

In what sense does consciousness provide its own criterion?

At the beginning of his *Science of Logic*, Hegel poses the question: “With what must science begin?”¹ It is this question that Hegel takes to be the central problem of modern philosophy, Science itself being understood by Hegel as philosophy proper. The *Logic* itself is the carrying out of Science, from what Hegel takes to be the proper beginning². What is to be understood from this is that the *Logic*, which will unpack the fundamental categories of thought, which are also the fundamental categories of Being, and thus constitute the equivalent of Kant’s *metaphysical deduction*, has at its start a certain presupposition: the *Notion* of Science, or the identity of thought and Being. Moreover, although it is possible to achieve this standpoint (also referred to as *absolute knowing*, or *absolute spirit*) through a variety of means, including being culturally conditioned by the spirit of one’s age, this presupposition is only *justified* through an exposition of the forms of consciousness “which contains and demonstrates the necessity, and so the truth”³ of this standpoint. This exposition is to be found in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which as such constitutes the equivalent of a *transcendental deduction* to correspond to the *Logic*’s metaphysical deduction. This problem of the justification of the beginning of Science can be said to be equivalent to Sextus Empiricus’ dilemma of the criterion⁴, which is to say it could be expressed as: how does one judge between competing claims to knowledge without either simply appealing to opinion (*assertion*), appealing to some self-justifying character (*intellectual intuition* or *circularity*), or trying to discriminate between them on the basis of further claims (*regress*), i.e. providing a criterion for judgment that is itself beholden to the problem? In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel will try to justify the standpoint of the *Logic* by providing an answer to this problem of the criterion. He will do this by showing how one particular subject of enquiry – *consciousness* – is not subject to this problem, precisely because, by providing a criterion for the judgment of its own knowledge *from within itself*, it in turn provides a criterion for the judgment of *its* criterion, i.e. we do not have to look anywhere outside of consciousness in order

¹ *SL*, pg 67

² *Ibid*, pg 68-69

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ The relation between this problem and the *Phenomenology* has been analysed in detail by Kenneth Westphal in his paper “Hegel’s Solution to the Dilemma of the Criterion”. The dilemma is in fact properly a *trilemma* in that it has three distinct horns, but that will be overlooked here.

to inquire into its *truth*, and this truth will turn out to be absolute spirit. Over the course of this essay I will show how it is that Hegel takes himself to do this.

Firstly, it will be important to go deeper into the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* in order to show the specific concerns Hegel has here, and how these relate to the dilemma of the criterion⁵. Hegel opens the Introduction by attacking two positions commonly held by philosophers, which set up a “mistrust of Science”⁶ by requiring an examination of the nature of cognition before any other enquiry can get under way. These positions, which Miller, I think correctly, attributes to Kant and Locke⁷, claim, respectively, that either cognition is an instrument employed by the subject to grasp the Absolute (or the True), or that cognition is a passive medium through which the truth of the Absolute reaches the subject. Hegel argues against the metaphors deployed by both, essentially by pointing out that each implies that cognition, in grasping the Absolute, distorts precisely what it is trying to cognize: “Either way we employ a means which immediately brings about the opposite of its own end; or rather, what is really absurd is that we should make use of a means at all”⁸. Hegel also points out that it is thought by some that it is possible to subtract the specific contribution that cognition brings to the Absolute, i.e. that a detailed enquiry into the nature of cognition would let us unwork the distortion wrought upon the Absolute in our ordinary apprehension of it, and as such to get at it as it is *in itself*. Hegel provides two responses to this kind of approach. The first involves taking apart the metaphors upon which such thinking is based; it is here that he deploys his own metaphors of the bird caught in the lime twig, and the refracted ray of light⁹. I don’t take myself to be able to add anything particularly useful to Hegel’s own considerations here, and additionally I take the second response to be the more useful. The second response is that the position which holds that cognition distorts the Absolute, and as such turns to an examination of cognition in the name of *fear of error*, itself has to make assumptions about what knowledge is *in truth*, and can only have this *knowledge* in virtue of having already used cognition prior to its analysis¹⁰. As such, it has avoided the only way to truth, which is, on Hegel’s account, to begin

⁵ Unlike the merely expository Preface, the Introduction forms a crucial part of the argument as a whole, even though it falls outside of the immanent description of the development of the forms of consciousness. Rather, as I will show, it is the Introduction that sets up this very immanence.

