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Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique

WILLIAM F. BRISTOW

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To Frederick Neuhouser

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Abbreviations

Immanuel Kant

References to Kant's texts are given by volume and page number of the Academy edition, *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (29 volumes; Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1900–1942). The exception is the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which I cite using the standard A and B pagination of the first and second editions respectively. Below I indicate the abbreviations I use for individual works and the English translations of these works to which I refer.

- Ak *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (29 volumes; Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1900–1942). Cited by volume and page number.
- GMS *Die Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785). In volume 4 of Academy edition (Ak).
Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, translated and edited by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- InDiss *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* (commonly referred to as Inaugural Dissertation), (1770). In volume 2 of the Academy edition (Ak).
On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World, translated by David Wolford in Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy: 1755-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 373–416.
- KU *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790). In volume 5 of the Academy edition (Ak).
Critique of Judgment, translated by Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).
- KpV *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788). In volume 5 of the Academy edition (Ak).

- Critique of Practical Reason*, translated and edited by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- KrV *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781; 2nd edn., 1787).
Critique of Pure Reason, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
 I also use the translation of Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's, 1965).
- MS *Metaphysik der Sitten* (1797). In volume 6 of Academy edition (Ak).
Metaphysics of Morals, in Immanuel Kant *Practical Philosophy*, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 353–603.
- Prol *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (1783). In volume 4 of Academy edition (Ak).
Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics, translated by Paul Carus, revised by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977).
- Rel *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1792–1793).
 In volume 6 of Academy edition (Ak).
Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, and Other Writings, translated and edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

I cite Hegel's works using the edition usually cited: *Werke im zwanzig Bänden*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970). In referring to his individual works, I have employed the abbreviations below. Where an abbreviation refers to both the German original and an English translation, I give page references to both, with the German first and the English second, separated by an oblique (/). In those cases in which the text is divided into relatively brief sections (for example, the *Encyclopedia Logic* and the *Philosophy of Right*) I cite using section rather than page number, which eliminates the need for two citations.

- BKH *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, translated and annotated by George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985). I use this text when citing the English translation of Hegel's essays *On the Essence of Philosophical Critique* (WdpK) and *On the Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy* (VSP), as well as writings by Karl Leonhard Reinhold and G. E. Schulze.
- Diff *Differenz der fichte'schen und schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie* (1801). In *Werke*, volume 2.
The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy, translated by H. S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977).
- EL *Die Enzyklopädie des philosophischen Wissenschaften, erster Teil: Logik* (1817/1827). In *Werke*, volume 8. (Known as the *Encyclopedia Logic*). I cite this text by section number. Some of the sections are supplemented by Hegel's elucidatory remarks and by additions derived from student notes to Hegel's lectures. Following convention, I append 'A' (for *Anmerkung*) to the section number when citing Hegel's remarks to a section, and I append 'Z' (for *Zusatz*) to the section number when citing the student additions.
Hegel's Logic, translated by William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
- GW *Glauben und Wissen* (1802). In *Werke*, volume 2.
Faith and Knowledge, translated and edited by W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977).
- PhG *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807). In *Werke*, volume 3.
Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). I cite the English translation by numbered paragraph.
- PhR *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1820). In *Werke*, volume 7.
Elements of the Philosophy of Right, edited by Allen Wood, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). I cite this text by section number. Some of the sections are supplemented by Hegel's elucidatory remarks and by additions compiled by Eduard Gans from lecture notes of students at Hegel's lectures. Following convention, I append 'A' (for *Anmerkung*) to the section number when citing Hegel's remarks to a section and I append 'Z' (for *Zusatz*) to the section number when citing the student additions.

