

Seven

The Dialectic

A CRITICAL FOUNDATION FOR METAPHYSICS

Having sketched Hegel's metaphysics in previous chapters (Three–Six), we must now see how he attempted to justify it. The problem of justification was indeed an especially formidable one for Hegel. His absolute idealism, his organicism, his concept of spirit and notion of God, are metaphysics on the grandest scale. Through pure thinking alone Hegel attempts to give us knowledge of reality in itself, the absolute or the universe as a whole. It was in just this sense, however, that Kant had attacked the possibility of metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hegel had no choice, therefore, but to face the Kantian challenge. After all, as we saw (pp. 54–5), Hegel affirms what Kant denies: that it is possible to have a knowledge through pure reason of the absolute or the unconditioned.

To the neo-Kantians, Hegel failed to address this challenge. His metaphysics was an irresponsible relapse into pre-Kantian 'dogmatism', a self-conscious attempt to revive the tradition of Leibniz, Malebranche and Spinoza, which had uncritically attempted to give us knowledge through pure reason about reality in itself. Hegel himself seemed to encourage this charge when, in the introduction to the *Encyclopedia*, he commended the old rationalism for its attempt to know reality through pure thinking, and even placed it on a higher level than Kantian criticism (§28). It was on these grounds that the neo-Kantians cried: 'Back to Kant!' They demanded a return to epistemic responsibility, so that philosophy became a handmaiden

to the empirical sciences and did little more than examine the limits of knowledge.

But the neo-Kantian interdict against Hegel did him scant justice. It completely ignored the extent to which he endorsed Kantian criticism and distanced himself from the rationalist tradition. This is fully clear from Hegel's retrospective assessment of the old metaphysics and Kantian criticism in the introduction to the *Encyclopedia*. It was one of Kant's great merits, he wrote, to have subjected the old metaphysics to criticism (§41A1). He agreed entirely with Kant that one of the chief failures of past metaphysics was its *dogmatism*, i.e. its failure to investigate the powers and limits of reason (§26). Hence Hegel fully endorsed the demands of Kantian criticism, insisting that 'any future metaphysics that comes forward as a science alone' would first have to pass the test of criticism. The old metaphysics was naive, because it simply assumed that we could know truth through thinking alone without having first investigated this possibility. There were two respects, Hegel further explained, in which the old metaphysics was uncritical: first, it did not examine the meaning of the concepts that it applied to the unconditioned; and, second, it did not investigate the limitations of the traditional forms of judgment in knowing the truth (§28R). Hegel's diagnosis of the chief failing of the old metaphysics is very similar to Kant's: its main problem was that it applied the concepts of the understanding to the infinite or the unconditioned (§28A). Since these concepts are valid only for the finite realm of experience, we cannot apply them to the infinite.

So far was Hegel from resisting Kant's demand for criticism that he insisted that Kant had not gone far enough. In the *Encyclopedia* he argued that Kant's critique of metaphysics had been deficient on several counts (§41A1–2). First, Kant did not investigate the inherent logic of concepts themselves, determining their precise meaning and powers. Rather, he just classified concepts as either subjective or objective according to his presupposed epistemological principles. Second, Kant insisted that we should have a

criterion of knowledge before we make claims to knowledge; but this demand created an infinite regress, for the criterion of knowledge too amounts to a claim to knowledge, so that we need another higher criterion to test it. Third, Kant failed to see that we cannot criticize the forms of thinking without first using them. Hegel likened his attempt to know the logic of our concepts before using them to the efforts of the wise Scholasticus to learn to swim before jumping in the water. All these points came together in Hegel's complaint that the method of Kantian criticism is *external*, presupposing the truth of some standard of criticism that does not derive from the concepts themselves. Against Kant, Hegel insisted that the criticism of knowledge must be *internal*, so that the subject matter is evaluated according to its own inherent standards and goals. It is for this reason that the method of the *Phenomenology* would be the *self-examination* or *self-criticism* of consciousness.

