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Absolute Knowledge and the Ethical Conclusion of the *Phenomenology*

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Abstract and Keywords

Hegel wrote in *The Science of Logic* that the deduction of the concept of science was accomplished at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 'Absolute Knowledge.' This chapter links the deduction claim to the metaphor of a ladder to science that Hegel discusses in the *Phenomenology* Preface, and to the sublation of the form of objectivity that is the focus of 'Absolute Knowledge.' It argues that this reconciliation of self-consciousness with objectivity coincides with the task of unifying the theoretical and practical domains. Once one appreciates that Hegel's goal is such a unification, one can see why he holds that the agent of conscience is already quite close to possessing absolute knowledge. The agent's knowledge in deliberation, together with the agent's relation to other agents in the process of recognizing action on conscience, has the same conceptual form as the complete theoretical object, the expanded version of the Concept, or inferential objectivity.

Keywords: Hegel, phenomenology, knowledge, absolute, recognition, conscience

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to comprehend “Absolute Knowledge” we must read it with an eye forward to *The Science of Logic*, and with an eye backward to the long road that brought the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to its concluding chapter. Most of the actual text is best understood in the latter, retrospective mode, and most of this chapter will be concerned with understanding how Hegel unifies the previous seven chapters of the *Phenomenology* by aligning what can be called the theoretical and practical accounts of objectivity. To understand “Absolute Knowledge” one must understand each part of the book, and so it seems that an explanation of AK (I will henceforth use AK to refer to the chapter and ‘absolute knowledge’ to refer to the knowledge itself) can only be given at the end of a long commentary on the whole book, not as a freestanding essay.¹ In what follows, I do say something about each part of the book, though in most cases only a little, and for a more adequate view I recommend that the interested reader consult the previous five chapters of this *Handbook* and the many excellent commentaries on the *Phenomenology* as a whole.

8.1. The *Phenomenology* as the Deduction of the Concept

In this opening section I focus on the purpose of AK with regard to *The Science of Logic*, outlining what Hegel took to be the *Phenomenology's* basic task and how he arrived at (p. 167) that task through a critique of previous forms of idealism. The most compact summaries of the task occur in two passages in the Introduction to *The Science of Logic*, where Hegel emphasizes the *Phenomenology's* role in the justification or deduction of the concept of science.² Here is the first passage:

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have presented consciousness as it progresses from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object [*Gegenstandes*] to absolute knowledge. This path traverses all the forms of the *relation of consciousness to the object* [Objekte] and its result is the *concept of science* [den Begriff der Wissenschaft]. There is no need, therefore, to justify this concept here (apart from the fact that it emerges within logic itself). It has already been justified in the other work, and would indeed not be capable of any other justification than is produced by consciousness as all its shapes dissolve into [*sich auflösen*] that concept as into their truth.

(SL 21.32/28)

The *Phenomenology* is designed to examine consciousness, which is defined by an opposition of subject and object, starting from its most immediate conception of knowledge ("Sense-Certainty") and ending with the complete resolution of the subject-object dualism in AK. From this passage we can gather that the aspiration is to consider 'all the forms' of consciousness, so that in the end we have a *complete* and *comprehensive* overcoming of the opposition of subject and object. This is a justification of 'the *concept of science*', where Hegel means *the* Concept. (I will use Concept with a capital 'C' to refer to what Hegel also calls the concept of science or the absolute concept.) For our purposes, it is important to see that Hegel aims to reduce the separation or opposition in all shapes of consciousness to a basic *internal difference* or separation that is contained within the Concept itself. The shapes of consciousness are dissolved into, or resolved into, the basic form of conceptuality, which thus proves to be the *truth* of those shapes.

Hegel's deduction claim is that the Concept is the basis of a 'pure science' because it is the truth of all the shapes of consciousness, where this claim for justification can be cast in more epistemological terms as an anti-skeptical strategy for grounding knowledge. The *Phenomenology* overcomes the skepticism that one could have toward the identity of subject and object, thought and being, because every claim to knowledge of an object contrasted with the subject's knowledge proves to be dependent on a conceptual form

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common to both subject (thought) and object (being). In the second passage from the *Science of Logic*, he casts the *Phenomenology* in terms of *certainty* and truth:

The concept of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than that deduction. Absolute knowledge is the *truth* of all the modes of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* brought out, it is only in absolute knowledge that the separation of the *object* [*Gegenstandes*] from the *certainty of itself* is completely (p. 168) resolved [*sich aufgelöst hat*]: truth has become equal to certainty and this certainty to truth.

(SL 21.33-34/29)

This passage casts absolute knowledge in the terms of the *Phenomenology* Introduction, where Hegel presented the process of consciousness 'testing' itself. The moment of the object is the moment of 'truth' or the 'in-itself' that is supposed to be independent of the subjective activity of consciousness, which Hegel identifies with the subject's 'certainty' or 'for-itself'. We can thus reformulate the trajectory of the *Phenomenology* as a path through every form of *limited* or *relative* truth, where each of those relative truths finds its ultimate truth in absolute knowledge. The main issue, then, is to understand how in absolute knowledge both certainty and truth are equal to each other *as the Concept*, and how absolute knowledge is thereby the truth of all the previous shapes. Absolute knowledge must contain the conceptual core of all the previous shapes, demonstrating that their objectivity (truth) and our knowledge of that objectivity (certainty) are united. How is this possible, and how did Hegel arrive at such a justificatory enterprise?

Hegel's project is deeply informed by the development of Kant's transcendental idealism in the hands of Reinhold and Fichte. Reinhold's 'principle of consciousness' and Fichte's 'self-positing I' are the precursors to Hegel's Concept. All three philosophers attempt to demonstrate that a *single* principle can provide a unified ground, immune to skeptical attacks, for all the branches of the idealist system that Kant had laid out but (in their view) had failed to properly ground. The issue of the unconditioned was central to Kant's attempt in the first *Critique* to provide *both* an account of knowledge of appearances (in the Transcendental Analytic) and a critique of the search for the unconditioned through thought alone (in the Transcendental Dialectic).³ The Analytic showed that representations are conditioned by the unity of self-consciousness, but also that our conceptual knowledge is conditioned by the forms of sensible intuition. One can read Kant's attack on rationalism as saying that conceptual knowledge must be mediated by sensible intuition (and vice versa), so that we cannot attain knowledge of the unconditioned in the domain of theoretical knowledge.⁴ The only genuine knowledge of the unconditioned comes from the practical side, in our knowledge of the moral law and our duties. But this leaves at least two dichotomies in Kant's system: (1) between sensible intuition and the concept, and (2) between the theoretical and practical domains. Kant himself suggested that freedom would be the master concept that provided the unity of

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the system, but it is hard to make out that unity from the rather baroque architecture of his system.

The philosophical system that Fichte developed in the 1790s, which has come to be known as the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*, is the bridge from Kantian idealism to Hegel's system. I will focus on Hegel's difference from Fichte, but the positive influence on Hegel's project is deep and pervasive. Fichte had taken over from Reinhold the idea that (p. 169) one needed to start from a first principle, and he held that an original act of self-consciousness, a *Tathandlung* or fact-act, was the only possible candidate for such a first principle. This principle expressed the freedom or spontaneity of self-consciousness, while also including an original synthesis that could ground the *necessity* of our claims to knowledge of the objective world. Fichte held that only by starting from the subject could we hope to explain *both* our own activity as self-conscious beings *and* the objective world that we encounter outside of us. In his two famous 1797 Introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, he argues that the only other possible philosophical system, which he thinks of as a *realist Spinozism*, seeks to explain everything starting from the domain of objects, but that it simply cannot explain freedom on that basis, and that it ends up endorsing a kind of *fatalism*. Fichte admits that there is a standoff of sorts between the two systems, with neither able to refute the other, but he argues that the idealist, subject-oriented system proves its superiority over the realist, substance-oriented system, because of its ability to explain human freedom. Opponents of Fichte's idealism will counter that any system that remains on the side of the subject cannot actually get beyond the domain of appearances limited by the subject's finite cognitive powers, and thus can never really comprehend substance.

Hegel's conception of philosophy as science, *Wissenschaft*, is quite similar to Fichte's, and Hegel's Concept is in fact rather similar to Fichte's self-positing 'I' if the latter is taken in logical rather than psychological terms. In the continuation of the second passage quoted earlier from *The Science of Logic*, Hegel actually goes on to write, "As *science*, truth is pure self-consciousness ..." (SL 21.33/29), which indicates that he is taking the starting point of science proper to be the domain of pure thought conceived as pure self-consciousness.⁵ But the whole *Phenomenology* is required to reach that point—a point at which the idealist system can commence without the specter of skepticism and without the admixture of psychological elements contained in Fichte's system. Hegel indicates in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* that the aim must be to overcome the standoff between subject-oriented idealism and substance-oriented realism. He writes, "In my view, which must be justified by the exposition of the system itself, everything hangs on apprehending and expressing the truth not as *substance* but also equally as *subject*" (PS 9.18/¶17). This point goes together with his holism, according to which the truth cannot be either subject or substance, conceived in an original way, but rather must be the whole that *results* from the dialectical interplay of the two. Hegel famously writes, "The true is the whole. However, the whole is only the essence completing itself through its own development. This much must be said of the absolute: It is essentially a *result*, and only at the *end* is it what it is in truth. Its nature consists precisely in this: To be actual, to be subject, that is, to be the becoming-of-itself" (PS 9.19/¶20). Hegel's

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language here gives us some indication of how in AK we complete the justification of the Concept by understanding how the Concept was at play all along in the earlier development. The (p. 170) Concept is 'the essence completing itself', or the 'subject' that is 'the becoming-of-itself' through the process of overcoming the immediacy and externality of appearance.

