

[PRE-PUBLICATION DRAFT]

PHENOMENOLOGY AS METAPHYSICS: ON HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETATION OF HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

Ioannis Trisokkas (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

I. Introduction

“What is [G. W. F. Hegel's] *Phenomenology of Spirit*?” Martin Heidegger asks in 1942.¹ His reply is that it is metaphysics and, particularly, an episode in the life of a metaphysical element called “the absolute.” Other names for the Hegelian absolute are, according to Heidegger, “absolute knowledge,” “spirit,” and “reason.”

Heidegger's metaphysical interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*² (hereafter “the *Phenomenology*”) contrasts with its epistemological interpretation, which is expounded and defended most notably by Stephen Houlgate. In Houlgate's view, the *Phenomenology* is not part of Hegel's philosophy “proper,” namely his metaphysics, and its purpose is only to show those who maintain that thought and being are fundamentally distinct that they are mistaken, thereby persuading them to accept the vantage point of Hegelian “philosophy” or metaphysics: the view that thought and being are fundamentally identical. *Contra* Heidegger, Houlgate believes that, for Hegel, the *Phenomenology* does not present the truth of being; rather, it only guides what Hegel calls “natural consciousness” to the standpoint of philosophy “proper,” where that truth can be exhibited.

The present article engages Heidegger in a discussion with Houlgate and seeks to adjudicate between them regarding the question, “Is Hegel's *Phenomenology* metaphysics?”

Concerning Heidegger, it must be emphasized that the article's *sole* focus is to lay out and examine his *interpretation* of the *Phenomenology* rather than his *critique* of this work. It should be noted, additionally, that the article deliberately avoids deep reflection on how Heidegger's interpretation relates to his own philosophical project. Some remarks pertaining to this issue will, however, be offered in passing.

¹ Martin Heidegger, “Elucidation of the ‘Introduction’ to Hegel's ‘Phenomenology of Spirit,’” in *Hegel*, (tr.) J. Arel and N. Feuerhahn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 75. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as EIHP.

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (tr.) A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as PS.

The textual basis of the discussion of Heidegger is provided by (1) his 1930–31 lecture course on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, published originally in 1980 under the title *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (volume 32 of Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe*),³ and (2) his 1942 text “Elucidation of the ‘Introduction’ to Hegel’s ‘Phenomenology of Spirit,’” published originally in 1993 as the second part of a volume titled *Hegel* (volume 68 of Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe*).⁴

I proceed as follows. Section II submits the puzzle driving Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, namely phenomenology’s⁵ ambivalent role in Hegel’s “system of science”: it functions as the ground of the system, but also as a fragment of philosophy of spirit, which is the third part of a system of science that has its ground in logic, not in phenomenology. If we assume, as I think we must, that Hegel does not propose that there are two systems of science, but only one, he seems to assert both that phenomenology is the ground and that phenomenology is not the ground of his system of science. Section III displays Heidegger’s fundamental thesis that not only the encyclopedic sciences but also phenomenology is metaphysics, the exposition of an episode in the absolute’s life. This transforms the question about phenomenology’s ambivalent role in Hegel’s system of science into a question about such an ambivalence in Hegel’s metaphysics. Section IV describes Houlgate’s epistemological interpretation of the *Phenomenology* and Section V sketches Heidegger’s metaphysical interpretation of it. It is argued therein that Heidegger’s interpretation cannot take off unless one accepts as true his fundamental thesis that “the *Phenomenology* begins absolutely with the absolute” (HPS, 39). Section VI examines Heidegger’s argument from the meaning of “science” for the support of this thesis and concludes that it is unsuccessful. Section VII considers Heidegger’s argument from the presence of an encyclopedic phenomenology in the system and argues that, *contra* Houlgate, it succeeds in establishing Heidegger’s aforementioned fundamental thesis. Nevertheless, it is also argued that Heidegger fails to justify the necessity for the *Phenomenology* to be the first ground of the system of science and, consequently, that its presence in the system has not been demonstrated. Finally, Section VIII discusses the possibility of “combining” Houlgate’s and Heidegger’s interpretations and of using this “combined” interpretation to justify positing the *Phenomenology* as the first ground of the system of science. It is concluded that this interpretation fails as well. The upshot is that

³ Martin Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, (tr.) P. Emad and K. Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as HPS.

⁴ See note 1 above.

⁵ I will use the term “phenomenology” (without a definite article) to refer to the *Hegelian* discipline that Hegel’s book *Phenomenology of Spirit* represents.

none of the interpretations considered succeeds in establishing the necessity of the *Phenomenology*'s presence in Hegel's system of science.

II. The Ambivalent Role of Phenomenology in Hegel's System of Science

The original title of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807, was *System of Science: Part One, Science of the Experience of Consciousness*,⁶ which after a few printed copies Hegel changed into *System of Science: Part One, Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit* (HPS, 5). Both of these versions of the original title were dropped in 1832, when the *Phenomenology* was republished as part of the posthumous complete edition of Hegel's works, and replaced by the shortened title *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁷

The original title's truncation seems to have been Hegel's own decision. Starting from the first volume of the *Science of Logic* (hereafter *SL*) in 1812, whenever Hegel referred to the *Phenomenology* thereafter, he did so by using its shortened title. Moreover, his chosen title for the *Phenomenology*'s new edition—which he started preparing around 1830, shortly prior to his death in 1831, but which he never completed—was *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁸

For Heidegger, the change of the *Phenomenology*'s title is not an innocent or insignificant event. The book, he points out, was written with the intention of presenting a discipline as a science and as the first part of Hegel's system of science (HPS, 1–2). Its content corresponds to the original title's characterization of it. Hegel, surely, was aware of this correlation. And yet, from the beginning of *SL* onwards, he chose to refer to the *Phenomenology* by its shortened title. For Heidegger, it is clear what this means: from *SL* onwards, the *Phenomenology* was no longer the first part of the system of science (*ibid.*, 4). It relinquished its role as the system's "ground" or "foundation" (*ibid.*, 3, 7). After the publication of *SL*, the system acquired a new form. Here is how Heidegger expresses it: "The title has changed for a weighty reason. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* had to forfeit its role as 'Part One' of the system because the *System* itself had in the meantime changed in Hegel's thinking" (EIHPS, 52).

Although promptly after the *Phenomenology*'s publication Hegel advertised the future appearance of a second part of the system, which would include the sciences of logic,

⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *System der Wissenschaft: Erster Theil, die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Bamberg: Joseph Anton Goebhardt, 1807).

⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, (ed.) J. Schulze (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1832).

