Hegel, Ancient Skepticism and the Problem of the Criterion

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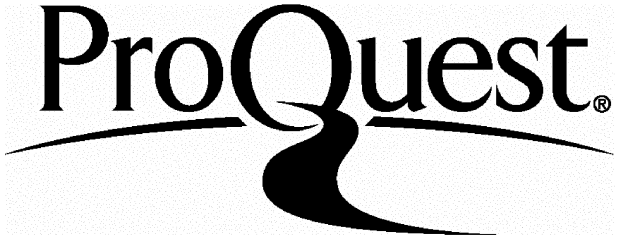

In Memory of
Robinson Fairbairn Watson
Forever a Support and Inspiration

Abstract

Recent papers on the topic of justification and epistemic circularity have provided the perfect context in which to re-assess Hegel's dialectical method. Hegel's dialectic is a topic that is frequently discussed, though rarely within the context of recent developments in epistemology. The problems responsible for motivating various key features of this method, the 'justificatory regress argument' and particularly ' the problem of the criterion' prove to be the same as those that provide the focus for many contemporary discussions. The result of many of the recent discussions is a move away from normatively based epistemological theories toward more naturalized theories, with philosophers such as W. P. Alston calling for a rejection of the demand that we be able to provide a fully reflective justification for our beliefs.

Hegel does not reject such a demand and attempts to tackle these problems by providing such a justification. His reaction to Ancient (Pyrrhonian) Skepticism and his analysis of its techniques, and their strengths and weaknesses, is of great importance to his dialectical method, which is supposed to overcome Skeptical difficulties. By considering his method in light of this reaction and by comparing it to recent discussions we can deepen our understanding of Hegel's system, as well as assess its contribution to contemporary discussions of these problems.

CONTENTS

Introduction

"When it takes things for granted, it doesn't treat them as starting-points, but as basic in the strict sense – as platforms and rungs, for example. These serve it until it reaches a point where nothing needs to be taken for granted, and which is the starting-point for everything. Once it has grasped this starting-point, it turns around and by a process of depending on the things which depend from the starting-point it descends to an end-point"[1]

This is Plato's characterization of reason's "...ability to practice dialectic"[2]. It is this characterization that Socrates offers to Glaucon in discussing the celebrated image of 'the Line' and it represents the road that reason must travel if it is to attain knowledge. It is offered in direct contrast to the methods of the "...practitioners of the various branches of expertise" who "...make the things they take for granted their starting-points" and "...don't understand these things"[3]. The double movement of this dialectic, first to a starting-point where nothing needs to be taken for granted, and then from this starting-point to an end-point guaranteed by it is involved in Hegel's own dialectical method. Hegel's own method likewise provides a road or pathway that reason must travel on if it is to avoid taking things as granted for its starting-point. More importantly, Hegel's dialectic will serve to raise consciousness to the 'standpoint of Science', that is to say, it is the dialectical method that will underpin and justify Hegel's system and its claims.

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[1] Plato *Republic*, Trans. R. Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1993. Page 239 (511 b-c).
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.* (511 c-d).

Hegel's dialectic however, is not that of Plato. It is idiosyncratic, seemingly ambiguous in places and always of central importance to his system, an understanding of its workings and motivations are essential to any interpretation of Hegel's thought. My aim, in part then, throughout this essay is to explicate Hegel's notion of dialectic but I would like to do this in a context of discussion more contemporaneous to our own time. Specifically, I would like to base the consideration of Hegel's dialectical method within the context of some recent discussions concerning issues surrounding epistemic justification. My reasons for this are twofold. First, it is in such discussions that treatment has been given to a particular problem, the 'problem of the criterion'[4], which I contend was a key factor in motivating certain aspects of Hegel's method, and so it is interesting to see how similar or dissimilar the contemporary approach is to that of Hegel. Second, Hegel is often ignored in such discussions and so it is worthwhile to consider whether his own proposed solution can add anything or suggest a new direction for future philosophical development.

In undertaking such a task I decided to focus mainly on Hegel's earlier texts, predominantly the *Phenomenology of Spirit*[5] and various early published and unpublished essays. The *Phenomenology* seemed an obvious choice as it was meant to function as an introductory text to Hegel's larger system, it was to present a pathway to Science; to provide a starting-point for Hegel's system at which 'nothing needs to be taken for granted'. In, short, it provides in microcosm, a justification of the Hegelian system and its dialectic. The earlier texts allow a glimpse of the underlying motivation for Hegel's dialectical method, particularly by expressing his attitude

[4] See Chapter One, Section 3:i.
[5] G. W. F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1977. Henceforth this text will be referred to simply as the *Phenomenology*, or for the purposes of quotation by the letters 'PS' followed by the relevant paragraph number.

toward the Pyrrhonian tradition of Skepticism. They permit us to see ways in which Hegel envisaged his dialectic overcoming the problems of that tradition while containing or preserving its strengths.

One inevitable difficulty to be faced in providing an assessment of Hegel's work, particularly when it is framed in a context of contemporary discussion, is the seeming ambiguity that pervades parts of Hegel's texts. Stylistically Hegel's work presents problems for the modern reader; it is often difficult and dense with many themes or issues being given simultaneous treatment. When compared to modern works it can often appear unclear, imprecise or ambiguous. This presents the challenge to any would be commentator of how best to render Hegel's thought clearly. In attempting to meet this challenge I have decided to employ the following, particular structure, for this essay. In chapter one I provide a context for the discussion, introducing some problems and positions involved in recent debate while highlighting the particular problem that ties Hegel to this debate. In chapter two, rather than tackling Hegel 'head on', as it were, I draw an outline of Hegel's proposed response to the problem by focusing upon his analysis of Ancient (Pyrrhonian) Skepticism, as opposed to Modern Skepticism, and I leave the work of filling in the details of this response to later chapters. In chapter three I begin this filling in process by providing an account of the dialectic and an example of it in action, taken from the *Phenomenology* itself. I then complete this process in chapter four, returning to the issues raised in earlier chapters before drawing a conclusion. By first introducing Hegel's putative solution to the problem in a basic, structural manner and then fleshing it out, I hope, at least in part, to have overcome the difficulty mentioned above. In addition I take the further precaution of attempting to present Hegel's position without undue use of Hegelian

terminology that is unfamiliar in modern contexts. Obviously where Hegelian terms of art are unavoidable they are explained to the best of my abilities.

Chapter One

Hegel's work on the nature of knowledge and his approach to Skepticism regarding the possibility of knowledge have been largely ignored in recent epistemological debate, and yet one of the primary aims of the *Phenomenology*, insofar as it is supposed to be an introduction to his larger philosophical system, was epistemological. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel was, in part, concerned with providing an acceptable way to assess and judge the various epistemological theories and the principles on which they are based; he was concerned with offering a justification of his system over others. His aim was to provide a definitive response to the 'problem of the criterion' (explained below, 3:i.).

This is a problem that has surfaced, in one form or another, in recent epistemological debates, and yet few philosophers make reference to Hegel's attempts to solve the problem. This is probably due, in part, to a lack of familiarity with Hegel's work or the lack of clarity (by modern standards) that seems to permeate Hegel's text. Whatever the reason, there is little doubt that Hegel has much to add to the debate on the topic, proposing as he does, a quite unique solution.

My aim then, in this first chapter is to locate Hegel within the context of recent discussions. I propose to do this by showing how the problem ties in to recent developments in epistemology. In section one I will briefly outline some common positions on the issue of justification. In section two I will introduce a traditional problem

(the regress problem of justification) that has, in part, helped motivate these various responses and more recently stimulated work concerning the problem of the criterion. In the final section (section three) I will explain the problem of the criterion and highlight a recent way of dealing with this difficulty, arguing that such a response to it remains unsatisfactory and that therefore a consideration of Hegel's own response is of more than mere historical interest.

1.

Epistemology has always been concerned with questions as to the nature, sources, limits, and legitimacy of knowledge, and a large array of varying responses have been offered regarding such questions. Historically, philosophers may have dealt with only one or two of these issues at a time, i.e. with just the 'nature' or 'sources' of knowledge, and different issues have been hotly contested at different times, invariably throwing up new questions of increasingly specific focus. One issue that has invited much interest in recent times is the issue of justification and the implications a particular view of justification may have for Skepticism. The principal concern is with what justifies belief, it is fair to say that justification is ordinarily viewed as a necessary condition for knowledge; the point at which various theories diverge is in response to the question of what is required for justification?

1:i Justification:- Different Responses

Neatly grouping various responses to this issue is not a straightforward task and any way of grouping or summarizing the different responses into predominant trends is likely to prove disagreeable to someone. I do not therefore propose to supply any kind of exhaustive list of responses or approaches, rather I will focus on those approaches that appear most relevant in providing a contemporary context for a discussion of Hegel's thought. Historically Foundationalism and Coherentism have been very important, prominent accounts of the structure of justification and have figured to some degree in most debate, but more recently the division between Internalism and Externalism has come to the fore and fuelled discussion, and it is the division between these approaches that I propose to focus on in what follows[1].

Internalism: Basically stated this view holds that the conditions for determining whether or not a belief is justified are ones internal to the believer's cognitive perspective. That is, they are internal psychological conditions cognitively accessible to the believer. We can interpret the requirement for cognitive accessibility in at least two ways. According to the strongest interpretation the believer would need to be aware of the justifying conditions in order for his belief to be justified and according to a weaker interpretation the believer would need to be capable of becoming aware of the justifying conditions without the

[1] I have based my summary of the following positions on those offered by L. Bonjour in the *Blackwell Companion to Epistemology*, Ed. J. Dancy & E. Sosa (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.) 1992 and R. Foley in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Ed. E. Craig (London: Routledge) 1998, Vol 5.

addition of extra information though he need not actually be aware of the conditions for his belief to be justified[2].

The principal motivation for a strong interpretation of the cognitive accessibility requirement is a normative one. The underlying idea is that we are duty bound to be epistemically responsible in respect of the cognitive goal of truth. That is, we have a duty to ensure that our beliefs are justified insofar as a justified belief aims at believing what is true. If we refuse such a duty and hold to unjustified beliefs then we are being epistemically irresponsible and are blameworthy. This entails having cognitive access to the conditions required for a belief to be justified, because if we didn't have such access we may be epistemically responsible and yet hold unjustified beliefs.

Externalism: In contrast externalist accounts of justification claim that some of the conditions required for a belief to be justified are external to the cognitive perspective of the believer. Whether or not such conditions obtain will not be determined by introspection. There are various motivations for externalist accounts, one of the principal ones being E. Gettier's paper 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?'[3] in which it was demonstrated that justified true belief will only result in knowledge if Gettier type counterexamples are absent. This gave rise to the dominant externalist account of justification, that of 'reliabilism'[4]. On this view the main condition for justification is that a belief be produced by a reliable cognitive process; the reliability of such a process

[2] There are also internalist positions that hold that the justifying conditions in some cases are too complex for it to be plausibly determined by introspection whether or not they obtain. See R. Foley *Working Without a Net* (New York: Oxford University Press) 1993.
[3] *Analysis* (1963), pp. 121-123
[4] See A. Goldman *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press) 1986.

depending in part upon the external environment of the believer. Another important motivation comes in the form of the allegedly unproblematic commonsensical ascription of knowledge to infants, children and higher animals. It is argued that an internalist account of justification would be unable to make such an ascription as the justifying inferences involved would be too complex to be plausibly possessed by the subjects to whom they are ascribed.

Externalism then offers a more naturalistic account than that of internalism. It views justification as essentially involving the correct type of relation obtaining between the external environment of a believer and that believer's cognitive processes and practices.

While both internalism and externalism are concerned with the conditions required for justification, foundationalist and coherentist accounts are accounts of the structure of such justification.

Foundationalism: claims that the structure of justification is a hierarchical one in which some beliefs are justified independently of others beliefs; these are 'foundational' or 'basic' beliefs from which all other non-foundational beliefs are to be justified provided that they are related appropriately. The foundational beliefs are non-inferential and self-justifying. Precisely what conditions have to be met to constitute a foundational belief varies from account to account: some require that a foundational belief be indubitable while others may hold that it need only be intrinsically probable. However, the exact

differences between various foundationalist accounts need not concern us here as we are simply sketching the bare bones of the position.

Coherentism: claims that every belief derives some of its justification from other beliefs and that there are no foundational beliefs. What is important here is not so much an individual belief but rather a system of beliefs. It is a system that is justified and thereby its constitutive beliefs given that they cohere in the right way. If a system of beliefs is coherent then it is justified. Justification then is not hierarchical but holistic on this account. The important question for the coherentist to answer is what does this coherence amount to? Does it involve consistency between beliefs and/or entailment of some kind?

An important feature of all these accounts is how they cope in response to skeptical attack. There are of course many different forms of skeptical argument, but one feature they share in common is that if successful they raise doubt concerning the correctness of beliefs that we ordinarily assume unproblematic. The various approaches sketched above hold different implications regarding Skepticism. A more naturalistic approach like that of the externalist need not commit as to whether or not the correct relation required for justification does actually occur most of the time, though interestingly many such approaches seem to want to be able to say something about this matter[5]. On the other hand, a normatively based approach like that of internalism tends to struggle to meet the Skeptic's insistent demands for a demonstration that the situation is other than he suspects. A response open to most approaches is to admit that it is simply a feature of our

[5] See R. Fumerton's *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (Lanham, MA: Rowan and Littlefield) 1995, pp. 159-181.

epistemic situation in the world that we cannot definitively banish skeptical worries. But these are all quite general statements and we should consider more closely some of the worries with respect to justification.

2.

2:i The Regress Argument

The regress argument is usually taken to show that the only alternatives to admitting foundational non-inferential beliefs are circularity, infinite regress, or dogmatic assertion[6]. The argument concerns attempts to demonstrate the truth of knowledge claims. If we consider a case where a belief is to be inferentially justified, then we note that in order to be justified in this belief we must be justified in certain other beliefs that are appropriately related to the belief in question. That is, for belief *P* to be inferentially justified it is required that the holder of *P* be justified in certain other beliefs *Q, R, S* etc. that are appropriately related to *P*. The difficulty is that the same condition holds for these other beliefs (*Q, R, S*) if they are to be inferentially justified, and again it holds for the beliefs by which these are justified and so forth ad infinitum. It seems that if *Q, R,*

[6] The argument is first mentioned, in one form, in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics,* ed. & trans. J. Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press) 1975, Book 1, Ch 2-3, but it was one of the standard arguments of Ancient Skepticism. See S. Empiricus *Works Vol. 1: Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (London: William Heinemann Ltd.) 1933, Book I, Chapters XV-XVI, pp 94-103. For two more recent viewpoints on this argument see L. Bonjuor's 'Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?' in *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1978), pp 1-14, and W. Alston's 'Two types of Foundationalism', *Journal of Philosophy 73*, No. 7 (1976) pp 165-185.

and *S* are to act as adequate grounds for *P* and they are themselves grounded by other inferentially justified beliefs, an infinite regress is started.

