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Knowing and Representing:
Reading (between the lines of) Hegel's *Introduction*

Lecture Three:

Following the Path of Despair to a Bacchanalian Revel:
The Emergence of the Second, True, Object

I. Introduction

1. Hegel opens the *Introduction* to the *Phenomenology* by considering an epistemological picture according to which our cognitive faculties are regarded as “the instrument with which one takes hold of the absolute or as the medium through which one discovers it.”¹ Philosophers otherwise as diverse as Descartes, Locke, and Kant can be seen to work with versions of

¹ [73]

such a picture. It seems clear that Hegel thinks we need to break out of the confines of this “natural” way of thinking about knowledge. In my first lecture, I tried to say why, and to indicate in general terms the shape of the new picture he will recommend to succeed this traditional one.

The broadest form of his objection is that theories of the kind he is complaining about make us patsies for skepticism. More specifically, he thinks traditional modern *epistemology* is conducted within the scope of *semantic* assumptions that make it impossible in the end to satisfy what I called the “Genuine Knowledge Condition.” This is the requirement that an epistemological theory not make it unintelligible that, at least when all goes well, how things *appear* to us is how they *really* are—in his terms, that how things are *for consciousness* can be how they are *in themselves*. I argued that the crucial feature of the class of theories he takes to fail this requirement (by precluding the intelligibility of genuine knowledge) is not that they construe the relation between appearance and reality (“certainty” and “truth”, “knowledge” and “the absolute”) in representational terms. It is that they take the termini of the relation to be characterized by a structural difference: representing appearances are construed as *conceptually articulated*, while represented realities are not. Theories with this shape

excavate a gulf of intelligibility separating knowing from the known, mind from world.²

Of all the differences there might be between how the known world objectively is and how the knowing subject represents it, why should one think *this* possible difference make such a difference? Why would it matter if thought, but not the world thought about, is construed as coming in conceptual shape? Hegel is working in a Kantian idiom, in which there is an internal connection between *conceptual* articulation and *understanding*. Concepts are the form of apperceptive awareness. So what can be understood, what is intelligible, is what is in conceptual shape. Hegel thinks that unless the picture has it that we can understand how things really are, any *relation* we assert between these realities and the appearances we *can* understand or grasp must itself be unintelligible. No relation to what is ultimately and intrinsically *unintelligible*, because not conceptually articulated, could count as a *cognitive* relation. It could not be the basis for an account of knowing that makes sense of the possibility of genuine knowledge. This is the problem with the idea of “getting the truth in its

² This is how I understood his claim that such theories presuppose “the notion that there is a *difference between ourselves and this knowledge*” in the sense that “the absolute *stands on one side* and that *knowledge.. is on the other side*, for itself and separated from the absolute...Hence it assumes that knowledge...is outside the absolute and therewith outside the truth as well.” [74]. In the context of such an assumption, it is a contradiction to treat knowledge as nonetheless genuinely possible.

purity simply by subtracting from the result the instrument's part in that representation of the absolute which we have gained through it."³ The result of "subtracting" its conceptual form from our understanding would be something unintelligible. We cannot understand the relation between what is intelligible and what is not intelligible, for the simple reason that we cannot understand what is not intelligible. A picture of this sort cannot satisfy the Genuine Knowledge Condition.

2. In my first lecture, I suggested that the key to the alternative picture Hegel wants to put in place lies in the non-psychological conception of the conceptual he introduces and develops in the *Consciousness* section of the *Phenomenology*. According to this conception, conceptual contents are articulated by relations of material incompatibility: his "determinate negation" or "exclusive difference" (Aristotelian contrariety). (It will follow that conceptual contents also stand to one another in relations of material consequence: his "mediation.")

This line of thought begins with an understanding of *determinateness* that applies equally to thoughts and things. It is codified in Spinoza's dictum

³ [73].

“Omnis determinatio est negatio.” Both that there is some determinate way the world is and that a thought has a determinate content are to be understood in terms of what possibilities they *exclude*. A state of affairs whose obtaining would rule out the obtaining of no other, a thought whose truth would rule out the truth of no other, would be *indeterminate* (“unbestimmt”). The kind of negation in terms of which determination is understood in Hegel’s version of Spinoza’s thought is that characterizing relations of what he calls “exclusive” (“ausschließend”) difference, as opposed to “indifferent” (“gleichgültig”) difference. That is, it is the relation between **circular** and **triangular**, not that between **circular** and **red**. (In the *Perception* chapter, Hegel uses a thought of Aristotle’s to show how the notion of exclusive difference can be used to make sense of states of affairs as having the internal structure of objects-with-properties.)

This way of understanding the metaphysics of determinateness is by no means idiosyncratic to Hegel. Besides its Spinozist (and, indeed, Scholastic) antecedents, it is the master idea behind contemporary information theory, which understands the information conveyed by a signal in terms of the possibilities its receipt excludes for its recipient. And it can be understood as another way of expressing the understanding of a proposition as a

partition of possible worlds into those compatible and those incompatible with its truth. But what warrant is there for thinking of this metaphysical conception of determinateness in terms of material incompatibility as a conception of the *conceptual*?

Justifying that identification requires giving an account of two defining characteristics of the conceptual. First, one must show how to justify in its terms the Kantian identification of *intelligibility* in terms of conceptual form, by saying what it is to *grasp* or *understand* something that is in conceptual form in this sense of “conceptual form.” Second, one must show how what is conceptually contentful in this sense also exhibits *representational* purport. These correspond to the two dimensions of intentionality I distinguished last time: ‘that’-intentionality and ‘of’-intentionality, what one can think or say, and what one would thereby be thinking or talking *about*.