⁸ Johannes Schulze, "Vorwort des Herausgebers," in *ibid.*, v–viii.

philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit,⁹ this was never materialized as a *second* part. Between 1812 and 1816 Hegel published *SL*, but not only did he refrain from referring to the *Phenomenology*'s original title therein, he also did *not* specify *SL* as *Part Two* of the *System of Science*. In 1817 he published the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (hereafter “the *Encyclopedia*”), but phenomenology was not included in the “philosophical sciences.” The *Encyclopedia* included logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit, and explicitly assigned the role of the system's “ground” or “first part” to logic,¹⁰ from which philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit followed. Phenomenology was not abolished altogether, but it abdicated its status as an independent “science” and became a fragment of philosophy of spirit, which was now the system's third part (HPS, 7). All this indicates, Heidegger insists, that *SL* initiates a new system of science, in which logic, rather than phenomenology, functions as its “ground” (EIHPS, 53) or “foundation” (HPS, 6).

What complicates things is that *SL*'s initiation of a new system does not entail that Hegel discarded or rejected the *Phenomenology* (HPS, 8). That a new system of science is in place, Heidegger contends, does not mean that Hegel thought that the *Phenomenology* was a mistake. There are two reasons for this. First, in *SL* Hegel explicitly refers to the *Phenomenology* as the justification and presupposition of *SL* (*SL*, 28, 47). Second, as already noted, Hegel started preparing a new edition of the *Phenomenology* shortly before he died.

It seems, then, that a new system of science emerges with *SL*'s arrival that is no longer grounded in phenomenology, but phenomenology nevertheless continues to be the ground of logic and hence, given that the remaining sciences follow from logic, the ground of a system of science. *SL* evinces here a peculiar status, for Hegel says, on the one hand, that *SL* has the *Phenomenology* as its ground and hence it is (part of) the second part of the system, and on the other hand, that *SL* is the ground and the first part of the system (EIHPS, 53–54; HPS, 2, 7). Given that philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit follow from logic, *SL* opens up *two* systems of science: one which has the *Phenomenology* as its first part and one which has *SL* as its first part. Yet, the new system has *exactly the same content* as the older one, with the only difference being that the older system contains phenomenology as its ground and the new system contains logic as its ground. Heidegger calls the system grounded in the

⁹ Johannes Hoffmeister “Einleitung,” in G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, (ed.) J. Hoffmeister (Leipzig: Meiner, 1937), xxxviii. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, (tr.) G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10–11. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *SL*.

¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, Zum Gebrauch seiner Vorlesungen* (Heidelberg: August Osswald, 1817), iv.

Phenomenology “the phenomenology-system” and the system grounded in *SL* “the encyclopedia-system” (HPS, 7; EIHPS, 53).

However, neither does Hegel give us *two* systems of science from which we may freely choose the one we prefer, nor does Heidegger claim so (HPS, 9). There is, for Hegel, only one system of science. Given this singularity of the system of science, the phenomenology-system and the encyclopedia-system must be different manifestations of a single system of science. The pressing question is why the single system of science *must* have two manifestations; or, what means the same, why this system *must* have two beginnings, grounds, or first parts. Why does Hegel keep the *Phenomenology* as *SL*’s ground after the latter emerges as the system’s ground? As things stand, the system of science begins with the science of phenomenology, which gives rise to the sciences of logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit, and then *begins again* with logic, which gives rise to philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit. Given the beginning with phenomenology, why is the logic’s emergence called a “beginning?” And why, given that logic is called a “beginning,” is phenomenology kept in the system as a beginning? Heidegger’s whole interpretation of the *Phenomenology* is driven by his attempt to resolve this conundrum (HPS, 9).

III. Phenomenology and Metaphysics

Heidegger pursues the resolution of the puzzle of the *Phenomenology*’s ambivalent role in the system of science by placing it firmly in the domain of metaphysics. Not only logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit are metaphysical sciences—phenomenology is too (HPS, 6). The encyclopedia-system, as well as its corresponding part in the phenomenology-system, “shows a decisive realignment with the basic structure of earlier metaphysics” (EIHPS, 56). This “earlier” or “traditional” metaphysics (HPS, 3) has two main components: *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. While *metaphysica generalis* is exemplified by ontology, *metaphysica specialis* is typified by speculative (or rational) psychology, speculative cosmology, and speculative theology. For Heidegger, Hegel’s philosophy of nature corresponds to speculative cosmology, his philosophy of spirit to speculative psychology, and his logic to an “original unity” of ontology and speculative theology, an “onto-theology” (HPS, 3; EIHPS, 56).

Phenomenology, Heidegger claims, is metaphysics, although it does not share *exactly* the same structure as traditional metaphysics. As he puts it, “[the *Phenomenology*] has dared to undertake a metaphysical task that never before needed to be assigned and that afterward

could never be assigned again” (EIHPS, 57). This makes phenomenology “a unique and in a special sense distinguished moment in the history of metaphysics” (*ibid.*).

All sciences constituting Hegel’s system of science are therefore metaphysical, according to Heidegger, making “system of science” effectively synonymous with “system of metaphysics.” Heidegger, then, understands the worries raised at the end of the previous section as *metaphysical* worries. The worry how phenomenology fits into Hegel’s unified system of science now becomes the worry how phenomenology fits into Hegel’s metaphysics. As Heidegger expresses it, the question we face is “how the two systems [*i.e.*, the phenomenology-system and the encyclopedia-system] belong together within Hegel’s metaphysics” (EIHPS, 56).

What is metaphysics’ subject-matter, taken in its most universal and abstract form? It is, Heidegger tells us, the truth of beings, *i.e.*, “what beings truly are” (*was das Seiende in Wahrheit ist*) (EIHPS, 62). Hegel, Heidegger claims, identifies the truth of beings with a metaphysical element called “the absolute” (*ibid.*). Other terms used synonymously with “the absolute” are “absolute knowledge,” “spirit,” and “reason” (HPS, 9, 23, 25, 27, 30, 41). Thus, the absolute, the truth of beings, for Hegel, is a kind of intelligence (“reason”) or “knowledge” (“absolute knowledge”) and, specifically, a knowledge that knows itself—in Heidegger’s view, this is how Hegel signifies, more precisely, “spirit”. Given all this, and given Heidegger’s theses (1) that phenomenology is metaphysics and (2) that phenomenology is the first ground of Hegel’s metaphysics, the *Phenomenology* is, in Heidegger’s view, a treatise disclosing a dimension of the truth of beings (as Hegel understands it), an episode in the absolute’s life; therefore, it cannot be discarded or rejected. It is a necessary, not a contingent or optional, part of Hegel’s system of science.