It was Hegel's recognition of the rightful demands of Kantian criticism that eventually forced him to abandon the concept of intellectual intuition, which, along with Schelling, he once championed as the organ of absolute knowledge. An intellectual intuition was meant to be a purely experiential, immediate or non-discursive grasp of the absolute. In the late 1790s and early 1800s Hegel advocated intellectual intuition because he shared the common romantic view that reason cannot grasp the unconditioned. Since reason grasps everything according to the principle of sufficient reason, it postulates an infinite series of conditions or causes, so that it is incapable of conceiving what is unconditioned or self-causing. Around 1804, however, Hegel began to realize that the appeal to an intellectual intuition is ultimately dogmatic.¹ If someone contradicts the claims of intellectual intuition, it is impossible to demonstrate them according to the common understanding. What right, then, does the intuition have to our assent? The principle of self-thought of the critical philosophy – a principle that Hegel explicitly reaffirmed – demands that we accept only those beliefs that agree with the critical exercise of our own reason; but

the claims of an intellectual intuition pretend to stand above any such exercise.

Hegel's endorsement of Kantian criticism, his critique of the methods of the older rationalism, and his rejection of intellectual intuition, all derived from his deeply held conviction that metaphysics stood in need of a new foundation. Ever since his early Jena years, Hegel's fundamental concern was to provide a critical foundation for metaphysics. This new metaphysics would be critical in the sense that it would begin with a critique of knowledge – an examination of the limits and powers of reason – and then derive metaphysics from it. It would start with the examination of our ordinary experience or the use of our everyday concepts, and then show how the ideas of metaphysics are necessary conditions of such experience or the use of such concepts. In more Kantian terms, Hegel was saying that the conditions of experience involve not only the intuitions of sensibility and concepts of understanding but also the ideas of reason. Such a metaphysics therefore would be immanent in the Kantian sense, remaining within the limits of experience and renouncing speculation beyond it.

Hegel saw his metaphysics not only as a *possibility* but as a *necessity* of the critical philosophy itself. It was only through metaphysics, he argued, that the critical philosophy could resolve its own inherent problems, and more specifically the problem of the possibility of knowledge. As we have already seen (pp. 104–7), during the 1790s many thinkers had argued that Kant's dualisms made it impossible for him to resolve this problem. The possibility of knowledge required some correspondence between the realms of the intellectual and the empirical, the subjective and the objective; but Kant had postulated such a sharp dualism between these realms that any correspondence between them became unintelligible. For Hegel, the necessity of metaphysics therefore derived from the need to explain the single source of Kant's divided faculties. Kant himself had forsworn all speculation about the single source of understanding and sensibility; but, without such speculation, Hegel argued,

there could be no resolution of the fundamental problem of the critical philosophy itself.

Once we take into account this point it becomes clear that the neo-Kantian reaction against Hegel's metaphysics really only begged the question against it. For the underlying assumption behind the demand for a return to Kant is that epistemology is autonomous, perfectly capable of resolving its problems on its own without metaphysics. Yet it was just this assumption that had worn so thin, and proven so illusory, to Hegel's generation, the thinkers who came of age in the 1790s. By the late 1790s the dreams of epistemology as a *philosophia prima* had been utterly shattered. After the *Grundsatzkritik* and meta-critical campaign, it had become clear to many not only that epistemology could not be *philosophia prima* but also that it could not resolve its own problems. These developments were completely forgotten by the neo-Kantians, who had fallen into a dogmatic slumber all their own.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS ABOUT DIALECTIC

For Hegel, the problem of justifying metaphysics was essentially one of discovering and following the right philosophical method. It has been wisely said that 'Hegel is the most methodologically self-conscious of all philosophers in the Western tradition'.² This statement is especially true of Hegel during his Jena years, when he was in desperate search for the proper methodology to justify his new metaphysics. The eventual fruit of this search was his dialectic.

The very term 'dialectic' is redolent. No aspect of Hegel's philosophy has been more interpreted, more misunderstood, and more controversial. Before we examine its precise structure, it is necessary to correct some misunderstandings and to sort through a few controversies.

The dialectic has been so controversial that some scholars even deny that Hegel had such a method.³ In the usual sense of the word, a 'method' consists in certain rules, standards and guidelines that one justifies a priori and that one applies to investigate a subject

matter. But, in this sense, Hegel utterly opposed having a methodology, and he was critical of philosophers who claimed to have one. Hence he objected to Kant's epistemology because it applied an a priori standard of knowledge to evaluate all claims to knowledge; and he attacked Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* because it mechanically applied a priori schemata to phenomena. Against all such a priori methods, Hegel insisted that the philosopher should bracket his standards, rules and guidelines and simply examine the subject matter for its own sake. The standards, rules and guidelines appropriate to a subject matter should be the result, not the starting point, of the investigation. So, if Hegel has any methodology at all, it appears to be an anti-methodology, a method to suspend all methods.

