Self-Completing Skepticism: On Hegel's Sublation of Pyrrhonism

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Abstract

In his 1802 article for the Critical Journal, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy," Hegel attempts to articulate a form of skepticism that is "at one with every true philosophy." Focusing on the priority that Hegel gives to ancient skepticism over its modern counterpart, Michael Forster and other commentators suggest that it is Pyrrhonism that Hegel views as one with philosophy. Since Hegel calls attention to the persistence of dogmatism even in the work of Sextus Empiricus, however, I argue that it is only a sublated form of Pyrrhonism, what in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he calls "self-completing skepticism," that Hegel takes to be part of genuine philosophical cognition. In this way, I hope to show that the insight that motivates Hegel's engagement with skepticism in the 1802 essay comes to inform the philosophical itinerary of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Introduction

In his 1802 article for the Critical Journal, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy," Hegel offers his first and most sustained treatment of the philosophical significance of skepticism. While the piece is ostensibly written as a review of Gottlob Ernst Schulze's newly published *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie*,[1] a skeptical attack on Kant's Critical Philosophy and Karl Leonhard Reinhold's adaptation of the latter in his "Philosophy of the Elements," Hegel's essay far exceeds this task, advancing the bold claim that "skepticism itself is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy."[2] If it is true, however, that skepticism in some sense belongs to all genuine philosophical cognition, one is nevertheless left wondering whether there is some particular expression of skepticism which Hegel has in mind. While it is evident in the 1802 Skepticism essay that Hegel considers the antithesis of thinking and being to be

somehow emblematic of the sort of skepticism with which he is concerned, this characterization raises more questions than it answers. If, as Hegel claims, it is Kant who deserves credit for "having brought this antithesis home to the culture of our modern age" (RSP, 340), one might wonder whether this antithesis is in fact unique to skepticism at all. Moreover, even if it were unique to skepticism, it remains unclear whether Hegel thinks that this antithesis has the same role to play in *every* form of skepticism or whether there is not one particular historical expression – say, Pyrrhonism – that puts this antithesis to special use. As we will see, there is in fact one particular form of skepticism that Hegel exalts as the "free side of every philosophy" (RSP, 324), but it cannot be confined to any given historical epoch. Although Hegel evidently holds ancient skepticism in higher esteem than its modern counterpart, this must not lead us to identify the skepticism which he sees as belonging to all genuine philosophical cognition – that is, the negative side of his own emergent speculative metaphysics – with that of Sextus Empiricus or the New Academy. In fact, we run the risk of missing Hegel's insight into the relationship of skepticism and philosophy entirely if we fail to recognize that the sort of skepticism with which he is concerned has no true analogue in the history of philosophy. Thus, while the distinction between ancient and modern skepticism remains an important one for Hegel, the more important distinction for his appraisal of the philosophical significance of skepticism is the one he draws between Pyrrhonism and the "self-completing skepticism" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As I will argue, it is only the latter sort of skepticism which can properly be said to belong to the philosophy which, Hegel claims, "is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323). Ultimately, I hope to show in this way that Hegel's early confrontation with the problematic of skepticism in his review for the Critical

Journal already marks a significant step toward the development of the philosophical itinerary of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

The Dogmatic Character of Modern Skepticism

Hegel's 1802 article for the Critical Journal provided him with an opportunity to outline the requirements of a philosophical system that could stand up to the most radical skeptical scrutiny. As the article makes clear, it is only that philosophical system which is capable of successfully integrating skepticism – that is, which recognizes the unity of philosophy and skepticism – that will remain safeguarded against the latter. Crucial to this account is Hegel's discussion of the superiority of ancient to modern skepticism. Indeed, it is only in exhibiting the "dogmatic" character of Schulze's modern skepticism that Hegel is able to articulate his own developing speculative metaphysics. Given that the dogmatic character of Schulze's project emerges within a discussion of the superiority of ancient skepticism, one might suspect that it is the latter which, for Hegel, constitutes the "free side" of philosophy. This would be a mistake, however. In Hegel's discussion, ancient skepticism serves primarily as a foil which allows him to articulate the limits of Schulze's approach, but which he nevertheless subordinates to the form of skepticism that he sees as one with philosophy. This becomes clear as soon as we recognize that even Pyrrhonism – by all accounts the most radical form of ancient skepticism – remains dogmatic on Hegel's account. To recognize the dogmatic character of Pyrrhonism, however, we must attend to Hegel's characterization of "dogmatism" in the Skepticism essay. Above all, we must recognize that, for Hegel, dogmatism expresses a substantive problem concerning the nature of truth – not a merely formal concern regarding epistemic justification. Only then will it be evident that Pyrrhonism, though superior to Schulze's modern skepticism, is not the specific

form which Hegel sees as one with philosophy. Let us turn then to Hegel's review of Schulze to see precisely what the superiority of ancient skepticism would seem to consist in.

In his anonymously published 1792 work, *Aenesidemus, or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Professor Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defence of Skepticism Against the Pretentions of the Critique of Reason*,[3] Schulze raised a number of skeptical objections concerning the success of Kant's Critical Philosophy and its elaboration by Karl Leonhard Reinhold – objections which Schulze would refine over the next nine years, culminating in the 1801 publication of his *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie*. Some of these objections were exclusively directed at Reinhold's attempt to ground Kant's Critical Philosophy on a universally valid, self-evident first principle, which according to Reinhold, philosophy requires if it is to aspire to the level of science. Reinhold locates this first principle in what he calls the "proposition of consciousness," which states that "in consciousness, the subject distinguishes the representation from the subject and the object and relates the representation to both."[4] It is the status of Reinhold's proposition of consciousness as first principle that Schulze calls into question in *Aenesidemus* and further contests in his *Kritik*. While Reinhold understood this proposition to concern merely the logical conditions of consciousness, Schulze treats it as an empirical description. Judging this description to be arbitrary on account of its ostensible empirical status, Schulze argues that it cannot constitute the self-evident first principle for philosophy that Reinhold was after.