My second lecture addressed exactly these two issues. Starting with the notion of conceptual contents as articulated by the relations of material incompatibility they stand in to other such contents, it showed both what one must *do* in order thereby to count as *cognitively grasping* such contents, and how doing that amounts to practically acknowledging the *representational*

purport of those contents. Grasping or understanding a conceptual content is engaging in the process of *experience*. This is Hegel's successor-conception of Kantian apperception. For Kant, what one must *do* in order to apperceive (to be cognitively aware) is to *judge*. Judging, in turn, is understood as rationally integrating a commitment into a developing whole that exhibits the distinctive synthetic unity characteristic of apperception. That unity is a *rational* unity, with critical, ampliative, and justificatory dimensions, corresponding to the normative obligation to extrude materially incompatible commitments, acknowledge material consequences, and assess justificatory credentials. The contents commitments must possess in order to be subject to these rational normative obligations must, accordingly, stand in relations of material incompatibility and consequence to other such contents. Grasping or understanding such a content is practically being able to distinguish what is materially incompatible with it (what it conceptually excludes), what is a material consequence of it (what it conceptually includes), and what it is a material consequence of (what conceptually includes it). That is just to say that it is necessary and sufficient to be graspable in this sense—to be apperceivable—that the contents be *determinate*, in the sense of standing to one another in relations of

determinate negation and (so) mediation. What is determinate in this sense is in conceptual form, in Hegel's sense.

In the *Introduction*, Hegel focuses on one dimension of the process of apperceptive experience: the experience of *error*. This sort of experience is occasioned by finding oneself with materially incompatible commitments. Practically acknowledging the error is exercising one's critical task-responsibility to repair it, removing the incompatibility by relinquishing or modifying at least one of the jointly incompatible commitments. In the previous lecture I explained how it is in the experience of error that *representational* purport is practically taken up—that is, that determinate (hence conceptually contentful) commitments are taken or treated *as* representations, as appearances *of* some reality. Incompatible commitments must have a common topic. For if two (or more) properties are incompatible, what is impossible is that they should be exhibited by one and the same object (at the same time). If one attributes incompatible properties to two different objects, one has not yet made a mistake. To take it that one *has* made a mistake, that the commitments *are* incompatible, *is* to take them to refer to or represent one and the same object.

In the second phase of the experience of error, a subject responds to the acknowledgment of error by fulfilling the critical task-responsibility of repairing the incoherence, by amending or discarding one of the commitments. Doing that is treating the amended or discarded commitment *as* a mere appearance, and the retained and resulting commitments as expressing how things really are. In this way, through the experience of error, the distinction between what things are *in themselves* (reality) and what things are merely *for consciousness* (appearance) becomes something *to* consciousness itself. That distinction is practically implicit in the process that is the experience of error. This is how consciousness incorporates as a basic aspect of the structure of its functioning a practical appreciation of its determinate *subjective commitments* as purporting to represent *how things really, objectively are*. It treats its commitments as *about* things in the sense of answering to how things are *in themselves* for the correctness of how things are *for* it.

3. So Hegel's Spinozist concept of determinateness, in terms of articulation by relations of modally robust exclusion, material incompatibility, or determinate negation, meets the principal requirements for a meta-concept of conceptual contentfulness. It makes sense of what it is

to *grasp* a conceptual content, and of what it is for such contents to have a *representational* dimension. Furthermore, the ways these two criteria of adequacy are satisfied are deeply connected. In the context of Hegel's structural critique of traditional modern epistemology, the key explanatory virtue of this non-psychological conception of the conceptual is that it applies not only to *subjective thoughts*, but also to *objective facts*. For both are determinate—there are determinate ways consciousness takes things to be and there are determinate ways things are—in virtue of standing in relations of material incompatibility to other ways one could take things to be or things could be. But the subjective and objective senses of “material incompatibility” are not the same. If two states of affairs are materially incompatible, then it is *impossible* for both to obtain. (If two objective properties are materially incompatible, then it is impossible for one and the same object simultaneously to exhibit both.) But if two thoughts or judgments are materially incompatible, it does not follow that it is impossible for one subject to be simultaneously committed to both. It only follows that the subject *ought not* to be so committed, that such a subject is *obliged* to *do* something to *change* the situation: to fulfill the standing critical task-responsibility to rectify the situation by eliminating the incoherence. On the side of objects, incompatibility of properties is an

alethic modal matter of *impossibility*; on the side of subjects, incompatibility of commitments is a *deontic normative* matter of *impropriety*.

But the notion of material incompatibility or determinate negation that comes in these two flavors is not simply ambiguous. For what one must *do*, in order thereby to count as practically *taking* or *treating* two objective properties or states of affairs *as objectively* incompatible is precisely to treat the corresponding commitments as *normatively* incompatible—in the sense that finding oneself with both obliges one to *change* one’s commitment, in acknowledgment of an *error*. Treating two commitments as incompatible in the deontic normative sense *is* representing two properties or states of affairs as incompatible in the alethic modal sense. What one must do in order to manifest practically one’s grasp or *understanding* of conceptual contents is suitably engage with them in the practice or process of experience, especially the experience of error, by fulfilling one’s obligation to resolve acknowledged incompatibilities. Doing that is treating incompatible commitments as *representing* incompatible states of affairs.

