

# Hegel's Critique of Cognitive Judgment

*From Naïve Realism to Understanding*

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PROSPECTUS

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# One

## Introduction

The philosophical aims of this study are both systematic and historical; they are epistemological throughout. Part 1, containing chapters One to Four, sets out Hegel's epistemological agenda. Part 2, containing chapters Five to Eight, reconstruct in detail and assess Hegel's epistemological arguments in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Part 3 presents an accurate translation of Hegel's first three chapters, comprised in the 'Consciousness' section of the *Phenomenology*. Before embarking on these investigations, several introductory remarks are in order. I first explain why 'Hegel' and 'epistemology' do belong together (§1). Next I provide an overview of this study (§2), followed by some important methodological and interpretive preliminaries (§3). I then summarize Hegel's epistemological argument in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (§4). Finally I indicate more fully some of the philosophical aims of this study (§5).

### 1 HEGEL'S EPISTEMOLOGY?

It is widely believed that Hegel has no theory of knowledge. My first book, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism (HER)*, showed this to be deeply mistaken.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Hegel developed a very sophisticated analysis of human knowledge. That book reconstructed Hegel's method in detail and showed its bearing on problems left unsolved by Sextus Empiricus, Descartes, Kant, Carnap, and William Alston.<sup>2</sup> Its final chapter set out the structure of Hegel's substantive analysis of human knowledge in his *Phenomenology of Spirit (PhdG, 1807)*. Hegel developed, for the first time in the history of philosophy, a socially and historically grounded theory of knowledge that is, and is intended to be, consistent with realism, with the commonsense view that objects of human knowledge exist and have characteristics that do not depend upon

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<sup>1</sup>See above, 'Note on Sources and Citations' (p. xx ff.) for a key to abbreviations. On this topic, also see Westphal (forthcoming \*).

<sup>2</sup>In chapter Three I bring this up to date by discussing the views of Chisholm, Moser, Fogelin and Alston's recent work.

what we say or believe about them. Hegel's 'idealism' is a realist form of moderate holism (*HER*, ch. 10.)

More recently, *Hegel's Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit* (*HE:PI*, 2003) provides a synopsis of Hegel's epistemology, explicates the literary roots of Hegel's phenomenological method in Greek tragedy (especially *Antigone*), and relates Hegel's views to a range of issues and views in contemporary epistemology, including twentieth-century empiricism, Dretske's information-theoretic epistemology, and recent developments in analytic social theories of knowledge.

I neither expect nor require familiarity with those books before venturing into the present study. I wish readers to know what purposes those books serve, and to contrast with them the approach taken here to introducing Hegel's epistemology, before examining its significant details. Chapter Two provides a different *entrée* into Hegel's epistemology, by epitomising his systematic responses to four forms of scepticism in the *Phenomenology*: Pyrrhonian, Cartesian, Humean and Kantian forms of scepticism. Considering Hegel's responses to these forms of scepticism highlights several key features of Hegel's positive epistemology. Each of these points prefigures key issues and arguments that are developed and examined throughout this study.

Chapter Three presents the core of Hegel's solution to the Dilemma of the Criterion and shows how it provides central features of his phenomenological method. This method involves the internal critique of alternative philosophical views, including theories of knowledge, which are espoused by various 'forms of consciousness' (*Gestalten des Bewußtseins*). In order to dissolve the Dilemma of the Criterion, Hegel's phenomenological method involves justifying a positive position through criticizing its alternatives internally: Hegel criticises and rejects the alternatives to his own position by arguing against those alternatives on the very grounds, principles and central examples offered by those alternatives. When successful, this kind of criticism is very powerful and it avoids question-begging (*petitio principii*). Hegel is very adept at developing such internal criticisms and using them to justify his own position. His criticisms of alternative views and his justification of his positive position deserve careful consideration. Long before anti-Cartesianism overtook recent analytic semantics, epistemology and philosophy of mind, Kant launched a far more penetrating anti-Cartesian revolt, which Hegel revamped and considerably augmented (Westphal 2006\*).

Chapter Four provides an entirely new account of the relation between Hegel's and Kant's epistemologies. Hegel's positive theory of knowledge

develops out of Hegel's penetrating insights into the insights and oversights of Kant's metaphysics and epistemology. By his own methodological lights, Hegel owes us a detailed internal critique of Kant's theoretical philosophy. Hegel did not develop such a critique *in extenso*. Chapter Four argues that Hegel clearly did identify several key points involved in such a critique, and that those points are sound.