In addition to the concern with Reinhold's appropriation of Kant, Schulze's more general concern is with the project of epistemology itself. For Schulze, the project of epistemology fails to live up to its own standards. It attempts to secure knowledge by ridding itself of all presuppositions. However, it fails to make good on this aspiration, since it inevitably

presupposes the category of causality in offering a causal explanation of the origins of our representations. Thus, as Frederick Beiser points out, for Schulze, "the whole enterprise of epistemology cannot get off of the ground because of Hume's skepticism about causality."[5]

This is one problem Schulze finds with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant claims to have undercut Hume's skepticism concerning the necessary connection between cause and effect. However, in relying upon the causal principle in order to establish the principle's objective validity, Schulze argues, Kant ends up begging the question against Hume, presupposing precisely what he must prove. Moreover, Schulze finds that Kant violates his own critical method. For Kant, the category of causality can only be legitimately applied to propositions about objects of possible experience. Schulze argues that Kant violates this rule, however, when he employs the causal principle in locating the ultimate causes of our representations of objects in the human mind. For this reason, Schulze sees Kant's Critical Philosophy as only one more expression of that dogmatic attempt to deduce existence from mere thought which Kant had sought to challenge in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

For Hegel, however, it is Schulze's argument – not Kant's – which signals a regression to dogmatism. Schulze's basic objection to Kant – that the Transcendental Deduction attempts to establish the objective validity of the causal principle by illicitly "inferring from the constitution of something as it is in our representations its objective constitution outside us"[6] – only makes sense on an erroneous conception of Kant's basic philosophical project.[7] On Schulze's interpretation, the deduction sets out to prove that the "original determinations of the human mind are the real ground or source of the synthetic judgments found in our knowledge."[8] But, in giving the mind a causal role in his argument for the applicability of the causal principle to the field of experience, Schulze maintains, Kant has already presupposed precisely what he set out to

prove – that our concepts can be legitimately referred to a mind-independent reality. This was, however, precisely the presupposition which Kant had argued metaphysics must leave behind if it is to advance beyond the "groping among mere concepts"[9] which had hitherto characterized this enterprise. Convinced that Hume was correct to deny that any necessary connection between concept and object could be established by the mere operations of thought, Kant sought to develop an account which would demonstrate the "objective validity" [*objektive Gültigkeit*] of *a priori* concepts by exhibiting their constitutive role in human experience. Hence, in the Transcendental Deduction, Kant famously undercut Hume's challenge to causality by demonstrating that the causal principle, as one of the twelve "true ancestral concepts of pure understanding" (CPR, A81/B107), subtends the unity of self-consciousness and, for this reason, first makes our experience of objects possible. If Kant had taken this argument as proof that our concepts legitimately apply to some mind-independent reality, Schulze's objection would undoubtedly hold. What Schulze failed to realize in raising this objection, however, was that in attempting to prove the "objective validity" of the categories, Kant was actually reworking the notion of objectivity itself. If Schulze could not see this, Hegel suggests, it was because it was he – not Kant – who was mired in the presuppositions of a dogmatic metaphysics. Indeed, as Hegel's account in the Skepticism essay shows, Schulze never seems to have seriously questioned the basic opposition underpinning his critique of theoretical philosophy – namely, the opposition between consciousness and its object:

> To begin with, 'things' are opposed to 'cognition' within [the context of] Reason here; and secondly an explanation of its origin [is asked for], and therewith the causal relationship is dragged in; the ground of cognition, then, is something other than what is grounded, the former the concept, the latter the thing, and when once this basically false picture of rational thinking is presupposed, then there is nothing further to be done, except to repeat for ever that ground and grounded, concept and thing are different modes; that all rational cognition aims just to

> *pluck* a being *out* of thinking, existence out of concepts, (as it is put in words that are likewise Kantian) (RSP, 341).

One might gather from Hegel's review of Schulze that modern skepticism can be considered "dogmatic," therefore, to the extent that it relies upon beliefs which it leaves insulated from criticism. On such an interpretation, the superiority of ancient skepticism would seem to consist, for Hegel, in the fact that it is able to dispense with all such presuppositions. To get a better idea of why the difference suggested here would seem to elevate ancient skepticism above its modern expression in Schulze, it will be helpful to recall Sextus Empiricus' discussion of the difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism. Sextus first draws this distinction at the beginning of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* where he offers a taxonomy of the basic forms of philosophy. Sextus observes that, "When people are investigating any subject, the likely result is either a discovery or a denial of discovery and a confession of inapprehensibility, or else a continuation of the investigation" (OS, 3). The first group, those claiming to have made a discovery, are the "dogmatists." Those who deny that a discovery has been made Sextus identifies with the Academic philosopher, that is, the Academic skeptic. Finally, those who neither affirm nor deny that a discovery has been made but persist in their investigation Sextus identifies as skeptics, that is, Pyrrhonists. Thus, Sextus distinguishes Pyrrhonian from Academic skepticism here by explaining that the latter conclude their investigation too hastily, which is to say, without providing sufficient evidence for their conclusion, while the former simply "suspend judgment" [*epoché*] on account of a lack of sufficient evidence. Thus, the true skeptics – the Pyrrhonian skeptics – are the ones who are still "investigating" [*skeptesthai*]. Sextus returns to this important distinction later in the *Outlines*:

> The members of the New Academy, if they say that everything is inapprehensible, no doubt differ from the [Pyrrhonian] Skeptics precisely in saying that everything is inapprehensible. For they make affirmations about this, while the [Pyrrhonian] Skeptic expects it to be possible for something actually to be apprehended. And

> they differ from us clearly in their judgments of good and bad. For the Academics say that things are good and bad not in the way we do, but with the conviction that it is plausible that what they call good rather than its contrary really is good (and similarly with bad), whereas we do not call anything good or bad with the thought that what we say is plausible – rather, without holding opinions we follow ordinary life in order not to be inactive.[10]

Realizing that the Academic could never be epistemically entitled to her claim concerning the inapprehensibility of reality (or her judgments regarding the good), since her claim would be immediately refuted the moment she attempted to provide it with justification, the Pyrrhonist abstains from making any claims which would stand in need of further proof. What leads the Pyrrhonist to contest the truth of any given knowledge-claim, without having to flatly – and dogmatically – affirm the truth of its contradictory, is the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism," which states that "to every account an equal account is opposed" (OS, 6). Rather than take recourse to claims which, as a skeptic, she is in no position to justify, the Pyrrhonist "set[s] out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all" (OS, 4). She does this in order to demonstrate the "equipollence" [*isosthenia*] – or, equal persuasive power – of the accounts in this way opposed and, consequently, the irresolvable nature of the matter under dispute. Because the Pyrrhonist only reports on how things *appear*, she is easily able to bypass that demand for justification which blunted the Academic's attack, since "no-one, presumably, will raise a controversy over whether an existing thing appears this way or that; rather, they investigate whether it is such as it appears" (OS, 9). Thus, the Pyrrhonist's strategy is not to counter her interlocutor's claim with an argument whose only hope for success lies in the off chance that it is spared from scrutiny, but simply to generate arguments, no more compelling than those to which they are opposed, in order to achieve a "standstill of the intellect."

Now, it may be tempting to conclude that Hegel finds ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism to be superior to its modern counterpart, since, following Sextus' distinction, one can see that

Pyrrhonian skeptics differ from the Academics in that they refrain from making claims to which they are not epistemically entitled. If, however, in charging Schulze with dogmatism, Hegel were merely rehearsing the same objection that Sextus once upon a time put to the skeptics of the New Academy, one might wonder why Hegel would then repeatedly deny the existence of any meaningful difference between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism. Hegel argues, for example, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, that "between the Academics and pure [Pyrrhonian] Skepticism a distinction has been drawn, which is certainly very formal, and has but little signification, but to which the [Pyrrhonian] Skeptics in their subtlety undoubtedly attached some meaning."[11] If the Pyrrhonian method of equipollence fails, for Hegel, to set it apart from the skepticism of the New Academy, then would it not, by the same token, fail to account for the superiority of ancient over modern skepticism? In point of fact, Schulze's modern skepticism is no more dogmatic, for Hegel, than its ancient counterpart. The problem which Hegel identifies in Schulze's skepticism is not, as Forster holds, that it is "founded on the acceptance of beliefs which are in fact vulnerable to skeptical attack,"[12] but that it is committed to an inaccurate description of reality. In charging Schulze with dogmatism, as we will see, Hegel is calling attention to a substantive metaphysical error that he finds in both ancient and modern forms of skepticism. This point comes out most clearly in Hegel's account in the Skepticism essay of the "essence of dogmatism" – an account which, to my mind, offers compelling evidence that the distinction between ancient and modern skepticism, like Sextus' distinction between Pyrrhonism and the New Academy, holds little import for Hegel's analysis.

> "The essence of dogmatism," Hegel writes,
>
> > consists in this that it posits something finite, something burdened with an opposition (e.g. pure Subject, or pure Object, or in dualism the duality as opposed to the identity) as the Absolute; hence Reason shows with respect to this Absolute that it has a relation to what is excluded from it, and only exists through and in

> this relation to another, so that it is not absolute, according to the third trope of relationship (RSP, 335).

Here, where one might expect to find an account of the norms of rational assent and their violation, we are met with something rather remarkable. What makes a given claim dogmatic, for Hegel, is not that it fails to accord with certain norms of justification (as in, for example, the informal fallacy of "begging the question"), but that it is made in denial of the concomitant truth of its contradictory.[13] A dogmatic claim, then, is made when one posits something finite – that is, something that has an opposite[14] – as absolute in observance of the principle of noncontradiction. This concerns Hegel's distinction between propositions of reason and propositions of the understanding. For Hegel, propositions of the understanding can only adequately express finite objects. This is where they have their legitimate role in cognition. Propositions of understanding cannot, however, properly express infinite objects, since these objects cannot be grasped through any one-sided opposition. Propositions of reason, by contrast, are self-contradictory but nevertheless true. By not denying the unity of opposites, which is to say by not holding fast to the principle of noncontradiction, they are able to properly express infinite objects. As Hegel puts it:

> If in any one proposition that expresses a cognition of reason, its reflected aspect – the concepts that are contained in it – is isolated, and the way that they are bound together is considered, it must become evident that these concepts are together sublated, or in other words they are united in such a way, that they contradict themselves; otherwise it would not be a proposition of reason but only of understanding (RSP, 324).

Thus, to say that a proposition of the understanding is dogmatic is to say that it is unable to articulate an infinite object and thus is not true in an absolute sense. This is, however, not to say that it is simply false. Such propositions are adequate for articulating finite objects. However, they become the mark of dogmatic thinking, for Hegel, as soon as one overlooks the proper limit

of their application and uses them to express something which, as infinite, is opposed only by itself.