⁶ *PS*, §74, pg 47

⁷ *Ibid*, pg 505

⁸ *Ibid*, §73, pg 46

⁹ *Ibid*, §73, pg 47

¹⁰ This point is elaborated well by Robert Williams (Williams, pg 124-125)

without assuming any conception of knowledge, and as such is *fear of truth*¹¹. In doing this, Hegel has identified that this approach is subject to the third horn of the dilemma as we have identified it: *regress*.

The significance of this can be understood better when we see how the first two horns of the dilemma turn up in Hegel's discussion of the justification of Science¹². Hegel does not just discriminate between Science and the Kantian/Lockean approach, but distinguishes the standpoint of Science from a general position that subsumes the Kantian/Lockean one. Specifically, he distinguishes the Notion of the identity of thought and Being from the Notion of their separation, or their opposition in the form of subject and substance, concept and object, or knowing and known. With regard to choosing between these competing Notions, he makes the point I made earlier that one can happily *start* from the Notion of Science, but that this does not itself *justify* that start. This means that Science must liberate itself from any mere *appearing* to be, and can do so only by showing how *appearance* itself leads to it, that is "by turning against it"¹³. It is immediately after this that Hegel introduces the horn of circularity¹⁴. He presents two possible options for justifying Science: rejecting the alternative Notion of the separation of thought and Being on the basis that Science is a different, and better, form of cognition, which depends upon already being in the standpoint of Science; or, appealing to intimations within this Notion that allude to the development of the Notion of Science, which already requires the resources that Science provides. He then introduces the horn of assertion by reducing both circularities to assertions¹⁵. He reduces the first circularity to the assertion that Science is true knowledge, and then contrasts it with the assertion that the alternative Notion includes – that *it* is true knowledge and Science is not – revealing that this gets us nowhere: "*One bare assurance is worth just as much as another*"¹⁶.

If the previous claim to circularity has been reduced to *bare* assertion, then the second is shown to be a far more specific kind of assertion; one that has particular relevance because it also describes a kind of objection which can be made against the *Phenomenology*. This could be called a *quasi-transcendental* objection¹⁷. This

¹¹ *PS*, §74, pg 47

¹² *Ibid.*, §76, pg 48

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ It is in this sense that in Hegel's treatment of the dilemma it becomes properly a dilemma, rather than a trilemma.

¹⁶ *PS*, §76, pg 48

¹⁷ *OHL*, ch. 5

particular way of justifying the standpoint of Science is to assume that one can already find within the vulgar Notion, that of the separation of knowing and known, the standpoint of Science in a nascent form. This is most interesting, because this is a claim that is often attributed to the *Phenomenology*, e.g. that Hegel has already assumed the Absolute, or that he has already assumed the dialectical method, or that he has a pre-determined idea of being. It is interesting, then, that Hegel explicitly rules out such an approach in the Introduction. The difference between such a claim and Hegel's approach, at least *what Hegel takes his approach to be*, is that this quasi-transcendental approach finds the nascent form of Science within the alternative only given that it already possesses the theoretical framework of Science, making it circular. As Hegel recognizes, this is to appeal to "an inferior form"¹⁸ of Science, i.e. Science as merely *asserted*. Hegel does claim to find the standpoint of Science within the alternative Notion, but on its own terms, that is, his approach is *immanent* to the content of that Notion. Given that Hegel denies himself this approach, it is also thereby denied to anyone wishing to criticize his procedure. This means that we cannot bring an existing body of knowledge to the *Phenomenology*, even one that would enable us to explain away how it is that Hegel moves from the Notion of consciousness to the Notion of Science. The only theoretical tools we are allowed are those Hegel himself uses. However, we should now turn to the last, and possibly most important section of this passage, as it will illuminate Hegel's actual procedure:-

"It is for this reason that an exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance will here be undertaken."¹⁹

It is here that Hegel's real answer to the Kantian/Lockean approach becomes explicit, and as such it is his answer to the problem of regress. Rather than inquiring into the truth of knowledge, which opens us up to the regress (the truth of knowledge of the truth of knowledge... etc.), the enquiry is into the appearance of knowledge. However, it is important to note that appearance here is used in two senses. It is both: how knowledge makes its appearance *to consciousness*, or what consciousness' conception of knowledge is at any specific time, and how knowledge makes its appearance across the different forms which consciousness will take, i.e. the genuine

¹⁸ *PS.*, §76, pg 48

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

appearing of knowledge that will constitute consciousness' *experience* of itself. It is this sense of experience, peculiar in relation to our ordinary understanding of experience, in which the *Phenomenology* can be said to be the "Science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through"²⁰.