The relation between the sense of “materially incompatible” that is articulated by deontic normative relations of what one is obliged or entitled

to do, on the subjective side of representings (what things are for consciousness), and the sense that is articulated by alethic modal relations of what is necessary and possible, on the objective side of representeds (what things are in themselves) is one of reciprocal sense-dependence. It is not that there cannot be objective properties and states of affairs standing in relations of modal incompatibility to one another unless there are representings of them. It is that one cannot *understand* what one is saying or thinking in saying or thinking that they stand in such relations, except as part of a story that includes what subjects who *represent* them as so standing, by practically acknowledging their normative obligation to do something to repair the situation when they find themselves with commitments to objects having incompatible properties, or to incompatible states of affairs more generally. And one cannot understand the nature of the obligation to alter one's conceptual commitments when they turn out to be incompatible unless one understands them *as* representing objectively incompatible situations. This relation of reciprocal sense-dependence is responsible for the Janus-faced character of Hegel's metaconcept of determinate negation. On the one hand, it characterizes the alethic modal *relations* that (as Kant taught) structure the objective world. On the other hand, it characterizes the norm-governed subjective *process* or practice that is experience—which is always,

inter alia, the experience of error. In this latter aspect, it is not a matter of static relations, but a dynamic principle of movement, change, and development.⁴ That one cannot understand the most fundamental structure of the objective world apart from understanding what one must *do* to represent things as being so is an essential element of Hegel's idealism. One can put the point by saying that objective substances, no less than subjects, things no less than thoughts, as determinate, are essentially *conceptually* structured.⁵ But unless one keeps in mind the complex fine-structure of Hegel's Janus-faced non-psychological conception of the conceptual in terms of determinateness as articulated by material incompatibility, one will not understand what is meant by such a claim.

II. The Emergence of the Second, New, True Object

⁴ The pure movement of this alienation, considered in connection with the content, constitutes the necessity of the content. The distinct content, as determinate, is in relation, is not 'in itself'; it is its own restless process of superseding itself, or negativity...[805]

⁵ Without endorsing the Hegelian conception of the conceptual in terms of determinate negation, in particular without invoking the fine-structure that relates its objective alethic modal and subjective deontic normative aspects, John McDowell makes a point of this general shape when he says in *Mind and World* [Harvard University Press, 1994] that on the understanding he is recommending (and associates with both Kant and Hegel) "the conceptual has no outer boundary."

4. The greatest hermeneutic challenge in reading the *Introduction* lies in the three paragraphs that precede the final one ([85], [86], and [87], in Miller's numbering). For here Hegel makes two claims that are surprising enough to be worth quoting at length. The first is introduced with the observation, which we have put ourselves in a position to understand, that in the experience of error the subject ("consciousness"):

...is consciousness of what to it is the true, and consciousness of its knowledge of this truth. Since both are *for consciousness*, consciousness itself is their comparison; whether its knowledge of the object corresponds or fails to correspond with this object will be a matter *for consciousness itself*. [85]

The subject assesses the material compatibility of its commitments, exercising its critical rational task-responsibility as a judger. Where an incompatibility is found, a choice must be made. One commitment can still be endorsed as presenting how things really are, in themselves. But then others must be unmasked as mere appearances. They are now implicitly or practically treated ("to it") as only presenting how things are for consciousness. (Recall here the crucial distinction which, as was pointed out in Lecture II, Hegel marks grammatically, between what things are *implicitly*, "to" consciousness ["ihm"] and what they are *explicitly*, "for"

consciousness.) In the example from the previous lecture, seeing its behavior when the half-immersed stick is fully removed from the water, the subject discards her commitment to its being bent, and substitutes a commitment to its being straight.

It is only slightly hyperbolic to say that the consciousness that is the subject of this experience “*is* their comparison.”

Something is *to it the in-itself*, but the knowledge or the being of the object for consciousness is *to it* still another moment. It is upon this differentiation, which exists and is present at hand, that the examination [Prüfung] is grounded. And if, in this comparison, the two moments do not correspond, then it seems that consciousness will have to alter its knowledge in order to bring it into accord with the object. [85]

That is, after the discordance has been repaired and material compatibility restored, the appearance, what things are *for* consciousness, should, as far as consciousness is concerned (“*to* consciousness”), have been brought in line with the reality, what things are in-themselves.

But that is not how Hegel wants us to understand what happens in such experience:

In the alteration of the knowledge, however, the object itself becomes to consciousness something which has in fact been altered as well. For the knowledge which existed was essentially a knowledge of the object: with change in the knowledge, the object also becomes an other, since it was an essential part of this knowledge. Hence it comes to pass for consciousness that what had been *to* it the *in-itself* is not in itself, or, what was *in itself* was so only *for consciousness*. When therefore consciousness finds its knowledge not corresponding with its object, the object itself will also give way. In other words, the standard [Maßstab] of the examination is changed if that whose standard it was supposed to be fails to endure the course of the examination. Thus the examination is not only an examination of knowledge, but also of the standard used in the examination itself. [85]

This is very odd. Why should we think that when a commitment a subject took to express how things really are (a presentation of how things are *in* themselves is what it was *to* the subject) is revealed as expressing merely

how things are *for* consciousness, that the *reality* changes? When I realize that the stick I took to be bent is really straight, my view of the stick changes, but the stick itself does not. That I took it to be bent is *not*, in our ordinary way of thinking, an essential feature of *the stick*. Surely the contrary claim does not follow from what one might justifiably claim: that its object, the stick, was an essential feature of the appearance, the stick-as-bent. The stick serves as a standard for assessments of the correctness of my commitments as to its shape. In what sense does that standard change when I realize that my shape-commitment does not measure up to the standard, that it gets things wrong? Hegel's claim here seems extravagant and perverse. The argument he offers:

For the knowledge which existed was essentially [wesentlich] a knowledge of the object: with change in the knowledge, the object also becomes an other, since it was an essential part of this knowledge.

appears to trade on an obviously unwarranted slide. Even if we grant that what it is a claim *about* (what it represents) is essential to the identity of the claim—so that altering the represented object would alter the content of the claim—it just does not follow that the content of the claim is correspondingly essential to the identity of the represented object—so that

altering the content of the claim alters the object. “Being essential to” is not in general a symmetric relation. So for instance, we might think that the identity of my parents is essential to my identity. Anyone with different people as parents would be someone different from me; it is not possible for me to have had different people as parents. But when we look at the converse, it does seem possible that my parents might never have had any children, or only had some of the children they did, not including me. Essentiality of origin of humans does not entail essentiality of offspring. It is easy to see Hegel here as engaging in a sleight-of-hand, attempting to smuggle in unobserved an implausible idealism that makes what is thought about it essential to the identity of what is thought about. But, as we shall see, that would be to misunderstand the claim he is making.