If this is the case then what options are open to us?

1. The regress might terminate with non-inferentially justified beliefs.
2. The regress might terminate with beliefs that are not justified.
3. The regress might circle back on itself. Some beliefs earlier in the sequence might be appealed to later as premises for a justificatory argument.
4. The regress might continue infinitely.

If we accept option 1 the regress would be halted. Each belief in the sequence would lead back to a non-inferentially justified belief, with the justification being transferred along the sequence. Options 2 and 4 both appear unpalatable. Option 2 would give a sequence in which none of the beliefs are justified as the beliefs in the sequence each make appeal to prior beliefs from which to derive justification, which in turn ultimately appeal to the terminus belief, yet this terminus itself is not justified and hence no justification can be conferred upon the sequence. Option 4 would require demonstrating that such an infinite regress is not damning, a difficult prospect in the case at hand. However far the sequence continued each belief would only be connected by inferential justification, so we could never demonstrate that the sequence is justified, as this appears to require a non-inferential base belief from which justification is conferred. Further, it's not clear that a knower is capable of an infinite number of distinct beliefs. Option 3 provides a circular

sequence in which no belief is non-inferentially justified. So what does this circle give us? It claims that *P* is justified as long as *Q* is justified, which in turn is justified as long as *R* is justified and so forth until we circle back to the condition 'as long as *P* is justified'. It amounts to the claim that *P* is justified just so long as *P* is justified. This is true of course, but it does not seem to answer our question of whether or not *P* is justified? Option 1. is typically regarded as being the most plausible response to the regress. It stops the regress and provides justification for our original belief that *P*, whereas the other three options appear much less likely to do so.

2:ii Responses to The Regress Argument

That foundationalism, option 1, is the best solution and that it accurately represents the way that our beliefs are related and justified is a response open to both internalist and externalist approaches. With this option we can provide cogent reasons, in the form of non-inferentially justified beliefs, as to why we take our putative knowledge to be knowledge. That is, we are able to demonstrate why we are justified in believing that *P*. There is a worry here however, as it may be claimed that option 1 is unable to halt the regress because our non-inferentially justified beliefs would have to share the feature of being 'truth-conducive' if they are to provide good reasons for accepting knowledge claims. As L. Bonjour points out in a discussion of the matter[7], if we consider the following argument:

[7] See L. Bonjuor 'Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?' in *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1978). Page 6.

(i.) Belief *P* has feature #

(ii.) Beliefs having feature # are highly likely to be true

Therefore *P* is highly likely to be true.

then we can see that we will not be able to use non-inferentially justified beliefs as they are used in option 1 unless we can justify both premises (i.) and (ii.). According to Bonjour it's not clear that both these premises taken together can be justified *a priori* and if this is the case then such beliefs cannot be taken as good reasons because we cannot be justified in accepting the conclusion that they are likely to be true. This response, itself, may motivate a move toward 'coherentism' (basically a modified version of option 3).

The difficulties raised by both the regress argument and Bonjour's response to it appear to be the result of a concern with *demonstrating* that a belief is justified, or *demonstrating* that a knowledge claim is true, that is to say, a concern with being able to vindicate a claim to being justified when it is challenged. We could urge that we should not confuse the ability to demonstrate justification with the state of being justified. For example, with the externalist justification is a matter of the correct relation obtaining between our cognitive processes and our external environment, and if this is the case, then provided that relation does obtain, we need not be able to demonstrate that it did in order to be justified. We may actually be justified without being able to show that we are.

This claim boils down to the observation that 'showing' or 'demonstrating' that we are justified requires more than simply being so justified. In the case at hand being justified

in an inferential belief requires that we have some appropriately related non-inferentially justified beliefs, while demonstrating that we have these non-inferentially justified beliefs requires giving grounds for these beliefs, for instance, grounds that the correct relation does in fact obtain. That is to say it requires giving inferential grounds, or reasons for these beliefs, which involves either being aware of or at least having access to, such grounds. In a sense this is what Bonjour's argument is aimed at. The moment that we attempt to demonstrate such beliefs is the moment that the regress threatens again. It is only from the perspective of attempting to show that we are justified that the regress argument is a danger; it seems to preclude the possibility of showing that we have non-inferentially justified beliefs, but it does not preclude the possibility that we have such beliefs.

It appears then, that the regress argument is on one level unstoppable if we allow that the demand that we be able to demonstrate that we, in fact, have justified beliefs is one that is to be met, or is reasonable. It is the intuitive pull of just such a demand that the skeptic exploits. So, is such a demand to be met or should it be dismissed?

3.

It seems that with this question we have come to the crux of the matter. The skeptic asks for a demonstration that the conditions for justification are fulfilled and this demand has some force. His worry is that if we are unable to provide an adequate demonstration then

it's not clear how we discriminate between cases in which those conditions are met (cases in which our belief is justified) and cases in which they are not met (cases in which our belief is not justified). If we are unclear on how to discriminate between such cases it is not clear that we can claim that the conditions we offer are ever fulfilled. Even if the skeptic allows that a given subject need not be aware that his belief is justified in order for it to be justified, surely there must be some rationale that can be offered in support of why we think it is justified, and presumably such a rationale would permit us to demonstrate instances in which the conditions for justification *are* fulfilled.

3:i The Problem of the Criterion

Such a worry is most clearly highlighted in the skeptical problem of the criterion. If we are unable to demonstrate instances in which the conditions set forth for justification are met then it's not clear that the conditions aren't simply assumed or arbitrary. If they are not arbitrary there should be no problem in highlighting instances in which they are met; after all, how did we come to be aware of them in the first place if not through instances in which they obtain? The problem is that identifying instances in which they obtain as opposed to ones in which they don't can only be achieved if we already know the conditions; we can't discriminate between the instances if we don't know the conditions.

This is essentially the traditional skeptical problem of the criterion. Sextus Empiricus formulates the problem in the following way:

"...some have declared that a criterion exists...let them tell us whereby it is to be decided, since we have no accepted criterion, and do not even know, but are still inquiring, whether any criterion exists. Besides, in order to decide the dispute which has arisen about the criterion, we must possess an accepted criterion by which we shall be able to judge the dispute; and in order to possess an accepted criterion, the dispute about the criterion must first be decided. And when the argument thus reduces itself to a form of circular reasoning the discovery of the criterion becomes impracticable, since we do not allow them to adopt a criterion by assumption, while if they offer to judge the criterion by a criterion we force them to a regress *ad infinitum*. And furthermore, since demonstration requires a demonstrated criterion, while the criterion requires an approved demonstration, they are forced into circular reasoning."[8]

What is required is an 'accepted criterion', that is, we require some kind of access to the conditions or criteria of justification other than through purported instances of their fulfillment if we are to arrive at a criteria of justification that is acceptable, and this seems to be precisely what we lack.

To further clarify the problem we can reformulate it using the following two propositions:

[8] S. Empiricus *Works Vol. 1: Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (London: William Heinemann Ltd.) 1933. Book II, Chapter IV, pp. 162-165.

A. To be able to identify instances of an accepted criterion and to be justified in believing that they are true we must already be justified in believing of the accepted criterion that it is true.
B. To be justified in believing of an accepted criterion that it is true we must already be able to identify instances of it and be justified in believing that those instances are true.

It seems that if both A. and B. are correct then we are trapped in a circle, and if we simply assume a criterion or assume instances of it then we can be accused of merely begging the question. The problem boils down to that of providing a non-skeptical solution; of denying A. or B. or providing some way out of the circle.

3:ii Epistemic Circularity

If we drop the demand for a fully reflective justification, then need this problem really worry us? We may be justified in various kinds of belief about the world on the basis of the appropriate relation obtaining between the world and our cognitive processes and practices; it's simply a contingent question as to whether we actually are justified in all such beliefs. It is not required that I be aware of the details of any criterion of justification in order to be justified in my beliefs provided that the relation obtains. But this seems to be a refusal to entertain the skeptic's worry. If we believe, for instance, that the required relation generally does obtain in perception, then how are we to justify this belief? How is it that we can discriminate supposedly sound methods of belief formation from unsound methods?

We could present the following argument. We take as premises a collected number of reported instances of a particular method of belief formation, say perceptually produced beliefs. These instances are constituted by reports of the beliefs and reports of corresponding states of affairs. The premises are used as the basis for an inductive inference to the conclusion that beliefs formed by perception are generally instances of the required relation obtaining. The conclusion of such an argument is not presupposed, nor does it appear in the premises of the argument. That is, it is claimed that there is no vicious circularity involved here; rather the circularity involved is referred to as 'epistemic' as it derives from our epistemic situation as humans[9]. We do of course assume that the required relation generally occurs in perception in the formation of the instances of belief that are to act as premises, but this does not supposedly entail a presupposition of the truth of our conclusion; we might never have carried out such an inference, or consciously formulated any principle like 'beliefs produced by perception are generally instances of the required relation obtaining'. Instead such a principle is manifested in our use of that method of belief formation; we assume it to be true in our cognitive practice of that method. As Alston puts it, the truth of the principle is "practically assumed"[10].

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[9] Many philosophers have offered epistemically circular responses to this problem. For an account of some of these responses see E. Sosa's 'Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles' *The Journal of Philosophy*, XCIV, 8, (1997), pp 410-430 & W. Alston's 'Epistemic Circularity' *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research,* 47, No. 1 (1986). Both of these articles only mention Sextus' problem in passing. Alston does provide a slightly fuller treatment of the argument in 'Level Confusions in Epistemology' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy,* 5 (1980), pp 135-150, but explicit formulations and direct treatments of the argument are lacking in most articles in this field. I am however, indebted to the above articles in the following analysis.

[10] See 'Epistemic Circularity' *Op. Cit.* Section III.

If epistemic circularity is not vicious circularity then the important feature is that the "practical assumption" we make is not justified until we make the inference from the premises to the conclusion. That is, we can accept the premises of the argument without being justified in believing the principle; this is provided by the distinction between being justified and being able to demonstrate that we are. We may actually be justified in various beliefs without being reflectively aware that we are i.e. without being justified in the belief that we are justified in those beliefs. If this is the case, then we can be justified in our belief of the principle by inferring it from a collection of instances in which beliefs formed in this way were directly justified, supposedly without incurring charge of vicious circularity. Such 'practical assumption' is to be permitted because it seems that we cannot justify beliefs to the effect that our methods of belief formation are generally sound, or reliable, or true and so forth, without using those very beliefs in that justification. That is, it seems we can only put the Skeptic's worries to rest if we allow this form of argument.

Alston, among others, takes this observation as being indicative of the different direction that epistemology should take. He sees it as reason to drop the demand for fully reflective justification and the task of a complete vindication of our epistemic situation in light of the skeptical challenge. He states:

"What I have shown... is that there are definite limits to the realization of these ideals" [ideals of fully reflective justification] "...not everything can be subjected to the test of critical examination, or else we shall be bereft of all belief. We can establish some conclusions only by assuming other propositions, not all of which can themselves be

established. There is, perhaps, no particular assumption that cannot be disengaged and successfully argued for, but we cannot turn the trick with the whole lot at once."[11]

Obviously the suggestion that we drop the demand for fully reflective justification will not satisfy the skeptic, he may well feel he is not been taken seriously, but it does constitute a response of sorts. It suggests that methods of belief formation can be saved individually. What cannot be achieved is a response that will satisfy the skeptic who requires that the 'trick be turned with the whole lot at once' for his problem to be answered.

The problem with accepting this kind of response is that the circularity involved in the argument appears no different from the type of circularity that we wish to avoid in the skeptic's problem. That is to say it still appears to be vicious circularity. We are assuming that perception is an instance of the appropriate relation required for justification obtaining, in order to justify our belief that it is. However, that it is so is precisely what is at issue. If we are interested in whether or not beliefs in the accuracy or reliability of perception are justified then surely we would not want to allow the use of perception in clearing up any doubt that we had any more than we would advocate the use of the techniques of tarot card reading in clearing up any doubts we had about its accuracy. Philosophers such as Alston are clearly aware of the concern and it is not clear that Alston himself has a definitive opinion on the matter. In 'The Reliability of Sense Perception'[12] he claims:

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[11] *Ibid.* Section VIII.
[12] W. P. Alston *The Reliability of Sense-Perception* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) 1993 p17.

"...the argument will not do its job unless we *are* justified in accepting its premises;.....But when we ask whether one or another source of belief is reliable, we are interested in discriminating those that can reasonably be trusted from those that cannot. Hence merely showing that if a given source of belief is reliable it can be shown by its record to be reliable, does nothing to indicate that the source belongs with the sheep rather than with the goats".

This appears to be an admission that we may be justified in such claims about perception only *if* we are justified. The difficulty comes in our desire to remove this 'if'. Obviously this is what the skeptic requires to be satisfied; if we are unable to assert more than a conditional then the skeptic's worries will not be banished.

The difficulty stems from the fact that admitting that turning the trick with the whole lot at once is impossible, amounts to an admission that the skeptic is correct. That is, admitting this type of limitation to knowledge seems to open the door to a much more extreme form of limitation. It appears that we need to be able to give a demonstration of knowledge as a whole, without admitting that it is in any way limited, i.e. we need to be able to show knowledge as being complete. If we are to give a satisfactory answer to the problem of the criterion then we do need to turn the trick with the whole lot at once. Effectively this is the strategy of Hegel's solution in the *Phenomenology*, which takes up the challenge of the Skeptic; it offers to give a demonstration of the completeness of knowledge, refusing to accept at face value the impossibility of this task. The cogency of

this demonstration depends, in a large part, upon the viability of various features of Hegel's 'dialectical method', and in part, upon his conception of 'completeness' that this method embodies.

The derivation of this method and the debt it owes to Hegel's ideas concerning Ancient Skepticism will form the main part of the next chapter, along with an identification of the manner in which it purports to solve the problem. Hegel tackles the Skeptic head on and his adaptation of Ancient Skeptical techniques to provide the very mechanism through which the demonstration is to be given, makes for a unique approach to the problem of the criterion.

Chapter Two

The obvious place to begin our discussion of Hegel's proposed solution to the problem of the criterion would be the 'Introduction' to the *Phenomenology*, as it is the *Phenomenology* that is to serve as an introduction to Hegel's larger system[1] and it is here that he explicitly outlines how his proposed solution is to function. However, the outline that Hegel provides here is both difficult and densely packed; it is in need of interpretation if it is to prove fruitful in providing a strategy by which to escape the problem. For this reason we will do well not to restrict ourselves solely to the *Phenomenology*, we should also look to some of Hegel's earlier works in which the ideas of his proposed solution were developed[2]. It will also be useful to have an understanding of the basic features of the proposed solution that are to be explained in Hegel's introduction, as this will allow us to see more clearly the manner in which the solution is to function.