So, Hegel is trying to show how the vulgar Notion undermines itself immanently and in so doing becomes the Notion of Science, which is the very unity of the two. Importantly, Hegel takes this vulgar Notion to be the standpoint of *natural consciousness*, which is to say the standpoint that we ordinarily adopt. It is here that another misconception about the *Phenomenology* must be diffused. If we are to take Hegel at his word, he has already reached the state of absolute knowing, and it is only on this basis that he has been able to uncover the detailed history of the development of consciousness leading up to this standpoint. This is sometimes misinterpreted as implying that it is only from the standpoint of absolute knowing that the *Phenomenology* can be justified. But, as we have seen, Hegel denies himself this kind of quasi-transcendental approach. As such, anyone who holds the vulgar view, that is anyone who is natural consciousness, *should* be able to fully understand and follow the argument of the *Phenomenology*, and so be raised to absolute knowing, providing that they deny themselves any external assumptions and let the content transform itself. This is to say, as long as one remains *immanent* in thinking the Notion of natural consciousness, which includes not assuming that it will become the Notion of Science, anyone can follow the *Phenomenology*²¹. The important question to answer now is: how does one *get* the Notion of natural consciousness which is thought? Surely an immanent investigation of natural consciousness cannot depend upon assumptions about its character.

The answer to this question relates back to the problem of regress, and it can only be understood after we have considered the way in which the Notion of natural consciousness is described²². Hegel characterizes natural consciousness as distinguishing itself from its object and relating to it at the same time. It relates itself to the object as a knowing of the object, which can also be characterized as knowledge, or *concept* (Notion). But, as we have noted elsewhere, the position of

²⁰ Ibid., §36, pg 21

²¹ Hegel confirms this at several point in the text, both during the description of his project in the *Preface* (§26, pg 14-15; §71, pg 44-45), and in his methodological considerations on what the project will require in the *Introduction* (§84, pg 54).

²² Ibid, §82, pg 52

natural consciousness is that its knowledge is separate from that which is known, and as such it distinguishes between itself as knowledge of the object, and the object as it is *in-itself*. Of course, this is a completely abstract *logical* account of consciousness, and it misses out all the more concrete details of consciousness. However, as Hegel goes on to say, this does not matter, because, essentially, this is the most minimal form of consciousness as it *appears*²³.

The question to ask here is: *who* do these abstract determinations *appear to*? The answer to this is found in the description of consciousness: “Consciousness simultaneously distinguishes *itself*”²⁴. These determinations of consciousness appear *to* consciousness, i.e. consciousness is always a rudimentary self-consciousness, as Hegel affirms later in the Introduction: “For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself”²⁵. This is of course not to confuse this rudimentary form of self-consciousness with the full-blooded self-consciousness which emerges as a form of consciousness later on in the progression of the *Phenomenology*²⁶; this is a non-objectival consciousness, i.e. consciousness is not an object *for itself*, but is more like a kind of pre-reflective awareness²⁷. What is important, however, is the implication that Hegel draws from this insight: as consciousness of itself and consciousness of the object, consciousness is “consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth”²⁸. It is here that we can see the first sense in which Hegel claims that consciousness provides its own criterion. Essentially, consciousness must have *some* conception of what the object is *in itself* in order to distinguish its knowing of the object from it. This is not to say that it has something like a second knowledge of the object, to which its first knowledge may or may not correspond, but rather that it has a conception of what it would be for its knowledge to be true. Hegel then links this to the problem of regress as we outlined it earlier²⁹. He again, and more explicitly, sets up the problem of inquiring into the truth of knowledge rather than the appearance of knowledge, the problem being that what we would assert would simply be our

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. (My emphasis)

²⁵ Ibid., §85, pg 54

²⁶ Ibid., Division B, pg 104

²⁷ This pre-reflective awareness is very similar to transcendental apperception in Kant’s first critique. Robert Pippin spends a great deal of time elaborating this relation between Kant’s transcendental apperception and Hegel’s consciousness (Pippin, pg 32 onwards).

