

The *Phenomenology* in context

(*Phenomenology*, Preface and
Introduction)

Hegel and his times

It is often said of Hegel (1770–1831) that he lived an uneventful life at an eventful time. Certainly his biography is relatively humdrum compared to that of Kierkegaard or Marx, for example. However, its uneventfulness can be exaggerated: he did, after all, have an illegitimate son at a young age; know many of the leading intellectual figures of his period, including Goethe, Schelling, and Hölderlin; and have a career with contrasting lows and highs, from a long period of relative anonymity up until his late forties, to national and growing international renown by the time of his death less than two decades later. It may be that Hegel's life has generated little interest because the character who lived it has been seen as rather unprepossessing: Hegel the man is commonly viewed (even by some of his admirers) as dogged, conformist, bombastic, and careerist. However, once again this assessment must be treated with caution, as he also clearly had his virtues, including loyalty, intellectual integrity, fortitude in the



face of adversity, an awkward charm, and a capacity for joy, humour and deep emotion, hidden behind the rather forbidding exterior that looms out at us from the portraits we have of him. Thus, while clearly prone to irritate, offend, and puzzle those with whom he came into contact, he was also capable of inspiring devotion and reverence, and abiding affection. His life and character are certainly more complex and interesting than is often assumed. (For a thorough study, see Pinkard 2000a.)

Nonetheless, it is probably right that priority in considering Hegel's work should be given to the times in which he lived, rather than to his life and character: for his work was more obviously shaped by this, than by biographical circumstances or the nature of his personality. Despite the apparent abstractness of much of his writing, Hegel was deeply engaged with the political and historical events around him, to which he sought to respond in philosophical terms. This is the meaning of his famous image of the owl of Minerva: the sacred bird of Minerva (or Athena), the goddess of wisdom, flies at dusk, after the happenings of the day, for only then can philosophy reflect on what has occurred, and fulfil its role as 'the *thought* of the world' (PR: Preface, p. 23).

Now, while it may be misleading to emphasize the ordinariness of Hegel's life, it is not misleading to emphasize the extraordinariness of his times: these were indeed remarkable, on several levels. First, at the historical and political level, Hegel and other thinkers of his generation witnessed the French Revolution, the bloody aftermath of the Terror, the rise and fall of Napoleon, and the July Revolution of 1830, whilst living through the demise of the Holy Roman Empire and the reorganization of political and social life in many German states, as the tide of liberal reform ebbed and flowed around them. The events in France were of particular importance to all German intellectuals of this period. Even as a student, Hegel formed part of a clandestine political club to discuss the revolution of 1789 (giving rise to the story that he joined others in planting a 'Tree of Liberty' to mark the event), while he claimed that he always took a toast throughout his life to celebrate the falling of the Bastille on 14 July (in 1820, less than one year after the passing of the repressive Karlsbad Decrees, he startled his companions by buying them the best champagne so that they could

do likewise). It is therefore no surprise that Hegel gave the Revolution a prominent place in his discussion of freedom and modernity in the *Phenomenology*, as well as in his other works on history and social philosophy.

Second, Hegel lived in a period of philosophical as well as historical and political upheaval, where it seemed that new and exciting possibilities for thought were opening up, and where competing conceptions of these possibilities were emerging. Hegel was a major figure in the movement of German Idealism, which runs roughly from the publication of the first edition of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, to the eclipse of Hegelianism in the 1840s, a movement that some see as rivaling classical Greek philosophy for originality and significance. German Idealism was inaugurated by Kant's 'critical philosophy', with its attempt to set metaphysics on 'the secure path of a science' (CPR: Bxviii), and to balance the competing perspectives of determinism in natural science and freedom in morality. However, Kant's successors came to feel that his actual achievement was to leave philosophy vulnerable to scepticism, while failing to overcome this central dualism between freedom and determinism, morality and the scientific picture, the autonomous subject and the natural self. They therefore sought to go 'beyond Kant', in seeking to find another philosophical system that would achieve what he had set out to do, and on a comparable scale, encompassing the natural sciences, the arts, and history, as well as epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy, and philosophy of religion. (See Ameriks 2000a for a helpful overview of German Idealism as a movement.)

Third, Hegel lived in a remarkable cultural period, situated at a kind of crossroads between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Thus, on the one hand he was fully aware of the range of new ideas the Enlightenment had brought to the sciences, political life, ethics and religion, as well as the reaction to those ideas by a variety of critical forces. On the other hand, he was also exposed to the more recent developments associated with Romanticism, which offered a distinctive approach to the issues raised by the debate between the Enlightenment and its critics, with its own organicist conception of nature, redemptive picture of history, and faith in the power of art. Hegel may

be seen as taking up many of the concerns raised by the Romantics such as Schiller, Novalis, and others, but in a way that sought to give a new direction to the basic ideas of the Enlightenment (such as ‘reason’, and ‘progress’) rather than setting them aside. In Hegel’s work, therefore, we find the confluence of the two major intellectual currents of his era.

With these events and issues in the background, it is hardly surprising that Hegel’s philosophy has a depth and complexity not often seen in calmer times, when the waters of intellectual and political life run more still. It is at this point in history that many of the paradigms of modern thinking were to be formed; and Hegel was to begin his own contribution to shaping them with the writing of the *Phenomenology*.

The place of the *Phenomenology* in Hegel’s life and works

The publication of the *Phenomenology* in 1807 marks the beginning of Hegel’s ‘mature’ philosophy: everything written and published before then is classified among his early or preparatory writings. The *Phenomenology* is taken to mark a watershed in Hegel’s intellectual development for three reasons.

First, it was through this work that Hegel started to emerge as a distinctive figure within the movement of post-Kantian German Idealism, as he began to set himself apart from other philosophers of this period. In his publications prior to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel seemed content to follow the lead of his more precocious friend and mentor F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854). Hegel’s association with Schelling began in their student days, when both attended the Protestant Seminary at the University of Tübingen (together with Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), who would much later come to be regarded as one of Germany’s greatest poets, and who also influenced Hegel in this period). While Hegel’s stolid virtues earned him the nickname ‘the Old Man’ from his classmates at Tübingen, and while he was slow to establish his reputation, Schelling’s rise was meteoric: his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) was quickly seen as moving beyond the post-critical philosophy of J. G. Fichte (1762–1814), in the same radical manner that Fichte himself had tried to take Kant’s critical

philosophy further forward. Both Schelling and Hegel had shared the dismal fate of leaving Tübingen to become private tutors in wealthy families (Hegel in 1793 and Schelling in 1795); but while Schelling was appointed a professor at the University of Jena in 1798 at the age of 23, and was well known as the author of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* as well as other works, Hegel remained a private tutor until 1801, when a legacy from his father at last enabled him to follow Schelling to Jena, at the latter's invitation. There he qualified as a *Privatdozent* (unsalaried university teacher) with a thesis on natural philosophy, a subject close to Schelling's concerns; after obtaining his licence to teach, the two began running courses together. Hegel's first published work under his own name appeared that year, under the unwieldy but descriptive title of *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*.¹ In 1802 Hegel joined Schelling in editing a philosophical periodical, the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, to which he contributed his second major publication, 'Faith and Knowledge', as well as writing the long introduction to the first issue, entitled 'The Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy in Particular'. In these essays, Hegel seemed to identify himself as a follower of Schelling, and clearly put forward his friend's position as the best hope for post-Kantian philosophy. Other publications of this period that appeared in the *Critical Journal* – 'The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy' (1802) and 'On the Scientific Way of Dealing with Natural Law' (1802–1803) – are less explicitly Schellingian in subject-matter and argument, but they are not particularly distinctive taken on their own. Schelling left Jena in 1803, going first to the University of Würzburg, and then on to Munich in 1806; with Schelling's departure, Hegel began to be more openly critical of his friend's position, and to achieve a greater distance from it (for details, see Lukács 1975: 423–48). However, Hegel's rather modest reputation at this stage meant he found it harder than Schelling to move on from Jena, and he was eventually forced to leave academia altogether, becoming a newspaper editor in Bamberg in March 1807. In the same year, he published the *Phenomenology*, which he hoped would revive his academic career, by establishing him as a thinker in his own right. (As Pinkard 2000a: 403 notes, however, it took some time before the originality of the

Phenomenology came to be clearly recognized, as ‘ten years after [its] publication . . . [Hegel] was still trying to convince much of the literary public that his philosophy was an advance on Schelling’s and not just another version of it’. See *ibid.*: 256–65 for an account of how the *Phenomenology* was first received.)

But the *Phenomenology* represents a watershed not just because here some critical distance between Hegel and Schelling can clearly be identified for the first time in Hegel’s published writings; it is also the first work in which Hegel began at last (aged 37) to lay out his own distinctive approach to the problems that had concerned his predecessors and so to adopt an outlook that is recognizably ‘Hegelian’. Thus, the position Hegel puts forward in the *Phenomenology* on a variety of issues is the one he will go on to defend in the remainder of his mature publications, while in his pre-*Phenomenology* writings his ideas were still in a state of flux. There is therefore a considerable degree of intellectual continuity between this work and those that follow: first, the *Science of Logic*, which appeared in three parts, in 1812, 1813, and 1816 respectively, written after Hegel had moved from Bamberg to become headmaster of a gymnasium in Nuremberg in 1808; second, the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the first edition of which he published in one volume in 1817 after his appointment as professor at the University of Heidelberg, and which became a three volume work by the time of its third edition in 1830; third, the *Philosophy of Right* of 1821, published three years after Hegel’s move from Heidelberg to the professorship at the University of Berlin in 1818; and finally his lectures on aesthetics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of history, and history of philosophy, which were published as works edited by his students after his death in 1831. Neither in his pre-Jena writings of 1793 to 1801 (which focus more on ethical and religious questions, and issues of contemporary politics), nor in the published Jena writings of 1801 to 1806 (which focus on critiques of other thinkers) is it possible to see anything more than the seeds of what was to be a fully developed philosophical position in the *Phenomenology* and the rest of the works that followed it. The *Phenomenology* is thus the initial step in the intellectual journey that was to take Hegel from the obscurity of his early career in Jena and Bamberg, where he struggled to make any kind of mark, to the even-

tual triumph of his period in Berlin, where ‘what does Hegel think about it?’ was the first question of the chattering classes (see Pinkard 2000a: 612).