To this end we will not tackle the 'Introduction' to the *Phenomenology* head on in this chapter; we will instead leave that task to chapter 3. Here we will focus on the basic outline of Hegel's strategy for solving the problem of the criterion as well as some of the motivations behind this strategy. The discussion will be divided into two sections. The first will look at Hegel's attitude towards the type of Skepticism from which the

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[1] "The Phenomenology of Spirit should replace psychological explanations and more abstract discussions concerning the grounding of knowledge. It considers the *preparation* for Science from a standpoint which makes it a new, interesting science and the first science in philosophy" from Hegel's own Announcement of the Phenomenology in 1807.

[2] Most notable amongst these earlier works are *Fragment of a System* (1800), *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosohpy: The Need for Philosophy* (1801), both of which can be found in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. S. Houlgate (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.) 1998. Also see *The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy* (1802), which can be found in G.W.F. Hegel *Jenaer Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp) 1970 pp. 222-231, and *Logic and Metaphysics* (1801-1802), both of which can be found in M.N. Forster's *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1998. Appendices V & VI pp. 586-604.

problem is to be derived, taking into account the earlier works mentioned above. This will enable us to highlight the most distinctive feature of Hegel's proposed solution in section two, namely that a solution will require a 'complete' account of knowledge and one that allows us to reach the standpoint of 'Absolute knowledge'. In just what sense the answer must be 'complete' will be considered in this section along with the requirements that Hegel's solution must fulfil if it is to be viable.

1.

Hegel's views on Philosophical Skepticism were formed early in his career and are outlined explicitly in earlier works such as *The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy* and *Logic and Metaphysics*[3]. While the *Phenomenology* itself does of course, to some degree, discuss these views few commentators discuss their importance in depth in reference to the formation of Hegel's overall strategy[4]. Basically, Hegel contends that there is a distinction to be made between the methods of 'Ancient' and 'Modern' Skepticism. The former is characterised by the works of Sextus Empiricus and the 'tropes' or 'modes of argument' of Pyrrho and Agrippa that are recorded there. The latter is constituted by Hegel's more immediate predecessors such as Descartes and Hume. Ultimately Hegel viewed Ancient Skepticism as constituting the greater threat to Philosophy insofar as it attacked all forms of dogmatic assertion while avoiding such assertion itself. This is something that he believed could not be said of Modern

[3] *Op. Cit.*

[4] The section in the *Phenomenology* that deals most directly with Skepticism is Section B: IV b. 'Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism and the Unhappy Consciousness' (PS 197-230). One of the best discussions in respect of the influence that Hegel's views concerning Skepticism had on his strategy in the *Phenomenology* is to be found in M.N. Forster's *Hegel's Idea of a*

Skepticism. Though interesting in themselves, the reasons that Hegel held for making such a distinction are not of direct concern to us here and due to limitations of space will not be discussed below[5]. Instead we will consider the strengths that Hegel perceived in Ancient Skepticism and the influence that they had on the formation of Hegel's own solution.

1:i. *Ancient Skepticism*

Ancient Skepticism is constituted by various 'modes of argument' or 'tropes' as they are otherwise known, all designed to induce suspension of belief (*epochē*) over a given issue. Hegel's knowledge of this philosophical school came from Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*[6] in which the various tropes are listed, explained and employed against all forms of dogmatic philosophy, that is, against all philosophical theories that assent to a non-evident proposition of some kind. What Sextus attempts to demonstrate is that any attempt to discern which dogmatic theory is correct ultimately results in failure, leaving suspension of belief as the only sensible option. For Sextus it seems that any argument in favour of a given doctrine will be matched by arguments that refute it. In order to understand such a position and Hegel's interpretation of it, we should first look to its central figures, to those who developed it as a position, and then to some of the modes or tropes themselves.[7]

Phenomenology of Spirit (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1998 pp. 129-192, for a more detailed discussion see Forster's *Hegel and Skepticism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press) 1989.

[5] For further discussion of this topic I refer the reader to M.N. Forster's work cited above.

[6] S. Empiricus *Works Vol. 1: Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (London: William Heinemann Ltd.) 1933, Book I. It is generally thought that Hegel possessed the 'Fabricus Edition' of the text which was the best edition available at the time-See K. R. Westphal *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer) 1989, 'Notes to Chapter 1' No. 54, page 219.

[7] In what follows regarding the historical development of Ancient Skepticism I have drawn on both the work of J. Annas & J. Barnes in the 'Introduction' to their translation of S. Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1994, and Charlotte L. Stough *Greek Skepticism:*

As indicated in the title of Sextus' work it is Pyrrho of Elis (c.360-c.270 B.C.) who is taken to be the founder and figurehead of such Skepticism. Very little however, is known about Pyrrho; he wrote nothing down and was not part of any institutionalised system of thought such as a school or academy. Moreover, he seemed to have little if any interest in founding such an institution. He did however, have at least one pupil: Timon of Philius (c.320-230 B.C.) and it is through the writings of Timon (amongst others such as Sextus) that we are informed of Pyrrho's thought. As a consequence we cannot be sure to just what degree Pyrrho's thought formed a coherent system. In the hands of Sextus it becomes explicitly systematic: a list of ten tropes designed to induce suspension of belief on various matters[8]. But given Pyrrho's general anti-academic outlook it is highly likely that he had no clearly worked out system. Rather his position seemed to consist in the view that certain general strategies can be used to make us realise that our differing theories about the world are ungrounded and hence equally at fault. Once this realisation has been made, we should cease worrying over such differing theories; we should simply refuse to assert one theory over any other, instead settling for a state of calmness or quietude (*ataraxia*) about such matters. It is the achievement of this state that constituted the goal or aim of Pyrrho's Skepticism. A summary of Pyrrho's message composed by his pupil Timon was reported as follows[9]:

A Study in Epistemology (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press) 1969, see Ch's 1 & 5.

[8] These 10 tropes as they appear in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* are generally taken to have actually been invented by Aenesidemus of Cnossos who originally belonged to the group of 'Academic Skeptics' (see page 35 below). He moved away from the Academy in the First Century B.C. believing it to be too dogmatic and established his own Skeptical movement adopting the teachings of Pyrrho and using him as a figurehead.

[9] As reported by Aristocles in Eusibius' *Preparation for the Gospel* XIV, xvii 2-4, Trans. J. Annas & J. Barnes in *The Modes of Skepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 1985.

"...Pyrrho shows that objects are equally indifferent and unfathomable and undeterminable because neither our senses nor our judgements are true or false; so for that reason we should not trust in them but should be without judgement and without inclination and unmoved, saying about each thing that it no more is than is not or both is and is not or neither is nor is not. And Timon says that for those who take this attitude the result will be first non-assertion, then tranquillity."

A second form of Skepticism arose in Plato's Academy under the leadership of Arcesilaus (c.315-240 B.C.) and Carneades (c.214-128/9 B.C.). This 'Academic Skepticism' developed independently from Pyrrhonian thought, basing itself instead on a modified version of the dialectic found in Plato's early dialogues. The Academic Skeptics cultivated precise arguments used to attack specific opponents. The key to these arguments was a clear understanding of their opponent's position; they assessed every claim of their opponent in order to demonstrate that the subsequent refutation of the overall position was complete. They took their cue from the *Theatetus*[10] in which Socrates claims:

"...the triumph of my art is in thoroughly examining whether the thought...is false and lifeless, or fertile and true...I resemble the midwives in being barren of wisdom, and the reproach which is often made against me, that I ask questions of others and have not the wit to pronounce upon any subject myself, is very just – the reason is, that the good compels me to be a midwife, but has not allowed me to bring forth."[11]

[10] Plato *Theatetus* in *The Dialogues of Plato*, Trans. B. Jowett (London: Oxford University Press) 4th Edition, 1953.
[11] *Ibid.* Volume III, Page 245.

Indeed, not 'bringing forth' was to lead to the Pyrrhonian result of *epochē* for the Academic Skeptics who urged that a proper understanding of both the arguments for and against a certain matter would lead to this result, as those arguments would be shown to be equal in respect of their force.

Sextus' own Skepticism developed from a tradition started in the First Century B.C. by Aenesidemus[12] who broke away from the Academy, claiming Pyrrho as the rightful figurehead for his own more extreme position. While Sextus held that his Skepticism was not part of the tradition of Academic Skepticism it undoubtedly owed a debt to the systematising influence of the Academy, as Aenesidemus not only took Pyrrho as a figurehead, but also maintained the close argumentation of the Academic Skeptics which gave structure to his form of Pyrrhonism, making it more systematic. Sextus continued this tradition, listing the various arguments, clarifying the methodology until he arrived at a position somewhat like an amalgam of the ideas of Pyrrho and the Academy insofar as it holds that:

1. Skepticism will lead to *ataraxia*; this being its aim.
2. *Ataraxia* will be achieved by demonstrating that arguments for and against a position have equal force.
3. 1. and 2. require a clear and accurate understanding of an opponent's position to be achieved.

An obvious question arises for such an approach: 'are we not guilty of endorsing certain assumptions in the arguments we use against other positions?' If the result is to be suspension of belief achieved via a demonstration of the equal force of contrary

[12] See Footnote 8 above.

positions, then surely we are guilty of making some unwarranted presuppositions, which is precisely what we are counselling against? Surely the Skeptic must hold to some kind of positive claim or assertion?

In responding to this we must bear in mind that Sextus does not wish to establish any one claim over against any other; instead we are supposed to understand the force of both claims and in doing so find ourselves unable to decide on one rather than the other. The way that this is to be achieved is by following the argumentative principles of the opponent. It is their principles and assumptions that are taken up by the Skeptic and used against them, the truth of such principles and assumptions is never asserted by the Skeptic. Instead the tactic is one of immanent critique, a refutation based on grounds that the opponent uses. It is in this sense a form of self-refutation and it is this that explains why we lose confidence in those argumentative grounds. Once all such principles and assumptions have been shown to generate contrary positions of equal force we are purged of any confidence in them.

Yet, it would seem that we are also purged of any confidence that we placed in the Skeptical argumentation that got us to this point, insofar as it relied on the principles and assumptions of the defeated positions in order to operate. It seems that part of the process of climbing the ladder to the goal of Ancient Skepticism involves kicking the ladder away afterwards, the important feature being that this only occurs *after* all the arguments of the opponent have been defeated. As Sextus puts it when speaking of the Skeptical argument against proofs:

"...the argument which deduces that proof does not exist, being probative itself, banishes itself. To which it must be replied that it does not entirely banish itself. For many things are said which imply exception...so also when we say that no proof exists we imply in our statement the exception of the argument which proves that proof does not exist; for this alone is proof. And even if it does banish itself, the existence of proof is not thereby confirmed. For there are many things that produce the same effect on themselves as they produce on other things...so too the argument against proof, after abolishing every proof, can cancel itself also. And again, just as it is not impossible for the man who has ascended to a high place by a ladder to overturn the ladder with his foot after his ascent, so also it is not unlikely that the Skeptic after he has arrived at the demonstration of his thesis by means of argument proving the non-existence of proof, as it were by a step ladder, should then abolish this very argument."[13]

Skepticism of this form then eventually overcomes itself; a feature that will prove important to Hegel. It may not result in any positive claim or assertion but it does seem to result in something, suspension of belief and presumably *ataraxia*, based on some deeper understanding or greater appreciation of matters. If we are now to see how all of this impacts on Hegel's proposed solution we should change our focus to Hegel's own thoughts on Ancient Skepticism and highlight what he took to be its main strengths.

[13] Sextus Empiricus *Works Vol. II: Against the Logicians* trans. R. G. Bury (London: William

1:ii Strengths of Ancient Skepticism

Hegel showed particular interest in five later tropes commonly known as the 'five tropes of Agrippa'. Subsequent to the ten tropes handed down by Aenesidemus, these are viewed by Sextus as being complementary to but not as superseding the previous ten. Hegel's interpretation is, however, that "(t)hese later five tropes constitute the real arsenal of the Skeptic's weapons against philosophical knowledge"[14]. Briefly the five tropes are as follows[15]:

1. *Discrepancy*: is the idea that "...with regard to the object presented there has arisen...an interminable conflict because of which we are unable either to choose a thing or reject it."[16]
2. *Regress ad Infinitum*: is the idea that when "...the thing adduced as a proof of the matter proposed needs a further proof, and this again another, and so on *ad infinitum*...the consequence is suspension, as we posses no starting point for our argument."[17]
3. *Relativity*: is the idea that an object may only have "...such or such an appearance in relation to the subject judging and to the concomitant percepts"[18]. If this is the case then any judgement as to its real nature must be suspended.
4. *Hypothesis*: is the idea that in instances where a regress has been forced (2.) and a solution has been provided by taking a starting point for granted

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Heinemann Ltd.) 1933, Bk. II, pp. 487-489.

[14] Hegel G. W. F. *The Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy*, *Op. Cit.* In what follows my account of the importance of 'equipollence' for Hegel is taken from M. N. Forster's discussion of the matter. *Op. Cit.*

[15] In the following list I have adopted the headings used in Sextus' own text: "...the first based on discrepancy, the second on regress *ad infinitum*, the third on relativity, the fourth on hypothesis, the fifth on circular reasoning." S. Empiricus *Works Vol. 1: Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (London: William Heinemann Ltd.) 1933, Book I, pp. 94/95.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*

"...simply and without demonstration"[19], then this starting point is not established as it has not been demonstrated and we should suspend belief on the matter.

5. *Circularity*: is the idea that when the "...proof itself which ought to establish the matter of inquiry requires confirmation derived from that matter..."[20] neither the proof nor the matter can be taken to establish the other and we must suspend judgement.

We can see that these five tropes provide the basis for the problem of the criterion. If we assert that a belief is justified then the Skeptic can ask, using trope 3, how we know this to be the case, perhaps it is not? If some proof is offered in the form of the identification of another instance of a justified belief that accords with the previous one then trope 2 is applied; further proof is required for that proof and a regress is started. On the other hand if we appeal to a criterion as proof the Skeptic will ask again, by 3 'what justifies belief in this criterion?' If we appeal to instances to justify it we are caught in a circle by trope 5 and if we appeal to a further criterion we are caught again by trope 2, and if we simply take our proof for granted then trope 4 can be applied. The result is an application of trope 1 by the Skeptic; there has arisen an 'interminable conflict'.

It seems then that any claim attempting to ground itself in light of trope 3 will be forced into the position of succumbing to trope 4, and thereby 1, if infinite regress (2) and circularity (5) are to be avoided. All avenues seem to lead to trope 1. The connection between this lack of proof and the 'interminable conflict' that supposedly

[19] *Ibid.*

results is the Ancient Skeptic's use of *isostheneia* or *equipollence*. That is, the equivalence of two or more propositions in respect of their justification and literally the term means 'equality of power'. To the Ancient Skeptic it was a technique whereby an opposing proposition could be introduced into a discussion with same justificatory power as the original proposition under discussion, thus forcing suspension of belief upon the matter; this is what gives the 'interminable conflict'. Hegel himself notes this underpinning idea when explaining the five tropes, claiming that in order to avoid a regress regarding grounds we might "...posit something first and unproven" but this would allow the Skeptic to "...imitate by positing the opposite of that presupposition without proof and with just the same right"[21]. The idea then is that a claim that is lacking a demonstrable ground will always be open to attack by an equipollent contrary; an opposing claim of the same justificatory right i.e. one that is also lacking a demonstrable ground. In such a case it seems that we require a way of deciding between the claims if we are to escape suspension of belief (by trope 1) and whatever the way, its ground must be demonstrable if it is to avoid attack by equipollent contrary[22].