Hegel's term for his own anti-methodology is 'the concept' (*der Begriff*), which designates the inherent form of an object, its inner purpose. It is the purpose of enquiry to grasp this inner form, Hegel argues, and it is for this reason that he demands suspending all preconceptions. If the philosopher simply applies his a priori ideas to the subject matter, he has no guarantee that he grasps its inner form or the object as it is in itself; for all he knows, he sees the object only as it is for him. When Hegel uses the term 'dialectic' it usually designates the 'self-organization' of the subject matter, its 'inner necessity' and 'inherent movement'. The dialectic is what follows from the concept of the thing. It is flatly contrary to Hegel's intention, therefore, to assume that the dialectic is an a priori methodology, or indeed a kind of logic, that one can apply to any subject matter. The dialectic is the very opposite: it is the inner movement of the subject matter, what evolves from it rather than what the philosopher applies to it.

It seems, then, that it would be only in the spirit of Hegel to banish all talk about method, let alone a dialectic. But this too would be only another misconception. Although Hegel thinks that the proper method for a subject matter cannot be determined a priori at the beginning of an enquiry, he still holds that it can be determined

a posteriori at its end. When the dialectic of his subject matter ends, he can then abstract from it a general structure, though such a summary will have only a *post facto* validity. On just these grounds there is a detailed discussion of methodology at the end of the *Science of Logic*. Of course, the philosopher can discuss methodology even prior to enquiry – as Hegel himself does in the *Phenomenology* – but he must recognize that his conclusions are only preliminary, a mere assurance of the truth to be assessed by later investigation. Sure enough, Hegel often makes just these caveats in his prefaces and introductions. So we can talk about Hegel's dialectic after all, and we can do so without violating his spirit, provided that we see it as nothing more than an a posteriori summary of the formal structure of his investigations.

Although it is possible to talk about a dialectic, it is advisable to avoid the most popular way of explaining it: in terms of the schema 'thesis–antithesis–synthesis'. Hegel himself never used this terminology, and he criticized the use of all schemata.⁴ In the *Phenomenology* Hegel did praise 'the triadic form' that had been rediscovered by Kant, describing it even as 'the concept of science' (PG 41/¶50); but this is a reference to the triadic form of Kant's table of categories, not a method of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. Although Kant's antinomies were the inspiration for Hegel's dialectic, Hegel never used Kant's method of exposition of thesis and antithesis. It has been said that this method was used by Fichte and Schelling, and then by extension wrongly attributed to Hegel; but it corresponds to nothing in Fichte or Schelling, let alone Hegel.⁵

Another common misconception is that the dialectic is some kind of alternative logic, having its own distinctive principles to compete with traditional logic. But Hegel's dialectic was never meant to be a *formal* logic, one that determines the fundamental laws of inference governing all propositions, whatever their content. In its most general form in the *Science of Logic* the dialectic is a metaphysics whose main task is to determine the general structure of being. Such a metaphysics does not compete with formal logic

because it has a content all its own, even if a very general one, namely, the most general categories of being. Those who have pronounced the death sentence on Hegel's logic have simply recycled the common misconception that it is a competitor to traditional logic.⁶

Still another popular misconception is that Hegel's dialectic is committed to denying the laws of identity and contradiction. To be sure, Hegel criticized traditional logic for its strict and rigid adherence to the laws of identity, contradiction and excluded middle. There are indeed passages in Hegel where he seems to countenance contradiction itself.⁷ His detractors have not been slow in pointing out the disastrous consequences: that it is possible to prove any proposition whatsoever.⁸ Still, even if Hegel is confused, his dialectic is not committed to a denial of these laws, and its operations really presuppose them. Hegel's criticisms of traditional logic have to be understood in their original context, which shows that Hegel is not rejecting these laws themselves but simply the *metaphysical application* of them. More precisely, he is criticizing a very specific metaphysical doctrine: that we can completely determine substance, reality in itself, through one predicate alone. Hegel rejects this claim because he thinks (on independent metaphysical grounds) that reality in itself is the universe as a whole, which has to be described as both F and -F. Since, however, he holds that F and -F are true of *distinct* parts of the whole, there is no violation of the law of contradiction. Indeed, the point of the dialectic will be to *remove* contradictions by showing how contradictory predicates that seem true of the same thing are really only true of *different* parts or aspects of the same thing. What Hegel is criticizing, then, is not the law of identity as such but the confusion of this law with the metaphysical claim that reality in itself must have one property and not another. We naturally but fallaciously move from 'No single thing is both F and -F at the same time' to 'Reality as a whole cannot be both F and -F at the same time'. Because it is true of each single thing that it cannot be both F and -F, we conclude that reality

