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The Inferential Object: Hegel's Deduction and Reduction of Consciousness

Zusammenfassung. Der Aufsatz untersucht Hegels immanente Kritik von Kants Idealismus in den drei Bewusstseins-Kapiteln der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Hegel will zeigen, dass das Objekt letztlich im „absoluten Begriff“ begründet ist, indem er gegen die Trennung von Anschauung und Begriff argumentiert, die für Kants Position zur Objektivität in der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* charakteristisch ist. Die Kritik ist immanent, weil Hegels Methode der „Gestalten des Bewusstseins“ mittels einer Dialektik des Urteils funktioniert. Diese Dialektik hat die negative Eigenschaft, die Trennung von Begriff und Objekt zu verringern, und die positive Eigenschaft, die logische Struktur der Objektivität herzuleiten. Ich argumentiere dafür, dass die endgültige Auffassung, die am Ende von „Kraft und Verstand“ erreicht wird, eine inferentielle Konzeption des Objektes ist. Das Objekt ist eine holistische Einheit von Inferenzen, die die Universalität von Gesetzen garantiert, aber im einzelnen Fall der Anwendung der Gesetze auch konkret ist.

In the *Encyclopedia* “Phenomenology of Spirit” Hegel makes the striking claim that Kantian idealism never reached the standpoint of the philosophy of spirit. He writes,

[t]he Kantian philosophy may be most determinately regarded as having construed spirit [*Geist*] as consciousness, and as containing the determinations only of the phenomenology, not of the philosophy, of spirit.¹

Hegel thinks of consciousness as marked by an opposition between the subject and object. He is criticizing Kant here for limiting cognition to the *appearances* of objects and for positing a thing-in-itself inaccessible to the knowing subject. Of course it is Hegel who is known for presenting a phenomenological account, and an important implication of this passage is that Hegel's own phenomenology of spirit can be seen as an *immanent* critique of Kant's idealism, a way to overcome Kantian phenomenology through a proper understanding of the implications of a

¹ E §415. I have altered the Wallace/Miller/Inwood translation (PM). Though in this context I prefer their “mind” for *Geist*, for unity's sake I use “spirit” throughout.

completed phenomenology.² In this paper I explicate this immanent critique of Kant through a reading of the “Consciousness” section of the Jena *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Kant is not the only target of critique in these chapters, but he is certainly the most important. My aim is to unpack Hegel’s argument that the determinations of consciousness are ultimately grounded in what he calls “the absolute concept” (9.99, §162), and to show how this argument is supposed to establish an identity of subject and object that is the standpoint of philosophy proper.³

How does Hegel’s treatment of consciousness purport to overcome Kantian phenomenology? The first point is that Hegel lines up the subject–object opposition characteristic of consciousness with the familiar (and much discussed) concept–intuition dichotomy in Kant’s idealism.⁴ Hegel thinks that if he can show that the intuitive dimension of consciousness is grounded in the conceptual without the remainder of the thing-in-itself, that will count as having overcome consciousness. As we will see, Hegel actually separates the critique of the Kantian sensible given and the Kantian thing-in-itself, but both critiques stand in the service of the overall project of overcoming the phenomenological standpoint. To critique consciousness Hegel argues first (in Chapters I and II) for the conceptual basis of sensible intuition and perceptual consciousness, and second (in Chapter III) against the idea of a supersensible ground (the thing-in-itself) of appearances. The trickiest dimension of understanding these arguments is specifying how they are not just destructive, but also constructive. Hegel not only aims to dismantle these claims to knowledge by *reducing* the opposition between object and subject, intuition and concept. If the arguments were just negative, the end result – the absolute concept or simply “the concept” – could not be the truth or ground of consciousness and its objects. Hegel’s overcoming of consciousness thus also involves a positive aspect that I refer to in this

² By “Kantian phenomenology” I refer specifically to Kant’s basic claim in his theoretical philosophy that our knowledge of the objective world is restricted to knowledge of appearances.

³ Citations of the *Phenomenology* give the volume and page number from Hegel’s *Gesammelte Werke* and then the paragraph number from the Miller and Pinkard translations (when the numbers diverge I follow the Miller numbering). I use the Pinkard translation with some alterations.

⁴ Hegel brings the two points together in the *Science of Logic*, where he writes of Kantian idealism: “But [...] it is also equally claimed that we cannot know things as they are in and for themselves and that truth is inaccessible to rational cognition; that the aforesaid truth that would consist in the unity of the object and the concept is in fact only appearance, again on the ground now that the content is only the manifold of intuition” (GW 12.24, SL 521). A few pages later he writes of Kant, “the manifoldness of intuition was too strong for him to be able to wrest himself away from it and turn to a consideration of the concept and the categories in and for themselves, and to a speculative form of philosophizing” (GW 12.27, SL 524).

paper as a *deduction* of the object of consciousness. The object that results from the whole process will be essentially constituted by its conceptual or logical determinations. This positive dimension of the immanent critique is crucial because it allows Hegel to say that he has actually delivered an account of the objective knowledge that Kant had aimed to capture, and that he has done so without the restriction to appearances characteristic of Kant's idealism.⁵

A major interpretive challenge is to see how Hegel's *method* in his critique of Kantian phenomenology is also immanent, how the dialectic is related closely enough to Kant's philosophy for Hegel to be able to claim that he is meeting Kant on his own terms. The most prominent Kantian reading of the dialectical method in the *Phenomenology* takes it to involve a series of *transcendental arguments*.⁶ I am skeptical that such an interpretation is true to Hegel's procedure, especially because the language of presupposition so central to transcendental arguments is not utilized by Hegel (even though it does play a prominent role in the *Science of Logic*). There is in fact a more basic Kantian element in Hegel's method, namely the role of *judgment* in constituting objectivity. Once we understand Hegel's method in terms of judgment (I lay this out in section 1), we are then in a position to see how Hegel's overcoming of consciousness involves an immanent overcoming of judgment's subject-copula-predicate structure. Hegel's key move is to show how the *object* (which of course stands in the *subject* position in a judgment) dissolves into the conceptual relations implicit in the copula and the predicates, but that the unity of the object can nevertheless be recovered as an inferentially articulated unity, a totality of relations. Because Hegel only gives a thorough account of the inference within the *Science of Logic*, where he presents it in its pure conceptual form, the relation of the inference to the more accessible themes of the *Phenomenology* has been hard to pin down. In particular, the inference has been hard to bring into contact with a key aspect of the *Phenomenology* that makes it so appealing to contemporary readers, namely that it operates at the boundary between empirical and logical concepts. My aim is to show that and how Hegel overcomes the form of consciousness by establishing an *inferential unity* of subject and object, of concept and intuition.⁷

⁵ I am not here providing a detailed account of all the moves in the three "Consciousness" chapters. For an excellent recent account, see Emundts (2012).