²⁸ *PS*, §85, pg 54

²⁹ Ibid., §83, pg 53

knowledge *of* knowledge – “the being of knowledge *for us*”³⁰. However, he then puts it in different terms, claiming that this would mean that the criterion against which knowledge was to be compared would lie inside us, as knowledge *for us*, whereas there would still be a knowledge *in itself* opposed to this, making any comparison of our knowledge with our criterion itself in need of a criterion. It is on the basis of this reformulation of the regress that Hegel introduces the claim that consciousness provides its own criterion:-

“Consciousness provides it own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself; for the distinction made above falls within it.”³¹

Because both consciousness’ knowledge of the object and its conception of truth simply *appear* within it, as opposed to the regressive scenario previously outlined, the two can be compared without any reference to an *in itself* of knowledge. Also: “Since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not”³². So, this is the first sense in which consciousness provides its own criterion: consciousness contains within itself, as consciousness of itself, a conception of what truth is, against which it compares its knowledge of truth, in virtue of being conscious of both.

Of course, as of yet, this does not get us out of the dilemma. That consciousness provides itself with a criterion by which to judge its knowledge does not make this criterion valid, it is still only a criterion that *appears*, and to declare it valid on this basis would be to fall back into circularity. Rather, we must understand a nuanced point about the nature of consciousness’ consciousness of itself, which is expressed by Pippin thus: ““In itself” consciousness is self-consciousness, although not “for itself””³³. What this means, strange as it sounds, is that although consciousness is conscious of itself, it is not conscious of its self-consciousness. Essentially, what this means is that although it is implied by consciousness’ very distinguishing of itself from its object that it is aware of itself, and thus that it has a

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., §84, pg 53

³² Ibid., §85, pg 54

³³ Pippin, pg 19

conception of the *in itself* it distinguishes its knowing from, this fact is *implicit* in the form of consciousness, not *explicit*. Despite it being implied by the structure of consciousness that the in itself it distinguishes its knowing from must be internal to consciousness itself, consciousness maintains its independence, it continues to distinguish it from its knowledge, for otherwise it would not properly be *natural consciousness*³⁴.

It is on the basis of this insight that we can understand where it is that the Notion of natural consciousness comes from at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*: the reader, *as* natural consciousness, is converted to the position of phenomenologist – the perspective of the ‘we’ that is deployed throughout the text – by having the implications of the structure of their own consciousness *as it appears to them* drawn out by Hegel’s Introduction. This is just to say that the reader becomes aware that consciousness provides its own criterion. This may seem to imply that the reader remains *consciousness* in opposition to *thought*, which would be incompatible with the interpretation that: “The phenomenologist works out for himself – *in thought* – the paradoxical consequences of espousing the various perspectives of ordinary consciousness”³⁵. There is no incompatibility here, and demonstrating this will reveal that ‘turning against’ appearance is the ‘turning back’ of the regress upon itself.

In order to demonstrate this it is necessary to explain the second sense in which consciousness provides its own criterion: consciousness as the comparison of its knowing with its criterion *is at the same time* the testing of this criterion against its knowing, i.e. its knowing activity can also be taken as a criterion against which to judge its first criterion. Hegel explains this in what is possibly the most difficult passage of the Introduction:-

“If we designate *knowledge* as the Notion, but the essence or the *True* as what exists, or the *object*, then the examination consists in seeing whether the Notion corresponds to the object. But if we call the *essence* or the in-itself of the *object* the *Notion*, and on the other hand understand by the *object* the Notion itself as *object*, viz. as it exists *for an other*, then the examination consists in seeing whether the object corresponds to its Notion. It is evident, of course, that the two procedures are the same. But the essential

³⁴ This is what Heidegger means when he says that the criterion, or standard is “not something that consciousness gives directly to itself. It is provided with its own standard. It gives and yet does not give at the same time” (*HCE*, pg 96)

³⁵ *FTH*, pg 52

point to bear in mind throughout the whole investigation is that these two moments, 'Notion' and 'object', 'being-for-another' and 'being-in-itself', both fall *within* that knowledge which we are investigating.”³⁶

Here Hegel is claiming an identity between two forms of comparison: the comparisons of knowledge with criterion and criterion with knowledge. There are also two ways in which we can understand such an identity based on this passage: as a simple numerical identity, or as an identity of distinct or different comparisons³⁷. Essentially, the difference turns on how we interpret the terms ‘object’ and ‘Notion’ in the line: “then the examination consists in seeing whether the object corresponds to its Notion”; whether we take them in the first way they are defined, as the True and knowledge respectively, or whether we take them in the way they are redefined, i.e. the reverse. The latter interpretation takes the comparisons to be simply the same, but that we can describe that same comparison in two ways. The former interpretation takes the comparisons to be importantly distinct, but to be *really* the same. The best way to draw this distinction is to appeal to the actual progression of the Consciousness section of the *Phenomenology*.