As far as the Ancient Skeptic was concerned every matter of inquiry admits of being brought under at least one of these five tropes and Hegel concurs that these later tropes will constitute a problem for any claim to knowledge as any attempt to ground such a claim will result in either regress or circularity, whereas leaving the claim ungrounded or positing a non-demonstrable ground for the claim licenses the

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[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Hegel G. W. F. *The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy, Op. Cit.*

[22] Indeed this is what we saw in relation to the 'epistemic circularity' argument. At base it appealed to a non-demonstrable form of direct justification for support, but this left open the possibility of justifying any method of belief formation in the same way, and hence we had no way of deciding which methods were actually correct. It did nothing to prove that our beliefs were true of the world.

application of an equipollent contrary. This general applicability of the tropes was one of the strengths of Ancient Skepticism as far as Hegel was concerned; the other was to be found in the Skeptic's use of immanent critique. They did not rely on a belief in certain principles but simply adopted those of their opponents, as we saw in *1:i.* It is these strengths that Hegel wished to both preserve and supersede in his own philosophy. In overcoming Ancient Skepticism and moving beyond mere suspension of belief Hegel adapts these strengths, and it is this that we will now consider.

1:iii. *Overcoming Ancient Skepticism*

If Hegel takes these as the strengths of Ancient Skepticism, then how are they to be overcome? How is an answer to the problem of the criterion to be given? An indication is to be found in Hegel's criticism of such Skepticism as a purely negative procedure:

"The skepticism that ends up with the bare abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot get any further from there, but must wait and see whether something new comes along and what it is, in order to throw it into the same empty abyss". (PS 79)

Such Skepticism "...is itself one of the patterns of incomplete consciousness" (PS 79). The criticism is that such Skepticism is limited in someway, it 'cannot get any further', it is incomplete, the suggestion being that Hegelian philosophy will go further, overcoming any such limitation; but why is this necessarily a criticism?

The answer is given in Hegel's analysis of the methods of Ancient Skepticism. If we are to avoid equipollent contraries in attempting to ground a knowledge claim, then it seems that we must avoid relying on unproven presuppositions. But this would seem to preclude us from positively asserting that anything is the case as any unproven claim would demand demonstration. However, if we could nullify the possibility of there being a contrary claim that has an equal justification to ours, that is, if the condition for an equipollent contrary for a certain claim could be shown to never arise, then it would seem that the claim in question would have a proof of sorts. It would be more justified than any contrary claim as there would be no possibility of a claim with equal justificatory power being made. Achieving this would require a demonstration that this claim is unlimited insofar as nothing stands in opposition to it. It is in this sense that claiming that Ancient Skepticism is 'incomplete' or limited constitutes a criticism. Hegel claims of the tropes of Agrippa that:

"...these tropes all contain and depend upon the concept of something finite, it is an immediate consequence of their application to the Rational that they pervert it into something finite, that in order to be able to scratch the Rational they give it the itch of limitation"[23].

His point is that Ancient Skepticism misrepresents the situation[24] by treating it as finite. The suggestion is that whatever the tropes are applied to must be limited as it is a condition of their application. It is only because claims require some other (be it another claim, or external relation) to be grounded that the tropes constitute a problem.

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[23] *The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy, Op. Cit.*

[24] For Hegel the Rational is "...nothing which can be grounded reciprocally by something else...(F)or the Rational has no opposite" *Ibid.* Establishing that this is the case will be, in part, the work of the *Phenomenology*.

If instead we could give a convincing claim that was complete in the sense that all oppositions were overcome while providing an account for the occurrence of such opposition, then no other would be required for or involved in its grounding and we could escape the threat of the Ancient Skeptic's tropes and equipollent contraries.

For Hegel then a genuine demonstration must be a complete one and such a demonstration must be given if the Ancient Skeptic is to be overcome. It is such a demonstration that Hegel's system is to provide. The way in which this is to be achieved and precisely what this sense of 'completeness' translates to in the context of a philosophical system is what we will consider next.

2.

Insofar as Hegel's response must nullify the possibility of equipollent contraries arising for his system it must contain a refutation of all possible incomplete or limited claims to knowledge, that is, it must demonstrate that it is not limited. This seems an impossibly tall order to fulfil and it cannot be achieved on the basis of any pre-supposed criterion as any such criterion could not be established until the refutation has been completed. Just how Hegel proposes to surmount this difficulty we shall see shortly, but it should be noted that the refutation of such claims will not result in something purely negative; it will not lead to the *epochē* of Ancient Skepticism. Rather, as each claim to knowledge is refuted a new, improved, one will be generated which in turn may be refuted. This inner dynamic of refutations and provisions is Hegel's famous dialectic, which is to be viewed as progressive, each provision

building on the preceding refutation. It is through a reconstruction of this self-determining dialectic that Hegel is to overcome Ancient Skepticism and its problems, providing a proof of his own Science. The detailed workings of this dialectic will be discussed in chapters three and four but as a preliminary to that discussion we should consider an outline of how it is supposed to fulfil its task.

2:i. *Forms of Consciousness*

The first thing to notice is that a reconstruction of the refutation of *all possible* limited or incomplete claims to knowledge involves such a refutation already having taken place. But how can this be so? Surely there may be claims made in the future not covered by Hegel's reconstruction? Would these claims be genuinely new claims or just a re-statement of old claims? For Hegel, if a satisfactory demonstration that our claims to knowledge are justified is to be given to the Ancient Skeptic, then it is necessary that all the forms of incomplete, non-justified claims, have already been passed through. The important feature of Hegel's proposed reconstruction in this is highlighted by the term 'forms'. Hegel does not propose to demonstrate that each particular incomplete claim has been defeated as this would indeed appear impossible, rather the idea is that any such claim will be the result of a certain set of background beliefs or principles being held. It is only on the basis of holding certain principles to be true about the world and our experience of it that we can make such claims; they result from the holding of these principles. The dialectic to be reconstructed will only act on sets of these principles. This provides Hegel with a task that is far more manageable; he need only demonstrate that each possible set of such principles or criteria are self-defeating.

A given set is called a 'form of consciousness' by Hegel and is essentially an interpretive schema through which consciousness apprehends its objects. Such a schema is constituted by one principle that specifies the basic type of entities encountered and one principle that specifies the type of access we have to those entities. That is to say, one stipulates the type of objects we encounter in the world and the other the type of knowledge we take ourselves to have of those objects. Together the principles are assumed to be true; we have 'certainty' in their interpretation. They act as a criterion against which to measure our experience and claims about such experience. Each form of consciousness then "...provides its own criterion from within itself" (PS 84) and it is on the basis of such a criterion that claims to knowledge are made and assessed.

Through the dialectic each form of consciousness will be shown to be incomplete, that is, the certainty they each constitute will prove to be ungrounded and their principles will be shown to be false insofar as they fail to comprehensively account for objects as they appear in experience. Nevertheless, in reducing his task in this way Hegel must still convince us that the forms passed through in the course of the dialectic are all the possible forms of consciousness, both that have been and that may be. It is only in this sense that his demonstration can be a genuinely 'complete' one, so how is he to convince us of this?

2:ii. *Completeness Requirements*

Hegel employs various strategies by which to convince us that the forms of consciousness we pass through are all the possible forms. My intention here is to sketch the basic requirements that, if fulfilled, Hegel thinks will ensure the completeness of his demonstration; we will return to such requirements in chapter four, but for now it will suffice to provide an outline.

(a.) Necessity Requirement: Each form of consciousness is to develop out of the rejection of its immediately preceding form. The idea is that each form of consciousness necessarily develops into the next via its self-refutation. As Hegel puts it "(T)he necessary progression and interconnection of the forms of unreal consciousness will by itself bring to pass the completion of the series" (PS 79). When a form of consciousness proves to be self-refuting the result is not merely negative as is the case with the Ancient skeptic, instead a new form is determined which in turn is to be considered. Hegel labels this process 'determinate negation'. By connecting the forms of consciousness in this way the forms become members of a system, but there is as yet no reason to suppose that the members considered in the *Phenomenology* constitute all the possible members of the system.

(b.) Circularity Requirement: Some evidence is to be given by the looping back upon itself of the progression through the forms of consciousness. The progression is to be circular, returning to the form of consciousness from which it began. That the progression from one form of consciousness to the next is necessary, and that this progression finally returns to its starting point will at least provide a closed system, i.e. it provides *one* completed system.

> However, this cannot guarantee that there aren't other possible systems of forms of consciousness; there could be some, as yet unaccounted for, forms of consciousness with there own systematic connections. Does the system of the forms of consciousness that Hegel's dialectic progresses through have to be the only one?

If Hegel is to provide the required 'completeness' it seems that it must. However, it is difficult to see how these two requirements alone will allow Hegel to establish this. Hegel certainly doesn't consider every logically possible form of consciousness, so how are we to accept his demonstration of the completeness of his demonstration? One way of answering this question would be to view the system as a teleological one. Hegel claims in speaking of the dialectic that, "...the *goal* is as necessarily fixed ...as the serial progression" (PS 80). It is the point where we arrive at a form of consciousness that is not limited, that does not meet the condition for the application of an equipollent contrary. This goal could be taken to explain the existence of the system which the forms of consciousness constitute. The forms can be explained in reference to the role they play in fulfilling this goal. Once the goal has been reached no other forms can be explained in this way; no other forms will fulfil this function as it has already been fulfilled. Any other putative forms of consciousness then cannot be accounted for in this way, that is, they cannot be forms of consciousness in this sense; they either fit into the series of forms presented in the Hegelian system or they are not forms of consciousness at all. So, if we follow Hegel through his reconstruction and see that the progress made necessarily results from the forms themselves, and recognise that we have reached the end point of the progression insofar as the development leads back to itself, and that it is the end point for which the forms exist,

then all possible forms must have been passed through whether explicitly characterized or not. That is, any further putative form we care to mention will either not be a form or it will fall somewhere within the system already completed.

But if the completeness of the system is to be explained teleologically, then the problem just seems to have been pushed back. It does seem that *if* the goal has been reached then there can no longer be independent systems of forms of consciousness. However that the goal has been reached can only seemingly be demonstrated by passing through all the possible forms of consciousness. It seems then that we are stuck in a situation like that involved in the problem of the criterion. In order to establish that every possible form has been passed through we must recognize that the goal has been achieved, but in order to recognize this we must have established that every possible form has been passed through. A further requirement that Hegel seemed keen for his system to meet was the following.

(c.) Historical Requirement: It must be demonstrated that the progress of the dialectic through the forms of consciousness is the progress of history itself. That is, he aims to demonstrate that the result of his own system is the very purpose of history fulfilled. That there is evidence that Hegel viewed this as a requirement I don't doubt, but that its result is that support will be added to his claim for the completeness of his system is not at all clear. Presumably Hegel faces the same problem in establishing that this requirement is met as he does in establishing the completeness of his system in general. If the goal of history involved the passing through of all the possible forms of consciousness then

demonstrating that the goal had been fulfilled would still entail demonstrating that all the possible forms had been passed through.

This last requirement does seem very peculiar if it is to somehow strengthen or bolster (a) and (b) and it's not clear that Hegel did intend this requirement to fulfil such a purpose, though it was a requirement that Hegel evidently thought his system should meet. Nevertheless, if Hegel can indeed meet requirements (a) and (b) he will have gone some way to convincing us of the completeness of his system. We will return to this important issue later after we have fleshed out the details of the dialectic. For the moment it will be useful to summarize the main features on which Hegel's proposed solution depends.

2:iii. *The Viability of the Demonstration*

The viability of Hegel's demonstration then appears to depend on three factors.

(i.) The cogency of the dialectic

(ii.) Fulfilling the 'completeness requirements'

(iii.) Identifying the correct starting point

The importance of (i.) and (ii.) should be obvious from what has been said so far. The importance of (iii.), however, is less obvious. If the progress through the various forms of consciousness is to be compelling to the Ancient Skeptic and other non-Hegelian positions then these positions must be able to recognise the completeness of the progress. Achieving both (i.) and (ii.) is of course necessary for this recognition, but the moment in which the other viewpoints will be able to recognise the

completeness of the progress will only occur when the progress returns to its starting point. If this starting point is not correctly identified, if it is not recognised as the most primitive form of consciousness, then Hegel's solution will not be recognised as being complete. This initial form then must be accepted as the most primitive by all non-Hegelian positions.

These are the three factors that we will focus on in assessing the overall plausibility of Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion. We will for the most part focus on factor (i.)[25] as this has a direct bearing on the 'completeness requirements' and involves what is perhaps Hegel's most controversial doctrine, that of 'determinate negation'. Further, if reasonable sense can be made of the dialectic then it would seem that we have a powerful philosophical tool that we can employ against the Ancient Skeptic, insofar as it would permit a resolution between equipollent contraries, even if the other features cannot be adequately demonstrated.

[25] See chapter three.

Chapter Three

We have already noted that the lion's share of the work of providing a convincing solution to the problem at hand falls to Hegel's dialectic. If this notion of a self-determining movement of refutations and resolutions can be clarified and if its reconstruction is cogent then Hegel will have gone a long way towards succeeding in 'turning the trick with the whole lot at once' to recall Alston's phrase[1]. It is the dialectic that will be the focus of this chapter, but before we get started it is worth noting a few of its basic features, so as to avoid embarking on our discussion with any false preconceptions.

First, it is worth noting that Hegel characterizes a dialectical movement as being "...precisely what is called *experience*"; an exposition of the course of the dialectic being "...an exposition of the course of experience" (PS 86/87). The dialectic, therefore, is not an operation or a method to be applied to some subject matter; rather it is the course of experience. Naturally enough what we are given in the *Phenomenology* is therefore a reconstruction that accords, in some way, to this course. In providing such a reconstruction or in discerning the dialectic from real events Hegel must be aware of its workings, the way in which it functions, but he is not supposed to be applying it as a method *to* experience. It is for this reason that Hegel can claim:

[1] W. Alston 'Epistemic Circularity', Section VIII. *Op. Cit.* See Ch 1, pp. 18-19.

"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 78 my italics).

