their investigation Sextus identifies as skeptics, that is, Pyrrhonists. Thus, Sextus distinguishes Pyrrhonian from Academic skepticism here by explaining that the latter conclude their investigation too hastily, which is to say, without providing sufficient evidence for their conclusion, while the former simply suspend judgment on account of a lack of sufficient evidence. The true skeptics – the Pyrrhonian skeptics – are the ones that are still "investigating" (*skeptesthai*). Sextus returns to this important distinction later in the *Outlines*:

The members of the New Academy, if they say that everything is inapprehensible, no doubt differ from the [Pyrrhonian] Skeptics precisely in saying that everything is inapprehensible. For they make affirmations about this, while the [Pyrrhonian] Skeptic expects it to be possible for something actually to be apprehended. And they differ from us clearly in their judgments of good and bad. For the Academics say that things are good and bad not in the way we do, but with the conviction that it is plausible that what they call good rather than its contrary really is good (and similarly with bad), whereas we do not call anything good or bad with the thought that what we say is plausible – rather, without holding opinions we follow ordinary life in order not to be inactive.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 59-60. Hereafter cited parenthetically as OS.

Realizing that the Academic could never be epistemically entitled to her claim concerning the inapprehensibility of reality (or her judgments regarding the good), since her claim would be immediately refuted the moment she attempted to provide it with justification, the Pyrrhonist abstains from making any claims which would stand in need of further proof. What leads the Pyrrhonist to contest the truth of any given knowledge-claim, without having to flatly – and dogmatically – affirm the truth of its contradictory, is the “chief constitutive principle of skepticism.” As we saw in the previous chapter, this principle states that “to every account an equal account is opposed” (OS, 6).⁵⁰ Rather than take recourse to claims which, as a skeptic, she is in no position to justify, the Pyrrhonist “set[s] out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all” (OS, 4). She does this in order to demonstrate the “equipollence” – or, equal persuasive power – of the accounts in this way opposed and, consequently, the irresolvable nature of the matter under dispute. Because the Pyrrhonist only reports on how things *appear*, she is easily able to bypass that demand for justification which blunted the Academic's attack, since “no-one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears” (OS, 9). Thus, the Pyrrhonist's strategy is not to counter her interlocutor's claim with an argument whose only hope for success lies in the off chance that it is spared from scrutiny, but simply to generate arguments, no more compelling than those to which they are opposed, in order to achieve a “standstill of the intellect.”

⁵⁰ Sextus elaborates on this principle in the following: “When we say ‘Opposed to every account there is an equal account’, we mean by ‘every’ every one we have inspected; we speak not of accounts in an unqualified sense but of those which purport to establish something in dogmatic fashion (i.e. about something unclear) – which purport to establish it in any way, and not necessarily by way of assumptions and consequence; we say ‘equal’ with reference to convincingness and lack of convincingness; we take ‘opposed’ in the sense of ‘conflicting’ in general; and we supply ‘as it appears to me’” (OS, 51).

Now, it may be tempting to conclude that Hegel finds ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism to be superior to its modern counterpart, since, following Sextus' distinction, one can see that Pyrrhonian skeptics differ from the Academics in that they refrain from making claims to which they are not epistemically entitled. If, however, in charging Schulze with dogmatism, Hegel were merely rehearsing the same objection that Sextus once upon a time put to the skeptics of the New Academy, one might wonder why Hegel would then repeatedly deny the existence of any meaningful difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism. Hegel argues, for example, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, that "between the Academics and pure [Pyrrhonian] Skepticism a distinction has been drawn, which is certainly very formal, and has but little signification, but to which the [Pyrrhonian] Skeptics in their subtlety undoubtedly attached some meaning."⁵¹ After all, if the Pyrrhonian method of equipollence fails, for Hegel, to set it apart from the skepticism of the New Academy, then would it not, by the same token, fail to account for the superiority of ancient skepticism over its modern, dogmatic counterpart? This would seem to suggest that, contrary to popular belief, Hegel is not primarily concerned with epistemological matters in his treatment of the philosophical significance of skepticism.⁵² As we will see next, this suspicion is confirmed in the Skepticism essay by Hegel's account of the "essence of dogmatism" – an account which, to my mind, offers compelling evidence that the

⁵¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume II: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 311. Hegel makes the same point in the Skepticism essay: "So Sextus was far removed in every way from distinguishing the teaching of Arcesilaus from skepticism itself" (RSP, 326).

⁵² So far, my analysis has kept in step with the interpretation advanced by Michael Forster, who argues that "the problem which Hegel sees in modern skepticism's essential reliance on certain beliefs for its attack on other beliefs, and sparing of the former from skeptical attack, is that this makes modern skepticism fundamentally *dogmatic* – in the sense of being essentially founded on the acceptance of beliefs which are in fact vulnerable to skeptical attack." See Michael Forster, "The Superiority of Ancient to Modern Skepticism," in *Skeptizismus und spekulatives Denken in der Philosophie Hegels*, ed. H.F. Fulda and R.P. Horstmann, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), 69. In what follows, I would like to demonstrate what I take to be the limits of this approach.

distinction between ancient and modern skepticism, like Sextus' distinction between Pyrrhonism and the New Academy, "has but little signification" for Hegel's analysis. "The essence of dogmatism," Hegel writes,

consists in this that it posits something finite, something burdened with an opposition (e.g. pure Subject, or pure Object, or in dualism the duality as opposed to the identity) as the Absolute; hence Reason shows with respect to this Absolute that it has a relation to what is excluded from it, and only exists through and in this relation to another, so that it is not absolute, according to the third trope of relationship (RSP, 335).

Here, where one might expect to find an account of the norms of rational assent and their violation, we are met with something rather remarkable. What makes a given claim dogmatic, for Hegel, is not that it fails to accord with certain norms of justification (as in, for example, the informal fallacy of "begging the question"), but that it is made in denial of the concomitant truth of its contradictory.⁵³ A dogmatic claim, then, is made when one posits something finite – that is, something that has an opposite – as absolute in pious observance of the principle of noncontradiction. This concerns Hegel's distinction between Reason and the understanding discussed in the previous chapter. To review, propositions of the understanding can only adequately express finite objects. This is where they have their legitimate role in cognition. Propositions of understanding cannot, however, properly express infinite objects, since these objects cannot be grasped through any one-sided opposition. Propositions of Reason, by contrast, are self-contradictory but nevertheless true. By not denying the unity of opposites, which is to say by not holding fast to the principle of noncontradiction, they are able to properly express infinite objects. As Hegel puts it:

If in any one proposition that expresses a cognition of Reason, its reflected aspect – the concepts that are contained in it – is isolated, and the way that they are

⁵³ Hegel thus seems to use the terms "dogmatic" and "formal" interchangeably: "To say that a proposition is merely formal, means for Reason, that it is posited alone and on its own account, without the equal affirmation of the contradictory that is opposed to it; and just for that reason it is false" (RSP, 325).

bound together is considered, it must become evident that these concepts are together sublated, or in other words they are united in such a way, that they contradict themselves; otherwise it would not be a proposition of Reason but only of understanding (RSP, 324).

Thus, to say that a proposition of the understanding is dogmatic is to say that it is unable to articulate an infinite object and thus is not true in an absolute sense. This is, however, not to say that it is simply false. Such propositions are adequate ways of articulating finite objects. However, they become the mark of dogmatic thinking, for Hegel, as soon as one overlooks the limit of their application.

In Part Two, we will encounter one particular expression of skepticism that consistently affirms the unity of contradictories; for the time being, however, I would simply like to stress that the charge of dogmatism indicates, for Hegel, the presence of a substantive metaphysical error – to wit, one in which a proposition of the Understanding is mistaken for a proposition of Reason – and not merely the kind of formal deficit which one might hope to avoid through strict adherence to accepted epistemic norms. Thus, Schulze's skepticism is dogmatic, not in the sense that it fails to adequately justify the basic opposition which it relies upon in presupposing the undeniable certainty of the "facts of consciousness," but in that it sunders "the rational" by positing this opposition (between thinking and being) to the exclusion of its contradictory (the unity of thinking and being). "This sundering of the rational, in which thinking and being are one, and the absolute insistence on this opposition, in other words the understanding made absolute," Hegel explains, "constitutes the endlessly repeated and universally applied ground of this dogmatic skepticism" (RSP, 339), and it is precisely what accounts for the dogmatic character of Schulze's *Kritik*.

Before turning to see why Pyrrhonism still remains inferior to the skepticism that is "one with every true philosophy," it will be instructive to briefly sum up what, on Hegel's conception

of dogmatism, the superiority of ancient skepticism would seem to consist in. If, as we just saw, Schulze's modern skepticism is dogmatic, not because it takes the antithesis of thinking and being for granted, but because it affirms this antithesis without at the same time affirming its opposite, then the superiority of Pyrrhonism would seem to lie not in the fact that it manages to dispense with presuppositions by reporting solely on how things appear, as we previously suggested, but in that it sets these very appearances in opposition to one another in accordance with the method of equipollence. Indeed, this is exactly what Hegel seems to suggest in the Skepticism essay when he elevates the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" above the principle of noncontradiction. Whereas the principle of noncontradiction denies the unity of contradictories by insisting that only the affirmation of a given proposition or its denial (but not both) can count as true, the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" – "to every account an equal account is opposed" (OS, 6) – would seem to stop short of such a claim. Because this principle leads the Pyrrhonist to suspend judgment on the truth of opposing claims, rather than affirm one of these to the exclusion of its opposite, it would seem then to elude Hegel's concern regarding dogmatism.

Though this perhaps accounts for the superiority of ancient skepticism over its modern counterpart, it should not lead us to identify the skepticism that is one with philosophy with Pyrrhonism. Even if there are "no better weapons against dogmatism on finite bases" (RSP, 335) than the Five Modes of Agrippa, Pyrrhonism still remains dogmatic for Hegel in its failure to sublimate the principle of noncontradiction. Indeed, it adheres to this principle and thus denies the unity of opposites as assuredly as Academic skepticism. While this is presumably the reason why Hegel chooses to underplay the distinction between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism, we will soon see that this is what ultimately separates the skepticism of Schulze, the New Academy,

and even Sextus Empiricus from the skepticism that is one with philosophy – that is, from the "self-completing skepticism" which animates the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Part Two: The Sublation of Pyrrhonism

If Hegel suggests in the Skepticism essay that Pyrrhonism is notably superior to the modern skepticism of Schulze, this is only because the former manages to articulate what is problematic about dogmatism – not because it remains impervious to it. Indeed, as we will see, it is just as open to the charge of dogmatism as its modern counterpart in Schulze. Although Hegel engages Pyrrhonism in a number of different contexts, ranging from his analysis of the Five Modes of Agrippa in the Skepticism essay to his examination of skepticism as a pattern of knowing in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, each of these discussions seem to express the same basic problem – that Pyrrhonism remains dogmatic to the extent that it fails to sublimate the principle of noncontradiction. We will soon see how this criticism emerges within Hegel's treatment of Pyrrhonism, but to begin with, let us briefly recall that Hegel takes the "essence of dogmatism" to lie in positing "something finite, something burdened with an opposition (e.g. pure Subject, or pure Object, or in dualism the duality as opposed to the identity) as the Absolute" (RSP, 335). We have already seen that, for Hegel, dogmatism expresses the metaphysical error of failing to affirm the unity of opposites (as seen, for example, in Schulze's insistence on the antithesis of thinking and being to the exclusion of the affirmation of their unity); however, if we attend to the specific examples that Hegel provides in formulating the "essence of dogmatism," it becomes clear that this criticism extends as much to Pyrrhonism as it does to the skepticism of Schulze. The Pyrrhonist would seem, at first sight, to avoid the charge

of dogmatism by adhering to the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" – that is, by setting conflicting claims in opposition to one another in order to bring about that "standstill of the intellect" wherein neither claim can be preferred over the other. Nevertheless, it is precisely this insistence on opposition that leaves the Pyrrhonist open to Hegel's objection, as we will see. Rather than recognize the unity of conflicting claims – their constitutive co-implication – the Pyrrhonist focuses exclusively on their opposition. If, however, the Pyrrhonist insists that one must suspend judgment in the face of opposing claims, this can only be because she takes their mutual exclusivity for granted – because, that is, she assumes that of two opposing and equipollent claims, only one can possibly be true. But this would be to deny – or, at any rate, to overlook – the fact that opposing claims comprise a unity precisely in virtue of standing in a relationship of opposition. Thus, the problem that Hegel finds with the Pyrrhonian position is not merely that it presupposes the universal validity of the principle of noncontradiction, but that in interpreting contradiction as a token of error, as what effects that "standstill of the intellect" from which no knowledge may proceed, it "posits something finite, something burdened with an opposition... as the Absolute" – namely, opposition itself. Indeed, in his explanation of the "essence of dogmatism," Hegel specifically mentions opposition as an example of something finite which has been mistakenly and dogmatically crowned Absolute. To privilege "in dualism the duality [*Dualität*] as opposed to the identity" is, for Hegel, tantamount to positing the "pure Subject" to the exclusion of the "pure Object" because, in each case, one has committed the same error of denying the concomitant truth of contradictories and treating one of these as absolute – that is, of failing to sublimate the principle of noncontradiction. That Hegel consistently raises this objection in the context of Pyrrhonism and that he does so in order to distinguish the latter from the skepticism that is one with philosophy can be seen in the following.

Near the end of the Skepticism essay, Hegel offers an exposition of the Five Modes of Agrippa. As discussed in Chapter One, the Five Modes are a series of ancient skeptical arguments designed to call into question all knowledge-claims by showing that they have no greater warrant than mere opinions. They are the most radical skeptical challenges that Sextus provides in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. The Five Modes include: the mode deriving from dispute, the mode of infinite regress (“the mode of throwing one back *ad infinitum*”), the mode of relativity, the mode of hypothesis, and the reciprocal mode. Sextus describes the first mode in this way: “According to the mode deriving from dispute, we find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers. Because of this, we are not able either to choose or to rule out anything, and we end up with suspension of judgment” (OS, 41). The First Mode of Agrippa thus calls attention to the fact that there is disagreement about any knowledge-claim that can be made and thus that the claim is not self-evident but requires further evidence to support it. By requiring justification for any knowledge-claim, the first mode sets up the rest of the modes. Thus, the Second Mode of Agrippa follows from the first. As Sextus writes, “In the mode deriving from infinite regress, we say that what is brought forward as a source of conviction for the matter proposed itself needs another such source, which itself needs another, and so *ad infinitum*, so that we have no point from which to begin to establish anything, and suspension of judgment follows” (OS, 41). As soon, therefore, as one attempts to offer evidence in support of their claim, the Pyrrhonist shows that any piece of evidence that they can offer is not self-evident but requires further evidence, leading to an infinite regress. The skeptic appeals to the Third Mode of Agrippa, the mode deriving from relativity, when, presented with some knowledge claim, she points out that the object of the knowledge claim is known only through some set of third, mediating terms, and

thus is not known in itself. In this mode, Sextus explains, “the existing object appears to be such-and-such relative to the subject judging and to the things observed together with it,” thus leading one to suspend judgment on what the thing is like in itself (OS, 41). For example, since the tower looks round from afar but square from up close, Sextus argues, it is not possible to say what the tower is like in itself. If, in accordance with the Second Mode of Agrippa, one is unable or unwilling to give any evidence in support of their claim, the skeptic will then use the Fourth Mode, the mode of hypothesis, pointing out that, without any evidence for a claim, then one has no reason to prefer it to any other. Finally, the Fifth Mode, the reciprocal mode, occurs “when what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation needs to be made convincing by the object under investigation; then, being unable to take either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgment about both” (OS, 41). This mode draws attention to the circularity when one attempts to justify a given knowledge-claim by appealing to some evidence which would, in turn, need to be legitimated precisely by the knowledge-claim at issue.

In Hegel's estimation, these Five Modes constitute the "genuine arsenal" of Pyrrhonism's attack. Here is how Hegel himself describes each of the modes in the Skepticism essay:

The *first of these tropes* of the suspense of judgment, is that of the *diversity*, no longer now of beasts or of men, as in the first ten tropes, but rather of common opinions, and of the teachings of philosophers, both in the opposition of the two groups, and internally within each group; this is a trope about which the skeptics are always very prolix – everywhere they look for and introduce diversity, where they would do better to see identity. The second is *that of the infinite regress*; Sextus uses it often, in the guise in which it has come to the fore in modern times as the 'urge toward a ground'; it is the familiar argument that for one grounding [principle] a further ground is required, for this still another again, and so on *ad infinitum*. – The third was already here in the first ten, namely, the trope of relationship.⁵⁴ The fourth concerns *assumptions*, – against the dogmatics who

⁵⁴ Hegel explains in his discussion of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus that the suspension of judgment can be derived "from relationships (i.e., because everything stands in relationship to something else)" (RSP, 331). He later elaborates on this when he writes that "Reason shows with respect to this [false] Absolute, that it has a relation to what is excluded from it, and only exists through and in this relation to another, so that it is not absolute, according to the *third* trope of relationship" (RSP, 335).

posit something as strictly first, and unproven, in order not to be driven to infinity. The skeptics straightaway imitate them, by positing with equal right the opposite of that assumption. The fifth is the *circular* argument, when that which is to serve for the proof of another [proposition], itself needs for its own proof, that same [proposition] that is to be proved by its means (RSP, 334-35).

Hegel acknowledges there to be "no better weapons against dogmatism on finite bases" (RSP, 335) than the Five Modes. However, he goes on to show how each of these same skeptical arguments prove to be dogmatic when tested against a genuinely non-dogmatic mode of cognition – what Hegel variously calls in the Skepticism essay "the rational," "the Absolute," or simply "philosophy." "Against dogmatism," Hegel writes, "they [the Five Modes of Agrippa] must necessarily be victorious therefore; but in the face of philosophy they fall apart internally, or they are themselves dogmatic" (RSP, 335). Let us consider the Fourth Mode of Agrippa in this connection. The mode of hypothesis is brought in, Sextus explains, "when the Dogmatists, being thrown back *ad infinitum*, begin from something which they do not establish but claim to assume simply and without proof in virtue of a concession" (OS, 41). When this occurs, the Pyrrhonist simply points out that, in the absence of evidence, one has no more reason to accept a given claim over its opposite. As Hegel's comments reveal, however, even if the Pyrrhonist manages to bring to light what is illicit in the dogmatic procedure of assuming something without evidence through the Fourth Mode, this does not prevent her from falling into the same error when she turns this argument against a philosophical standpoint which embraces the unity of opposites: "the rational is not an unproved assumption," Hegel explains, "so that its counterpart could with equal right be presupposed unproven in opposition to it; for the rational," he continues, "has no opposed counterpart" (RSP, 335-36). Now, if, as we have seen, a claim is dogmatic in the Hegelian sense of the term when it is asserted independently to the exclusion of its contradictory and taken as absolute, then the Fourth Mode of Agrippa would seem to express precisely this

problem by stipulating that no unproven presupposition can be preferred over its opposite. On the other hand, if "the rational" – or, "philosophy" – names that which, for Hegel, "has no opposed counterpart" since it "includes both the finite opposites, which are mutual counterparts, within itself" (RSP, 337), then the Pyrrhonist can only wield the Fourth Mode of Agrippa against philosophy by treating it *as if it did* have some contradictory opposed to it. Because, however, the Pyrrhonist insists on opposition even when she is faced with something which evidently has no opposite, she would appear to be guilty of positing opposition to the exclusion of unity, and thus, of dogmatically adhering to the principle of noncontradiction. Accordingly, even though the Pyrrhonist seems to recognize the "essence of dogmatism" when she insists, in accordance with the Fourth Mode, that no unproven assumption can be privileged over its opposite, she nevertheless posits "something finite, something burdened with an opposition... as the Absolute" (RSP, 335) in turning the Fourth Mode against the rational. Not only then, does Hegel's engagement with Pyrrhonism in the Skepticism essay provide him with an opportunity to exhibit the dogmatic character of modern skepticism; by exposing Pyrrhonism's own inherent limits, he is also able to define the contours of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323). Nowhere is such a philosophy more evident than in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – a work which Hegel explicitly describes as one of self-completing skepticism.