⁶ This reading was pioneered by Taylor (1972).

⁷ I cannot investigate here the vexed question of the relation between the two versions of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Suffice it to say that I think that his introductory remarks in the *Encyclopedia* version (from which I am quoting here) apply to the Jena version as well.

While the structure of the object has been a central topic in recent scholarship,⁸ there is ongoing controversy over how Hegel sought to overcome Kant's approach to objectivity, and in particular over how Hegel's thought should be viewed in relation to pre-critical metaphysics. I do not address that debate directly here, for this essay aims to lay out Hegel's inferentialism on the basis of his text, prior to considering how we draw the line between pre- and post-critical metaphysics. My argument draws on elements of Robert Brandom's inferentialist interpretation of the *Phenomenology's* "Consciousness" chapters,⁹ though my aim is to provide an account of Hegel's inferentialism that is independent of Brandom's systematic philosophy of language.¹⁰ The intertwining of Hegel interpretation and systematic philosophy is one thing that makes Brandom's project so stimulating, but it has also proven to be a stumbling block for scholars aiming to do justice to the details and systematic power of Hegel's own thought. I find the core inferentialist idea of Brandom's approach very appealing, but I take that appeal to be a reason to vindicate an inferentialist interpretation of Hegel's philosophy through a reading that hews closely to the arguments as Hegel himself presented them.

1. Judgment in Hegel's Method of Self-Testing

The goal of this section is to lay out the steps of Hegel's method in the *Phenomenology* in terms of two kinds of *judgment*. Hegel's method takes off from the epistemological project of identifying the criterion of knowledge through an examination of consciousness. Because nothing is justified at this introductory point of inquiry, it is hard to know how an investigation of consciousness can

8 See especially Pippin (1989), Stern (1990) and (2009), Lumsden (2003), Kreines (2004) and (2008), and Sedgwick (2012).

9 See Brandom (2002), Chapter 5. For perspicuous critiques of Brandom's essay, see Pippin (2007) and Houlgate (2008). See also Redding (2007) for a discussion of Brandom's view and for discussions of the Sellarsian background to Brandom's account. For a different Sellars-inspired take on the *Phenomenology*, see Pinkard (1994). Pinkard's reading rightly stresses the social character of reason, an aspect of Hegel's overall view that I am purposely avoiding in this essay.

10 In Brandom's terms, I am offering here a *de dicto* account, meaning an account that attempts to reconstruct Hegel's own argument as he understood it, rather than a *de re* account like Brandom's that imports collateral commitments into the interpretation. For this distinction in types of reading, see Brandom (2002), pp. 94–107.

so much as get off the ground.¹¹ Hegel claims to escape this impasse by examining the criterion that is internal to each “shape of consciousness” through a *self-testing* of consciousness from which the genuine criterion of knowledge will emerge.

A shape of consciousness centers on a subject's claim to knowledge, which in Hegel's view includes a double relation to the object. On the one hand the subject relates to the object through certain sensory, perceptual, and conceptual capacities (that Hegel groups on the side of the *concept* in the Introduction). On the other hand a shape of consciousness includes a certain conception of the object as independent, as the in-itself or truth that serves as the standard for knowledge. In the self-testing process consciousness is forced to recognize that what it took to be the independent object was in fact a *limited conception* of the object, a mediated appropriation of the in-itself rather than a completely independent standard for knowledge.¹²

The loss of the object seems like a failure, but the experience is productive in that it produces a transition to a new shape of consciousness. There is a built-in impetus towards greater universality in the breakdown or failure, for there is always a kind of immediacy or particularity that compromises the initial shape and that is negated in the breakdown. This new shape arises through determinate negation of the previous concept-object pairing. The transition is not a matter of simply adjusting the concepts in order to grasp more adequately a static object-conception. There is a “new true object” (9.60, §86) that is what the previous object turned out to be “for consciousness,” the *result* of consciousness's failed test. The switch from knowledge to object is a “reversal of consciousness” (9.61, §87) that the philosopher contributes to the process.

Schematically, we can understand Hegel's method as involving two “shapes” separated by three distinct stages of argument, giving a total of five steps in the method. Taking a shape of consciousness as always having the form of a *judgment*,¹³ the method runs as follows:

¹¹ I cannot within the scope of this paper address all of the dimensions of the skepticism issue. For an excellent recent account, see Heidemann (2008).

¹² “It thus becomes [evident] to consciousness that what was formerly to it the *in-itself* [das *An-sich*] is not in itself, or that it was *in itself* merely *for consciousness*.” (9.60, §85)

¹³ See E §412 and §417Z, §423, where Hegel explicitly links the standpoint of phenomenology to judgment. While the importance of the judgment, as that which comes in between the concept and inference, is frequently mentioned in recent writing on Hegel's *Science of Logic*, it is seldom discussed in a systematic way in commentaries on the *Phenomenology*. Exceptions to this are Pippin (1989) and Lumsden (2003).

- (1) *Shape1*: Judgment of Object1 through Concept1.
- (2) *Breakdown*: Demonstrates incongruence between multiple judgments.
- (3) *Result*: Object1-for-consciousness = reflective judgment of universality.
- (4) *Reversal* (by us): Produces next shape by turning the *result* into the new object.
- (5) *Shape2*: Judgment of Object2 (= Object1-for-consciousness) through Concept2.

A shape has the form of a judgment in that there are two elements connected by a copula, “X is Y.” In the description of Step 2 I am using “incongruence” as a general term, overlapping with formal terms such as inconsistency or contradiction, but meant to emphasize that the issue in the breakdown is always formulated in a manner specific to the shape under consideration.¹⁴

Before going further into the details of Steps 3–5, let’s see how the first steps of the method function in the first case, “Sense-certainty.” Hegel’s opening move in “Sense-certainty” is in effect to shoe-horn the most immediate shape of consciousness into a judgmental structure. From the immediate “this is,” Hegel draws out the idea of identifying an *example*, an *instance* (9.64, §95). This move leads to the first real claim of this shape of consciousness, “*The now is the night*” (9.64, §95), and to its spatial counterpart, “*The here is, for example, the tree*” (9.65, §98). By multiplying instances of these judgments Hegel is able to generate judgments that are incongruent with each other (Step 2). The move to the “result” happens when we take “this,” “here,” and “now” to be universal terms (Step 3).