as a whole cannot be both F and -F. The problem is that we treat reality as a whole as if it were just another entity, another part of the whole.

STRUCTURE OF THE DIALECTIC IN THE *LOGIC*

Hegel's attempt to provide a critical foundation for metaphysics left him with a quandary. Any such foundation would have to recognize the rights of the understanding, and more specifically the right of the common understanding to think for itself and to accept only those beliefs for which it could find sufficient evidence. But there was a fundamental contradiction between the understanding and the subject matter of metaphysics, a contradiction made apparent to him through Kant's and Jacobi's critique of reason. The subject matter of metaphysics is the absolute, which is infinite, unconditioned and indivisible; but, since its concepts are finite, conditioned and divisive, the understanding destroys such an object in the very act of conceiving it.

Kant and Jacobi put forward three arguments for this conclusion. (1) The understanding proceeds according to the principle of sufficient reason, attempting to find the causes for all events, the necessary and sufficient conditions for their occurrence. For any given event, it finds a prior condition or cause, and so on *ad infinitum*. Since, however, the absolute is self-causing or unconditioned, to understand it according to the principle of sufficient reason would be to give a cause for the self-causing, a condition for the unconditioned. (2) The understanding is an analytical power, i.e. it takes a whole and divides it into its parts, each of which it regards as self-sufficient apart from the whole. But the absolute is indivisible, a whole that precedes its parts by making them possible. Hence the attempt to understand the absolute would be to divide the indivisible. (3) All concepts are finite or limited because they have their determinate meaning only through negation; but the infinite is by definition infinite or unlimited, so that to conceive or describe it would be to make it finite.

The dialectic was Hegel's response to these arguments. The basic strategy and idea behind the dialectic is simple, even if its application in specific cases is often very complex. The dialectic arises from an inevitable contradiction in the procedures of the understanding. The understanding contradicts itself because it both separates things, as if they were completely independent of one another, and connects them, as if neither could exist apart from the other. It separates things when it analyzes them into their parts, each of which is given a self-sufficient status; and it connects them according to the principle of sufficient reason, showing how each event has a cause, or how each part inheres in a still smaller part, and so on *ad infinitum*. Hence the understanding ascribes both independence and dependence to things. The only way to resolve the contradiction, it turns out, is to reinterpret the independent or self-sufficient term as the whole of which all connected or dependent terms are only parts. The mistake of the understanding arose in giving self-sufficient status to a part of the whole; it rectifies its error and resolves its contradiction when it ascends to the standpoint of the whole itself.

The crucial point to see here is that the ascent to the whole comes from within the understanding itself, deriving from its own inherent activity and proceeding according to its own laws. It does not come from any higher act of intuition or conception that abstracts from its activity, and that needs some other kind of justification. Although Hegel often distinguishes between reason (*Vernunft*) and understanding (*Verstand*), these terms do not designate completely independent functions or faculties. Reason is simply the necessary result of the immanent movement of the understanding. Both the contradiction and its resolution proceed strictly according to its own laws and have to be warranted by its own insight. Whether the dialectic is correct can be determined every step along the way by the understanding itself, and there is no reason to think that it cannot appraise the dialectic until its course is finished.⁹

The chief result of the dialectic is that reason is not only a form

of mechanical explanation, which shows how one finite thing depends upon another, but also a form of holistic explanation, which shows how all finite things are parts of a wider whole. The fundamental mistake of Jacobi and Kant, in Hegel's view, was that they understood reason according to a mechanical paradigm of explanation, which understands an event by its prior causes and so on *ad infinitum*. Since they believed that reason is limited to such a form of explanation, they had to conclude it could never grasp the unconditioned, which is never given in the series of finite causes. They failed to see, however, that reason also has the power to explain the presence of the entire series of causes, to grasp the reason for which it exists in the first place. The inner logic of the understanding ultimately demands that we see both cause and effect, condition and conditioned, as parts of a single indivisible whole.