Taken together, chapters One through Four (Part 1) provide the necessary background information for understanding Hegel's issues, methods, analyses and defence of our cognitive powers of judgment in the *Phenomenology*. The present study undertakes to reconstruct the first major part of Hegel's substantive analysis of human knowledge in the first three chapters of his *Phenomenology*. Chapters Five through Seven (Part 2) critically reconstruct Hegel's analysis of knowledge in the 'Consciousness' section of the *Phenomenology*. The main aim of Hegel's epistemological analysis can be clarified by considering a key aim Hegel shares with Kant.

One main aim of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is to justify the validity of our cognitive judgments about objects of experience. At issue are judgments using certain basic *a priori* categorial concepts, such as substance, cause, identity, and number. Kant's core arguments, his 'objective deduction', aim only to show *that* the judgmental use of such concepts in empirical knowledge is legitimate; they do not attempt to explain how we are able to use such concepts. Two important facts make an objective deduction difficult. First, there is no experience of objects that does not already involve the judgmental use of the concepts in question. Second, the basic concepts in question cannot be defined solely in terms of elementary experiences and logic; *i.e.*, they cannot be defined in accord with concept-empiricism.

The present study contends that Hegel develops an objective deduction of such categorial concepts in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's objective deduction is important because it is (broadly) naturalist and defends realism in epistemology. Realism in epistemology is the joint thesis that there are objects or events that exist and that have characteristics, regardless of what we say, think or believe about them; and that we can know at least something about some of these objects or events.

The two facts that make an objective deduction difficult are central points made in criticisms of empiricist theories of knowledge. These points were elaborated and defended both in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and in recent criticisms of empiricism in the Anglo-American analytic tradition of philosophy. In both periods, these objections to empiricism led

many philosophers to reject realism and even to adopt one or another form of relativism. Hegel's theory of knowledge is thus of great contemporary importance. His theory of knowledge rejects relativism and defends realism, while recognising the deficiencies of both empiricist and historicist theories of knowledge.

The secondary literature on Hegel has been marred by three shortcomings: an inadequate understanding of Hegel's method, a failure to interpret his views and arguments in the context of the other figures and the larger philosophical issues he addresses, and a lack of detailed textual analysis and reconstruction. My approach to Hegel is designed to avoid these failings. My work aims to make his views accessible to a wider audience of philosophers and historians of philosophy who are interested in Hegel's issues but discouraged by his idiom; I aim to show the general philosophical interest of Hegel's views and analyses. Methodologically, I seek the convergence of three distinct interpretive approaches: detailed textual analysis aiming at a complete reading of Hegel's text (here, a complete reading of three chapters), coupled with rigorous systematic reconstruction of Hegel's views within both their historical and their philosophical context. If these three approaches coincide, as they did in *HER*, and as they do below, this provides very strong support for my unconventional interpretation of Hegel's views.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY.

The ensuing study is both extensive and detailed. Prospective readers are entitled to know in advance what they can expect to learn, or at least to consider, if they venture in. I hope the following, more detailed remarks will encourage you to do just that.

Hegel held that a proper criticism of a philosophy must be sufficiently immanent, detailed and systematic to show that and how a more adequate view is introduced and justified by a thorough comprehension of the merits and deficiencies of another view (see chapter Three).<sup>3</sup> However, Hegel's explicit criticisms of Kant can hardly be said to meet this exacting standard. As Ameriks (1985) and Guyer (1993) have argued, Hegel's express criticisms

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<sup>3</sup>*WL* II, *GW* 12:14.27–15.1; *SL* 580–81. The main task of *HER* is to explain Hegel's phenomenological method of internal criticism and self-criticism, and to exhibit its scope and power by using it to assess the views of several paradigmatic theories of knowledge.

of Kant are too often external, and thus admit easy Kantian rejoinders. Hegel's lectures on Kant are only an overview. Hegel makes some detailed criticisms of Kant in the conceptual preliminaries of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* and in a number of remarks in the *Science of Logic*, but these criticisms appear isolated. Hegel often criticized Kant in his early writings, but those objections are embedded in Hegel's still embryonic philosophy, and as such do not constitute a thorough and mature Hegelian critique. In other research,<sup>4</sup> I have determined that Kant's transcendental idealism is subject to fundamental internal criticism. In chapter Four I show that Hegel clearly identified the main points and implications of this internal critique. This enables me to show, really for the first time, exactly what Hegel learned from Kant's epistemology, which of Kant's views Hegel rejected, and why he focussed on just those aspects of Kant's philosophy. Hegel's epistemology develops directly and naturally out of his recognition of these key problems inherent in Kant's epistemology.<sup>5</sup>