14 There is much that is right about Brandom’s use of “material incompatibility” to designate this element of Hegel’s view. But Brandom’s main example of material incompatibility, the exclusion of square by triangular (Brandom 2002, p. 179), does not support thinking of material incompatibility as a general model for Hegel’s understanding of determinate negation (Brandom wants to model all determinacy on the determinacy of such empirical concepts, but I think this is a major departure from Hegel’s view on the primacy of logical concepts). I am using “incongruence” not for determinate negation in general, but for the negation that sets up the unification in a new universal that contains the determinacy of the first negation but also introduces the element of self-reference. In contrast to “incompatibility,” “incongruence” has the connotation of a whole with discordant parts, which supports Hegel’s emphasis on the negativity within a single entity rather than (as on Brandom’s model) mainly between various entities or properties. Another advantage of “incongruence” is that its positive counterparts, congruence and congruent, are preferable to compatibility, for the latter is too weak to capture the synthesis that constitutes new objects once a new concept comes on the scene. That congruence is the result of taking what had been determinately opposed into a self-referential unity of relations. There is one point in the *Science of Logic*, when Hegel is introducing “The Idea,” where he uses “congruence (*Kongruenz*)” in this sense. See 12.174, SL 671.

The breakdown phase of the method should thus be understood as a breakdown in judgment, one that comes about through contact with other judgments that are incongruent with the original judgment. The incongruence is “internal” because the conflicting judgments are of the same type, or rely on the same criterion. This internal breakdown of judgment is especially clear in “Sense-Certainty” when Hegel considers the I who makes the judgment as the source of the judgment. He writes:

I, *this*, see the tree and *assert the tree to be here*. However, another I sees the house and asserts that there is no tree here but rather a house. Both truths have the same warrant, namely, the immediacy of seeing and the trustworthiness and assurance which both have about their knowledge. However, one vanishes into the other (9.66, §101).

Substituting “judgments” for “truths,” this passage shows how the initial immediate judgment is undermined by an equally justified judgment by another. The lesson is that the immediate subject of the judgment must be reconceived as a universal, for there is no problem reconciling the judgments if we view them in terms of indexicals: “I see a house here,” “I see a tree here,” etc. “I” is just then a universal term or concept that has different instances.

While the initial shape has the character of a *determining* judgment, in which particulars are subsumed under universals, the move from the incongruent judgments to the new universal content (from Step 2 to Step 3) has the character of what Kant calls *reflective* judgment.¹⁵ This becomes clear when we consider what Hegel says about reflective judgment in the *Science of Logic*. In the *Science of Logic* Hegel writes the following of this kind of judgment, which starts from the immediate individual and then arrives at a universal:

For the universal, the principle or the rule and law to which reflection rises in its process of determination *counts as the essence* of the immediate from which the reflection began [...]. Therefore, what reflection does to the immediate, and the determinations that derive from it, is not anything external to it but is rather its true [*eigentliches*] being (GW 11.254, SL 350; translation altered, italics added).

This move from immediacy to universality is just what Hegel carries out in the move from the multiple incongruent immediate judgments to the universal result. The universal *counts as the essence* (*Wesen*) of the next shape of consciousness, and thus becomes the basis of a determining judgment for a domain of newly constituted objects.

¹⁵ See Pippin (1997) on the importance of reflective judgment for Hegel.

To connect reflective judgment to the *Phenomenology's* method, it is crucial to see that Hegel uses “essence” to describe the content that is transferred from one shape of consciousness to another. In the Introduction he writes of the way in which the result includes a new essence, and thus a new object, “the first object is thereby altered; it ceases to be the in-itself and in its eyes becomes the *in-itself merely for consciousness*. However, what we thereby have is the truth, the *being-for-it of this in-itself*, which means that this is the *essence*, that is, its *object*” (9.60, §86). This structure mirrors exactly the claim that Hegel makes for reflective judgment in the passage from the *Science of Logic* above. Reflective judgment arrives at an essence that is the truth of the previous immediate judgments.

If a determining judgment involves a simple copula “is,” we can think of a reflective judgment as involving the more complex “is essentially.” In “Sense-certainty,” the judgments “now is night,” “now is day,” “now is afternoon,” show the inadequacy of the immediate judgment, with the result expressed in the reflective judgment “now is essentially universal.” The immediately given object-instances can now be classified through indexical terms conceived as universals (such as “now,” “here,” “I,” etc.).

The *reversal* that connects two shapes of consciousness (Step 4) switches the new universality from one side (knowledge) to the other side (object). Hegel writes of the reversal of consciousness as “our contribution” to this experience, but insists that we do not thereby *add* any content. We merely connect the content to a new concept and a new object (9.61, §87). We take advantage of a lesson that consciousness has learned via experience and reflective judgment, namely that our initial determining judgments of individual objects demand a universal, or more robustly universal, characterization. In the subsequent shape (Step 5) we take this more robust universality to be constitutive of the object, a new true object that is subsumed under a new concept, which in turns sets up a new breakdown and result.

2. Reduction, Deduction and Inference

With this judgment-based outline of the method in place, I can now explain exactly how I am using the terms deduction and reduction. I am using *reduction* to designate the move from the breakdown of the concept-object pair to the resulting object-for-consciousness (Step 2 to Step 3). It is important to stress that I am not arguing that objects are reduced to concepts such that in the end we can

summon objects at will just by thinking them.¹⁶ Rather, the reduction is of the object *qua object of consciousness*, where consciousness is characterized by an *opposition* of subject and object. So what is reduced is the *difference* between the concept and object. The reflective judgment draws out the consequences of the demonstrated incongruence in the initial shape by locating a new concept that unifies the manifold of disparate determining judgments. Those judgments are in effect *reinterpreted* by the reflective judgment so that they are congruent, and in that reinterpretation the immediacy of the original shape gives way to mediation and universality. When the reflective judgment substitutes an “is essentially” for the previous “is,” the difference between the subject and object is reduced because the object’s non-essential character is left behind.

While in the *Phenomenology* Hegel only uses the term reduction (*Reduktion*) in a narrow context (see section 4 below), he does use the term in my broad sense in the *Science of Logic*. In the introduction to the “Logic of the Concept” he writes:

Abstractive thought, therefore, is not to be regarded as the mere discarding of a sensuous material which does not suffer in the process any impairment of reality; it is rather the sublation and *reduction* (emphasis added) of that material as mere *appearance* to the *essential*, which is manifested only in the *concept* (GW 12.21, SL 519).

The reduction involves an “impairment of reality” of the sensuous, for the reduction results in determination through the essential universality, and in the end through the absolute concept. We can also see how the phenomenological character of consciousness itself is reduced in this move, since in this passage Hegel contrasts the essential with appearance, and gives priority to the conceptual as *the essential*.