Let me put the point once more in the terms of truth and certainty that Hegel uses in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* and that he foregrounds in the passages from *The Science of Logic*. The process is a self-testing of the knowledge of consciousness in which that knowledge is compared by consciousness with the standard of truth, the 'in-itself', that consciousness has taken to be independent. The endpoint of this process comes when concept and object, certainty and truth, are no longer separate. We can see this as a deduction of self-consciousness (subject) as the ground of all objectivity insofar as the process aims to incorporate all of the in-itself or the 'real' (substance) within certainty or subjectivity. This movement is clear enough in the trajectory of the first three chapters, for those chapters culminate in 'inner difference', which he also identifies with 'infinity, the simple concept', and finally with self-consciousness. One might think, in fact, that the initial culmination at the end of Chapter III would already be absolute knowledge. If that conclusion really does show that the certainty of self-consciousness is equal to the truth of objectivity, why isn't this standpoint already absolute? The short answer is that the Concept has to be shown to be the truth not only of theoretical consciousness (Chapters I-III), but of *all* shapes of consciousness, which Hegel takes to include the ways in which we confront *each other* as natural beings and the way that we live with each other in social and religious institutions. The longer answer, as we shall see, is that we have to show that the practical world has replicated the structure of objectivity for self-consciousness itself, and that it has done so in actual history, rather than simply in an idealized reconstruction of experience.

8.2. Living with the Concept and Hegel's Ladder to Science

A curious feature of the above passages from *The Science of Logic* is that they make no reference to the specifically *practical* project carried out in much of the *Phenomenology* after Chapters I–III, and the project that dominates the actual text of AK. In this respect the passages follow the *Phenomenology* Introduction, which is a clear expression of the method but which was written with a less comprehensive project in view. Having completed the *Phenomenology*, with its long chapters on “Spirit” and “Religion,” Hegel could in *The Science of Logic* have summed up absolute knowledge with a claim about the knowledge of ourselves *as free agents* who are not simply determinations of substance but are rather self-determining subjects. This not only would have shown that the *Phenomenology* aimed to overcome the standoff between Fichte and Spinoza, but also would have situated his project as an answer to Kant’s split between *conditioned* theoretical objectivity and *unconditioned* but theoretically inaccessible practical freedom. I suspect that he thought that the comprehensive introduction to the system that (p. 171) he gave in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* dealt adequately with the practical and that the *Logic* should stick to theoretical matters. But I think that Hegel’s argument in AK is in fact a response to the Fichtean and Kantian issues with freedom. The method of the *Phenomenology* Introduction does fit the expanded project, for one can include with *all* shapes of consciousness the ethical and religious attitudes toward the world. Hegel holds that science must be justified *to* the individual, *for* the individual, and the *Phenomenology* takes up this task for the entire extent of our conscious experience. In the end the *Phenomenology* is not just an epistemological text, but an ethical, political, and religious text as well, for those practical domains cannot be left out of the Concept’s justification if the Concept is going to be accepted as the basis of their objectivity as well.

The famous passage in the Preface (written after AK) in which Hegel describes the *Phenomenology* as a ladder to science complements the two passages from *The Science of Logic* in emphasizing the justification of science to the epistemic subject *and* to the living, ethical agent. Hegel states the abstract principle of idealism—“[p]ure self-knowledge in absolute otherness,” which I take to be a basic statement of the Concept as identity with otherness or difference. He continues,

The beginning of philosophy presupposes or demands that consciousness feel at home in this element. However, this element itself has its culmination and its transparency only through the movement of its coming-to-be... For its part, science requires that self-consciousness shall have elevated itself into this ether in order to be able to live—and [actually] to live—with science and in science.

(PS 9.22–23/¶26)⁶

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With this reference to life, Hegel already places the project of the *Phenomenology* on a practical plane and thus moves beyond the dynamics of 'Consciousness' explored in Chapters I-III. Indeed, he points us to the very first sections of Chapter IV in which he focuses on the concept of life and its relation to self-consciousness. Hegel's demand on the individual self-consciousness is complemented by a strong claim of the individual's right against the authority of philosophical science:

Conversely, the individual has the right to demand that science provide him at least with the ladder to reach this standpoint. The individual's right is based on his absolute self-sufficiency, which he knows he possesses in every shape of his knowledge, for in every shape, whether recognized by science or not, and no matter what the content might be, the individual is at the same time the absolute form, that is, he possesses *immediate self-certainty*; and, if one were to prefer this expression, he thereby has an unconditioned *being*.

(PS 9.23/¶26)

Hegel is emphasizing the individual I, saying that we cannot simply begin as Fichte did with a transcendental or universal I. When Hegel writes that the demand of "absolute self-sufficiency" is present "in every shape of his knowledge," he is saying that the challenge of reconciling the individual with the standpoint of science must be answered for (p. 172) the whole of science. In acknowledging the claim of the individual as that of 'unconditioned being', Hegel is recognizing the claim of immediate self-consciousness *against* the pure mediation of the Concept. The 'element' of science expresses the complete mediation of the self through otherness and the otherness through the self, whereas the ordinary self-consciousness views itself as certain *over against* an independent world of objects.

Hegel acknowledges that the ordinary standpoint and the standpoint of science—which we can identify with the standpoints of naïve realism and philosophical idealism—seem to be the opposite of each other. He writes, "Each of these two parts seems to the other to be the inversion of the truth" (PS 9.23/¶26). He emphasizes that philosophical science must demonstrate that the realistic standpoint is implicated in the ideal, and that the idealist standpoint can account for the real. He is describing the task of the *Phenomenology* as the task of uniting natural consciousness and science:

Science may be in itself what it will, but in its relationship to immediate self-consciousness it presents itself as an inversion of the latter, or, because immediate self-consciousness is the principle of actuality, and since, for itself, immediate self-consciousness exists outside of science, science takes the form of non-actuality. Accordingly, science has to unite that element with itself or to a greater degree to show both that such an element belongs to itself and how it belongs to itself. Lacking actuality, science is the *in-itself*, the *purpose*, which at the start is still something *inner*, which exists at first not as spirit but only as spiritual substance.

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Science has to express itself and become for itself, and this means nothing else than that science has to posit self-consciousness as one with [science] itself.

(PS 9.23/¶26)

For philosophy, the opposition of subject and object is the loss of spirit, since spirit is defined (in an idealist manner) as the unity of subject and object. But for *consciousness*, a ‘scientific’ standpoint that bars consciousness from contrasting itself with objects, a standpoint in which objects were logically defined rather than given in immediate representation, would be a spectral world without actuality. Science says that “everything has its truth in the Concept” and “everything is conditioned by the Concept.” Immediate self-consciousness thinks that these claims are ridiculous (because there just is a hard external world) and undesirable since they seem to take authority from the individual experienter. The solution is to show that self-consciousness not only *is* the Concept—which is essentially Fichte’s claim—but also that the *actuality* of the individual self and her world is already secured through the Concept.

In the preceding passage Hegel seems to equate ‘natural consciousness’ and ‘self-consciousness’, and this is confusing because, as I mentioned, the goal seems to be to show how consciousness is led through its own internal dialectic *to* self-consciousness. The key point here is that in the preceding passage Hegel is talking about *immediate* self-consciousness, which he also describes as “knowing itself to be opposed to [objective things].” He is taking realistic consciousness and realistic (or immediate) *self-consciousness* as part of *the same initial standpoint* that is to be elevated to science. The (p. 173) task of the *Phenomenology*, then, is to show *both* that the objects (that are putatively opposed to the subject) are in fact a function of conceptual mediation, *and* that the putatively immediate self-consciousness is in fact a *conceptually mediated self-consciousness*. This means that after showing that consciousness is dependent upon self-consciousness, Hegel then will need to show that self-consciousness is not immediate self-certainty, but rather is constituted by relations to other self-consciousnesses *through practical activity*. From his initial claim that “self-consciousness is *desire* in general” (PS 9.104/¶167) to his claim toward the end of “Spirit” that the language of moral conscience is “self-consciousness existing *for others*” (PS 9.351/¶652), Chapters IV–VI portray self-consciousness objectifying itself through practical activity. In this progression, Hegel shows that the conceptual mediations of consciousness and self-consciousness *are the same*, have the same structure. He thus shows that consciousness (in the narrow sense as the relation to objects outside of us) and self-consciousness (as our relation to our own activity) both take the form of the Concept and thus are “posited as one” with science.

Once we appreciate how consciousness (in the narrow sense) is standing in for the theoretical domain and self-consciousness is standing in for the practical domain, we are in a good position to see how absolute knowledge is supposed to accomplish the unity of the theoretical and practical. In AK, Hegel summarizes the unity as “the reconciliation of spirit with its own genuine [*eigentlichen*] consciousness” (PS 9.424/¶793) and as “[t]his reconciliation of consciousness with self-consciousness” (PS 9.425/¶794). I will argue in

the next two sections that these summary statements are meant to show that with absolute knowledge the domains of theoretical reason and practical reason are united. Hegel develops consciousness into an objective totality of conditions governed by the Concept (what I call ‘inferential objectivity’); self-consciousness and spirit are reconciled *with consciousness* in that they have produced an ethical world in which that same structure—of an objective totality of conditions—is embodied in the actions of ethical individuals. To know this ethical world as meeting the criterion of full objectivity, and to see how it thus achieves the aspirations of religion, is to have absolute knowledge.