The second surprising claim is introduced as part of an account of the basic structure of *experience*, in the distinctive technical sense Hegel introduces here:

This *dialectical* movement, which consciousness exercises on its self—on its knowledge as well as its object—is, *in so far as the new, true object emerges to consciousness* as the result of it, precisely that which is called *experience*. [86]

The challenge posed by the earlier passage is echoed here. How are we to understand the “movement” which consciousness “exercises” on the *object* of its knowledge? The key question will turn out to be this: when commitment to the stick as bent is discarded and replaced by commitment to the stick as straight, what exactly is the “new, true object”? Answering this question correctly is integral to understanding the sense in which, on Hegel’s account, the representational purport of conceptually contentful commitments is itself something *to* consciousness, implicit in its own process of experience. In order to understand the justification for saying that the experience of error changes not only how the subject is committed to things being (the stick is taken to be straight, not bent), that is, “consciousness’s knowledge”, but also the *object* of that knowledge, the essential point to realize is that the “new, true object” which “emerges to consciousness” is *not* the straight stick. (After all, *it* didn’t change; it was straight all along.)

5. Hegel describes the experience like this:

Consciousness knows *something*, and this object is the essence or the *in-itself*. But this object is also the in-itself for consciousness; and hence the ambiguity of this truth comes into

play. We see that consciousness now has two objects; one is the first *in-itself* and the second is the *being-for-consciousness of this in-itself*. The latter seems at first to be merely the reflection of consciousness into its self, a representation, not of an object, but only of its knowledge of the first object. But, as already indicated, the first object comes to be altered for consciousness in this very process; it ceases to be the in-itself and becomes to consciousness an object which is the *in-itself only for it*. And therefore it follows that this, the *being-for-consciousness of this in-itself*, is the true, which is to say that this true is the *essence* or consciousness' new *object*. This new object contains the annihilation of the first; it is the experience constituted through that first object. [86]

The first thing to notice is that the first object is described as the “*first in-itself*”. That implies that there is (at least) *another* in-itself. But there is only one real stick (and it is straight). The key to understanding this is that what is at issue here is the role something can play in experience. The role in question is **being an in-itself to consciousness**. To be an in-itself to consciousness is to be what consciousness practically takes or treats *as* real. At the beginning of the experience, the subject in question endorses the

claim that the stick is bent. That is what the subject takes to be real. That bent-stick commitment expresses the *first* in-itself to consciousness: how it initially takes things really, objectively, to be. The *second* in-itself to consciousness is expressed by the later straight-stick endorsement.

What, then, is the "second object" being talked about in this passage? It is not the straight stick (which is the second in-itself to consciousness). Hegel says here the second object is the "being-for-consciousness" of the first in-itself. What does that mean? When he introduces the movement of experience in the previous paragraph, Hegel says

Hence it comes to pass for consciousness that what had been to it the *in-itself* is not in itself, or, what was *in itself* was so only *for consciousness*. [85]

What the subject discovers is that what it had taken to express the way things really are (the stick is bent), actually only expresses an appearance. The role the bent-stick representation plays for consciousness, what it is to consciousness, has changed. It "becomes to consciousness an object which is the in-itself only for it." The "new, true object" is the bent-stick representation revealed *as* erroneous, as a *misrepresentation* of what is now *to* the subject the way things really are: a straight stick. This representing is

“true” not in the sense of representing how things really are, but in the sense that what it is now *to* consciousness is what *it* really is: a mere appearance, a misrepresenting. That is why “This new object contains the annihilation of the first; it is the experience constituted through that first object.”

This is the sense in which “In the alteration of the knowledge...the object itself becomes to consciousness something which has in fact been altered as well.” What alters is the status of the bent-stick representing, what it is *to* consciousness. It had enjoyed the status of being to consciousness what the stick is in itself. But now its status has changed to being *to* consciousness only what the stick was *for* consciousness: an appearance. Understanding that the two “objects” are the bent-stick representation when it was endorsed and the bent-stick representation when it is no longer endorsed, we are now in a position to see that on our first reading we misunderstood “knowledge of the object” in the argument

For the knowledge which existed was essentially a knowledge of the object: with change in the knowledge, the object also becomes an other, since it was an essential part of this knowledge.

What is knowledge *to* consciousness is what is endorsed, what the subject practically or implicitly takes to be how things really are. What has, to consciousness, the status of knowledge changes in the course of the experience, from being the stick as bent to being the stick as straight. That was knowledge *of* the object not in the sense in which a representing is *of* something represented, but in the sense that the status (being to consciousness knowledge) was possessed or exhibited by the object (the bent-stick representation). That the status was possessed by *that* object (that conceptual content) is indeed essential to *that* knowing [“denn das vorhandene Wissen war wesentlich ein Wissen von dem Gegenstande”].

When the status attaches to something else, a straight-stick representation, it is in a straightforward sense a *different* knowing. What object (here, crucially, in the sense of what conceptual content) it attaches to is *essential* to its being *that* knowing. Altering the knowing, by endorsing a different, incompatible content, alters the status of the original content, and so alters the “object” associated with the original knowing: its status changes from being a conceptual content that is endorsed to being one that is rejected.

[fnt: Hegel could have avoided confusion here either by not introducing this new sense of “object of knowledge”--as referring to a candidate

knowing's conceptual content, rather than what it represents--or by explaining it when he does.]