The structure of this section is such that it is broken up into further parts corresponding to the particular forms of consciousness: Sense Certainty, Perception, and Understanding; each form being distinguished by the particular conception it has of its object, i.e. the criterion of truth internal to consciousness. Inside each of these sections is a dialectical progression corresponding to the comparisons of its knowledge that the particular form of consciousness makes with its criterion. By dialectic here, we importantly do not mean the repetition of a particular kind of systematic inference, such as the *reductio ad absurdum*, but rather a series of *determinate negations*, that is to say negations which do not simply leave us to choose between all of the possible positions that are compatible with the falsity of that which is negated, but that in turn produce a new *determinate* position³⁸. This will be discussed further shortly. On this basis we can distinguish between two different dialectics which are taking place: the *minor* dialectic through which consciousness’

³⁶ PS, §84, pg 53

³⁷ This is a general interpretative strategy that I am borrowing from Heidegger, in trying to understand the way in which the verbs in some of Hegel’s most important passages are ambiguous (*HCE*, pg 115). In this case, I am interested in the ‘are’ in “the two procedures *are* the same”.

³⁸ PS, §79, pg 53

knowledge of its object is repeatedly negated, producing a series of successive new conceptions, and the *major* dialectic through which consciousness' criterion is repeatedly negated, producing a succession of new criterions. We can elucidate this by describing the particular dialectic of Sense Certainty in brief.

Firstly, we begin with the most simple form of natural consciousness: that which simply takes its object to be 'this', and on this basis takes itself to have the *most immediate* and thus richest form of knowledge. We can distinguish between and elaborate upon what constitutes the knowledge of the object here, and what constitutes the criterion, or conception of objectivity³⁹, and in doing so we find that they are *implicitly* contradictory, and that this implicit contradiction, when made *explicit*, forces consciousness' knowledge to change. In the first instance we identify the conception of objectivity as precisely consisting in the notions of immediacy and specificity (the pure *this*), whereas the knowledge is further determined as a knowing of 'this, here and now', i.e. it has spatio-temporal co-ordination. We then find that in intending to pick out the pure *thisness* or *haecceity* of the object, consciousness can pick out nothing specific, because the determinations 'this', 'here' and 'now' are in fact the most abstract universal determinations, in that they apply to every object. So, what consciousness takes its object to be contradicts what it takes objectivity to be, and as such it negates its knowledge and in doing so produces a new knowledge: this, here, now that *I* am conscious of. In doing this consciousness *indexes* the object's spatio-temporal location to its own. This particular move demonstrates a fact about the nature of consciousness' pre-reflective awareness, namely that its knowledge of the object and its knowledge of itself are not fully distinct, and that as such they reciprocally permeate one another. It is obvious that if consciousness' knowledge of the object changes, then its knowledge of its knowledge of the object also changes, not merely in a contingent, after the fact fashion, but necessarily, because they are really one and the same knowledge. This particular move demonstrates the opposite kind of permeation, where, in the production of its new knowledge, consciousness draws from the resources provided by its knowledge of itself, i.e. it is because consciousness is conscious of itself that it can say: '*this* which *I* am conscious of'. We will discuss this further later. For now, we can see the kind of move which constitutes the minor dialectic – the implications of the new knowledge are drawn out and found

³⁹ The idea that consciousness' conception of the in-itself or its criterion is a criterion of objectivity is best worked out by Jon Stewart in his book *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

to contradict the criterion, that is, the knowledge is *compared* with the criterion. Thus, we have found the comparison of Notion to object.