Heidegger’s use of the term “truth of beings” (*Wahrheit des Seienden*) has a connotation which should be mentioned. It contrasts, for Heidegger, with the term “truth of being” (*Wahrheit des Seins*). He understands metaphysics as that attempt to present the truth of being that does not respect or accommodate our lived experience. This is harmful to its cause, Heidegger contends, because lived experience is the domain in which the truth of being is hidden. By ignoring lived experience or treating it as “nothing” or “non-being,”¹¹ metaphysics loses contact with the truth of being and is thereby transformed into an inquiry into the truth of *beings*. Metaphysics is said to ignore lived experience because it subsumes it

¹¹ See Dennis J. Schmidt, *The Ubiquity of the Finite: Hegel, Heidegger, and the Entitlements of Philosophy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 69–95.

under *logos* or “the subject.” By calling the *Phenomenology* “metaphysics,” Heidegger insinuates that it ignores real lived experience, that it subsumes it under *logos*, and, therefore, that it is a *logocentric* discipline (like all traditional metaphysics).

Heidegger has a long, elaborate story to tell about how exactly the phenomenology expounded by the *Phenomenology* (hereafter “the 1807 phenomenology”) is “a work of absolute speculative metaphysics” (EIHPS, 75). The problem is that not many contemporary Hegel scholars would be willing to hear it. This is because the dominant view in Hegel scholarship today is that the *Phenomenology* is an epistemological, not a metaphysical treatise. Its purpose, such scholarship argues, is not to present a dimension of the truth of being but only to guide “natural consciousness” to the standpoint of “philosophy” or metaphysics, initially exemplified by the beginning of logic, where it will then be initiated into the whole of Hegel’s metaphysics. One of the most lucid exponents of this view is Stephen Houlgate, to whom I now turn.

IV. Houlgate’s Epistemological Interpretation of the *Phenomenology*

For Houlgate, the *Phenomenology* thematizes a particular kind of human mind: the mind refusing (1) to suspend its belief that thought and being are fundamentally distinct and (2) to begin its enquiry into what Houlgate calls “the truth of being,” as *SL* demands, which would require (*contra* 1) the belief that thought and being are fundamentally identical.¹² (Note that Houlgate’s term “the truth of being” differs from Heidegger’s same term, for Houlgate does not proceed from the assumption that the truth of being is hidden in lived experience. In Heidegger’s view, Houlgate’s term “the truth of being” corresponds to Heidegger’s term “the truth of *beings*,” because it correlates with the logocentric enquiry into being. In *Houlgate’s* view, it corresponds simply to the fundamental ontological structure of all there is.) This kind of mind is what Hegel calls “natural consciousness” or, simply, “consciousness.”¹³ Natural consciousness needs to be persuaded that its position cannot provide the framework in which the truth of being can be disclosed. In Houlgate’s view, phenomenology provides the demonstration that will convince natural consciousness that the enquiry into the truth of being should be pursued from the standpoint of “philosophy,” whose framework is determined by the beginning of logic, the identity of thought and being.

¹² Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 50. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as IH.

¹³ Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 5.

Natural consciousness, in Houlgate's view, is not a universal feature of the human mind. Not everyone assumes that thought and being are fundamentally distinct. Thus, the *Phenomenology* is not for everyone; it addresses only those who are initially unwilling to let this assumption go. The *Phenomenology* provides a ladder to *this kind of mind* that will help it "raise itself to the standpoint of ontological logic" (IH, 50). Therefore, the *Phenomenology* is not really *necessary* and "does not form part of Hegel's philosophy proper," since "philosophy proper" is only the exposition of the truth of being, namely metaphysics, which includes only the encyclopedia-system, comprising logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit.¹⁴ Here is how Houlgate expresses it in this telling passage:

The *Phenomenology*, as I understand it, can be bypassed by those who are prepared to carry out the free act of suspending all their presuppositions about thought and being, begin with the bare thought of "pure being," and accept that, initially, being itself may not be understood to be anything beyond the bare, indeterminate immediacy of which Hegel is minimally aware. The *Phenomenology* is essential reading, however, for those who are deeply attached to the ordinary view of the world as something that stands over against us and who want to know why they should be persuaded to give up that common-sense view and adopt the standpoint of ontological logic. The role of the *Phenomenology*, on this interpretation, is thus to justify the standpoint of ontological logic (or "absolute knowing") to ordinary, natural consciousness. (IH, 50–51)

Or, again in another passage:

The role of the *Phenomenology*...is not to set out Hegel's own philosophy, but to lead natural consciousness from its own certainties to the perspective of philosophy, and so to *justify* such philosophy in the eyes of consciousness.¹⁵

Houlgate's understanding of the *Phenomenology* is epistemological rather than metaphysical. Phenomenology, in contradistinction to logic and the other encyclopedic sciences, does not inform us about how things are in their truth. The latter is the subject-matter of Hegel's metaphysics or "philosophy." As Houlgate puts it, "the *Phenomenology* does not set out Hegel's own philosophical account of the world, but it is the 'science of the experience which consciousness goes through'" (IH, 63; citing PS, 21). This experience does reveal to every form of consciousness that its object has the same logical form as the thinking of it, yet

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

until the very end of its “dialectic” consciousness refuses to accept this identity of logical forms and insists that the object is fundamentally distinct from the mind that thinks it (*ibid.*, 64–66). Thus, in Houlgate’s view, the *Phenomenology* is all about (1) why a certain way of thinking about the world (*i.e.*, consciousness) can never produce “knowledge of the world” and (2) how a mind that follows such thinking can be persuaded to change its ways and thereby be “introduced” to Hegel’s “philosophy proper,” where it can indeed be presented with “knowledge of the world.”

It should be stressed at this juncture that Houlgate does not belong to the camp of “anti-metaphysical” interpreters of Hegel. *Contra* Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, Allen Wood, and others, Houlgate understands Hegel’s system of science not only as an exposition of the categories of thought but also as an exposition of the fundamental structure of *being*.¹⁶ He, therefore, would agree, *mutatis mutandis*, with Heidegger that Hegel’s purpose regarding the system of science is the disclosure of (what Hegel takes to be) the truth of being. Yet, Houlgate excludes the *Phenomenology* from this system and hence from the sciences that present the truth of being.