So read, the first originally surprising claim becomes so no longer. The second surprising claim is one that Hegel himself flags as such:

In this presentation of the course of experience, there is a moment in virtue of which it does not seem to be in agreement with the ordinary use of the term “experience.” This moment is the transition from the first object and the knowledge of that object to the other object. Although it is said that the experience is made in *this other object*, here the transition has been presented in such a way that the knowledge of the first object, or the being-for-consciousness of the first in-itself, is seen to become the second object itself. By contrast, it usually seems that we somehow discover another object in a manner quite accidental and extraneous, and that we experience *in it* the untruth of our first Concept. What would fall to us, on this ordinary view of experience, is therefore simply the pure *apprehension of* what exists in and for itself. From the viewpoint of the present investigation, however, the new object

shows itself as having come into being through an *inversion of consciousness* itself. [87]

Here Hegel is explicitly acknowledging that there is a danger of being misled by the way he has described the experience of error. He explicitly confirms the reading we have been considering: the second (“new, true”) object is the “being-for-consciousness of the first in-itself.” The “inversion of consciousness” is the change in status of the “stick is bent propositional conceptual content from being endorsed (as reality) to being rejected (as mere appearance). His surprising claim is that *this* element of experience—the unmasking of what one had taken to present reality as it is in itself as in fact a mere appearance, a representation that is a misrepresentation—is the centrally important one, *not* the new perception that leads one to endorse the claim that the stick is straight. That new “object”—that is, conceptual content we are led to endorse—indeed prompts the experience of error. But if we focus on the event that contingently *occasions* the process that is the experience, he is saying, we will miss what is necessary and essential to that process.

This new way of thinking about experience that he is recommending is really the major point of the whole *Introduction*. It is what makes possible

the sort of narrative that occupies the rest of the *Phenomenology*. Focusing on the distinctive “inversion of consciousness” by which what was to the subject the way things are in themselves is unmasked as merely how things were for consciousness is what will give us, Hegel’s readers, a phenomenological insight that is not part of the experience of error of the phenomenal consciousness we are considering. The passage above continues:

This way of observing the subject matter is our contribution; it does not exist for the consciousness which we observe. But when viewed in this way the sequence of experiences constituted by consciousness is raised to the level of a scientific progression. [87]

This shift of perspective is what makes possible the “science of the experience of consciousness” [87]—the working title with which Hegel began the project of writing what would become the *Phenomenology*. The particular commitments acknowledgement of whose material incompatibility initiates a process of experience are contingent. What is necessary about that process is the acknowledgement of error, and the subsequent disillusionment it leads to. What is necessary is “the *movement* which is cognition—the transforming of that in-itself into that which is for itself...”, as Hegel says at

the very end of the book.⁶ At this point in our story, we understand what that movement *is*, but not yet why it is the key to the *science* of the experience of consciousness. That will be the topic of the final section of this lecture.

III. From Skepticism to Truth through Determinate Negation

6. Hegel tells us that the key to understanding the significance of the change in perspective he is urging is to think through the significance for the threat of skepticism of the role of what is made explicit in experience by the concept of determinate negation. The penultimate paragraph of the *Introduction* continues:

As a matter of fact, the circumstance which guides this way of observing is the same as the one previously discussed with regard to the relationship between the present inquiry and skepticism: In every case the result which emerges from an untrue mode of knowledge must not be allowed to dissolve into

⁶ [802], in the final chapter, *Absolute Knowing*.

an empty nothingness but must of necessity be grasped as the nothingness *of that whose result it is*, a result which contains what is true in the previous knowledge. Within the present context, this circumstance manifests itself as follows: When that which at first appeared as the object sinks to the level of being to consciousness a knowledge of the object, and when the *in-itself becomes a being-for-consciousness of the in-itself*, then this *is* the new object. [87]

We have put ourselves in a position to understand this final sentence, about how the change of normative status a judgeable content undergoes when the subject withdraws a previous endorsement (the “inversion of consciousness”) is intelligible as the emergence of a new object. What does this have to do with the attitude we should take toward skepticism?

The issue arises because of the expository trajectory we have traversed. In my first lecture, I claimed that we should read the opening of the *Introduction* as concerned that epistemological skepticism not be forced on us already by our semantics. The more specific diagnosis was that skepticism will be forced on us if we construe the relation between appearance and reality as one in which conceptually contentful representings

confront nonconceptually structured representeds across what then looms as a gulf of intelligibility. I claimed further that Hegel's proposed therapy (gestured at in the *Introduction*, and developed in the *Consciousness* chapters) is to identify *conceptual contentfulness* with *determinateness*, and to understand determinateness in terms of *negation*. The kind of negation in question, *determinate* negation, corresponds to Aristotelian contraries, not Aristotelian contradictories, which would be understood in terms of formal or abstract negation. The determinateness of a thought or state of affairs (predicate or property) is a matter of its modally robust *exclusion* of other thoughts or states of affairs, those it is materially incompatible with.

This conception allows Hegel to endorse another central Spinozist doctrine: "the order and connection of things is the same as the order and connection of ideas." For this notion of determinateness applies equally to things and thoughts, representeds and representings. No gulf of intelligibility is excavated between appearance and reality. Determinate thoughts and determinate states of affairs are, as determinate, both conceptually contentful, and hence in principle intelligible. Epistemological skepticism is not built into this semantics at the outset.

In this context, there is no reason not to construe the semantic relation between appearance and reality in representational terms. But understanding conceptual content in terms of the concept of determinate negation does not just *allow* a such a representational construal. In Hegel's hands it makes possible a constructive *analysis* of the representational dimension it finds to be implicit in conceptual content.⁷ Hegel combines this fundamental aspect of Spinoza's thought (the structural isomorphism of the order and connection of things and ideas, construed in terms of relations of determining negation) with a Kantian idea that Spinoza did *not* have. For Spinoza did not appreciate the distinctive *normative* character of the "order and connection of ideas," which distinguishes it from the order and connection of things. Hegel's synthesis of Spinoza with Kant depends on Kant's grounding of semantics in pragmatics: his account of what one must *do* in order to take responsibility for a judgeable conceptual content.