8.3. Overcoming the Object

Hegel describes the main task of AK as following from a certain deficiency in the Chapter VII account of “Religion.” While celebrating Christianity as the ‘absolute religion’, Hegel argues that there remains a gulf between religious consciousness and the world. For religious consciousness “actuality is still broken” (PS 9.42/ ¶787), and the ‘reconciliation’ of the human and the divine is only in the ‘heart’ (PS 9.42/ ¶787), rather than being an object for consciousness, an actuality present to consciousness. This divide should have been overcome in Christianity, since the idea of God becoming man and being unified in the Holy Spirit does involve a transfiguration of the world and of our relation to it. But the form of religious practice, as worship and feeling rather than as knowing, (p. 174) contradicts this content.⁷ Hegel writes that moving beyond religion will require “sublating [*Aufheben*] the form of objectivity” or the “overcoming [*Überwindung*] of the object of consciousness” (PS 9.422/¶788). The form of objectivity is none other than the objectivity developed in Chapters I–III, and Hegel sets out to overcome it by recapitulating how the same structure is reproduced in a practical mode, *as* and *for* self-consciousness, in Chapters V and VI. The idea is that by showing that “the form of objectivity” has *already* been overcome in reason and spirit *for the subject*, we can leave behind the brokenness of the religious point of view because we will know the divine *in the world*.

Viewing the main account in “Absolute Knowledge” as the uniting of the theoretical account of Chapters I–III with the practical account of Chapters V–VI raises an obvious question: What role does the famous Chapter IV account of self-consciousness play in the unification of the theoretical and practical? Many commentators have rightly viewed that chapter’s account of desire and the master-servant struggle as a turning point in the *Phenomenology*, so it stands as one of the great puzzles of AK that Hegel leaves out exactly that chapter, and that one alone, from his recapitulation.⁸ Yet when we look closely at Hegel’s opening description of the task of “Absolute Knowing,” we see that he *does* address the end of Chapter III and the achievement of Chapter IV before he describes the movement we have to recollect from Chapters V and VI. He writes,

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The overcoming of the object of consciousness is not to be taken one-sidedly, that is, as showing that the object is returning into the self. Rather, it is to be taken more determinately, namely, that the object as such was exhibited to consciousness to be as much in the act of vanishing as, to a greater degree, the alienation of self-consciousness turned out to be what posits thinghood.⁹ This alienation has not only a negative meaning but a positive one as well, and not only for us, that is, in itself, but also for self-consciousness itself.

(PS 9.422/¶788)

The first sentence tells us that we cannot simply read the end of Chapter III, in which the object returns into the self, as sufficient for overcoming the object. The next sentence describes the movement of Chapter IV in which the object is exhibited “in the act of vanishing.” He had portrayed this vanishing in IV.B in the shapes of skepticism, stoicism, and the unhappy consciousness. The first main move from alienation to positing ‘thinghood’ happens when the individual of medieval Christianity alienates himself completely in relation to God, but also (through the mediating activity of the priest) prepares the way for the positing of thinghood in the practice of ‘observing reason’. The turn to ‘Reason’ is the turn from alienation having a negative meaning to alienation having a positive meaning. The move *within* Reason from a theoretical posture to a practical posture, from Reason A to Reason B, is the move to having positive meaning ‘for self-consciousness itself’.

Let me back up a moment, though, to say a few more words on the theory-practice relation in Chapter IV and the transition to ‘Reason’. There remains much disagreement about the import of Hegel’s introduction of practical themes at the outset of the Chapter IV account of ‘Self-consciousness.’¹⁰ Hegel identifies self-consciousness with *desire* and with *life*, gives a detailed description of the intersubjective structure of mutual recognition necessary for the *satisfaction* of self-consciousness, and then portrays a struggle to the death between two agents that ends in the master-servant relation and a discussion of the significance of the servant’s *work*. By contrast, much of the second part of the chapter (titled “Freedom of Self-Consciousness”) returns to relatively familiar epistemological issues dealt with by the ancient stoics and skeptics. But in the ‘unhappy consciousness’ section, and the transition to ‘Reason’, we are forced to confront the *relevance* of the practical themes to the epistemological issue of skepticism, and how the complete alienation of the medieval Christian individual eventuates in the modern conception of theoretical, ‘observing’ rationality. My view, which I can only give here in slogan form, is that the chapter makes sense when we take self-consciousness to be from the beginning essentially *evaluative*.¹¹

Hegel presents immediate self-consciousness at the opening of Chapter IV as desire, and if we disentangle this move from the many layers in which it is embedded, we can notice that it picks up on the fundamental ambiguity in the *object of desire*: Do we desire an object because it is good, or is it good because we desire it? Initially all that self-consciousness knows is that it must unite the object with itself, but the goodness of what

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is desired can only be a relatively opaque question mark. The only clearly good object is one that possesses the unifying capacity itself, namely another self-consciousness. In the master-servant relation that results from the clash between these two over who sets the standard of goodness, the servant's work is more significant than the master's dominance because in the formative activity of work one actually 'posits thinghood'. The big move from IV.A to IV.B is that the standard for the object is set by *thought*. This move is exemplified by the Stoic sage who is confident in his evaluation of the world. As Hegel writes, "Consciousness is the thinking essence and that something only has essentiality for consciousness, or is true and good for it, insofar as consciousness conducts itself (p. 176) therein as a thinking creature" (PS 9.117/¶198). But what, then, of the claim at the end of Chapter IV that the practices of self-denial of the Christian supplicant flip the alienation of self-consciousness over into the positive meaning of Reason? How does the giving up of one's own evaluative capacities to God, one's declaration of one's utter dependence, pave the way for Reason? The religious *practice* is supposed to have serious implications for the grounding of the *observational* sciences that we recognize as distinctive of the modern period. My claim is that the standpoint of the immediate evaluative individual is important throughout Chapter IV. Medieval Christianity is especially important because in it the immediate individual gives up his individual evaluative standpoint (which was still the basic locus of evaluation in stoicism and skepticism), and simultaneously invests a universal priestly class with the role of interpreting the world as it is. Religion in this sense helps the individual get out of his own way, so to speak, by getting him to devalue his desiring power and formative powers and even this thinking powers (insofar as those thinking powers lead to a denial of the world's reality). The priests are the forerunners of the modern natural scientists who have the goal of comprehending God's creation.

Hegel's summary of the lessons of Chapter IV when he introduces 'Reason' sheds a good deal of light on the rather cryptic commentary on 'Reason' in AK. The introductory paragraphs of 'Reason' are also important for AK because in them Hegel reflects on the moves that have led to a standpoint that he identifies with 'idealism'. He clearly aligns this view with Kantian and Fichtean idealism and to some extent with his own ultimate position. In a passage that is echoed in the AK claim for 'positive meaning', Hegel writes of the achievement of the standpoint of Reason that it has overcome the merely negative stance to otherness:

Since self-consciousness is reason, what had so far been its negative relation to otherness is now converted into a positive relation. Until now it had occupied itself only with its self-sufficiency and its freedom in order to save and preserve itself for itself at the cost of the *world* or its own actuality, both of which appeared to it as the negative of its own essence. However, as reason assured of itself, it has come to be at rest with regard to both of them, and it can sustain them, for it is certain of itself as being reality. That is, it is certain that all actuality is nothing

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but itself, that its thought itself is immediately actuality, and it is therefore as idealism that it conducts itself in relation to actuality.

(PS, 9.132/¶232)

This close identity of truth and certainty may look rather solipsistic in its certainty, but the opposite is the case.¹² The achievement of Reason is that it can let the world be, not have to consume it or form it or fight it in order to find unity with it. In evaluative terms, we can say that in Reason the world is good as an independent object to be discovered through observation. The certainty is a confidence that the world is intelligible to us. That the world is *open to* comprehension is the claim of Reason, but Reason does not aim to (p. 177) project itself into the world, or set itself up as a standard *against* the world.

Hegel formulates the 'positive meaning' in terms of *interest*:

Since self-consciousness grasps itself in this way, in its own eyes it is as if the world had only now come to be for it for the first time. Formerly, self-consciousness did not understand the world; it desired it and worked on it, withdrew itself from it, took an inward turn back into itself away from it, and abolished the world for itself and itself as consciousness ... self-consciousness discovers here for the first time the world as *its* newly actual world. In its continuing existence, this world **interests** it in the way it previously was only interested in the world's disappearance, for that world's *durable existence* comes to be in its eyes its own *truth* and *present moment*, and self-consciousness is certain that it experiences only itself within it.

(PS 9.132-133/¶232, my bold)

Even with this claim, though, we have reached 'the positive meaning' only for consciousness, not for 'self-consciousness itself', in the initial phase of 'Observing Reason'. The passive stance of observation becomes explicitly self-conscious of the world as the world posited *by it* only with the transition to 'active reason', an explicitly practical stance that brings back the structure of desire and recognition from the opening of Chapter IV.