Before turning to examine how the skepticism that is one with philosophy emerges in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, let us briefly take stock of what we have seen in the course of our analysis. In Part One, we saw that Hegel considers Schulze's skepticism dogmatic not because it fails to adequately justify the basis of its attack on Kantianism in presupposing the truth of what is given in the facts of consciousness, but because it posits the antithesis of thinking and being to

the exclusion of their unity. Although the dogmatic character of Schulze's skepticism comes into view when it is set alongside the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" ["to every account an equal account is opposed" (OS, 6)], this should not lead us to conclude that ancient skepticism fares any better, in Hegel's estimation, than its modern counterpart. Both of these, as we have seen, remain dogmatic, insofar as they fail to consistently acknowledge the unity of contradictories. Since, however, "every genuine philosophy," as Hegel explains, "always sublates the principle of contradiction" (RSP, 325), it would seem that neither of these forms could qualify as the skepticism that is one with philosophy. Indeed, if the skepticism that is one with philosophy is anywhere present in the 1802 article, it is in Hegel's description of the rational as that which exposes the falsity of every dogmatic assertion – including any that would posit opposition to the neglect of unity – and which, presumably, sublates the principle of noncontradiction in doing so. Already by 1802, then, Hegel had articulated the idea that "skepticism is itself in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23), but, as we will see next, it wasn't until 1807 that he was able to bring this idea to life in developing an account of the "path of natural consciousness pressing towards true knowing."⁵⁵ Let us turn then to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegel's account of self-completing skepticism.

Part Three: Self-Completing Skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

When Hegel argues in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that Science cannot presuppose its own validity without putting itself on equal footing with the "untrue

⁵⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 49. Hereafter cited parenthetically as PS.

knowledge" which it disclaims, he is implicitly appealing to the Fourth Mode of Agrippa.⁵⁶ However, even if Hegel helps himself to the modes of skepticism in exposing the falsity of all forms of natural consciousness – and he does so liberally throughout this text – this is not because he thinks that Pyrrhonism is valid on its own account. Indeed, Hegel even identifies Pyrrhonism as one such pattern of knowing whose "untruth" the skeptical modes make manifest. What allows Hegel to make use of these modes in order to demonstrate the imperfections of each successive form of natural consciousness without reducing philosophy to skepticism is, as we will see, a basic feature of the *Phenomenology's* own distinctive method. Accordingly, if, as I have suggested, in speaking of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323), Hegel is attempting to articulate a mode of thinking which is capable of demonstrating the falsity of every "one-sided" claim to knowledge, and of doing so without taking for granted the validity of the principle of noncontradiction, then it will soon become clear that the skepticism that he is after is none other than the self-completing skepticism exhibited in the *Phenomenology*.

Hegel introduces self-completing skepticism [*der sich vollbringende Skeptizismus*] in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, where he defines it in contradistinction to both Pyrrhonism and Descartes' hyperbolic doubt. In contrast to that methodological skepticism which would question the certainty of all long-standing opinions only in order to put these on a more secure footing, Hegel explains that the path outlined in the *Phenomenology* entails the "conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge" (PS, 50). Rather than concern itself merely with questions of subjective *certainty* (of whether, that is, *I* am epistemically entitled to make a

⁵⁶ Kenneth R. Westphal also takes note of Hegel's Pyrrhonian appeal in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in "Hegel's Manifold Response to Scepticism in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*." See Kenneth R. Westphal, "Hegel's Manifold Response to Scepticism in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103, no. 2 (2003) : 154-55.

given knowledge-claim), this skepticism "brings about a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions" (PS, 50) precisely so as to arrive at the *truth* of what knowing is. Hegel further elaborates on this distinction between certainty and truth when he explains that "self-completing skepticism is also not the skepticism with which an earnest zeal for truth and Science fancies it has prepared and equipped itself in their service: the *resolve* in Science, not to give oneself over to the thoughts of others, upon mere authority, but to examine everything for oneself and follow only one's own conviction, or better still, to produce everything oneself, and accept only one's own deed as what is true" (PS, 50). Thus, while Descartes uses skeptical examination as a tool for arriving at subjective certainty, this is not the role of skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Rather, the "self-completing skepticism" that Hegel embarks on there is carried out in the interest of truth.

Though this would seem to make self-completing skepticism similar to Pyrrhonism – if, that is, Hegel is correct that the concept of "doubt" is always "inappropriate" to ancient skepticism on account of its subjective undertones – he nevertheless goes on to sharply distinguish the former from the latter.⁵⁷ As opposed to Pyrrhonism, the skepticism which "only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results*" (PS, 51), Hegel explains that "self-completing skepticism" identifies a positive, determinate product issuing from the oppositions which it engages. The Pyrrhonist can never get beyond this "pure nothingness" because the suspension of judgment entails that she remain as indifferent to the counter-argument she puts

⁵⁷ Of the Pyrrhonist's relation to the appearances she sets in opposition to elicit the suspension of judgment, Hegel claims "there is no room for inquiry; it is *azetetos* ["that which cannot be questioned"] (the German term 'Zweifel' ['doubt' in English] used about [Pyrrhonian] skepticism is always awkward and inappropriate)" (RSP, 321). What Hegel seems to be driving at here is that, even if the Pyrrhonist remains at the level of appearances, she is out to demonstrate that the question at hand is irresolvable.

forth as to the original assertion she sets out to contest. To the Pyrrhonist, what is most significant is that the equipollence of opposing claims brings knowledge to a standstill. This is, presumably, why Hegel considers Pyrrhonism to be engaged in a purely "negative procedure" (PS, 50). "But," Hegel argues, "when the result [of contradiction] is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a *determinate negation*, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself" (PS, 51).

This is precisely what occurs in the case of self-completing skepticism. Rather than treat contradiction as the undoing of knowledge, self-completing skepticism regards it as a necessary moment in the development of Science – one which allows the phenomenological observer not only to recognize the falsity of a given pattern of knowing, but also to discover a new pattern disclosed in this very negation. Because, as Hegel argues, the distinction between the concept of knowledge ("being-for-another") and the object of knowledge ("being-in-itself") belongs to consciousness itself, the phenomenological observer need not provide her own criterion in order to evaluate each pattern of knowing, but merely "look on" to see whether these two moments correspond to one another within a given form of natural consciousness. Hegel describes this procedure in the following:

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 for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. [...] Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test; in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is (PS, 54-55).

If, after demonstrating the non-correspondence of the concept of knowledge and the object of knowledge within a given pattern of knowing, self-completing skepticism merely fastened onto the negative result of its findings (that is, the fact that this pattern does not constitute true knowledge), then it would hardly be distinguishable from the dogmatic skepticism of Sextus Empiricus. To the extent, however, that it identifies a positive result captured in the negative of a given knowledge-claim (that is, that consciousness alters its own shape when confronted by the non-correspondence of its two moments), it is able to advance beyond the narrow limits of Pyrrhonism.⁵⁸ This difference between Pyrrhonism's own self-understanding and that of self-completing skepticism is ultimately what allows the latter to qualify as the skepticism that is one with philosophy and, as we will see next, it is precisely this difference which Hegel chooses to highlight when he takes up Pyrrhonism as a pattern of knowing in the *Phenomenology*.

In the section entitled "Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness," Hegel examines three patterns of knowing which, as moments of Self-Consciousness, suggest that all knowledge is essentially *self*-knowledge. While Hegel finds in "Stoicism" a shape of consciousness which merely asserts the freedom of thought from the "bustle of existence," in "Skepticism" he takes up the "actual experience of what the freedom of thought is" (PS, 123) – a mode of thinking which attempts to establish its own absolute independence by tearing down everything firm which would stand in its way. As Hegel explains, however, "what [Pyrrhonian] Skepticism causes to vanish is not only objective reality as such, but its own relationship to it"

⁵⁸ Kenneth R. Westphal makes the same point in "Hegel's Manifold Response to Scepticism in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*." As Westphal notes, "Hegel criticized (among others) Sextus Empiricus for being satisfied with mere refutation, with merely 'abstract negation', i.e. finding sufficient fault with a theory to reject it as inadequate, but stopping at that. In opposition to this Hegel maintains that a truly penetrating refutation consists in a strictly internal critique that identifies both the insights and the defects of a philosophical theory, and through that critique derives grounds of proof for a more adequate theory. This Hegel calls 'determinate negation.'" Kenneth R. Westphal, "Hegel's Manifold Response to Scepticism in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103, no. 2 (2003) : 152.

(PS, 124). If the Pyrrhonist can only establish her own absolute *independence* by negating all otherness standing before her, this means that she is in fact *dependent* on the negation of the existence of this otherness to achieve self-certainty:

This consciousness is therefore the unconscious, thoughtless rambling which passes back and forth from the one extreme of self-identical self-consciousness to the other extreme of contingent consciousness that is both bewildered and bewildering. It does not itself bring these two thoughts of itself together. At one time it recognizes that its freedom lies in rising above all the confusion and contingency of existence, and at another time equally admits to a relapse into occupying itself with what is unessential (PS, 125).

In this way, Hegel locates within Pyrrhonism a disparity between its concept and its object of knowledge. Although it maintains that all knowledge is simply the self-knowledge of a stable, self-identical, and radically independent subjectivity, it turns out that what it really knows is an utterly dependent figure which can escape the "contingency of existence" no more than the otherness that it seeks to annihilate in thought; what it knows is merely the "dizziness of a perpetually self-engendered disorder" (PS, 125).

Because the path outlined in the *Phenomenology* is one of self-completing skepticism, when the phenomenological observer is thus presented with the self-contradictory character of Pyrrhonism, she does not merely linger over the negative result of this form of consciousness, but identifies in its failure a new configuration of knowing – one which "brings together the two thoughts which [Pyrrhonian] Skepticism holds apart" (PS, 126). Since Pyrrhonism, however, insists on the mutual exclusivity of its two moments, oscillating between two conflicting conceptions of itself (as absolutely independent, on the one hand, and as absolutely dependent, on the other), it is incapable of acknowledging the emergence of this new pattern of knowing, which Hegel characterizes as the "unhappy"⁵⁹ awareness of Pyrrhonism's own self-contradictory

⁵⁹ Pyrrhonian skepticism is therefore "unhappy," for Hegel, since he finds that tranquility (*ataraxia*) does not, as Sextus claims, follow the suspension of judgment "as a shadow follows the body" (OS, 11).

nature. Here, we encounter once more the distinction which Hegel drew earlier in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*: unlike self-completing skepticism, Pyrrhonism cannot advance beyond the negative result of contradiction – not even when it is confronted with a contradiction which obtains in its own self-understanding.⁶⁰ The reason why Pyrrhonism "only ever sees pure nothingness in its result" (PS, 51) is because it takes contradiction to entail falsehood. Now, self-completing skepticism shares this conviction with Pyrrhonism insofar as it considers the non-correspondence of concept and object in a given pattern of knowing to disqualify its claim to truth; however, it differs from Pyrrhonism in its understanding of the nature of falsity:

To know something falsely means that there is a disparity between knowledge and its Substance. But this very disparity is the process of distinguishing in general, which is an essential moment [in knowing]. Out of this distinguishing, of course, comes their identity, and this resultant identity is the truth. But it is not truth as if the disparity had been thrown away, like dross from pure metal, not even like the tool which remains separate from the finished vessel; disparity, rather, as the negative, the self, is itself directly present in the True as such (PS, 23).

To say that a given pattern of knowing is "false" on account of the disparity between its concept and object is not, therefore, to say that it is extraneous to true knowing. Rather, the same process which exposes what is false in a given pattern of knowing through the comparison of its moments reveals what is true in that form. As Hegel is quick to point out, however, this does not mean that the "false is a moment of the True, let alone a component part of it" (PS, 23) – for this

⁶⁰ Hegel presents the same critique of Pyrrhonism later in the second volume of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: "Skepticism deduces no result, nor does it express its negation as anything positive. But the positive is in no way different from the simple; or if Skepticism aims at the disappearance of all that is universal, its condition, as immovability of spirit, is itself in fact this universal, simple, self-identical – but a universality (or a Being) which is the universality of the individual consciousness. Skeptical self-consciousness, however, is this divided consciousness to which on the one hand motion is a confusion of its content; it is this movement which annuls for itself all things, in which what is offered to it is quite contingent and indifferent; it acts according to laws which are not held by it to be true, and is a perfectly empiric existence. On another side its simple thought is the immovability of self-identity, but its reality, its unity with itself is something that is perfectly empty, and the actual filling in is any content that one chooses." G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume II: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 371.

would be to suppose that "truth" and "falsity," like oil and water, are so constituted that they must repel one another whenever they come into contact – but rather that they are two sides of the same coin. The "truth" of a given form of consciousness – and likewise its "falsity" – is contained in the shape succeeding it as the negation of that concept-object disparity present in this now superseded form. It is in this sense that the "Unhappy Consciousness" is the "truth" of "Skepticism." Because Pyrrhonism, by contrast, takes a dogmatic approach to falsehood, it fails to recognize that the oppositions upon which it insists already bespeak the presence of truth.

Thus, if we now ask what accounts for this fundamental difference between Pyrrhonism and self-completing skepticism, we find ourselves met once more with the foremost insight of the Skepticism essay. The Pyrrhonist is unwilling to accept the fact that negation is an essential moment in knowing because she holds dogmatically to the opposition of truth and falsehood – that is, because she cannot countenance the unity of these apparent opposites. Between the Skepticism essay and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, therefore, Hegel's view of Pyrrhonism remains essentially unchanged: Pyrrhonism cannot be considered a genuine mode of philosophical cognition since it fails to sublimate the principle of noncontradiction. On the other hand, because self-completing skepticism brings together the two opposing moments held part in every form of natural consciousness, it would seem to possess the defining characteristic of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323) – that is, to consistently acknowledge the unity of contradictories. Consequently, self-completing skepticism is a later articulation of what Hegel described in his 1802 article for the *Critical Journal* under the heading of the rational. In fact, the only significant difference between these consists in the fact that the rational refers to that speculative standpoint from which the "essence of dogmatism" becomes visible, while self-completing skepticism demonstrates the dogmatic

character of every form of natural consciousness through a mode of philosophical skepticism unencumbered by the principle of noncontradiction. And yet, if, as I have argued, the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* approximates Hegel's description of a form of skepticism that is "in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23), one might wonder whether this should be considered a form of skepticism at all. It is to this question that we now turn in conclusion.

In this chapter, I have argued that that particular form of skepticism which Hegel sees as one with philosophy is not that of Schulze, the New Academy, or Sextus Empiricus, since each of these fails in one way or another to sublimate the principle of noncontradiction, but the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* – a later, more carefully developed articulation of what Hegel calls the rational in the Skepticism essay. However, if, as Hegel writes, "the concepts of skepticism which allow it to be viewed *only* in the particular form in which it comes on the scene as skepticism pure and simple, disappear in the face of a philosophic standpoint from which it can be found as genuine skepticism even *in those philosophical systems* which Sch[ulze] and others with him can only regard as dogmatic" (RSP, 322), then it would seem to follow that self-completing skepticism is – strictly speaking – no form of skepticism at all. To view the matter this way, however, is to miss the entire point of Hegel's discussion of the philosophical significance of skepticism. The Pyrrhonist may insist on the antagonistic nature of the relationship of skepticism to philosophy, but, if my interpretation is correct, this is only because her adherence to the principle of noncontradiction prevents her from acknowledging the fact that opposition is an indispensable moment in all genuine philosophical cognition, and not, as the Pyrrhonist maintains, the foreclosure of this possibility. Accordingly, to oppose skepticism to philosophy is already, in principle, to admit that "skepticism is itself in its inmost heart at one

with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23) – or, to put it in the terms of the *Phenomenology*, that philosophy is the "truth" of skepticism. As I have tried to show, the line of argument that Hegel develops across the Skepticism essay and the *Phenomenology* challenges us not only to rethink the opposition between philosophy and skepticism, but, equally, to rethink the nature of opposition itself. This will be essential to bear in mind, as we turn in Chapter Three to examine how the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* leads Hegel beyond the oppositions of consciousness, and thus, to the completion of skepticism in "Absolute Knowing," the starting point of the *Logic*.

Chapter Three

The Problem of Presuppositionlessness and the Path of Rational Proof:

Skepticism in Hegel's Logic

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I attempted to clarify the sense in which the *Phenomenology of Spirit* could be considered a work of "self-completing skepticism." There, I showed that, in contrast to Pyrrhonism, which Hegel argues "only ever sees pure nothingness in its result"⁶¹ on account of its *dogmatic* observance of the principle of noncontradiction, the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* pushes beyond the limits it encounters in each pattern of consciousness, reaching its culmination in the standpoint of "absolute knowing." When the phenomenological observer arrives, in this way, at the "concept of science," the skeptical antithesis constitutive of ordinary consciousness – between the concept of knowledge ("being-for-itself") and the object of knowledge ("being-in-itself") – gives way, and with this insight, that the activity of knowing is identical to what is known, natural consciousness passes over into genuine philosophical cognition. Accordingly, I suggested there that the path outlined in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* could be considered one of "self-completing skepticism" since it refutes every account of cognition predicated upon this skeptical antithesis by following the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" ("to every account an equal account is opposed"⁶²) to its logical conclusion.⁶³ It

⁶¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 51.

⁶² Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 6. Hereafter cited parenthetically as OS.

⁶³ See Chapter Two, especially pages 68-75.

would certainly seem to follow, therefore, that with the conclusion of that text, questions should no longer arise as to whether or how we might attain to an unmediated grasp of an object which lies exterior to our own limited cognitive means – for if the *Phenomenology* succeeds in proving anything at all, it is that all such questions proceed from presuppositions which make cognition impossible. And yet, it is precisely at this point – namely, at the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* – that the challenge of skepticism seems to recur once more.

In the final paragraph of his examination of the three "Positions of Thought with Respect to Objectivity," an introductory essay to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* which, Hegel explains, shares with the *Phenomenology* roughly the same goals, we find the following remark: "The *opposition* between a self-standing immediacy of content or knowing and a mediation that is equally self-standing but incompatible with the former must be set aside... because it is a mere *presupposition* and an arbitrary *assurance*" (ENC, §78).⁶⁴ As he continues with this line of thought, however, several questions immediately arise – questions which, one would expect, the *Phenomenology* has long since laid to rest:

Similarly, *all other presuppositions or prejudices [Voraussetzungen oder Vorurteile] must be surrendered at the entry to science*, whether they be taken from representation or from thought. For it is in science that all such determinations must first be examined and the status of them and their oppositions recognized (ENC, §78; my emphasis).⁶⁵

If, as Hegel goes on to suggest, the science must meet the requirement of "total presuppositionlessness [*gänzliche Voraussetzungslosigkeit*]," one might wonder how this may be

⁶⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline: Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 125. Hereafter cited parenthetically as ENC. All English translations of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* refer to this edition.