Now, if we took the simple identity view, then this comparison would be *just* the same as the comparison of object to Notion; each of these minor moves would also constitute a comparison between the object and our knowledge of it, as if to say that each element is compared with the other in the same way in the same individual move. The problem is that on this view it seems hard to see why Consciousness is split up into sections at all, i.e. it seems to rebuff the idea that there is a distinct *major* dialectic. It is this kind of view that holds that all consciousness *must* develop into the different successive forms in an *actual* sense, because there is no real distinction between sections, just a single unbroken chain of *inferences*. However, Hegel is very clear that there is a substantive difference between forms of consciousness; that each new form of consciousness is not just the result of the proceeding comparisons, but is rather a form of consciousness which *explicitly* takes up the result *implicit* within the proceeding comparisons⁴⁰.

To understand the way in which Hegel conceives of what I have called the major dialectic, and as such its relation to the minor dialectic, we have to look at what Hegel says about the alteration of the object⁴¹. Here Hegel claims that the alteration of the knowledge brought on by the comparison of Notion to object also alters the object, but he is not specifically claiming that every such individual comparison results in such an alteration. Rather he is making a very subtle claim, that because, as I demonstrated earlier, consciousness' knowledge of the object and its knowledge of itself are not fully distinct, the alteration of the knowledge of the object, in altering the knowledge of that knowledge, can also alter the knowledge of the *in itself* of that object, as this is an aspect of its knowledge of itself⁴². Moreover, consciousness becomes aware that what it previously took to be *in-itself*, was only the *in-itself-for-it*. There is here a question of how this relates to my account of the position of the phenomenologist. Surely, it seems, if consciousness becomes aware that its conception of the object is *its* conception, it has worked out the implications of its own structure as it *appears* to itself. However, consciousness could not realise that it

⁴⁰ This can be seen in the opening of the second form of consciousness, Perception (*PS*, §111, pg 67).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, §85, pg 54

⁴² It is important to note here that my description of consciousness' consciousness of itself as 'knowledge' is quite loose, and that although it is clear here that Hegel is depending on the knowledge-like character of this pre-reflective awareness, he does not properly call it knowledge, that term being reserved for properly objectival consciousness.

was an implicit feature of its own structure, as it appears to itself, that its conception of the in-itself was *always* the in-itself-for-it *and still be natural consciousness*. Rather, it comes to realise that *this particular* conception is *just* a feature of its knowledge. It is for this reason that Hegel refers to the phenomenological development as the “way of despair”⁴³, for it is only for the phenomenologist that it has positive significance, whereas consciousness sees only the nothingness of its criterion of truth. This is also why the different forms of consciousness are properly distinct, in that it is the phenomenologist who contributes the “reversal of consciousness”⁴⁴, leading to the progression between forms, whereas consciousness itself may simply languish in scepticism, refusing the transition to the new object.

We can now begin to see how this second comparison is constituted. It is the case that the comparison of Notion with object is the same as that of object with Notion, but not in the sense of the numerical identity of particular inferences; rather it is an identity of *process*, or movement. Each of the comparisons that compose the minor dialectic of a given form is not a comparison of the object with Notion when taken individually; rather, they constitute this comparison only when taken together as a single movement. As Taylor points out, the negation of the criterion which constitutes the movement of the major dialectic is the exhaustion of the possibilities of knowledge in accordance with that criterion⁴⁵. So, all of the reconfigurations of its knowledge that consciousness produces within the dialectic internal to the form of consciousness, which are the result of comparisons of the previous knowledge with the criterion, are all of the variations that are possible under that criterion. As such, the final movement of the minor dialectic within each form is the proof of the impossibility of any knowledge, if knowledge is what it is taken to be under that criterion. It might be objected here that the claim that these different variations are exhaustive is ungrounded, but this can be rejected if we recall the character of determinate negation. It is precisely not the case that any of the negations that are carried out simply opens up a field of possible positions that are compatible with the negation of the previous position; the immanent development of the content itself *necessitates* a new determinate position. This means that at each point any alternative possibilities that we could conceive in abstraction from the content of the Notion are excluded, because of the immanence of the unfolding of the Notion and the necessity

⁴³ PS, §78, pg 49

⁴⁴ Ibid., §87, pg 55-56

⁴⁵ Taylor, pg 135-136

this implies. So, to return to the example of Sense Certainty, when we negate the negation of the ‘now’ that is pointed to in the immediate act of pointing, that is to say when we negate its *having been*⁴⁶, we produce a ‘now’ that is a collection of ‘nows’, a ‘this’ which is essentially mediated, and this new knowledge already *explicitly* contradicts the criterion and its stipulation of immediacy. As such, it does not need to be further compared with the criterion, but its very production is the negation of that criterion. This is only half of the story however, because, as Hegel indicates, consciousness’ criterion is not just negated, but a new criterion is produced, and it is this very same movement which produces it⁴⁷. In the case of the transition from Sense Certainty to Perception, the multiplicity of interrelated ‘heres’ and ‘nows’ that is produced in the culmination of Sense Certainty provides the character of the criterion taken up by Perception, namely that of a unified, mediated universal that is sensuously conditioned. In the dialectic of Perception this will itself be transformed into the unconditioned universal⁴⁸, which, as implicit Notion, will then be taken up explicitly *as* Notion by Understanding.