In Part Two, we will encounter one particular expression of skepticism that consistently affirms the unity of contradictories; for the time being, however, I would simply like to stress that the charge of dogmatism indicates, for Hegel, the presence of a substantive metaphysical error – to wit, one in which a proposition of the understanding is mistaken for a proposition of reason – and not merely the kind of formal deficit which one might hope to avoid through strict adherence to accepted doxastic norms. Thus, Schulze's skepticism is dogmatic, not in the sense that it fails to adequately justify the basic opposition which it relies upon in presupposing the undeniable certainty of the "facts of consciousness," but in that it sunders "the rational" by positing this opposition (between thinking and being) to the exclusion of its contradictory (the unity of thinking and being). "This sundering of the rational, in which thinking and being are one, and the absolute insistence on this opposition, in other words the understanding made absolute," Hegel explains, "constitutes the endlessly repeated and universally applied ground of this dogmatic skepticism" (RSP, 339), and it is precisely what accounts for the dogmatic character of Schulze's critique.

Before turning to see why Pyrrhonism still remains inferior to the skepticism that is "one with every true philosophy," it will be instructive to briefly sum up what, on Hegel's conception of dogmatism, the superiority of ancient skepticism would seem to consist in. If, as we just saw, Schulze's modern skepticism is dogmatic, not because it takes for granted the opposition between consciousness and its object, but because it affirms this opposition without at the same time affirming its opposite, then the superiority of Pyrrhonism would seem to lie not in the fact that it manages to dispense with presuppositions by reporting solely on how things appear, as we

previously suggested, but in that it sets these very appearances in opposition to one another in accordance with the method of equipollence. Indeed, this is exactly what Hegel seems to suggest in the Skepticism essay when he elevates the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" above the principle of noncontradiction. Whereas the principle of noncontradiction denies the unity of contradictories by insisting that only the affirmation of a given proposition or its denial (but not both) can count as true, the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" – "to every account an equal account is opposed" (OS, 6) – would seem to stop short of such a claim. Because this principle leads the Pyrrhonist to suspend judgment on the truth of opposing claims, rather than affirm one of these to the exclusion of its opposite, it would seem then to elude Hegel's concern regarding the “essence of dogmatism.”

Though this perhaps accounts for the superiority of ancient skepticism over its modern counterpart, it should not lead us to identify the skepticism that is one with philosophy with Pyrrhonism. Even if there are "no better weapons against dogmatism on finite bases" (RSP, 335) than the Five Modes of Agrippa, Pyrrhonism still remains dogmatic for Hegel in its failure to recognize the limits of the principle of noncontradiction. Indeed, it adheres to this principle and thus denies the unity of opposites as assuredly as Academic skepticism. While this is presumably the reason why Hegel chooses to underplay the distinction between Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism, we will soon see that this is what ultimately separates the skepticism of Schulze, the New Academy, and even Sextus Empiricus from the skepticism that is one with philosophy – that is, from the "self-completing skepticism" which animates the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

The Dogmatic Character of Pyrrhonian Skepticism

If Hegel suggests in the Skepticism essay that Pyrrhonism is notably superior to the modern skepticism of Schulze, this is only because the former manages to articulate what is problematic about dogmatism – not because it remains impervious to it. Indeed, as we will see, it is just as open to the charge of dogmatism as its modern counterpart in Schulze. Although Hegel engages Pyrrhonism in a number of different contexts, ranging from his analysis of the Five Modes of Agrippa in the Skepticism essay to his examination of skepticism as a pattern of knowing in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, each of these discussions seem to express the same basic problem – that Pyrrhonism remains dogmatic to the extent that it fails to recognize the limits of the principle of noncontradiction. We will soon see how this criticism emerges within Hegel's treatment of Pyrrhonism, but to begin with, let us briefly recall that Hegel takes the "essence of dogmatism" to lie in positing "something finite, something burdened with an opposition (e.g. pure Subject, or pure Object, or in dualism the duality as opposed to the identity) as the Absolute" (RSP, 335). We have already seen that, for Hegel, dogmatism expresses the error of failing to affirm the unity of opposites (as seen, for example, in Schulze's insistence on the antithesis of thinking and being to the exclusion of the affirmation of their unity); however, if we attend to the specific examples that Hegel provides in formulating the "essence of dogmatism," it becomes clear that this criticism extends as much to Pyrrhonism as it does to the skepticism of Schulze. The Pyrrhonist would seem, at first sight, to avoid the charge of dogmatism by adhering to the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism" – that is, by setting conflicting claims in opposition to one another in order to bring about that "standstill of the intellect" wherein neither claim can be preferred over the other. Nevertheless, it is precisely this insistence on opposition that leaves the Pyrrhonist open to Hegel's objection, as we will see. Rather than recognize the unity of contradictory claims – their constitutive co-implication – the

Pyrrhonist focuses exclusively on their opposition. If, however, the Pyrrhonist insists that one must suspend judgment in the face of opposing claims, this can only be because she takes their mutual exclusivity for granted – because, that is, she assumes that of two opposing and equipollent claims, only one can possibly be true. But this would be to deny – or, at any rate, to overlook – the fact that opposing claims comprise a unity precisely in virtue of standing in a relationship of opposition. Thus, the problem that Hegel finds with the Pyrrhonian position is not merely that it presupposes the universal validity of the principle of noncontradiction, but that in interpreting contradiction as a token of error, as what effects that "standstill of the intellect" from which no knowledge may proceed, it "posits something finite, something burdened with an opposition… as the Absolute" – namely, *opposition* itself. Indeed, in his explanation of the "essence of dogmatism," Hegel specifically mentions opposition as an example of something finite which has been mistakenly and dogmatically crowned absolute. To privilege "in dualism the duality [*die Dualität*] as opposed to the identity" is, for Hegel, tantamount to positing the "pure Subject" to the exclusion of the "pure Object" because, in each case, one has committed the same error of denying the concomitant truth of contradictories and treating one of these as absolute – that is, of failing to attend to the fact that the principle of noncontradiction holds validity only for the determination of finite objects. That Hegel consistently raises this objection in the context of Pyrrhonism and that he does so in order to distinguish the latter from the skepticism that is one with philosophy can be seen in the following.