- VGP *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. In *Werke*, volumes 18–20.
Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy, 3 volumes, translated by E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1896, reprinted 1955).
- VSP *Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie. Darstellung seiner verschiedenen Modifikationen und Vergleichung des neuesten mit dem alten* (1802). In *Werke*, volume 2.
On the Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One, translated with notes by H. S. Harris in BKH, 311–62.
- WL *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812–1816). In *Werke*, volumes 5 and 6.
Science of Logic, translated by A. V. Miller (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999).
- WdpK *Einleitung. Über das Wesen der philosophischen Kritik überhaupt und ihr Verhältnis zum gegenwärtigen Zustand der Philosophie insbesondere* (1802). In *Werke*, volume 2.
The Critical Journal, Introduction: On the Essence of Philosophical Criticism Generally, and its Relationship to the Present State of Philosophy in Particular, translated with notes by H. S. Harris in BKH, 272–91.
- Werke *Werke im zwanzig Bänden*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

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Introduction

Whether, or to what extent, Hegel's system of philosophy regresses to the dogmatic rational metaphysics that Kant had effectively criticized in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is one of the central perennial issues about Hegel's thought. Undeniably, Hegel makes bold claims on behalf of reason, in conscious defiance of the limits Kant famously draws. According to Kant's critical limits, human reason cannot achieve knowledge beyond the bounds of possible experience, and hence knowledge of reason's special objects in metaphysics (of God, of the soul, of the size, age, or causal ground of the world as a whole) is impossible for us. Kantian criticism consists in the self-limitation of human reason. Hegel, in contrast, claims for his system what he calls 'absolute' knowledge, (or also 'knowledge of the absolute'). Instead of limiting itself, reason finally attains in Hegel's system of thought perfectly adequate knowledge of that which it has in the history of metaphysics forever been attempting to know. Hegel presents his system as the complete fulfillment of reason's age-old ambitions.¹ While so much is undeniable, readers are sharply divided in their responses to Hegel's apparently transgressive metaphysics.

If Hegel's thought has been largely absent in the tradition of Anglo-American analytic philosophy over the last century, this is to a great extent due to the widespread perception that his thought is 'extravagantly' metaphysical. In a tradition of philosophy marked by its hostility to metaphysics in general, Hegel's talk of 'the Absolute', 'Spirit', 'the Subject', 'the Negative', etc.—all usually capitalized in English translations—has been read as so untied to epistemological constraints as to be nonsense. Hegel acquired the reputation as an unregenerate speculative metaphysician, complacently unconcerned with issues of epistemological justification. Consequently Hegel's thought

¹ Hegel writes in the Introduction to his *Science of Logic* that its 'content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and the finite mind' (Hegel, WL, vol. 5, 44/50). (For the manner in which I refer to the texts of Hegel and of Kant, please see the section entitled 'Abbreviations'.)

was supposed worthy of serious consideration (if at all) mostly only in the domain of social and political philosophy, not in the domain of metaphysics or epistemology.²

Things have changed recently. In the past generation or so, Hegel studies have enjoyed a renaissance in English language scholarship.³ Partly this renaissance has been fueled by formidable recent work combating the misconception of Hegel as a retrograde metaphysician, simply unconcerned with the epistemological grounding of his bold metaphysical claims.⁴ Recent studies have convincingly made the case, not only that Hegel has an epistemology, but that Hegel is *intensely* concerned with the epistemological justification of his metaphysical system. However, there is fundamental disagreement among recent commentators regarding how to understand the shape and direction of Hegel's epistemology.⁵ This study offers a new interpretation of the shape of Hegel's epistemology, one that takes advantage of recent work, but which goes beyond that work as well, in part through bringing together disparate, apparently contradictory strands of recent scholarship.

Granted Hegel's intense concern with epistemological justification, how could sensitive readers have missed his epistemology? Prominent among the many tasks of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is its epistemological task: to demonstrate exhaustively and thoroughly the possibility of absolute knowledge, the possibility of the metaphysical system he subsequently propounds

² Michael Forster documents nicely the traditional blindness to Hegel's epistemology—not only among casual readers of Hegel's work, but among Hegel scholars as well—in a chapter entitled 'Hegel's Epistemology?' of his book *Hegel and Skepticism*.

³ Charles Taylor's *Hegel* is often cited as marking a turning point.