A third reason why the *Phenomenology* is considered the first of Hegel’s mature writings is that it is also given a *systematic* place in his thought, in a way that the earlier works are not. Hegel was most insistent about the need for system-building, declaring that ‘[a]part from their interdependence and organic union, the truths of philosophy are valueless, and must then be treated as baseless hypotheses, or personal convictions’ (EL: §14, p. 20). The first published version of Hegel’s system as a whole, with its division into Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of Spirit (*Geist*),² is the edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* that appeared in 1817, while the earlier *Science of Logic* is a detailed elaboration of the first part of the system, and the later *Philosophy of Right* develops some of the ethical and political issues dealt with in the third part, under the section ‘Objective Spirit’. But Hegel had begun his attempt to articulate a rigorously articulated philosophical system after his move to Jena in 1801, so that although this project was not finalized at the time (and continued to develop through the various editions of the *Encyclopedia*), Hegel was already thinking in a systematic way when he came to compose the *Phenomenology*. Thus, while the *Phenomenology* was published some years before the *Encyclopedia* system appeared, it was written while Hegel was working on its predecessors, and so is shaped by the same concerns and fundamental ideas. (The Jena lecture materials and unpublished notes in which Hegel made these early attempts to work out a satisfactory philosophical system are now to be found in the *Jenaer Systementwürfe* (Jena System Drafts) from 1803 to 1804, 1804 to 1805, and 1805 to 1806: see JS I, JS II and JS III.)

Moreover, the *Phenomenology* reveals Hegel’s systematic concerns not just because he was already thinking in this way while in Jena; he also felt at this time that any system he was to complete would need some sort of introduction, a role which the *Phenomenology* was designed to fill. Initially, Hegel planned to publish an introduction to his system of around 150 pages, together with a ‘Logic’ as the first part of his system, in a single volume at Eastertime in 1806; but this never appeared, and instead he quickly completed the *Phenomenology*

as a much longer and independent work. His first title for this work was a ‘Science of the Experience of Consciousness’³ (which was the title originally envisaged for the projected earlier, shorter introduction to the system), but after the proof stage he altered the title to the one we now have. However, the publisher of the first edition saw fit to include both titles so that it first appeared as ‘System of Science: First Part: the Phenomenology of Spirit’, with a further title inserted between the ‘Preface’ and the ‘Introduction’, which in some copies read ‘Science of the Experience of Consciousness’ and in others read ‘Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit’, also as a result of confusion on the part of the publisher created by Hegel’s vacillations. As well as trying to signal its place within his system in its title, Hegel’s ‘Preface’ also highlighted the *Phenomenology’s* role as a necessary introductory work, as being required if we are to see things in the way that Hegel’s fully developed philosophical science demands:

Science on its part requires that self-consciousness should have raised itself into this Aether in order to be able to live – and [actually] to live – with Science and in Science. Conversely, the individual has the right to demand that Science should at least provide him with the ladder to this standpoint, should show him this standpoint within himself . . . When natural consciousness entrusts itself straightway to Science, it makes an attempt, induced by it knows not what, to walk on its head too, just this once; the compulsion to assume this unwonted posture and go about in it is a violence it is expected to do to itself, all unprepared and seemingly without necessity. Let Science be in its own self what it may, relatively to immediate self-consciousness it presents itself in an inverted posture; or, because this self-consciousness has the principle of its actual existence in the certainty of itself, Science appears to it not to be actual, since self-consciousness exists on its own account outside of Science . . . It is this coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge*, that is described in this *Phenomenology* of Spirit.

(PS: 14–15)

In constituting a ‘ladder’ designed to take us towards the standpoint of the kind of philosophical system which Hegel was working on in

Jena and which came to be articulated later in the *Encyclopedia*, the *Phenomenology* therefore has a claim to be considered as vital to a proper understanding of Hegel's mature systematic work, in a way that his previous publications do not.

However, whilst everyone recognizes that the *Phenomenology* marks a turning-point in Hegel's philosophical career, in terms of its originality, its depth and sophistication, and its systematic significance, certain remarks by Hegel himself have led some to warn that we should not expect to fit the *Phenomenology* into his final philosophical outlook without remainder (where some go on to claim that that final outlook introduced certain deplorable elements that are thankfully missing in the *Phenomenology* as an earlier work, while others go on to disparage the *Phenomenology* as a misleading guide to Hegel's ultimate position). This dispute has come about for several reasons. First, while Hegel certainly stresses the *Phenomenology's* systematic importance in the work itself and in its various titles and subtitles, in later presentations of the system he appears to downplay this role (for example, commenting of a projected second edition of the *Phenomenology* that he did not live to complete, that it would no longer be called the 'first part' of the system of science: cf. SL: 29). In the second place, the third part of the *Encyclopedia*, the *Philosophy of Spirit*, contains a long section in which the earlier parts of the *Phenomenology* (the three chapters on Consciousness, Self-Consciousness and parts of that on Reason) reappear in much the same form, suggesting perhaps that the *Phenomenology* was now supposed to lose its status as a self-contained and independent work. Third, some commentators have been puzzled that Hegel should have supplied the *Encyclopedia* itself with its own introductory apparatus in §§26–78 of the *Logic*, if the *Phenomenology* was meant to serve that role.

Behind these matters of scholarship (which are hardly conclusive: cf. Forster 1998: 547–55), there is a deeper and more significant concern, namely, that the haste in which the *Phenomenology* was written inevitably lends to the work an unconsidered and ungoverned quality (typified in confusions surrounding the title page, Preface, and table of contents), which disqualifies it as a settled statement of Hegel's position. The story of the *Phenomenology's* composition in this respect is the stuff of philosophical legend. Hegel was forced to finish the book

in great haste because his friend Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer had promised to pay the publisher's costs if he failed to supply the completed manuscript by 18 October 1806. As Hegel was rushing to meet this obligation, Napoleon moved to capture Jena, and Hegel entrusted part of the manuscript to a courier who rode through French lines to the publisher in Bamberg. Although he completed the manuscript (except the Preface) the night before the battle for the city, he did not dare to send the last installment, and so missed his deadline (although he was not held responsible for the delay, as this had occurred due to an act of war). Given the extraordinary circumstances of its composition, the question naturally arises how far the work can properly be presumed to provide us with a coherent and properly worked out account of Hegel's position. Hegel himself seems to have recognized that at the very least, the *Phenomenology* needed reworking, and hence planned a second edition, which he began preparing immediately prior to his death – although the fact that at this late stage he still felt a second edition was needed perhaps itself suggests that for him the *Phenomenology* had never lost its status as an important work with its own unique role in the system. Hegel expressed his sense of dissatisfaction concerning the text as we have it in a letter to Niethammer on 16 January 1807, written after reading through the proofs: 'I truly often wished I could clear the ship here and there of ballast and make it swifter. With a second edition to follow *soon* – if it pleases the gods! – everything shall come out better' (HL: 119–20). Given Hegel's own apparent qualms, there has always been some support for the view – expressed with varying degrees of sophistication and scholarly subtlety – that the *Phenomenology* cannot be taken as a unified and properly structured work, and so should not be taken as a reliable statement of Hegel's final view. (Cf. the famous remark in Haym 1857: 243, that 'the *Phenomenology* is a *psychology* brought to confusion and disorder by history, and a history brought to ruin by *psychology*'. For a helpful brief discussion of this issue, with further references to the current scholarship, see Pippin 1993: 53–6.)

It is certainly the case that perhaps the greatest challenge to any reading of the *Phenomenology* is to show how it can be understood as a coherent and well-ordered work, and to fit its bewildering range of topics into a satisfactory and unified philosophical conception. While

recognizing that the *Phenomenology* is far from flawless (which, as we have seen, Hegel himself accepted), I would nonetheless claim that it still has an underlying unity of purpose and method, which can be brought to light once its overall approach is clarified. It is to be hoped that this unity will become clearer as we proceed through the work, once we grasp how Hegel understood the *Phenomenology*'s role as an introduction to the system, and what he intended that system as a whole to accomplish.

Hegel's system

'In everything that is supposed to be scientific, reason must be awake and reflection applied. To him who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back; the two exist in a reciprocal relationship' (ILPWH: 29/RH: 13; translation adapted). These comments, made in the course of his discussion of the philosophy of history, may stand as an epigraph for Hegel's philosophy as a whole, in telling us much about the aspirations of that philosophy, and how he hoped those aspirations would be achieved.

Hegel's aim, as this comment makes clear, is to help us see that the world is rational, by getting us to look at it in the right way; for, Hegel holds, the world *is* rational, and the goal of human enquiry is to 'bring this rationality to consciousness', that is, to become aware of this rationality, and hence achieve a fully adequate comprehension of reality. (Cf. PS: 4–5, where Hegel speaks of philosophy as 'opening up the fast-locked nature of substance, and raising this to self-consciousness . . . by bringing consciousness out of its chaos back to an order based on thought [and] the simplicity of the Notion'. Cf. also PR: Preface, p. 12, 'nature is *rational within itself*, and . . . it is this *actual* reason present within it which knowledge must investigate and grasp conceptually – not the shapes and contingencies which are visible on the surface, but nature's eternal harmony, conceived, however, as the law of essence *immanent* within it'.) In claiming that the world is rational in this respect, Hegel means many things, but mainly he means that it is such that we can find deep intellectual and practical *satisfaction* in it: there is nothing in reality *as such* that is aporetic to reason, which is truly incomprehensible, contradictory or

inexplicable, and there is nothing in reality which makes it inherently at odds with our purposes and interests. As the world itself is rational in this way, once we can see that this is so, the world will thereby have shown itself to us in the right way, and we will have achieved absolute knowledge, which represents the highest form of satisfaction; until that point is reached, Hegel calls our knowledge 'finite' or 'conditioned', in so far as this rational insight has not yet been attained.