This brings us back to the relation between the Notion of natural consciousness, the position of the phenomenologist and the dilemma of the criterion. On my interpretation, Hegel has responded to the dilemma of the criterion by finding a starting point for thought that he need not *assert*, and this starting point is consciousness’ appearing-to-itself. In the Introduction, Hegel transforms the reader into the phenomenologist, by showing them the implications of their own appearing-to-self, and by doing this makes that appearing-to-self into an *object of thought*, namely the Notion of natural consciousness, the basic logical structure of which he describes. So, the phenomenologist is conscious of consciousness’ limited self-consciousness as the very logical structure of the Notion they are *thinking*, and remains the phenomenologist proper in so far as they deny themselves any resources other than the content of the Notion itself. In doing this Hegel turns the regress back upon itself, by taking the self-critical impetus of thought that constituted it and directing it upon an aspect of itself such that its self-criticism is productive of new content, rather than remaining in the static motion of perpetually making the same reproach. This depends upon revealing a *pure thought* that is the non-inferential self-movement of the content. The imperative here is thus not to *assume* a distinction

⁴⁶ PS, §107, pg 63

⁴⁷ Ibid., §86, pg 54

⁴⁸ Ibid., §129, pg 77

between form and content⁴⁹, such that the content of every thought must be *asserted* and then transformed externally according to the purely formal rules of the understanding, but to *just think* one's appearing-to-self (the *appearing* of knowledge) *immanently*. This is the character of phenomenology in opposition to philosophy, such that the former justifies the beginning of the latter.

It is this non-inferential foundation that provides the character of determinate negation. As Hegel goes over in the Preface, it is only on the basis of the external, formal rules of the understanding that one can conceive of negation as a delimitation of possibilities wherein no new determinate position is provided. Quite simply, under the understanding's conception of negation we reproduce the dilemma at every turn, in that we have no criterion to select between the delimited possibilities. In Hegel's enterprise, the selection of the new position from the possibilities is not truly a selection, but a production from out of the immanently thought content of the previous position. As such, this production cannot be further broken down into inferential parts which would be subject to questions of justification, i.e. subject to the dilemma; it is merely that *minimum* which we are forced to think by the content itself, before we add any of our own ideas. As such, thought is here understood properly as *process*, not as inference. This does not mean that classical inferential structures do not crop up in the phenomenology, or that each determinate negation is so basic as to be unexplainable, but rather that it is the movement of the content itself which is prior to its caching out in the language of the phenomenologist. It is in this sense that Hegel takes himself to be legitimately *tracing* the logical development of consciousness itself and not to be *demonstrating* it in its own terms⁵⁰ - the *logic* of the development is separate from Hegel's language. This understanding of thought as process is manifest in the development of the *Phenomenology* itself, as can be seen by the

⁴⁹ It must be noted that there is a distinction between form and content at work within the *Phenomenology*, but it is the distinction that natural consciousness itself makes. Natural consciousness distinguishes between the content of itself as knowing, and its conception of the in-itself or criterion as the very form that constrains this knowing. However, it is of course not conscious of making this distinction. The phenomenologists thinking of this distinction as it is made in the Notion of natural consciousness is not itself constrained by the form of this distinction, because it does not assume its truth. Importantly, this is another way of seeing the way in which the *Phenomenology* overcomes the sceptical dilemma – by thinking through the very content of the distinction (between form and content, made in natural consciousness) that is productive of it.