The task of 'overcoming the object' is thus a task of showing that our world, the world that expresses our freedom, does not fall short of objectivity. We achieve evaluative objectivity through acting in an ethical world that has the same structure or form as the gold standard of objectivity that was deduced in Chapters I-III. In AK, Hegel presents this overcoming as having already happened, and he recollects the moments of the practical activity of self-consciousness and spirit from Reason B through the end of Spirit. But what does it really mean to think of a practical form of objectivity that would parallel the theoretical form of objectivity? As I read it, Hegel's goal is to show how ethical activity (in a broad sense) leads to practical knowledge with the same form or structure of objectivity as the (already deduced) knowledge of the material world. As *active* or *practical*, the object in question has to be a *purpose*, an action that is subject to a criterion of successful realization, rather than confirmation by evidence. To continue the parallel with

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theoretical knowing, whose object is the *truth*, the object of ethical activity is *the good*, or *valuable action*. This switch to value is easy to miss, but Hegel does point us toward his conception of value in the tricky final sentence of the opening paragraph of “Absolute Knowledge.” He writes, “This totality of its determinations makes the *object in itself* into a spiritual essence, and for consciousness, it becomes this in truth through the act of apprehending each of its individual determinations as a determination of the self, that is, through the spiritual conduct mentioned above” (PS 9.422/¶788). I take the ‘spiritual essence’ claim to be a reference to the end of Reason C.a., where Hegel introduces the ‘spiritual essence’ (9.227/¶418) in connection with the ‘honest consciousness’ (9.225/¶414) and ‘the thing that matters [*die Sache selbst*]’ (PS 9.223/¶409). I understand that earlier version of the spiritual essence as a conception of value that arises through a social process in which (p. 178) the agent learns that the meaning of her action depends on a world of value that she cannot manipulate at will.¹³

Even with this framing in terms of practical value, one might still wonder in analyzing the task of AK what happened to the Chapter IV account of intersubjectivity, of mutual recognition. I think that Hegel claims that the world of value is a social product, and the alienation of self-consciousness is a social process, but also that we should be able to give a structural account of social reality that focuses on the object of action rather than on the intersubjective processes that condition the action. Part of the reason for this goes back to the ladder passage and the need to demonstrate *to* the individual self-consciousness. The whole thrust of the account is to demonstrate the dependence of the individual on the social, but the justification still has to work *for the individual*. In this respect my interpretation is somewhat different from Terry Pinkard’s influential ‘social’ reading of the *Phenomenology*. Pinkard holds that Hegel is talking about ‘communal self-reflection’ in AK, namely about the self-grounding character of the social practices that have developed in modernity.¹⁴ I am sympathetic to this reading, but I think that for comprehending Hegel’s exact moves it is important to put some distance between sociality or recognition, on the one hand, and the account of practical objectivity that he is reconstructing, on the other. I think that the theme of recognition is elided in the opening statement of AK (though not in the full recapitulation, as we shall see) because Hegel is focused on the practical *object*, which he gives—right up until the very end of his recapitulation—in terms abstracted from the intersubjective struggle over the meaning of the object. His account of value and his account of recognition are deeply intertwined, but by focusing on value we can get a more detailed sense of just how Hegel thinks that theoretical reason and practical reason are united. It is by replicating the structure of the true in the structure of the good that modern social practices attain their absolute status. By *knowing* the absolute content (which religion also possessed) as achieved by human, self-conscious agents, we will know the absolute content in the absolute *form* of the Concept. By stressing the role of value in this knowing, I aim to highlight the ethical character of knowledge and philosophy for Hegel.

(p. 179) **8.4. Inferential Objectivity in Theory and Practice**

As we saw at the outset, Hegel claims that the *Phenomenology* is a justification of the concept of science because in it all the shapes of consciousness “dissolve into [*sich auflösen*] that concept as into their truth” (SL 21.32/28). The Concept can be expressed in a simple form, as when Hegel identifies it with ‘infinity’, or in *The Science of Logic* when he identifies its three moments as universality, particularity, and individuality. But the whole movement that Hegel lays out in AK is premised on *not* taking the Concept in its simplicity, but rather taking it in its expanded ‘form of objectivity’.¹⁵ The form of objectivity must be an expression of the Concept in order for Hegel’s various claims about absolute knowledge to hold together. On my reading, this form of objectivity is best captured in Hegel’s description of it as an *inferential whole* or a set of inferences linking together the moments of universality, particularity/determinacy, and individuality.¹⁶ In this section I go through Hegel’s recapitulation of the theoretical version of this form and the initial recapitulation of the practical form. Only in recognizing that this *expanded* version of the Concept is the ‘truth’ of the earlier shapes can we fully appreciate the positive achievement of the *Phenomenology*.

8.4.1. The Recapitulation of Theoretical Objectivity

The first three ‘moments’ in Hegel’s theoretical description of the form of objectivity are a fairly straightforward presentation of the first three chapters. Each of those chapters is oriented by a single capacity (the senses, perception, the understanding) and a limited conception of the object. Each shape of consciousness takes itself to be complete, and each shape is undone by challenges that expose its limitations. But the *logical core* of each of these shapes is retained in the ultimate form of objectivity; each form of *judgment* retains a limited validity for constituting objectivity.¹⁷ He writes of the first, “The (p. 180) object is therefore in part *immediate* being, that is, a thing per se, something which corresponds to immediate consciousness” (PS 9.422/¶789). The account begins with the immediate sensing of individuals, and while Hegel’s main goal in “Sense-Certainty” is to show that such immediacy must give way to mediation and universality, the ‘thinghood’ that we associate with spatiotemporal individuals is preserved. In the second phase, Hegel focuses on ‘the thing of many properties’ (PS 9.71/¶112), which he associates with perceptual understanding’s attempt to stabilize the thing in its determinate relations to other things and properties. He writes of this second moment, “In part, it is a coming-to-be-the-other of itself, its relation, that is, *being for an other* and *being-for-itself*, the determinateness which corresponds to *perception*” (PS 9.422/¶789). At the end of “Perception” Hegel shows that the perceptual object on its own perishes from the contradiction inherent in its dual status as self-related and related to others. The downfall of perception leads to the idea of a supersensible ground, or essence, that Hegel

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associates closely with natural scientific laws of force. In AK he writes, “in part, it is *essence*, that is, the universal which corresponds to the understanding” (PS 9.422–423/¶789). The end of Chapter III is among the most difficult parts of the book, but Hegel’s critique of the concepts of law and the kind of explanation that goes with it is fairly clear. He thinks that laws that are generalized from observations do not actually do much more than restate the observational phenomena in which those laws are expressed. The restatement through universal laws *is* important for Hegel, but he thinks that it is not sufficient for determining actual individual objects.

At the end of Chapter III, Hegel introduces ‘the simple infinity or the absolute concept’ (PS 9.99/¶162) as the conceptual core of the previous shapes. In light of what he says in his recapitulation of this move in AK, we can see that the absolute concept (= the Concept) is supposed to capture the *complete* form of objectivity because it is what ties together the *inferences* that form the whole of the determinations of the object. The Concept determines objects not simply as an abstract universality or unity, but through a specific *inferential form of objectivity*. That form unites the three main discrete moments of the Concept, such that objectivity is a totality of conditions inferentially articulated through the Concept.¹⁸ In the definitive restatement of the achievement of Chapters I–III, Hegel describes the ‘object as a whole’ in this way in “Absolute Knowledge”:

The object as a whole is the inference or the movement of the universal through determination to individuality, as also the reverse movement from individuality through individuality as sublated, or through determination, to the universal.

(PS 9.423/¶789)

This is supposed to capture both the sense in which universal laws determine individuals and the way in which individuals in concrete circumstances determine the nature of the laws themselves (the role of law-constituting individuals is easier to see in the Supreme Court than in the physics laboratory). Hegel thinks he has achieved in a single (p. 181) activity of reciprocal determination the *compression* of the Concept and the *expansion* of the conceptual that can account for complex systems. What becomes much clearer in the account of objectivity in *The Science of Logic*, as well as in the practical version that we are about to see, is that this form of objectivity is a *standard*, a *normative* conception of what an object has to be in order to be a self-determining whole. His full model is life, the organic (as he says already in ¶162), a self-sustaining and self-reproducing whole.

Hegel’s doctrine of the inference is less exotic than it seems, for it is an expanded version of the idea of *definition through conditionals*. We can ask, what determines this object as a knife? It is the kind of object that *if* you were to bring its blade down onto this apple, *then* it would cut it in half. *If* you were to run your finger across its edge, *then* you would bleed. This thing, the individual knife, *relates* to other things, such as fruit, through the act of cutting, such that if there were a world in which it did not relate to other things in that way (in which nothing could be cut), it would not be the knife that it is. The general conditionals that we state of the knife are its ‘essence’: “*if* it is brought with certain force at a certain angle against material of a certain quality, *then* it will cut that material.”

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When it is dull enough that this conditional no longer holds, it will cease to meet the normative standard of knifeness. This individual knife has *proven itself* in practice (as an inference from individual to universal), but we can also subsume it under the universal character of knifeness (the inference from universal to individual). Hegel likes to use the example of criminal action to illustrate the kind of inferential whole he is getting at here (see PS 9.98/¶159). A knife can also be used to stab someone. Shifting examples, we can think not of the consequences to the material cut by the knife, but of the consequences to the individual wielding the knife, whose action is defined in part by the laws that determine the punishment (the consequences) of the crime.