Now, as Hegel also makes clear in this comment, whether we attain this state of absolute knowledge does not just depend on the world and the fact that it is rational: it also depends on *us*, on how we *look* at the world. If we are unable to view the world correctly, therefore, it will not appear satisfactory to reason: that is, the world will appear to contain elements that are incomprehensible, contradictory, and alien, in a way that may lead us into despair. However, Hegel's project is not the purely conservative or quietistic one, of reconciling us to the world no matter what difficulties we see in it; rather, Hegel aims to give us a way of resolving those difficulties by finding a new way of looking at things, to show us the world as it intrinsically is when these difficulties are removed (cf. Hardimon 1994: 24–31). Thus, Hegel believes that the greatest contribution philosophy can make is to help us overcome our despair, by providing us with fresh ways of thinking about reality, thereby bringing us back to our sense that the world is a rational place, one in which we can truly feel 'at home'; for, as he puts it in the *Philosophy of Right*, "'I" is at home in the world when it knows it, and even more so when it has comprehended it' (PR: §4Z, p. 36). (Cf. also EL: §194Z, p. 261, 'The aim of knowledge is to divest the objective world that stands opposed to us of its strangeness, and, as the phrase is, to find ourselves at home in it: which means no more than to trace the objective world back to the notion – to our innermost self.')

In order to achieve this goal, as Hegel says, 'reason must be awake and reflection applied': that is, philosophy must take a reflective stance, by identifying and guarding against those forms of thought that lead us to adopt an intellectual or practical conception of the world that prevents it appearing rational to us in the way it should, when we are looking at it properly. Philosophy must therefore set out to correct those outlooks which create the puzzles that stop us from seeing reason

in the world, by showing how these outlooks arise as a result of some sort of distortion which can be overcome, thereby enabling the puzzles to be resolved and the world to look back to us in a rational way once again. If philosophy does not fulfil this role, then we may become convinced either that the world is not rational as such, or that even if it is, it can never look that way to us, and so can never be a 'home' to creatures like ourselves. Hegel sees both these options as (literally) counsels of despair: but both will remain options until philosophy has shown that we can achieve a perspective from which the world is made fully satisfactory to reason. Only then, Hegel argues, will we have overcome our estrangement from the world and thus have achieved freedom:

The ignorant man is not free, because what confronts him is an alien world, something outside him and in the offing, on which he depends, without his having made this foreign world for himself and therefore without being at home in it by himself as in something his own. The impulse of curiosity, the pressure for knowledge, from the lowest level up to the highest rung of philosophical insight arises only from the struggle to cancel this situation of unfreedom and to make the world one's own in one's ideas and thought.

(LA: I, p. 98)

We have seen, therefore, that Hegel takes it that we are responsible for creating the kind of intellectual and social environments that lead us to find the world intellectually and socially alien, as the world itself is and should be a 'home' to us. But given this, how does Hegel think these alienating conceptions come about? Hegel claims that such mistaken conceptions arise because we are inclined to think in a 'one-sided' or oppositional way: we believe that something is *either* finite *or* infinite, one *or* many, free *or* necessitated, human *or* divine, autonomous *or* part of a community, and so on. The difficulty is, Hegel argues, that if we take things in this way, then reason will find it hard to make sense of things, as it will then look at reality in a way that abstracts from the complex interrelation of these 'moments', when in fact to see itself in the world, reason must grasp that there is no genuine dichotomy here. Thus, to take one example, by assuming that to act

freely is to act in a way that is not constrained or fixed in any way, we are faced with the apparent absurdity of taking only arbitrary choices as autonomous actions, as it is only then that we could be said to be acting without anything specifically determining our behaviour; but if we then take autonomous actions to be of this kind, it is then hard to see freedom as being particularly desirable or significant (cf. EL: §§155–9, PS: 218–22). At this point, we may well feel baulked by a puzzle so deep that we no longer know where to turn to find the satisfaction reason craves: but for Hegel, it is just here that ‘reason must be awake and reflection applied’. That is, we must ask whether there is something intrinsically problematic about our starting point, and whether this has created our subsequent difficulties, namely, our assumption that freedom involves lack of constraint; for if the constraining factor is something we can ‘internalize’, then it appears that constraint and freedom can be made compatible and should not be opposed. Hegel argues that our initial dichotomy must therefore be broken down if the puzzle is to be resolved, ‘[f]rom which we may learn what a mistake it is to regard freedom and necessity as mutually exclusive’ (EL: §158Z, p. 220): only then, Hegel suggests, will we come back to seeing the world as rational once again.⁴

In his desire to find some sense of intellectual and social harmony by overcoming the divisions and dichotomies that seemed to make this impossible, Hegel was clearly responding to the sense of dislocation shared by many of his contemporaries, both within his immediate circle (such as Schelling and Hölderlin) and beyond. This dislocation was felt at many levels, as it appeared that the Enlightenment had shaken old certainties but had put nothing substantial in their place. Thus, reason was seen as leading to scepticism, science to mechanistic materialism, social reform to bloody revolution, humanism to empty amoralism and crude hedonism, and individualism to social fragmentation. There was therefore a felt need on all sides to find a way forward, to ‘begin again’ in a manner that did not lead to these unhappy consequences. But for Hegel, as we shall see, it was crucial that this new direction should not involve the simple *repudiation* of reason, science, social reform, and so on. Instead, Hegel argues that the conceptual assumptions underlying the way these ideas had been developed required investigation, to show how they could be taken

forward in a less limited and one-sided way; only once this had been achieved, he believed, could the ideas of the Enlightenment help us find satisfaction in the world, rather than cutting us off from it, for only then could we find a way of reconciling the demands of reason *and* religion, freedom *and* social order, scientific naturalism *and* human values, and so on. Unlike the irrationalists and conservatives of the counter-Enlightenment, who questioned the critical power of reason, and unlike the Romantics, who turned to art and aesthetic experience as a cure for the ills of modernity, Hegel's position is therefore distinctive in continuing to give philosophy the exalted role of restoring our sense of intellectual and spiritual well-being, albeit a philosophy that thinks in a new, non-dualistic, way. As Hegel puts it in the 'Difference' essay of 1801: 'When the might of union vanishes from the life of men and the antitheses lose their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence, the need of philosophy arises' (DFS: 91).

It is because of his insistence that we must learn how to break down the opposition between certain fundamental concepts (such as freedom and necessity, one and many, and so on), that Hegel's thought is characterized as *dialectical*. Hegel himself uses this term quite rarely, and his only prolonged discussion of what he means by it is in Chapter VI of his *Encyclopedia Logic*, entitled 'Logic Further Defined and Divided'. In this short chapter, Hegel distinguishes three stages in the development of thought, which he identifies as '(a) the Abstract side, or that of understanding; (b) the Dialectical, or that of negative reason; (c) the Speculative, or that of positive reason' (EL: §79, p. 113). The first stage, of understanding, is characterized as that faculty of thought which treats its concepts as apparently discrete and (in Hegel's terms) 'finite'; it therefore 'sticks to fixed determinations and the distinctness of one determination from another: every such limited abstract it treats as having a substance and being of its own' (EL: §80, p. 113; translation modified). Hegel acknowledges that we will always find it tempting to think of things in this way, as we seek to order the world into distinct and self-identical aspects, and up to a point this can bring great intellectual and practical benefits: the mistake the understanding makes, however, is to forget that these aspects are abstractions made against the background of a more complex interdependence. This mistake is

brought home to the understanding in the second or dialectical stage of thought, which is ‘the inherent self-sublation of these finite determinations and their transition into their opposites’ (EL: §81, p. 115; translation modified): ‘its purpose is to study things in their own being and movement and thus to demonstrate the finitude of the partial categories of understanding’ (EL: §81Z, p. 117). Hegel argues that it is here that scepticism finds its natural place, for when the understanding is forced to see that its conceptual divisions lead it into incomprehension, it may come to doubt that we can ever arrive at a satisfactory grasp of how things are (cf. McGinn 1993, Valberg 1992: 197–218). However, he insists that the results of the dialectical stage are not merely ‘negative’ in this way: rather, they lead on to the third and final stage of *reason*, which ‘apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition – the affirmation, which is embodied in their dissolution and their transition’ (EL: §82, p. 119; translation modified). Thus, after we have been forced to rethink our concepts in such a way as to break down the ‘abstract “either-or”’ of the understanding (EL: §80Z, p. 115), we will then arrive at a new conceptual standpoint, from which it can be seen that these concepts can be brought together, thereby overcoming the sceptical aporia of the dialectical stage. According to Hegel, without this conceptual transformation, it will be impossible for us to see the world without apparent incoherence; only once we have identified and surpassed the rigid conceptual dichotomies of the understanding will we be able to conceive of reality in a way that is satisfactory to reason. Thus, as Hegel puts it, ‘[t]he battle of reason is the struggle to break up the rigidity to which the understanding has reduced everything’, while ‘the metaphysic of understanding is dogmatic, because it maintains half-truths in their isolation’: the ‘idealism of speculative philosophy carries out the principle of totality and shows that it can reach beyond the inadequate formularies of abstract thought’ (EL: §32Z, pp. 52–3).