⁶⁵ Similarly, he writes in the *Science of Logic* that "Logic... cannot presuppose any of these forms of reflection, these rules and laws of thinking, for they are part of its content and they first have to be established within it." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23. Hereafter cited parenthetically as SL. All English translations of the *Science of Logic* refer to this edition.

achieved and, indeed, whether such a goal can ever truly be realized – for surely there are certain conditions or presuppositions that beset every new beginning. Must we not, at the very least, presuppose in any inquiry both the object under investigation and the method by which the investigation is to be carried out? If it is true that presuppositions such as these are always unavoidable and, further, that the truth of the investigation conducted in the *Logic* is in fact contingent upon the achievement of "total presuppositionlessness," then Hegel's project would seem to be as hopelessly self-refuting as the forms of consciousness under consideration in the *Phenomenology*. But is Hegel claiming that the *Logic* is presuppositionless in this apparently irredeemable sense?

Two comments contained within the introductory material to the *Logic* speak against this interpretation and, to my mind, warrant a further examination of Hegel's claim. In the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*, Hegel makes the following remark:

Absolute knowledge is the truth of all the modes of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* brought out, it is only in absolute knowledge that the separation of the subject matter from the certainty of itself is completely resolved: truth has become equal to certainty and this certainty to truth. *Pure science thus presupposes the liberation from the opposition of consciousness* (SL, 29; my emphasis).

If, as Hegel contends, the result of the *Phenomenology* is the presupposition of the *Logic*, then it is difficult to understand the sense in which the latter may be considered truly presuppositionless. Moreover, if, as we have seen, the *Phenomenology* is able to articulate the concept of science only after despairing over the "untruth of phenomenal knowledge," then the following comment, which comes at the heels of Hegel's remark concerning the *Logic*'s presuppositionless character, must seem equally perplexing:

Skepticism, as a negative science applied to all forms of knowing, would present itself as an introduction in which the vacuousness [*Nichtigkeit*] of such presuppositions would be exposed. But this path would be not only unpleasant but

also superfluous since the dialectical element is itself an essential moment of the affirmative science (ENC, §78R).

How can the Logic attain to "total presuppositionlessness" if not through that *via negativa* laid out in the *Phenomenology*? But how, if the Logic is *preceded* by a work of self-completing skepticism which clears the way to genuine cognition, can it be said to have abandoned all presuppositions at the outset? It is my goal in this chapter to clarify the way in which the Logic resolves these apparent *aporiai*. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate that the problematic of skepticism remains of the utmost importance for Hegel even after the conclusion of the *Phenomenology*.⁶⁶

When Hegel describes the Logic as presuppositionless, as I will argue, he is referring, not to the argument's having met a formal methodological requirement, but to a unique feature of his speculative metaphysics. In fact, Hegel's understanding of the presuppositionless character of the Logic puts him squarely at odds with the project of foundationalist epistemology inaugurated with Descartes' program of methodical doubt.⁶⁷ I will go on to show that this important point of

⁶⁶ William Maker and Richard Dien Winfield have each argued that the starting point of the Logic turns on its presuppositionless status, suggesting that the Logic meets the requirement of total presuppositionlessness through the negative work of the *Phenomenology*. The Logic, on this interpretation, presupposes the result of the *Phenomenology*, but can nevertheless be regarded as presuppositionless on account of the *Phenomenology*'s self-eliminating structure. See William Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) and Richard Dien Winfield, *Overcoming Foundations: Studies in Systematic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

⁶⁷ Though Stephen Houlgate provides an otherwise excellent discussion of this issue in *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, his account gives the mistaken impression that Hegel regards the presuppositionless character of the Logic, not merely as a positive feature of his speculative metaphysics, but also as a formal methodological requirement which every philosophical inquiry must piously observe. Dietmar Heidemann's skepticism concerning Hegel's solution to the problem of presuppositionlessness seems to be predicated on this same interpretive error. If the Logic is supposed to be presuppositionless in this sense, however, it obviously fails, since it would have to presuppose the validity of this very requirement. In *Hegelian Metaphysics*, Robert Stern argues that Hegel is closer on this point to pragmatists like Charles Sanders Peirce than he is to someone like Descartes, since Hegel acknowledges the impossibility of beginning free from all presuppositions. While Stern does well to point up the Cartesian character that interpreters like Houlgate find in Hegel's concern with presuppositionlessness and to indicate that Hegel admits to beginning with certain assumptions, he does not seem to acknowledge that, for Hegel, the presuppositionless character of the Logic is not inconsistent with the fact that it has presuppositions and that this fact constitutes a fundamental feature of his speculative metaphysics. See Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), 27-42; Dietmar H. Heidemann, "Doubt and

clarification – namely, that the Logic is presuppositionless only in the sense that it is its *own* presupposition – is pivotal to understanding how Hegel succeeds not simply in refuting skepticism but, indeed, in demonstrating how it expresses, albeit inadequately, the second moment of the dialectic and thus a constituent element of reality in the highest sense. In Part One, I concentrate on Hegel's account in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* of the three "positions of thought towards objectivity." Here, I argue that Hegel's basic objection to each account of cognition he considers is that it presupposes, at the methodological level, certain metaphysical and logical categories – what Hegel calls "thought-determinations [*Denkbestimmungen*]" – which only become justified finally in the Logic itself, where it becomes clear that these concepts are not merely subjective but, taken together in their systematic relationship, constitute the fundamental structure of reality. Or, as Hegel puts it in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, "the relationship of forms such as concept, judgment, and syllogism to others like causality, etc., can only establish itself within the Logic itself" (ENC, §24R). Because, as I explain, each of the three positions of thought fails in this way to justify the basic concepts upon which it relies, it cannot be considered presuppositionless in the unique sense at issue in Hegel's description. An important consequence of this argument, as we will see, is that Hegel considers the attempt to clarify cognition prior to its employment to be predicated upon an epistemological prejudice. As it will turn out, Hegel rejects the attempt to employ skepticism as a propaedeutic for philosophy for the same reason. In both cases, Hegel's rejection stems from his insistence that the critique of the finite forms of cognition and the activity of cognition itself must be considered one and the same. In Part Two, I turn to Hegel's account of "rational proof," where, I argue, his solution to

Dialectic: Hegel on Logic, Metaphysics, and Skepticism," in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, ed. Nectarios G. Limnatis (London: Continuum, 2010); Robert Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 233-34.

the problem of presuppositionlessness is to be found. This solution, as we will see, involves the application of a method which grounds all of its assumptions over the course of its elaboration – a method which proves to be identical to its object. Finally, I argue in Part Three that the presuppositionless character of the Logic, which emerges over the course of its "rational proof," helps clarify the way that Hegel conceives of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy in the most mature stage of his thinking. Here, Hegel comes to recognize that skepticism, containing "mere negation as the result of the dialectical" (ENC, §81R), is an inadequate expression of the second moment of the dialectic.

Part One: The Proof of the Understanding

Hegel's introductions to the system are notoriously difficult. In the process of explaining what kind of project philosophical science is," Ardis Collins observes, "the introductory essays of *Enc* and *WL* call attention to the unique challenge involved in justifying its starting point."⁶⁸ As we will see, this unique challenge consists in the fact that philosophical science must be able to provide its own justification without appealing to any criterion which it does not itself prove. This is not only reflected in "With What Must the Beginning of Science Be Made?," the introductory essay to the *Science of Logic*, but, as Collins suggests, also in Hegel's discussion of the three positions of thought towards objectivity in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. Though this early section of the *Encyclopaedia*, like the *Phenomenology*, is intended to "explicate the importance and the standpoint here given to logic" (ENC, §25) and lead the reader up to the standpoint of

⁶⁸ Ardis Collins, "The Introductions to the System," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, ed. Allegra de Laurentiis and Jeffrey Edwards (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 55.

philosophical science,⁶⁹ Hegel admits that this examination "can be conducted only historically [*historisch*]⁷⁰ and by reasoning in a strictly formal way [*räsonierend*]" (ENC, §25R) – which is to say, *unscientifically*. This will be important to bear in mind as we make our way through Hegel's argument. While this introductory section arguably succeeds in clarifying the sense of presuppositionlessness at issue in the Logic by exposing the way that the proof procedure tacitly employed by each of these positions draws upon concepts which it cannot justify, his argument here suffers from the same basic limitation: it presupposes, rather than proves, its own validity. As we will see, it is only because the Logic deduces these same concepts from thinking itself that it can claim to be truly presuppositionless. Let us begin then by briefly familiarizing ourselves with these three positions – along with the assumptions that they unwittingly harbor – before moving on to examine how each one employs a method which ultimately prevents them from achieving total presuppositionlessness.

The first position of thought that Hegel addresses is pre-Critical *metaphysics*. This position, "still oblivious to the opposition of thinking within and against itself," Hegel writes, "contains the *belief* that through *thinking things over* the *truth* comes to be known" and that thought, in this way "engages the objects [*Gegenstände*] directly" (ENC, §26). Rather than concern itself with whether, how, or to what extent the forms of thinking that it is wont to employ can be legitimately predicated of things, this "*naïve* manner of proceeding" only inquires

⁶⁹ More specifically, Hegel explains that the purpose of this introduction is to "contribute principally to the insight that the questions one entertains and holds as utterly concrete in the representation of the nature of *knowing*, *faith* and so forth in fact lead back to *simple* thought-determinations that receive their definitive treatment only in the Logic" (ENC, §25R).

⁷⁰ As Collins notes, Hegel uses the term *historisch* to refer "to the author's position as one who has already worked through the text that demonstrates and justifies claims that are simply asserted in the introductions." Ardis Collins, "The Introductions to the System," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, ed. Allegra de Laurentiis and Jeffrey Edwards (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 59.

into whether *this* concept corresponds to *this* object. To illustrate the limitations of this approach, Hegel directs us to the so-called "metaphysical proofs" of God's existence. According to the standpoint assumed in such arguments, there can be no question of whether predicates like "existence" can be meaningfully assigned to an apparently infinite object such as "God," or whether, on the contrary, this "form of determining the absolute by means of the attribution of predicates" (ENC, §28) can only persuade us of our own prejudices – for, as Hegel explains, it simply takes up the "abstract thought-determinations in their immediacy, and allow[s] them to count as predicates of what is true" (ENC, §28Z).⁷¹ Nor can there be any question here of whether this standpoint correctly construes the *objects* which it claims to know. Rather, Hegel argues, these objects (the soul, the world, God) are taken up in the first position of thought merely as they are given in "representation [*Vorstellung*]" – that is, in the pre-philosophical manner in which we consider objects in abstraction from their conditions of intelligibility.⁷² For example, in the Ontological Proof, one begins with a representation of God as "something than which nothing greater can be thought"⁷³ and concludes from this representation that God exists. Not only then is this position guilty of taking for granted the concepts through which it claims to

⁷¹ "Pre-critical metaphysics," Ardis Collins explains, "presupposes a sameness between thought determinations operating in thinking and these same determinations as the fundamental truth of what exists in itself and apart from thinking." Ardis Collins, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Dialectical Justification of Philosophy's First Principles* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 89.

⁷² As Hegel explains in a related passage, "even such intrinsically spiritual [*an sich geistige*] determinations stand *isolated* on the wide terrain of the inner, abstract universality of representing as such. In this isolation, they are *simple*; right, duty, God. Now either representation remains at a standstill with the determination that 'right is right' and 'God is God' or, if it is more educated, it adds determinations, for instance, that God is the creator of the world, all wise, omnipotent, etc." (ENC, §20R).

⁷³ Anselm of Canterbury, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 93.

grasp its object (e.g., the concept of existence); it also presupposes the very object itself (e.g., God) and, in this way, restricts thought to its immediate representations.

For Hegel, the second position of thought, which he identifies in both *empiricism* and *critical philosophy*, constitutes both an advance beyond, and a regression behind, the standpoint of the older metaphysics. "The initial point of departure," Hegel writes of the second position of thought, "is the difference between the elements that result from the analysis of experience: the *sensory material* and its *universal relations*" (ENC, §40). In other words, it sets out from a distinction between what is given in the sensible manifold, on the one hand, and the forms that unite and render intelligible this manifold, on the other. This difference is not operative in the first position of thought, which, as just discussed, simply takes for granted the objectivity of the concepts it employs without any reference to what is specifically given in experience. According to Hegel, empiricism introduces a new principle with respect to seeking the truth, namely, that truth must be sought with reference to experience. As he puts it, "There lies in empiricism this great principle that what is true must exist in actuality and be there for perception" (ENC, §37R). Hegel includes Critical Philosophy in the second position of thought, because in Kant's philosophy one finds not only a similar distinction – namely, the distinction between concept and intuition – but a similar effort to limit the theoretical employment of reason to objects of possible experience. However, rather than accepting that the forms are only customary and ultimately contingent, Kant seeks to demonstrate their objective necessity through an investigation into the transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience itself.⁷⁴ In this way, Kant's Critical

⁷⁴ As Hegel explains in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, "while Hume attacks the universality and necessity of the categories generally, and Jacobi their finitude, Kant merely argues against their objectivity in so far as they are present in external things themselves, while maintaining them to be objective in the sense of holding good as universal and necessary, as they do, for instance, in mathematics and natural science." G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 427. Hereafter cited parenthetically as LHP III.

philosophy attempts to avoid the presuppositions of the first position of thought by engaging in a comprehensive investigation into the nature and limits of human cognition. Kant's critique of metaphysics reflects in this way the understanding that cognition is only genuine when it is free from presuppositions.

However, Hegel makes clear that despite this, Kant nevertheless fails to consistently apply this very insight to his own investigation. Rather than examine the categories "in and for themselves," Hegel explains, the critical philosophy considers them merely "with a view to the opposition of *subjectivity* and *objectivity* " (ENC, §41), without realizing that these, too, are concepts which must in turn be made subject to critical scrutiny. It is for this reason that Hegel counts Kant's contribution as a regression behind the first position of thought – because, that is, his investigation into the limits of cognition led him to deny that crucial insight that the determinations of thought must be considered the "fundamental determinations of things." This is, presumably, what accounts for the fact that Kant could affirm in the Transcendental Deduction that the categories are "objective" (insofar as they prove to be necessary for the legitimate cognition of the objects we encounter in experience), but at the same time deny that they could be said to pertain to things in themselves: in Hegel's estimation, Kant simply assumes that thoughts, "despite being universal and necessary determinations, are... *merely our* thoughts, and distinguished from what the thing is *in-itself* by an insurmountable gulf" (ENC, §41Z2), even as he recommends a thoroughgoing critique of the cognitive faculties. The second position of thought therefore fares no better in Hegel's judgment than the earlier metaphysics whose presuppositions it sought to expose. While it proceeds from the correct observation that genuine

cognition can only come about once we abandon all presuppositions, Hegel argues that it can only offer this as a "bare assurance" for which it ultimately gives no justification.⁷⁵

The third position of thought – *immediate knowing* [*das unmittelbare Wissen*] – shares with the preceding standpoint the conviction that the concepts of classical metaphysics are fundamentally limited. Since, according to this position, the activity of thinking only allows objects to be apprehended in the form of "something *conditioned* and *mediated*" (ENC, §62), thinking must necessarily distort any object which cannot be located within a given causal sequence.⁷⁶ Jacobi thus finds himself in agreement with Kant that God, as an infinite, unconditioned object, cannot be known through the finite operations of discursive cognition. As Hegel explains, however, the peculiarity of the third position of thought consists in the fact that it insists that an adequate apprehension of the infinite is nevertheless possible through a form of knowing which eschews the mediation characteristic of discursive thought. Rather than attempt to prove God's existence through the employment of concepts which, according to this position, would reduce God to the status of something conditioned, the standpoint of immediate knowing considers God's existence to be an undeniable fact which can be found *immediately* within consciousness itself and proven in no other way.⁷⁷ Though Hegel is far from disputing the claim

⁷⁵ Kant, of course, does attempt to establish the objective validity of the concepts of the understanding in the Transcendental Deduction. Hegel's point, however, is that Kant does not examine the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity "in and for themselves."

⁷⁶ Jacobi's polemic against Spinoza, Hegel explains, "construes knowing to be of the finite only, as a *serial* progression in thought, from something *conditioned* to something else *conditioned*, in which everything that is a condition is in turn itself something conditioned – [in other words, a progression] through *conditioned conditions*" (ENC, §62R).

⁷⁷ Hegel elaborates on this point in his discussion of Jacobi in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: "The consciousness of God, which is in our consciousness, is, however, of such a nature that along with the thought of God, we have immediately associated the fact that He is. The existence of the supernatural and super-sensuous, to which the thought of man regarding the natural and finite passes on is just as certain to Jacobi as he is himself. This certainty is identical with his self-consciousness; as certainly as I am, so certainly is God" (LHP III, 416-17).

that "the infinite, the eternal, the God in our *representation* also is" (ENC, §64) but indeed affirms this as an indubitable certainty which philosophy shares with this standpoint, he nevertheless denies that this can be known *only* in the form of immediacy. As Hegel explains, Jacobi comes to the conclusion that the infinite can be exclusively grasped by an immediate form of knowing which eludes conceptual mediation only after first *presupposing* the mutual exclusivity of the concepts of immediacy and mediation. This is evidently what Hegel has in mind when he writes at the end of his introductory essay that "the *opposition* between a self-standing immediacy of content or knowing and a mediation that is equally self-standing but incompatible with the former, must be set aside... because it is a mere *presupposition* and an arbitrary *assurance*" (ENC, §78) – that is, that Jacobi assumes, rather than explains, the basic opposition underpinning the doctrine of immediate knowing.⁷⁸ As I will argue in what follows, however, Hegel's remark here is not merely directed at the third position of thought, but is rather aimed at *all three positions* to the extent that each employs a mode of proof that prevents it from achieving the sort of presuppositionlessness that is at issue in the Logic. Let us turn our attention then to Hegel's description of this proof procedure so that we might see how it is utilized by each of the three accounts of cognition he considers.

Hegel elaborates this proof procedure in connection with the metaphysical arguments for God's existence employed in the first position of thought, but, as we will see, its use is not restricted to this task: "The chief point here," he writes,

is that the way of constructing proofs as it is undertaken by the understanding concerns the dependency of one determination on another. With this kind of demonstration, one makes a presupposition, something fixed, from which

⁷⁸ Hegel makes roughly the same point in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: "This opposition between immediacy and mediacy is thus a very barren and quite empty determination; it is a platitude of the extremest type to consider anything like this to be a true opposition; it proceeds from a most wooden understanding, which thinks that an immediacy can be something on its own account, without a mediation within itself" (LHP III, 421).

something else follows. So what is being demonstrated here is the dependency of a determination on a presupposition. Now if the existence of God is supposed to be demonstrated in this way, then this means that the being of God is made to depend on other determinations so that the latter constitute the ground of God's being. Here one sees immediately that something out of kilter is bound to result, for God is supposed to be the ground absolutely of everything and therefore not dependent on something else (ENC, §36Z).

Now, we have already seen that the first position of thought takes for granted the validity of the concepts through which it claims to know its object. As Hegel's account suggests, however, this is no mere accident, but rather the necessary consequence of a "finite" procedure predicated upon the opposition of immediacy and mediation. When Hegel, following Jacobi, objects that the Cosmological Proof, an argument which derives God's existence from certain alleged facts about the world, results in the absurd conclusion that the "being of God is made to depend on other concepts so that the latter constitute the ground of God's being," he is not simply drawing attention to the fact that this argument rests upon questionable premises which it would do well to re-examine. If I am correct, his suggestion is rather that this argument can only grasp the unconditioned in the form of something conditioned because it presupposes the mutual exclusivity of the concepts of immediacy and mediation at the level of method – which is to say that the proof procedure employed in the metaphysical arguments for God's existence is ultimately *incapable* of demonstrating the truth of its premises and, for this reason, insufficient for an apprehension of the infinite. It is ordinarily assumed that a proof is complete when one has shown the conclusion to follow from a given set of presuppositions or premises granted at the outset. In this way, the typical process of proof assumes that something can be known only as *mediated* by an other which, in turn, can be known simply by virtue of its own *immediate*, self-evident content. But if, as Hegel suggests, one can only hope to establish in this manner "the dependency of a determination on a presupposition," it follows that this proof procedure cannot

establish its own validity, since it assumes that the concepts of immediacy and mediation are true "in and for themselves." Consequently, the method of demonstration employed by the understanding leads to an explanatory regress in which the justification for this very approach is held in a state of abeyance and fails, in this way, to achieve total presuppositionlessness.⁷⁹ Though Kant and Jacobi were for this reason convinced that a cognition "which proceeds along *finite* mediations knows only the finite and contains no truth" (ENC, §77), this same argument, as we will see, led Hegel to a vastly different conclusion about the truth of cognition.

