HEGEL'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL REALISM

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HEGEL'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL REALISM

A Study of the Aim and Method of
Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

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In studying logic, you hope to correct your present ideas of what reasoning is good, what bad. This, of course, must be done by reasoning Some writers fancy that they see some absurdity in this They say it would be a '*petitio principii*' Let us rather state the case thus. At present you are in possession of a *logica utens* which seems to be unsatisfactory. The question is whether, using this unsatisfactory *logica utens*, you can make out wherein it must be modified, and can attain to a better system. This is a truer way of stating the question; and so stated, it appears to present no such insuperable difficulty, as is pretended.

—C. S. Peirce

I am convinced that progress in philosophy, as in science, can come only through continual mutual criticism, self-criticism, and attempts at improved approaches.

—R. Carnap

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PREFACE

The scope of this study is both ambitious and modest. One of its ambitions is to reintegrate Hegel's theory of knowledge into main stream epistemology. Hegel's views were formed in consideration of Classical Skepticism and Modern epistemology, and he frequently presupposes great familiarity with other views and the difficulties they face. Setting Hegel's discussion in the context of both traditional and contemporary epistemology is therefore necessary for correctly interpreting his issues, arguments, and views. Accordingly, this is an issues-oriented study. I analyze Hegel's problematic and method by placing them in the context of Sextus Empiricus, Descartes, Kant, Carnap, and William Alston.

I discuss Carnap, rather than a Modern empiricist such as Locke or Hume, for several reasons. One is that Hegel himself refutes a fundamental presupposition of Modern empiricism, the doctrine of "knowledge by acquaintance," in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, a chapter that cannot be reconstructed within the bounds of this study. Second, philosophers still tend to turn positivist when criticizing Hegel. Thus it is important to show that Carnap's program fails to handle the relevant problems. Third, I believe that Hegel has much to offer the contemporary philosophical scene. In this regard it is important to show that Hegel and (*e.g.*) Carnap are, after all, working within the same philosophical arena. Finally, Carnap is the last figure in the analytic tradition who addresses the relevant issues as issues in (or at least about and against) epistemology rather than formulating them mainly as issues in philosophy of language. Pursuing the issues of this study into contemporary philosophy of language would exceed manageable bounds.

Hegel's expositors face a difficult dilemma. Hegel's corpus is so vast that it is well nigh impossible to cover all the texts relevant to the issues of any particular investigation or to any one Hegelian text, so that an expositor risks omitting something crucial. On the other hand, attempting to treat Hegel's views synoptically inevitably leads to a superficial treatment of his particular statements and arguments, thus leaving an expositor at risk of misconstruction. It is my firm conviction that Hegel has suffered far too much from this second shortcoming. Attempts to treat his philosophy, or even one of its major components, synoptically has led expositors to misconstrue Hegel's views, sometimes drastically. Hegel insists that there is no way to understand the very pungent and suggestive (and sometimes absurd) statements he makes in the latter parts of his expositions without understanding how the meaning of his terms and the justification of his statements have been developed from the beginning of his discussion. I'm convinced that Hegel needs to be taken at his word about this point. To do this, however, requires understanding how he proposes to develop his points from the beginning to the end of any one of his expositions. To follow his development of his views thus requires what has seemed most difficult of all: to follow the development of his arguments from one statement to the next, and from one paragraph to the next.

This study provides a complete, detailed analysis and reconstruction of an important portion of one of Hegel's most important texts. The portion I consider, principally the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, concerns Hegel's philosophical aims and method in the *Phenomenology*. Thus the purpose of this study is to provide a detailed understanding of his procedure in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, an interpretation intended to

facilitate an exacting and philosophically sensitive reading of Hegel's very interesting book. The modesty of the present study lies in its subtitle: It is a study of the aim and method of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and not an exhaustive treatment of his whole book.