Hegel’s outlook here may therefore be likened to those who claim that when we are faced with apparently intractable intellectual problems, we should not try to answer them ‘head on’, by taking up one side or the other, but should rather step back and apply ourselves ‘reflectively’ (as Hegel puts it), and ask how it is the problem has arisen in the first place; once we see that the problem has its source

in a set of one-sided assumptions, if we can overcome that one-sidedness, then the problem will simply dissolve and we can escape the ‘oscillation’ between one unsatisfactory stance and its equally unsatisfactory opposite. (Cf. AW: 2, translation modified, ‘The questions which philosophy fails to answer, are answered by seeing that they should not be so posed in the first place.’) However, where Hegel differs from many more recent philosophers who otherwise share this ‘therapeutic’ approach with him (cf. Wittgenstein 1968, Austin 1962) is that he does not take this approach in order to champion the superiority of ‘ordinary language’ or our ‘pre-philosophical outlook’ against the snares and delusions of philosophy and its ‘forgetting’ of our common-sense conception of things. Rather, for Hegel, it is the other way round, as the outlook of the understanding forms the natural starting point of our thoughts, so that it is only with the intervention of further philosophical reflection that we can see our way through the problems that this generates. Far from thinking that common-sense or our ordinary pre-philosophical scientific, political, or religious beliefs should just be ‘left alone’, Hegel claims that they must be reflected on philosophically if we are to make the ‘discovery . . . that gives philosophy peace’ (Wittgenstein 1968: §133); for, Hegel maintains, these beliefs are in fact saturated with philosophical assumptions, and are unstable on their own. Thus, though in a sense Hegel takes some of the central problems of philosophy to be pseudo-problems (in that they are generated by our way of looking at the world, rather than inherent in the world itself, and so should be resolved ‘reflectively’ rather than via further inquiry), he nonetheless holds that they can only be dealt with by turning *to* philosophy, and not *away* from it, as only philosophy and not ‘natural consciousness’ is capable of the kind of dialectical thinking that is required to overcome the puzzles that ‘natural consciousness’ itself generates:

What man seeks in this situation, ensnared here as he is in finitude on every side, is the region of a higher, more substantial, truth, in which all oppositions and contradictions in the finite can find their final resolution, and freedom its full satisfaction. This is the region of absolute, not finite, truth. The highest truth, truth as such, is the resolution of the highest opposition and

contradiction. In it validity and power are swept away from the opposition between freedom and necessity, between spirit and nature, between knowledge and its object, between law and impulse, from opposition and contradiction as such, whatever forms they may take. Their validity and power *as* opposition and contradiction is gone. Absolute truth proves that neither freedom by itself, as subjective, sundered from necessity, is absolutely a true thing nor, by parity of reasoning, is truthfulness to be ascribed to necessity isolated and taken by itself. The ordinary consciousness, on the other hand, cannot extricate itself from this opposition and either remains despairingly in contradiction or else casts it aside and helps itself in some other way. But philosophy enters into the heart of the self-contradictory characteristics, knows them in their essential nature, i.e. as in their one-sidedness not absolute but self-dissolving, and it sets them in the harmony and unity which is truth. To grasp this Concept of truth is the task of philosophy.

(LA: I, pp. 99–100)

Thus, Hegel sees that the role of philosophy is to lead ordinary consciousness away from the oppositional thinking of the understanding, in order to overcome the kind of conceptual tensions that make the world appear less than fully intelligible to us; once this is achieved, we will overcome the intellectual and practical difficulties that have arisen because we do not look at the world rationally, at which point the world will look back at us in a rational manner.

Now, obviously, showing that reason can enable us to feel ‘at home in the world’ by freeing us from the apparent opposition between concepts like freedom and necessity, one and many, finite and infinite, and so on is an enormous and ambitious undertaking, which aims at nothing less than the dissolution of all the traditional ‘problems of philosophy’ and the aporias that these oppositions generate. It is this undertaking which forms the basis of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* system, beginning with the *Logic*.⁵ In the *Logic*, Hegel sets out to show how the various categories of thought are dialectically interrelated, in such a way that the conceptual oppositions responsible for our perplexities can be resolved, once we rethink these fundamental notions. Hegel

suggests that of great importance in this respect is how we conceive of the categories of universal, particular and individual (which he calls the categories of the 'notion' or 'concept'),⁶ for (he holds) it is only when the opposition between these categories is overcome that the tension in our conceptual scheme can be resolved, to be superseded by a more unified and rational world-picture. Hegel focuses on these categories, and especially on the relation between universal and individual, because he holds that they are central to our way of thinking, and are thus very pervasive. (Cf. PR: §258, p. 276, 'Considered in the abstract, rationality consists in general in the unity and interpenetration of universality and individuality.') At the metaphysical level, we oppose the universality of the ideal to the individuality of the real, and so generate the debate between Platonists on the one hand and nominalists on the other; we oppose the universality of essence to the individuality of existents, and so generate the debate between essentialists and existentialists; we oppose universal properties to individual entities, and so generate the debate between predicate realists and predicate nominalists; we oppose the universality of form to the individuality of matter, and so generate the debate between conceptual realists and conceptual idealists; and we oppose the universality of God to the individuality of man, and so generate the debate between theists and humanists. At the epistemological level, we contrast the universality of thought with the individuality of intuition, and so generate the debate between rationalists and empiricists. And at the moral and political level, we distinguish the community as universal from the citizen as individual, and so generate the debate between communitarianism and liberalism; we distinguish the universal interest from the individual interest, and so generate the debate between the egoist and the altruist; we distinguish the universality of the general good from the particularity of the individual agent, and so generate the debate between the utilitarian and the Kantian; we distinguish the universality of law from the freedom of the individual, and so generate the debate between the defender of the state and the anarchist; and we distinguish the universality of rights and natural law from the particularity of local traditions and customs, and so generate the debate between the cosmopolitan who thinks that all societies should be ruled in the same way, and the communitarian who thinks divergent cultural histories

should be respected.⁷ Hegel therefore claims that crucial issues of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political and religious thought are all associated with the ways in which the categories of universal, particular, and individual are conceived, such that apparently insuperable philosophical difficulties will be generated unless these categories are brought together or ‘mediated’ in the right way. Thus, when Hegel talks of the failure of ‘the understanding’ to overcome the opposition between these categories, he can point to a whole series of divisions in our view of the world, between abstract and concrete, ideal and real, one and many, necessity and freedom, state and citizen, moral law and self-interest, general will and particular will, reason and tradition, God and man. Hegel believed that the division between universal and individual lies behind all these dichotomies; but at the same time, he believed that we do not have to set these categories apart, but can see things as *combining* individuality with universality, the one aspect depending on the other (cf. EL: §164, pp. 228–9, SL: 605).⁸ Because Hegel thought that these are the categories that can be best integrated in this way, in his *Logic* Hegel works through other sets of categories (such as being and nothingness, quantity and quality, identity and difference, whole and part, one and many, essence and appearance, substance and attribute, freedom and necessity), to show that with these categories certain residual dichotomies remain. It is therefore only once we arrive at the categories of universal, particular, and individual that truly dialectical thinking becomes possible for us; the aim of philosophical reflection is thereby achieved.

Having reached the categories of thought in the *Logic* which Hegel thinks will enable us to ‘look at the world rationally’, in the next two books of the *Encyclopedia* Hegel moves on to show that this then enables the world to look rationally back at us, in such a way that reason can find satisfaction in it. In the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel considers the natural world in this regard, trying to show that where we find conceptual difficulties in our understanding of nature (for example, in the notion of ‘action at a distance’) this can be resolved through a more dialectical approach. As Hegel puts it in his discussion of heat, ‘[t]he task here is the same as that throughout the whole of the philosophy of nature; it is merely to replace the categories of the understanding by the thought-relationships of the speculative

Notion, and to grasp and determine the phenomenon in accordance with the latter' (EN: II, §305, p. 88). Likewise, in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel considers the human world at the levels of anthropology, phenomenology of mind, psychology, ethics, politics, art, religion, and philosophy, where again his aim is to demonstrate the value of his dialectical method rests on the categorical investigations of the *Logic*. Hegel does not doubt the far-reaching significance of that investigation for all these fields of inquiry, in so far as all involve conceptual assumptions that must be made dialectical if the damaging one-sidedness in our thinking is to be avoided:

metaphysics is nothing but the range of universal thought-determinations, and is as it were the diamond-net into which we bring everything in order to make it intelligible. Every cultured consciousness has its metaphysics, its instinctive way of thinking. This is the absolute power within us, and we shall only master it if we make it the object of our knowledge. Philosophy in general, as philosophy, has different categories from those of ordinary consciousness. All cultural change reduces itself to a difference of categories. All revolutions, whether in the sciences or world history, occur merely because spirit has changed its categories in order to understand and examine what belongs to it, in order to possess and grasp itself in a truer, deeper, more intimate and unified manner.

(EN: I, §246Z, p. 202)

The role of the *Phenomenology*

We have therefore seen in a general way what Hegel wanted his philosophical system to achieve, and how he hoped it would achieve it: by enabling us to think dialectically and so to resolve certain 'blindspots' in how we take the world to be, it will allow the world to look back in a rational way, to manifest its rational structure to us. The question now arises: what role is there for the *Phenomenology* within this enterprise, and how does that role come about?

As we have already seen, Hegel himself characterizes the *Phenomenology* as an introduction to the system, and now it can be made

clearer why such an introduction is needed, and how it might proceed. Hegel takes it that in order for his system to succeed in showing how we can find rational satisfaction in the world, we must enter into a process of conceptual therapy (undertaken in the *Encyclopedia*); but he recognizes two preliminary difficulties here. The first is that we may feel no need for this therapy, because we do not see the problem for which this therapy is the solution, or because we do not see that non-dialectical thinking is the source of the problem, or because we think the problem is intrinsically irresolvable. The second difficulty is that we just may not know how to go about making the kind of dialectical revisions that Hegel believes are required to follow through the transitions of the *Logic*.