This leads to a second, related point that the dialectic is not simply a movement from a *thesis* to its *antithesis* and then finally to a *synthesis*[2]. Hegel uses two terms of art in describing the dialectic: *Aufhebung*, which denotes the transitions of the dialectic, in which a previous stage is overcome and yet preserved and *Versohnung*, which is usually rendered as 'reconciliation' and is employed to refer to the outcome of a dialectical transition, implying that the opposition of two terms has been annulled while the terms themselves remain. Such a characterization captures the underlying sense of these terms of art, that of a transition through opposition to some kind of differentiated unity, but it oversimplifies matters. It makes it appear as if the outcome of a given dialectical step is simply a mix of elements of a thesis and elements of its antithesis, and while this is true in abstract it is by no means the whole picture. It detracts from the putative reality of the dialectic, making it seem like a merely formal operation rather than a real historical process. Further, it fails to adequately capture the detailed nature of the transitional movements involved in the dialectic. Obviously this claim of oversimplification can only be established once a richer more accurate account of the dialectic has been given, but before we consider such an account there is one final feature to note.

[2] For an account of the origin of this common characterization of Hegel's dialectic see Gustav E. Mueller 'The Hegel Legend of "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis"' in *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, Ed. J. Stewart (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press) 1996.

This final feature is that the movement of the dialectic rests on the key Hegelian idea of *Determinate Negation*. This is the idea that the negation of a form of consciousness is not simply negative but instead furnishes its own unique solution, that is, it determines the new form of consciousness that replaces the previous one. Really, this is just the idea that the 'equipollence' employed by the Ancient Skeptics need not simply come to a halt in suspension of belief; when viewed correctly it produces a new position that overcomes the contrary claims and yet somehow preserves them. It is with the idea of determinate negation that Hegel is to make good on his criticism of Ancient Skepticism as 'incomplete'. Indeed, it is in showing, via the dialectic, that equipollent contraries needn't simply result in *epochē* that Hegel is to give his answer to the problem of the criterion, and it is determinate negation that will provide the necessity and direction of the dialectic.

In light of these features it will be worthwhile to begin our consideration of the dialectic with a general look at how one might envisage the dialectic's generating contradictions and determining the solution to such contradictions, section 1., before we tackle Hegel's own presentation of the matter in section 2. In this manner we will gain a general understanding of the dialectic and the difficulties surrounding it that Hegel must explain if his conception of it is to be rendered cogent. It will also be useful to take a look at an example of the dialectic as presented in the *Phenomenology*; an example of it 'in action' so to speak. This will be undertaken in section 3 of this chapter and should help clarify, in part, the functioning of the important notion of determinate negation.

1.

The starting point of a dialectical movement is a form of consciousness. The first difficulty we face then in understanding the dialectic is how a form of consciousness is to be self-refuting? How is it to contradict itself? It is this aspect that provides the impetus for a dialectical movement after all. The second difficulty we face is explaining the movement itself; given that a contradiction has arisen how is this to be resolved? And more importantly, how is it to be construed as resolving itself?

1:i. Generating Contradictions

We have already seen how a system of principles can generate a contradiction from within itself, albeit in a general way, in our discussion of Ancient Skepticism in Chapter 2. There the Skeptic, adopting his opponents' principles of argumentation showed that they ultimately lead to the equal licensing of claims contrary to the very claims that the opponent asserts. This basically was the import of equipollence. The Skeptics concluded that this difficulty was insoluble. So, are we to understand the contradictions generated by a form of consciousness in a similar way?

The answer is: 'yes, insofar as a form of consciousness is systematic in the same way'. We noticed that a form of consciousness is constituted by two principles, one that may be termed ontological as it designates the kind of entities in its domain and one that may be

termed epistemological as it designates the sort of knowledge we can have of those entities. Such a form involves construing the relation of its constituent elements (these principles) in a certain way. If they are construed as being related in another way then the form of consciousness is changed; it becomes another form. That is to say the form would now interpret the data it receives differently. In this sense a form of consciousness is systematic, so if we can understand how a given system can generate contradictions from within itself then we may be able to better understand how contradictions are generated in the dialectic.

This suggestion is used to good effect by M. Inwood in *Hegel:*[3] There he presents an example of a mathematical system that generates a contradiction, though this type of contradiction could just as well occur in any hierarchical system such as one of rank or title. The example is basically as follows:

Consider a hierarchical system, such as one of rank, in which being given one stripe indicates the rank of 'lance corporal', two that of 'corporal', three that of 'sergeant', four that of 'captain' and *any* number above that indicates the rank of 'major'. If all majors are considered to be equal in rank and if stripping two people of the same rank the same number of stripes demotes them to the same rank, then we can see how a contradiction is generated. If we award a corporal three more stripes he becomes a major and if we award a captain three more stripes he too becomes a major. If we let '$' be the symbol for 'stripes' it seems we have the following situation:

[3] M. J. Inwood *Hegel* (London: Routledge) 2002, page 292.

'2$ + 3$ = Major'

'4$ + 3$ = Major'

Therefore '(2$ + 3$) = (4$ + 3$)' as all majors are equal in rank.

But stripping two people of the same rank the same number of stripes (3$) demotes them to the same rank,

In which case '2$ = 4$'

Or, in other words, a corporal is equal in rank to a captain, but it is a feature of the system that a captain is of a higher rank than a corporal.

Such a contradiction can of course be avoided through a denial of the proposition that 'all majors are equal in rank', and acceptance of its opposite that 'all majors are not equal in rank'. This could be achieved by extending the designations of our system to include a separate rank for all the possible permutations that result in a rank above that of captain. Such a resolution highlights some of the features we might expect in the resolution of a dialectical movement, for example, the resolution is provided by extending the limits of the system, all majors are no longer equal in rank. Also, if resolved in this way then the rest of the original system is preserved; we have overcome the contradiction and preserved the system. However, it also throws up some questions relevant to Hegel's own system: 'why is the contradiction resolved in this manner?', 'could we not have just rejected that particular system of hierarchy all together, perhaps as a Skeptic might?' Our solution need not, it seems, prove to be a progressive one that preserves what went

before. Further, we might ask why we need to offer a solution at all? Could we not simply accept the situation as it is? Are there not sometimes contradictions in our thought that are just to be accepted?

1:ii. Resolving the Contradictions

Understanding Hegel's reply to these questions requires understanding his notion of determinate negation, and it is through the exposition of this notion that we will see what Hegel has to offer in response to them. A couple of suggestions can be made at this point however. One thing that is clear so far is that if the dialectic is progressive in the sense that each new stage overcomes and preserves its preceding one, then presumably, any of the higher stages would overcome and preserve any of the lower ones. That is to say, any of these higher stages would solve the contradictions inherent in the lower stages. But if this is the case how are we to interpret the necessity of one stage developing into the next? What is the general characteristic of each proceeding stage that connects it systematically to the preceding one? It can't simply be that it overcomes the contradictions of that stage while preserving it, as any higher stage will achieve this and so, strictly speaking, the intermediate stages would not appear necessary. This is not an easy question to find an answer to in Hegel's text. One good suggestion, put forward by M. Forster[4], is that each new stage of the dialectic is to be identified as necessary insofar as it is that candidate which solves the contradiction of the previous stage while modifying it *the least*. In other words the new stage will modify the old one just enough

[4] M. Forster *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: Chicago University Press) 1998, pages 185-187.

to eliminate the implicit contradiction while departing *less* from the meaning of the original stage than any other known candidate that performs that function. Naturally the suggestion is, that this is actually the way that consciousness progresses through the dialectic. It is not contrary to Hegel's comments that in our role as observers "...any contribution by us is superfluous...all that is left for us to do is simply to look on" (PS 85), here Hegel is simply keen to point out to the reader that the dialectic is not his invention but instead, his discovery. However, in explaining that the dialectic moves in a progressive fashion, unbeknownst to the consciousness involved in the movement, and in explaining the corollary of how the dialectic shapes history to is own end, despite the myriad intentions and actions of individual historical agents, Hegel will need more. He posits a notion of an unconscious, instinctual side of consciousness; what he terms a 'cunning of reason' that drives the movement of the dialectic onwards. It is this that ultimately underwrites the type of necessity that Forster suggests.

We will return to the question of necessity later, but there is, I think, one problem to note with Forster's suggestion: while it does seem to fit well with the transitions in Hegel's own text it's not clear that it will compel "...non-Hegelian individuals to move from their current non-Hegelian viewpoints to other viewpoints lying in the direction of Hegelian Science"[5]. Retrospectively assessing which candidate departed least from the meaning of the original stage while resolving the contradiction inherent in it, may not always prove as straightforward a task as it sounds. There may be candidates that both resolve the contradiction while changing the meaning in different ways but to the *same* degree and so

[5] *Ibid.* P187

in reconstructing the dialectic Hegel may well have gone wrong[6]. What's to guarantee that Hegel has reconstructed the dialectic correctly? If this question can't be answered the movement of the dialectic might simply appear arbitrary[7]. Indeed, it's not clear what there would be to convince the reader that the dialectic and cunning of reason weren't simply Hegelian inventions designed to impose an arbitrary systematization on things, rather than an actual discovery.

Generally speaking, the notion of a determinate negation is not an easy one to accept. If we begin with 'ordinary negation' it seems improbable that a new element can be determined from it: if we take *P* as representing an element of the dialectic, then its negation would be *~P* and this simply seems to leave us with 'either *P* or *~P*'. Now, if we try a slightly different approach and take *Q* to be the new element supposedly produced in a given dialectical step and bear in mind that *Q* incorporates or preserves some features of *P*, we might be able to get further. We can imagine *P* being constituted by various features: *p1, p2,* and *p3.* Likewise, *Q* is constituted by various features: *q1, q2, q3*, but also preserves some features of the previous element in its make up: *p2* and *p3*. So, a complete list of *Q*'s constituent elements would be *q1, q2, q3, p2,* and *p3*. While this may be a way of visualizing the incorporation of previous elements into new ones, we still face the problem explaining the connection between *P* and *Q* as being one in which *~P* determines *Q*. Moreover, we are now aware that this must involve an explanation of what

[6] In fact, Forster does seem to acknowledge this when he suggests that, the acceptability of the necessity, in principle, will "...by no means ensure that its *applications* in the work are successful". However, he does not indicate any particular problem that he may have in mind regarding an attempt at such application.
[7] This concern is paralleled by the worries we had in chapter 1 concerning the 'if' of Epistemically Circular arguments. Hegel is essentially facing a similar difficulty; in order to convince us as against the Ancient Skeptic he must establish the connection of the dialectic to reality. Either that or ultimately agree with the likes of Alston that we ought to drop the demand for fully reflective justification altogether.

exactly determines *which* aspects of *P* are preserved in *Q*; why '*p2* and *p3*' rather than '*p1* and *p2*' or '*p1* and *p3*', or simply *p1* and so forth? How is the notion of determinate negation to help in explaining all this?

The answer Hegel provides is given in terms of a *confrontation* and subsequent *recognition*. The negation of an element of the dialectic, a form of consciousness, comes in the form of a confrontation with something that seems fundamentally different from itself. Through this confrontation that form of consciousness recognizes aspects of itself in what confronts it; it recognizes that what confronts it is not as different as it was initially taken to be. It is in this recognition that the form of consciousness is transformed. As it stands, this vague characterization is obviously not supposed to solve the difficulties above, but it does indicate the form that the putative solution will take. In order to fill in the details of this solution we will now turn to Hegel himself, and an example from his *Phenomenology*.

2.

2:i Introduction Considered

It is the 'Introduction' to the *Phenomenology* that is to sketch Hegel's proposed solution to the 'problem of the criterion'[8]. He begins by highlighting a common sense view that knowledge is a relation in which a subject simultaneously relates itself to a putatively known object and distinguishes itself from this object. Such a view will at least involve a conceptual distinction of the object 'itself' from the object 'as it is taken to be' by the

[8] See Chapter 1 for a full exposition of this problem.

subject, though naturally, the subject may be assuming that there is no important difference between these two. This appears to highlight the very problem that Hegel is trying to solve, namely: 'how are we to tell if the object itself is as it is taken to be?' What is required is access to the object as it is in itself, irrespective of any putative knowledge of it, so that we can compare this putative knowledge to it. That is to say, we require a criterion that does not appear arbitrary, presupposed, or involve vicious circularity, against which to test knowledge claims. Hegel claims that his solution will rest upon this distinction stating:

"The object, it is true, seems only to be for consciousness in the way that consciousness knows it; it seems that consciousness cannot, as it were, get behind the object as it exists for consciousness so as to examine what the object is *in itself*, and hence, too, cannot test its own knowledge by that standard. But the distinction between the in-itself and knowledge is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all. Something is *for it* the *in-itself*; and ...the being of the object for consciousness, is, *for it*, another moment. Upon this distinction the examination rests." (PS 85)

This may well appear puzzling. Hegel claims, that 'it *seems* that consciousness cannot examine what the object is in itself' and then he states '*but* the distinction is already present in the fact that consciousness knows an object at all'. Is he suggesting that consciousness can perform the required comparison of the object itself and putative knowledge of the object because this distinction is available to consciousness? What sense can we make of this? What sense can we give to Hegel's proposed solution?

One way of answering this question is to distinguish the different ways in which Hegel employs the term *Ansich* (in-itself) in his introduction. This is a method employed to good effect by K. Westphal and a similar set of distinctions can also be found in the work of M. Theunissen[9]. I certainly think that this approach makes good sense of some of the more ambiguous sections of Hegel's Introduction and it is difficult to see what else Hegel could have intended if he didn't have something like the following distinctions in mind.

2:ii Distinctions

Westphal argues that Hegel employs the term 'in-itself' in the following two ways:

1. To refer to the object itself as it is outside of any relation to consciousness, irrespective of any putative knowledge of it.
2. To refer to the basic conception of an object that consciousness has. That is "...what consciousness affirms from within itself as *being-in-itself* or the *True*" (PS 84).

[9] See K. R. Westphal *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer) 1989, and 'Hegel's Solution to the Dilemma of the Criterion' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays* Ed. J. Stewart (Albany: SUNY Press) 1998. M. Theunissen 'Begriff und Realität' in *Dialektik in der Philosophie Hegels,* Ed. R. P. Horstmann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp) 1978. Also compare Kenly R. Dove 'Phenomenology and Systematic Philosophy' in *Method and Speculation in Hegel's Phenomenology* Ed. M. Westphal (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press) 1982.

It is the 'in-itself' in the second sense of the term that will serve as "...the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows" (PS 84)[10].

What this highlights in reference to Hegel's proposed solution is that the 'common sense' view of knowledge involves a conception of the world as being something independent from any knowledge of it. Just such a conception is given in recognizing that the object putatively known might *not* be as we take it to be. It is this *conception* of the object, that it is whatever it is irrespective of any relation it may have to consciousness, that is to be used as the 'standard' by consciousness for its self-examination. Before we see exactly how this works there is a further distinction that Westphal highlights.

This further distinction is one concerning the object of knowledge. According to Hegel we can distinguish objects that are *for*-consciousness from those that are *to*-consciousness. For example we note in paragraph 84 of the *Phenomenology* that "In consciousness one thing exists *for* another" i.e. the in-itself as it is for consciousness, and yet "...at the same time, this other is to consciousness not merely a *for it*..." (PS 84). Hegel makes this distinction at various points throughout his introduction[11].