There are many ways of explaining Hegel's dialectic, but one of the simplest, and historically most accurate, is to see it as Hegel's response to Kant's antinomies.¹⁰ In the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had argued that reason of necessity contradicts itself whenever it transcends the limits of possible experience. On the one hand, reason finds itself compelled to postulate the unconditioned to bring the totality of conditions to completion; there must be some first cause, some ultimate constituents, because otherwise there would be an infinite regress and nothing would come into being. On the other hand, however, reason is forced always to seek the condition for any event or thing, so that for any cause or constituent there must be some prior cause or simpler constituent. Kant discovered four such antinomies, which all have the same basic structure. In the thesis the understanding must postulate something unconditioned; and in the antithesis it cannot postulate something unconditioned because it must regard everything as conditioned and seek the conditions for it. In sum, the contradiction consists in the fact that the series of explanation must and cannot end.

What Hegel admired in Kant's antinomies was his insight into the necessity of the contradictions of the understanding (EPW §48R). Kant rightly saw that the understanding of necessity contradicts itself whenever it goes beyond the limits of experience; he also fully recognized that the understanding is compelled to go beyond experience in its attempt to seek the unconditioned cause of all conditions in experience. Hegel agreed with Kant too about the general structure of the antinomies: there is a thesis that postulates something unconditioned, and an antithesis that postulates a condition for everything. When we consider the general structure of the Kantian antinomies – the apparently natural need both to continue and to stop an infinite series of explanation – it is possible to appreciate Hegel's point about the inevitable dialectic of the understanding.

For all his agreement with Kant, Hegel differed from him on several crucial points. First, he criticized Kant for discovering only four antinomies; in his view, there are many such contradictions, which are omnipresent in reason (EPW §48R). Second, Hegel also drew very different lessons from the antinomies. They show not that the understanding must remain within the confines of the finite, but that it must go beyond the finite (EPW §48A). They show that the understanding is *self-transcending*, that it destroys of necessity its own limitations and goes beyond them.

The Hegelian solution to the antinomies is the direct antithesis of the Kantian. For Kant, the solution to the last two antinomies is to divide the world into noumena and phenomena, the realms of the unconditioned and conditioned, where the thesis holds for the noumenal realm and the antithesis for the phenomenal realm. In so dividing the world Kant believed he had given both tendencies of reason their due: if it was possible to postulate the unconditioned for the noumenal realm, it was also possible to postulate the conditioned for the phenomenal realm. But Hegel saw Kant's dualism as part of the problem rather than the solution. The proper solution to the antinomies is not to divide but to unite the noumenal and

the phenomenal, unconditioned and conditioned, by showing how both form necessary parts of a single indivisible whole; it was necessary to show, in other words, that the noumenal is within the phenomenal, the unconditioned within the conditioned.

We can have a better understanding of the dialectic if we review its specific stages as outlined by Hegel in the *Encyclopedia* (§§80–2). There Hegel states that there are three stages to the dialectic: the moment of abstraction or the understanding; the dialectical or negatively rational moment; and the speculative or positively rational moment. Each stage deserves separate comment.

The moment of abstraction or the understanding

This moment is the analogue of the Kantian thesis. The understanding postulates something unconditioned or something absolute, which it attempts to conceive in itself, as if it were independent and self-sufficient. This is the moment of the understanding whose specific virtue is to make sharp and fast distinctions between things, each of which it regards as self-sufficient and independent. But, in insisting upon its hard and fast distinctions, the understanding is in fact making a *metaphysical* claim: it holds that something exists in itself, that it can exist on its own without other things.

The dialectical or negatively rational moment

This moment is the correlate of the Kantian antithesis. When the understanding examines one of its terms it finds that it is not self-sufficient after all, but that it is only comprehensible through its relations to other things. It finds that it has to seek the reason for its apparently self-sufficient terms, because it is artificial to stop at any given point.

This stage is dialectical because the understanding is caught in a contradiction: it asserts that the unit is self-sufficient or comprehensible only in itself, because it is the final term of analysis; and that the unit is comprehensible only through its relations or connections to other things, because we can always find some further

reason outside itself. The contradiction is that we must affirm both thesis and antithesis: the unit of analysis is both unconditioned and conditioned, both independent and dependent.