As an introduction to the system, the *Phenomenology* therefore has two fundamental tasks, one motivational and the other pedagogic. The motivational task is to make us see why we are *required* to undertake the kind of reflective examination of our categories that takes place in the *Logic*. Hegel points out that though we *use* categories all the time (such as being, cause and effect, force) we do not usually recognize that the categories we adopt in this way have a vital influence on how we view and act in the world, and thus we do not see the importance of critically reflecting on them:

everyone possesses and uses the wholly abstract category of *being*. The sun *is* in the sky; these grapes *are* ripe, and so on *ad infinitum*. Or, in a higher sphere of education, we proceed to the relation of cause and effect, force and its manifestation, etc. All our knowledge and ideas are entwined with metaphysics like this and governed by it; it is the net which holds together all the concrete material which occupies us in our action and endeavour. But this net and its knots are sunk in our ordinary consciousness beneath numerous layers of stuff. This stuff comprises our known interests and the objects that are before our minds, while the universal threads of the net remain out of sight and are not explicitly made the subject of our reflection.

(ILHP: 27–8)

Hegel thinks that the best way of getting us to move to the *Logic*, and to turn from merely *using* categories to affording them the rightful

'honour of being contemplated for their own sakes' (SL: 34) is to make vivid to us exactly how important it is to think dialectically, by showing what goes wrong for a consciousness when it does not. Thus, as we shall see, the *Phenomenology* operates by tracing the development of a consciousness through various ways of thinking about the world (including itself and other consciousnesses), where this consciousness is faced by apparently intractable difficulties in making the world a 'home', until at last it comes to recognize that what underlies these difficulties is its failure to think dialectically: at this point, it is ready to make the transition to the *Logic*, where instead of merely being shown why conceptual therapy matters, we undergo the therapy itself, by making 'thoughts pure and simple our object' (EL: §3, p. 6). The *Phenomenology* therefore portrays consciousness in three modes, where at first it is blithely oblivious to any potential problem and so is characterized by a self-confident 'certainty'; it is then faced with a problem, but is unable to resolve it given the conceptual resources at its disposal; it then succumbs to despair, and reifies the problem by treating it as unresolvable, as inherent in the world. Only when all these three stances are exhausted will consciousness be ready to reflect on the particular assumptions that are causing it the difficulty, and only when all these assumptions have been shown to be problematic, will consciousness be ready to undergo the kind of profound analysis of the categories of thought that is proposed within Hegel's speculative philosophy:

Quite generally, the familiar, just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood. The commonest way in which we deceive either ourselves or others about understanding is by assuming something as familiar, and accepting it on that account; with all its pros and cons, such knowing never gets anywhere, and it knows not why. Subject and object, God, Nature, Understanding, sensibility, and so on, are uncritically taken for granted as familiar, established as valid, and made into fixed points for starting and stopping. While these remain unmoved, the knowing activity goes back and forth between them, thus moving only on their surface . . . Hence the task nowadays consists . . . in freeing determinate thoughts from their

fixity so as to give actuality to the universal, and impart to it spiritual life.

(PS: 18–20)

Hegel thus characterizes his approach in the *Phenomenology* as '[a] scepticism that is directed against the whole range of phenomenal consciousness [which] renders the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is', by forcing consciousness to question 'all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions, . . . ideas with which the consciousness that sets about the examination [of truth] *straight away* is still filled and hampered, so that it is, in fact, incapable of carrying out what it wants to undertake' (PS: 50).

However, ordinary consciousness may resist this 'task' of speculative philosophy not merely because it finds no need for it (the motivational problem); it may do so because (as Hegel recognizes) it finds it too counter-intuitive and intellectually demanding, as its conceptual certainties are overturned and it is required to 'walk on its head' (the pedagogic problem): 'The mind, denied the use of its familiar ideas, feels the ground where it once stood firm and at home taken away from beneath it, and, when transported into the region of pure thought, cannot tell where in the world it is' (EL: §3, p. 7). Hegel therefore gives the *Phenomenology* a role here too, helping consciousness to gradually question those conceptual certainties and thus to move to a position where it can see what it might mean to give them up. Thus, as it proceeds through the *Phenomenology*, consciousness does come to set aside some of its 'familiar ideas', so that by the end it is prepared for the kind of explicit examination of those ideas that is achieved in the *Logic*. This is the pedagogic function of the *Phenomenology*: it helps ordinary consciousness face up to the fact that it can no longer take the apparently obvious distinctions of the understanding for granted, and so makes speculative philosophy possible for it.

The *Phenomenology* is therefore written in a distinctive style, in so far as it has a story to tell from two points of view: the point of view of ordinary consciousness, which is undergoing this experience of moving from confident 'certainty' to despair, to renewed certainty as it revises its position and sees things in a different way; and the point of view of Hegel (and us) as *observers* of this consciousness,

who already occupy the speculative standpoint, and who can therefore see, in a way that consciousness itself cannot, what is going wrong for it and why. Thus, Hegel will often ‘step back’ from merely describing the experience of consciousness itself, to comment on what is *really* going on, or to anticipate how eventually consciousness will come to resolve a particular problem, where at that point in the narrative this is not apparent to consciousness itself. For consciousness itself, therefore, the *Phenomenology* is a *via negativa*, as it responds to some failed position with another position that is equally one-sided, and so equally doomed to collapse. But at the same time *we* (as phenomenological observers) learn a great deal from seeing what is going wrong, and when (at the end of the *Phenomenology*) consciousness is ready to adopt our standpoint, then it too will be in a position to learn these lessons for itself.

Given this conception of the *Phenomenology*, it is therefore possible to see why the *Phenomenology* forms an introduction to the system set out in the *Encyclopedia* and associated works, and why also material from it is repeated *within* that system, in the *Philosophy of Spirit*: for in the *Phenomenology* we just experience the difficulties caused by our non-dialectical use of the categories, while in the *Philosophy of Spirit* which *follows* the *Logic* in the system, we are able to put those difficulties more explicitly in the light of the categorical discussion of the *Logic*, and so diagnose them fully in a way that is not yet possible in the *Phenomenology* itself.

As well as linking the *Phenomenology* to the rest of his system, and particularly the *Logic*, in a natural way, I hope that another advantage of this emphasis on the dialectic will become clear as we proceed: namely, it will allow us to treat the *Phenomenology* itself as a unified work, but without having to distort the text in order to do so. One difficulty is that the *Phenomenology* discusses consciousness both at the level of the individual, and at the social level (most particularly in Chapter VI on ‘Spirit’, in its treatment of the Greek world and the Enlightenment, for example), where some commentators have seen this as problematic (for references and further discussion, see Pippin 1993: 55–6). But, on my account there is nothing particularly troubling here: for, as Hegel himself stresses (cf. EN: I, §246Z, p. 202), just as we can see that individuals employ categories in how they think about the

world, so too do cultures and world-views in which individuals participate, in the sense that these can also be characterized as involving certain categorial assumptions (as when Hegel says, for example, that the Greeks lacked the modern concept of ‘the person’). From the perspective of my reading, therefore, it is hardly surprising that the discussion operates at both the individual and the cultural–historical level. This in my view explains why in Chapter VI, Hegel feels able to make his notorious move from ‘shapes merely of consciousness’ to ‘shapes of a world’ (PS: 265). Another difficulty that has faced many commentators is that they have sought for unity by seeing the *Phenomenology* as focused on one problem or issue: for example, that Hegel is here offering a theory of knowledge, designed to overcome the familiar problems of scepticism, relativism and subjectivism; but then they have struggled to integrate more obviously ethical or social parts of the text into this reading (cf. Pippin 1989: 154–63, where he tries to give an epistemological account of the master/slave section, which in my view is more naturally read as addressing issues in social philosophy; and Rockmore 1997, which starts by treating epistemological issues as fundamental, but then fails to locate such issues in large parts of the text). Once again, however, on my approach this problem does not arise: for, on this approach, what unifies the *Phenomenology* is the consistency of its diagnostic *method*, which is then applied to a number of *different* problem areas. Once this is accepted, there is no need to look for *one* key issue, or to treat the *Phenomenology* as a contribution to *one* area of philosophy (as a contribution to epistemology *or* ethics, *or* philosophy of religion, *or* whatever): rather, the unity of the work comes from its attempt to show that a similar difficulty is common to a range of concerns, which all show the same kind of distortion in our thinking (cf. Nagel 1986, who takes the problem of reconciling subjective and objective standpoints to underlie fundamental issues in ethics, political philosophy, epistemology, and metaphysics). Thus, in answer to Haym’s question, how one work can include a discussion of sense perception and also ‘the madness of Diderot’s musician . . . [and] the fanaticism of Marat and Robespierre’ (Haym 1857: 241), we can reply (rather prosaically, perhaps) that all reveal dialectical limitations at different levels and to different degrees.