The *deduction* as I am using it is a deduction of the conceptual structure of the object. Each shape of consciousness includes a pure concept or category that

¹⁶ This would be the kind of reduction that Sedgwick has recently made a point of arguing against. See Sedgwick (2012), pp. 8–9 and 56–59. Her argument for a reciprocal determination of concept and intuition is compatible with the view presented here that Hegel aims to reduce the gap between concept and intuition in a way that gives priority to the concept. Pippin reads the reduction in Hegel’s method as “an extended *reductio ad absurdum* of any skepticism about Notion-object ‘identity’ [...] a systematic rejection of the *skeptical* claim of nonidentity between even the *necessary* conditions of our experience of the world and the world in itself” (Pippin 1989, p. 108). While I think that this description of Hegel’s goal is basically correct, I don’t think that *reductio ad absurdum* is the right way to think about Hegel’s arguments. In very few cases in the *Phenomenology* (the “frenzy of self-conceit” would be one) does Hegel argue in such a way that the position he reduces is shown to be absurd, rather than one-sided, limited, etc.

partly constitutes the structure of the object. The categories that are deduced are for Hegel *logical categories*, such as the *for-itself* and *for-another* that together constitute *relation*. Yet it is important to the overall account that the deduction of each specific category also secures a connection to subjective capacities (sensing, perceiving, understanding) and empirical judgments. The deduction of the inferential object is supposed to both draw out the full logical structure of objectivity *and* account for how, with the capacities of consciousness, we actually do make well-grounded claims about ordinary objects.

To get this interplay of the empirical and logical to work, Hegel has to show that for each subjective capacity there is a single logical form or type of judgment. He does this through an underappreciated aspect of his method that I call *judgment-invariance*. Hegel typically stages an initial scene of incongruence and reduction, such as the above reduction of the “now” and “here” to universality, and then he allows consciousness to regroup and to place the source of the judgment in the subject, in the I as sensing, perceiving, etc. Next, after that subject-oriented version breaks down, consciousness regroups once again and tries to save its knowledge by insisting on the integrity of the whole relational complex of subject and object.¹⁷ By repeating the experience or reduction of the shape, Hegel is able to strengthen his deduction by binding more tightly a specific subjective capacity (i. e., sensing, perceiving, understanding) to a certain type of judgment. Hegel thus shows not only that each shape of consciousness has a characteristic judgmental structure, but also that attempts to deny that structure in the face of criticism are futile.

My judgment-based account of the method explains how Hegel moves from one shape to another, but it does not yet provide much insight into how Hegel conceives of the knowledge that is the goal of the method. It is therefore worth examining up front an important passage from “Absolute Knowing” in which Hegel looks back on what the first three chapters achieved. This passage is at once the clearest evidence that Hegel thought of Chs. I–III as deducing the inferential object, and the most definitive statement of that achievement. He writes:

The object is therefore in part *immediate* being, that is, a thing in general (*überhaupt*), something which corresponds to immediate consciousness. In part, it is a coming-to-be-the-other of itself, its relation, that is, *being for an other* and *being-for-itself*, the determinateness which corresponds to *perception*, and, in part, it is *essence*, that is, the universal which corresponds to the understanding. The object as a whole is the inference (*Schluss*), that is, the movement of the universal into individuality by way of determination, as well as

17 Stewart (1999) lays out clearly these different stages.

the converse movement from individuality to the universal by way of sublated individuality, that is, determination (9.422–423, §789).

From this passage we learn that there are three separate moments corresponding to the three chapters, and that “the object as a whole” is the inference, or rather two complementary types of inference. What Hegel calls here “the object as a whole” is the endpoint of the *completed* reduction and deduction of consciousness. The three specific categories correspond to three *partial deductions*, and as we will see, there are three *partial reductions* corresponding to the three shapes of consciousness. The three categories established in the partial deductions are 1) immediacy or thinghood, 2) relation or for-itself and for-another, and 3) universality or essence. As we will see, the reduced results following from the breakdown of these three are 1) mediated universality, 2) unconditioned absolute universality, and 3) inner necessity.

How are we to read the relation of these partial categories to “the object as a whole”? Specifically, how are the partial moments contained in the two inferences that constitute the whole? I take it that the three individual categories characterize entities that are not *complete objects*, or stated more intuitively, not *fully objective*. This implies that the inferential structure of the object as a whole is the *criterion* that an entity must satisfy in order to *count* as a complete object, as fully objective. The criterion at issue is thus best characterized as a standard of *intelligibility*, where intelligibility defines objectivity.¹⁸ Returning to the claim about Kant with which I started, it is this criterion of the object as a whole that allows us to move from the phenomenology to the philosophy of spirit, for it allows us to understand the mind *in its identity* with the object rather than seeing the object as merely appearing to a mind standing over against it. The two inferences of the complete object have the familiar three-term structure of the Hegelian concept (Hegel uses “determinacy” rather than the usual “particularity” in the above passage as the term that mediates between individuals and the abstract universals). Deducing this inferential object through reducing the ordinary objects of consciousness is the first major element of the *Phenomenology*'s overall argument of showing that all possible shapes of consciousness return into the absolute concept as their ground.¹⁹ To achieve this goal is to justify

¹⁸ I resist labeling this standard as *either* semantic *or* metaphysical. I would like to say it is both, but I cannot get into that issue here.

¹⁹ Hegel writes in the *Science of Logic*: “In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have presented consciousness as it progresses from the first immediate opposition of itself and the subject matter (*Gegenstandes*) to absolute knowledge. This path traverses all the forms of the *relation of consciousness to the object (Objekte)* and its result is the *concept of science*. There is no need, there-

the standpoint of philosophy or “science,” thereby overcoming the Kantian phenomenological standpoint.

3. Individuation and Relationality in Perceptual Judgment

The reduced content that is the result of “Sense-certainty” is not a bare universal, but rather a “mediated universal,” an immediate identity of individual and universal that is now the basis of the next shape of consciousness.²⁰ The reversal of consciousness from “Sense-certainty” to “Perception” places the mediated universal in the object position.²¹ The object of perception contains both the universal thinghood and the universal sense-properties of the previous shape. Hegel thus writes of the new object:

Since the object’s principle, the universal, is in its simplicity a *mediated* simplicity, the object must express this in itself as its nature, and it thereby shows itself to be a *thing of many properties*. The wealth of sensuous knowledge belongs to perception, not to immediate certainty, in which the object was only in play in an ancillary role, for only the former (perception) has *negation* (the distinction, that is, multiplicity) in its essence (9.71, §112).

The essence of the judgment characteristic of “Perception” includes negativity or exclusive difference. The judgment can thus not rest on a simple copula, but rather there must be contrastive *relation* in the judgmental form itself.