Hegel acknowledges there to be "no better weapons against dogmatism on finite bases" (RSP, 335) than the Five Modes of Agrippa – a series of skeptical arguments that the Pyrrhonist employs to achieve the suspension of judgment. However, he goes on to show how each of these same skeptical arguments prove to be dogmatic when tested against a genuinely non-dogmatic

mode of cognition – what Hegel variously calls in the Skepticism essay "the rational," "the Absolute," or simply "philosophy." "Against dogmatism," Hegel writes, "they [the Five Modes of Agrippa] must necessarily be victorious therefore; but in the face of philosophy they fall apart internally, or they are themselves dogmatic" (RSP, 335). Let us consider the Fourth Mode of Agrippa in this connection. The mode of hypothesis is brought in, Sextus explains, "when the Dogmatists, being thrown back *ad infinitum*, begin from something which they do not establish but claim to assume simply and without proof in virtue of a concession" (OS, 41). When this occurs, the Pyrrhonist simply points out that, in the absence of evidence, one has no more reason to accept a given claim over its opposite. As Hegel's comments reveal, however, the Fourth Mode of Agrippa itself becomes dogmatic when it is wielded against a form of philosophy which, as infinite, embraces the unity of opposites: "the rational is not an unproved assumption," Hegel explains, "so that its counterpart could with equal right be presupposed unproven in opposition to it; for the rational," he continues, "has no opposed counterpart" (RSP, 335-36). Now, if, as we have seen, a claim is dogmatic in the operative sense of the term when it is asserted independently to the exclusion of its contradictory and taken as absolute, then the Fourth Mode of Agrippa would seem to express precisely this problem by stipulating that no unproven presupposition can be preferred over its opposite. On the other hand, if "the rational" – or, "philosophy" – names that which, for Hegel, "has no opposed counterpart" since it "includes both the finite opposites, which are mutual counterparts, within itself" (RSP, 337), then the Pyrrhonist can only wield the Fourth Mode of Agrippa against philosophy by treating it *as if it did* have some contradictory opposed to it. Because, however, the Pyrrhonist insists on opposition even when she is faced with something which evidently has no opposite, she would appear to be guilty of positing opposition to the exclusion of unity, and thus, of extending the principle of

noncontradiction beyond its legitimate scope of application. Accordingly, even though the Pyrrhonist seems to recognize the "essence of dogmatism" when she insists, in accordance with the Fourth Mode, that no unproven assumption can be privileged over its opposite, she nevertheless posits "something finite, something burdened with an opposition… as the Absolute" (RSP, 335) in turning the Fourth Mode against the rational. Not only then, does Hegel's engagement with Pyrrhonism in the Skepticism essay provide him with an opportunity to exhibit the dogmatic character of modern skepticism; by exposing Pyrrhonism's own inherent limits, he is also able to define the contours of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323). Nowhere is such a philosophy more evident than in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – a work which Hegel explicitly describes as one of "self-completing skepticism."

Before turning to examine how the skepticism that is one with philosophy emerges in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* let us briefly take stock of what we have seen in the course of our analysis. In Part One, we saw that Hegel considers Schulze's skepticism dogmatic not because it fails to adequately justify the basis of its attack on Kantianism in presupposing the truth of what is given in the "facts of consciousness," but because it posits the antithesis of thinking and being to the exclusion of their unity. Although the dogmatic character of Schulze's skepticism comes into view when it is set alongside the "chief constitutive principle of skepticism," this should not lead us to conclude that ancient skepticism fares much better, in Hegel's estimation, than its modern counterpart. Both of these, as we have seen, remain dogmatic, insofar as they fail to acknowledge the unity of contradictories. Since, however, "every genuine philosophy," as Hegel explains, "always sublates the principle of contradiction" (RSP, 325), it would seem that neither of these forms could qualify as the skepticism that is one with philosophy. Indeed, if the

skepticism that is one with philosophy is anywhere present in the 1802 article, it is in Hegel's description of the rational as that which exposes the falsity of every dogmatic assertion – including any that would posit opposition to the neglect of unity – and which, presumably, "sublates" the principle of noncontradiction in doing so. Already by 1802, then, Hegel had articulated the idea that "skepticism is itself in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23), but it wasn't until 1807 that he was able to bring this idea to life in developing an account of the "path of natural consciousness pressing towards true knowing."[15] Similarly, though the Skepticism essay gestures toward a form of philosophy which reveals the dogmatic character of Pyrrhonism, it is not until the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that we are made to understand *how* the latter comes to be "sublated" in self-completing skepticism.

Self-Completing Skepticism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

When Hegel argues in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that science cannot presuppose its own validity without putting itself on equal footing with the "untrue knowledge" which it disclaims, he is implicitly appealing to the Fourth Mode of Agrippa. However, even if Hegel helps himself to the modes of skepticism in exposing the falsity of all forms of natural consciousness – and he does so liberally throughout this text – this is not because he thinks that Pyrrhonism is valid on its own account. Indeed, Hegel even identifies Pyrrhonism as one such pattern of knowing whose "untruth" the skeptical modes make manifest. What allows Hegel to make use of these modes in order to demonstrate the imperfections of each successive form of natural consciousness without reducing philosophy to skepticism is, as we will see, a basic feature of the *Phenomenology*'s own distinctive method. Accordingly, if, as I have suggested, in speaking of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is

thus both at once" (RSP, 323), Hegel is attempting to articulate a mode of thinking which is capable of demonstrating the falsity of every "one-sided" claim to knowledge, and of doing so without taking for granted the validity of the principle of noncontradiction, then it will soon become clear that the skepticism that he is after is none other than the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology*.