Finally, I hope that my approach may shed some light on the notorious problem of explaining Hegel's transitions in the *Phenomenology*, from one form of consciousness to the next. Some readings require these transitions to be extremely rigorous. For example, those readings that treat the *Phenomenology* as a transcendental argument are committed to the view that each new form of consciousness is introduced as a necessary condition for the possibility of the previous form of consciousness. (Cf. Taylor 1972, Norman 1981: 121, Neuhouser 1986, Pippin 1989, Stewart 2000. I myself have followed Taylor in arguing that Hegel's treatment of 'Perception' contains some interesting transcendental claims about the content of perceptual experience (see Stern 2000: 164–75); but I am doubtful that this procedure can be made to fit the *Phenomenology* as a whole.) On other readings, Hegel is seen as aiming to establish his position as uniquely coherent by showing *all* other possible world-views to involve some sort of incoherence, and that this requires him to be *exhaustive* in moving through these world-views, so that every transition must involve the smallest possible alteration from one perspective to the next. (Cf. Forster 1998: 186, '[T]he "necessity" of a transition from a shape of consciousness A to a shape of consciousness B just consists in the complex fact that while shape A proves to be implicitly self-contradictory, shape B preserves shape A's constitutive conceptions/concepts but in a way which modifies them so as to eliminate the self-contradiction, and moreover does so while departing less from the meanings of A's constitutive conceptions/concepts than any other known shape which performs that function.') The advantage of readings of this sort is that they take seriously the things Hegel says in some of his programmatic remarks, for example that 'the goal' as well as the 'serial progression' from one form of consciousness to the next is 'necessarily fixed' (PS: 51). The difficulty, however, is that it is hard for these readings to show that the rigour they demand is actually to be found in the development of the *Phenomenology* (as Forster, for example, implicitly concedes, when he comments that the text might need to be 'reconstructed' in order to fit the method he proposes for it: see Forster 1998: 187. Cf. also K. R. Westphal 1998b: 94–5). Faced with this difficulty, other commentators have gone to the opposite extreme, and denied that there is any real method at all underlying

the order in which the forms of consciousness develop. (Cf. Kaufmann 1965: 171, 'And the *Phenomenology* is certainly *unwissenschaftlich*: undisciplined, arbitrary, full of digressions, not a monument to the austerity of the intellectual conscience and to carefulness and precision but a wild, bold, unprecedented book that invites comparison with some great literary masterpieces.') Readings of this kind have the advantage of not trying to hold Hegel to a methodological ideal that he failed to meet; but on the other hand they make a nonsense of Hegel's own claims for the systematic nature of his work, and ignore the kind of structure that *can* be found in it.

Now, on my approach we can take the transitions seriously, but are not committed to these being more rigorous than a realistic interpretation of the actual text allows. On this approach, there is indeed a 'necessary progression and interconnection of the forms of the unreal consciousness' (PS: 50), in the sense that its fundamental limitations force consciousness to face certain difficulties, and to handle these difficulties in a particular way. Consciousness will therefore find itself caught up in a characteristic movement: starting from one position, it comes to see that that position leads to problems that are unresolvable from that standpoint. Consciousness will therefore be plunged into despair, as it now finds no satisfaction in the world, but only puzzlement and frustration. However, Hegel claims that consciousness cannot remain content with this sense of dissatisfaction, as 'thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest disturbs its inertia' (PS: 51); it must therefore move to a fresh standpoint, in order to recover its sense of being 'at home in the world'. It will therefore adopt a new perspective by questioning some of the assumptions of the position from which it began. However, as a merely 'unreal' (natural, ordinary, unspeculative) consciousness, it does so in a one-sided or undialectical manner, and so arrives at another position which (*because* of this one-sidedness) is no more workable; so it then plunges into despair once again, only then to question the assumptions of *this* position in an incomplete manner, and so on. Thus, for example, after finding Sense-certainty to be inadequate, consciousness moves to Perception, which no longer thinks of objects as mere individuals, but instead thinks of them as bundles of property-universals; but this makes it difficult to capture the unity of the object as an individual,

so it regards these universals as instantiated in a substratum; but this makes it difficult to see how the substratum relates to the properties, so it moves to a conception of objects as the appearance of a holistic structure of interconnected forces; but this sets up a problematic dualism between a world of sensible phenomena and the super-sensible beyond of theoretical understanding; so consciousness rejects this beyond and instead sees the world as something it can master through action; and so on. Or, to take some examples from later in the *Phenomenology*: Hegel argues that problems with Greek ethical life lead consciousness to question the perspective of the Greeks and to introduce new notions of individuality and freedom, but these concepts are themselves developed one-sidedly, in a way that leads to fresh difficulties highlighted in various ways through the chapters on 'Reason' and 'Spirit'. Likewise, he argues that while modern consciousness has become dissatisfied with a certain kind of dogmatic religious belief, it moves beyond that in a limited way, thereby introducing the kind of Enlightenment standpoint that is merely materialistic and utilitarian. Thus, in all these transitions, Hegel wants us, as phenomenological observers, to see that the moves consciousness makes are inevitable given its dialectical limitations; likewise, we are supposed to see that these limitations mean that it cannot properly escape the difficulties of one standpoint when it moves to another, because it does so in a merely one-sided manner. Only at the end of the *Phenomenology*, when the 'natural' consciousness we have been observing at last feels this dissatisfaction for itself, will it be ready to reflect on the categorial assumptions that have led it to this impasse, thereby finally understanding the need for the kind of philosophical self-examination required in order to achieve 'absolute knowing'. Thus, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness can see that far from the world itself being irrational or alien, 'what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing' (PS: 21); at that point it is ready to begin the kind of categorial examination that we find in the *Logic*, and the preparatory role of the *Phenomenology* is at an end.

The Preface and the Introduction

Given that Hegel thinks that the ordinary consciousness will be ready and able to face up to the ordeal of dialectical thinking (to ‘take on . . . the strenuous effort of the Notion’ (PS: 35)) only after it has been through the chastening experience of the *Phenomenology*, it is not so surprising that he holds that any attempt to tell us what such thinking involves before we have had that experience would be wasted effort: we would inevitably misunderstand what was required, and be unable to grasp what is demanded of us. The Preface and the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* are therefore notorious for failing to assist its readers by telling them anything in advance about the conclusions to be reached, as those conclusions will only be properly grasped at the end of the work, and not the beginning: ‘the real issue is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about’ (PS: 2). Thus, as many commentators have complained, Hegel seems to set out deliberately to make the preliminaries to the *Phenomenology* hard to understand until one has been through the work as a whole, so that they are more suitably read at the end rather than at the outset; this seems particularly true of the Preface, which only came to be written after the work was complete, so that it serves more as a coda to the text (or perhaps even to Hegel’s entire system) than as a preamble. (As Hegel remarked rather superciliously, ‘The usual royal road in philosophy is to read prefaces and book reviews, in order to get an approximate idea of things’ (AW: 4). This is a shortcut he seems determined to deny us.)

The Preface

Nonetheless, though the Preface does not give much away concerning the content of the *Phenomenology*, and is certainly far from transparent and fully explicit, it is still highly relevant to Hegel’s main theme, which is that we must satisfy reason in our conception of the world, and further that philosophy as a speculative science can help reason find that satisfaction: ‘The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth. To help bring philosophy closer

to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title “*love of knowing*” and be *actual* knowing – that is what I have set myself to do’ (PS: 3). Much of the Preface is therefore taken up with polemicalizing against his contemporaries who (Hegel believes) have failed to achieve what he sets out to do, either because they have held that satisfaction can only be attained by abandoning reason in favour of faith, or because they have mistaken the kind of world-view in which true intellectual satisfaction can be found.⁹

With regard to the first group, he launches a scathing attack on those who argue that consciousness must seek immediate awareness of the divine and abandon thought altogether, if it is to feel at home in the world; these critics of philosophy (such as F. H. Jacobi (1743–1819)) blame it for undermining former certainties through its excessive rationalism, for which it must now make amends by committing itself to ‘edification rather than insight’ (PS: 5). Hegel is scornful of what seems to him to be a merely anti-philosophical mysticism:

The ‘beautiful’, the ‘holy’, the ‘eternal’, ‘religion’, and ‘love’ are the bait required to arouse the desire to bite; not the Notion, but ecstasy, not the cold march of necessity in the thing itself, but the ferment of enthusiasm, these are supposed to be what sustains and continually extends the wealth of substance . . . Such minds, when they give themselves up to the uncontrolled ferment of [the divine] substance, imagine that, by drawing a veil over self-consciousness and surrendering understanding they become the beloved of God to whom He gives wisdom in sleep; and hence what they in fact receive, and bring to birth in their sleep, is nothing but dreams.

(PS: 5–6)

Hegel declares that thankfully the period of such irrationalism has passed, and that ‘ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era’ (PS: 6). However, he also states that when it first appears on the scene, this renewed commitment to reason is flawed by a certain intellectual immaturity, as this new way of thinking is ‘no more a complete actuality than is a new-born child; it is essential to bear this in mind. It comes on the scene for the first time in its immediacy or its Notion . . . Science, the crown of a world of Spirit, is not complete

in its beginnings' (PS: 7). The result of such immaturity, Hegel says, will be that it is claimed that rational insight is said to be 'the esoteric possession of a few individuals', whereas in fact (as the *Phenomenology* is intended to show) '[t]he intelligible form of Science is the way open and equally accessible to everyone' (PS: 7). Moreover, in the early stages of its development this programme has taken a shape that has made it an easy target for its critics, as it has sought to satisfy reason with a 'monochromatic formalism' in which philosophy tries to pin down the bewildering variety of phenomena in a few simple schema, and hence ends up declaring that 'all is one'. Hegel states that we are right to be dissatisfied with this outcome, and to be successful philosophy must provide us with a deeper form of rational insight than this: 'To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, is to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black – this is cognition naively reduced to vacuity' (PS: 9). However, although he accepts that some of the contemporary critics of philosophy have a point in attacking the philosophical sciences in their current state, he nonetheless insists that this is because in this state they are not properly developed, and that further philosophical progress will show that such attacks are premature: 'Science in its early stages, when it has attained neither to completeness of detail nor perfection of form, is vulnerable to criticism. But it would be as unjust for such criticism to strike at the very heart of Science, as it is untenable to refuse to honour the demand for its [i.e. Science's] further development' (PS: 8).