⁴ Recent work in English expounding and defending Hegel as an epistemologist includes: Michael Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* and *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*; Paul Franks, *All or Nothing*; William Maker, *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel*; Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*; Tom Rockmore, *Hegel's Circular Epistemology* and *On Hegel's Epistemology and Contemporary Philosophy*; Kenneth Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* and *Hegel's Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Karl Ameriks surveys and discusses much of this work in his article 'Recent Work on Hegel: The Rehabilitation of an Epistemologist?' For recent work on Hegel's epistemology by German scholars, see *Skeptizismus und spekulatives Denken in der Philosophie Hegels*, edited by Hans-Friedrich Fulda and Rolf-Peter Horstmann.

⁵ Two fundamental disagreements are worth mentioning here: (i) Kenneth Westphal's attention to Hegel's epistemology has led him to the view 'that Hegel's "idealism" is in fact a realist form of holism' (*Hegel's Epistemology*, xi), whereas Pippin's perception that Hegel continues Kant's critical programme has led him to view Hegel's position as inscribed into a broadly idealist framework; (ii) Michael Forster's attention to the relatively neglected early work by Hegel on the difference between ancient and modern skepticism has led him to interpret Hegel's epistemological procedure as an adaptation of ancient skeptical procedure (and to recommend it to us as such), whereas Pippin interprets (and recommends to our attention) Hegel's epistemological procedure as an adaptation of Kant's.

(in his *Science of Logic* and in his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*). Given that Hegel's most famous work is a systematic epistemological grounding of his metaphysics, how could readers find Hegel indifferent to epistemological questions and content dogmatically to assert metaphysical claims?

Ironically, the answer lies in the very intensity of Hegel's reflection on, and experimentation with, epistemological procedure in his Jena period (1800–1806). Hegel's engagement with epistemological procedure arises in the context of controversies surrounding Kant's epistemological project of critique. Naturally enough, one effect of Kant's 'revolution in methodology', of his celebrated project of philosophical critique, is to concentrate philosophers' attention on the question of how metaphysical knowledge can be justified. In the immediate aftermath of the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, there is much controversy regarding Kant's critical project. Hegel cuts his philosophical teeth, so to speak, in an environment in which the so-called 'meta-critical' challenges to Kant's criticism are salient. His earliest published writings show him concerned from the beginning with how to establish metaphysics as a science, as Kant's criticism promises to do, against the background of the assumption (shared by many of Hegel's contemporaries) that Kant's critique fails to fulfill its promise to do so. The ultimate result of Hegel's early reflection on epistemological procedure is his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. But the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is such a multifaceted work, and its epistemological method has such an unusual form, that one easily overlooks altogether the respects in which it dispatches an epistemological task. Ironically, Hegel's intense early reflection on the question of *how* to ground our metaphysical knowledge in the face of skeptical challenges ultimately yields a method so unfamiliar that we miss the epistemology altogether and judge that he complacently propounds dogmatic metaphysics, oblivious to Kant's trenchant challenges to the possibility of such knowledge.

This study argues that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is, in its epistemological aims and methodology, thoroughly shaped by Hegel's response to the event of Kant's philosophical criticism. The story of Hegel's response to the event of Kant's criticism has a few very important plot twists. The story begins with a fundamental objection that Hegel directs against Kant's critical project. The main work of Part I of this two-part study is to develop (and provide limited defense for) Hegel's objection. The basic outline of the objection is as follows. The task of Kant's philosophical criticism is to determine, in a subjective reflection on our cognitive capacities, how and whether metaphysics (rational knowledge) is possible for us. The critical inquiry is (I argue) an attempt to