This object is relational both in the sense that individual things and properties are self-related or “for-itself,” and in the sense that they are *related to* other things and properties, or are “for another.”²² The tension in the “Perception” chapter, and its complexity compared to “Sense-Certainty,” stems largely from

fore, to justify this concept here (apart from the fact that it emerges within logic itself). It has already been justified in the other work, and would indeed not be capable of any other justification than is produced by consciousness as all its shapes dissolve into that concept as into their truth.” (GW 11.42, SL 28; see also GW 11.43, SL 29)

20 Willem deVries has elaborated on this lesson in a way that brings out the inferentialism already in play at the end of “Sense-certainty” (deVries 2008, p. 73).

21 For an important argument that Brandom’s inferential reading goes wrong in neglecting the mediated character of this universal, see Houlgate (2008), pp. 35–36.

22 Brandom (2002) makes this exclusive difference central to his account, but he is rightly taken to task by Houlgate for ignoring the problem of how the properties are bound together in a single object, and how the objects and properties are self-relating. See Houlgate (2008), pp. 37–39.

the need to come to terms with the judgmental form that includes these two kinds of relation. The typical judgment of perception has as its object some ordinary complex thing, such as a sugar cube: "(I perceive that) this thing is a sugar cube because this thing is white, cubic, hard, and sweet." It seems that there are actually two judgments here: one that identifies an individual thing ("This thing is a sugar cube") and another that gives the basis for that identity judgment ("this thing is white, cubic, hard, and sweet"). Hegel thinks of the first judgment (for-itself) as a kind of identity judgment – x is x , or this sugar cube is a sugar cube. The second judgment (for-another) is that a sugar cube in general has these properties and not others, so that the otherness – what it excludes – is what really determines or identifies the object.

This problem resembles the "binding problem" in Kant's *Transcendental Analytic*. The Kantian problem of "uniting the manifold" is in part the problem of binding the properties to a single object, for which Kant held that the unity of "I think" is required. Hegel in fact writes in the *Encyclopedia* "Phenomenology" that Kant's philosophy starts from the level of perception, and is in a sense stuck at unifying the object through relating "sensuous certainties of individual apperceptions or observations" to each other and making them the basis of the universal.²³ The subject brings order to the manifold through the synthetic power of perceptual judgment (and the formal unity of apperception); Hegel's point is that such a conception of the subject-object relation remains too external. It cannot account for how the relations of individual objects and their properties constitute the *identity* of the individual objects themselves.

Hegel's deduction of the relational categories takes place not only by a reversal from the previous shape, but also by the demonstration that perception exhibits what I have called judgment-invariance. That is, Hegel shows that there is no way for perception and its object to escape from these relational categories of for-itself and for-another. Hegel first draws out the incongruence (here Hegel actually writes of "contradictions", 9.74, §117) generated by the *object* of perception, and then moves in a second stage to show the subjective version fares no better. The subject of consciousness attempts to make itself (as empirical apperception or synthesis) the essence of the unity and determinate complexity of the object, but the fundamental logical incongruence remains unresolved (9.77, §122). Hegel then shifts once more to consider the object as "this whole movement" (9.77, §123). This switch generates the distinction between an object's essential and non-essential properties, which is in effect a new way to separate the for-itself identity and the for-another relationality of the thing. The content of the new

²³ See E §§420–421.

judgment would be: “this X is an X because of its essential property A.” But this move just makes the basic contradiction more explicit (9.77–78, §§124–125). The essential aspect is what it is only through its relation both to the object’s non-essential properties and to the other properties excluded by the essential property, so the self-identity or for-itself determinacy of the thing is still compromised.

In the final paragraphs of “Perception” Hegel highlights the judgment-invariance element of the deduction by emphasizing that the logical form (what Hegel calls the “simple essentialities” of for-itself and for-another) is what essentially determines perceptual consciousness through all its transformations. He writes:

Perceptual understanding does not amount to the awareness that it is those kinds of simple essentialities which are governing in it; rather, it always supposes that it is dealing with entirely solid material and content, just as sense-certainty does not know that the empty abstraction of pure being is its essence. However, the essentialities are in fact that in which the perceptual understanding runs hither and thither through all material and content; they are the cohesiveness of that material and content and what rules them, and they alone are what the sensuous, *as essence*, is for consciousness. They alone are what determines the relation between consciousness and the sensuous, and they are alone that in which the movement of perceiving as well as that of its truth runs its course (9.80, §131).

Though the interplay of the essentialities of relation “genuinely constitutes the everyday and constant life and practice” (9.80, §131) of perception, Hegel shows that these essentialities produce incongruent judgments and he thus reduces them to “unconditioned absolute universality.” In this second reflective judgment, one that provides the raw material for the reversal to the next shape, the idea is to think of a universal ground that is unconditioned and absolute in the sense that it provides a basis for the unity of objects apart from their relations. Ultimately the system of inferences will bring back the relational categories, but first the understanding seeks to stabilize the objection from within, through an inner ground for individual objects.

4. Overcoming the Inner-Appearance Opposition

In one sense Hegel has already overcome the standpoint of Kantian phenomenology at the beginning of the “Force and the Understanding” chapter, while in another sense the most important step still remains. Hegel has shown that there is no *independent* contribution to knowledge from the sensible given. This is why he begins “Force and the Understanding” with a claim that “content” is now identical with form or with the conceptual. He writes that “the content,

which was held to be true in perception, in fact only belongs to the form and that it dissolves into the form's unity" (9.83, §134). The content, and here we are talking about what counts as the content of the *object* (or, alternately, as *objective content*), is only that which can be unified in relational judgments, and all appeals to a separate contribution by sensibility are now otiose.

But there is another side of the Kantian phenomenological picture that remains intact, namely the side that requires a "thing-in-itself" as a ground for appearances. Even though the roles played in Kant's philosophy by sensible intuition and the thing-in-itself are deeply intertwined, Hegel does not think that he can immediately eliminate the supersensible world of the in-itself simply by arguing against the role of sensible intuition. Rather, he has to take seriously the Kantian picture of a world of appearances that reflects an inner ground. In "Force and the Understanding" Hegel thus sets up a shape of consciousness that will undermine its own claim that the inner *behind* appearances is something other than a product of reflection itself. For Kant there remains the possibility that *our concepts*, or *our objectivity*, might not be the way *things really are*. Hegel aims to eliminate this possibility (at least the global claim that there could be an entirely different reality) by *reducing* the opposition of subject (as thought) and object (as the in-itself).