Heidegger, contrastingly, explicitly rejects the epistemological interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. He writes that “the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was to be the foundation of metaphysics, its grounding. But this grounding is not an epistemology...” (HPS, 3). As if he, *per impossibile*, had Houlgate in mind, he further writes,

Allied with these two misinterpretations, there is a third which takes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an introduction to philosophy in the sense that this phenomenology leads to a transition from the so-called natural consciousness of sensibility to a genuine speculative philosophical knowledge. ...[W]e maintain: Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is neither a phenomenology in the current sense, nor a typology of philosophical standpoints, nor an introduction to philosophy. (*Ibid.*, 29–30; see also EIHP, 66)

Heidegger’s view of the *Phenomenology*, then, is decidedly different from Houlgate’s. Heidegger thinks that, for Hegel, the *Phenomenology* presents an episode in the life of a metaphysical entity, the absolute. Human consciousness is a form of the absolute. In Hegel’s view, Heidegger thinks, the *Phenomenology* is not the demonstration of the unsuitability of a

¹⁶ See especially Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), 115–43. See also Ioannis Trisokkas, “Anachronism, Antiquarianism and *Konstellationsforschung*: A Critique of Beiser,” *Clio*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2014), 87–113. The *locus classicus* of the anti-metaphysical reading of Hegel is Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

kind of mind for producing “knowledge of the world”; it is rather the presentation of a dimension of what Hegel takes to be the truth of being. But what exactly is this episode? How is consciousness a form of the absolute? The next section focuses on this issue.

Before I proceed, let me respond in passing to the following question: “*Why* does Heidegger want to reject the *Phenomenology*’s epistemological interpretation and promote instead its metaphysical interpretation?” This relates to the connection he instigates between being and lived experience. Although Houlgate would not see it in this way (as he does not accept Heidegger’s perspective), Heidegger would see Houlgate’s interpretation as implying something like a respect for or an accommodation of lived experience in Hegel’s thought. For if Houlgate were right, Hegel’s phenomenology would designate a domain of being that is not captured by “philosophy” or metaphysics, and therefore, one could argue, is not subsumed under *logos*.¹⁷ Since Hegel describes this domain as the domain of “everyday,” “natural” consciousness—to wit, the domain of, one might say, “lived experience”—Houlgate’s interpretation could be seen as entailing a position that comes very close to Heidegger’s own. By arguing for the *Phenomenology*’s metaphysical interpretation, Heidegger intends to block the semblance of such an affinity.¹⁸

V. Heidegger’s Metaphysical Interpretation of the *Phenomenology*

In Houlgate’s epistemological interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, absolute knowledge or “the absolute” lies the farthest away from the phenomenological beginning. The latter is made with sense-certainty, the most extreme expression of the belief that thought and being are fundamentally distinct. In Heidegger’s metaphysical interpretation, by contrast, “the *Phenomenology of Spirit* begins absolutely with the absolute” (HPS, 39). By saying that phenomenology begins with the absolute, Heidegger on the one hand denies that it *contrasts* with logic and the other encyclopedic sciences, and on the other hand claims that phenomenology is, for Hegel, an episode in the absolute’s life and hence a “proper” subject-matter for philosophy. In Heidegger’s words, saying that phenomenology begins with the absolute makes it clear that “[phenomenology] no longer vaguely represents a position outside and distinct from the matter of philosophy, but belongs to philosophy itself and constitutes the structure of philosophy’s own inner realm” (*ibid.*, 40).

¹⁷ This is exactly how Williams understands the *Phenomenology*; see Robert R. Williams, “Hegel and Heidegger,” in *Hegel and His Critics*, (ed.) W. Desmond (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 135–57.

¹⁸ Schmidt’s discussion of the pressure Heidegger felt to distinguish his position from Hegel’s is very illuminating; see Schmidt, *The Ubiquity*, 24–62.

The absolute is absolute knowledge. “But what does ‘absolute knowledge’ mean?” (*ibid.*, 14). First, it is knowledge of the truth of beings. Second, it is knowledge of itself, to wit, it is the truth of beings that knows itself. Third, it is not only a feature of the human mind and the human culture, but also a metaphysical element, an ontological structure, a universal intelligence pervading all things. Finally, and most crucially, it is a knowledge that knows itself, and consequently the truth of beings, *by staying solely within itself*: it does not involve its “being carried over” to objects in order to know their truth (*ibid.*). As Heidegger puts it, absolute knowledge is not “consumed” by the object, does not “surrender” to it, and is not “lost in it” (*ibid.*). In other words, absolute knowledge is an intelligence knowing objects solely *through itself*: it does not require the object to affect it or be given to it or be affected by it in order to count as “knowledge” of that object’s truth.

In this section’s first quotation, Heidegger says not simply that phenomenology begins with the absolute but rather that it *begins absolutely* with it. The reference to an *absolute* beginning rather than simply to a beginning implies the simultaneous presence of another, a non-absolute beginning. Heidegger writes that the absolute phenomenological beginning “is effective and is simply concealed from us” (HPS, 40). These, then, are two features of the absolute phenomenological beginning: (1) it has an effect on what happens at the beginning of phenomenology and on what follows from it and (2) it is hidden or concealed from us, to wit, it does not appear as such. What begins absolutely at the phenomenological beginning is absolute knowledge, so it is absolute knowledge that *affects* consciousness’s experience, but it does this in a *concealed* manner.

If the *Phenomenology*’s absolute beginning with the absolute is concealed, there *has to* be *another* phenomenological beginning, one which is not concealed, but rather *apparent* or *explicit*. Since what is concealed is absolute knowledge, what remains to be apparent is its opposite (or “other”): *relative knowledge*. Thus, the *Phenomenology* has *itself* two beginnings: an absolute beginning in which absolute knowledge is concealed but effective, and an apparent or explicit beginning in which what appears is relative knowledge.

What is relative knowledge, with which phenomenology begins apparently or explicitly? First, relative knowledge is knowledge pertaining to the human mind. Second, it takes itself to be the standpoint of true knowledge, that is, the standpoint from which the truth of beings can be exposed, and seeks to justify this belief to itself. Third, it is knowledge requiring some kind of confirmation from an *object* it regards as fundamentally distinct from it; it is called “relative” precisely because it is relative to the object (HPS, 14). As Heidegger expresses it, “a relative knowledge would be caught up in and imprisoned by what [*i.e.*, the

object] it knows” (*ibid.*, 15). Relative knowledge corresponds to what Hegel calls “natural consciousness” or simply “consciousness” (*ibid.*).

What is the relation between absolute knowledge and relative knowledge at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, or, put differently, between the absolute and the apparent phenomenological beginning? For Heidegger, it is a metaphysical relation, in particular a metaphysical relation of *attachment* (*ibid.*). The concealed absolute knowledge is *attached* to the appearing relative knowledge (the human mind determined by objects) at the phenomenological beginning. This relation is a problem for absolute knowledge because, due to that attachment, it appears in the shape of its complete other. *The truth of beings*, absolute knowledge, appears as what it is not: sense-certainty or the fundamental distinction between being and thought. The journey of consciousness (relative knowledge) from sense-certainty to explicit absolute knowledge is the journey of *the hidden absolute knowledge to itself* or, if you like, to its own “complete appearance” (EIHPS, 66). This is so because consciousness is *implicitly* constituted, in terms of a metaphysical attachment, by absolute knowledge and its “dialectic” makes absolute knowledge *explicit* to itself.