So what does he mean when he claims that an object can be 'for-consciousness' and 'to-consciousness'? Something that is 'for-consciousness' is the object as putatively known by consciousness, the object as it is related to consciousness. However, this involves

[10] The second sense of 'in-itself' is flagged as different, argues Westphal, by Hegel's use of the term *erklart*- translated by Miller as 'affirms' and by Westphal as 'declares'. If an object is external from consciousness in the sense of 1 above, then it cannot be something "affirmed from within". To characterize such an object in this way would be to describe it incorrectly.
[11] See particularly the later part of the 'Introduction'- (PS 85-89).

slightly more than it first appears to. An object that is 'for-consciousness' is the result of the application of consciousness' conception of an object (2 in the distinctions above) to an object in-itself (1 in the distinctions above). That is to say, it's the result of the combination of the two senses of 'in-itself' distinguished earlier. As Westphal points out, Hegel is following Kant here, agreeing that there is no knowledge of an object without the application of concepts to it. The object may or may not instantiate our conception of it, but insofar as it does it is an object 'for-consciousness' and insofar as it does not it is an object 'to-consciousness'.

We must bear in mind however, that an object is "at the same time" something 'for' *and* 'to' consciousness. That is, what is 'for' and 'to' consciousness are *aspects* of the same object. Aspects that are 'to-consciousness' are not captured by consciousness' conception of objects, they are not known, and it is about such aspects that consciousness will be mistaken. Nevertheless, these aspects still bear some relation to consciousness, and it is these aspects that consciousness meets in discovering the inadequacy of its conception of objects.

2:iii The Criterion & Expectations

We have up to this point been considering knowledge insofar as it is a relation between a subject and an independent object in the world, but Hegel's concern in the 'Introduction' is with the criterion for assessing such knowledge i.e. with such knowledge as an object of self-knowledge. After all, for Hegel, "...consciousness is on the one hand,

consciousness of the object, and on the other consciousness of itself..." (PS 85). Our knowledge of the world as an object of self-knowledge is key to Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology*. The dialectic is supposed to trace the development of consciousness to the standpoint of absolute knowledge and this development progresses via self-criticism, hence, the ability to take our own knowledge as an object for inspection will figure as a condition for the success of the project. It seems then that the object of a given form of consciousness is simultaneously a pair of objects: the world as an object of empirical knowledge and this knowledge as an object of self-knowledge. Therefore the distinctions we made above will be doubled, one list of distinctions applying to the world and the other to empirical knowledge itself. Westphal offers a list like the following[12]:

World	**Knowledge**
A1. Consciousness' Conception of the World	A2. Consciousness' Conception of Knowledge
B1. The World *For* Consciousness	B2. Knowledge *For* Consciousness
C1. The World *To* Consciousness	C2. Knowledge *To* Consciousness
D1. The World Itself	D2. Knowledge Itself

[12] K. R. Westphal *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer) 1989, page 107.

Westphal admits that such a distinction of elements is at best only indicated in Hegel's introduction, however, I think it is fair to claim it is certainly operative throughout his text in his discussion of the various forms of consciousness[13].

We have not as yet answered the crucial question of how these distinctions constitute a solution to the problem of the criterion, nor the further related question of what use they are in explaining Hegel's idea of 'determinate negation'. We need to consider how they allow consciousness to determine whether or not its conceptions correspond to the objects themselves. Given that the recognition of such correspondence should be forthcoming in cases were correspondence occurs, this recognition must be based on the elements distinguished above. We have already noticed consciousness is explicitly aware of its conceptions of the world and of knowledge, and of the world and knowledge 'for consciousness' i.e. A1, A2, B1, and B2. But if we are to avoid a purely subjective criterion we need to be able to compare A1 and A2 with D1 and D2; the criterion we seem to require must surely be given by the objects themselves (D1 and D2) and this appears to be precisely the criterion that Hegel lacks. However, as Westphal points out, we must not forget that the objects 'for consciousness' (B1, B2) result from the application of consciousness' conceptions (A1, A2) to the objects themselves (D1, D2). That is, we are only aware of the world and of knowledge, as they are for-us, as a result of our conceptions of them being applied to the world and knowledge, as they are in-themselves. The objects themselves (D1, D2) are involved in providing the objects 'for consciousness' (B1, B2), the result being that when the objects 'for consciousness' coincide with consciousness' conception of them (A1, A2), then the conceptions also

[13] As we shall see in the following discussion of 'Sense-Certainty'.

correspond to the objects themselves (D1, D2). But don't the objects 'for-consciousness' simply always coincide with our conceptions of them? If the objects themselves need not instantiate our conceptions of them and yet they do instantiate the conceptions, say, of a given form of consciousness- there is, after all, something that is 'for-(that form of) consciousness' -then how are we to gain anything? From within that given form of consciousness will everything not simply seem as if it is the way that form of consciousness conceives it to be? Insofar as its conceptions are instantiated, things are as they seem to be for-it. So, how will it come to recognize otherwise? How will it come to recognize that its conceptions, though seemingly complete, are actually incomplete? How will it come to recognize the aspects that are simply 'to-consciousness'?

The answer is supplied by the thought that we make various theoretical and practical inferences based on the conceptions of the world and of knowledge that we posses, that is, we have certain expectations that may or may not be met by the actual world or actual cognitive practices. The world need not instantiate our conception of it and such an experience of defeated expectations demonstrates a lack of correspondence between our conceptions and their objects. This provides an indication as to why Hegel takes defeated forms of consciousness to be determinate of new forms. Given that the conceptions involved in one form are inadequate, their failure to correspond to their objects will highlight features of those objects related to the conceptions, but not encompassed by them. This is how features of knowledge or of the world that are, at first, simply 'to consciousness' become explicit for it. In highlighting previously unaccounted for or unrecognized features of the world or knowledge, defeated expectations supply

information that is used to revise conceptions of the world and of knowledge. What determines the next form of consciousness, that is, in what way the initial conceptions are to be revised, is provided by the relation that the aspects 'to consciousness' bear to the initial conceptions of its objects. That is, given the content of the conceptions that constitute a form of consciousness, certain expectations will be defeated by aspects of the objects that are currently unrecognized; aspects simply 'to consciousness'. In the experience of this defeat these aspects are highlighted as the defeaters of the previous conceptions. These aspects are then taken as part of the conceptions of the objects of consciousness; the highlighted aspects become 'for consciousness'. That is to say, what consciousness "...previously took to be the in-itself" is recognized to be "...only an in-itself *for consciousness*" (PS 85). In changing the conceptions that constitute a form of consciousness a new form is given along with new objects, as aspects that were previously only 'to consciousness' are now for it. To give this elucidation more clarity we should consider an example from Hegel's own text.

3.

The example we will consider is that of 'Sense-certainty'[14], the starting point of the dialectic in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel first introduces us to this form of consciousness, then he traces the contradictions inherent in it by demonstrating the ways in which they become apparent in experience, and finally he explains the nature of the new object resulting from the dialectical movement. This is an explanatory format that Hegel

[14] See PS 90-110 inclusive.

employs throughout the dialectic with varying degrees of complexity, and as such will serve as a good format to use for our discussion here[15].

So, what is the form of consciousness that Hegel calls 'Sense-certainty'? It is to represent the lowest form of consciousness in our dialectic. He claims:

"The knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply *is*. Our approach to the object must also be *immediate* or *receptive*; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In *ap*prehending it, we must refrain from trying to *com*prehend it." (PS 90)

The criterion for knowledge in this form of consciousness is then, *immediacy*. Consciousness' conception in this case is one of a particular subject immediately related to a particular object passively receiving whatever lies before it in its entirety. There is no conceptual or inferential mediation between consciousness and its object, there is no interpretation of what stands before it and hence "...sense-certainty immediately appears as the *richest* kind of knowledge" (PS 91). The 'certainty' of this form of consciousness then, is given by the putative immediacy of its relation to its object.

[15] In the following analysis of Hegel's comments on 'sense-certainty' I have based parts my explanation upon those offered by Richard J. Norman in his *Hegel's Phenomenology: a Philosophical Introduction* (Sussex: Sussex University Press) 1976, K. Dulckeit in 'Can Hegel Refer to Particulars' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader* Ed. J. Stewart (Albany: SUNY Press) 1998, as well as R Stern's *Hegel and the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*, (London: Routledge) 2002.

This immediacy is tested against experience. That is to say, consciousness compares its conceptions of its objects against the objects as they appear 'for-consciousness'. In experience Sense-certainty finds individual particulars such as 'this house' or 'this tree', but it discovers that it cannot account for the particulars that it allegedly knows without withdrawing its criterion of immediacy and allowing that such knowledge is mediated by universals. Hegel highlights how, through experience, we discover that demonstratives such as 'this', 'here', 'now', are terms applicable to every possible spatial or temporal location; in picking out particulars they are shown to be universal terms, unchanged by whatever they refer to.

Three different strategies by which we might save Sense-certainty's position are considered[16]. In each "(O)ne of the terms is posited in the form of a simple, immediate being, or as the essence" (PS 93). In the first instance this is the object, "...the object *is*; it is what is true, or it is the essence" (PS 93). Hegel questions just what this amounts to? If Sense-certainty passively receives its object in its entirety without any interpretation of it, without any mediation, then it can only be certain of a 'this', or a 'here' and 'now' so he asks "(W)hat is the This?" (PS 95). It seems though, that the 'this' just like the 'here' and 'now' does not pick out anything particular to that object, it does not convey any truth; instead it proves indifferent to its object:

"It is as a universal too that we *utter* what the sensuous [content] is. What we say is: 'This' i.e. the *universal* This; or, 'it is', i.e. *Being in general*...The same will be the case

[16] These separate strategies are clearly marked in Hegel's text, and a very clear account of these approaches is provided in R Stern's *Hegel and the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*, (London: Routledge) 2002.

with the other form of the 'This', with 'Here'. 'Here' is, e.g. the tree. If I turn round, this tree has vanished and is converted into its opposite: 'No tree is here, but a house instead'. 'Here' itself does not vanish; on the contrary, it abides constant in the vanishing of the house, the tree, etc., and is indifferently house or tree. Again, therefore, the 'This' shows itself to be a *mediated simplicity*, or a universality." (PS 97-98)

In the second strategy "...the certainty is now to be found in the opposite element, viz. in knowing, which previously was the unessential element. Its truth is in the object as *my* object, or in its being mine; it is, because *I* know it" (PS 100). The 'this' will remain true because it is unique to a subject's experience. The 'this' is a house because 'I' see it. The difficulty is that another subject, another 'I' might answer with "...the same authentication viz. the immediacy of seeing, and the certainty and assurance that both have about their knowing" (PS 101) that 'this' is a tree. Still nothing particular is picked out, 'I' just like 'this' proves indifferent; it cannot hold onto anything particular as true.

The third strategy then is to treat the experience as a whole as the immediacy of Sense-certainty. Hegel claims that "(S)ense-certainty thus comes to know by experience that its essence is neither in the object nor in the 'I', and that its immediacy is neither an immediacy of one nor of the other" (PS 103). It seems that we reach the stage where "...sense-certainty as a *whole* stands firm within itself as *immediacy*" (PS 103). But here Sense-certainty can only express its putative knowledge by ostension because it is only this relation as a whole, and it attempts to ignore all other times, places and subjects. That is to say it can only designate the 'this' by pointing it out to itself at a particular moment.

Here Sense-certainty professes to know what it means though it can't put it into words. The problem is that the instant it attempts to point the particular 'this' out as being 'here' and 'now', the 'this' pointed to is no longer 'here' and 'now'. It is not the particular 'this' that was pointed to but is instead another one. If Sense-certainty insists that the 'this' remains the same, then it acknowledges that 'this' can be applied over a variety of instances, that is, it does not pick out the particular that it is supposed to.

We can summarize the failure of the strategies by which Sense-certainty is to account for its putative knowledge of immediately given particulars with the following table:

Location of 'Immediacy'	Reason for Failure
1. Object	Failure to pick out particular
2. Subject	Failure to pick out particular
3. Object-Subject Complex	Failure to pick out particular

In 1 experience teaches Sense-certain consciousness that it is unable to pick out particular objects. In 2, that Sense-certainty as a subject is unable to pick out objects that are particular for it, and in 3, that the Sense-certainty as a whole is unable to pick out particular objects. That is, it cannot pick out such particulars without rejecting its position and admitting the mediation of universals. Hence, if Hegel is correct in his demonstrations, it seems that Sense-certainty is incapable of explaining how it is that consciousness experiences such particulars.

Sense-certainty then, seems to involve a costly 'trade-off'. By taking immediacy to constitute the certainty of its knowledge it has indeed avoided all possibility of error as nothing is permitted to come between consciousness and its object. As Hegel puts it: "...it has the object before it in its perfect entirety" (PS91). But what has it lost by avoiding any form of mediation? It cannot describe its object, or compare it to other objects. We are left with what Hegel characterizes as "...the most abstract and poorest *truth*", he continues: "(A)ll that it says about what it knows is just that it *is*; and its truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing" (PS91). Such an impoverished truth can hardly constitute knowledge as it tells us nothing about its object that would enable us to distinguish it from any other object. It tells us nothing that allows us to individuate the object from any other.

Is this enough to bring about the new form of consciousness that Hegel calls 'Perception', in which the universal is the essence? Can we not hold fast to the truth of Sense-certainty even though it tells us little if nothing about our object? Hegel's response is obviously "no", but not because holding to Sense-certainty would involve such a costly 'trade-off'. Rather we would reject Sense-certainty because it involves an internal conflict made explicit by experience. This conflict involves both of the conceptions of that form of consciousness, namely: that of knowledge as immediate and that of the world as constituted by independent particulars. The conflict is provided by the fact that one conception lays claim to immediacy while the other lays claim to determinacy[17]. What experience shows is that a condition of designating particulars is the use of universals,

[17] I am indebted to K. Dulckeit here who makes this point forcefully in her article 'Can Hegel Refer to Particulars' *Op. Cit.*

but in the application of universals the immediacy of 'Sense-certainty' is lost and any alleged knowledge of particulars that we lay claim to takes on the character of mediate knowledge.

So, are we simply to cite trope 1 and suspend belief like the Ancient Skeptic? 'No', Hegel claims, it is from this internal contradiction of Sense-certainty that we arrive at Perception, that conceives of knowledge as mediate and accordingly "...takes what is present to it as a universal" (PS 111). So why is the contradiction resolved in this way? How has negation proved 'determinate' in this instance? This is one of the issues we will now take up in chapter four.

Chapter Four

We should now be in a position to better understand the dialectic and assess its cogency. There are still a number of particular issues to clear up: that of the operation of determinate negation and the necessity of the transitions of the dialectic, the issue of completeness, and the precise nature of the type of response offered to the Ancient Skeptic. It is the first three issues that I wish to clarify in the first section of this chapter. In the second section I will attempt to assess both the type and overall viability of the response that Hegel offers; how successfully this response deals with the problem of the criterion and the threat of the Ancient Skeptical tropes.

1.