Hegel introduces self-completing skepticism [*der sich vollbringende Skeptizismus*] in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, where he defines it in contradistinction to both Pyrrhonism and Descartes' hyperbolic doubt. In contrast to that methodological skepticism which would question the certainty of all long-standing opinions only in order to put these on a more secure footing, Hegel explains that the path outlined in the *Phenomenology* entails the "conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge" (PS, 50). Rather than concern itself merely with questions of subjective certainty (of whether, that is, *I* am epistemically entitled to make a given knowledge-claim), this skepticism "brings about a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions" (PS, 50) precisely so as to arrive at the *truth* of what knowing is. Thus, while Descartes employs “doubt” [*der Zweifel*] in the *Meditations* as a means for achieving subjective certainty, Hegel conceives of the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* as a way of “despair” [*der Verzweiflung*] that leads up to the standpoint of science only in falsifying each form of natural consciousness in its claim to truth. The philosophical itinerary of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is one of “despair,” therefore, in that its forward progress is driven on by exhibiting the “nothingness” of each form of consciousness, rather than “shilly-shallying about this or that presumed truth, followed by a return to that truth again, after the doubt has been appropriately dispelled” (PS, 49).

Though this fact would seem to make self-completing skepticism similar to Pyrrhonism, Hegel nevertheless goes on to sharply distinguish the former from the latter. Indeed, this point is crucial for understanding how the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* can be said to "sublate" Pyrrhonism. As opposed to Pyrrhonism, the skepticism which "only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results*" (PS, 51), Hegel explains that self-completing skepticism identifies a positive, determinate product issuing from the oppositions which it engages – a product, that is, which not only negates, but simultaneously preserves, the oppositions through which a given form of consciousness is made intelligible. The Pyrrhonist can never hope to reach such a "determinate nothingness" (PS, 51) because the suspension of judgment requires that she remain as indifferent to the counter-argument she puts forth as to the original assertion she sets out to contest. To the Pyrrhonist, what is most significant is that the equipollence of opposing claims brings knowledge to a standstill. This is why Hegel considers Pyrrhonism to be engaged in a purely "negative procedure" (PS, 50). "But," Hegel argues, "when the result [of contradiction] is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself" (PS, 51). It is just such a transition that Hegel attempts to express with the term "sublation,"[16] and it is only because sublation is "at once a *negating* and a *preserving*" (PS, 68) of what is contained within a given form of consciousness that the forward progress from one form to the next is made possible. Thus, Pyrrhonism may certainly lead one to despair about the truth of natural consciousness, but this despair is a roadblock obstructing the way forward to true knowing,

rather than that path which “renders the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is” (PS, 50).

This is, however, precisely what occurs in the case of self-completing skepticism. Rather than treat contradiction as the undoing of knowledge, self-completing skepticism regards it as a necessary moment in the development of science – one which allows the phenomenological observer not only to recognize the falsity of a given pattern of knowing, but also to discover a new pattern disclosed in this very negation. Because, as Hegel argues, the distinction between the concept of knowledge ("being-for-another") and the object of knowledge ("being-in-itself") belongs to consciousness itself, the phenomenological observer need not provide her own criterion in order evaluate each pattern of knowing, but merely "look on" to see whether these two moments correspond to one another within a given form of consciousness. Hegel describes this procedure in the following:

> If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. […] Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test; in other words, the criterion for testing is altered when that for which it was to have been the criterion fails to pass the test; and the testing is not only a testing of what we know, but also a testing of the criterion of what knowing is (PS, 54-55).

If, after demonstrating the non-correspondence of the concept of knowledge and the object of knowledge within a given pattern of knowing, self-completing skepticism merely fastened onto the negative result of its findings (that is, the fact that this pattern does *not* constitute true knowledge), then it would hardly be distinguishable from the dogmatic skepticism of Sextus Empiricus. To the extent, however, that it identifies a positive, determinate result captured in the

negation of a given knowledge-claim (that is, that consciousness alters its own shape when confronted by the non-correspondence of its two moments), it is able to advance beyond the narrow limits of Pyrrhonism. This difference between Pyrrhonism's own self-understanding and that of self-completing skepticism is ultimately what allows the latter to qualify as the skepticism that is one with philosophy and, as we will see next, it is precisely this difference which Hegel chooses to highlight when he takes up Pyrrhonism as a pattern of knowing in the *Phenomenology*.

In the section entitled "Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness," Hegel examines three patterns of knowing which, as moments of Self-Consciousness, suggest that all knowledge is essentially *self*-knowledge. While Hegel finds in "Stoicism" a shape of consciousness which merely asserts the freedom of thought from the "bustle of existence," in "Skepticism" he takes up the "actual experience of what the freedom of thought is" (PS, 123) – a mode of thinking which attempts to establish its own absolute independence by tearing down everything firm which would stand in its way. As Hegel explains, however, "what [Pyrrhonian] Skepticism causes to vanish is not only objective reality as such, but its own relationship to it" (PS, 124). If the Pyrrhonist can only establish her own absolute *independence* by negating all otherness standing before her, this means that she is in fact *dependent* on the negation of the existence of this otherness to achieve self-certainty:

> This consciousness is therefore the unconscious, thoughtless rambling which passes back and forth from the one extreme of self-identical self-consciousness to the other extreme of contingent consciousness that is both bewildered and bewildering. It does not itself bring these two thoughts of itself together. At one time it recognizes that its freedom lies in rising above all the confusion and contingency of existence, and at another time equally admits to a relapse into occupying itself with what is unessential (PS, 125).