In my second lecture, I rehearsed how Hegel's account of the experience of error—what he makes of Kant's critical integrative task-

⁷ I take one of the positive points of Hegel's Introduction to the *Phenomenology* to be a suggestion as to what it is to treat such conceptual contents as appearances *of* a reality, to take such Sinne to be modes of presentation of Bedeutungen, to understand thinkables that can be expressed *de dicto* (e.g. as the thought *that* the object in the corner is round) as always also in principle expressible *de re* (e.g. as the thought *of* the ball that *it* is round). To do that one must acknowledge them as subject to a certain kind of normative assessment: answerability for their correctness *to* the facts, objects, and properties that they thereby count as *about*.

responsibility in synthesizing a constellation of commitments that has the rational unity distinctive of apperception—underwrites an implicit, practical grasp of representational purport. Downstream from Kant, Hegel’s conception of determinate negation accordingly incorporates an essentially *dynamic* element. It arises out of the crucial residual *asymmetry* between the order and connection of ideas and that of things. It is *impossible* for one object simultaneously to exhibit materially incompatible properties (or for two incompatible states of affairs to obtain), while it is only *inappropriate* for one subject simultaneously to endorse materially incompatible commitments. Representings are articulated by deontic normative relations, while representeds are articulated by alethic modal ones. Finding oneself with materially incompatible commitments obliges one to *do* something, to revise those commitments so as to remove the incoherence. It is only in terms of that obligation to repair that we can understand what it is to take or treat two objective properties or states of affairs as incompatible in the alethic modal sense. Understanding the representational dimension of conceptual content—the relation and connection between the deontic and alethic limbs of the cognitive-practical constellation of subjective and objective—requires understanding how the experience of error, articulated in normative terms, is intelligible as the (re)presentation of objective alethic

modal relations of incompatibility. Unlike Spinoza's, Hegel's concept of determinate negation is Janus-faced, displaying subjective and objective aspects that are complementary in the sense of being reciprocally sense-dependent.⁸ On the side of the subject, the normative significance of negation is pragmatic: it yields an obligation to movement, change, development. Determinate negation, material incompatibility mediates the relation between pragmatics and semantics—as well as the relation between the expressive and the representational dimensions of intentionality, on the semantic side.

But the revelation that the semantogenic core of experience is the experience of *error*, that its essence consists in the unmasking of something as not real, but as mere appearance, seems to raise once more the specter of skepticism. If error is the necessary form of experience, if what one implicitly discovers in experience is always the incorrectness and inadequacy of one's knowledge or understanding, then why is not skepticism the right conclusion to draw? Why has not Hegel's own concept of experience shown itself as the “path of despair”?

⁸ This is how “the form of the Notion...unites the objective form of Truth and of the knowing Self in an immediate unity” [805].

7. Hegel wants to understand the relation between the two “objects”, the “first in-itself” and the “being- for-consciousness of the in-itself” as one of *negation*. “This new object contains the nothingness [Nichtigkeit] of the first, it is what experience has made of it” [86]. The idea is that skepticism consists in taking the sense in which the second object is negation of the first to be *formal* or abstract negation, rather than *determinate* negation. Doing that is “allowing the result which emerges from an untrue mode of knowledge” to “dissolve into an empty nothingness.” The point is that the sense in which the second object “contains the nothingness of the first” is not that “The stick is bent,” is succeeded by “The stick is *not* bent.” It is that it is succeeded by the realization that “The stick is bent,” is not saying how things really are. It is an appearance, a *mis-representation of a straight stick*. That is the materially incompatible commitment for which the bent-stick representation was discarded, changing its normative status. The original commitment is not revealed by its incorrectness as an appearance—but as the appearance *of a reality*. It is genuinely an appearance of that reality: a way that reality shows up for consciousness. It is wrong, but it is not simply wrong. It is a path to the truth.

When Hegel says that “the result which emerges from an untrue mode of knowledge” must “be grasped as the nothingness *of that whose result it is*, a result which contains what is true in the previous knowledge,” this is so in a double sense. First, the original take on things is not simply cancelled, leaving a void, as a bare contradiction of it would do. It is replaced by a contrary, substantive commitment—one that is materially, not merely formally incompatible with it. Something positive has been learned: the stick is straight. Second, the transition from the original object to the second, true object is a change of status from a propositional attitude ascribable to the subject *de dicto* to one ascribable (also) *de re*. Where before we, and the subject, could say “S believes *that* the stick is bent,” after the experience of error and the rejection of the original endorsement in favor of a materially contrary one, the very same attitude is ascribable as “S believes *of* a straight stick that *it* is bent.” That is the point of the analysis of representational purport and its uptake in terms of the experience of error, which I discussed last time. The transformation of status is a rejection of a prior endorsement, but it is not *just* a rejection of it. In an important sense, it is an enrichment of its content, as it becomes *to* the subject a claim *about* something. The representational dimension of its conceptual content becomes manifest—albeit by its being revealed as a *misrepresentation*.

As we saw in the first lecture, the unintelligibility of this representational dimension is characteristic of the semantically rooted epistemological skepticism Hegel diagnoses in the opening paragraphs of the *Introduction*. It is no surprise at this point, then, to learn that skepticism's characteristic defect is a failure to appreciate the role of determinate negation in extracting consequences from the experience of error.

the presentation of untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely *negative* movement, as natural consciousness one-sidedly views it. And a mode of knowledge which makes this onesidedness its basic principle is... the skepticism which sees in every result only pure *nothingness* and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is determinate, that it is the nothingness *of that from which it results*. In fact, it is only when nothingness is taken as the nothingness of what it comes from that it is the true result; for then nothingness itself is a determinate nothingness and has a *content*. The skepticism which ends up with the abstraction of nothingness, or with emptiness, cannot proceed any further but must wait and see whether anything new presents itself to it, and what this is, in order to cast it into the

same abysmal void. But if, on the contrary, the result is comprehended as it truly is, as *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen... [79]

Only from the point of view he is recommending can we make sense of the fact that in each experience of error something positive is learned. One of the pieces of the puzzle—and of Hegel’s solution—that I hope to have added here is the understanding of how the representational dimension of conceptual content, no less than the expressive dimension, becomes intelligible in terms of the essential constitutive role determinate negation plays in the process of experience.