This section of the Preface, and a later one on the same topic (PS: 29–31), are clearly designed to alert the reader to the fact that Hegel's position is not to be aligned with Schelling's identity-philosophy and its associated philosophy of nature. Rather, while Hegel acknowledges Schelling's importance as a pioneer in giving contemporary philosophy a renewed intellectual optimism and respect for reason, he also plainly wishes to warn his readers that such optimism cannot find its fulfilment in the work of Schelling and his followers, for although Schelling tries to avoid irrationalism, his conception is too formulaic and empty to make the world properly comprehensible to us. If reason is to find satisfaction, Hegel argues, it

must preserve the distinctions that Schelling simply collapses, but in such a way that these distinctions become unproblematic:

Whatever is more than such a word, even the transition to a mere proposition, contains a *becoming-other* that has to be taken back, or is a mediation. But it is just this that is rejected with horror, as if absolute cognition were simply surrendered when more is made of mediation than in simply saying that it is nothing absolute, and is completely absent from the Absolute.

But this abhorrence in fact stems from ignorance of the nature of mediation, and of absolute cognition itself . . . Reason is, therefore, misunderstood when reflection is excluded from the True, and is not grasped as a positive moment of the Absolute.

(PS: 11–12)

Hegel diagnoses Schelling's mistake here as based on a desire for a form of intellectual satisfaction that is blissfully unaware of the problems faced by ordinary finite understanding, modelled on 'the life of God and divine cognition . . . [where] that life is indeed one of untroubled equality and unity with itself, for which otherness and alienation, and the overcoming of alienation, are not serious matters' (PS: 10); but Hegel argues that this is a mistake, for the divine intellect must be able to work through these problems if such intellectual satisfaction is not just to be 'insipid'. For philosophy to succeed against edification, for reason properly to answer its irrationalist critics, Hegel claims we must move from the identity-philosophy of Schelling to the properly dialectical outlook of his own speculative system; in this way, Hegel seized the torch of progressive thinking from his friend and former colleague, and began a rift between the two that was never to heal.

In this section of the Preface, Hegel comes out with some of his most notoriously dark sayings, namely that 'everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*' (PS: 10), and that 'The True is the whole' (PS: 11). As Hegel himself points out (PS: 9), it is only through 'the exposition of the system itself' that he can properly justify these claims, or even render them fully intelligible; but the fact that they come in the course of his skirmish with Schelling (or perhaps, as Hegel himself always insisted, with Schelling's less able followers) makes them somewhat

easier to interpret. For, as we have seen, it is clear that what troubled Hegel about Schelling's approach was its tendency towards monism, that is, to the view that 'all is one' (PS: 9). In claiming, therefore, that 'the True' is not only substance, but also subject, Hegel may be taken as rejecting this monistic position, on the grounds that it collapses the subject/object distinction, whereas (in Hegel's view) the subject can be both distinguished from the world *and* find itself in it: 'This Substance is, as Subject, pure *simple negativity*, and is for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis [the immediate simplicity]. Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such – is the True' (PS: 10). In declaring that 'The True is the whole' (PS: 11), Hegel thus associates himself with holism as against monism; for while he rejects atomism or radical dualism, he is happy to accept 'identity-in-difference', whereas (in his view) the Schellingian takes reality to be fundamentally self-identical and lacking in differentiation. Hegel calls *Spirit* the subject that embodies this relation of identity-in-difference to the world, by finding itself in its 'other', so that while it is not cut off from the world (radical dualism), it is not indistinguishable from it either (monism): 'The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is essence, or that which has *being in itself*; it is that which *relates itself to itself* and is *determinate*, it is *other-being* and *being-for-self*, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is *in and for itself*' (PS: 14). (It is a matter of some dispute as to whether Hegel was right to associate Schelling with monism here, and to claim that Schelling's doctrine of 'intellectual intuition . . . fall[s] back into inert simplicity' by submerging subject into substance (PS: 10): see Bowie 1993: 55–6. It is also frequently argued that Hegel himself fails to show how this doctrine of 'identity-in-difference' avoids either incoherence or itself ending up as monistic as the position he is criticizing: cf. James 1909, Russell 1956: 21.)

Hegel then goes on to consider at some length why his dialectical outlook cannot be grasped by consciousness immediately, and so why we cannot proceed to it directly 'like a shot from a pistol', in the way that the Schellingian system 'begins straight away with absolute

knowledge, and makes short work of other standpoints by declaring that it takes no notice of them' (PS: 16). Hegel here makes clear what is distinctive about the therapeutic nature of his approach: consciousness has to see that its own way of understanding the world has failed, before it can grasp the significance of Hegel's way of looking at things: 'But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself' (PS: 19). Hegel therefore contrasts his approach to that adopted by history and mathematics, where the outcome of these inquiries can be understood and defended without going through any such 'labour of the negative' (PS: 10): he argues that this is the wrong model to use for his form of therapeutic enquiry, where here 'truth therefore includes the negative also, what could be called the false, if it could be regarded as something from which one might abstract' (PS: 27). As a consequence, he rejects the mathematical method as inappropriate for philosophy, observing in his defence: 'If this comment sounds boastful or revolutionary – and I am far from adopting such a tone – it should be noted that current opinion itself has already come to view the scientific regime bequeathed by mathematics as quite *old-fashioned* – with its explanations, divisions, axioms, sets of theorems, its proofs, principles, deductions, and conclusions from them' (PS: 28). (As Harris 1997: I, p. 154, n. 31 remarks, by 'current opinion' Hegel probably means Kant and Jacobi, judging by his comment at SL: 816 that they had 'exploded' the Spinozistic *more geometrico* as a philosophical method.) On the other hand, he warns that in rejecting the 'pedantry and pomposity of science' we should not be tempted towards the anti-rationalistic 'non-method of presentiment and inspiration, or by the arbitrariness of prophetic utterance, both of which despise not only scientific pomposity, but scientific procedure of all kinds' (PS: 29).

Hegel therefore claims that his project puts him between two extremes: on the one hand 'the inadequacy of common-sense' (PS: 43) with its 'habit of picture-thinking' (PS: 35), but on the other hand a purely esoteric and mystical philosophy that cannot be articulated (what he calls 'the uncommon universality of a reason whose talents have been ruined by indolence and the conceit of genius' (PS: 43));

rather, Hegel says, his is ‘a truth ripened to its properly matured form so as to be capable of being the property of all self-conscious Reason’ (PS: 43). He therefore criticizes a philosophy that is non-speculative in that it merely sets out to overturn common-sense without putting anything in its place: such a philosophy mistakenly ‘imagines that by establishing the void it is always ahead of any insight rich in content’ (PS: 36). On the other hand, he also stresses that genuine philosophical thought will always represent a challenge to non-philosophical consciousness, ‘which makes comprehension difficult for it’ (PS: 36). To illustrate this, he focuses on the way in which the ordinary subject–predicate form is tested by philosophical propositions like ‘God is being’ or ‘the actual is the universal’, where the predicate is not being attributed to the subject in the normal way: ‘The philosophical proposition, since it *is* a proposition, leads one to believe that the usual subject–predicate relation obtains, as well as the usual attitude towards knowing. But the philosophical content destroys this attitude and this opinion’ (PS: 39). Thus, though he does not doubt that the public is ‘ripe to receive [the truth]’ (PS: 44), Hegel in the Preface warns the reader not to be misled into accepting a non-Hegelian view of what that truth is, but also not to expect grasping it to be easy: ‘True thoughts and scientific insight are only to be won through the labour of the Notion’ (PS: 43).

The Introduction

Like the Preface, the Introduction has a clear polemical intention, in setting out to show how a new approach is needed after the false starts in philosophy prior to Hegel. Also like the Preface, the Introduction makes plain what Hegel takes to be the consequences of failure: unless philosophy can make good on its promise to find reason in the world, then the forces of anti-philosophy will triumph, heralding a return to sceptical irrationalism, to ‘[t]his conceit which understands how to belittle every truth, in order to turn back into itself and gloat over its own understanding, which knows how to dissolve every thought and always find the same barren Ego instead of any content’ (PS: 52). However, whereas in the Preface Hegel’s polemic is rather narrow in seeing this irrationalism as arising out of the ‘immaturity’ and ‘empty formalism’

of the kind of philosophical position occupied by the post-Kantians, in the Introduction Hegel tries to deal with a more fundamental challenge, one that sees such irrationalism as stemming from nothing more than a 'natural assumption' (PS: 46) concerning the method of philosophical inquiry. Hegel accepts that once this 'natural assumption' is made, then sceptical irrationalism follows; he therefore sets out to show that it is in fact not 'natural' at all, and that instead it should be treated as an unwarranted imposition.

Hegel sets out the problematic assumption at the start of the Introduction: namely, that before we set out to find 'reason in the world', we must first step back and examine whether our intellects have the capacity for this sort of understanding, where the fear is that otherwise we may find ourselves embarking on a hopeless project with no prospect of success. In a passage that Hegel cites elsewhere (FK: 68–9), John Locke famously recommended this procedure, which requires that we 'take a Survey of our own Understandings, examine our own Powers, and see to what Things they [are] adapted' (Locke 1975: 47); and although Hegel cites Locke here, he could equally well have quoted the following passage from Descartes: 'Now, to prevent our being in a state of permanent uncertainty about the powers of the mind, and to prevent our mental labours being misguided and haphazard, we ought once in our life carefully to inquire as to what sort of knowledge human reason is capable of attaining, before we set about acquiring knowledge of things in particular' (Descartes 1985: 30). Now, Hegel sees Kant's critical project as sharing essentially the same outlook, according to which we must begin in philosophy by first investigating the scope of our intellectual capacities (cf. FK: 69, EL: §10Z, p. 14 and EL: §41Z, p. 66); and although Locke may not have been a sceptic or idealist, Hegel holds that Kant in the end was both, and in a way that was inevitable given his Lockean starting point. For, once we adopt this approach, we inevitably treat our thought as an 'instrument' or 'medium' with in-built limitations, and the idea naturally arises that our cognitive capacities *stand between* us and reality; it then comes to seem that the world as it is 'in itself' is inaccessible from our perspective, an 'evil' that we find we cannot remedy no matter how hard we reflect on the nature of this 'instrument' or 'medium' (PS: 46–7). The Kantian may seek to console us here by

adopting a more relativistic conception of truth, and claim that this provides us with an adequate goal of inquiry; but Hegel is airily dismissive of such intellectual bad faith, claiming that ‘we gradually come to see that this kind of talk which goes back and forth only leads to a hazy distinction between an absolute truth and some other kind of truth, and that words like “absolute”, “cognition”, etc. presuppose a meaning which has yet to be ascertained’ (PS: 48).