We saw above that Kant's critical philosophy shares with the Logic its concern for total presuppositionlessness. However, as we will now observe, it must necessarily fail to achieve this same goal since it employs a method that presupposes, rather than proves, its own validity. That Kant utilizes this mode of demonstration can be seen throughout the Critical Project, perhaps, most evidently, in his use of transcendental argumentation – a form of argument which attempts to derive from some evidently undeniable fact (e.g., the unity of self-consciousness) its necessary preconditions (e.g., the applicability of the categories to objects of possible experience). Hegel already discerns this derivative mode of reasoning, however, in the very notion of critical philosophy itself. The "Critical Philosophy," he writes,

made it its task to investigate to what extent the forms of thinking were capable of being of assistance in knowing the truth at all. More specifically, the faculty of knowledge was now supposed to be investigated prior to knowing. In this there is contained the correct thought that the forms of thought themselves must indeed be made the object of knowing. However, the misunderstanding of wanting already to know prior to knowing or of wanting not to set foot in the water before one has learned to swim, very quickly creeps into the process. To be sure, the forms of thought should not be employed unexamined, but examining them is itself already

⁷⁹ This observation leads Sextus Empiricus, in his discussion of the Two Modes, to a skeptical conclusion. Sextus writes, "Since everything apprehended is thought to be apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else, they [the skeptics] are thought to induce puzzlement about everything by suggesting that nothing is apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else" (OS, 43).

itself a process of knowing. Consequently, the activity of the forms of thought and their critique must be joined in knowing (ENC, §41Z1).⁸⁰

Kant, as we have seen, engages in a second-order inquiry into the limits of human thinking in an effort to avoid the presuppositions of the older metaphysics; but, as Hegel here suggests, to insist that a critique of the faculties of cognition must *precede* their legitimate employment is to impose upon philosophy an insurmountable task. Kant's project is misguided, in Hegel's estimation, not merely because it takes recourse to unwarranted assumptions, but because, in failing to recognize that the activity of knowing is itself the very same activity by which knowing is made aware of its own inherent limits, the critical philosophy employs a proof procedure which is unsuitable to its object. Thus, the critique of cognition is no better starting point than the facts themselves. As Hegel explains in the *Science of Logic*:

Whatever might be adduced against it [universality] – about the limitations of human cognition; about the need to reflect critically on the instrument of cognition before getting to the fact itself – all these are themselves *presuppositions, concrete determinations* that as such carry with them the demand for mediation and grounding. Therefore, since they formally have no advantage over *beginning* with the fact itself as they protest against, and, because of their more concrete content, are on the contrary all the more in need of derivation, singling them out for special attention is to be considered as empty presumption (SL, 751).

As Hegel explains here, the notion that cognition must be clarified prior to its employment is itself a mere presupposition. This point is crucial to understanding Hegel's conception of logic, which he refuses to separate from metaphysics or equate with the merely formal rules of thinking. For Hegel, one cannot separate knowing from what is known; hence, logic should not be regarded merely as an investigation into thinking but as an investigation into what is. This is what Hegel means when he says that "logic coincides with metaphysics" (ENC, §24). To insist,

⁸⁰ Hegel makes the same point in the *Science of Logic* (SL, 46).

therefore, that genuine cognition can only come about *after* the forms of thinking have been made subject to critical analysis is to overlook the cognition already at work in the analysis itself and to employ a problematic proof procedure. The proof procedure in this case is, once again, one that "makes a presupposition, something fixed, from which something else follows." In supposing that the critique of the finite forms of cognition ground our comprehension of the activity of knowing, Kant presumes the mutual exclusivity of the determinations of immediacy and mediation. This suggests to Hegel a very important result – namely, that the "forms of thought must be considered in and for themselves [*an und für sich*]" (ENC, §41Z1), and not according to some presupposed method which would have received its legitimation prior to this consideration. This result offers an important clue to how it is that the Logic actually achieves total presuppositionlessness, a point I will shortly develop further. However, before going on to consider the alternative mode of demonstration that Hegel employs in the Logic, and which he calls "rational proof," let us first see how the position of immediate knowing takes recourse to the very proof procedure that it denounces.

Though he credits Jacobi for having recognized the basic defect in the way that the understanding conducts its proofs, Hegel finds that the standpoint of immediate knowing "does not change anything in the method, introduced by Descartes, of ordinary scientific knowing" (ENC, §77). The standpoint of immediate knowing claims to offer an unmediated grasp of its object; but, as we have already seen, so long as it takes immediacy to exclude mediation, it will be ill-equipped to make good on this promise. Indeed, "in those very exclusions," Hegel writes, "the identified standpoint immediately reveals itself to be a relapse into metaphysical understanding, into its *either-or*" (ENC, §65), since they reveal it to be *mediated* by one-sided concepts which, according to its own self-conception, it can neither justify nor even

accommodate. To the extent then that the standpoint of immediate knowing depends, even in its basic self-understanding, upon concepts which it takes for granted, it can be constructively compared to the proof procedure of the understanding. Since both of these approaches can only prove "the dependency of a determination on a presupposition," they cannot do otherwise than presuppose their own validity. It is this insight that leads Hegel to claim that the standpoint of immediate knowing "discards *all* methods" and, at the same time, that it nevertheless changes nothing "in the method, introduced by Descartes, of ordinary scientific knowing" (ENC, §77). Rather than allowing the determinations of thought to "examine themselves... and determine for themselves their limits and point up their deficiency in themselves" (ENC, §41Z1), the standpoint of immediate knowing, like the proof procedure which it rejects, can ultimately only assert the truth of its claims. Accordingly, when Hegel remarks at the conclusion of his introductory essay to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that the opposition between immediacy and mediation, along with all other presuppositions, must be abandoned with the commencement of science, this comment must not be taken simply as an attack on the standpoint of immediate knowing and its rejection of discursive cognition. But neither, for that matter, should it be read as an endorsement of Kant's effort to divest thought of its immediate character through a critique of the cognitive faculties. Least of all, however, should Hegel's comment here be interpreted as a general methodological principle, the mere adherence to which would secure in advance the legitimacy of a given inquiry, irrespective of its particular subject matter.⁸¹ Rather, I suggest that

⁸¹ Hegel makes this same point in "With What Must the Beginning of Science be Made?": "But the modern perplexity about a beginning proceeds from a further need which escapes those who are either busy demonstrating their principle dogmatically or skeptically looking for a subjective criterion against dogmatic philosophizing, and is outright denied by those who begin, like a shot from a pistol, from their inner revelation, from faith, intellectual intuition, etc. and who would be exempt from *method* and *logic*. If earlier abstract thought is at first interested only in the principle as *content*, but is driven as philosophical culture advances to the other side to pay attention to the conduct of the *cognitive process*, then the *subjective* activity has also been grasped as an essential moment of objective truth, and with this there comes the need to unite the method with the content, the *form* with the *principle*" (SL, 45-46).

we read Hegel's remark, on the one hand, as an indictment of each of the three positions to the extent that they employ a formal procedure which prevents them from establishing their own validity and, on the other, as a provisional articulation of the unique constraints which define the project of philosophical science.

The success of this project is indeed bound up with its presuppositionless character. As I have tried to suggest, however, this entails not only that it abandon all pre-scientific conceptions of its object but, equally, that it renounce the pretension of possessing a method whose legitimacy could be secured in advance, prior to its engagement with its object: "the exposition of that which alone can be the true method of philosophical science," Hegel writes, "falls within the treatment of logic itself; for method is the consciousness of the form of the inner self-movement of the content of logic" (SL, 33). The Logic can claim to be presuppositionless, as we will soon see, because it utilizes a different method of demonstration than the one employed in the three positions of thought – namely, that of "rational proof," which is able to establish each of the concepts it employs, including the "essential, self-positing unity of immediacy and mediation" (ENC, §65R), because it recognizes these same concepts to compose the very substance of its object.

Part Two: The Path of Rational Proof

Even if Hegel is primarily concerned in the introductions to the system to remind his reader that the mere articulation of philosophical method is not yet its realization and, consequently, that any provisional attempt at explaining genuine philosophical cognition "could

not be more than a web of presuppositions, assurances and formal reasoning [*Räsonnements*]" (ENC, §10), it will nevertheless be instructive for our purposes to begin our analysis of the mode of demonstration employed in the Logic with the description of "rational proof" contained within Hegel's consideration of the three positions of thought. Here, Hegel provides an invaluable articulation of his own method that helps to clarify the way in which the Logic succeeds in winning its truth. In considering this preliminary methodological statement – first, in contradistinction to the proof procedure of the understanding, then with reference to the general structure of the Logic as a whole – it will become clear that the Logic is presuppositionless, not in the sense that it employs a method whose presumed validity guarantees the truth of its findings, but in that it provides its own immanent deduction wherein method and object turn out to be two complementary expressions of one and the same fundamental reality.

Hegel's account of rational proof follows immediately upon his description of the procedure employed within the metaphysical proofs of God's existence. Accordingly, Hegel elaborates this alternative mode of demonstration using the being of God once more as his primary example. Hegel's choice here, however, is not incidental, but rather reflects the only sort of object that he deems appropriate to this mode of proof – an object to which the finite predicates of classical metaphysics cannot be ascribed in any straightforward manner. These are what Hegel calls "objects of reason." "To be sure, the manner of proving engaged in by reason," he writes,

equally takes something other than God for its point of departure, and yet in its progression it does not leave this other standing as something immediate and as a being. Rather, by exhibiting this other as something mediated and posited, it leads at the same time to the result that God is to be regarded as that which is truly immediate, primordial, and self-subsistent, containing mediation as sublated within himself. [...] Hence, the position is reversed and what appeared as a consequence shows itself equally as a ground, and what presented itself at first as

a ground is demoted to a consequence. This is precisely the path of rational proof [*der Gang des vernünftigen Beweisens*] (ENC, §36Z) (with my changes).

Hegel's fundamental objection to the proof procedure of the understanding is, as we have seen, that it must necessarily fail to establish its own validity since it rests upon concepts which it cannot prove, but must rather presuppose – concepts which, for this reason, it effectively treats as the ground of the object under investigation. Although in a rational proof, one must also presuppose concepts in the beginning, this does not mean that rational proof fails in the same way that the proof procedure of the understanding does. This is because, in contrast to that procedure of finite cognition in which "one makes a presupposition, something fixed, from which something else follows" (ENC, §36Z), a rational proof proceeds to prove its own presuppositions by deducing these from its own unique object. To be clear, Hegel's point is not that the logic of the understanding must be rejected as false. This logic is adequate for making finite claims about finite objects. However, for Hegel, we cannot ever fully justify the claims made by the logic of the understanding without engaging in rational proof. In other words, a finite logic must be grounded in one that is infinite.

At first sight, the difference between the proof of the understanding and the proof of reason that Hegel points to here might seem to amount to a merely nominal difference, changing only *what* is presupposed in the process of proof, rather than doing away with presuppositions entirely. But Hegel is not suggesting that we must derive knowledge of the world from presumptions about the nature of God any more than that we must derive knowledge of God's existence from presumptions about the world. For in either case, the inquiry's presuppositions – what mediates the object of inquiry – are left unscrutinized. When, for example, one looks to nature as a guide for finding God, Hegel explains: ". . . this does not mean that God is something mediated, but only that *we* progress from an other to God in *such a way* that God as the

consequence is at the same time the absolute ground of the former” (ENC, §36Z). In taking the presuppositions of an inquiry to be valid independently of that inquiry’s results, then, we proceed from a derivative conception of cognition. The problem with the proof of the understanding is not, therefore, that it begins with something immediate, something taken for granted, for every inquiry must begin in this way. As Hegel says, "The difficulty of making a beginning... arises at once, since a beginning is something *immediate* and as such makes a presupposition, or rather it is itself just that" (ENC, §1). The problem, rather, is that, in making the truth of its findings entirely dependent upon that of its starting point, it effectively presupposes the mutual exclusivity of immediacy and mediation, presupposition and result, at the level of method. Thus, when Hegel claims that "what appeared as a consequence shows itself equally as a ground, and what presented itself at first as a ground is demoted to a consequence" his point is we discover along the path of rational proof that immediacy and mediation, like all other finite concepts, do not hold absolute validity in the face of a truly unconditioned object – an object of reason. What Hegel is trying to express here therefore, albeit in a provisional and anticipatory manner, is that the Logic, qua rational proof, can attain to total presuppositionlessness only insofar as it serves as its *own* presupposition. This is because, from the speculative standpoint assumed in the Logic, the beginning is nothing more than the concept of science posited in advance, prior to the entire process of its development: "this standpoint," Hegel writes, "which thus appears to be an *immediate* one, must transform itself into a *result* within the science itself, and indeed into its final result, in which the science recaptures its beginning and returns to itself" (ENC, §17). To illustrate this point in greater detail, it will be instructive to consider the epistemological presupposition which stands at the beginning of the Logic – the result of Hegel's preceding investigation into the "science of spirit in its appearance."

The *Phenomenology* concludes with the insight that all knowledge is essentially the *self-knowledge* of a subject for whom every reference to an other standing over against it has been sublated. Because, however, each of the oppositions encountered along the "way of despair" are shown up, in their turn, to be false, Hegel argues that this simple unity into which consciousness resolves is, strictly speaking, no knowledge at all, and is more appropriately conceived as "simple immediacy [*einfache Unmittelbarkeit*]" – or, better yet, as "pure being [*reine Sein*]." ⁸² It is with this "simplest of all simples" that the Logic properly begins. Though this determination, being the most basic and thus least determinate articulation of the concept, is what in the Logic comes first, Hegel makes clear that it must not be taken simply as the ground of all that follows: in philosophical science, "*progression is a retreat to the ground, to the origin and the truth on which that with which the beginning was made, and from which it is in fact produced, depends*" (SL, 49). Thus, the Logic begins with pure being, but it proceeds to ground this presupposition by exhibiting knowledge in its full systematic totality as the "concept of the concept" – that truly universal form of thinking in which each of the concepts of classical metaphysics which, taken singly and on their own, suggest a separation between concept and object, are grasped in their necessary interrelation. ⁸³ It is only at the end of this exposition, when being is grasped, not merely as something immediate, but as the first expression and product of the idea, that it becomes truly intelligible. As Hegel explains in the *Science of Logic*, "what constitutes the

⁸² "Pure knowledge, thus *withdrawn* into this *unity*, has sublated every reference to an other and to mediation; it is without distinctions and as thus distinctionless it ceases to be knowledge; what we have before us is only *simple immediacy*" (SL, 47).

⁸³ "Each of the parts of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle coming to closure within itself, but in each of its parts the philosophical Idea exists in a particular determinacy or element. The individual circle, simply because it is in itself a totality, also breaks through the boundary of its element and founds a further sphere. The whole thus presents itself as a circle of circles, each of which is a necessary moment, so that the system of its distinctive elements makes up the idea in its entirety, which appears equally in each one of them" (ENC, §15).

beginning, because it is something still undeveloped and empty of content, is not yet truly known at that beginning... only science, and science fully developed, is the completed cognition of it, replete with content and finally truly grounded" (SL, 49). From this perspective, however, the presupposition that stands at the beginning of the Logic loses its "one-sided" character since it proves to be mediated by that systematic totality of which it is a mere moment, that is, it proves to be "something posited and mediated and not what simply and immediately is [*nicht als das Seiende und Unmittelbare*]" (ENC, §239Z). It becomes, in this respect, not unlike "the old man who says the same religious sentences as the child... but [for whom] ... they have the meaning of his entire life" (ENC, §237Z). It is not, therefore, in renouncing, but rather, in grounding what first appears as immediate that the Logic turns out to be totally presuppositionless and to depend upon nothing other than what it already contains. Accordingly, when Hegel claims that "pure science... presupposes the liberation from the opposition of consciousness" (SL, 29), he does not mean to suggest that the truth of the Logic is in any way contingent upon that of the *Phenomenology*,⁸⁴ but rather that the latter concludes with the concept of science in its infancy – the same point with which the Logic begins and to which it invariably returns upon the path of rational proof.

It must, of course, be stressed that the meaning that being takes on when it is comprehended as both presupposition and result is different than the meaning it has when it is taken up simply as immediate:

One may well say... that every beginning must be made with the *absolute*, just as every advance is only the exposition of it, in so far as *implicit in existence* is the

⁸⁴ William Maker argues that the Logic is presuppositionless since it has the *Phenomenology*, a "self-eliminating" structure, as its presupposition. For Hegel, however, a presupposition is merely a thought-determination that has been abstracted from its systematic unity and taken up in its immediate form. Pure being is certainly the first presupposition of the Logic, but it is not the only one. Each of the determinations of thought may be counted as presuppositions until they are grasped in their systematic interconnection as idea.

concept. But because the absolute exists at first only *implicitly, in itself*, it equally is *not* the absolute nor the posited concept, and also not the idea, for the *in-itself* is only an abstract, one-sided moment, and this is what they are. The advance is not, therefore, a kind of *superfluity*; this is what it would be if that which is at the beginning were already the absolute; the advance consists rather in this, that the universal determines itself and is the universal *for itself*, that is, equally a singular and a subject. Only in its consummation is it the absolute (SL, 740).

The Logic begins and ends with the absolute; it is both the presupposition and the result of that investigation. This does not mean, however, that the latter is reducible to the former. The Logic exhibits the concept of science in its full systematic development, from pure being to the idea. It is not until the concept is comprehended as both presupposition and result, however, that it is grasped "for itself."

To reiterate then, when Hegel describes the Logic as presuppositionless, he is not claiming that it satisfies a formal methodological requirement which would secure in advance the legitimacy of this investigation. As we have seen, this notion of presuppositionlessness is predicated upon the mistaken assumption that immediacy and mediation are mutually exclusive concepts which are true "in and for themselves," rather than two moments of the Concept whose truth lies in their unity.⁸⁵ While the Logic certainly proceeds from an assumption arrived at through phenomenological reflection – namely, that concept and object stand as one in a simple unity – it differs from the formal procedure exhibited in the three positions of thought in that it goes on to *ground* that presupposition in its result, in accordance with that alternative mode of demonstration which Hegel calls "rational proof." It is only, therefore, in utilizing a method which establishes each of the concepts to which it appeals in the course of its employment by

⁸⁵ "The relationship in which the above-mentioned three major stages of thought or of the logical idea stand to each other is generally to be construed in such a way that only the *concept* is what is true and, more precisely, the truth of *being* and *essence*, both of which, held fast for themselves in their isolation, are to be regarded at the same time as untrue: *being* because it is at first only what is *immediate*, and *essence* because it is at first only what is *mediated*" (ENC, §83Z).

demonstrating these to belong to the very nature of its object that the Logic wins its truth and achieves total presuppositionlessness.⁸⁶ This is why Hegel can claim, without inconsistency, that though the Logic is indeed presuppositionless, it nevertheless presupposes the result of that investigation conducted in the *Phenomenology*.