Nonetheless, we can ask: Why doesn’t Hegel’s account of experience as the experience of error, as the unmasking of what we took to reality as appearance, as the revelation of what was to subjects the way things are *in* themselves as merely how they are *for* consciousness provide exactly the premise needed for a fallibilist meta-induction? The fallibilist meta-induction is the inference that starts with the observation that every belief we have had or judgment we have made has eventually turned out to be false, at least in detail, and concludes that every belief or judgment we ever will or even could have will similarly eventually be found wanting—if we but subject it

to sufficient critical scrutiny. Early on in the *Introduction*, Hegel tells us that this skeptical conclusion is a natural one for those who have not learned the lessons he is teaching us:

Natural consciousness will show itself to be merely the Concept of knowledge, or unreal knowledge. But since it immediately takes itself to be real knowledge, this pathway has a negative significance for it, and what is actually the realization of the Concept is for it rather the loss and destruction of its self: for on this road it loses its truth. The road may thus be viewed as the path of doubt, or, more properly, as the path of despair... [T]his road is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge...[78]

What one needs to learn to see that this is the wrong conclusion is the central *semantic* significance of the experience of error for the intelligibility of the representational dimension of conceptual content. But to understand the positive significance of the unmasking of commitments as determinately mistaken, as misrepresentations since corrected, a substantive new conception of *truth* is required. That conception is developed in the body of

the *Phenomenology*, and only hinted at in the introductory material. It is foreshadowed, however, already in the *Preface*.

Truth...includes the negative also, what would be called the false, if it could be regarded as something from which one might abstract. The evanescent itself must, on the contrary, be regarded as essential, not as something fixed, cut off from the True...

Appearance is the arising and passing away that does not itself arise and pass away, but is in itself, and constitutes actuality and the movement of the life of truth. [47]

Instead of thinking of truth as an achievable state or status, Hegel wants us to think of it as characteristic of a *process*: the process of *experience*, in which appearances “arise and pass away.” They arise as appearances taken as veridical: ways things are *for* consciousness that are endorsed as how they are *in* themselves. When they are found to be materially incompatible with other commitments in the experience of error, some are rejected—a transformation of status that is the arising of the “second, true object”, the appearance as a *misrepresentation*, becoming *to* consciousness only how things are *for* consciousness. This process of weighing the credentials of competing

commitments to determine which should be retained and which altered so as to remove local material incompatibilities *is* the process by which we find out (more about) how things really are.

The passage continues with a famous image:

The True is thus a Bacchanalian revel, with not a member sober; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose.⁹

The revel is the restless elbowing of commitments discovered to be incompatible. Those that “drop out” are those that undergo the transformation of experience and are rejected in order to maintain the rational homeostasis that Hegel identifies as a state of “simple repose.” The party continues its movement and development, because the place of those that fall away is immediately taken by other commitments.

⁹ Das Wahre ist so der bacchantische Taumel, an dem kein Glied nicht trunken ist.

IV. Recollection and the *Science* of the Experience of Consciousness

8. This axial passage from the *Preface* continues in a way that introduces three themes with which I want to end my discussion:

Judged in the court of this movement, the single shapes of Spirit do not persist any more than determinate thoughts do, but they are as much positive and necessary moments, as they are negative and evanescent.

In the *whole* of the movement, seen as a state of repose, what distinguishes itself therein, and gives itself particular existence, is preserved as something that *recollects* itself, whose existence is self-knowledge, and whose self-knowledge is just as immediately existence. [47]

First, the truth-process whose structure is that of the experience of error is the process by which conceptual contents develop and are determined. It is not just the process by which judgments are selected, but

also the process by which concepts evolve. It is the process in and through which more and more of how the world really is, what is actually materially incompatible with what in the objective alethic sense, becomes incorporated in material incompatibilities deontically acknowledged by subjects. For one's response to the acknowledged incompatibility of two commitments one finds oneself with often is to adjust one's commitments concerning what is incompatible with what (and so what follows from what). If my initial concept of an acid obliges me to apply it to any liquid that tastes sour, and applying it commits me to that liquid turning Litmus paper red, I might respond to a sour liquid that turns Litmus paper blue (and the incompatibility of those two color-commitments) not by rejecting either the perceptual judgment of sourness or the perceptual judgment of blue, but by revising the norms articulating my concept. I might, for instance, take it that only *clear* liquids that taste sour are acids, or that cloudy acids don't turn Litmus paper red. It is because and insofar as they inherit the results of many such experiences of error that the normatively articulated conceptual contents subjects acknowledge and deploy track the objective modal conceptual articulation of the world as well as they do. That is why the experience of error is a truth-process.

The second point is that Hegel's invocation of *recollection* [Erinnerung], to which he returns at the very end of the *Phenomenology*, is a gesture at the *third* phase of the experience of error. We have already considered the first two: acknowledging the material incompatibility of some of one's commitments and revising one's commitments (including those concerning what is incompatible with what) so as to repair the discordance. What Hegel calls "recollection" is a subsequent rational reconstruction of the extended process of experience that has led to one's current constellation of commitments. What is reconstructed is a sequence of episodes, each of which exhibits the three-phase structure of acknowledgment, repair, and recollection of materially incompatible commitments one has endorsed. From the actual process of past experience the recollector selects a trajectory that is exhibited as expressively progressive—that is, as having the form of a gradual, cumulative revelation of how things really are (according to the recollector). It is a Whiggish story (characteristic of old-fashioned histories of science) of how the way things are in themselves came to be the way they veridically appeared *for* consciousness. That in this way the *past* is constantly turned into a *history* (differently with each tripartite episode of experience) is how Hegel understands reason as retrospectively "giving contingency the form of necessity."