Thus, for Heidegger, the dialectic of relative knowledge in the *Phenomenology* presents an episode in the absolute’s life: it presents how *the absolute* appears or comes to *itself*. The whole process, Heidegger contends, is a process of “absolution” or liberation (HPS, 15): the absolute “absolves” or liberates itself from its attachment to consciousness and thereby is able to begin again as the explicit identity of thought and being. It cannot begin “appropriately” (*ibid.*, 9)—to wit, as what it is, as *absolute* knowledge—unless it fully *appears*, and the *Phenomenology* is the presentation of the absolute’s *coming to its own appearance*. This is not something philosophy can bypass, as Houlgate maintains. Without the *Phenomenology* there is no philosophy because without the *Phenomenology* the truth of beings will remain forever hidden in sense-certainty. *Pace* Houlgate, the *Phenomenology* discloses a dimension of the truth of beings, namely how it comes to *appear*. Relative knowledge, the “not-absolute,” is not something foreign to the absolute—it is an episode in the absolute’s own history. Here are Heidegger’s own words:

At the beginning of its history, absolute knowledge must be different from what it is at the end. Certainly. But this otherness does not mean that knowledge is at the beginning *not yet and in no way* absolute knowledge. On the contrary, this knowledge is right at the beginning already absolute knowledge, but has not yet come to itself. . . . The absolute is other and so is *not absolute*, but relative. The not-absolute is not yet absolute. But this “not-yet” is the not-yet *of the absolute*. In other words, the not-absolute is absolute, not in spite of, but precisely because of its being *not-absolute*. The “not”

on the basis of which the absolute can be relative pertains to the absolute itself. It is not *different* from the absolute. It is not finished and *lying* dead *next to* the absolute. The “not” in “not-absolute” does not express something which exists in itself and lies *next to* the absolute, but expresses a mode of the absolute. (*Ibid.*, 33)

Heidegger is, to my mind, clear enough. Consciousness or relative knowledge is “a mode of the absolute.” It is so precisely in the sense that absolute knowledge is attached (metaphysically or ontologically) to relative knowledge: it is *hidden* (or *implicit*) in its very core, its “essence,” as it were. Consciousness’s experience is the process of the absolute’s appearance: by experiencing its relation to the object, consciousness materializes the absolute’s coming to itself, namely to its *complete* appearance. This complete appearance will mark the beginning of *SL*, that is to say, the system of science’s *second* beginning. There has to be a second beginning because at the end of phenomenology, the absolute is no longer attached to relative knowledge and, therefore, it is free to simply exhibit its content as what flows from the identity of thought and being.

Heidegger’s metaphysical interpretation, of which only a sketch has been provided here, cannot take off unless one accepts Heidegger’s fundamental thesis that phenomenology begins absolutely with the absolute. Houlgate does not accept this thesis and hence he does not feel obliged to accept Heidegger’s metaphysical interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. In order to determine whether Heidegger has a convincing argument for his fundamental thesis, I will now discuss two such arguments that one could trace in his texts on the *Phenomenology*: the argument from the meaning of “science” (Section VI) and the argument from the presence of an encyclopedic phenomenology (Section VII).

VI. “Science” and Metaphysics

An argument Heidegger employs in order to justify his claim that the *Phenomenology* begins with the absolute is an argument from the meaning of “science.” The *Phenomenology*’s original title determines it as the system of *science*’s first part. Heidegger stresses that the original title provides the basis for understanding “the intrinsic mission that is initially and properly assigned to the work [*i.e.*, the *Phenomenology*] as a whole, as it stands at the service of the Hegelian philosophy and begins its exposition,” and thereby determines its “foremost character” (HPS, 9). Heidegger contends that “science” means metaphysics for Hegel, in particular the presentation of the absolute. It follows that phenomenology is metaphysics, the absolute’s exhibition, and hence it cannot but begin with the absolute.

Heidegger claims that the word “science” in the original title, *System of Science*, refers neither to the various sciences nor to their common character (“scientificity” or “scientific research” in general) (*ibid.*, 10). It refers rather to “*the science*,” which is “the totality of the highest and most essential knowledge” (*ibid.*, 10, 32). This knowledge is *philosophy* (*ibid.*, 10). “System of science,” therefore, means system of philosophy. “But why is philosophy called [by Hegel] *the science*?” (*ibid.*). In Heidegger’s view, this has nothing to do with the customary belief that philosophy is the various sciences’ foundation. Rather, it is “*the science*” because it is the domain of absolute knowledge. As Heidegger himself puts it, “[*T*he science [is] the way in which philosophy unfolds itself as absolute knowledge” (*ibid.*, 10, 32). So, *System of Science* means, eventually, system of absolute knowledge. Since this original overarching title covers the whole of phenomenology, Heidegger concludes that Hegel’s view is that absolute knowledge is present both at the beginning and throughout the whole course of phenomenology.

But why does Heidegger think that “science” means, for Hegel, absolute knowledge? According to Heidegger, Hegel signifies “science” in this way because he belongs to the tradition of Western metaphysics, which has its roots in Greek (Platonic and post-Platonic) philosophy. Hegel *inherits* the meaning of “science” (*επιστημη*, *scientia*) as absolute knowledge from an understanding of philosophy that runs from antiquity to the modern era. Yet, Hegel does not simply “receive” or “imitate” such an understanding. His philosophy, rather, is the “final development” and the “completion” of the ancient conception of “science” (*ibid.*, 12).¹⁹ But on what occasion did this tradition define “science” as absolute knowledge?

Heidegger’s response is that it did so as a reply to “the guiding question” of ancient philosophy. In his view, this question is “[w]hat is a being?” (*τι το ον*;) (*ibid.*, 12, 41).²⁰ Ancient philosophy *decided*²¹ to answer this question in terms of *λογος* (*reason*) and *νοος* (*thinking*)

¹⁹ In his essay “Overcoming Metaphysics,” Heidegger specifies that Hegel is only the first stage of the “completion” of ancient metaphysics, the final stage being Nietzsche. See Martin Heidegger, “Overcoming Metaphysics,” in *The End of Philosophy*, (ed. and tr.) J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 89.