But one might wonder whether this is this really *all* that the Logic presumes. After all, if the Logic presupposes the conclusion of the *Phenomenology*, and if this conclusion can only be attained through the destructive work of a "negative science" which would reveal the finite forms of cognition in their nullity, doesn't this then imply that the Logic requires skepticism as its propaedeutic? And, if it is indeed the case that the Logic must put skepticism to work in its service in order to purify cognition of its finitude, doesn't this make it vulnerable to the same objection which Hegel put to the second position of thought – namely, that "to want to clarify the nature of cognition *prior* to science is to demand that it should be discussed *outside* science, and *outside* science this cannot be done" (SL, 46)? For to treat skepticism as a propaedeutic to philosophy is to suggest that true cognition can only come about once the activity of thinking is legitimated by something external to it or, to recall Hegel's formulation presented earlier, to refuse to "set foot in the water before one has learned to swim" (ENC, §41Z1). And finally, if Hegel supposes that an adequate apprehension of the infinite can only come about with the negation of the finite, doesn't this make him guilty of taking for granted the mutual exclusivity of the concepts of immediacy and mediation, that is, of assuming that we must set aside all finite,

⁸⁶ Focusing primarily on "With What Must the Beginning of Science Be Made?," Michael Wolff argues that Hegel's solution to the problem of presuppositionlessness involves the transformation of a destructive dilemma into a constructive dilemma. Translating Hegel's argument into formal logical terms like this certainly has its place, but Wolff's interpretation seems to suggest that Hegel takes the rules of inference for granted, while his real aim is to show that all such forms are true only when they are taken in their systematic interconnection. See Michael Wolff, "Science of Logic," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, ed. Allegra de Laurentiis and Jeffrey Edwards (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

mediating structures so as to attain an unmediated grasp of the infinite? If Hegel cannot meet these basic objections, then he can hardly claim to have improved upon the proof procedure of the understanding.

But is it true that the Logic *must* be preceded by a work of skepticism? Hegel's answer, in short, is no – that such a requirement would be not only "unpleasant [*unerfreulicher*]" but also "superfluous [*überflüssiger*]" since, as he explains, "the dialectical element is itself an essential moment of the affirmative science" (ENC, §78R). Now, we have already seen that the Logic, qua rational proof, cannot depend upon any presupposition which it does not itself establish and, consequently, that its truth cannot be won through the employment of a method which would lie external to logic itself. However, even if this already suggests that the critique of the forms of finite cognition must constitute a necessary feature of the project of philosophical science, it still does not explain how, within a truly presuppositionless philosophy, this is to be accomplished. It is to this question that we now turn.

Part Three: The Self-Sublation of the Finite

The Logic is presuppositionless, as we have seen, in that it goes on to establish each of the presuppositions to which it appeals: it begins with pure being taken in its immediacy, but concludes when this presupposition is comprehended equally as mediated by its result. While this fact illustrates the important point that I have been trying to develop – namely, that the Logic can be considered presuppositionless only insofar as it serves as its own presupposition, it does not so much explain how Hegel actually reaches this conclusion. We have seen that immediacy

and mediation, along with all other concepts of the understanding, can only be regarded as inadequate expressions of the infinite; however, it still remains unclear what it means to say that these concepts are not true in and for themselves. This, I argue, is precisely what Hegel is attempting to explain when he claims that skepticism is "superfluous" for the achievement of a truly presuppositionless philosophy, since "the dialectical element is itself an essential moment of the affirmative science" (ENC, §78R). As we will see, Hegel's account of the three moments of the dialectic clarifies the precise sense in which the concepts of the understanding are to be regarded as "finite" and, at the same time, offers a glimpse at how Hegel conceives of the relationship between skepticism and philosophy in the most mature form of his own thinking.

"Every concept" and, indeed, "everything true in general," Hegel explains, can be said to contain three distinct, but ultimately inseparable elements: "(α) *the abstract* side or that of the *understanding*, (β) *the dialectical* or *negatively rational* side, (γ) *the speculative* or *positively rational* side" (ENC, §79). Hegel relates the first of these moments to the activity of the understanding. Now, we have already seen that the understanding conducts its proofs by exhibiting the "dependency of one determination on another," where each determination is treated as though it possessed a discrete, self-contained, and independently intelligible content. Hegel's characterization here of the first moment of the dialectic is in keeping with this usage: "Thinking as *understanding* does not budge beyond the firm determinateness [of what is entertained] and its distinctiveness over against others. A limited abstraction of this sort counts for it as self-standing and [as having] being [*als für sich bestehend und seiend*]" (ENC, §80). Accordingly, the first moment pertains to the fact that an object first becomes intelligible only after it has been endowed with the form of immediacy – a form which imparts to the content of thought the appearance of being something fixed and comprehensible in abstraction from other

such objects.⁸⁷ It is only, for instance, once pure being has been abstracted from the systematic totality within which it is embedded, and taken up as a presupposition, that it can be first identified as an object of thought. Though it turns out that the activity of the understanding presents a deceptive image of its object when it is led to impose the form of immediacy upon something which turns out to be essentially mediated, Hegel nevertheless maintains that "the understanding shows itself in every domain of the objective [*gegenständlich*] world, and it belongs essentially to the perfection of an object that the principle of the understanding receive its due in it" (ENC, §80Z). This is because this moment of abstraction constitutes an essential feature, not just of our own thinking, but of reality itself. This is what Hegel means when he identifies the moment of abstraction as one side of "the logical." As Hegel explains, "since the logical sphere in general is to be construed not merely as a subjective activity, but instead as absolutely universal and therefore at the same time as objective, this is to be applied to the understanding as the first form of the logical as well" (ENC, §80Z).

With the second moment of the dialectic, the sense of independence conferred upon objects by abstract thinking is shaken, and the "determinations of the understanding, of things, and of the finite in general" (ENC, §81R) are grasped in their "untruth." Though the form of immediacy grants to the determinations of thought the semblance of possessing a fixed and self-subsistent content (in Hegelian terms, of being true "in themselves"), the dialectical moment shows these same determinations to be intrinsically incomplete, to transition into their opposites, and to depend upon these opposites for their own coherency. That is, it shows these concepts to be *mediated* by their opposites. This is why Hegel argues that the mode of demonstration characteristic of the understanding is a "finite" procedure – because this form of proof cannot

⁸⁷ "For it is this very form [that of immediacy] which, because it is *one-sided*, renders its content one-sided as well and thus *finite*" (ENC, §74).

demonstrate its own basic presupposition that something can be known only *mediately*, that is, through something else whose truth is presumed to be self-evident.

Though Hegel at one point likens the dialectical moment to skepticism,⁸⁸ he goes on to explain that the Logic need not put skepticism to work in its service in order to demonstrate the specious nature of this proof procedure along with the concepts which it employs, since it is in the very nature of these one-sided concepts to reveal their own internal limits. "[T]he finite," Hegel explains, "is not limited merely from the outside but, by virtue of its own nature, sublates itself and changes into its opposite on account of itself" (ENC, §81Z1). The concept of immediacy itself at first appears to be such a fixed, stable, and self-subsistent totality; but a closer look reveals it to be conceptually incomplete and to depend upon the concept of mediation for a meaning which it possesses only by virtue of this relationship to its opposite. It is simply, therefore, in exhibiting the "self-sublation" of the concepts of classical metaphysics – the inevitable negation of their claim to immediacy – that the Logic carries out the critique of the finite forms of cognition, not through the work of skepticism. We will return to this point in a moment.

While it is true that the second moment of the dialectic shatters that semblance of immediacy conferred upon the determinations of thought in the first moment, Hegel makes clear that its genuine philosophical worth lies not in its destructive capacity, but rather in the "positive result" which can be seen to emerge within the contradictions it elicits. It is ordinarily assumed that contradiction is an indication of error, and that only that which conforms to the image of fixity imparted by the moment of abstraction can count as true. Hegel's claim, however, is that

⁸⁸ Cf. ENC §81.

this notion is a prejudice of the sort of one-sided thinking that the dialectical moment reveals as false, and that the result of contradiction is never merely negative, since it necessarily preserves that content which the second moment negates in its immediate form:

The one thing needed to achieve scientific progress – and it is essential to make an effort at gaining this quite simple insight into it – is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only in the negation of its particular content; or that such a negation is not just negation, but is *the negation of the determined fact* which is resolved, and is therefore determinate negation; that in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives – a tautology indeed, since the result would otherwise be something immediate and not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a *determinate* negation, it has a *content*. It is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding – richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite (SL, 33).

Though each of the concepts examined in the Logic prove to be self-contradictory, this does not mean that they must be rejected, but rather that their true significance only comes to light when they are wrested from that process of abstraction characteristic of the understanding and comprehended as integral to a concrete, self-mediating totality.⁸⁹ Indeed, as Hegel here suggests, it is only through successively negating the finite forms of thought as they immediately appear – and laying hold of the positive, sublated content contained therein – that the Logic progresses to an apprehension of the infinite. This is precisely what we have already seen to occur along the path of rational proof. The Concept proves to be "truly immediate, primordial, and self-subsistent" (ENC, §36Z) – and, hence, totally presuppositionless – only when it has been shown to contain the presuppositions with which it is mediated as its own sublated moments.⁹⁰ To grasp

⁸⁹ This sets Hegel apart from Kant and Jacobi, who regard the self-contradictory nature of the categories of classical metaphysics as disqualifying them from an adequate apprehension of the infinite.

⁹⁰ Marina Bykova is helpful on this point: "Instead of leading 'from something *conditioned* to something else *conditioned*' (ibid.) in an infinite regress, thinking transforms the conditioned into the self-conditioning and so

the determinations of thought in their finitude is not, therefore, simply to perceive in them inadequate expressions of the infinite, but to recognize that it is only by virtue of the self-sublation of the oppositions which emerge within every finite form of thought that the infinite is made manifest. With this insight, however, we have already arrived at the third moment of the dialectic – its "speculative or positively rational" side.⁹¹

Now that we have seen that the Logic achieves total presuppositionlessness by performing an *immanent* critique of the finite forms of thinking, where each of these are grasped as sublated moments which, in their systematic unity, compose the very content of the concept, it should be apparent why Hegel would say that skepticism is "superfluous." Though skepticism is capable of exhibiting the finitude of one-sided concepts through the method of equipollence, it proves to be an "extraneous art" and an "external... elevation above the finite" (ENC, §81R) since it is in the very nature of these concepts to transition into their own opposites. To say that skepticism is "superfluous," however, is not to say that it has no role to play within the achievement of a truly presuppositionless philosophy. Hegel's point is rather that skepticism represents an imprecise articulation of the second moment of the dialectic – one which emerges

discloses the infinite and unconditioned within the finite and conditioned. Likewise, true immediacy does not result from transcending mediation; it has its beginning in the subsumption or sublation of the mediation into a higher synthesis of mediations. True immediacy is thus nothing but perfected mediation (ENC, §50R); what is immediate is a fully self-mediated content (ENC, §74)." Marina Bykova, "Mediation and Immediacy," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, ed. Allegra de Laurentiis and Jeffrey Edwards (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 248.

⁹¹ Bykova is thus quite right to describe the three sides of the logical in terms of degrees of immediacy: "Thinking begins with abstract concepts that appear, as Hegel puts it, in their 'immediate universality' (WL GW 12:239). Yet thought always refers to another, something it posits as mediated. Once thinking becomes aware of the mediated nature of being, it renounces all pretensions of immediacy and universality and searches for 'the *determinate content*' (WL GW 12:240) it lacked in the beginning. This is the meaning of the dialectic from abstract to concrete that inheres in the activity of thinking." Marina Bykova, "Mediation and Immediacy," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel*, ed. Allegra de Laurentiis and Jeffrey Edwards (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 249.

when it is taken up immediately and considered in abstraction from the other two moments with which it forms a unity.

Though Hegel is led, for analytical purposes, to divide the logical into three distinct elements, he explains that to treat them as separate is to bring them under the purview of the understanding, where they are "not considered in their truth" (ENC, §79R). This is precisely what occurs in the case of skepticism.⁹² Rather than "hold fast to the positive in *its* negative, to the content of the presupposition in the result" (SL, 744), the skeptic "stops short" at the negative result of contradiction. In the contradictions she shows to arise with the one-sided thinking of the understanding, she does not recognize a content which sublates itself and transitions into a new concept containing the negation of the one preceding it, but only something null and void – the "nothingness of all things finite" (ENC, §81Z2). Even if the skeptic is correct to see in the concepts of the understanding so many forms of immediacy, no more true in their apparent fixity than the opposing concepts with which they are mediated, she nevertheless fails to recognize that, in interpreting contradiction in its merely negative significance, she remains beholden to the very sort of abstract thinking that she rejects. In the first moment of the dialectic, as we have seen, the determinations of thought are abstracted from their concrete unity in the concept and presented as fixed, self-subsistent totalities – a procedure which is effectively reversed under the "negatively rational" moment. When, however, the skeptic sees in the contradictions she elicits the impossibility of knowledge, rather than that "principle through which alone *an immanent connection and necessity* enters into the content of science" (ENC, §81R), she holds fast to this

⁹² Here, Hegel primarily has Pyrrhonism in mind: "skepticism proper," he writes, "is the complete despair of anything solid in understanding and the attitude that results from it is an unshakeable mind that rests in itself. This is the high-minded ancient skepticism as we find it presented notably in Sextus Empiricus and as it developed as a complement to the dogmatic systems of the Stoics and Epicureans during the later Roman period" (ENC, §81Z2).

same abstractive activity: contradiction holds a merely negative significance only for one who presumes that truth must approximate the one-sided form it is given by the understanding, and abstracts the dialectical moment from that dynamic unity within which it is embedded – only, that is, for one who considers contradiction in its mere immediate form. This is what Hegel ultimately means when he writes that "the dialectical [moment], when taken in isolation by the understanding, constitutes *skepticism*" (ENC, §81R) – that skepticism, like those forms of immediacy whose illusory character it reveals, is properly understood only when it is seen as composing a moment of "everything true in general" (ENC, §79R), and not, as occurs when the dialectical moment is taken in abstraction by the understanding, when it is presupposed as something true in and for itself. What this shows, however, is that the sublation of skepticism, that all-important result that the *Phenomenology* reaches only with its culminating moment, is already contained within the critique of the finite forms of cognition which the Logic performs immanently – namely, in the very movement of the dialectic itself. It proves, moreover, that skepticism continues to hold special significance for Hegel's philosophical project, even after the conclusion of the *Phenomenology*. Skepticism, as an incomplete expression of the negatively rational moment of the dialectic, may in the final analysis amount to a mere presupposition, but its transformation signifies, for Hegel, "the soul of all truly scientific knowing" (ENC, §81Z1) and the way that knowledge proves to be truly immediate.

In this chapter, I have tried to show that the problem of presuppositionlessness only pertains to those for whom the opposition of immediacy and mediation represents a fixed starting point and an ultimate foundation, and that Hegel's solution to this difficulty constitutes a significant advance beyond that of his philosophical forbearers. This solution, as we have seen, consists in nothing less than the Logic's own "rational proof," where the concepts of immediacy

and mediation – presupposition and result – prove to be two moments in the development of "every properly logical content" (ENC, §79R) whose truth lies solely in their sublated unity. Though Hegel shows the problem of presuppositionlessness to be predicated upon a confusion which arises when the concepts of classical metaphysics are taken up immediately by the understanding and treated as true in and for themselves, his account at the same time reveals this confusion – and its correction – to belong to the very nature of reality. This is why Hegel argues that philosophy does not need skepticism as its propaedeutic – because, as the Logic shows, the critique of the finite forms of cognition is "already itself a process of knowing" (ENC, §41Z1), not something external which would occasion its mere possibility. Accordingly, Hegel's consideration of the problem of presuppositionlessness does indeed open the door to skepticism, but only to show that philosophy has nothing to fear from it.

Chapter Four
History and Skepticism: The Philosophical Basis for
Hegel's Interpretation of the *Parmenides*

Introduction

When Arcesilaus assumed leadership of the Academy in the third century BCE, he found no better means by which to oppose the suspicion growing in Athens at that time that Stoicism was "the logical development and true intellectual heir of Platonism"⁹³ than to point up the skeptical dimension of Plato's philosophy. And he was not without good reasons for doing so – for it is difficult, even in those dialogues which do not expressly end in *aporia*, to discern a positive philosophical statement being advanced by Plato. It is easy enough to identify the assumptions at issue within a given dialogue, but since Plato never seems to speak in his own name – leaving all the talking, largely, to Socrates – it remains unclear whether Plato genuinely endorses any of the beliefs that he puts into the mouths of his characters.⁹⁴ Be that as it may, it is

⁹³ John Dillon, *The Heirs of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 236.

⁹⁴ Five classical arguments for Plato's alleged skepticism are given within an anonymous sixth-century CE *Introduction to Plato's Philosophy*: "In his discussion of things, they say, he uses certain adverbs indicating ambivalence and doubt – e.g. 'probably' and 'perhaps' and 'maybe'; and that is a mark not of one who knows but of one who fails to apprehend any precise knowledge . . . They argue secondly that inasmuch as he tries to establish contrary views about the same things he clearly extols inapprehensibility – e.g. he tries to establish contraries when discussing friendship in the *Lysis*, temperance in the *Charmides*, piety in the *Euthyphro* . . . Thirdly, they say that he thinks that there is no such thing as knowledge, as is clear from the fact that he refutes every account of it in the *Theaetetus* . . . Their fourth argument is this: if Plato thinks that knowledge is two-fold, one sort coming through perception and the other through thought, and if he says that each sort falls down, it is clear that he extols inapprehensibility . . . This is their fifth argument: they say that he himself says in his dialogue 'I know nothing and I teach nothing: all I do is raise problems' (pp. 205-6 Hermann)." Cited in Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 13. In "Plato the Sceptic," Julia Annas contrasts the arguments given in this anonymous sixth-century text with those offered by Arcesilaus in the second century B.C.E., likening these positions to two modern interpretations of Plato. See Julia Annas, "Plato as Sceptic," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume (1992): 43-72.

one thing to acknowledge the fact that Plato's preferred mode of presentation, the dialogue, poses certain unique interpretive challenges, and quite another to argue that his philosophy is, for this reason, skeptical through and through: "[W]hen Plato makes assertions about Forms or about the existence of Providence or about a virtuous life being preferable to a life of vice," writes Sextus Empiricus,

then if he assents to these things as being really so, he is holding beliefs; and if he commits himself to them as being more plausible, he has abandoned the distinctive character of Skepticism, since he is giving something preference in point of convincingness and lack of convincingness . . . Even if he does make some utterances in skeptical fashion when, as they say, he is exercising, this will not make him a Skeptic. For anyone who holds beliefs on even one subject, or in general prefers one appearance to another in point of convincingness or lack of convincingness, or makes assertions about any unclear matter, thereby has the distinctive character of a Dogmatist.⁹⁵

For Sextus, the question is not whether Plato employs skeptical arguments and phrases, nor even whether his dialogues aim to generate the suspension of judgment, but merely whether he considers some beliefs to be more convincing than others. Only if Plato abstains from such preferences, Sextus argues, can he be considered a skeptic; otherwise, if he holds beliefs which cannot ultimately be justified, he must be counted among the dogmatists. For dogmatism is the condition of possessing unjustified beliefs.⁹⁶ But doesn't there remain, between dogmatism and skepticism, a third way – a path upon which the non-skeptical examination of knowledge and the non-dogmatic possession of belief ultimately coincide? And wouldn't such a way seem more apt to describe Plato's actual philosophical practice than the two poles of Sextus' opposition?

⁹⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 58. Hereafter cited parenthetically as OS.