The speculative or positively rational moment

This final stage is characteristically Hegelian, whereas the former stages had analogues in Kant. The understanding now finds that the only way to resolve the contradiction is to say that what is absolute or independent is not one thing alone, but the whole of that thing and all others upon which it depends. If we make this move then we can still save the central claim of the thesis – that there is something self-sufficient or unconditioned – and we can also admit the basic thrust of the antithesis – that any particular thing is dependent or conditioned. We avoid the contradiction if we ascend a higher level, to the standpoint of the whole, of which the unit and that on which it depends are only parts. While any part of this whole is conditioned and dependent, the whole itself is unconditioned or independent with respect to them.

The problem with the understanding is that it unwittingly sees the unconditioned simply as *one part of the whole*, whereas the only thing that can be unconditioned is the whole, of which the unit and that on which it depends are only parts. This whole is unconditioned relative to its parts since it does not stand in relation to them as they stand in relation to one another. They stand to one another as one thing *outside* or *external* to another; but the parts are internal to the whole. The whole's relation to its parts is a *self-relation*; but the parts, before they are integrated into the whole, stand in relation to an other.

Of course, the dialectic must continue. The same contradiction arises for the whole, of which the unconditioned and conditioned are only parts. It claims to be unconditioned; but there is something else, on the same level, upon which it depends, so that it too is conditioned. The same thesis and antithesis work on the new level. The dialectic will go on until we reach the absolute whole, that

which includes everything within itself, and so cannot possibly depend upon anything outside itself. When this happens the system will be complete, and we will have achieved knowledge of the absolute.

TASK OF DIALECTIC IN THE *PHENOMENOLOGY*

Hegel first developed his idea of a dialectic in his 1801 *Differenzschrift* in the section entitled 'Reflection as Instrument of Philosophizing'. There Hegel sketched the idea of a dialectic of reflection whereby the concepts of the understanding of necessity contradict themselves and resolve their contradiction by ascending to the level of the infinite whole (II, 25–30/94–7). The earlier sketch of the dialectic in the 1800 *Systemfragment* does not lead to such a positive result: it shows only the contradictions inherent in the understanding, and the infinite remains beyond the scope of reason.¹¹ Yet in the *Differenzschrift* too Hegel vacillated about the status of his dialectic. Sometimes he wrote as if knowledge of the absolute required an intellectual intuition independent of reflection, or as if the dialectic led only to a negative result, destroying the concepts of reflection in their attempt to know the absolute (II 18, 20, 42, 45/88, 89–90, 110, 112). But at other times he maintained that the ideas of reason are the positive result of the dialectic of reflection, so that they can be deduced from its contradictions (II 25, 44/94, 111). Hegel still held to the need for an intellectual intuition, and shared Schelling's view that there could not be an introduction to the standpoint of philosophy, which was esoteric and mysterious to ordinary consciousness and understanding. As Hegel originally conceived his dialectic, then, it did not fully or unequivocally satisfy the demands of Kantian criticism.

The dialectic first appears in its fully mature form in Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This work grew out of Hegel's rejection of intellectual intuition and his recognition that it is necessary to provide some kind of critical foundation for metaphysics. After

Schelling's departure from Jena in 1803 Hegel became more and more preoccupied with the problem of providing a foundation for his metaphysics.¹² He now realized that it was question-begging to appeal to an intellectual intuition because its fundamental claim – that the subject and object are identical in the absolute – is contradicted by ordinary consciousness, which finds a dualism between subject and object in experience. Ordinary consciousness would now have to discover the truth of the standpoint of philosophy from within, according to its own self-examination and self-criticism.

Hegel's strategy to resurrect metaphysics on the basis of the Kantian critique of knowledge is most apparent from his original conception of the *Phenomenology*: a 'science of the experience of consciousness' (*Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewusstseins*).¹³ This science made experience its fundamental standard of knowledge. 'Consciousness knows and conceives nothing more than what is within its experience . . .', Hegel wrote in the preface (32/¶36).¹⁴ The metaphysician's claim to absolute knowledge therefore has to be tested against, and if true ultimately derived from, the experience of consciousness itself. As Hegel sometimes put it, what is 'in itself' for the philosopher has to become 'for itself' through consciousness's own experience. In making experience his standard of knowledge, Hegel was embarking upon nothing less than a *transcendental deduction* of metaphysics. According to Kant, a transcendental deduction is a justification of synthetic a priori principles that shows them to be necessary conditions of possible experience (KrV, B 117, 129). It begins from some undeniable fact that is true of any possible experience (namely, that having representations implies the possibility of awareness of them) and it then discovers the necessary conditions of such a fact, arguing that it cannot hold unless other synthetic a priori principles hold. Now just as Kant argues in the Transcendental Deduction of the first Critique that the categories are a necessary condition of any possible experience, so Hegel contends in the *Phenomenology* that the ideas of metaphysics are a