²⁰ For Heidegger, the Pre-Socratics raised the most fundamental question of ontology, namely “what is being?” Plato and post-Platonic philosophy transformed this into the less fundamental question “what is *a* being?” Hegel represents the culmination of this Platonic tradition of Western philosophy. Heidegger’s project is to lead Western philosophy back to its pre-Socratic roots, so as to re-raise the most fundamental question “what is being?” See HPS, 41–42; Martin Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” (tr.) T. Sheehan, in *Pathmarks*, (ed.) W. McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jacques Taminiaux, “The Interpretation of Greek Philosophy in Heidegger’s Fundamental Ontology,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1988): 3–13; C. J. White, “Heidegger and the Beginning of Metaphysics,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1998): 34–50. For a recent article on the treatment of the fundamental ontological question by Hegel and Heidegger, see Andrew Haas, “On Being in Hegel and Heidegger,” *Hegel Bulletin*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2017): 150–70.

²¹ On the significance of decisions, see Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, (tr.) P. Emad and K. Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 61–70.

(*ibid.*, 12), which stand for absolute knowledge; the exhibition of absolute knowledge was meant to disclose the structure of a being. Heidegger underlines that this does not merely mean that thinking, reason, and absolute knowledge are the *means* or the *procedure* through which a being is disclosed to us. It means, moreover, that a being *is* thinking, reason, and absolute knowledge. As he puts it, thinking, reason, and absolute knowledge are the guiding question's "factual content" (*ibid.*). For the ancients, as well as for Hegel, the structure of a being *is* the structure of thinking, reason, and absolute knowledge.²² To present absolute *knowledge* is to present the structure of *a being* (and vice versa). Hegel "brought to completion in a radical way" "this answer, which was...prepared [in] ancient philosophy" (*ibid.*).²³ This "completion" is the view that "*a being as such*, the actual in its genuine and whole reality, is the *idea*, or the *concept*" (*ibid.*). The "idea" and the "concept" here stand for absolute knowledge.

Heidegger's argument is clear. The *Phenomenology*'s original title as *System of Science* determines it completely, and hence its beginning as well. But "science," for Hegel, means absolute knowledge, therefore absolute knowledge has a *parousia* at that beginning. Hegel signifies "science" as absolute knowledge because he belongs to the tradition of Western metaphysics which has followed the Greeks' thesis that philosophy, "*the science*," is the exhibition of absolute knowledge as the answer to the guiding question "what is a being?" The argument from the meaning of "science" is clear, but is it successful?

Houlgate does not agree with Heidegger that "science," especially if it is meant to apply to phenomenology, means absolute knowledge (IH, 51–54). Absolute knowledge, for Houlgate, pertains only to logic and the sciences following from it, namely philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit; this is philosophy "proper." Phenomenology is not absolute knowledge. So, if one were to agree with Heidegger that phenomenology is "science," the meaning of "science" here cannot be absolute knowledge. Since "science" is a term used for the characterization not only of phenomenology but also of the "philosophical sciences" of the encyclopedia-system, it must have a generic meaning that captures an element that is *common* to both phenomenology and these encyclopedic disciplines.

For Houlgate this common element is presuppositionless and immanent inquiry. Both phenomenology and the encyclopedic disciplines must presuppose nothing, begin with the simple concept of their subject-matter, anticipate nothing, and let their subject-matter develop

²² See Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 19: Platon: Sophistes*, (ed.) I. Schuessler (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1992), 370; my translation: "For the most part, the philosophy of today's situation moves inauthentically within the *Greek* conceptuality..."

²³ See Robert Sinnerbrink, "*Sein und Geist: Heidegger's Confrontation with Hegel's Phenomenology*," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 3 (2007), 132–52, here 140 n. 17.

itself, to wit, immanently, without any external interference. It is the presence of these methodological features that makes both phenomenology and the encyclopedic disciplines “sciences.”

Contra Heidegger, Houlgate insists that the phenomenologist cannot assume that the examination of consciousness will result in absolute knowledge. He stresses that the phenomenologist “must, rather, put his own expectations to one side, examine consciousness with an open mind and seek to discover *whether or not* ordinary certainties lead to absolute knowing” (IH, 51). Consciousness’s transformation into absolute knowledge is *not* a certainty—the possibility of success must be viable for *consciousness* when it starts its self-examination. Why? Precisely because “otherwise, ordinary consciousness may justifiably complain that its point of view is not being taken seriously, but is being subjected to an examination whose outcome is predetermined” (*ibid.*). For consciousness to be taken seriously, the result of its self-examination must not be “already fixed in advance” (*ibid.*) or, in Paul Redding’s words, already “rigged from the start.”²⁴ But why does Hegel think that consciousness “is being taken seriously” only if it is allowed to examine itself presuppositionlessly and immanently? Houlgate’s response is that it is demanded by Hegel’s conception of “science”:

Science, Hegel writes in the Preface, requires that one must “enter into the immanent content of the matter, ...surrender oneself to the life of the object, or, what amounts to the same thing, confront and express its inner necessity” [PS, 32; Houlgate’s translation] *and this applies as much to phenomenology as to philosophy proper.* (IH, 52; my emphasis)

There is, then, a disagreement between Heidegger and Houlgate concerning the meaning Hegel ascribes to “science.” For the former it is absolute knowledge, for the latter it is presuppositionless and immanent inquiry into a subject-matter. The two notions do not have the same reference, because for Houlgate the beginning with relative knowledge *alone*—*without* the company of an absolute beginning with absolute knowledge—can *still* be a “scientific” beginning.

The problem for Heidegger is that Hegel does not use “science” uniformly in the *Phenomenology*. Although he signifies it as absolute knowledge in some passages, in some others he signifies it simply as immanent and presuppositionless inquiry, as a *method* or a *technique* for arriving at the truth within any suitable domain of inquiry. For example, he says

²⁴ Paul Redding, *Hegel’s Hermeneutics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 136.

that science is not performed by means of “an aggregate of information” (PS, 1), does not seek mere edification (*ibid.*, 5–6), is completely determined (*ibid.*, 7–8), “is derived and developed from the principle itself, not accomplished by counter-assertions and random thoughts from outside” (*ibid.*, 13), “achieves its own perfection and transparency only through the movement of its becoming” (*ibid.*, 14), is a method (*ibid.*, 28), does not proceed by “way of asserting a proposition, adducing reasons for it, and in the same way refuting its opposite by reasons” (*ibid.*), does not blend “with the arbitrary and the accidental” (*ibid.*), is “the self-moving soul of the realized content” (*ibid.*, 31–32), is “the immanent self of the content” (*ibid.*, 33), lets the content “move spontaneously of its own nature, by the self as its own self, and then contemplate[s] this movement” (*ibid.*, 35–36), and so on. Notice that all these assertions describe traits of a method or a technique that could be used for the examination of *relative* knowledge *even if this were not accompanied by or attached to absolute knowledge*. Moreover, sometimes Hegel *contrasts* science with phenomenology. He writes, for example,

Whereas in the phenomenology of spirit each moment is the difference of knowledge and truth, and is the movement in which that difference is cancelled, science *on the other hand* does not contain this difference and the canceling of it. (*Ibid.*, 491; my emphasis)

Given the amphisemy in Hegel’s use of “science” in the *Phenomenology*, it cannot be said with certainty that the original title *System of Science* means “System of Absolute Knowledge”; it may instead mean “System of Immanent and Presuppositionless Knowledge.” This entails that Heidegger’s argument from the meaning of “science” must be deemed unsuccessful: it fails to establish that phenomenology is metaphysics, the absolute’s presentation, and hence that it begins absolutely with the absolute.