⁹⁶ While Sextus identifies as dogmatic anyone who ascribes to any belief whatsoever, it is clear from his argument in the *Outlines* that, since there are no beliefs that seem capable of withstanding skeptical scrutiny, any possession of belief is effectively unjustified. It is this sense of dogmatism – the possession of unjustified beliefs – that I will be employing throughout this chapter.

In his 1802 examination of the "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy," Hegel makes his first attempt to carve out this alternative path, citing Plato's *Parmenides* as a prime example of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once."⁹⁷ In Plato's dialogue, Hegel finds a "self-sustaining document and system of genuine skepticism" which is not only compatible with the non-dogmatic possession of belief, but in fact "is itself the negative side of the cognition of the Absolute, and directly presupposes Reason as the positive side" (RSP, 323). Accordingly, Hegel's attempt to resolve this long-standing controversy involves interpreting Plato's *Parmenides* as an early instantiation of speculative dialectic in which skepticism is but a moment in the expression of truth.

For this very reason, however – because, that is, Hegel sees in the *Parmenides* an anticipation of his own speculative dialectic, it would be easy to dismiss his contribution to the debate concerning the skeptical status of Plato's philosophy as the product of a dogmatic and ahistorical retrojection.⁹⁸ If Hegel can find in Plato an early proponent of speculative dialectic, so it would seem, this says perhaps more about Hegel and the prejudices of his time than it does about the status of Plato's philosophy. The concern here is part of a widespread suspicion regarding Hegel's orientation toward the history of philosophy – namely, that he fails to treat historical texts on their own terms, assimilating them rather to his own decidedly modern sensibilities. In fact, however, Hegel has already anticipated this concern and integrated it within

⁹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison to the Latest Form with the Ancient One", in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H.S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 323. Hereafter cited parenthetically as RSP.

⁹⁸ Even otherwise sympathetic readers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Michael Forster suggest that Hegel misinterprets Platonic dialectic in order to shore up his own metaphysical aspirations. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) and Michael Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

the very conception of history which forms the basis for his reading of Plato. In this chapter, I look to Hegel's philosophical historiography in order to argue that the justification for his interpretation of historical texts can be seen as an extension of his engagement with skepticism. In Part One, I examine Hegel's interpretation of the *Parmenides*, first as it emerges in his early essay on the "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy" and then in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Here my chief interest is to clarify what leads Hegel to identify Plato's dialogue as an early instance of speculative dialectic – that is, as exhibiting a logical structure according to which things that are taken to be opposed and distinct are unified. In Part Two, I examine the basic elements of Hegel's philosophical historiography, that is, his theory of the writing of history, arguing that his account of the history of philosophy is best understood as a philosophical history of philosophy, where concerns surrounding the historical status of his interpretation of the *Parmenides* ultimately lose their footing.

Part One: Hegel's Reading of the *Parmenides*

Hegel's initial intervention into the debate surrounding Plato's alleged skepticism can be found in his 1802 article for the *Critical Journal* on the "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy." In his attempt to demonstrate the limitations of G.E. Schulze's attack on Kant's Critical philosophy, an attempt that I examined earlier in Chapter One, Hegel turns at one point to Plato's *Parmenides*, a text that he argues indicates an alternative, a third way, beyond the poles of Sextus' opposition. For Schulze, no philosophy can escape the horns of Sextus' dilemma: a philosophy is either dogmatic, in which case it naïvely posits the identity of concept and object, or else it is skeptical and soberly insists on their difference, as attested by the "facts of

consciousness."⁹⁹ For Hegel, however, the *Parmenides* offers an example of a philosophy that not only contests the truth of this opposition, but that exposes the dogmatic or unjustified character of oppositional thinking as such. Thus, Hegel finds here in the Skepticism essay a philosophy that is "infinitely more skeptical" (RSP, 323) than the brand of skepticism exemplified by Schulze. Later, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel returns to the *Parmenides* once again, focusing on the way that the text exemplifies a form of dialectic that incorporates elements of, but is not reducible to, the later skeptical tradition. Before turning to Hegel's engagement with the *Parmenides*, however, let us review the series of proposals and refutations that occur in Plato's dialogue. Of course, it cannot be my task here to offer a detailed summary of Plato's *Parmenides*. I wish, however, to highlight the elements of the dialogue that are most germane to Hegel's interpretation.

The *Parmenides* opens with an exchange between the Eleatic Zeno and a young Socrates on the nature and number of being. Though we do not hear Zeno's initial speech, Socrates provides us with a summary of the philosopher's argument: "If things are many," Socrates states, reiterating Zeno's position, "they must then be both like and unlike, but that is impossible, because unlike things can't be like or like things unlike" (127c).¹⁰⁰ After confirming that he has correctly understood Zeno's speech, and identifying an unacknowledged partnership between his argument against "the many" and Parmenides' teaching of "the one," Socrates proceeds to advance an alternative ontological account:

⁹⁹ It is worth noting here that Hegel actually contests Schulze's interpretation of Sextus' opposition: "Right in his very first lines Sextus divides philosophers into dogmatists, academics and skeptics; and if in his whole work he is dealing with the dogmatists, he by no means imagines that he has refuted the Academy too" (RSP, 325). Hegel does not, however, comment on the fact that Sextus seems to treat his opposition between skepticism and dogmatism as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive in dealing with Plato.

¹⁰⁰ All references to Plato in this chapter are to the editions available in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett, 1997).

But tell me this: don't you acknowledge that there is a form, itself by itself, of likeness, and another form, opposite to this, which is what unlike is? Don't you and I and the other things we call 'many' get a share of those two entities? And don't things that get a share of likeness come to be like in that way and to the extent that they get a share, whereas things that get a share of unlikeness come to be unlike, and things that get a share of both come to be both? And even if all things get a share of both, though they are opposites, and by partaking of them are both like and unlike themselves, what's astonishing about that (128e5-129a9)?

Socrates' account seems, at first sight, to improve upon the Eleatic conception. In asserting that only “one,” properly speaking, *is*, Zeno finds himself compelled to deny not only the manifold character of being, since he cannot accept the evidently absurd notion that that which is can admit of opposing properties.¹⁰¹ But Socrates is able to circumvent this difficulty by explaining how it is that things can be both like and unlike in a non-contradictory sense. He does this by positing the existence of a *form* of likeness and differentiating it from particular things that participate in this form (i.e., like things).¹⁰² Socrates provides an analogy to help make his point, explaining that it is not astonishing at all to say that he is both one and many in two different respects. Insofar as he has a frontside and a backside, an upper part and a lower part, he is many, but insofar as he may be one person among seven people present, he can also rightfully be called one. In this way, one and many can belong to the same subject, just as like and unlike can. What would be astonishing, by contrast, is to say that the one itself is many or that likeness itself is

¹⁰¹ Sandra Peterson suggests that Zeno is actually inconsistent on this point, since he implies that he and Parmenides are "like in that they say the same things (128b5) and unlike in that Zeno says 'not many' and Parmenides says 'one' (128b3-5). By implying that there are several beings like in some respects and unlike in others, even while he contends there cannot be several beings both like and unlike," she concludes, "Zeno is conspicuously inconsistent." Sandra Peterson, "The Parmenides," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 387.

¹⁰² Socrates employs the same strategy in the *Phaedo* at 102c to resolve the apparent contradiction that Simmias is both short and tall. There he explains that Simmias is tall by participating in the form of tallness and short by participating in the form of shortness.

unlike.¹⁰³ The contradiction only arises when we assert a thing to be both like and unlike without further qualification. In sum, Socrates' proposal manages to avoid the manifest contradiction of asserting something as both like and unlike at once by distinguishing between the *different respects* in which something may be like and unlike.

Nevertheless, Parmenides finds several problems with Socrates' account. He quickly stumps Socrates by asking him whether he thinks that there are forms for all things, even things that are "totally undignified and worthless," such as mud, hair, and dirt. More importantly, Parmenides goes on to offer a series of arguments that challenge Socrates' notion that particular things are what they are by virtue of participating in the forms of which they are instantiations. Parmenides asks, for example, whether it is the whole form or just a part that is instantiated in every particular thing. He reaches the conclusion that, in either case, each form must be divisible, thus contesting Socrates' proposal that each form is one. Next, Parmenides introduces a problem that anticipates Aristotle's Third Man.¹⁰⁴ As Parmenides explains, if there is in fact a form of likeness "itself by itself" which stands quite apart from, but unites all like things, and if this form, being what all like things truly consist in, is also *like*, then it follows that there must be above this form another form of likeness, greater than the first, which would unite it with all other like things, and above this, yet another, *ad infinitum*. Parmenides points out, in other words, that Socrates' proposal leads to an infinite regress where it becomes necessary to posit ever greater

¹⁰³ At *Phaedo* 103a, Socrates exhibits the same unwillingness to countenance the notion that the forms can turn into their opposites while remaining themselves: "In the same way, the short in us is unwilling to become or to be tall ever, nor does any other of the opposites become or be its opposite while still being what it was; either it goes away or is destroyed when that happens."

¹⁰⁴ See Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 990b17, 1079a13, 1039a2 and *Sophistical Refutations* 178b36.

forms in order to account for the unity each successive form has with the class of things it is meant to unite.

Finally, Parmenides points to one last difficulty faced by Socrates' proposal. If each form is truly separate from the many sensible things which instantiate it, and if we only have access to these instantiations, then if there is a form of knowledge "itself by itself," it would have to be radically separate from the knowledge available to humans, including even knowledge of the forms themselves. If the forms cannot therefore be known by humans, it seems unlikely that anyone will be able to refute the skeptic who doubts whether such forms truly exist. With this last argument, Socrates is left at an impasse. Parmenides goes on to suggest, however, that these difficulties may not in fact be insurmountable, and that a way forward remains for one who has received proper training in a dialectical exercise which "people think useless" and "the crowd call idle talk" (135d5), but which is in fact, Parmenides insists, necessary "to achieve a full view of the truth" (136c7-8). The entire second part of the dialogue is devoted to an illustration of this "worklike game."

Earlier, Socrates had claimed that, though there's nothing strange about the fact that opposing properties can be found among things which participate in opposing forms, he would be quite astonished to learn that such properties could be attributed to the forms themselves:

So if – in the case of stones and sticks and such things – someone tries to show that the same thing is many and one, we'll say that he is demonstrating *something* to be many and one, not the one to be many or the many one – and we'll say that he is saying nothing astonishing, but just what all of us would agree to. But if someone first distinguishes as separate the forms, themselves by themselves, of the things I was talking about a moment ago – for example, likeness and unlikeness, multitude and oneness, rest and motion, and everything of that sort – and then shows that in themselves they can mix together and separate, I for my part... would be utterly amazed... (129d3-e3).

However, in the eight series of deductions which together comprise the recommended "gymnastic" training, Parmenides shows that one can indeed observe a certain "wandering between opposites" even among "those things that one might above all grasp by means of reason and might think to be forms" (135e3-4). To demonstrate this point, Parmenides explains, one must consider in turn the consequences that follow from the assumption that one *is* and from the alternative assumption that not-one (or many) *is*,¹⁰⁵ for each of the forms, taken both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other. Thus, the dialectical analysis which spans the latter half of the dialogue proceeds from the initial hypothesis, "if one is," and leads to the apparently paradoxical conclusion that whether one or not-one is, "it and the others [e.g., like, unlike, part, whole, motion, rest, etc.] both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other" (166c3-6).¹⁰⁶ In this way, the

¹⁰⁵ I follow Allegra de Laurentiis and Klaus Düsing here in rejecting the traditional rendering of the alternative hypotheses presented by Parmenides. Parmenides does not ask Socrates to consider the consequences that follow on the hypothesis "if one is" and the alternative "if one is not." Rather, his proposal is that Socrates consider whether "one is" or "not-one (many) is." "Ever since Ficino," de Laurentiis points out, "this is rendered in the (inherently Hamletic) version "either the one is or it is not," in which "not [*me*]" negates the existence of the one (as if the text read *me estin*) rather than negating, as Plato's text does, simply the one (*me hen*). The Platonic formulation thus implies," on de Laurentiis' reading, "the possibility that what there is may be the negation of oneness in form of multiplicity – the not-one and thus the many, or also, perhaps, a one that is many." Allegra de Laurentiis, "The One and the Concept: On Hegel's Reading of Plato's *Parmenides*," *Cardozo Public Law, Policy and Ethics Journal* 3, no. 1 (2004): 73.

¹⁰⁶ Klaus Düsing represents the eight series of deductions that constitute Parmenides' gymnastic training in the following schema:

A. If One is,	I. can be affirmed of the One	1. nothing 2. everything
	II. can be affirmed of the Many	3. nothing 4. everything
B. If Not-One is,	III. can be affirmed of the One	5. everything 6. nothing
	IV. can be affirmed of the Many	7. everything 8. nothing

dialogue concludes by acknowledging a number of contradictions that arise in either case – whether we assume that being is one or that being is not-one (or many). These are contradictions that Socrates’ perspectivist solution presumably cannot resolve. Unfortunately, it is never explained how such a display might offer a way forward for the theory of forms beyond the problems that Parmenides identifies or a defense of their existence to the skeptic: Parmenides simply states that without this dialectical training "the truth will escape you" (135d5-6).

For this reason, it is tempting to read the *Parmenides* as an “aporetic” text, for the dialogue seems to offer no indication of whether the dialectical demonstration at its core is meant to reinvigorate the theory of forms or signal its demise. On Hegel's reading in the Skepticism essay, however, the dialogue does not leave us in a state of *aporia*, forced to suspend judgment on the truth of this theory, but in fact deals a fatal blow to the heart of Socrates' proposal: "This Platonic skepticism," he writes

is not concerned with doubting these truths of the understanding which cognizes things as manifold, as wholes consisting of parts, or with coming to be and passing away, multiplicity, similarity, etc. and which makes objective assertions of that kind; rather it is intent on the complete denial of all truth to this sort of cognition (RSP, 323).

Although Hegel is not explicit here about how Socrates' forms relate to these "truths of the understanding," it is not difficult to see what he has in mind. What Plato's *Parmenides* shows, on Hegel's view, is how Socrates' theory of forms embodies the same mode of thinking that in the Skepticism essay he identifies with the understanding. Recall that, for Hegel, the understanding is characterized by its tendency to think in terms of one-sided oppositions. In denying that opposing predicates can be equally affirmed of the same subject at the same time and in the same

Klaus Düsing, "Formen der Dialektik bei Plato und Hegel" in *Hegel und die antike Dialektik*, ed. Manfred Riedel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 175 (*my translation*).

respect, propositions of the understanding uphold the principle of noncontradiction. As such, the understanding is legitimate for a cognition of finite, non-contradictory objects. However, it is inappropriate for an apprehension of infinite objects – objects for which finite predicates can at best represent only one side of their nature. For such objects, only propositions of reason, which violate the principle of noncontradiction, are adequate. Thus, when Parmenides shows Socrates that the forms themselves have a way of turning around into their opposites (e.g., that if one is, it also is not, that it is both like and unlike itself, both in motion and at rest, etc.), and that, for this reason, they lack the sort of self-subsistence and ontological primacy that Socrates ascribes to them, Hegel reads this along the lines of his own distinction between reason and understanding. That is, he reads Parmenides' dialectical exercise in the second half of the dialogue as demonstrating the inability of the understanding to adequately think the infinite.¹⁰⁷ This is why Hegel extols the *Parmenides* for revealing the limits of the understanding. Every work of "true philosophy," for Hegel, necessarily includes such a "negative" or "skeptical" side which acknowledges the equipollence of opposing concepts and thus rejects the one-sided truths of the understanding: "This skepticism that comes on the scene in its pure *explicit* shape in the *Parmenides*, can, however, be found *implicit* in every genuine philosophical system; for it is the free side of every philosophy" (RSP, 324).

If Plato's dialogue makes plain what is tacitly expressed in every true philosophy – namely, that propositions of the understanding are inadequate for articulating infinite objects, its

¹⁰⁷ Franco Chiereghin argues that since, on Hegel's interpretation, the genuine skepticism of Plato's *Parmenides* "does not constitute a particular thing in a system," the first part of the dialogue, which concerns Zeno's refutation of Socrates' theory of forms, cannot be separated from the second part, where Parmenides offers an illustration of the recommended dialectical training. This suggests to Chiereghin that Hegel finds a speculative dialectic at work throughout the dialogue, rather than exclusively in the second part. See Franco Chiereghin, "Platonische Skepsis und spekulatives Denken bei Hegel," in *Skeptizismus und spekulatives Denken in der Philosophie Hegels*, ed. Hans-Friedrich Fulda and Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996).

philosophical significance, for Hegel, goes beyond this strictly negative utility. Though Hegel acknowledges that the *Parmenides* "appears only from its negative side" (RSP, 323), exposing the limits of Socrates' theory, he suggests that the dialogue contains a "positive side" as well. It is the inclusion of this positive side that, for Hegel, makes Plato's dialogue an instance of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism" but both at once. If the negative side of the *Parmenides* is concerned with the rejection of that sort of "one-sided" thinking which Hegel associates with the understanding and which insists on the mutual exclusivity of opposites, its positive side is concerned with the speculative insight that opposites "are united in such a way that they contradict themselves" (RSP, 324) – that is, that Socrates' forms are in fact "true" only insofar as they can be seen passing over into their own opposites. In other words, Hegel finds that Plato's *Parmenides* exhibits an awareness of the fact that objects of reason (the world, the mind, God) are self-contradictory, in bearing opposite predicates, but nevertheless true, in being the sort of object which is equally a subject. This is why, on Hegel's reading, the *Parmenides* cannot be interpreted as "skeptical" in Sextus' sense of the term. Even though it offers a refutation of Socrates' proposal, it does not do so without at the same time advancing a positive alternative to the theory of forms – an alternative which, on Hegel's reading, directly issues from the refutation itself. This is what Hegel ultimately means when he writes that the skepticism of Plato's *Parmenides* "is itself the negative side of the cognition of the Absolute, and directly presupposes Reason as the positive side" (RSP, 323) – that Plato articulates a form of "genuine" skepticism which compels us to move beyond the poles of Sextus' opposition¹⁰⁸ and the one-

¹⁰⁸ As Düsing puts it: "Genuine skepticism, for Hegel, is essentially a logic of the finite determinations of the Understanding, which stand in antinomies in each of the oppositions. Thus, the Understanding or Reflection proves to be antinomial in itself and hence contradictory in its own determinations. The oppositional-being and the contradiction of the finite, however, is for Hegel only the negative meaning of the infinite and the Absolute." Klaus Düsing, "Formen der Dialektik bei Plato und Hegel," 182 (*my translation*).

sided mode of cognition which it represents. Though in the *Skepticism* essay Hegel only offers a general indication of how the *Parmenides* expresses the unity of philosophy and skepticism, later, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he returns to this very same point.

Between the Skepticism essay and the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel's interpretation of the *Parmenides* undergoes a subtle shift in orientation. While Hegel focuses in the former on the skeptical features of Plato's dialogue, in the latter he apparently abandons this pursuit in favor of an analysis of the "logical" or "dialectical" element present in Plato's philosophy. Although Hegel's discussion no longer turns on the skeptical status of the dialogue, his analysis of Platonic dialectic nevertheless makes it clear that he considers Plato to be neither a skeptic nor a dogmatist, but rather a speculative philosopher in whom the equipollence of opposing concepts receives its first positive and systematic expression. As we will see, in distinguishing the speculative dialectic he sees at work in the *Parmenides* from two additional forms of dialectic then in currency (one that he associates with the Sophists, and another with the Eleatics), Hegel can be seen in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* intervening into the debate concerning the skeptical status of Plato's philosophy once more.