We saw in the example taken from 'Sense-certainty' that a new form of consciousness was to be provided by our experience of the limitation of the previous form of consciousness that we inhabited. What occurred in experience was a mismatch between the conception of the objects of consciousness as particulars and the conception of the kind of knowledge we putatively have of those objects as immediate, that constitutes that particular form of consciousness. What was demonstrated in this case was that the objects of consciousness could not be immediately given particulars. The conceptions that constituted that form were then transformed according to experience and a new form of consciousness, 'Perception', took its place. It was explained that our experience is the application of the conceptions of our inhabited form of consciousness to the object in-itself, and that this object need not instantiate

our conceptions of it; it need not satisfy our criterion. What remains to be explained is how a new form is to be determined in all of this and why this is necessary? That is, we need to understand the transition between an object that is merely *to* consciousness into one that is for-consciousness, and in what way this transition is a necessary one.

1:i. *Determinate Negation*

Westphal's account claims that aspects that are 'to-consciousness' are aspects of the object-in-itself that are not captured by a given form of consciousness' constitutive conceptions. It is such aspects that supposedly become 'for-consciousness' in the movement of the dialectic, furnishing the dialectic with new forms of consciousness. The picture he provides then is one of a gradual conceptualisation of the unconceptualized in-itself, a conversion of the aspects 'to-consciousness' into aspects 'for-consciousness'. So how is this to occur?

From the perspective of an inhabited form of consciousness, from *within* a particular form, we have a conception of how the object-in-itself is that our experience initially bares out, e.g. in 'Sense-certainty' this is an immediately given particular and in experience things can indeed seem this way. That is, we experience the object as it is 'for-consciousness'. We are able to identify 'this tree' or 'that house' and in doing so it seems that we do indeed experience immediately given particulars. However, upon further reflection and from the perspective of phenomenological observers, we recognise that the condition of being able to pick out such particulars is being able to use universals. What occasions such reflective recognition on behalf of an individual within a given form of consciousness is usually some new experience, as Hegel puts it:

"(I)t usually seems to be the case...that our experience of the untruth of our first notion comes by way of a second object which we come upon by chance and externally, so that our part in all this is simply the pure *apprehension* of what is in and for itself" (PS 87).

From within a given form of consciousness we come to realize, 'by way of a second object' that the condition of our experiencing particulars is that they are not immediately given, but mediated by universals. The supposedly unconceptualized in-itself (the object simply 'to-consciousness') turns out to be, by way of our defeated expectations, only an object 'for-consciousness'. Consciousness recognizes that what it took to be the independent object-in-itself is the object-for-consciousness, that is, it is merely its own conception of it. So how and why does this furnish a new form of consciousness? Why does consciousness not simply stop there?

Hegel claims that "(F)rom the present viewpoint", i.e. that of phenomenological observers "...the new object shows itself to have come about through a *reversal of consciousness itself*" (PS 87). The idea is that our expectations could only be defeated if we already inhabited a form of consciousness that involved mediation by universals. We could only experience particulars on the condition that they are mediated by universals and we do experience particulars. That is to say, because we only experience the object as it is 'for-consciousness', we could not experience the particulars as we do unless we already inhabit this higher form of consciousness in some way. What is recognized at the end of 'Sense-certainty' is that, in order to experience particulars as we do, we must already have passed into the form of consciousness called 'Perception', i.e. we must already be applying the conceptions of

that form of consciousness to the world and its objects. This is the importance of recognizing that our expectations are defeated ones, of recognizing that our object has turned out to be merely that object as it is 'for-consciousness', we can only recognize it as such if we have already passed into the next form of consciousness. We can only recognize the conceptions of Sense-certainty as too limited to account for our experience of particulars if we are already using a conception that involves particulars as mediated by universals. This is why the new object that causes Sense-certainty to recognize the untruth of its conceptions, appears to us as observers to have come about through a 'reversal of consciousness'. Sense-certainty from our standpoint could only recognize the untruth of its conceptions if it already possessed the conceptions involved in Perception.

It is in this sense that the negation of one form of consciousness is to be viewed as determinate. It could only be recognized as a negation if the new form of consciousness is already inhabited or possessed. This also explains the way in which every higher form of consciousness contains or preserves the previous form. The higher form is implicit in the experience of the lower form and is what permits the lower form to be recognized as limited, as merely a *form* of consciousness. The experience in one sense does not change; we still experience 'this house' and so forth, only that now we are more aware of the reason behind it, as we are aware of the limited nature of our previous understanding.

If this is the case across the entire range of the dialectic then we can see that a consciousness that remains within one particular form of consciousness is in some sense imposing its limits upon itself. From the perspective of phenomenological

observers an individual that remains within one form of consciousness, say, Sense-certain consciousness, would appear not to recognize that he already possesses and employs conceptions that outstrip his notion of his objects as immediately given particulars. He would, in this sense, be imposing his limited outlook upon himself. A Skeptic, as an individual who holds that the *epochē* is all that results from defeated claims to knowledge would likewise be imposing limits upon himself. It is in this sense that the Skeptic "...only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results*" (PS 79).

1:ii. *Two Necessities*

There are two interrelated features of Hegel's system that this brings to light. The first is that Hegel seems to hold that recognizing that something is limited, in someway involves transcending those limits, it involves standing outside of them. The second is that our role as observers cannot be a purely passive one, contrary to what is sometimes indicated[1]. We will consider the second feature first.

From within a given form of consciousness it is clear that the initial transition into another form is experienced as if by accident, insofar as some external object triggers a recognition of the limitation of the currently inhabited form. However, as Hegel notes:

[1] "...any contribution by us is superfluous...all that is left for us to do is to simply look on" (PS 85).

"...we have here the same situation as the one discussed in regard to the relation between our exposition and scepticism, viz. that in every case the result of an untrue mode of knowledge must not be allowed to run away into an empty nothing, but must necessarily be grasped as the nothing *of that from which it results*- a result that contains what was true in the preceding knowledge" (PS 87).

The seemingly contingent experience "...or the *origination* of the new object, that presents itself to consciousness without its understanding how this happens" (PS 87) must be grasped as a necessary one. For the consciousness at hand "...what has thus arisen exists only as an object" whereas "...*for us* it appears at the same time as movement and a process of becoming" (PS 87). So the recognition of the limitations of a given form of consciousness involves an active role to be played by 'us' as phenomenological observers. A consciousness may be presented with an object that highlights the limitations of its current conceptions but we can fail to recognize it as such; we might not grasp the transition as a necessary one. That is to say, if an advance is to be made, if knowledge is to be justified, it is up to us as observers to recognize the wider context from which our conceptions are demonstrated as inconsistent, to recognize the progress that consciousness has made. We might be tempted to say that we have an epistemic responsibility or duty to do so.

A dilemma presents itself. On the one hand we are simply onlookers reviewing the experiences of consciousness, experiences in which we all partake and are all familiar with. However, if this were the case then we would simply seem to be witness to a description of the objects of consciousness as they come and go, and this description need not take any particular form. On the other hand the description is raised into a

scientific progression by virtue of the fact that we are witnesses to a description of our experience. It would seem that this aspect is something contributed by us in our role as observers; in this role "...the way to Science is itself already Science" (PS 88). But how is this contribution to be explained?

One way of considering the problem is to note that there are two necessities involved in the descriptions of the *Phenomenology*[2]. First, there is the necessity that consciousness tests its conceptions within experience, adjusting them accordingly and second, there is the necessity that this experience form a non-contingent series, one which observed by us in the *Phenomenology*. The first necessity is not as questionable as the second. We may well agree that consciousness tests its conceptions in this way, and we may agree that in altering its conceptions its objects are also altered, insofar as they appear as they are 'for-consciousness'. But none of this need lead us to the claim that this experience constitutes a non-contingent series. The second necessity seemingly only becomes apparent in retrospect. But if the condition of the appearance of this necessity is that we view it retrospectively, does this mean that, as observers, we must have passed through the complete series of the forms of consciousness? Must we be viewing the series from its end point?

It does seem so. It seems that in order for our contribution to be that of viewing the transitions between forms as necessary, we must have already completed the progress through the series of the unreal forms of consciousness. Naturally we may not explicitly comprehend that this is the case until we have followed through Hegel's reconstruction, it is meant to provide the reader "...with the ladder to this standpoint,

[2] This distinction is focused on in Kenly R. Dove's 'Hegel's Phenomenological Method' in *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays* Ed. J. Stewart (Albany: SUNY Press) 1998, pp. 52-75.

and show him this standpoint *within himself*' (PS 26 my italics). This is not to deny that we could not have explicitly comprehended it without the *Phenomenology,* working through this text cannot be the condition for grasping the necessary progression of experience. After all, the *Phenomenology* is only meant as an introduction to Hegel's system and what is presented there is a description of the progression of experience, i.e. a description of the way that it appears. The prerequisite for the system then, is the appearance of this experience as a non-contingent series, which involves us being able to view the series retrospectively, that is, it involves the series having already been completed.

So what about the notion that recognizing something as limited involves transcending those limits? We can see that this is important to the second necessity, as this is what we recognize as observers of consciousness' experience. When we observe 'Sense-certain consciousness' attempting to explain or describe its knowledge, what becomes manifest is that it must be employing the conceptions of 'Perception' in order to be able to come to recognize that its conceptions can't account for its experiences. If it were simply 'Sense-certain consciousness' it is not clear it would be experiencing anything at all. This is what 'we' as observers see. It is seen as necessarily adopting 'Perception' rather than any other form higher in the series, because it is the absence of the constitutive conceptions of this form that accounts for the conflict between 'Sense-certainty's' conceptions and its experience. Naturally a form of consciousness higher in the series would preserve 'Perception's' conceptions but such a form would also involve conceptions not necessary for overcoming the conflict at hand[3].

[3] That is, we can agree with M. Forster's suggestion that the next form of consciousness in a given dialectical transition is to be identified as necessary insofar as it is that candidate which solves the contradiction of the previous stage while modifying it *the least.*

But does recognizing something as limited involve transcending those limits in some way? As stated this is a very vague principle and it's not absolutely clear just what it implies for Hegel. In the current context, however, it is obvious that recognizing the limits or shortcomings of a given form of consciousness, at least, implies inhabiting a form of consciousness higher in the series. I do not think that this is an indefensible claim if we consider another instance in which we discover a conception is limited. One example is coming to recognize that I cannot state the full expansion of π^4. Recognizing this involves understanding why I can't, it involves understanding that the full expansion of π is infinite and so would take an infinitely long time to state. While I can't state or know the full expansion I can state or know something about it. My previous conception of π has been expanded, I have recognized that my previous conception was limited and this involved transcending that conception. This hasn't happened instantaneously, it may have taken months of calculation to prove that the full expansion of π is infinite, but the recognition that my conception was limited involved my transcending of the limits of that conception. That consciousness might, or does, develop its conceptions in this manner does not immediately seem an unreasonable claim.

1:iii. *Trajectory & Completeness*

We still haven't fully accounted for what licenses consciousness reaching the end of the dialectic. We saw that in order to recognize the dialectical transitions as necessary consciousness must have already passed through them. As observers we need not have witnessed this, we need not be aware that this is the case, but if consciousness'

[4] This example is based on a similar example in M. Inwood's *Hegel* (London: Routledge) 2002, p. 119.

experience is to appear as non-contingent consciousness must have completed the dialectic. The real difficulty for Hegel, it seems, is in providing any kind of independent ground for this. Consciousness, as we have seen, supposedly has an instinctual side driving it to overcome the conflict between its conceptions and its experience, but even if we allow this, what is to guarantee that it results in the completion of the dialectic? That it reaches an end point rather than continuing to develop infinitely? If this instinctual side steers consciousness toward this point, what independent grounds can be offered in support of this direction?

The problem is that Hegel's account allows little, if no room, for the establishment of the directionality of the system by independent grounds, because all the developmental processes of the system are internal to it; they are endogenous. The trajectory of development is explained by causal factors internal to the system whereas what we require is for the trajectory to be determined by causal factors external to the system; by exogenous processes. If the trajectory could be explained by exogenous processes then we would have independent grounds for it. An example of a system that functions in this way is Darwinian Evolutionary Theory. Here causal factors internal to an evolving population, like that of random genetic mutation, are recognized, but they are not the primary determining factors of the trajectory of change. Instead exogenous processes, such as natural selection, explain the trajectory of development; the organisms of an evolving population are adapted to their environment[5].

[5] I am indebted to E.O. Wright, A. Levine, and E. Sober's *Reconstructing Marxism* (London: Verso) 1992 for this observation. In Part 1, Ch 3. they provide a similar analysis of the trajectory of Marx's Historical Materialism.

The same may, at first, appear to be taking place in Hegel's system; forms of consciousness are being adapted to their environment. Certainly Westphal's account would seem to suggest this, as it presents our conceptions of the world and our knowledge of it as developing according to the application of those conceptions to the world and this would seem to agree with Hegel's comments regarding the 'external object' that affects this development. But the origination of this object turns out to be nothing but consciousness' recognition of the limitations of its conceptions. The 'external object' will in turn prove to be nothing but consciousness' "...way of knowing it" (PS 87). As Hegel puts it "...consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands; it spoils its own limited satisfaction" (PS 80). The trajectory of development is determined by consciousness itself and is achieved in the first place by the instinctual side of consciousness or the 'cunning of reason' mentioned in chapter 3, and these factors are endogenous. If Hegel could establish that such factors are exogenous he would have independent grounds for establishing the trajectory he proposes. As it stands we do not appear to have such grounds; at least their independence cannot be demonstrated by Hegel and this opens the door to the use of equipollent contraries. So, what of the 'completeness' that was supposed to guard against such an attack?

The completeness required amounted to demonstrating that all the possible forms of consciousness that there could be, had been passed through. This was to be shown by the necessity of the progression through the forms and their circular shape, i.e. that the end of the progression had been reached. The problem we have encountered is that the necessity involved only appears if we have, in fact, reached this point; all the developmental processes appear endogenous and so the circular trajectory of the

progression can only be guaranteed if in fact it has occurred in this way, if it actually has progressed in the manner proposed. But we seem to lack any independent grounds for supposing this to be the case. Even if the progress of History was interpreted as following this trajectory[6] we would still lack any such grounds for accepting this interpretation because History would be internal to the system, it would be swallowed up by the dialectic and all the relevant developmental processes would still be endogenous. The overall picture that Hegel is presenting is one of an independent universal consciousness manifesting itself over time in different limited forms, through which it comes to recognize itself as this universal whole. It will come to recognize itself as a unity in differentiation. But it seems that Hegel has no demonstrably independent grounds with which to convince us of such a picture, indeed if his system were complete in the required sense it is not clear that there could be such grounds.