Now, in order to rebut this apparently inevitable slide into sceptical irrationalism, Hegel’s aim here is to suggest that there is in fact nothing that obliges us to adopt the ‘natural assumption’ that we must begin by ‘first of all [coming] to an understanding about cognition’ (what could be called ‘the critical epistemic method’). One argument for it might be that it is properly presuppositionless, as it does not assume anything about our capacity to investigate the world; but, Hegel claims, the adoption of this approach does not in fact make the critical epistemic method presuppositionless, as it still assumes something, namely that we have the ability to successfully ‘step back’ and investigate our cognitive capacities. So, as Hegel puts the point in the *Logic*, if it is claimed that the limitations of our intellect must be assessed before we can begin inquiring into the ‘true being of things’, then presumably before we can begin inquiring into the limitations of our intellects we must assess our capacity for such inquiry; and thus our capacity to achieve *that* must be assessed, and so on ad infinitum, for ‘the examination of knowledge can only be carried out by an act of knowledge’. Thus, the aim of the critical epistemic theorist to investigate our cognitive capacities without also using them and so ‘to seek to know before we can know’ is nonsensical and absurd, ‘as absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim’ (EL: §10, p. 14). Faced with this difficulty, defenders of the ‘natural assumption’ may instead claim that their procedure is warranted, because otherwise we cannot be sure that our cognitive faculties are up to the job of arriving at knowledge; in the *Logic*, Hegel suggests that this was Kant’s view: ‘We ought, says Kant, to become acquainted with the instrument, before we undertake the work for which it is to be employed; for if the instrument be insufficient, all our trouble will be spent in vain’ (ibid.). Hegel’s argument against this view in the *Phenomenology* is straightforward: why should

we *need* any assurance of this sort before beginning our inquiries? Why shouldn't we just start and see how far we get? Hegel thus recommends that rather than going in for any sort of preliminary investigation of our faculties, 'Science . . . gets on with the work itself . . . and mistrusts this very mistrust' (PS: 47).

Now, it is important to remember that Hegel's target here is a view of the critical epistemic method that sees it as a 'natural assumption', one that claims that this inquiry into the nature of our cognitive capacities is an obvious and commonsensical starting point of any responsible philosophical endeavour, either because of a conviction that this way can we guard against grasping 'clouds of error instead of the heaven of truth' (PS: 46), or because of a 'fear' of taking anything for granted (PS: 47). It is harder to see how Hegel's arguments here would tell against other ways of motivating the critical epistemic method, particularly those built around the claim that there is *positive* evidence that our cognitive capacities are limited, based on the apparent failure of our inquiries in certain areas (theology or metaphysics, for example). Given this evidence of our cognitive limitations, it might then be seen as sensible to see what it is about our cognitive capacities which produces those limitations, so that we do not try to overstep them in a way that would prove fruitless or misleading. Thus, it would seem, the critical epistemic method could be motivated not by an epistemic overscrupulousness that gets things in the wrong order by questioning our capacities before it has sought to exercise them; rather, it could be motivated by a desire to make a reasonable inventory of our abilities faced with real evidence of their limitedness. (In terms of Hegel's analogy, therefore, this sort of critical theorist is not like someone who wants to learn to swim without getting wet, but instead like someone who having nearly drowned, has got out of the water to reflect on how far his swimming abilities can be expected to take him.) It may seem that Hegel's arguments here do not really deal with this way of taking the critical epistemic method (although it could be said he tackles it elsewhere, for example in his attack on Kant's claim that the problems of metaphysical thinking show reason to be limited: cf. EL: §§45–52, pp. 72–86).

At this stage, however, it is not clear how much of a worry this should be to the Hegelian. For here Hegel is focusing on how a 'natural

assumption' about philosophical inquiry *as such* can lead to sceptical irrationalism, and the claim that proper methodology requires that we should *start* with the critical epistemic method; he is not concerned at this point to rule out the possibility that once we get on with the business of trying to understand the world, we may find that we encounter certain intractable difficulties which make it apparent that there are particular cognitive limitations we must accept. *If* this happens (and as we have already seen, for Hegel it is a very big 'if'), then proceeding as the critical epistemic theorist suggests may be sensible. Thus, while this point may undermine the force of his polemic here as a critique of Kant and perhaps others (if it can be shown that they adopted the critical epistemic method for the reasons just given, and not for the reasons Hegel criticizes), this still does not undermine his central philosophical point, that there is little reason to adopt the critical theorist's approach as a 'natural assumption' at the outset, *prior* to philosophical inquiry; and it is only if it *is* a 'natural assumption' that it is valuable to the sceptic's case, as only then would it seem to show that doubts about our capacity for knowledge arise as soon as we even begin to seek such knowledge, so that it is somehow self-defeating to seek to know reality. What is significant, therefore, is that Hegel undermines the status of the critical epistemic method as a 'natural assumption', even if some of its proponents (such as Kant) could have had other, philosophically more substantive, reasons for adopting it.

Nonetheless, Hegel argues that it would be a mistake to take the failure of the critical theorist's 'natural assumption' to show that we can just be sure that our view of the world is the correct one, or that we can proceed with whatever presuppositions we like. The difficulty is that different conceptions of the world may strike different inquirers as valid, so that unless we can show why one conception is to be preferred to the others, we could not claim that that conception has a right to be regarded as true. However, it would be wrong to expect these other conceptions to concede defeat without any argument (as this would be dogmatic); and it would be wrong to attempt to overcome such other conceptions by assuming things about the world that they do not accept (as this would be question-begging); we must therefore attempt to show that these other conceptions are inadequate *on their own terms*, and are thus *self*-undermining, so that in the end if

and when we arrive at a conception that is not inadequate in this way, we will have reached a conception that has established its legitimacy in a non-dogmatic and non-question-begging way. This is what is known as Hegel's method of *immanent critique*: to establish that his conception is the one that is best able to make us feel 'at home in the world', Hegel first sets out to show that these other conceptions cannot overcome the problems and puzzles that arise for them, so that they cannot claim to give us the kind of rational satisfaction that is required.

Thus, as a preliminary to Hegel's systematic position, the *Phenomenology* has the task of bringing out how each non-dialectical viewpoint involves some sort of self-contradiction; it is thus a 'way of despair' for ordinary consciousness (PS: 49), as it comes to see that its conceptions are inadequate: 'this path is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, for which the supreme reality is what is in truth only the unrealized Notion . . . The series of configurations which consciousness goes through along this road is, in reality, the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science' (PS: 50). Hegel claims that because each inadequate stage of consciousness 'suffers this violence at its own hands' (PS: 51), he can persuade consciousness to accept his position in a non-dogmatic and non-question-begging way, by showing that consciousness moves towards it of its own accord, as it seeks to make good on its own internal problems. We therefore do not need to assume anything about the world at the outset, or to use such assumptions to criticize consciousness: rather, '[c]onsciousness provides its own criterion from within itself' by which its adequacy can be judged, 'so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself' (PS: 53). Thus, Hegel famously declares, 'since what consciousness examines is its own self, all that is left for us to do is simply to look on' (PS: 54). Consciousness will find itself in the position of seeing that how it took things to be is somehow incoherent, and so will be forced to revise its outlook accordingly, until ultimately a conception is reached where it is able to see how to free itself from these problems, at which point 'knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion' (PS: 51). However, while consciousness will move forward immanently in this way, without our having to motivate or

impel it from the outside, what will not be apparent to consciousness is how exactly its new way of looking at things is related to its previous conception, and how this new conception has come about. As we have discussed, for Hegel this sort of shift involves a revision in how consciousness thinks about the world: but, in the *Phenomenology*, although consciousness undergoes these shifts, it is not aware that this is the driving mechanism behind them, so that here ‘the *origination* of the new object . . . presents itself to consciousness without its understanding how this happens, which proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness’ (PS: 56). To consciousness, it appears that its understanding of the world develops because the world has revealed itself to it in a new way; but to us, as phenomenological observers, it is clear that this has only happened because consciousness has changed its way of thinking about the world, so that these cognitive shifts do not come about ‘by chance and externally’, but ‘through a *reversal of consciousness itself*’ (PS: 55), as it moves from one conception to another by questioning some assumptions and taking on others. Only at the end of its journey is consciousness ready to understand what has happened to it and why; it is then able to think reflectively and self-consciously about the categorical shifts that have led it forward from one problematic position to the next, to the point at which ‘it gets rid of the semblance of being burdened with something alien’ (PS: 56), and can at last feel at home in the world. Before such homecoming is possible, however, we must follow Hegel as (like Dante’s Virgil) he guides us through the journey of the Soul, ‘so that it may purify itself for the life of the Spirit, and achieve finally, through a completed experience of itself, the awareness of what it really is in itself’ (PS: 49).