As we set out to unpack this difficult section, it is crucial to keep in mind that in the progression of shapes Hegel's methodological moves become internal to the shapes of consciousness themselves. The *reduction* of the immediate to the essential that is at first only "for us" increasingly becomes "for consciousness itself." A clear indication of this convergence is that "essence" and "universality" are the *specific* categories of "Force and the Understanding" (cited in section 2 in the passage from "Absolute Knowing") and they also play a central role in the *general* account of the method. In the end, as we will see, the method is revealed to be an inferential method and the object is revealed to be an inferential object, thus completing the convergence of the method of knowing and the object of knowledge.

Force is the "new true object" with the "unconditioned universality" that resulted from "Perception." Initially, in its immediate shape, the understanding tries to capture force within the judgmental structure of a thing and its various properties, treating the expressions of force as properties and the force itself as a thing-like unity. The various expressions of force are "reduced" (in §136 he actually uses "*Reduktion*" twice)²⁴ to the unity of "*the actual force*" (9.84, §136) by collecting all the expressions as instances of a single force. Hegel emphasizes

²⁴ Hegel's uses of "reduction" here are more specific than my use in this essay, though they are consonant with my use in so far as they indicate a unification of a manifold (here of expressions) in a universal content (the actual force).

that although natural science tends to treat force in an ontic way (the force is an entity *behind* the appearances), closer attention to the interplay of opposed forces and to the relation of force to its expression shows this ontic realism to be a mistake. In an important passage, Hegel writes:

The *force as actual* exists purely and simply in the *expression*, which at the same time is nothing but a self-sublation. This *actual* force, represented as free-standing from its expression and as existing for itself, is the force driven back into itself; however, as it has turned out, this determinateness is in fact itself merely a moment of *expression*. The truth of force remains therefore merely the *thought* of force [...]. The realization of force is therefore at the same time the loss of reality; it has to a greater degree become within that movement something wholly other, namely, this *universality*, which the understanding at first, that is, immediately, cognizes as its essence (9.87, §141).

The *actuality* of force lies in its *expression*, which itself can be stabilized only by the thought of an inner ground. The structure of judgment is breaking down here, for the force-expression relation is not a subject-predicate structure. Instead of the simple “is” we have “is actual” or “is realized in,” but even with those expressions we do not really capture the sense in which force is an object that is realized through “the loss of reality.” When Hegel writes of “this determinateness” as a “moment” of expression he indicates that we are dealing with a holistic structure in which the parts exist only within a “movement” of *thought*. When Hegel uses the term “movement” he is typically referring to a kind of inference, and the above passage indicates that the judgmental structure of force and expression is already a proto-inferential structure, too complex to be handled by the simple judgmental form.

Hegel identifies the initial immediate understanding of force as universality with the Kantian view that objects as they *appear* are an expression of an *inner* inaccessible *in-itself*. The Kantian picture includes a true supersensible world beyond the appearing world, an “*absolute universal*” (9.89, §144) that is first conceived as the mere “void” (9.89, §146). Hegel criticizes the Kantian idea that we cannot know this empty inner because “reason might be too short-sighted, or limited” (9.89, §146). Rather, we cannot know anything about it “because it is simply defined as the *beyond* of consciousness” (9.89, §146). The positing of a domain of things in themselves, *even as a mere epistemic restriction*, is itself a reflective move, and as such it is part of the very process of knowing that it claims to be able to restrict. Yet, Hegel writes, consciousness “still” insists on treating “the movement of appearance” (9.88, §143) as independent, rather than as its *own thought*.²⁵ At this point consciousness cannot admit that there

25 This is why he concludes the paragraph with the claim that the “movement” is for conscious-

is no difference between the movement that defines the relation of the inner to the appearances, on the one hand, and the inferential movement of its own thinking of that opposition, on the other.²⁶

To conceive of the play of forces as *universality*, or as the *essence* of the appearing world, is to conceive of force as law.²⁷ The “universality” of the “essence” in law is the final and full version of the *third* moment of objectivity, the third *deduced* category. In the understanding’s very concept of law we have the universal ground or “in-itself” that we claimed to be able to hold apart from our grasp of the objects.²⁸

A Kantian might concede this point, for Kant also held that the object is conceptual, and ultimately law-governed. But the orthodox Kantian could insist that these law-governed objects are still subject-relative appearances in that they are anchored in sensible intuition, in singular representations in the conditions of space and time, and we can imagine that there is a non-spatiotemporal objectivity that would look completely different. Hegel could counter that he has *already* shown that the immediacy of sensible intuition is united with the logical in the judgments of perception and their reduction, so the appeal to intuition alone will not count against the full objectivity of logical form.

Yet in a way Hegel *does* sympathize with the Kantian complaint that laws floating free from sensible intuitions are inadequate to specify objects. Hegel thinks that at this stage in the argument there is still an unacceptable disconnect between law and objectivity. Because the conditions under which the laws apply to individual objects are still unspecified, the individuals and the laws themselves are underdetermined. Having rejected sense-certainty and perception as independent sources of content, Hegel has not simply abandoned singular judgments or the idea of relational self-identity. But he needs a way to reincorporate them into the law-based picture that has developed in “Force and the Under-

ness “not yet its *own* being-for-itself” because it “does not yet know the nature of the concept” (9.89, §143).

26 Hegel announces the overcoming of this limitation later in the text when he writes that “the understanding’s relation to the inner through the mediation is the understanding’s own movement, a movement through which the inner will bring itself to fruition for the understanding” (9.90, §148).

27 Hegel explicitly writes of the move to law as a move of reduction (see 9.91, §148).

28 Hegel proceeds to criticize this conception of the law of force, but it is important to underscore that this essential universality is the third partial category of objectivity. Hegel stresses this in his own voice when he writes: “For that reason, the expression of *universal attraction* has to that extent great importance as it is directed against the unthinking *representation* for which everything presents itself in the shape of contingency and for which determinateness has the form of sensuous self-sufficiency” (9.92, §150).

standing” thus far. This reincorporation is a major part of what the final stage of his argument, the reduction of the law-actuality opposition and the deduction of the inferential object as a whole, is supposed to accomplish.

The reduction to “inner necessity” is designed to reduce the opposition between the empty universality of the law and the determinate conditions under which the law is *actual*. Hegel *reduces* the law-based account to its conceptual core through the by now familiar process of entertaining disparate individuals and showing what kind of universality would resolve their incongruence. The clearest version of this incongruence is that “law is present in appearance, but it is not the entire presence of appearance; under ever different circumstances, the law has an ever different actuality” (9.91, §150). The criticism here sets up a *reduction* because it highlights the gap between the law’s universal force and the specific actuality in which the law is instantiated. The determinacy of the law and the universality of lawfulness are only united in a further concept, namely “inner *necessity*” (9.93, §151). The necessity we seem to have in the individual laws, such as in the law of electricity and the law of motion, turns out to be “an empty word” (9.93, §152) or “a sham, false necessity” (9.94, §153). Only if an individual law possessed this inner necessity would the conditions of the law’s actuality be contained within the law itself.