On this basis, chapter Four then highlights five main points of Hegel's post-Kantian reorientation that stem directly from his internal critique of Kant's transcendental idealism and his recognition that intellectual intuition is philosophically bankrupt. The model of the intuitive intellect entranced Hegel until 1804, and has entranced Hegel scholars ever since. Hegel's model of intellectual intuition differed from those of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. Most importantly, Hegel came to recognize that intellectual intuition generates insoluble problems of question-begging (*petitio principii*).<sup>6</sup> That problem led Hegel to recognize that Sextus Empiricus' Dilemma of the Criterion is *the* central methodological problem facing epistemology, and it led Hegel to return to some of his Kantian roots by developing, in the *Phenomenology*, a fully discursive account of human knowledge and by recasting Kant's regressive method of proof on a naturalistic, and hence realist basis.

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<sup>4</sup>K. R. Westphal (2004a), *Kant's Transcendental Proof of Realism*, abbreviated 'KTPR'.

<sup>5</sup>These problems are not noticed in the essays collected in Priest (1987). Closely related problems are analysed brilliantly, without reference to Hegel, in Edwards (2000). My account of the relation between Kant's and Hegel's epistemologies differs sharply from Pippin (1989). I explain my disagreements in Westphal (1993), (1999), 310–13.

<sup>6</sup>A note about usage is required here. In American usage, which I follow in this particular, the phrase 'question-begging' designates *petitio principii*, whilst British English uses this to mean 'to raise a question'. Perhaps German fares best by using the Latin term.

Though Hegel did not develop a thorough internal critique of Kant's idealism, there is clear evidence that Hegel clearly saw the problems involved in Kant's account of the affinity of the manifold of sensory intuition. He also recognised that Kant's transcendental idealist deduction of causality failed, and that the only solution was to take forces as basic, real features of the natural world! Hegel's objective deduction, his regressive, transcendental argument for commonsense realism, grows directly out of his recognition of these fundamental insights and flaws in Kant's idealist deduction (chapter Four).

Part 2 (chapters Five through Seven) of this study reconstructs and assesses the first stage of Hegel's proof of the objective validity of our basic categorial concepts. There is an important point of contrast between Kant's and Hegel's deductions. Kant sought to derive the basic categories of human thought from a table of logical functions of judgment. He then sought to justify our judgmental use of these categories in empirical knowledge by showing that their use is necessary for the possibility of unified self-conscious experience. Hegel found Kant's derivation of the categories from the table of judgments instructive but inadequate. Hegel also knew that he had to respond to Kant's contention that appealing to any independently real features of the objects of experience could only yield empirical and contingent judgments, and could not support any claim to be necessary conditions for the possibility of unified self-conscious experience.

Hegel sought to solve both of these problems at once, by arguing that if the objects we experience were not relatively discrete and stable, and if we did not have and could not use certain basic concepts (*e.g.*, of individuation, plurality, self, other, and substance) in knowing those objects, we could never identify objects as distinct from ourselves and so we could never have unified self-conscious experience. These real, empirical features of objects are thus conditionally necessary for unified self-conscious human experience. Hegel develops the main elements of this argument in the first three chapters of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Chapter Five reconstructs and assesses Hegel's first chapter, 'Sense Certainty'. Here Hegel criticizes the view that we can know objects without using concepts to identify them, most recently known by Russell's phrase, 'knowledge by acquaintance'. Hegel here refutes empiricist theories of concept acquisition, most standard forms of epistemological foundationalism, and he refutes 'correspondence' as a criterion of truth. Significantly, unlike many recent critics of foundationalism (including Rorty), Hegel realised that rejecting correspondence as a criterion of truth does not entail rejecting

correspondence as an *analysis* of truth and it does not entail rejecting realism. Hegel's chapter develops a sound internal critique of naïve realism that shows that sensation is necessary but not sufficient for knowledge of sensed particulars. Cognitive reference to particulars also requires using pure *a priori* conceptions of space, spaces, time, times, self and individuation.

Hegel's proto-semantics in 'Sense Certainty' accords in important regards with Evans (1975). Moreover, his arguments in 'Sense Certainty' have a wide philosophical and historical scope. First, they highlight an important, unacknowledged conflation in many early modern logic texts, which assimilated the perceptual recognition of particular objects in our local surroundings to the logical doctrine of the 'simple apprehension of terms'. This conflation is found in logic texts from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries. Second, though cast in terms of spatio-temporal particulars, Hegel's arguments in 'Sense Certainty' also hold with regard to 'mental' particulars, such as Hume's impressions of sensation. This I show by carefully analysing Hume's account of 'understanding' and his account of our ideas of space and time (*Treatise*, Bk. I). Finally, I show that Hegel's arguments hold against Russell's doctrine of 'knowledge by acquaintance'. *Mutatis mutandis*, Hegel's arguments hold against other twentieth-century exponents of acquaintance, including the entire sense-data tradition, because Russell worked out the epistemology of acquaintance far more than anyone else.