It appears then that the proposed demonstration of completeness is not a viable one. The dialectic will only prove cogent if the completeness requirements are fulfilled, and even if Sense-certainty constitutes the correct starting point which it, at least, intuitively seems to, insofar as it represents the most straightforward or naive conception of our environment and our relation to it, Hegel does not seem able to demonstrate that these requirements are fulfilled. The problem seems to be the same type of problem we noticed with the epistemic circularity argument of chapter one: we have no independent grounds for asserting more than the conditional 'if the system is complete, then the system is complete'.

[6] See Chapter 2, section 2:ii.

2.

So what does this mean for Hegel's response to the Skeptic? It is obvious that the type of argument that Hegel offers in the *Phenomenology* is not the same type of argument we saw in chapter one. It is not an inductive argument to the reliability of a certain method of belief formation from premises that 'practically assume' the reliability of that method of belief formation. Rather, Hegel is involved in re-tracing the developmental steps of a consciousness that avoids attack by skeptical tropes and arguments, one that is complete. In this sense it is more like an evolutionary account. However, it assumes the completeness of this consciousness for the purposes of demonstration, and in this respect the circularity is of the same type as epistemic circularity; the necessity of assuming the completeness stemming from our epistemic situation as one in which the independence of the required grounds cannot be demonstrated.

2:i. *Ancient Skepticism & Hegel's Response*

So does this mean that Hegel simply begs the question against the Ancient Skeptic? Is there nothing more in his response that allows him to avoid succumbing to the tropes? In his 'Introduction' he outlines the nature of the dialectic and the structure of consciousness that permits such a progression, and this is done from the perspective of someone who has presumably completed the progression. But has Hegel simply set things up in his favour from the outset?

Well, we have seen that Hegel at least believes that he couldn't reconstruct the dialectic unless it had been completed; being able to write the *Phenomenology* would seem to involve the dialectic having been completed. However, it is not so clear that his comments in the 'Introduction' as to the structure of consciousness involve consciousness fulfilling its goal. Insofar as the structure is supposed to be observable we as readers are presented with examples of it in action through the transitions of the *Phenomenology*; we are free to observe it in such transitions. Upon attempting to observe such a structure in the examples we may not, of course, be convinced that it is to be found. The putative structure that allows the dialectic is to be legitimated through observing putative examples of it and in this respect we are not simply given assertions in the 'Introduction' by Hegel. Obviously the 'Introduction' describes consciousness from the standpoint of the dialectic that has been completed, but the description is only to be justified as true once we have undertaken a critical reading of Hegel's reconstruction.

We may well agree with the appearance of various features that we observe through the course of Hegel's presentation: we may agree that there is a general tendency to develop conceptions over time as a result of our interaction with the world, we may even claim that the result of this tendency seems progressive or cumulative in someway. However, we may wish to disagree with the overall direction that Hegel gives it. Hegel may well have purposefully reconstructed the progress of his dialectic just to meet its purported goal and we seem to lack any independent grounds for supposing otherwise, but by employing a method that claims to describe, to deal in appearances as the Ancient Skeptic does, Hegel hopes to allow us as readers to observe and agree with the direction of the progression. The crux of the matter is

whether or not it is plausible that the structures described are such that they can be observed? If they are then Hegel is not simply involved in offering assertions.

It is fair to say that this probably will not convince the Ancient Skeptic and so it seems then that Hegel's strategy toward the Ancient Skeptic cannot function as one of providing a direct refutation. Rather we may view it as being more akin to repudiation than refutation. Ancient Skepticism is on the one hand to be embraced; Hegel's system is to modify the essential strengths of such Skepticism, the passage through the various forms of consciousness constituting a "...pathway of doubt, or more precisely...the way of despair" (PS 78) as consciousness realizes the inadequacy of its unreal forms. In this sense Hegel is a thoroughgoing skeptic, one not content to rest in the Pyhrronian *epochē*, to be paralysed by the "...fear of error" that "...reveals itself rather as the fear of truth" (PS 74). If one refuses Ancient Skepticism as a serious option then Hegel's system offers an alternative through which our conceptions of the world and our knowledge of it may be justified as true.

2:ii. *Hegel and Foundationalism*

It should be clear by now that Hegel's account is not one with a foundationlist structure, rather it appears as a form of coherence theory in which internal coherence is realized when the end point of the dialectic is reached. Hegel appears to actively reject a foundationalist structure as adequate for justifying his system. His account is not to rely upon the known truth of its staring point, it is circular, and it is intended to be so from the outset. Hegel attempts to acquire knowledge without a starting point of this kind, he attempts to acquire knowledge as the result of a circular process.

Hegel would agree with the Ancient Skeptic that the presupposition of a set of axioms or some kind of basic principles that are to act as a foundation from which to justify other claims cannot be permitted, because the foundation cannot be established as true. Attempts to do so will result in regress. He rejects this approach for a positively circular one and this is where he parts company with the Ancient Skeptic; he does not hold that all circularity is vicious. His rejection of the approach of foundationalism results in a strategy that is to function in the reverse manner of that of foundationalism[7]. Whereas with foundationalism the starting point, or foundation, will be the ultimate source of justification, transferring justification along series of claims extending from this source, in Hegel's system the end point acts as source, justifying the starting point. Rather than being justified from the outset, justification can only come as a consequence of following the course of the system. As we move through the system our staring point is progressively justified until we reach the terminus point in which the starting point is seen as the result of the progression.

For Hegel any starting point will appear as a presupposition, we cannot justify other claims on the basis of this presupposition until we have demonstrated its veracity, and the veracity of such a presupposition can only be demonstrated by its progressive elaboration and application to experience. Hegel's thought regarding foundationalism is then remarkably similar to Plato's analysis of the fault of 'the practitioners of the various branches of expertise' that we mentioned in the introduction: "...because of their failure to ascend to a starting point- because their enquiries rely on taking things for granted...they don't understand these things, even though they are intelligible,

[7] This observation is made by T. Rockmore in *Antifoundationalism Old and New* Ed. T. Rockmore & B. J. Singer, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 1992, Ch 5, pp105-127.

when related to a starting point."[8] It is this line of thought that motivates Hegel to adopt a circular response, and it is a similar thought that motivated the circular response we saw in chapter one.

2:iii. *Hegel, Internalism & Externalism*

The aspect of Hegel's account that appears most troublesome, namely the instinctual side of consciousness that pushes the dialectic onwards, the 'cunning of reason' which ensures that the end of the dialectic is met, is the aspect that divides his account most clearly from externalist forms of epistemically circular arguments regarding justification. We noticed in chapter one that the externalist, insofar as his account is more naturalistic than normative, need not commit as to whether the appropriate relation for justification does occur most of the time. Indeed, providing an epistemically circular argument in order to demonstrate that one is justified is something that the externalist, strictly speaking, need not involve himself in. When the criticism that, at best, such arguments only allow us to assert that 'if we're justified then we're justified' is highlighted, the externalist may well wonder precisely what the criticism amounts to. For example, when speaking of such criticism against an epistemically circular argument for the reliability of perception E. Sosa notes:

"(I)t is not easy to understand this position, however. If our perceivers believe (a.) that their perception, if reliable, yields them knowledge, and (b.) that their perception is reliable, then why are they restricted to affirming only the conditional, *a*, and not its

[8] Plato *Republic* trans. R. Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1993, p.239 (511d).

antecedent *b*? Why must they wonder whether they understand their relevant knowledge?"[9]

The question seems a fair one and the implication is that to wonder in this way, when one believes the contrary, is in someway incoherent.

Hegel may agree once the passage through the re-constructed dialectic has been completed, once understanding of our knowledge has been gained; but before this has been achieved he would not. Such wondering about the status of our belief must be a feature of consciousness if it is to complete the dialectic in first place. We are told that consciousness "..directly takes itself to be real knowledge" (PS 78), but there must be an instinct to question this knowledge, to not rest in one form of consciousness, if there is to be a progression at all. The confrontation of a form of consciousness with its environment is not enough; that form must recognize its own shortcomings through such a confrontation. The "...conceit that relies on truths which are taken for granted and which it sees no need to re-examine" is, for Hegel, detrimental to philosophy and thought in general (PS 67). Hegel's idea is that such an instinct to question can be explained by its function of improving our understanding of our knowledge; indeed that there is such an instinct and that this is its function is what at base motivates Hegel's rejection of "...the skepticism which only ever sees pure nothingness in its results" (PS 79). If it is indeed the case that "(W)e cannot help ourselves"[10] wondering whether we know what we think we know, as R. Foley puts it, then without an explanation of this wondering, it may well seem incoherent.

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[9] E. Sosa 'Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles' *The Journal of Philosophy*, XCIV, 8, (1997).
[10] R. Foley 'Scepticism and Rationality' *Blackwell Anthology of Epistemology* Ed. E. Sosa & J. Kim (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.) P187.

A major difference then between Hegel's account and the more naturalistic contemporary externalist accounts of justification is that, for Hegel, justification will involve an explanation of this putative tendency to wonder whether we know what we think we know. It will involve an explanation of Skepticism and its surpassing. For Hegel, in order to be epistemically justified we must have followed him through his reconstruction of the allegedly complete series of the forms of consciousness presented in the *Phenomenology*. Consciousness cannot be justified until it has completed the course; until it can see for itself and understand that it is justified. It is only this that will satisfy and explain the tendency to wonder about such matters, and it is only once this is achieved that epistemic justification, for Hegel, can be had. Hegel then upholds a strong form of the cognitive accessibility requirement and in this sense is internalist in his overall approach. Consciousness must be fully self-conscious in order to be justified and this involves its own reflective consciousness of it being so. It involves 'having turned the trick with the whole lot at once' to recall Alston's phrase; something which, insofar as it requires a convincing demonstration of completeness, is not clearly achieved by Hegel.

Conclusion

"Hegel is to be honoured for having willed something great and having failed to achieve it"[1]

This was Kierkegaard's summation of the appropriate attitude that one should adopt toward Hegel and his system and insofar as Hegel's overall strategy against the Ancient Skeptic has proved impracticable, we may well be inclined to agree with him. But before we accept this as the last word on the matter, we should pull together the strands of the foregoing discussion and consider the implications of Hegel's approach for future treatments of Ancient Skepticism.

It was suggested that in his analysis of Ancient Skepticism Hegel identified two main strengths: the general applicability of the skeptical tropes and the use of the opponents' own principles against them. These were adapted in the construction of his own system which yielded two distinctive features:-

1. The first was that the system must begin and proceed via description. By observing consciousness in its activity, by watching it apply its conceptions to its objects, we were to avoid presupposition in the same way as the Ancient Skeptic claimed to. By proceeding in this phenomenological fashion we were to avoid begging the question against the Skeptic.

[1] S. Kierkegaard *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Trans D.F. Swanson and W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1941.

2. The second was that by providing a necessarily complete account, in the sense outlined, we were to give a justification of the system, demonstrating that it is not open to skeptical attack.

This second feature was the one that proved impracticable. Hegel could not satisfactorily demonstrate that the required completeness had been achieved. That the system is complete was of course required in order for the phenomenological description to be more than conjecture in the eyes of the Ancient Skeptic. We may, of course, allow that some of the descriptions given by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* are, perhaps, close to the truth of the matter and this would help explain the ongoing interest that the text has generated, but no independent grounds for their truth is to be found there.

While the failure to demonstrate the completeness of his account in a way that is acceptable to the Ancient Skeptic is where Hegel's account falls down, one thing that the account brings out is the extent of what is required in providing a demonstration that will satisfy such a Skeptic and the obstacles we face in attempting to provide one. If we are to seriously engage with the Ancient skepic then every opposition must be overcome, an absolutely complete account must be given and this does appear to be beyond our abilities. Does this mean that we should accept our efforts as ultimately useless and simply give up, siding with the Skeptic? Or should we accept that epistemically circular answers are satisfactory, given our circumstances, and drop the demand for fully reflective justification?

It's not clear that either course is a live option. One thing that Hegel's dialectic successfully highlights in its dealings with the various forms of consciousness is our attitude toward our putative knowledge in our ordinary interactions with the world. Each form constitutes a certainty; we ordinarily trust our cognitive processes and practices, that is at least, until something leads us to doubt them, usually some 'external object' or event. It is in such a situation that we do come to view such processes and practices as simply 'ours', as 'being for-us', and it is the result of such situations that we find the notion of a fully reflective justification desirable. It is such situations that upset the certainty of a form a consciousness, that disturb its satisfaction with itself. In Hegel's system the desire for a fully reflective justification becomes a driving force; in each incomplete form of consciousness no satisfaction is to be found because a situation will always arise in which the certainty of that form is disturbed. Until a fully reflective justification is gained we will always be affected by doubts, we can always come to see the world and our knowledge of it as simply 'for-us'. If a fully reflective justification is not to be had then this always remains possible and the Skeptic's worries will not go away. However, agreeing with the Skeptic would not banish the worries, insofar as we ordinarily trust our cognitive processes and practices situations may always arise in which this trust is undermined. Living as a Skeptic and attaining *ataraxia* would not seem plausible in the context of everyday interactions with the world; we have certain expectations of the way that things are and will be, when they turn out not to be so we cannot help being disturbed. It seems from his analysis of the movement through the forms of consciousness that Hegel would agree. Ancient Skepticism for Hegel is not to be taken seriously because it proves an interesting and difficult intellectual problem, but rather because it results from reality, from a real movement of consciousness. By the same token an

epistemically circular answer will not suffice, even though this seems to be the best that can be offered. Any real satisfaction it allows will depend on whether or not we are actually justified. If we bracket off skeptical worries, then such a response may seem satisfactory and would accord with the confidence we have in our cognitive processes and practices, but it could not guarantee that such confidence was well founded.

Hegel's system on the other hand, if successful, could make such a guarantee. Hegel was not content with offering a palliative for the situation like the Ancient skeptic but rather was interested in a cure. His mistake seems to be the confidence he placed in his system as being able to provide such a cure. It is for this aim of providing a cure that Kierkegaard, in part, criticises Hegel, and it is this aim that most obviously places Hegel at odds with Ancient Skepticism[2]. It seems also that an epistemically circular response can, at best, only offer a palliative. If we agree with Hegel that this will not suffice, and we also acknowledge that Hegel's efforts are ultimately in vain, then the only option open to us seems to be to live with the situation.

What we can perhaps save of Hegel's approach is that the dialectic is productive, that a thorough consideration of the application of our conceptions to reality can result in a more comprehensive and coherent set of conceptions. If we treat each set of conceptions as a hypothesis we can use the end point of Hegel's dialectic heuristically, as an ideal to strive for. We can accept that the Skeptic is not to be beaten but refuse to drop the demand for a fully reflective justification insofar as it represents a

[2] It is no doubt this aim that has lead to Hegel to be viewed, rightly or wrongly, as representative of a wholehearted acceptance of the restorative powers of reason. See J. Stewart 'Hegel and the Myth of Reason' in *The Hegel Myths and Legends* ed. J. Stewart (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press) 1996, pp. 306-319.

desirable ideal. It seems that the Ancient Skeptic and his problems, though not defeated, are not to be ignored or sidelined. Rather, they are to be embraced as a stimulus to the ongoing improvement of our epistemological theories.

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