8.4.2. The Recapitulation of the Practical

Hegel's recapitulation of the practical is highly selective and does not map neatly onto the main stages of Reason or Spirit. The first moment is in some ways the trickiest, for with it Hegel aims to summarize the "Reason" chapter and set it into relation to the "Spirit" chapter.¹⁹ According to this recapitulation, the pivotal moment is the transition from observing reason to 'active reason' (Reason B), for it is in that transition that the alienation's negative meaning first takes on a "positive meaning for self-consciousness itself." The negative meaning of this alienation is the case of the pseudoscience of phrenology (reading character from the bumps on one's skull), the turning of self-consciousness (character) into a thing (the skull bone). Hegel interprets phrenology as forfeiting and (p. 182) externalizing self-consciousness, but also as leading to the move that *invests* thinghood *with* self-consciousness. Self-consciousness engages in pseudoscience in phrenology, alienating itself to try to bring the study of character into the form of rational science, to reach self-understanding with the tools of observational anatomical science. But in the reversal that leads to Reason B, the objectifying of self-consciousness is inverted such that what *counts as real* is henceforth the world as it presents itself to human *agents*.²⁰ In Hegel's recapitulation, the switch is from a theoretical, pseudo-scientific understanding of self-consciousness *as an object*, to a practical self-understanding of the objective world as subordinate to, a context for, free action. That is, the world is reappropriated at the higher level of practical reason.

Hegel's statements about the first moment in AK are obscure enough to warrant looking to the transitional text itself to see why he accords it such importance. In the opening paragraph of "The Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness Through Itself" (Reason B), Hegel thematizes 'objectivity' in a way that clearly prefigures the AK discussion:

Self-consciousness found the thing as itself and itself as a thing [*das Ding als sich, und sich als Ding*]; i.e., it is for self-consciousness that it is *in itself* objective actuality... it is the kind of certainty for which the immediate as such has the form of what has been sublated, and it has been sublated in such a way that the

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objectivity of the immediate now counts as the merely superficial, whose innerness and essence is *self-consciousness itself*.

(PS 9.193/¶347)

The 'merely superficial' character of the objectivity (an indication that we here witness a key move in the overcoming of the object) is the transformation of an observed physical object into an evaluatively loaded context for meaningful action. The skull bone had been used to make claims about the potential action of the person (e.g., whether or not he might be a criminal), and while Hegel finds these claims absurd, he thinks that phrenology prepares the way for the decisive reversal to thinking of the physical world as a function of the evaluative. The point that Hegel emphasizes here, and that he suppresses somewhat in his recapitulation, is that this first moment is the rendering of objectivity into a social, ethical register. He continues,

Hence the object to which self-consciousness positively relates itself is a self-consciousness. The object is in the form of thinghood, i.e., it is *self-sufficient*. However, self-consciousness has the certainty that for it this self-sufficient object is nothing alien. It thereby knows that it is *in itself* recognized by the object. Self-consciousness is *spirit* that has the certainty of having its unity with itself in the doubling of its self-consciousness and in the self-sufficiency of both self-consciousnesses.

(PS 9.193/¶347)

(p. 183) Here Hegel clearly turns back to the issue of recognition, the intersubjective moment in which subjects identify with the object insofar as the object is another subject. The introduction to Reason B goes on to discuss ethical life and its immediacy, so that what is now objective is the happy ethical life of a free people. This highlights one of the odd structural features of the book, namely that the happy ethical life of the Greeks is thematized *both* at the beginning of Reason B and in Spirit A. For our purposes, one lesson is that Hegel is attempting in AK to include the "Reason" chapter within his recapitulation for the sake of the unity of the book as a whole; but we should also bear in mind that one can read Hegel's practical recapitulation as replaying the three main sections of "Spirit" itself. In the second moment of the practical recapitulation, Hegel jumps ahead to the discussion of the Enlightenment in the "Spirit" chapter. His reference to phrenology thus reads as a somewhat awkward attempt to get the "Reason" chapter into the overall recapitulation. Hegel's recapitulation would have been more straightforward if he had mapped the theoretical form of objectivity onto the "Spirit" chapter, for as it stands the first moment is located in Reason B, whereas the second, third, and comprehensive final moment are located in Spirit B and C. Once we appreciate the proximity of the first moment of the recapitulation to the first shape of "Spirit," Hegel's move in AK to the *second moment* of the recapitulation is less jarring. We see that

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he could have identified the first moment with Greek immediate ethical life, and the immediate ethical individual, and then moved to the alienation of culture and onto utility.

The second moment of objectivity brings out even more clearly Hegel's switch to a world of value, for he invokes a parallel between the theoretical shape of perception and the practical shape of *utility* that arises from the self-alienated culture of pre-revolutionary France. Announcing the transition from the first recapitulated moment to the second, he writes, "The thing is nothing in itself; it only has any meaning in relationships, only *by virtue of the I and its relation to the I*" (PS 9.423/¶791). Utility is the form of the good that represents "the truth of the Enlightenment" (PS 9.311/¶574). Like the object of perception, the object of utility is a unity through relation, in practical terms a purpose *defined as good* through a determinate benefit *for* another. In the world of utility, something is good because it is useful *for* someone or *for* some other end. In his treatment of utility, Hegel writes of a sense of loss when the world is disenchanting by the Enlightenment, once the intrinsic goodness of the world has fallen to instrumental rationality. Hegel calls this shape 'the *unsatisfied* Enlightenment' (PS 9.310/¶573), which is a version of the claim that the object has disappeared for consciousness but only with a negative meaning. The full-blown shape of utility arises once that sense of loss is itself lost, and utility takes on a positive meaning *for self-consciousness itself* (PS 9.314/¶579). This is the moment he identifies in his recapitulation with the moment of relation in objectivity; it is a conception of the good that has resulted from the alienation of self-consciousness in culture and from the struggle of modern science with religion. One might wonder if the concept of 'utility' is really fit to play this pivotal role in Hegel's account. We should recall, however, the momentous pronouncements that surround this move. In relation to religion, Hegel writes that in the victory of utility over faith, "Both worlds are reconciled, and heaven is transplanted to the earth below" (PS 9.316/ (p. 184) ¶581), with the result that the modern world is characterized by practical rather than religious metaphysics.²¹ Like the perceptual object, utility is ultimately contradictory, for the identity of the purpose 'for-itself' dissolves into the relations 'for another', with the result that nothing has value any longer unless it can be grounded in the universal will.

The third moment in Hegel's practical recapitulation is 'universality'. In the spiritual domain, this moment comes on the scene first with the general will of the French Revolution, but in Hegel's official recapitulation it is definitively represented by the will as the inner ground of action in the Kantian moral worldview (PS 9.424/¶792). For Kant the good is defined through the universal moral law; the unconditionally good will is the will that wills universality for the sake of universality. Of course this is not all that Kant has to say about the good, and Hegel had engaged since his student days with Kant's treatment of the Highest Good. Hegel ultimately thinks that Kant's attempts to reincorporate the ends of happiness into the moral picture through the idea of the Highest Good lead to a shifty moral stance that he calls 'dissemblance [*die Verstellung*]'. The problem arises because action is supposed to have value solely through the motive of duty, and yet finite ends are also supposed to get into the picture because we are beings

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who are necessarily oriented by the drive for happiness. Hegel's basic charge is that Kant has no way to stabilize the relationship between the moral value based on duty and the ordinary value based on happiness.

The hero of Hegel's practical recapitulation is, somewhat surprisingly, a version of post-Kantian *conscience*. With his new conception of conscience, one derived from Fichte's but differing in important ways, Hegel thinks he has achieved a holistic conception of practical reason that can stabilize the relationship between duty and interest, between objective and subjective value. Much of the confusion around AK stems from the dialectical complexity of Hegel's treatment of conscience in the "Spirit" chapter, for it seems incredible that Hegel would celebrate conscience in AK when he had strongly critiqued it earlier in the text. Yet in his recapitulation of the productive alienation of self-consciousness, Hegel follows the presentation of the three individual moments (corresponding to the three individual moments of the object) with an emphatic statement of the place of conscience as the completion of the form of objectivity:

As conscience, it finally no longer switches back and forth between taking a position, then hedging about its position, and then dissembling about existence and the self. Rather, it knows that its *existence* as such is this pure certainty of itself. The objective element into which it injects itself [*sich hinausstellt*] when it acts, is nothing but the self's pure knowledge of itself.

(p. 185) These are the moments out of which the reconciliation of spirit with its own genuine consciousness composes itself. For themselves, those moments are individual, and it is their spiritual unity alone which constitutes the force of this reconciliation. However, the last of these moments is necessarily this unity itself, and, as elucidated [*wie erhellt*], it in fact combines them all into itself. Spirit certain of itself within its existence has as the element of its *existence* nothing but this knowledge of itself, that is, nothing but its articulation [*Aussprechen*] that what it does, it does out of the conviction of duty, and that this, its language, is *what makes its action count as valid*.

(PS 9.424/¶¶792–793)

Hegel's claim that conscience is the 'spiritual unity' of the moments is a reference especially to ¶641 (PS 9.345), in which Hegel described conscience as the 'negative essence' of the earlier moments.²² The conscience that Hegel refers to here is a complex whole of determinate factors, not simply a feeling of certainty about my duty. Conscience includes the moment of *recognition* by others and the moment of utility that Hegel conceives as a specific purpose or interest of the subject. It also includes the universality of the Kantian moral law, but as a holistic process of deliberation that results in a specific action, conscience is recognized and thus not guilty of the empty formalism of the moral law.²³ In the earlier dialectic of conscience, Hegel had derived the *language of conscience*

from the initial indeterminacy of the holism of conscience, from the fact that its spiritual unity could conceal a tendency to favor self-interest over the universality of duty.