The third point is that the recollection phase of experience is a crucial element in what Hegel calls (in [87]) the *science* of the experience of consciousness. So far in these lectures I have talked a lot about the experience of consciousness, but not officially about the *science* of the experience of consciousness. This might well have led to some puzzlement. Why am I talking about the role in experience of mundane concepts such as bent stick and straight stick when the book Hegel is introducing us to focuses exclusively on concepts such as consciousness, self-consciousness, and agency (that is: cognitive authority, the social institution of authority, and practical authority)? Why have I been discussing the development of constellations of judgments and concepts when Hegel is concerned, at least in the second half of the *Introduction*, as in the *Phenomenology*, with the development of “shapes of consciousness”? Such questions, while understandable, are misplaced. Though I have not explicitly been talking *about* it, what I have been *doing* is an exercise of the “science of the experience of consciousness.” For that “science” is the explicit, systematic, self-conscious *understanding* of the “experience of consciousness.”

9. I take it that any understanding of Hegel (or Kant) must start with what he has to teach us about ordinary, ground-level empirical and practical experience—for him (as for Kant) a matter of applying what he calls “determinate concepts”. These are concepts like stick and straight, blue and sour. What he calls “speculative,” or “logical” concepts are theoretical philosophical metaconcepts whose distinctive expressive role it is to make explicit features of the conceptual contents and use (the semantics and pragmatics) of those ground-level concepts. The *Phenomenology* is a story about the development of those higher-level concepts in terms of which his readers (“phenomenological consciousness”) can be brought to comprehend discursive activity in general (“phenomenal consciousness”). The measure of our understanding of what he has to say on that topic lies principally in the sense we can use those metaconcepts to make of the whole constellation of conceptually articulated normative practice and institutions Hegel calls “Spirit.” That is why I have started my story with what I take it he wants us ultimately to understand about the “experience of consciousness.”

Then, and I think *only* then, and on that basis, we can consider what it is to render the development of *either* kind of concept in *scientific* terms, in Hegel’s sense of that term. To do that is to tell a certain kind of

retrospective, rationally reconstructive story about their development—one that displays an expressively progressive *history*, made out of the *past*. This is the third phase of the process of experience, which is initiated by the acknowledgment of the material incompatibility of some commitments, proceeds through the local and temporary resolution of that incoherence by relinquishing or modifying some commitments (including those concerning what is materially incompatible with or a consequence of what), while retaining others, and culminates in comprehending the experience by situating it as the current result of a process in which previous commitments show up as ever more revelatory, (but still ultimately inadequate) appearances *for* consciousness of what (one now takes it) things are *in* themselves. The capstone of Hegel’s account (at the end of the *Reason* chapter, and further at the end of the *Spirit* chapter) will be to show us how this retrospective rationally reconstructive *genealogical* phase of the process of experience means that such experience is at once *both* the (further) determining of the content of concepts (whether determinate or philosophical), in the sense of the expressive dimension of conceptual content (‘that’-intentionality) that is articulated by *relations* of determinate negation, *and* the discerning of referents (Bedeutungen, what things are in themselves) that are represented by such senses (Sinne, what things are for

consciousness) along the representational dimension of conceptual content ('of'-intentionality), as articulated by the *process* that is the experience of error, normatively governed by relations of determinate negation.¹⁰ That is a story for another occasion.¹¹

Hegel thinks that the *only* form a theoretical comprehension of the conceptual and representational content of a concept can take is such a genealogy of the process of experience by which it is determined. This is true whether what is being addressed is a constellation of concepts-and-commitments at the meta-level of scientific self-consciousness, or at the ground-level of empirical consciousness. That is why he assimilates them in the *Preface* passage we have been considering:

Judged in the court of this movement, **the single shapes of Spirit** do not persist any more than **determinate thoughts** do, but they are as much positive and necessary moments, as they are negative and evanescent.

A proper meta-level account of the *experience* of (self-)consciousness is a *science* of the experience of (ground-level) consciousness. The

¹⁰ Spirit is this movement of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content. [804]

¹¹ I tell it at the end of "Hegel's Expressive Metaphysics of Agency".

Phenomenology recounts the *experience* of the science of the experience of consciousness: the process by which meta-concepts he takes to be adequate to comprehend explicitly the process of experience are themselves developed and determined. We see Hegel asserting that the experience of error as here described is also the mechanism whereby new “shapes of consciousness” arise, in a passage we are now in a position to appreciate:

When that which at first appeared as the object sinks to the level of being *to* consciousness a knowledge of the object, and when the *in-itself becomes a being-for-consciousness of the in-itself*, then this *is* the new object. And with this new object a new Shape of consciousness also makes its appearance, a Shape *to* which the essence is something different from that which was the essence *to* the preceding Shape. It is this circumstance which guides the entire succession of the Shapes of consciousness in its necessity. But it is this necessity alone—or the emergence of the new object, presenting itself to consciousness without the latter’s knowing how this happens to it—which occurs for *us*, as it were, behind *its* back. A moment which is both *in-itself and for-us* is thereby introduced into the movement of consciousness, a moment which does not present

itself for the consciousness engaged in the experience itself. But the *content* of what we see emerging exists *for it*, and we comprehend only the formal aspect of what emerges or its pure emerging. *For consciousness*, what has emerged exists only as an object; *for us*, it exists at once as movement and becoming. This, then, is the necessity in virtue of which the present road toward science is itself already a *science*. And, in accordance with its content, it may be called the science of the *experience of consciousness*. [87]

In these lectures I have focused on what Hegel will have to say about the semantics and pragmatics of the concepts deployed and determined through base-level experience, by way of preparation for understanding the course of the experience of meta-level *self*-consciousness that he recollects for us in the body of the *Phenomenology*.

END