The reduction of the law-actuality gap can be seen more clearly in Hegel’s treatment of the issue in Kant’s practical philosophy, namely the issue of the emptiness of the law. In the *Phenomenology’s* “Reason” chapter, Hegel replays this reduction with ethical action as the object. Hegel uses the example of the law “*Everyone ought to speak the truth*” (9.229, §424). In that episode, he shows that by the time you add all the conditions to this law (such as “*If he knows the truth*”), the “*universal necessity*” has become “a complete *contingency*” (9.230, §424). If you have to *add* the determinate conditions of the law in order to provide a conclusive reason to act, then the necessity is obviously not contained within the law itself. Hegel’s final move to his inferential view shows how to think of the necessity as properly *determinate*, or how to think of laws as related to individuals in the right way.

5. The Inverted World as the Inferential World

Hegel completes his case for an inferential understanding of the object with a perplexing set of moves centered around the idea of “the inverted world.” In this section I argue that the inverted world is a constructive argument that introduces the full inferential view of the object. Let us begin by recalling the passage from “Absolute Knowing” discussed in section 2, where Hegel writes: “The object

as a whole is the inference (*Schluss*), that is, the movement of the universal into individuality by way of determination, as well as the converse movement from individuality to the universal by way of sublated individuality, that is, determination" (9.423, §789). The first inference, *from universality to individuality*, is the familiar model in which individuals are determined as standing under universal laws. This $U \rightarrow I$ inference is very close to the final partial category, which Hegel identifies with essence and with the universality of law. The $U \rightarrow I$ inference typically has a universal premise containing a statement of a universal law and a conclusion containing an individual object essentially characterized by that law. The argument we just looked at shows that this cannot be a simple subsumption, for there must be an intervening "determinate" premise that specifies *the conditions of the application* of the law. It is this "application premise" that requires the other type of inference.

The individual to universal, or $I \rightarrow U$ inference, is in effect the translation into inferential terms of the method of experience: the method of generating incongruent judgments and reducing them to a universal. The $I \rightarrow U$ inference is especially clear in the movement of the first two shapes of consciousness, shapes that are reincorporated into "the object as a whole" precisely through this second kind of inference. For Hegel the $I \rightarrow U$ inference begins with judgments of individuals and then, through the testing process, develops *contrasting* judgments that are reduced, through a reflective judgment, to a universal. In this direction, the *determinacy* comes from the relations of exclusion between individuals, relations that are fixed in the *process* of resolving incongruent judgments. This process can be thought of as setting the terms for the application of the law in so far as it gives the determinate conditions of the relations between individuals (the case of punishment under the law below will illustrate this dynamic). The ultimate lesson of the "Consciousness" chapters is that the $U \rightarrow I$ and $I \rightarrow U$ inferences are interdependent. These inferences both exhibit the structure of the absolute concept and show the need to think of a totality or whole of such inferences in order to have a complete object.

After his reduction to inner necessity, Hegel introduces and critiques the concept of "explanation." Though Hegel gives his critique in terms of the determinate components of a single law, the critique also makes sense in terms of the conditions of application that partly constitute the "actuality" of the law. The law always has the same actuality because the abstract universality of explanation has rigged actuality from the outset. Hegel is critical of explanation for dealing in tautologies, but he highlights the positive role of explanation's formal testing in directing our attention to "what was missing in the law, namely the absolute alternation itself" (9.95, §155). The absolute alternation was present in the *relation* of "Perception" as the relation of the for-itself and for-another moments,

or the self-identity in other-relation, moments that simply disappeared in the first realm of law, but that now “have pushed their way into the supersensible itself” (9.95, §155).

The transition from explanation to the inverted world brings the idea of determinacy via negation into the constitution of objects, but now on the footing of law that has been established in “Force and the Understanding.” In the “law of the inverted world” the relations asserted by the law connect terms and objects to the other terms and objects that they *exclude* (in the simplest case, that are their opposites). The difficulty in understanding Hegel’s move here lies in the idea of law-determining individuals, for we are accustomed to thinking instead of individual-determining laws. Yet the complementary direction of determination does make intuitive sense if we think of law-determination as a dynamic process. The inverted world adumbrates a conception of law in which the *content* of the law is always in the process of being determined by new individual instances.

To understand how the law of the inverted world stands for the I→U inference, and thus partly constitutes the object as a whole, we have to rely on Hegel’s examples. His most illuminating example takes the object to be an intentional action. On a “superficial” interpretation of a case of action in the inverted world, the inversion would be split between the appearing action and the inner intention: “an action, which in the realm of *appearance* is a crime, should be in its *inwardness* what can actually be good, that is, a bad action could have a good intention” (9.97, §159). This reading would take the for-itself as the inner and the for-another as the appearance. But Hegel insists that we are already beyond these distinctions of inner and outer, two kinds of actualities or two kinds of substances. The superficial reading of the inverted world holds onto the last vestige of a divide between the in-itself and appearance, taking the determination via negation to imply an actual domain of opposing objects in a hypostatized inner world. Hegel *reduces* this opposition in the proper interpretation of the inverted world as structured by inner difference or infinity.²⁹

The proper conception of the inverted world emerges in Hegel’s example of crime and punishment. In this example, the individual criminal action is the object that is constituted “as a whole” through the inferences implied and initiated by the action. To tie this example into the earlier discussion of force, we should think of the agent’s intention as corresponding to force and the deed or executed

²⁹ See Pinkard (1994), pp. 41–43, for an excellent take on the critical dimension of the inverted world, its role in Hegel’s argument against the Kantian “thing in itself.” I depart from Pinkard’s reading in arguing for a more positive account of objectivity itself as the outcome of the inverted world.

intention as corresponding to the expression of force. Hegel writes of the proper relation of law, crime, and punishment:

However, the *actual* crime has, as *possibility, its inversion and its in-itself in the intention* as such but not in a good intention, for the truth of intention is only the deed itself. The crime, in terms of its content, has its reflection into itself, that is, has its inversion in *actual* punishment, and this is the conciliation of the law with the actuality contrasted to it in the crime. Finally, the *actual* punishment has within it its own *inverted* actuality in that it is such an actualization of the law through which the activity, which the law has as punishment, *sublates itself*. From being active, the law comes once again to be both *at rest* and valid (*geltendes*), and both the movement of individuality against it and of it against individuality is extinguished. (9.98, §159)

Hegel first counters the idea that the inversion should be understood as the relation between the actual deed (as criminal) and the inner intention (as good). He then claims that the deed is the truth of the intention, which is the same claim he made about force and expression. But now he takes the point further, arguing for a holistic complex of action, expression, law, and consequence. The crime has its proper inversion (its proper expression) in the punishment of the deed under law. What looks like an individual action, localized in space and time, is *essentially constituted* through the punishment of that action by a counteraction under the law. The will is inherently universal, so the individual wills not only the crime but also the “universal” consequences of that crime, namely the punishment. Inferences are primarily a matter of *consequence relations*, of what follows from what, so the criminal act in which the punitive consequences are part of the individual act is indeed an exemplary instance of an object-constituting inferentialism.