So how is Hegel's agent of conscience the holistic embodiment of the inferential objectivity that sets the standard for theoretical reason? Rather than an ordinary physical object or physical system, the practical object is the object of intentional action, the *purpose* that one intends to carry out as an ethical agent. The action is an individual event in space and time, but what really constitutes the action is the thinking—along with its inferential form—that goes into the deliberation of which the action is the conclusion (bracketing for the moment the important issue of the actual reception of the action by others). In elevating conscience to the level of the holistic conclusion of the ethical form of objectivity, Hegel is actually assuming quite a lot about the social context for the action of conscience. This is important because if one thinks that Hegel is just describing conscience in a normative void, then his account of conscience as objectivity will seem rather far-fetched and just as open to criticism as the debased versions of conscience that Hegel sometimes ridicules. In the passage that Hegel refers to here (PS 9.344–345/¶¶640–641), (p. 186) he is clear that conscience includes the element of *recognition* or *substantiality* of ethical life. In fact, in the earlier shape, Hegel identifies that substantiality as the first of the three moments (the one corresponding to immediacy).

The picture of action on conscience is complex, yet it is not hard to locate its affinity with the two sorts of inferences (from individual to universal and from universal to individual) in the 'object as a whole'. As an individual, I deliberate about an action in a world suffused with recognized value (the moment of immediate ethical life), on a specific purpose that fits into my overall plans (the moment of utility), and according to principles that make my action my duty (the moment of universality). As a holistic deliberative structure, I am able to synthesize a host of morally relevant factors within a given decision. Perhaps most important, I am able to act on my own interests while also maintaining the subordination of those interests to the ethical purposes that provide the overarching value context for my action. In language I express my commitment to the action as my duty, as an individual act with the rationality of a universal. My individual action depends on the universal, and the universal depends in turn on the actions of individuals. In both directions of inference, my action is mediated by the particular or determinate purposes that bring my individual action into a relational nexus with other actions that stand under the universal.

8.5. The Convergence of Ethical Action, Religion, and Science

In the world that Hegel has reconstructed as the world of ethical conscience, *the form of goodness* has the same *form of objectivity* that the object as whole had achieved by the end of Chapter III. The reconstruction has shown that the good achieves the same

rational standard as the true and that the two domains are therefore united in that standard (the Concept). This is a convergence of knowledge and action: one acts only on one's knowledge of the good (and the good is defined in terms accessible to knowledge or truth). While the element of recognition is built into the conception of conscience, this shape of spirit is still distinct from absolute knowledge itself because the medium of practical activity is the finite ethical world. Hegel's own conception of philosophy does involve a conception of philosophy as action, but it is action within the domain of knowledge and interpretation. Hegel makes this point in AK in recounting the dialectic in the "Spirit" chapter and comparing the result to his conception of religion.

8.5.1. Recognized Conscience as Absolute Knowledge

The holistic conception of individual conscience is not quite the final word on how ethical objectivity reproduces and thereby overcomes the form of objectivity. There is a final (p. 187) move in which conscience splits into judging and acting sides, each representing the priority of one direction of inference (from universality judging the individual, and from the individual's interests determining what one counts as duty). It is only in the confession and forgiveness of these two agents that we have Hegel's full version of *mutually recognized conscience* as the ethical version of inferential objectivity. To translate the terms into the ethical register, conscience represents *inferential goodness*, or the agent has at her disposal a whole of value relations partly determined by previous history but united in the present by self-consciousness of their totality. An ethical world of agents of conscience, with the holism and recognition Hegel works into the view, is the world of freedom essentially determined by the form of the Concept and realized (Hegel thought and hoped) in modern Europe.

Hegel acknowledges the priority of the universal in ethical action, but he aims to do so without compromising the integrity and vitality of the individual. He also aims to demonstrate, in line with his inferential description of the 'object as a whole', that ethical life is a complex whole of mutually reinforcing inferences. The knowledge of this complex whole, as with all expressions of self-consciousness in Hegel, must be exhibited in a scene of mutual recognition. The reciprocal relations between the 'extremes' of individuality and universality must be mediated by a process of recognition that is manifest for the agents *as such a process*. The inferential form lies within conscience as individual conscience, but the full inferential objectivity is only secured when that form—the interrelation of universal and individual—becomes explicit between two self-consciousnesses.

His last argument in "Spirit" is thus a confrontation between two versions of the individual conscience. In AK he recounts this scene twice, and in between he attempts to clarify the relation of this scene to the philosopher's knowledge by aligning the philosopher with the figure of the beautiful soul. He writes, "The beautiful soul is its own knowledge of itself within its pure and transparent unity—the self-consciousness which knows this pure knowledge of *pure inwardly-turned-being* as spirit—not merely the

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intuition of the divine but the divine's self-intuition" (PS 9.425–426/¶795). The problem with that shape of consciousness is its stubborn interiority, its sense that any expression of itself in the finite world would compromise its purity. Hegel identifies the beautiful soul with one of the characters (the judge) in the dialectic of confession and forgiveness. He thus seems to say that the philosopher should be thought of as implicated in that same process, and that the philosophic perspective must be united with the perspective of action.²⁴

The final scene of recognition comes about when the beautiful soul turns into the hard-hearted *judge* who enters a process of recognition with the *agent* of conscience. (p. 188) The judge represents the inference from universal to individual, for the judge thinks that there are universal laws or principles that hold without exception, and he thinks that any admixture of particularity in the action vitiates its worth. His typical inference excludes actions from counting as ethical: "If the action produces any advantage for the agent, then it does not count as ethical." In fact, it must count as evil, for the only alternative to pure universality is the evil of particular individuality. The *agent* represents the individual to universal direction of inference because his deliberation is shaped through the priority that he gives to his own individuality. He eventually has to confess that he represented himself as purer than he actually was, though this is more a confession of a misconceived purity than an accusation against action in general. Every action has to be circumscribed insofar as it is determinate, and the individual's interest is typically a major factor in narrowing the field of action and determining which specific action is taken. Hegel thinks that selfless action is something of an oxymoron. There is *talk* about selfless action and *judgment* based on such an ideal, but action itself typically includes an investment by the self in the purpose.

The decisive move in Hegel's portrayal of the agent and judge is the analysis of self-righteous judgment as itself an action based on particular motives. This leads the agent to recognize himself in the judge and to confess his own prioritizing of particularity. Hegel concludes the retelling of the story in terms that bring out the structure of the Concept:

One of the two parts of the opposition is the disparity between *inwardly-turned-being-in-its-individuality* [*In-sich-in-seiner-Einzelheit-seins*] and universality—the other is the disparity between its abstract universality and the self. The former dies back [*stirbt ... ab*] from its being-for-itself and alienates itself and confesses; the latter disavows the rigidity of its abstract universality and thereby dies back from its lifeless self and its unmoved universality. The result is that the former completes itself through the moment of universality which is the essence, and the latter completes itself through the universality which is the self.

(PS 9.426–427/¶796)

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Confession and forgiveness are the proper movements or inferences of the Concept because they arrive at the fundamental mediation and unity from each of the two opposed directions, one as the agent giving up its individuality and the other as the self-righteous judge giving up its 'unmoved universality'. In the reconciliation of the two self-consciousnesses, there is a mutual recognition that is an awareness of the inferential whole of the Concept, the basic structure realizing itself as the whole of the ethical world, existing in the knowledge of the two reconciled agents.²⁵

(p. 189) After his third recapitulation of confession and forgiveness in "Absolute Knowledge," Hegel writes of the reconciliation of judge and agent as the culmination of the determination of substance as subject. He writes, "For this concept is, as we see, the knowledge of the self's activity within itself as all essentiality and all existence, the knowledge of *this subject* as *substance* and of the substance as this knowledge of its activity" (PS 9.427/¶797). Clearly Hegel is writing here about *ethical* substance, and the fact that he does not qualify it as such is just one indication that the ethical project has come to take precedence over a more theoretical metaphysical project. Absolute knowledge is the self-knowledge of ethical substance that knows its norms as self-generated and as fulfilling the form of objectivity that theoretical reason had already discovered within the physical world. We can thus describe Hegel's philosophy as a *practical metaphysics*, not in the sense that metaphysical claims about God and immortality are practical postulates, but in the sense that the *reality of the ethical domain* is held to be a superior reality to the merely natural reality described by natural science.

8.5.2. The Affirmation of Ethical Action over Religious Consciousness

At this point a question remains: How exactly does our knowledge progress to absolute knowledge simply through a recapitulation of the earlier development? The question concerns the possibility of advancing in the account simply by looking back to what has already happened. If the sublation of objectivity has really already taken place for self-consciousness, how is it possible that self-consciousness did not know it as such? Can a later redescription of the previous movement really *transform* the earlier knowledge without thereby moving beyond it? Moreover, given that the problem seems to be a problem with *religion*, why should we think that a recollection of *spirit* would provide the solution, when the account had previously made a transition *from spirit to religion*?

Part of the answer is that in AK Hegel has explicitly united the theoretical and practical deductions of the form of objectivity, and that moral conscience was not previously self-conscious of the fact that it instantiates the form of objectivity developed in Chapters I–III. This answer is correct as far as it goes, yet by itself this would be a rather weak addition, since it is surely part of conscience and its movements that it knows its own objectivity *in some sense*. Conscience may not know objectivity in terms parallel to the shapes of sense-certainty, perception, and the understanding, but that doesn't seem to fundamentally alter its achievement.