⁵⁰ It is perhaps important to point out a linguistic ambiguity here in the use of the word 'term'; Hegel can describe the immanent development of the Notion of natural consciousness 'on its own terms', meaning that he is not bringing anything of his own to the analysis, while his description of this development is not 'in its own terms', because he may require elucidatory concepts not possessed by the form of consciousness itself. As long as these external terms play no active part in the logical development, there is no contradiction here.

processual unity of the major and minor dialectics as I have described them. The minor dialectic culminates in the *formal* negation of the criterion, but in turn provides the *content* of the next criterion, thus constituting the determinate negation of the major dialectic in a way which cannot be reduced to formal inferential concerns; yet consciousness is not conscious of this production, and it is only the phenomenologist, who thinks it, that is aware of it as process *through* thinking it⁵¹.

Although there is not time in this essay to show in detail how this structure carries on beyond the Consciousness section, it is important to point out the general way in which the movement continues. The transition between Consciousness and Self-Consciousness does not proceed like the transition from Sense-Certainty and Perception, i.e. the movement from Understanding to Self-Consciousness is not just another move in the major dialectic I have described. Rather, the transition to Self-Consciousness is itself the uncovering of a further level of criterion, the uncovering of consciousness' conception of its criterion. This is to say that in Consciousness, the criterion was a criterion of true knowledge, and that in the move to Self-Consciousness this criterion of criteria is negated, resulting in Self-Consciousness' criterion taking the form of a criterion of true satisfaction, and its internal Notion thus changing from knowledge to desire⁵². It is in this way that the *Phenomenology* does not have a predetermined set of dialectics, but constantly proceeds to higher levels of self-critical dialectic, for which the lower dialectics provide the content. We need not go through the exact number and structure of these dialectics here, as long as we understand the way they proliferate within the self-critical movement of thought, and how they culminate in the negation of the fundamental conception that organises all the proceeding criteria – the non-identity of thought and Being – through having immanently exhausted all its possible configurations.

In conclusion, we have uncovered three senses in which consciousness provides its own criterion. Firstly, it provides a criterion by which to judge its own knowledge of its object. Secondly, in the very process of providing this criterion, it provides a further criterion by which to judge it. Thirdly, in that very same process which provides the first and second, it provides a criterion for judging its second criterion, i.e. for judging the form of its first criterion (truth, satisfaction, etc.). These three senses boil down to a single sense, and it is this single sense which provides

⁵¹ *PS*, §87, pg 56

⁵² *Ibid.*, §167, pg 105

Hegel's answer to the dilemma of the criterion itself. The providing of a criterion in each instance can be understood as a single process of thought through which each new position is necessitated by the former. This is because the dilemma of the criterion is a problem that accosts thought at every turn, as long as it follows the inferential or formal pattern of the understanding. At each point we are confronted with the problem of how to select between possible positions – 'what criterion lets us choose?' By taking consciousness as our immanent object of thought we provide a criterion once and for all, by guaranteeing that whatever level of self-criticism the dialectic reaches (minor, major and beyond), the previous level of dialectic immanently constitutes the production of new content in a way that excludes the abstract possibilities of the understanding, and thus the need to *choose* between them. It is because of this exclusion of choice that Hegel calls the immanent progression the sinking of one's freedom within the content⁵³. Thus, consciousness *as content* chooses its own path: it provides its own criterion. This can be seen as directly answering two of the horns of the regress. Firstly, in turning the reader into the phenomenologist thinking the content of their own appearing-to-self, Hegel need not *assert* the content of his starting point. Secondly, in turning the self-critical movement of thought back upon itself, i.e. in criticising its own self-criticism, he turns the *regressive* movement of this thought into a *progressive* one. To view the *Phenomenology* this way is to see it as coiling back on itself, successively delving deeper into the implicit content of its initial position, rather than repeating the same reproach *ad infinitum*⁵⁴. As for circularity, Hegel has not dispensed with it in as direct a way as he has with the other horns of the dilemma. He has shown in advance how certain objections which take his project to be circular are incorrect, through reducing those circularities to mere assertions and then abstracting from them – refusing to assume either the assertion or its opposite. But, this is not to rule out objections appealing to circularity *in principle*. There may as yet be implicit circularities at the beginning of the project whose reduction to assertion would reintroduce the need for an external criterion to decide between them and their opposite. However, the onus is on the challenger to find them.

⁵³ *PS*, §58, pg 36

⁵⁴ This solution is of the same general kind as that which Hegel proffers to the problem of 'The Infinite Progress' (*SL*, pg 150), relating it to his earlier discussion of the spurious, or bad infinity of the understanding (*SL*, pg 139).