What many may find surprising is my contention that the "absolute idealist" Hegel defends the view that there is a way the world is that does not depend on our cognitive or linguistic activity and that we can know the way the world is. Hegel's idealism is an ontological holism that is, and is intended to be, consistent with what I call "epistemological realism." This view is obviously a realism. I call it "epistemological realism" in order to draw attention to the fact that this view involves both an ontological thesis—there is a way the world is which does not depend on our cognitive or linguistic activity—; and an epistemological thesis—we can know the way the world is. Providing this label distinguishes this view, as an issue in epistemology, from what is called "scientific realism," the view that the theoretical entities posited by scientific theories exist. Hegel has views which bear on the issue of scientific realism, but they cannot be discussed at length in this study. Hegel's issue is the Modern issue of the "external world," the existence of which is typically granted in debates about scientific realism. This is also to say, Hegel's issues are prior to those concerning scientific realism. It is thus important to note that Hegel's criterion of truth analyzed in this study concerns the truth of epistemological theories of knowledge, and neither does nor is designed to apply to problems of theory selection or the underdetermination of theory by observation.¹

Those who find incredible my contention that Hegel is an epistemological realist might first read G. W. Cunningham's essay, "The Significance of the Hegelian Conception of Absolute Knowledge."² Cunningham valiantly attacks numbers of mistaken impressions of Hegel's philosophy, many of which still have unwarranted currency today. Henry Harris, Hegel's most dedicated and sensitive expositor, remarks:

The balance of social influence has shifted so drastically between Hegel's time and ours ... from the religious to the scientific establishment, that Hegel's own contribution to this shift has itself become an obstacle to the right understanding of what he said. *He* wanted to swing religious consciousness into full support of a scientific interpretation of human life His own choice of language was conditioned by the Christian teaching, but also by the knowledge that the Christian doctrine of spirit was derived from Stoic sources.³

The Stoics were, of course, thoroughgoing materialists and naturalists. Strong evidence of Hegel's epistemological realism is interlaced throughout Harris's magnificent reconstruction of Hegel's early metaphysics, logic, and philosophy of nature. The present study aims to establish a proper understanding of Hegel's mature approach to defending epistemological realism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and so to provide access to Hegel's very interesting views about empirical knowledge and its philosophical analysis.

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I have worked on this study for a long time and in many places. I gratefully thank my friends, teachers, and colleagues who have contributed to my endeavors. I wish to extend special thanks to a number of them. Robert Brandom kindly allowed me to sit in on his stimulating seminar on Hegel's *Phenomenology* in the summer of 1983. For their kindness and perseverance in commenting on a very rough draft of this study written at that time, I thank Allen Wood, Peter King, and Frederick Beiser. Peter and Fred have been especially generous with their conversation, support, and enthusiasm. Peter also brought Sextus Empiricus to my attention and read over my discussion of Descartes. Michael Theunissen graciously supported my application to the DAAD and provided many insights into Hegel's philosophy in his seminar (co-taught with Ernst Tugendhat) on the "*Vorbegriff*" to Hegel's *Enzyklopädie*. Hans Friedrich Fulda kindly discussed with me a preliminary account of Hegel's critical inference. Matthias Kettner has been a real source of stimulation and insight. Michael Hardimon spurred me on at crucial moments and stimulated many improvements in the final chapter. Ron Laymon insightfully suggested that I focus on Carnap for the purposes of Chapter Four and discussed and commented on drafts of that chapter. I heartily thank Robert Turnbull for many hours of friendly and fruitful conversation and for his comments on my treatment of Sextus Empiricus. William Alston stimulated several improvements in my discussion of his views. Bill Rowe and Rod Bertolet provided very helpful remarks on a number of points. None of these people is responsible for my failure to make better use of their advice.

Two people deserve very special thanks. My eternal gratitude goes to Alice Mae Westphal, who taught me at an early age not to settle for easy answers. And I extend my deepest gratitude to Frederick Will, whose writings and correspondence have provided much guidance and insight. He has been for me something most rare—an abiding source of philosophical wisdom.

The Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst generously supported my year at Die Freie Universität Berlin. I thank Nicholas Rescher, Editor of *The History of Philosophy Quarterly*, for permission to reprint material which appeared in Vol. 5 No. 2 of that journal under the title "Hegel's Solution to the Dilemma of the Criterion." This material is dispersed through Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine. I thank Robert Turnbull, Editor of *Philosophy Research Archives*, for permission to reprint material which appeared first in Vol. XIII of that journal under the title "Sextus Empiricus *Contra* René Descartes." This material is reused in Chapters One and Two. Quotations from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, trs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) are used by permission. Dianne deVries did a marvelous job of copy editing under relentless time constraints. Her services were funded by a Liberal Arts Faculty Research Support Grant at the University of New Hampshire. David Rohde of the university's Printing Services provided calm, friendly, and expert assistance in producing the final print-out of the book. The costs incurred in that printing were generously borne by a Projects and Programs Grant from the Center for the Humanities of the University of New Hampshire. I am grateful to each of these parties for their support.

NOTE ON CITATIONS

A list of abbreviations for frequently cited texts other than Hegel's appears in Appendix IV, pp. 204-206. Abbreviations used for citing Hegel's works are listed below. Full bibliographical information appears in the Bibliography. Kaufmann's translation of the Preface to the *Phenomenology* has been used. I have translated the brief Introduction to the *Phenomenology* in full. My translation appears in Appendix I, pp. 189-196. With the exception of the Preface, where no translator is named in the notes, the translation is my own. In all citations references are provided for the corresponding passages in the original German and in a standard English translation. (I have additionally provided references to Kaufmann's translation of the Preface and to Dove's translation of the Introduction, should the reader wish to consult their renderings.) Those of Hegel's texts that are divided into sections are cited by section number and, where relevant, by the Remark or *Zusatz* appended to each section. Hegel's Remarks are indicated by an "r" suffix following a section number; a *Zusatz* by a "z" suffix. Countenancing this bit of bilingualism avoids the ambiguity of "a" between "addition" and "*Anmerkung*."

Hegel's writing is notoriously dense and convoluted. Citing merely a page number is frequently insufficient to pick out the statement to which one intends to refer. This problem has been alleviated in part by the magnificent new critical edition of Hegel's *Gesammelte Werke*, in which the editors have provided line numbers. I have gratefully availed myself of these line numbers when referring to passages in Hegel's *Phänomenologie*. Referring to an English translation of the *Phenomenology* is not so easy, for no translator has provided such line numbers. Counting lines of text is a tedious process. I have therefore devised a simpler method for referring to line numbers in Miller's translation. I have used a "ruler," marked off in line numbers from 1 to 40, which can be laid down a page of text in order to determine line numbers. Such a ruler may be made by laying a strip of paper or card stock down a full page of text in Miller's translation, numbering each line of text along the edge of the strip. In using this gauge I have allowed simplicity to override accuracy in the following regards. First, if a heading appears at the top of a page, I have set the gauge at the first line of text, and not at the heading. Second, where a heading interrupts the body of the text, I have ignored the gaps this produces and "measured" from the top line of text on the page. Since the point of adopting line numbers is to facilitate a commentator's referring readers to Hegel's text, ease of use is paramount. I hope my readers will find my method useful, or at least useable. Where a whole paragraph is cited, I have included the paragraph numbers used in Miller's translation.

GW *Gesammelte Werke*. Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, ed.

Werke *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel, eds.

G *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*. *Gesammelte Werke* Vol. 9.

M *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. A. V. Miller, tr.

- K ‘The Preface to the *Phenomenology*.’ W. Kaufmann, tr.
- D ‘The Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.’ K. R. Dove, tr.
- WL *Wissenschaft der Logik*. 2nd ed. *Werke* Vols. 5 and 6.
- SL *Hegel’s Science of Logic*. A. V. Miller, tr.
- Enz. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*. *Werke* Vols. 8—10.
- = *Hegel’s Logic*. (*Enzyklopädie* Vol. I.) W. Wallace, tr.
- + *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*. 3 Vols. (*Enzyklopädie* Vol. II.) M. J. Petry, tr.
- + *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*. (*Enzyklopädie* Vol. III.) W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, trs.
- VGP *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. *Werke* Vols. 18—20.
- LHP *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. 3 Vols. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson, trs.