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A much bigger difference, and I think the real answer to the question, is that in AK conscience is explicitly compared with religion. Understanding both conscience's fundamental similarity to religion and the superiority of ethical action to religious practice is what elevates the knowledge of reconciled conscience to *absolute* knowledge. The Concept has now become the 'form of objectivity' that exists in the recognition of reconciled agency, so religion's opposition to a 'broken' world has been overcome. When he is (p. 190) presenting the movement of conscience as achieving objectivity, Hegel does mention the way in which religion almost reaches the same level, but in five straight paragraphs (PS 9.425–428/¶794–798) he thematizes the contrast with religion. He writes that "the unification of the two sides" (PS 9.425/¶794) is the only task that remains for the account, and he explicitly notes the way in which conscience surpasses religion. Hegel writes that the unification has already happened 'in-itself' in the movement of Protestant Christianity, whose worship did in fact involve a form of mutual recognition among members of the congregation (PS 9.419–420/¶786). But he is also quick to point out that this unification is inadequate since it stands opposed to "the movement of self-consciousness" (PS 9.425/¶795). Hegel claims that the unification must in fact take place in the element of self-conscious action, on the side "that contains both its own self and its opposite, not only *in-itself* or in a universal way, but rather *for itself* or in a developed and differentiated way" (PS 9.425/¶795). The key points of emphasis are on the superior attention to *form* rather than *content* in conscience, and on the active character of conscience against the passive or withdrawn character of religious devotion.²⁶ He writes, "the form is the self itself, since it contains the self-certain *acting* spirit, the self accomplishing the life of absolute spirit [*das Selbst führt das Leben des absoluten Geistes durch*]" (PS 9.426/¶796). The implication here is that philosophy itself must be conceived as action and realization, and thus be more like ethical action than religious devotion.²⁷

In the main argument of "Absolute Knowledge," Hegel thus comes out strongly in favor of aligning philosophy with ethical action. But what does this mean? It certainly does not make Hegel into Marx, for Hegel does not think that philosophy's main aim is to change the world rather than to interpret it. Philosophy remains an interpretive discipline for Hegel, though one with an ethical purpose and one whose activity engages with the here and now, with actuality, in much the way that action on an ordinary ethical purpose does. The clearest discussion of this issue comes in §270 on the *Philosophy of Right*, in which Hegel deals with the relationship of the ethical state to religion. One of the main points of that discussion is that religion cannot claim to have a special authority over and above the laws of the state. Hegel holds that to the extent that the state needs an extralegal justification and legitimation, it is philosophy rather than religion that can provide it.²⁸ He thinks of the domains of ethics (centered on the state) and philosophy as sharing the medium of law, concepts, and knowledge: "Thus, *science*, too, is found on the side of the state, for it has the same element of form as the state, and its end is *cognition*, by means of thought, of *objective* truth and rationality" (PR §270R). To the extent (p. 191) that religion is rational, it will not contradict the (rational) state, so Hegel does think that religion and philosophy are compatible. For Hegel the realization of God is the actual ethical world, and our ethical action in that world is the realization of the divine, the

accomplishment of the good.²⁹ Of course he is not claiming that everything is as it should be. He is to some extent lowering—or at least revising—expectations in relation to the idea of religious salvation and transfiguration. It is a picture of a “rose in the cross of the present,” to borrow the phrase from his Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, not a picture of a sanctified present with no crosses.

It is also the case that Hegel is not giving up on religion, or even entertaining the idea that that is possible. He is advocating a convergence of the ethical, religious, and philosophical, with the ethical and philosophical having a rather higher status but one that is nonetheless supposed to complement religion. This alignment of the perspective of conscience with religion and philosophy is not a one-off claim by Hegel. There is another important place in his corpus where he presents his case for this systematic convergence around conscience, namely in the *Encyclopedia* account of “World History” (E §552). There he claims a convergence of ethical conscience, religion, and philosophic knowing, and he does so in a remark added for the 1830 edition, thus reaffirming his position from almost twenty-five years earlier.

8.6. The Standpoint of Philosophical Science and the Incorporation of Realism

In my view, the main task of “Absolute Knowledge” is completed with the recapitulations of “Spirit” and the comparisons with “Religion.” Hegel’s reflections in the rest of the chapter have attracted more attention because he makes a number of sweeping claims about science, time, and history.³⁰ Hegel argues that it is only now, after the French Revolution and with the birth of Kantian and Fichtean moral philosophy, that science can appear. This is how I take the claim that “*science* does not appear in time and in actuality until spirit has come round to itself as being this consciousness about itself” (PS 9.428/¶800). Only once ethical life has reached a level of transparency to itself, consciousness of its own freedom, can philosophical science as a system of freedom emerge.³¹ But Hegel is quick to deny that science is therefore *conditioned by* temporality. (p. 192) He claims that the completion of spirit’s temporal development results in *a concept that negates the temporality of the development*.

The claim of Hegel’s idealism is that the Concept is prior to, and in fact can generate, the forms of sensible intuition (space and time) through which objects appear to us. But the Hegelian claim is more complex than the rather similar Fichtean thesis because Hegel argues that we must work *through* the realist consciousness, critique it from within, in order to arrive at the Concept. In the key passage, in which the aim of overcoming Kant’s intuition-concept dualism is fully on display, he writes:

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Time is the *Concept* itself that *exists there* and is represented to consciousness as empty intuition. Consequently, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time as long as it does not *grasp* its pure concept, which is to say, as long as it does not annul time. Time is the pure self *externally* intuited by the self but not *grasped* by the self; time is the merely intuited concept. In that this concept grasps itself, it sublates its temporal form, comprehends the act of intuiting, and is intuition which has been conceptually grasped and is itself intuition which is comprehending [*und ist begriffnes und begreifendes Anschauen*].

(PS 9.429/¶801)

Hegel is thinking of the Concept as determining what *follows from* what. Insofar as time presents things following one after the other, it can also be thought of relationally. But time is external in the sense that there is no *inner* or *essential* relation of the moments to each other.³² Time appears as ‘fate’ (PS 9.429/¶801) when the connection between the successive moments is not comprehended. But when the pure Concept grasps itself as the source of all relationality, by witnessing the object of consciousness becoming subject and the religious substance being reproduced by ethical subjectivity, then science can assert its own necessity or self-sufficiency against the accidents of time, as conditioning time rather than being conditioned by it.

Against those commentators who think that the standpoint of philosophical science—the *Science of Logic* and the whole *Encyclopedia* project—renders the *Phenomenology* dispensable, I argue that we should take seriously Hegel’s claim that the *Phenomenology* exhibits the *reality* of the concepts developed in the *Logic*. The whole point of an immanent critique, starting from within shapes of consciousness in which the object is opposed to the subject, is to justify the concept of science by showing that it is the truth of the realist perspective of consciousness. The process undermines the *absoluteness* of the realist perspective, while preserving the moments of being and otherness that allow us to distinguish the world from our self-conscious activity. The *Phenomenology* negates the immediacy of the shapes of consciousness, and in that sense the real world goes missing. But the world is regained and put on solid footing within the phenomenological process itself. This is why Hegel writes, after emphasizing the logical character of science proper, (p. 193)

Conversely, to every abstract moment of science, there corresponds a shape of appearing spirit per se [*überhaupt*]. Just as existing spirit is not richer than science, so too spirit in its content is no poorer. To take cognizance of the pure concepts of science in this form, namely, in which they are shapes of consciousness, is what constitutes the aspect of their reality. In terms of that reality, their essence, the concept, which is posited in that reality in its *simple* mediation as *thought*, breaks up and separates the moments of this mediation and exhibits itself in terms of their inner opposition.

(PS 9.529/¶805)

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The 'pure concepts of Science', which correspond in a very rough way to the Kantian 'pure categories', do not take the form of postures *toward* objectivity (as the shapes of consciousness do). But this does not mean, Hegel says here, that we as living agents have ourselves somehow 'crossed over' into beings who do not need consciousness. While speculative philosophy can now present the content as self-developing, from simplest to most comprehensive, that does not mean that consciousness is 'lost' within the whole, or that the individual is swallowed within the System, as the caricatures of Hegel would have it. Rather, as "in its content no poorer," the existing [*daseiende*] spirit displays the richness of the scientific concepts, but seen from the side of 'the antithesis', from the opposition necessary to conceive of ourselves as subjects conscious of a world.

The final paragraphs of AK provide a short summary of the *Encyclopedia* project of moving from Logic to Nature to Spirit. One can view this as a portrayal of how philosophy itself can replicate the traditional representation of God, and thus prove that it supplants religion in conceptual form. Another, more sober way, would be to see it as Hegel's answer to the challenge set by Kant's idealism that I mentioned at the outset: how to establish a unitary and unifying ground prior to the conditions of space and time, so that space and time are not a separate, merely presupposed, root of knowledge. The goal of the *Phenomenology* is to justify the Concept, to deduce the starting point of *The Science of Logic*. He describes the logic as "*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*" (SL 21.34/29). The philosophy of nature, then, is the knowledge of that creation as it unfolds into the living organism and eventually into the human mind.³³ After the bold claims about philosophy's access to pure science as the 'eternal essence' and to nature, the step to the comprehension of spirit almost seems easy, and even modest, by comparison. In one sense he is just appealing to the temporal form through which we know ourselves by studying the history of spirit, which is just what the *Phenomenology* has done. The tricky issue here is how the account of conceptualized history is supposed to match up with the normative domains (p. 194) developed on a scientific basis in the *Philosophy of Spirit*. Hegel is forthright that there is contingency in this process; the philosopher's action of recollection [*Erinnerung*] is a way of taking into knowledge the contingent externalities of the past. The claim of absoluteness in the end is the claim that we can render all experience intelligible in the form of the Concept, Hegel's non-psychological version of the synthetic unity of self-consciousness. It is essential to this knowledge that it be able to adapt to contingency by incorporating it into an ethical interpretation of our form of life and its trajectory, rather than holding the conceptual judgmentally against the new and the different. In that interpretation we *understand* or *know* ourselves in our history, not through mere observation, but rather through an *evaluation* of who we have become, and who we should be.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ The best accounts at the end of excellent full-length commentaries are Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*; Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*; and Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

⁽²⁾ For a detailed inventory of the tasks of the *Phenomenology*, see Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, Parts One and Two.