The relations of inversion thus represent inferential relations between the individual act of the criminal and the punishing act of the state. The criminal wills his own punishment in the “content” of his deed, and conversely the law’s individual act of punishment is constitutive of the law’s universality. The final inversion Hegel cites is a relation of the actual punishment to the law: By the very activity of punishment the law becomes “calm” or simply “valid” once more. The law is both transformed and reinforced by its active enforcement in individual cases. The actual punishment is thus a determinate (particular) action through which the stable relation of individual and universal, agent and law, is mediated. The final bi-directional description (“the movement of individual against it and of it against individuality”) is the last and decisive clue that connects this description to Hegel’s claim in §789 about the two sets of inferences that constitute the object as a whole.

What is perhaps not entirely clear from this example is why focusing on the action of the criminal works to incorporate into the law the concrete conditions of the law's application. The key step in clarifying Hegel's strategy is to see that punishment *just is the application of the law* in its determinacy. While the law is in force, and individuals do not transgress it, the simple universality-individuality model captures the law's validity. But a crime is a determinate action that requires a determinate punishment, and in specific cases we can always raise questions about why the individual committed the crime and what punishment is fitting for the crime. Answers to these questions will function as a kind of feedback loop for the law, giving reasons to alter the law *based on past applications of the law*. So, for instance, if enough individuals break the law for the same reason, we might begin to think that there is something *wrong* with the law itself and that the law needs to be modified. To take a prominent Hegelian case of normative conflict: If too many people invoke a "right of necessity" to steal in order to survive, resolving the incongruent situation of their starvation through theft, we could infer that the laws governing the economic system should be altered. Hegel in effect invites us to think of the whole law-action complex as a self-regulating system, maintaining itself in equilibrium. This dynamic brings out what is perfectly clear in his *Science of Logic* account of objectivity, namely that the purposive objects of "teleology" are the goal, the true standard, of objectivity. In the *Science of Logic* Hegel basically ranks mechanism, chemistry, and teleology, with the teleological, action-based systems representing a more robust inferential structure and therefore a higher standard of objectivity. We can thus see that the choice of action as his main example of the inferential object is no accident. Action under the law is a paradigmatic instance of objectivity in Hegel's view, and criminal action makes explicit the negativity within the rational.

There is one last step to complete the argument, for according to Hegel's method Chapter III must also end in a reduction, in a new universality that gets taken up into the next shape. But the end of "Consciousness" is not the same as the previous transitions precisely because at this point the object is complete. From the completed picture of the inferential object (that I have argued is contained in the inverted world), Hegel needs now to reduce the object in the sense of locating the *simplest* universality at the core of that objectivity. This universality must be both the result of a world reduced to a simple conceptual structure, and the deduced result in the sense that the objective world is grounded in (or can be developed out of) that simple structure. This structure is indeed what Hegel describes at first as "inner difference" (9.98, §160), or a kind of universality that transparently includes differentiation within itself ("unconditioned absolute universality" was the non-transparent version of this). My interpretive suggestion about Hegel's next move is that he shifts from the re-

duced result to the deduced result in shifting from “inner difference” to a description of “simple infinity or the absolute concept” (9.99, §162). This basic inferential structure is Hegel’s version of the root of a priori synthesis, which for Hegel is (among other things) the power to unite consequence relations in a single complex objective unity (the crime entails the punishment, the action entails the reaction).

When Hegel writes that infinity is “the soul of all that came before” (9.100, §163), we can understand him as claiming that the convergence of the *method* and the *object* of knowledge is now complete. Hegel has shown through a series of reflective judgments that the *reduction* to the universal constitutes the *essence* of the intuitions, and he has thus brought intuition into the form of the conceptual. Infinity has proven to be the form of the conceptual because it is an identity of opposites, a unity of initially incongruent individuals, sense-universals, perceived objects, etc. (this is the I→U direction of inference). But this is not a one-way identity in which the universal simply swallows up the individuals. Rather, the deduction also *preserves* the individuals in their relation to each other. The ultimate inferential *identity* is a reciprocal relation of the two directions of inference, mediated by determinacy (or particularity). The universal emerged from the individual, and the individual is seen retrospectively to be a function of the universal. Infinity is the “soul” of the account because it is the power of the inferential processes to constitute objectivity through reductions and reversals.

At the very end of Chapter III Hegel introduces self-consciousness and claims that it is a self-relation with the inferential structure of the absolute concept. Could it be, though, that Hegel’s immanent critique of Kant ends with the very dependence of consciousness on the unity of self-consciousness that Kant himself had argued for in the *Critique of Pure Reason*? Hegel certainly implies something stronger than such a formal dependence relation when he writes, “consciousness is *for itself*, it is a *distinguishing of what is not distinct*, that is, it is *self-consciousness*” (9.101, §164). Yet we must be careful with this point. Hegel is not conflating consciousness and self-consciousness here, but rather asserting a structural relation that effects the transition to the next shape of consciousness. The claim is in fact a stronger claim than Kant’s, for Hegel holds that within the structure of self-consciousness itself we have the basic dynamics to derive the logical content that essentially constitutes consciousness. This claim is not far from the basic premise of Fichte’s idealism (the self-positing I), though Hegel claims to have overcome the lingering externality in Fichte’s structural account and to have deduced what Fichte only asserted to be the starting point of philosophy. What this transition highlights is that Hegel’s immanent critique of Kant’s theoretical philosophy is incomplete at this point, for that critique also demands a critique of the formality of the subject, of self-consciousness. Hegel’s

subsequent moves in Chapter IV to life, to self-consciousness as desire, and to mutual recognition are such a critique, and they tend to overshadow the *logical* result of Chapters I–III. But that latter result is pivotal for understanding the project as a whole, and indeed for understanding Chapter IV itself. On the basis of the inferential account of objectivity, the inferential *subject* and indeed the network of inferential practices of “Reason” and “Spirit” can be rendered intelligible, with the ultimate goal of overcoming the dichotomy between subject and object for all domains of human activity.³⁰

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