Chapter Six analyses Hegel's second chapter, 'Perception'. In 'Perception' Hegel treats a problem prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: how to perceive a single item amidst its multitude of sensed properties. Hegel here argues two main points. First, the concept of the identity of a perceptible object cannot be defined in terms of elementary experiences and logic; this concept is thus *a priori*. Second, this concept of identity requires the concept of cause (which is also *a priori*). I reconstruct Hegel's arguments in 'Perception' in connection with the Modern figures he criticizes, especially Hume. The 'contradictions' Hegel finds in 'perception' are in fact precisely those Hume identified in 'Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses' (*Treatise* I.iv §2). (The importance of Hume's theory of perception to Hegel's epistemology has been previously unrecognized.) To extend his concept-empiricism to handle the non-logical concept of the identity of a perceptible thing, Hume must appeal to several psychological 'propensities' to generate, in effect, *a priori* concepts; he must confront a 'contradiction' in the concept of the identity of a perceptible thing; and he must regard this concept as a 'fiction'. Hegel reexamined Hume's account to show that the concept of the identity of a perceptible thing

is non-logical and cannot be defined in accord with concept-empiricism. This important point supports (what I call) Hegel's concept-pragmatism. This point is also important in connection with the quite general problem of how we bring various sensations together into the percept of any one object. This is the 'binding problem' in contemporary neurophysiology of perception, a problem that has only recently garnered attention from analytic epistemologists.

Chapter Seven analyses Hegel's widely misunderstood third chapter, 'Force and Understanding'. One aim of Hegel's third chapter is to show that the fact that the objects we experience are causally active substances gives no grounds for the scepticism found in Locke's view of substances as something 'I know not what'. Second, Hegel argues that our use of the concepts of cause and substance in knowing the objects we experience can be justified without recourse to Kant's transcendental idealism and its consequent scepticism, symbolized by unknowable 'things in themselves'. Part of Hegel's argument involves criticising the hypothetico-deductive model of scientific explanation. Hegel's criticisms anticipate criticisms that have become familiar only quite recently. Hegel defends a 'phenomenological' account of laws of nature. (This sense of 'phenomenological' is distinct from the sense in which Hegel's method is phenomenological.) According to this view, laws of nature formulate relations among manifest natural phenomena. Hegel's phenomenological account of laws of nature has roots in Newtonian theory (*e.g.*, J. Keill) and had its first great historical example in Joseph Black's theory of specific and latent heats. This view was prominent in German physics throughout the nineteenth century (*e.g.*, G. Kirchhoff) and in the British Isles (*e.g.*, W.J.M. Rankine). It is found most recently in phenomenological thermodynamics. I reconstruct Hegel's arguments in 'Force and Understanding' in connection with Locke and Kant, some of Hegel's scientific contemporaries, and also with recent theory of explanation (*e.g.*, Salmon, Kitcher).

Chapter Eight summarizes my findings about the aims, merits, and limits of Hegel's substantive arguments and indicates how his analysis fits into the over-all aim of his argument in the *Phenomenology*. Part III contains my translation of the text I have analysed, the first three chapters of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

Hegel's defence of the objective validity of categorial concepts purports to show that we can be self-conscious if, and only if, we are conscious of perceptible, causally interactive substances and events in our environs. Strictly speaking, the 'Consciousness' section of Hegel's *Phenomenology* only defends the

‘if’ portion of this thesis. He defends the ‘only if’ portion by *reductio ad absurdum* arguments against a wide array of subjectivist views in ‘Self-Consciousness’ and ‘Reason’ (*PbdG* chapters 4, 5). Those texts and the historical and philosophical issues they address are sufficiently important and intricate that they deserve (and shall receive) independent treatment. Fortunately, much of the central thrust of those arguments is made plain by Hegel’s internal critique of Kant’s epistemology, the key points of which are reconstructed chapter Four of the present study.<sup>7</sup>

## 5 SOME PHILOSOPHICAL AIMS OF THE PRESENT STUDY.

While I have brought considerable historical and textual scholarship to bear on identifying, reconstructing and assessing Hegel’s epistemological issues and views, this study is not merely an historical undertaking. On the contrary, I have devoted this attention to Hegel’s views because I believe, and shall try to show, that there is very much to be learned philosophically from them. Strawson’s (1966) forceful development of Kantian ideas about realism and our knowledge of individuals generated significant attention to Kant’s ‘Second Analogy’ and ‘Refutation of Idealism’. Initial enthusiasm generally has given way to disappointment and disregard of Kant’s arguments by epistemologists, mostly for two reasons. First, philosophers have supposed that Kant’s cure for scepticism is as bad as the disease, because transcendental arguments require transcendental idealism; second, it has been widely supposed that Kant’s transcendental arguments require eliminating all possible alternatives to his conclusions, and there is no way to establish this completeness.