In the lectures, Hegel explains that the speculative dialectic that commences with Plato is concerned with the fulfillment of two intimately related tasks: (1) the demonstration of the self-contradictory nature of "the particular" and (2) the production and determination of "the universal." "The first concern of dialectic," Hegel explains,

... is to confound the particular, to refute its validity, since what gets exhibited is the finitude of the particular, the negation within it, the fact that it is conditioned,

that it is not in fact what it is but passes over into its opposite – that it has a limit, a negation of itself that is essential to it.¹⁰⁹

This description calls to mind Hegel's earlier account in the Skepticism essay of the "negative side" of the *Parmenides*. Indeed, what Hegel sees presaged here in Plato's text is once again the critical distinction mentioned above between reason and understanding. Here, however, Hegel presents the demonstration of the inherently self-contradictory nature of objects of understanding, what he refers to here as the "dissolution of the particular," not as a feature of "every genuine philosophical system," but as something that can be found even among the most dogmatic – or, indeed, the most skeptical – of philosophies: "it is a dialectic," Hegel explains, "that Plato has in common with the Sophists, who understood very well how to dissolve the particular" (LHP II 25-6, 197). Hegel makes a similar point when he remarks, in his article for the Critical Journal, that "since every genuine philosophy has this negative side, ... anyone who has the urge can set this negative side in relief and set forth for himself a skepticism" (RSP, 325). Here however, he goes one step further and distinguishes the dialectic that is peculiar to Plato from a "common dialectic" which he attributes to the Sophists, but which can be found among the skeptics as well. Unlike this "common dialectic," which "annuls one determination in the process of substantiating another" (LHP II 25-6, 199) – that is, which appeals to an opposing truth in order to contest the truth of a claim – the genuine Platonic dialectic has no need to appeal to some external criterion. This is because it directly exhibits the particular in its own self-contradictory nature – that is, because it shows the particular to depend upon its opposite for its own coherence. This is, presumably, why Socrates dismisses Zeno's refutation of "the many" in the opening section of Plato's dialogue – because it fails to demonstrate that "the many," were it

¹⁰⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6, Volume II: Greek Philosophy*, ed. Robert F. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 197. Hereafter cited parenthetically as LHP II 25-6.

to exist, would have to be both like and unlike itself, rather than be like in one respect and unlike in another.¹¹⁰ Not only, however, does Plato's dialectic, for this reason, put him squarely at odds with skeptics who, like Schulze – and even Sextus himself¹¹¹ – can dispute a given knowledge-claim only by taking recourse to some apparently undeniable fact (e.g., the "facts of consciousness"); Hegel suggests that it is only through demonstrating in this way the self-contradictory nature of the particular that we arrive at the universal, that rational object which, in containing all opposites, has nothing to which it is truly opposed.

Accordingly, the second task of Plato's dialectic "consists in taking the universal that emerges from the confounding of the finite, in defining it within itself and resolving the antitheses within it" (LHP II 25-6, 197). As Hegel observes, however, many of Plato's dialogues actually fail to meet this aim and often end without having arrived at any positive result.¹¹² At the end of the *Euthyphro*, for example, we do not learn so much what piety truly is as what it is not (e.g., that it is not "what is dear to the gods"). Dialogues such as these succeed in "bringing people's finite views into confusion and dissolution" (LHP II 25-6, 197) – that is, succeed in challenging a certain concept, or contesting a set of particular claims, but fail to bring the

¹¹⁰ Hegel makes the same point in reference to Zeno's dialectic: "It does not help if I prove my system or my proposition and then conclude that thus the opposite is false; to this other proposition the first always seems to be foreign and external. Falsity must not be demonstrated through another, and as untrue because the opposite is true, but in itself; we find this rational perception in Zeno." G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume I: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. E.S. Haldane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 264. Among other things, this comment suggests that Hegel may not identify the figure of Zeno in Plato's *Parmenides* with the actual historical personage.

¹¹¹ In Chapter Two, I suggested that the Pyrrhonists, in subordinating unity to opposition, fall prey to the same problem. See Chapter Two, especially pages 61-66.

¹¹² "Even Plato himself is still dialectical in an argumentative fashion, for the method and form is not yet elaborated in a pure, undiluted way; instead it sets out from individual perspectives and affirms the validity of other perspectives in an argumentative way. Often it has only a negative result and often no result at all" (LHP II 25-6, 197).

universal to consciousness. Nevertheless, Hegel finds that a number of Plato's dialogues also make good on this latter ambition – namely, the *Sophist*, the *Philebus*, and, above all, the

Parmenides:

The result of the dialectic of the *Parmenides* has a strange look: whether the One (τὸ ἓν) is or is not (either itself or the other Ideas, rest and motion, arising and perishing, and so forth – taken not only in isolation but also in relation to another), all of this together both is and is not, appears and appears not, and the One, or what is, both is and is not, appears and appears not. In our ordinary view we are very far from taking these wholly abstract categories – the One, being, non-being, appearing, rest, motion, and so forth – to be Ideas. But for Plato the Ideas are what is wholly universal. They show that they are dialectical, in that only identity with its other is what is true" (LHP II 25-6, 206).

The conclusion of the *Parmenides* is indeed strange. As we have seen, it ends not with any explicit pronouncement on the status of Socrates' theory of forms, but rather with the apparent affirmation of a whole host of contradictions which emerge over the course of Parmenides' dialectical exercise. On Hegel's mature reading, however, though Plato's dialogue ends in contradiction, it exhibits an affirmative result nonetheless, since the universal is articulated precisely in that activity whereby the forms transition into and are united with their opposites.¹¹³ Indeed, on Hegel's view, the universal, the true subject and object of thinking, is nothing other than this very activity.

Hegel contrasts the speculative dialectic he sees at work in Plato's *Parmenides* with one he associates with the Eleatics in order to clarify this crucial point:

The second thing Plato combats is the dialectic of the Eleatics and their thesis (shared by the Sophists) that only being is, and non-being is not at all. For the Sophists this thesis, as Plato presents it, has the sense that the negative is not at all, for only what has being *is*; that is, there is nothing false; what has being –

¹¹³ Hegel illustrates this point with the following example: "the 'becoming' of Heraclitus, which is the truth of being and non-being, belongs here. The truth of both is becoming; it is the unity of the two as inseparable. In the One, being is non-being and non-being is being; the unity of the two is in becoming" (LHP II 25-6, 206).

everything – is something true. In other words, everything that we perceive or imagine, the purposes we espouse, are purely affirmative determinations and, as such, are all something true and not something false (LHP II 25-6, 200).

Hegel calls special attention to the relativistic consequences that follow from this assumption, arguing that it undermines the distinction between true and false, right and wrong, virtue and vice. However, what is more important for our purposes is the fact that, on Hegel's view, the Eleatics cannot supply a determinate conception of the universal without renouncing this apparently "harmless" thesis. For Hegel, all determination is negation (*omnis determinatio est negatio*)¹¹⁴ and nothing *is* except insofar as it is involved in a process by which it is distinguished from what it is not. Accordingly, the universal – the only thing which, on Hegel's conception, properly speaking *is* – *is* only to the extent that it distinguishes itself from all particulars which, as we have seen, are by their very nature self-contradictory. Thus, absolute being, the universal, is not, as the Eleatics suggest, something that stands above and beyond particulars – some one whose very existence excludes that of the many, but *is* its negation. Because, on Hegel's reading, the Eleatics fail to grasp this crucial insight and deny the being of non-being, they can only think the universal in terms of an indeterminate one; because they fail to grasp "the one thing needed to achieve scientific progress... the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive" (SL, 33), they are left with the empty tautology that "being is."

In the dialectic that appears in the *Parmenides*, however, Hegel sees an anticipation of this all-important speculative insight. "For Plato," Hegel writes,

the highest form [of dialectic] is the identity of being and non-being. The true is what has being, τὸ ὄν, τὸ ὄντως ὄν. But this actual being is not devoid of

¹¹⁴ In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel attributes this famous formulation to Spinoza: "That determinateness is negation posited as affirmative is Spinoza's proposition: *omnis determinatio est negatio*, a proposition of infinite importance" G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87. Hereafter cited parenthetically as SL. All English translations of the *Science of Logic* refer to this edition.

negation. On the contrary, non-being is [too], and what is simple or self-identical partakes of the other, unity partakes of multiplicity (μετέχει, μέθεξις) (LHP II 25-6, 201).

Hegel acknowledges that the *Parmenides* never explicitly affirms the being of non-being.¹¹⁵ His suggestion, however, is that the dialogue exhibits an awareness of this decisive point in demonstrating the equipollence of opposing concepts even if no such statement can be found in Plato's text.¹¹⁶ Only on this supposition does it make sense to argue that the negation of the particular constitutes a determination of the universal. If this interpretation of the *Parmenides* is correct, and if the dialectical demonstration at its core does in fact reflect an appreciation of the being of non-being, not only does this distinguish Plato from the Eleatics and Sophists – it also sets him apart from the Pyrrhonists. Hegel does not make this point explicit in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* – presumably, because he considers it anachronistic to distinguish Plato from a philosophical movement that rose to prominence only after his death. As we saw in Chapter Two, however, Hegel presents the fact that Pyrrhonian skepticism "only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results*"¹¹⁷ as both its defining characteristic and fundamental

¹¹⁵ "The *Parmenides* seems... to have a result of a rather negative sort, such that the very thing that is truly first, or the prius, is not affirmative. Only the third stage, the negation of the negation, is what is affirmative. But that is not yet expressed here. So far as that goes, the result of the *Parmenides* may perhaps appear unsatisfactory to us" (LHP II 25-6, 206). A dissenting statement appears, however, in the *Science of Logic*: "Even the Platonic dialectic, in the *Parmenides* itself and elsewhere even more directly, on the one hand only has the aim of refuting limited assertions by internally dissolving them and, on the other hand, generally comes only to a negative result" (SL, 34-35).

¹¹⁶ "The point of Hegel's mature reading of *Parmenides*," de Laurentiis writes, "is... that he detects in it an objective logic leading inescapably, even against Plato's intention and self-understanding, to the recognition of such a contradictory 'one.'" Allegra de Laurentiis, *Subjects in the Ancient and Modern World: On Hegel's Theory of Subjectivity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 111.

¹¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 51. See also G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 60 (§31R) and LHP II 25-6, 302.

flaw. Thus, because on this reading Plato's dialectic subsumes but ultimately transforms features which have come to define the skeptical persuasion, Hegel's mature interpretation of the *Parmenides* can be read as an attempt to more clearly articulate what he had earlier conceived in the Skepticism essay in terms of the relationship of skepticism to philosophy,¹¹⁸ and to portray Plato as a speculative thinker whose contribution to the history of philosophy is only obscured by its skeptical assimilation.¹¹⁹

Hegel's interpretation of the *Parmenides* certainly departs from the more familiar account of Plato that has come down to us from the tradition, but to what extent does his reading reflect a careful and historically sensitive engagement with Plato's philosophy? If, as Hegel himself admits, the *Parmenides* never explicitly affirms the unity of opposites, and if, as others suggest, the only textual evidence that Hegel can muster in support of this crucial claim derives from a now notorious "mistranslation" of the *Sophist*,¹²⁰ what sense is there in even countenancing such an interpretation? Given these considerations, isn't it just as likely that Hegel, like Arcesilaus, is merely foisting his own presuppositions onto Plato in an effort to shore up his own philosophical

¹¹⁸ This indeed accords with Hegel's statement in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that "the dialectical [moment], when taken in isolation by the understanding, constitutes *skepticism*." G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline: Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), §81R. Hereafter cited parenthetically as ENC.

¹¹⁹ Hegel admits, however, both in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and the *Science of Logic*, that the dialectic of the *Parmenides* is not "wholly pure," since Plato at one point derives the non-being of the One from the proposition "the One is," which contains two determinations (namely, "the One" and "being"), rather than deriving this from the One considered by itself. Cf. LHP II 25-6, 207 and SL, 76.

¹²⁰ According to Hegel, Plato says "definitively" at *Sophist* 259c-d that "what is other – τὸ ἕτερον – is also the same (αὐτόν) or the self-identical, and what is the same (self-identical) is the other too, and indeed in one and the same respect (and not in such a way as to confute and contradict one another), and according to the same aspect, so that they are identical" (LHP II 25-6, 201). Gadamer, among others, has pointed out that "what is actually said is that what is difficult to grasp yet true is that when someone says, the same is in some way different, one must inquire in *which* sense and in *which* respect it is different." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers," in *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 22.

ambitions – or, at the very least, that he is so completely immersed in the concerns of his own age that he cannot achieve the critical distance that is necessary for an unbiased historical study? How, indeed, can anyone leap outside of their place in history and attain to such an impartial perspective? Unfortunately, Hegel gives us no reason to believe that his interpretation of the *Parmenides* agrees with Plato's own intentions, but, as we will see, he does offer a powerful argument as to why this does not undermine its legitimacy. Hegel grants that we need "a wholly unbiased, impartial, dispassionate spirit in order to study Plato's dialogues" (LHP II 25-6, 198), but he insists that the historian of philosophy need not leave his own age behind in order to apprehend the philosophical significance of an earlier historical text. In order to understand how Hegel attempts to justify his heterodox interpretation of the *Parmenides*, let us look next to Hegel's own philosophical historiography, his theory of the writing of history, where he offers a way forward beyond these apparent *aporiai* and explains how it is possible to achieve a standpoint that would validate his engagement with the history of philosophy.

Part Two: History and Skepticism

Hegel begins his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* by examining three varieties of historiography: "original history," "reflective history," and "philosophical history." He associates the first mode of historiography, "original history," with historians like Herodotus and Thucydides, who "wrote down the events that they experienced or described the deeds of which they were aware."¹²¹ A work of original history is not necessarily written by one who has

¹²¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Volume I: Manuscripts of the Introduction and The Lectures of 1822-3*, ed. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 133. Hereafter cited parenthetically as LPWH.

personally witnessed the events in question, but its author must belong to the same historical context within which these events originally occurred. Since the original historian "stands and lives in the material itself" (LPWH, 134), they do not need to abstract from their own historical situation in order to express what was particular to the epoch which they describe, for, as Hegel writes, "the spirit of the author and the general spirit of the actions he relates, are *one and the same*" (LPWH, 134). Indeed, the historian's testimony is, in this respect, no different than that of any other contemporary observer: "even if he elaborates on what they said, the substance, culture, and consciousness of this elaboration are identical with the substance and consciousness of those whom he has speak in this fashion" (LPWH, 69).

Hegel contrasts original history with "reflective history," the second mode of historiography which he examines. If original history presents what is peculiar to a given epoch from the internal standpoint of one who has lived through it, reflective history, by contrast, offers an image of the past that is the product of later historical reflection – it is a history "whose portrayal goes beyond what is present simply to the author and that depicts not only what was present in time but is present in the life of spirit" (LPWH, 71). Unlike the original historian, the reflective historian does not concentrate their efforts on any one particular epoch, but attempts to provide a historical narrative that is more comprehensive, more expansive, in scope – "what one expects from them above all is a survey of the whole of a people or of world history" (LPWH, 136). For this reason, however, they cannot assume the perspective of any one of the ages they describe; rather, they must try to transcend each of these and achieve a standpoint from which it is possible to engage each epoch with the same impartiality. As Hegel points out, however, such attempts are never particularly successful. Not only must the reflective historian "more or less dispense with individual portrayals of reality and [make do with] abstractions, epitomes, and

abbreviations" (LPWH, 74) in their attempt to compose a unified narrative, but since "the spirit of the time in which the [reflective] historian writes is different from the spirit of the time that is to be described" (LPWH, 136), their descriptions can never approximate the same degree of historical accuracy that is exhibited in a work of original history. When the reflective historian attempts to describe the spirit of a bygone era, Hegel explains, "it is usually his own spirit that is heard" (LPWH, 72).¹²² It doesn't matter whether the reflective historian calls upon the past for the purpose of moral instruction or simply in order to evaluate the credibility of conflicting historical accounts (what Hegel calls "pragmatic" and "critical" history, respectively), for in each instance, the problem remains the same: their account of the past is burdened by the weight of present concerns, distorted by the particularity of their own historical situation.¹²³

A number of skeptical and relativist conclusions can be drawn from the observation that every individual is the product of unique historical circumstances which one can no more escape "than one can jump out of one's own skin."¹²⁴ Since all historical knowledge is mediated in this way, one may argue, no true knowledge of history is possible.¹²⁵ Hegel, however, rejects this

¹²² In the 1822-23 lecture course, Hegel claims that reflective histories tend to fail because "the whole should convey a single tone, whereas the spirit and culture of diverse times are not uniform" (LPWH, 136), but this should not be taken to suggest that he is primarily concerned with stylistic considerations in his examination of the varieties of historiography. This is made abundantly clear in his discussion of philosophical history.

¹²³ Hegel does not discuss these three varieties of historiography in the manuscript introduction to his 1830-31 lecture series, but he does express there a similar concern to the one he raises in connection to reflective history: "Even the ordinary, average historian, who believes and professes that his attitude is entirely receptive, that he devotes himself only to the given, is not passive in his thinking and introduces his own categories as medium through which to view the available evidence" (LPWH, 81).

¹²⁴ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6, Volume I: Introduction and Oriental Philosophy*, ed. Robert F. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 67. Hereafter cited parenthetically as LHP I 25-6.

¹²⁵ George Dennis O'Brian also sees skeptical concerns potentially emerging from this historicist insight: "If self-consciousness is finally private and personal consciousness, then the interference of self-consciousness, the necessary infusion of the historian's spirit into his narrative, will always lead back to private subjectivity and one's view of historical narrative will be relativistic and skeptical at best." George Dennis O'Brian, *Hegel on Reason and History: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 33.

conclusion. In order to understand the basis for this rejection, we turn now to the third mode of historiography, what Hegel calls "philosophical history." As we will see, this is the mode of historiography at work not only in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, but also in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, where his mature interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* is found.

Philosophical history, like reflective history, has something universal for its subject matter, "but," Hegel explains, "this is no abstract universal; rather it is what is infinitely concrete and utterly present" (LPWH, 140). Both the reflective historian and the philosophical historian are interested in past events insofar as these comprise a totality. However, whereas the reflective historian is only concerned with the fact that these events belong to a given whole (for instance, the whole of human history), the philosophical historian aims to discover the principle by which all such events are organized. Their question is not simply what has occurred in the history of the world (*res gestae*), but what ultimately determines the actions and deeds which unfold over its course and the individuals through whom they are enacted. Their answer (the philosophical historian's and Hegel's) is that "reason governs the world" (LPWH, 79). Reason, Hegel explains,

is itself the *infinite material* of all natural and spiritual life and the *infinite form* that activates this its content. [It is] the *substance* whereby and wherein all actuality has its being and subsistence. [It is] infinite *power*, for reason is not so impotent as to yield only an ideal or a moral ought, and only outside the bounds of actuality, or who knows where – perhaps merely as something particular that exists in the heads of a few individuals. [It is] the infinite *content*, all essentiality and truth, itself constituting the material on which it operates by its own activity. Unlike finite action, it does not require the limiting factors of external materials or a given medium from which to derive its sustenance and the objects of its activity. It feeds upon itself, it is itself the material that it labors on. Just as it is itself its own presupposition, its own end, the absolute final end, so it is itself the activation and the bringing forth, out of inwardness into appearance, into world history, not only of the natural universe but also of the spiritual realm (LPWH, 80).

To say that reason governs the world and directs the course of world history is, therefore, to say that the historical process is the activity of a subject that knows itself to be its own object – the work of an infinite, self-determining subject that realizes itself through the actions of individual self-conscious agents. This work, Hegel insists, is not arbitrary, but is guided by the principle of freedom: "the *application* of this principle to actuality, the penetration and transformation of the worldly conditions by the principle of freedom, is the long process that is history itself" (LPWH, 88). Thus, world history, for Hegel, is a rational process oriented toward the actualization of human freedom, and it is the task of the philosophical historian to trace this development in time through the accomplishments (and failures) of the individual historical actors through whom this process is effected.