In this way, Hegel locates within Pyrrhonism a disparity between its concept and its object of knowledge. Although it maintains that all knowledge is simply the self-knowledge of a stable, self-identical, and radically independent subjectivity, it turns out that what it really knows is an utterly dependent figure which can escape the "contingency of existence" no more than the otherness that it seeks to annihilate in thought; what it knows is merely the "dizziness of a perpetually self-engendered disorder" (PS, 125).

Because the path outlined in the *Phenomenology* is one of self-completing skepticism, when the phenomenological observer is thus presented with the self-contradictory character of Pyrrhonism, she does not merely linger over the negative result of this form of consciousness, but identifies in its failure a new configuration of knowing – one which "brings together the two thoughts which [Pyrrhonian] Skepticism holds apart" (PS, 126). Since Pyrrhonism, however, insists on the mutual exclusivity of its two moments, oscillating between two conflicting conceptions of itself (as absolutely independent, on the one hand, and as absolutely dependent, on the other), it is incapable of acknowledging the emergence of this new pattern of knowing, which Hegel characterizes as the "unhappy"[17] awareness of Pyrrhonism's own self-contradictory nature. Here, we encounter once more the distinction which Hegel drew earlier in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*: unlike self-completing skepticism, Pyrrhonism cannot advance beyond the negative result of contradiction – not even when it is confronted with a contradiction which obtains in its own self-understanding.[18] The reason why Pyrrhonism "only ever sees pure nothingness in its result" (PS, 51) is because it takes contradiction to entail falsehood. Now, self-completing skepticism shares this conviction with Pyrrhonism insofar as it considers the non-correspondence of concept and object in a given pattern of knowing to

disqualify its claim to truth; however, it differs from Pyrrhonism in its understanding of the nature of falsity:

> To know something falsely means that there is a disparity between knowledge and its Substance. But this very disparity is the process of distinguishing in general, which is an essential moment [in knowing]. Out of this distinguishing, of course, comes their identity, and this resultant identity is the truth. But it is not truth as if the disparity had been thrown away, like dross from pure metal, not even like the tool which remains separate from the finished vessel; disparity, rather, as the negative, the self, is itself directly present in the True as such (PS, 23).

To say that a given pattern of knowing is "false" on account of the disparity between its concept and object is not, therefore, to say that it is extraneous to genuine philosophical cognition. Rather, the same process which exposes what is false in a given pattern of knowing through the comparison of its moments reveals what is true of that same form. As Hegel is quick to point out, however, this does not mean that the "false is a moment of the True, let alone a component part of it" (PS, 23) – for this would be to suppose that "truth" and "falsity," like oil and water, are so constituted that they must repel one another whenever they come into contact. It means rather that the truth only emerges through the determinate negation – that is, through the “sublation” – of the false. The "truth" of a given form of consciousness – and likewise its "falsity" – is preserved in the shape succeeding it as the determinate negation of that concept-object disparity present in this now superseded form. It is in this sense that the "Unhappy Consciousness" constitutes the "truth" of "Skepticism." Because Pyrrhonism, by contrast, takes a dogmatic approach to falsehood, it fails to recognize that the oppositions upon which it one-sidedly insists already betray the presence of truth.

Thus, if we now ask what accounts for this fundamental difference between Pyrrhonism and self-completing skepticism, we find ourselves met once more with the foremost insight of the Skepticism essay. The Pyrrhonist is unwilling to accept the fact that negation is an essential

moment in knowing because she holds dogmatically to the opposition of truth and falsehood – because, that is, she cannot countenance their unity. Between the Skepticism essay and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, therefore, Hegel's view of Pyrrhonism remains essentially unchanged: Pyrrhonism cannot be considered a genuine mode of philosophical cognition since it fails to recognize the dogmatic character of the principle of noncontradiction. On the other hand, because self-completing skepticism brings together the two opposing moments held apart in every form of natural consciousness, it would seem to possess the defining characteristic of a philosophy which is "neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP, 323) – namely, that it acknowledges the unity that emerges through the sublation of contradictories. Consequently, self-completing skepticism can be seen as a later articulation of what Hegel described in his 1802 article for the Critical Journal under the heading of “the rational.” In fact, the only significant difference between these consists in the fact that the latter merely names that speculative standpoint from which the "essence of dogmatism" becomes visible, while self-completing skepticism reveals the dogmatic character of every form of natural consciousness through the sublation of the finite oppositions upon which they are founded. And yet, if, as I have argued, the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* approximates Hegel's description of a form of skepticism that is "in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23), one might wonder whether this should be considered a form of skepticism at all. It is to this question that we now turn in conclusion.