VII. The Two Phenomenologies

Besides the argument from the meaning of “science,” which seems unsuccessful, there is another argument Heidegger employs in support of his claim that phenomenology begins absolutely with the absolute, or, simply, that phenomenology is metaphysics. This second argument I call “the argument from the presence of an encyclopedic phenomenology.” In the current section I describe this argument, which I take to be successful, and draw its far-reaching ramifications.

As seen, not only for Heidegger but also for Houlgate, the encyclopedia-system comprises Hegel’s “philosophy,” which is metaphysics, in the sense that it (allegedly)

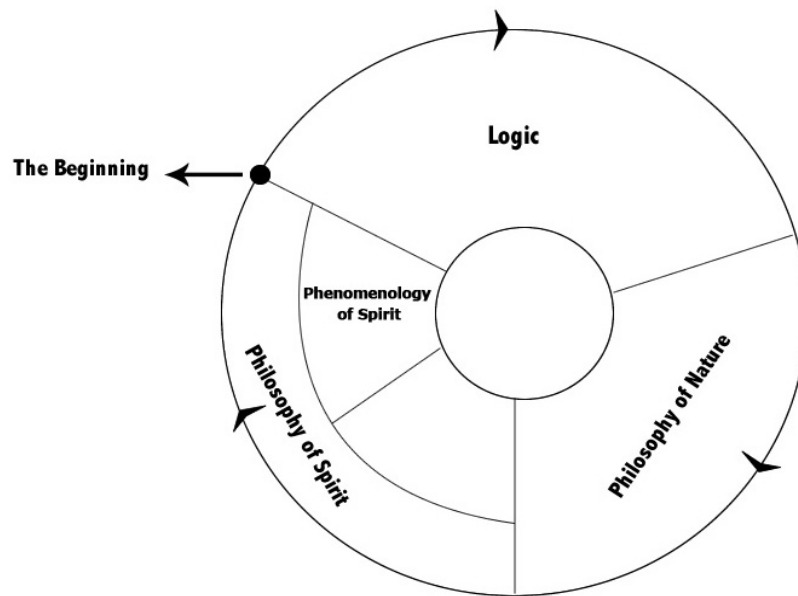
determines the truth of beings (for Heidegger) or the truth of being (for Houlgate). However, while Heidegger believes that the 1807 phenomenology is also part of Hegel's metaphysics, Houlgate believes that it is not. Heidegger observes that the encyclopedia-system contains phenomenology, although not as a ground of the system but rather as a fragment of the system's third part, namely philosophy of spirit (EIHPS, 55). Yet, what is significant here is not that phenomenology has relinquished its function as the system's ground but rather that *the encyclopedic phenomenology* has substantially the same content as the 1807 phenomenology: "In terms of its doctrinal content the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has remained the same in the Encyclopedia system" (*ibid.*). Since (1) the encyclopedic phenomenology is part of Hegel's metaphysics and (2) it has the same content as the 1807 phenomenology, it follows that *the 1807 phenomenology* is also part of Hegel's metaphysics.

I consider this argument successful. It proves that, for Hegel, the 1807 phenomenology presents a part of the absolute's life, and hence, given that its apparent beginning is sense-certainty, that it begins absolutely with the absolute. It is certainly telling that Houlgate neither reflects on the *encyclopedic phenomenology's* presence and status nor discusses the 1807 phenomenology's *repetition* within the encyclopedia-system.

If one accepts that phenomenology is the exposition of (an episode in the life of) the absolute, the question that immediately rises is why, given the encyclopedic phenomenology's presence, the 1807 phenomenology should be retained in the system of science as one of its two grounds, as Heidegger claims. What does the 1807 phenomenology offer to the system that the encyclopedic phenomenology does not? It cannot be the *content*, for it is substantially the same in the two phenomenologies.

If the 1807 phenomenology and the encyclopedic phenomenology have the same content, the system of science must have, in terms of its content, three rather than four parts, as the encyclopedia-system instructs: logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit. In terms of content, the system of science does not contain phenomenology as an independent fourth part because its content is incorporated in philosophy of spirit. In the encyclopedia-system, which has its beginning in logic, phenomenology arises through a *transition* within the system, to wit, a transition from *the soul* to *sense-certainty*.²⁵ Given that the encyclopedic phenomenology, like the 1807 phenomenology, leads to the standpoint of philosophy or absolute knowledge, the encyclopedia-system has the form of a circle:

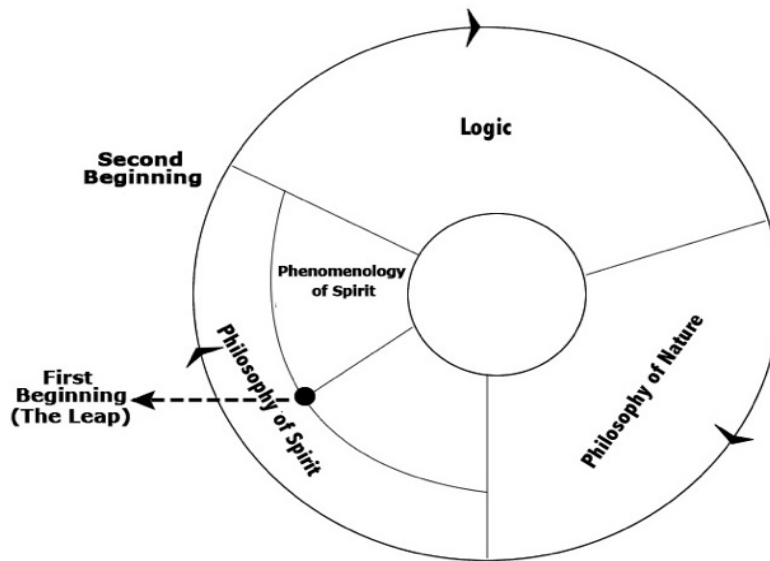
²⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (tr.) W. Wallace, A. V. Miller, and M. Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), §§412–18.