I argue below (in chapter Four) that Hegel was the first to see two points of fundamental importance: that transcendental arguments do not require transcendental idealism, and that one of Kant’s best transcendental arguments in fact *undermines* transcendental idealism and justifies realism instead. Hegel made these two points the cornerstones of his regressive, transcendental argument for socio-historically grounded realism. While I

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<sup>7</sup>I sketch Hegel’s argument in ‘Self-Consciousness’ and ‘Reason’ in *HER*, 160–71. In Westphal (1998b), I show that one of the key problems infecting Kant’s idealism also infects Carnap’s anti-realism, and that these problems provide a strong justification for realism that undercuts Simon Blackburn’s quasi-realism and Michael Williams’ partial defense of scepticism, and augments Crispin Wright’s defense of realism.

hardly expect this study to become a ‘must read’ among analytic epistemologists, it presents issues and arguments that are altogether central in epistemology and should interest them.

One point of this study that should be of interest to analytic epistemologists is its detailed analysis, reconstruction, and defence of Hegel’s regressive, transcendental argument for realism.

A second point concerns Hegel’s analysis and defence of what I call ‘the Evans thesis’ (Evans 1975). Hegel argues, namely, that predication requires conjointly specifying the relevant spatio-temporal region and some manifest characteristics of any particular we self-consciously experience or identify (chapter Five). These conjoint specifications may be rough and approximate; the key point is that spatio-temporal designation and ascription of manifest characteristics are *conjoint, mutually interdependent* cognitive achievements that integrate sensation (‘sensibility’) and conception (‘understanding’). I defend the soundness of Hegel’s analysis and defence of the Evans Thesis, and thereby show that Hegel’s epistemology is based on an acute analysis of the semantics of singular cognitive reference, and that his analysis has great contemporary philosophical significance.<sup>8</sup>

A third point concerns our conception of the identity of perceptible things (chapter Six). Although this is a topic much beloved of analytic philosophers, they have analysed this conception almost exclusively in metaphysical terms, and have failed to notice some very important epistemological issues involved in our identifying the ordinary objects and events around us. In part, I shall argue that Kant was right to address issues about ‘perceptual synthesis’, that Hegel was right to re-examine carefully the concepts required by such synthesis, and that an account of perceptual synthesis is needed to have an epistemology that can be linked effectively with the empirical sciences of cognition.<sup>9</sup> More centrally, I shall contend that Hegel followed and built upon Hume’s acute analysis of the concept of the identity of perceptible things in its epistemic use.

A fourth point is that Hegel’s analysis and justification of causal judgments and of causal laws (chapter Eight) provides for a telling critique of contemporary empiricist accounts of causation and causal laws. I argue this in

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<sup>8</sup>E.g., Hegel’s views have significant bearing on those of John McDowell; see Westphal (2006\*).

<sup>9</sup>This point has been argued briefly, in connection with Kant, by Strawson (1971; *cf.* 1979, 1989), Biro (1979, 1988), and especially Guyer (1989).

connection with Bas van Fraassen's views in *The Empirical Stance*.

Though the present study builds on my previous research, I have sought to make it self-contained and readable on its own. The philosophical agenda summarized here is elaborated in greater detail in chapter Two, with references forward to the detailed development of these themes in the remainder of this study. Because my understanding of Hegel's views is strongly heterodox, sceptical inquirers will surely want more analysis and defence of many points. Accordingly, I have referred to other publications that provide necessary details.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The present study compensates for the brief treatment of Kant's views in *HER* chapter 3; it brings Hegel's views to bear on a Modern empiricist, namely Hume (rather than Carnap, *HER* chapter 4); it provides new and much more thorough account of the relations between Hegel's views and those of his immediate predecessors Fichte, Schelling, and especially Kant; and it develops and defends the brief sketch given there of Hegel's aims and arguments in 'Consciousness' (*PbdG* chapters 1–3; *HER* 158–60).