I have argued that that particular form of skepticism which Hegel sees as one with philosophy is not that of Schulze, the New Academy, or Sextus Empiricus, since each of these remain beholden to the principle of noncontradiction, but the self-completing skepticism of the *Phenomenology* – a later, more carefully developed articulation of what Hegel calls in the

Skepticism essay “the rational.” However, if, as Hegel writes, "the concepts of skepticism which allow it to be viewed *only* in the particular form in which it comes on the scene as skepticism pure and simple, disappear in the face of a philosophic standpoint from which it can be found as genuine skepticism even *in those philosophical systems* which Sch[ulze] and others with him can only regard as dogmatic" (RSP, 322), then it would seem to follow that self-completing skepticism is – strictly speaking – no form of skepticism at all. To view the matter this way, however, is to miss the entire point of Hegel's discussion of the philosophical significance of skepticism. The Pyrrhonist may insist on the antagonistic nature of the relationship of skepticism to philosophy, but, if my interpretation is correct, this is only because her dogmatic adherence to the principle of noncontradiction prevents her from acknowledging the fact that opposition is an indispensable moment in all genuine philosophical cognition, and not, as the Pyrrhonist maintains, the foreclosure of this possibility. Accordingly, to oppose skepticism to philosophy is already, in principle, to admit that "skepticism is itself in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy" (RSP, 322-23) – or, to put the same point another way, that philosophy is the sublation of skepticism. As I have tried to show, the line of argument that Hegel develops across the Skepticism essay and the *Phenomenology* challenges us not only to rethink the opposition between philosophy and skepticism, but, equally, to rethink the nature of opposition itself. Indeed, Hegel’s insight into the relationship of skepticism and philosophy leads him not only beyond the oppositions of consciousness, and thus, to the completion of skepticism in “absolute knowing,” but also, in the *Logic*, to the deeper metaphysical claim that opposition constitutes a fundamental feature of “everything true in general” (EL, 125) – namely, the “dialectical” or “negatively rational” side of the dialectic. Thus, when Hegel later remarks in the *Logic* that the second moment of the dialectic, “when taken in isolation by the understanding, constitutes

skepticism" (EL, 128), he is merely drawing out the metaphysical implications of his critique of Pyrrhonism. Accordingly, to say that Pyrrhonism is dogmatic, for Hegel, is to say that it fails to recognize not only that opposition is an indispensable moment in all genuine philosophical cognition, but even more fundamentally, that opposition belongs to the very nature of what is. Hegel's suggestion is that Pyrrhonism is not, therefore, merely an inadequate account of the true nature of cognition – it is an account which is bound to result whenever opposition is taken to exclude unity at the metaphysical level.

[1] G. E. Schulze, *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie, Bd. 1*. Hamburg: Bohm, 1801.

[2] G. W. F. Hegel, "Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison to the Latest Form with the Ancient One," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 322-23. Hereafter cited parenthetically as RSP.

[3] G. E. Schulze, "Aenesidemus, or Concerning the Foundations of the Philosophy of the Elements Issued by Prof. Reinhold in Jena Together with a Defence of Skepticism Against the Pretentions of The Critique of Reason," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*, ed. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 112-13.

[4] Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen, Bd. 1*, ed. Faustino Fabbianell (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), 167.

[5] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 281.

[6] G. E. Schulze, "Aenesidemus," 113.

[7] George di Giovanni has a helpful discussion of this point in "The Facts of Consciousness," his introductory essay to *Between Kant and Hegel: Texts in the Development of Post-Kantian Idealism*.

[8] G. E. Schulze, "Aenesidemus," 113.

[9] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxv. Hereafter cited parenthetically as CPR.

[10] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 59-60. Hereafter cited parenthetically as OS.

[11] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume II: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 311. Hegel makes the same point in the Skepticism essay: "So Sextus was far removed in every way from distinguishing the teaching of Arcesilaus from skepticism itself" (RSP, 326).

[12] See Michael Forster, "The Superiority of Ancient to Modern Skepticism," in *Skeptizismus und spekulatives Denken in der Philosophie Hegels*, ed. H.F. Fulda and R.P. Horstmann, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), 69.

[13] Hegel thus seems to use the terms "dogmatic" and "formal" interchangeably: "To say that a proposition is merely formal, means for Reason, that it is posited alone and on its own account, without the equal affirmation of the contradictory that is opposed to it; and just for that reason it is false" (RSP, 325).

[14] As Hegel explains in an addition to paragraph 28 of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, "that which comes to an end, that which [merely] *is*, is called finite, and it ceases where it is connected to its other and is thus limited by the latter." G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline: Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 68. Hereafter cited parenthetically as EL.

[15] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 49. Hereafter cited parenthetically as PS.

[16] Hegel offers a helpful explanation of this term in a remark on Becoming in the *Science of Logic*: "*To sublate* and *being sublated* (the *idealized*) constitute one of the most important concepts in philosophy. It is a fundamental determination that repeatedly occurs everywhere in it, the meaning of which must be grasped with precision and especially distinguished from *nothing*. – What is sublated does not thereby turn into nothing. Nothing is the *immediate*; something sublated is on the contrary something *mediated*; it is something non-existent but as a result that has proceeded from a being; it still *has in itself*, therefore, the *determinateness from which it derives*." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81.

[17] Pyrrhonian skepticism is therefore "unhappy," for Hegel, since he finds that tranquility (*ataraxia*) does not, as Sextus claims, follow the suspension of judgment "as a shadow follows the body" (OS, 11).

[18] Hegel presents the same critique of Pyrrhonism later in the second volume of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*: "Skepticism deduces no result, nor does it express its negation as anything positive. But the positive is in no way different from the simple; or if Skepticism aims at the disappearance of all that is universal, its condition, as immovability of spirit, is itself in fact this universal, simple, self-identical – but a universality (or a Being) which is the universality of the individual consciousness. Skeptical self-consciousness, however, is this divided consciousness to which on the one hand motion is a confusion of its content; it is this movement which annuls for itself all things, in which what is offered to it is quite contingent and indifferent; it acts according to laws which are not held by it to be true, and is a perfectly empiric existence. On another side its simple thought is the immovability of self-identity, but its reality, its unity with itself is something that is perfectly empty, and the actual filling in is any

content that one chooses." G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume II: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 371.