establish the content and authority of the highest norms of reason as a pro-paedeutic to the subsequent construction of a science of metaphysics on the basis of these norms. Though Hegel nowhere develops his objection fully and thoroughly, he expresses the view at several places that Kant's project of philosophical critique begs the question *against* the possibility of metaphysics for us; Hegel expresses the view, moreover, that the attempt to establish the content and authority of reason's highest principles in a prior, self-reflective inquiry implicitly *confines* us cognitively to a subjectively constituted domain, that is, to knowledge of mere appearances. Thus, Hegel objects that the subjectivism at which Kant's critical inquiry arrives—meaning by 'subjectivism' merely the general claim that knowledge of objects is relativized to the standpoint of the knowing subject—is implicit from the beginning in Kant's critical procedure. Though Hegel's usually rather summary dismissals of Kant's criticism have tended either to be uncritically embraced (by commentators already sympathetic to Hegel) or quickly dismissed as based on a crude reading of Kant's doctrines (by philosophers already sympathetic to Kant), few have undertaken to develop and construct Hegel's objection carefully and critically. Part I develops a case on behalf of Hegel's contention against Kant's critical project, responsive to the complexity and philosophical richness of Kant's project.

The context of analytic philosophy poses obstacles to gaining a fair hearing for Hegel's objection against Kant's criticism. The obstacles derive from the way in which prominent preoccupations of analytic epistemology have shaped the analytic reception of Kant's epistemology. So I comment here briefly on the shape of this reception in order to explain how I attempt to overcome the obstacles in presenting Hegel's objection in Part I. However, we get there by way of a brief comment on the way in which Hegel's epistemology finds itself on the agenda of contemporary analytic epistemologists.

Surprisingly, the recent wave of interest in Hegel's epistemology is not limited to scholars of Hegel's thought but extends also to a smattering of prominent analytic epistemologists themselves.⁶ It's one thing for Hegel's epistemology to be taken seriously by analytic philosophers interested in the history of philosophy; but it is quite another for it to be drawn upon by contemporary analytic epistemologists, as if it might actually be (at least partly) right! What

⁶ John McDowell remarks in the preface to his Locke lectures, published as *Mind and World*, that he would like to conceive those lectures as a 'prolegomenon to a reading of [Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*]' (ix). Robert Brandom also points in recent work towards Hegel's thought as containing lessons for us in how to understand knowledge. See, in particular, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Content* and *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism*.

explains this surprising development? Speaking quite generally, of course, analytic philosophy—over the last five decades or so—has been oriented against the Cartesian dualism of mind and world and against the conception of the epistemological task associated with this dualism. In general, analytic philosophers have wanted to reject or get beyond the Cartesian conception of knowledge as achieved through bridging an ontological and epistemological gulf across which the subjective and the objective are supposed to face each other.⁷ Such a conception seems destined to deposit us either in external world skepticism or in subjectivism. Hegel is one of the first philosophers in the tradition to conceive what is distinctively modern in philosophy in terms of this ontological and epistemological gulf. Moreover, Hegel explicitly turns against the modern in philosophy, on this conception of what the modern in philosophy consists in. Now that certain strands of analytic epistemology, worked out independently of Hegel, have arrived at a similar conception of our struggle to understand human knowledge correctly, some analytic philosophers are discovering Hegel's thought as a resource in their own work.

However, we need to say slightly more in order to explain how Hegel's thought finds itself on the agenda of contemporary epistemologists. It gets there by way of dissatisfaction with naturalized epistemology. Naturalizing epistemologists also would transcend the Cartesian conception of the epistemological task. But the naturalization strategy does not lead thinkers in the direction of Hegel's thought. The naturalization of epistemology consists—in one classic characterization, anyway—in construing epistemological inquiry as contained within the (empirical) science of nature. According to naturalizing epistemologists, the task of epistemology should not be construed as that of *justifying* the possibility of knowledge of objects (objects conceived, initially anyway, as 'external') from a standpoint of epistemological reflection situated (somehow) outside or before our actual knowledge. Instead, the task should be conceived as the natural-scientific task of *explaining* (empirically, of course) how 'the human subject ... posits bodies and projects his physics from his data ...' from a position situated *within* the ongoing concern of natural science.⁸ However, epistemology so construed may seem to elide something essential to epistemology, namely, the moment of the epistemic subject's recognition of (or failure to recognize) the *reasons* for judgment. One important source of dissatisfaction with the strategy of naturalizing

⁷ I take this characterization of the modern epistemological situation from John McDowell's 'Knowledge and the Internal', 889.

⁸ Willard Van Orman Quine, 'Epistemology Naturalized', 83.