But why see history this way? We have already considered concerns, after all, about how the reflective historian's conception of their object is influenced by their own historical circumstances in a way that threatens the reliability of his account. For example, one may worry about how a modern historian's conception of science impacts the history of science they offer. Since it is clear that one can raise this objection to any work of reflective history, why should it not be the same with the philosophical historian's notion of history as governed by reason? Isn't this no more than a presupposition that stems from some historian's particular historical situation?

When it comes to philosophical history these concerns ultimately prove misplaced. This is because "its point of view," Hegel explains, "is not a particular universal, nor is it one of many general viewpoints that is singled out abstractly at the neglect of others; rather it is a *concrete* universal, the spiritual principle of peoples and the history of this principle" (LPWH, 141). In other words, if the philosophical historian sees reason at work in every epoch, this is not because

they have taken their own age for granted, nor because they have somehow managed to abstract themselves from the historical conditions in which they are embedded. Rather it is precisely the particularity of their own historical moment that affords them an adequate conception of their object, because theirs is the age in which reason, the universal, has come to an adequate comprehension of itself – the age in which it has become possible to consider history *rationally*.¹²⁶ As Hegel puts it,

...the main objection brought against philosophy is that it approaches history, and reflects on it, with thoughts or conceptions [*Gedanken*]. However, the sole conception that it [philosophical history] brings with it is the simple conception of reason – the conception that reason governs the world, and that therefore world history is a rational process. From the point of view of history as such, this conviction and insight is a *presupposition*. Within philosophy itself this is no presupposition: by means of speculative cognition it is *proved* that *reason... is substance* and infinite power (LPWH, 79).

When looking to justify the standpoint of philosophical history, then, we can look nowhere but to philosophy itself. It is not by some external standard that it is to be measured – for example, by its correspondence to some event lying, as it were, buried in the past – but by the cogency of the philosophical demonstration which it offers. To properly evaluate a work of philosophical history requires, then, that one come to grips with the claim that reason governs world history and that this rational process is teleologically determined by the idea of human freedom, absolute reality as it unfolds in time through the medium of human spirit. But this, in turn, requires the examination of certain claims that lie at the heart of Hegel's system – above all, those regarding the self-justification of reason and the autonomy of philosophical science. While

¹²⁶ "To consider something rationally," as Hegel explains in his introduction to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, "means not to bring reason to bear on the object from outside in order to work upon it, for the object is itself rational for itself; it is the spirit in its freedom, the highest apex of self-conscious reason, which here gives itself actuality and engenders itself as an existing world; and the sole business of science is to make conscious this work which is accomplished by the reason of the thing [*Sache*] itself." G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §31R.

it cannot be my task here to expound upon Hegel's justification for these fundamental claims which he regards as the all-important achievement of that investigation conducted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,¹²⁷ it is important to note that though philosophy is, for Hegel, "wholly identical with the spirit of its age" (LHP I 25-6, 67), he also regards it as reason's own self-comprehension: the universal as it comes to know itself through the particular. This is what Hegel means when he writes, "The spirit of its age is its [philosophy's] specific, worldly content, although at the same time philosophy as knowing is outside the age, which it sets over against itself" (LPH I 25-6, 67). Thus, when the philosophical historian engages history philosophically, they are neither insulated from the concerns of their own age nor entirely bound to and limited by them.

Now that we have come to understand why philosophical history is not burdened by the same problems as reflective history, let us now return to Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. In reading these lectures, I suggest, one must consider what kind of history Hegel's own history of philosophy is, that is, which of the three modes of historiography outlined by Hegel it reflects. After all, although Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* examine philosophical thought systems rather than *res gestae*, these thought systems must nevertheless be considered the deeds of concrete historical actors. By examining Hegel's own introductory remarks to these lectures, I will demonstrate that Hegel understands his own account of the history of philosophy to be a work – not of original history nor of reflective history – but of philosophical history in the sense described above. It is in the context of a *philosophical* history of philosophy, then, that Hegel engages with Plato's *Parmenides*. Hence, we will see that the

¹²⁷ In Chapters Two and Three, I interpret the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a work of self-completing skepticism upon which natural consciousness comes to recognize itself as absolute reality. Although the *Phenomenology* leads consciousness to the standpoint of science, in Chapter Three I suggest that the justification for the autonomy of philosophical science is internal to the Logic itself.

mode of historiography operative in his mature interpretation of the *Parmenides* already anticipates concerns surrounding the historical status of this interpretation. For just as in the case of philosophical world history, the task is not to understand the significance of past events from the perspective of those who lived through them but to discover the principle by which all such events are organized, Hegel's task in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* is not to lay bare the intentions of an historical author but to discover the principle that organizes all historical systems of thought.

Hegel opens his 1823-24 *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* with a reflection on the supposed need for impartiality in composing an historical narrative:

It is admittedly justifiable to require that a history of any topic whatsoever recount the facts without partiality, without seeking to validate some particular interest and aim. Yet a commonplace requirement of this sort does not amount to much because the history of a topic is necessarily linked very closely to the view one forms of that topic. In light of that view, one decides for oneself what counts as important and pertinent. Then the way one relates what has taken place to that decision brings selectivity into the narration of events. It introduces a method of grasping them and perspectives that govern their arrangement (LHP I 25-6, 205-06).

In these remarks, Hegel introduces the same concern that we saw him address above in the context of reflective history. At first sight, it seems quite reasonable to demand of a work of history that it dispense with all presuppositions and consider its object impartially, for these presuppositions would seem to restrict what the work can discover to the particular concerns of its author and the historical conditions in which it is embedded.

While one may raise such concerns about any history whatsoever, these concerns would seem especially relevant to the kind of history that Hegel is undertaking in these lectures – namely, the history of philosophy. After all, there is no generally agreed-upon notion of what philosophy itself is. As Hegel himself admits, this is what sets philosophy apart from other

sciences: “that there are the most diverse views even about its concept, about what philosophy could and should be accomplishing” (LHP I 25-6, 206). Thus it would seem that the historian of philosophy can do nothing but project his own particular conception onto the past and evaluate each previous system on this basis. The result is that the history of philosophy appears to be open to the charge of dogmatism – that is, of harboring unwarranted presuppositions.

Hegel argues, however, that it is neither possible nor even desirable to make a presuppositionless beginning in constructing a history of philosophy. As we have seen, thinking, for Hegel, is always historical, always bound to the particular time of its emergence. It is therefore impossible for the historian of philosophy to understand earlier philosophical systems apart from the conception of philosophy at work in the historian's own particular age. More emphatically, without any presupposition, the historian of philosophy could have no conception at all of what they are examining. In this case, the philosophical tradition would appear to be nothing more than a meaningless sequence of events with nothing to render them intelligible. This is why Hegel argues that “wanting impartiality in the history of philosophy is no different from wanting that history to be devoid of thought and content, to be just one thing after another, a narration leading up to the present day without connecting its various parts” (LHP I 25-6, 247).

Such attempts at offering an impartial history of philosophy are strange indeed in that they require that we approach the tradition as if it were totally insignificant to the present, or as Hegel occasionally puts it, as if this tradition were not alive and active but dead and gone: “Dealing with what is lifeless,” Hegel warns, “is itself devoid of life. The heart must be dead if it is said to find its satisfaction in dealing with cadavers” (LHP I 25-6, 62). To relate to the philosophical tradition as a living tradition is not to understand it as something external to ourselves, the significance of which lies buried in the distant past, but to understand it as the

development of our own thinking: "its historical course does not present the coming-into-being of things foreign to us, but is *our own becoming, the coming about of our scientific knowledge*" (LHP I 25-6, 210). To understand this point better, how it is that the history of philosophy bears upon our present thinking, however, we need to look more closely at Hegel's discussion of the concept of philosophy which forms the basis for his historical interpretations. This discussion makes it clear that Hegel thinks that the history of philosophy can hold significance for the present age without being bound by it.

It is usually assumed that the history of philosophy must proceed impartially and is thus taken for granted that the goal of such history should be to provide an objective portrayal of previous philosophical developments. This is not, however, Hegel's approach. For Hegel, just as philosophical history is concerned with past events only to the extent that they are expressions of reason, a philosophical history of philosophy takes up past philosophical systems only insofar as they constitute determinate stages in the self-comprehension of the idea – what Hegel describes in the *Science of Logic* as the absolute unity of concept and object. Thus, "by stripping away from the basic concepts of the systems appearing in the history of philosophy whatever pertains to their external configuration, to their application to particular concerns, and the like, we are left with the different stages of determination of the idea itself in its logical concepts" (LHP I 25-6, 176). In other words, while Hegel takes the idea to be one by virtue of the systematic relations of which it is comprised, he holds that the unity of the idea can nevertheless be observed in history through the relationships that obtain among distinct philosophical systems – namely, through the fact that each philosophical perspective can be shown to contain the various systems which have preceded it in time. The diversity of *philosophies* throughout history, then, is no argument against the existence of such a unity, but is rather its historical warrant. For, as Hegel puts it,

"one idea is in the whole and in all its parts, just as in a living individual one life or one pulse courses through all the members" (LHP I 25-6, 175).

To be clear, Hegel's claim is not that each philosophical system in the past was consciously aware of its involvement in this unitary, dialectical development, just as historical actors are not aware of their role in the gradual unfolding of significant historical events. Rather, this development can only be discerned from the philosophical standpoint of the contemporary age. It is only at this point – the point at which reason arrives at an adequate conception of itself – that past philosophical systems can be comprehended as particular stages in the self-determination of the whole. For the historian of philosophy in the present age, past philosophical systems are not therefore mere relics, artifacts of a distant and remote reality. As stages in the development of our own thinking, that is, the one thinking that pervades the entirety of human history and links together each successive age, they are of more than mere historical significance.¹²⁸

This is why Hegel thinks that it is not problematic, but indeed, necessary, that the history of philosophy is oriented by a particular conception of its object – because it is only by virtue of this conception that it becomes possible "to *understand* [*verstehen*] the works of the philosophers who have labored within its framework" (LHP I 25-6, 206). Even though this conception comes onto the scene in one particular stage in the development of human history, this does not mean that it is merely a reflection of its time, for Hegel insists that the universal can only express itself in the particular – that the universal, absolute reality, is nothing other than its own particularization. As Hegel explains in the *Science of Logic*, "Since it [the absolute idea] contains

¹²⁸ As de Laurentiis puts it: "One epoch's spirit is made up of that of all previous epochs and transforms the latter by assimilation into something new, namely itself. This is why to read history is for us not to read a story of extraneous events but our own story." Allegra de Laurentiis, "Metaphysical Foundations of the History of Philosophy: Hegel's 1820 Introduction to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*," *Review of Metaphysics* 59, no. 1 (2005): 8.

all determinateness within it, and its essence consists in returning through its self-determination and particularization back to itself, it has various shapes, and the business of philosophy is to recognize it in these" (SL, 735). By the same token, it is the business of the philosophical history of philosophy to recognize the absolute idea as it emerges in each particular epoch within this tradition.¹²⁹

At this point, one may still demur and claim that the history of philosophy must forgo any preconception of its object if it is to offer anything like an impartial representation of the past. There are two problems, however, with this objection. First, as we have already seen, such an objection would have to engage the philosophical demonstration that Hegel offers in support of this conception of philosophy. For this, Hegel refers us to the *Logic*.¹³⁰ Secondly, this objection comes with its own presupposition about the aim of the history of philosophy – namely, that it must necessarily involve an unmediated grasp of past thinking. The objection, therefore, cannot stand without providing justification for why we ought to conceive of the history of philosophy this way – that is, along the lines of what Hegel calls reflective history.

¹²⁹ Hegel first developed this understanding of the history of philosophy as the history of reason's own self-differentiation in his 1801 essay on *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*: "Speculation is the activity of the one universal Reason directed upon itself. Reason, therefore, does not view the philosophical systems of different epochs and different heads merely as different modes [of doing philosophy] and purely idiosyncratic views. Once it has liberated its own view from contingencies and limitations, Reason necessarily finds itself throughout all the particular forms – or else a mere manifold of the concepts and opinions of the intellect; and such a manifold is no philosophy. The true peculiarity of a philosophy lies in the interesting individuality which is the organic shape that Reason has built for itself out of the material of a particular age." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, ed. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 88. While it remains unclear how Hegel thinks that the liberation of reason's "own view from contingencies and limitations" must proceed, it is evident that he regards it as the task of the history of philosophy to trace the self-comprehension of reason as it emerges in every epoch.

¹³⁰ "The task and business of philosophy itself," Hegel writes, "is to present the one mode of this emergence, the derivation of the configurations, the necessity of the determinations as it is thought and known. Because doing so involves the pure idea and not yet its further particular configuration as nature and spirit, this presentation is pre-eminently the task and the business of *logical* philosophy" (LHP I 25-6, 176).

The fact that Hegel insists that the history of philosophy must presuppose the concept of philosophy and that he thinks that any attempt to avoid this presupposition ensures the irrelevance, if not incoherence, of one's account, makes it clear that he thinks that the history of philosophy can only be successful as a philosophical history of philosophy. This is indeed the strategy that Hegel takes in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. He does not attempt to abstract away from his own historical circumstances so as to attain an unmediated grasp of the thought of an earlier epoch, for he is not concerned with what is particular to that age except inasmuch as it represents a particularization of the universal, a determinate stage in the historical development of the idea.¹³¹

Understanding Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* as a philosophical history of philosophy allows us to see why his interpretation of the *Parmenides* may not be open to the same sort of objections we considered above in connection with reflective history. If it is true that Hegel's interpretation proceeds from an adequate conception of philosophy – a conception that comes to light only in Hegel's own time, then it is only natural that he should see in the *Parmenides* an anticipation of his own speculative metaphysics, for his account entails that these are but two stages in the development of one and the same thinking. This would be problematic if Hegel's conception of philosophy were merely a reflection of his own particular historical circumstances, but his claim, as we have seen, is that it is also universal – that it is this conception which ultimately determines the shape which thought takes in each and every epoch.

¹³¹ Hegel offers a strikingly similar description of the relationship of the historian of philosophy to the thought of previous epochs in *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*. In this early essay, however, Hegel describes the philosophical comprehension of the past in terms of intuition: "The particular speculative Reason [of a later time] finds in it spirit of its spirit, flesh of its flesh, it intuits itself in it as one and the same and yet as another living being." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, ed. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 88.

Even so, it may be argued, Hegel gives us no reason to believe that his interpretation of the *Parmenides* accords with Plato's actual intentions; even if Hegel has uncovered the true concept of philosophy, it is by no means clear that Plato had this concept in mind when he originally conceived his dialogue. This, however, is precisely Hegel's point. His concern is not with how Plato understood his own philosophical project – indeed, he himself admits that "in the most important matters we cannot sympathize with the Greeks [or share] their feelings" (LPWH, 73). It makes no difference then whether Plato understood himself to be a skeptic. Hegel's sole interest in Plato is with how his philosophy marks an important stage in the historical development of the idea. By understanding Hegel's interpretation of the *Parmenides* in the context of a philosophical history of philosophy, we can see why it is no objection to point out the vast historical gulf that separates Hegel from Plato or to insist upon the close affinity between Hegel's interpretation of this dialogue and his own philosophical project. Such objections are only valid when brought against a work of history that attempts to transpose its reader to an earlier epoch and secure an unmediated relationship to the past. As we have seen, however, this is not the mode of historiography at work in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

In this chapter, I have tried to show that Hegel's interpretation of the *Parmenides* must be read in light of his discussion of philosophical historiography, and that concerns surrounding the historical status of this interpretation reflect a limited understanding of the role of history in Hegel's philosophical project. I would now like to argue, by way of conclusion, that Hegel's approach to the historicist concerns raised above in connection with reflective history can be seen as an extension of his enduring engagement with skepticism.

To demand impartiality from a work of history is to require that the historian transcend the historical conditions in which they are embedded and achieve an unmediated grasp of their

object. But this, as we have seen in previous chapters, is the same demand that the skeptic imposes on knowledge in general. This is what is articulated, for example, in the Third Mode of Agrippa, when Sextus writes that: "the existing object appears to be such-and-such relative to the subject judging and to the things observed together with it, but we [skeptics] suspend judgment on what it is like in its nature" (OS, 41). The skeptic sees quite clearly that knowledge is always mediated, that objects only ever appear to us under particular conditions. Indeed, the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus are exclusively devoted to demonstrating this point in various ways. However, what the skeptic does not recognize in all of this is a fundamental assumption about knowledge operating implicitly in her own account. What the skeptic assumes is that to know an object is to know it independently of the conditions under which it appears to us, to know it without preconception or presupposition – that is, to know it *immediately*. In other words, what the skeptic assumes is that all mediated, particular knowledge must be considered unreliable. But, as we saw in the last chapter, in exposing the opposition between immediacy and mediation as a presupposition of the understanding and demonstrating there to be nothing truly immediate but the self-mediating totality of the absolute idea, Hegel effectively undermines the very basis for skeptical reasoning.

As I hope this chapter has made clear, the historian's concern about the mediating effect of their historical situation is similarly short-sighted, for it only arises when the historian strives for an unmediated grasp of past events. As Hegel shows, however, this reflects a one-sided conception of history, one that confines the historian to the particularity of their age and precludes a rational comprehension of the past. This is not the case, however, for the concept of history that forms the basis for philosophical history. Although the philosophical historian's knowledge of the past is surely mediated by the spirit of their age, this is no reason to consider

their account dogmatic – an unjustified assertion of a particular historical vantage point. As we have seen, it is only because the philosophical historian belongs to the age in which reason has arrived at an adequate self-conception that they are able to see every age, including their own, as a moment in this development. Their particular historical situation is therefore no obstacle to their analysis but rather what supports its claim to universality. Here again, Hegel's strategy is not to deny the existence of such mediation or particularity, but to show that mediation and immediacy are but two sides of one and the same rational process. To insist upon the mutual exclusivity of immediacy and mediation is to insist upon an abstract conception of universality – a conception according to which the universal stands apart from its particular instantiations. It is this conception of universality that is ultimately at work when we suppose that the historian is separated from the past by an unbridgeable gulf, or when the skeptic denies the unity of concept and object. This is the fundamental insight that informs Hegel's approach to skepticism: thought, as truly universal, is nothing other than its own particularization. Both the skeptic and the historicist fail to appreciate this crucial point, however, in employing a finite mode of thinking which leads them to focus narrowly on the opposition of the universal and the particular and, consequently, to treat with suspicion all particular, mediated claims to knowledge. As Hegel explains in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, such a procedure is hardly different than asking for fruit and rejecting “cherries, pears, and grapes simply because they are cherries, pears, and grapes, but *not* fruit” (ENC, §13R).

As I have tried to show, this same idea informs Hegel's own ventures into the history of philosophy. It is with this in mind, after all, that he locates the speculative dimension of Plato's *Parmenides*. On Hegel's interpretation, Parmenides rejects the young Socrates' proposal and recommends that he engage in a dialectical exercise because, in taking the forms to be separate

from the particular objects in which they are instantiated, Socrates fails to recognize the sense of the universal that is not opposed to but is found within its own particularization. It is for this reason that the set of contradictions presented at the conclusion of Plato's *Parmenides* does not leave us merely in suspense of judgment, as the Pyrrhonist would prefer, but offers, on Hegel's terms, a "self-sustaining document and system of genuine skepticism" (RSP, 323) and an instance of true philosophy.

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