⁽³⁾ See Kreines, "From Objectivity to the Absolute Idea in Hegel's *Logic*," Chapter 14 in this volume.

⁽⁴⁾ On Kant's own definition of the term 'absolute' in Kant, *CPR*, see A324–326/B380–383. For a discussion of this passage in relation to AK, see Nuzzo, "The Truth of *Absolute Wissen*," 270–271.

⁽⁵⁾ See Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, for the classic account of Hegel's philosophy as focused on the theme of self-consciousness.

⁽⁶⁾ I am adopting here Miller's translation of the very end of the passage.

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(⁷) There is a good description of this by Mitchell Miller, Jr.: “the subject as religious knower remains opposed to what, through religious knowledge, he knows himself to be” (Miller, “The Attainment of the Absolute Standpoint,” 429).

(⁸) Allegra de Laurentiis argues the ‘self-consciousness’ in Chapter IV is already a kind of absolute knowledge. See de Laurentiis, “Absolute Knowing.”

(⁹) *Entäußerung* is especially difficult to translate. Most of the time the bland ‘externalization’ fits, but it does not convey the fact that it is *self-consciousness* that is active in this way. In the *Philosophy of Right* it is usually translated as ‘alienation’ in the sense that one can alienate a piece of property. In the current passage the deficiency of ‘externalization’ is obvious if you consider that Hegel is assuming that the natural reading of *Entäußerung* is for it to have a ‘negative meaning.’

(¹⁰) See Jenkins, “Self-Consciousness in the *Phenomenology*,” Chapter 4 in this volume.

(¹¹) This is not too far from Charles Taylor’s claim that Hegel’s key insight is that we are ‘self-interpreting’ animals. But by putting the emphasis on evaluation rather than interpretation, I think we get a clearer sense of the continuity of the theoretical and practical.

(¹²) See Bristow, “Reason, Self-Transcendence, and Modernity in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” Chapter 5 in this volume.

(¹³) Contrary to my reading of this opening paragraph, H. S. Harris has argued that the description of the ‘movement of consciousness’ quoted earlier must be seen “as a review only of the *repetition* of the whole journey on the part of ‘the Infinite’ in chapter VII.” Harris claims that this passage is unintelligible without assuming that the prior description is a recapitulation of the shapes of ‘Religion’: “For it is only after Chapter VI (*Spirit*) that the consciousness we are observing can have a *spiritual* relationship to its ‘determinations” (Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder*, vol. 2, 713).

(¹⁴) “Absolute knowledge is *absolute* in that it has no ‘object’ external to itself that mediates it in the way the natural world mediates the claims of natural science. Absolute *knowledge* is thus the way in which absolute *spirit* articulates itself in modern life; it is the practice through which the modern community thinks about itself without attempting to posit any metaphysical ‘other’ or set of ‘natural constraints’ that would underwrite those practices. Absolute knowledge is the internal reflection on the social practices of a modern community that takes its authoritative standards to come only from within the structure of the practices it uses to legitimate and authenticate itself” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 262).

(¹⁵) When one compares AK to “C. Die Wissenschaft,” a striking difference is that AK renders the object as an inferential whole whereas “C. Die Wissenschaft” is concerned only with the simple Concept.

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(¹⁶) In focusing here (and in my essay “The Inferential Object”) on the inference, I am concurring with the main thrust of the interpretation of Hegel by Robert Brandom. See especially Brandom, *Tales of the Mighty Dead*, Chapter 6. One of the few other scholars to pick up on the importance of the inference for AK is Allegra de Laurentiis. She writes, “To investigate the dynamic structure of an object of thinking by abstracting from its temporal or developmental features, according to Hegel, is tantamount to investigating its ‘logic.’ This is analogous to the way in which we think of an inference as opposed to the psychological event of inferring: an inference is an atemporal process despite the fact that the term does refer to a flow or ‘movement’ of thought. If, now, the object of thinking is thought itself, their dynamic structure or logic will be one and the same” (De Laurentiis, “Absolute Knowing,” 250; see also 254–255).

(¹⁷) I have analyzed the first three chapters in terms of judgment and inference in Moyar, “The Inferential Object.”

(¹⁸) See Rand, Chapter 17 in this volume, for how this model informs the philosophy of nature.

(¹⁹) There is a case to be made that Hegel’s reconstruction of this first moment is partly a hangover from the earlier plan of the book; “Observing Reason” is the one moment that is mentioned in “C. Die Wissenschaft” (PS 9.439), which was probably written for the end of the “Reason” chapter before Hegel decided to expand the book by adding the “Spirit” and “Religion” chapters. See Förster, *The Twenty-five Years of Philosophy*, for the argument that “C. Die Wissenschaft” was originally written for the end of “Reason.”

(²⁰) Hegel references the scene in which Hamlet considers the skull of Yorick, the former court jester, in order to bring out the duality of Spirit as a bone and Spirit as a living, active individual (PS 9.184/¶333). See Harris, *Hegel*, 54.

(²¹) “In fact, what is now present is nothing more than an empty semblance of objectivity which separates self-consciousness from possession. In part this is so because all the durable existence and validity of the determinate members of the organization of the actual world and the world of faith have, as such, returned into this simple determination as their ground and their spirit, but in part it is because this objectivity possesses nothing more of its own for itself, and it is now to an even greater degree pure metaphysics, the pure concept or knowledge of self-consciousness” (PS 9.316/¶583).

(²²) His recounting of the moments in ¶641 is slightly different but basically the same. Instead of a reference to thinghood (the outset of Reason B) we have a reference to substance (beginning of Spirit) as the first moment. Taking substance as the first moment fits better with my claim that these moments of the object are moments of the *good*. The *immediate* ethical life of the Greeks, reading the good as what *is*, the immediate substance of the people, is a clearer ethical moment than the one that Hegel stresses, namely the move to ‘active Reason’ from observing Reason. The AK version puts more weight on the *practical* character of the transition rather than its specifically *spiritual*,

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ethical, or *historical* character. But given that Hegel actually introduces Greek ethical life already in the introduction to Reason B (PS 9.193–195/¶¶347–352), the difference between the two recapitulations is less than it seems.

(²³) For a fuller explication of this account, see Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience*.

(²⁴) Pippin takes this character's focus on purity to define Hegel's paradigm of the view of agency he is trying to overcome: "The paradigm picture Hegel keeps reverting to is of an acting subject so stubbornly insistent on the decisive role played by his subjectively formulated intention, so insistent on the individual authority to determine the determinate content of what was done and what scope the action should include, that the actual transition from intention to action is experienced as a regrettable qualification and intrusion on such purity" (Pippin, "The 'Logic of Experience' as 'Absolute Knowledge,'" 223).

(²⁵) When Hegel first introduces the two directions of inference in "Force and the Understanding," he illustrates his theoretical point with the practical example of crime and punishment (¶159). This is a lower level of practical inferentialism, but in its basic similarity to the scene of conscience—as action-reaction-resolution through individual (criminal) and universal (law)—the example does bring out the unity of the end of Chapter III and the end of Chapter VI.

(²⁶) Siep writes, "Hegel apparently considers the crucial point to be that the experience of moral consciousness 'individually performs,' as it were, a process which is also constitutive of the object of perfected religion: the individualization and externalization of a self-consciousness which appears in morality as at once universal law and 'communal consciousness.' It is the very same 'spirit' process which is thought, or faithfully believed, in the dogmas of the Trinity, creation, and salvation and which is to be found in the moral action of autonomous, conscientious consciousness" (Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 230).

(²⁷) For a reading that gives more importance to religion, see Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

(²⁸) See Siep, "Hegel's Liberal, Social, and 'Ethical' State," Chapter 23 in this volume.

(²⁹) See Lewis, "Religion and Demythologization," and his Chapter 26 in this volume.

(³⁰) For an account that focuses on these later sections, see Baptist, "Das absolute Wissen."

(³¹) See also Pinkard: "It is only when the form of life has incorporated into its essential self-understanding a conception of self-reflection on ourselves as cultural beings—only in a *self-grounding, reflective historicist* culture when the social practices of reason-giving have been turned on themselves—that such absolute reflection is possible and that this

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type of dialectical philosophical reflection can appear and can understand itself for what it is" (Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 266).

(³²) See the discussion in Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 232-235.

(³³) In AK he writes of the alienation of knowledge into time and space: "Knowing is acquainted not merely with itself, but also with the negative of itself, that is, its limit. To know its limit means to know that it is to sacrifice itself. This sacrifice is the alienation [*Entäusserung*] within which spirit exhibits its coming-to-be spirit in the form of a *free contingent event*, and it intuits outside of itself its pure *self* as *time* and likewise intuits its *being* as *space*. This final coming-to-be, *nature*, is its living, immediate coming-to-be. Nature, that is, alienated spirit, is in its existence nothing but this eternal alienation [*Entäusserung*] of its *durable existence* and the movement which produces the *subject*" (PS 9.433/¶807).

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