necessary condition of actual experience. By embarking upon such a transcendental deduction, Hegel hopes to disarm Kant's fundamental objection to metaphysics: that it transcends the limits of possible experience. The *Phenomenology* aims to establish a strictly immanent metaphysics, and it does not tolerate a special source of knowledge transcending experience, such as an intellectual intuition. Hence the absolute knowledge of the *Phenomenology* is nothing more than 'Re-collection' (*Er-innerung*), the recounting of the whole experience of consciousness.

Certainly, to justify metaphysics through experience, Hegel has to extend the sense of 'experience' beyond its narrow Kantian limits, where it applies exclusively to sense perception. But Hegel thinks that Kant has artificially and arbitrarily restricted the meaning of experience, so that it means something as banal as 'Here is my lighter and there is my tobacco tin' (GP XX 352/III, 444–5). Experience is not only sense perception, Hegel insists, but also what is discovered and lived through. This is by no means a stipulative or technical sense of the word '*Erfahrung*', and there is no need to replace it with another synonym, such as *Erleben*.¹⁵ Hegel is only reviving the original sense of the term, according to which '*Erfahrung*' is anything that one learns through experiment, through trial and error, or through enquiry about what appears to be the case.¹⁶ Hegel's term '*Erfahrung*' is therefore to be taken in its literal meaning: a journey or adventure (*fahren*), which arrives at a result (*er-fahren*), so that '*Erfahrung*' is quite literally '*das Ergebnis des Fahrts*'. The journey undertaken by consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is that of its own dialectic, and what it lives through as a result of this dialectic is its experience (73; ¶86).

It is ironic that Hegel criticizes Kant for having a narrow concept of experience. For what allows him to extend the concept of experience beyond its narrow use in the empiricist tradition, where it indicates nothing more than the data of sensation, is his all-too-Kantian insistence that it is not possible to separate what appears in perception from the conditions of its appearance. This Kantian

point means that what we perceive is constituted by the conditions under which we perceive it. For Hegel, the empiricist's definition of experience as sense impressions in contrast to abstract ideas simply begs the question, because the concepts by which experience is understood are constitutive of it, conditions of its very appearance. Hence Hegel's decidedly more intellectual concept of experience: it is not just sense perception, which cannot even appear to consciousness on its own, but it is also the laws and concepts that make it appear: 'The empirical is not only mere observing, hearing, feeling, perceiving particulars, but it also essentially consists in finding species, universals and laws' (GP XX 79/III, 176).

This concept of experience means that it is possible to broaden and deepen one's experience simply by reflecting on the necessary conditions of its appearance. This extension of experience through the progressive discovery of its necessary conditions is in fact characteristic of the entire dialectic of the *Phenomenology*. As it ascends a new stage of consciousness, the self-examining subject learns the conditions of its experience on a previous stage; it discovers that what is apparently given on a lower stage requires the concepts and presuppositions of a higher stage. This discovery or higher-order self-awareness does not stand above experience but it is part of experience itself. Hence in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* Hegel explains how the experience of consciousness consists in the discovery that the content of knowledge is inseparable from the criteria by which we evaluate claims to knowledge (73; §86). If we change these criteria, the object of knowledge too undergoes change.

Obviously, Hegel's project for a transcendental deduction of metaphysics is of a tall order. It can succeed only if all its arguments leading from the standpoint of ordinary consciousness to that of absolute knowledge prove to be rigorous and necessary. We cannot retrace here the many arguments of the *Phenomenology* that presume to lead to this result. Our only point now is to stress one

fundamental aim of the *Phenomenology*: its attempt to provide a critical foundation for metaphysics. At the very least this shows it is a false dilemma to think Hegel is either a dogmatic metaphysician or not a metaphysician at all.