The Encyclopedia-System

The difference between the 1807 phenomenology and the encyclopedic phenomenology is *only* that while the encyclopedic phenomenology involves a transition at its beginning, the 1807 phenomenology arises, according to Heidegger, through a *leap* (*Sprung*): absolute knowledge leaps into consciousness or relative knowledge, in general, and into sense-certainty, in particular. Recall that consciousness is the (“ordinary” or “natural”) *human* mind; so the absolute leaps into the human mind or, to use Heidegger’s terminology, into *Dasein*. The leap, however, is also the absolute’s leap into itself, for as soon as the absolute begins to will its appearance, it attaches *itself* to consciousness (as an implicit structure). It is only such a leap into sense-certainty—rather than a transition to sense-certainty—that differentiates the 1807 phenomenology from the encyclopedic phenomenology. Their difference, as Heidegger puts it, comes down to “the factual issue of executing...the leap” (HPS, 149).

The leap—the absolute’s leap into itself through its attachment to relative knowledge—is, as Heidegger notes, a unique event in the history of metaphysics (*ibid.*, 57). It happens only once, for thereafter the absolute will be making a *transition* from the soul to relative knowledge, it will not be *leaping* into it. The phenomenology-system distinguishes itself from the encyclopedia-system not in terms of content (they are identical) but only through the former including a leap into human consciousness and the latter not including such a leap. Diagrammatically, the phenomenology-system would look like this:



The Phenomenology-System

It is evident from this diagram that as soon as one removes “the leap,” the phenomenology-system vanishes and all that remains is the encyclopedia-system. What distinguishes the 1807 phenomenology from the encyclopedic phenomenology is that the former begins with a leap and the latter begins with a transition. In Heidegger’s words, “[T]he *only* thing that exists here [*i.e.*, at the beginning of the 1807 phenomenology] is the leap and the leap into it” (EIHPS, 58). The leap is the absolute’s “absolute leap into the absolute” and “the *Phenomenology of Spirit* dares to accomplish this leap” (*ibid.*).

The most crucial question of all must now be asked: why, given that the encyclopedic phenomenology has the same content as the 1807 phenomenology, should the system of science, the absolute itself, have a beginning and, therefore, a ground in phenomenology? Why does it not simply begin with the logical beginning and then come full circle to this beginning through the encyclopedic phenomenology? Why does the absolute leap into itself at the point of sense-certainty, in particular, and human consciousness, in general? In Heidegger’s own words, “What does it mean to say that the *first* part of the system of science *requires* the science of the experience of consciousness, or the science of the phenomenology of spirit?” (HPS, 17; my emphasis).

One can detect two distinct responses to this question in Heidegger’s texts. The first is that, for Hegel, the absolute can appear only through human consciousness; since phenomenology is the exposition of consciousness, phenomenology would necessarily be the system of science’s first part. As Heidegger puts it, “[In] experience as the movement of

consciousness...takes place the *coming-to-appearance* of spirit..." (*ibid.*, 23). The second response is that the absolute must come to itself through its *other*, consciousness or relative knowledge; this simply belongs to the definition of the absolute. In Heidegger's words, "[S]pirit is nothing but being-alongside-itself which comes back to itself in becoming something other than itself" (*ibid.*; see also *ibid.*, 33).

Both of these responses are unsatisfactory. The first response is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, one (such as Houlgate) might object that the absolute can appear also through "thought" (*Denken*), which, in contradistinction to consciousness, is not determined by the object. Thought's standpoint is logic's standpoint, so the absolute can appear without traversing consciousness's domain. Second, even if one somehow shows convincingly that the domain of appearance is, for Hegel, only consciousness's domain, this still does not explain the necessity of the phenomenological beginning (the leap), because the absolute could appear through its *transition* (rather than through its *leap*) to sense-certainty, to wit, the beginning of the encyclopedic phenomenology, which is not a beginning or a ground of the system of science. If the absolute must go through consciousness's dialectic in order to appear, this could very well happen in the transition to the encyclopedic phenomenology.

The second response is unsatisfactory as well because (a) the demand that the absolute must come to itself first *through its other* is posited *arbitrarily*, to wit, without an explanation, justification, or grounding, and (b) therefore, it is not shown why this demand is preferable to the opposite belief (held, for example, by Houlgate), which is that the absolute can come to itself first by beginning explicitly with itself. I take Heidegger's belief to be arbitrary precisely because he does not justify it against its opposite and hence its opposite is equipollent to it.²⁶ Heidegger notes that, for Hegel, the absolute's or spirit's "essence" is the "will to show itself" (EIHPS, 56) and hence that "[absolute knowledge]...*must* come to itself" (HPS, 32). Yet, this could very well be established through the logical beginning, for it also generates the absolute's self-showing. Heidegger wants to associate this will only with the phenomenological beginning. This is why he immediately adds that the absolute's essence is the will to show itself *through its other*. As he puts it, "[A]bsolute knowledge is a knowing knowledge...by becoming other to itself..." (HPS, 33). Or, again, "Absolute knowledge *must*...be...the movement or the history in which *coming to itself* takes place as *becoming other to itself*" (HPS, 33; my emphasis). Yet, this (allegedly Hegelian) demand that the absolute "must" begin the journey toward its self-revelation *from* its attachment to its other is never justified *by Heidegger*. To

²⁶ See Ioannis Trisokkas, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Hegel's Theory of Judgement* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 11–42.

my mind, this makes it an *arbitrary* belief because the opposite interpretive claim (made, *e.g.*, by Houlgate), that the absolute comes to itself by beginning explicitly with itself, has equal force (equipollence) in the universe of discourse.

Heidegger may mean to say that the demand that the absolute comes to itself first through its other is a consequence of the *principle* that infinity (or absoluteness) is *determined* through finitude (or relativity), a principle that is established in *logic*. Or it may be maintained, even more generally, that such a demand derives from the logical “principle of determinate negation,” which requires that any element whatsoever is *determined* through its other. These suggestions, however, are problematic and do not provide justification for the existence of a leap into consciousness.

First, if the principle justifying the leap belongs to logic, the latter is proven to be the explicit ground of consciousness, which means that consciousness and its history can function in the system *solely* as a consequence of pure *logos* (logic’s subject-matter). The very notion of a *leap* into history is undermined by the reference to a *logical* ground supporting it. This, of course, does not entail that human consciousness and its history are undermined; they simply acquire the status of a consequence of an already explicitly existing logic. And, surely, such a structure would be perfectly accommodated by the absolute’s *transition* to the encyclopedic phenomenology, leaving thereby any claim for a *leap* into the 1807 phenomenology ungrounded.

Second, if the demand that the absolute comes to itself first through its other (the demand that has been offered as the leap’s justification) is made as a condition for the possibility of the absolute’s *determinacy*, two complications arise. On the one hand, the absolute that is explicitly posited at the logical beginning is *indeterminate* being, so it cannot be that consciousness’s dialectic in the 1807 phenomenology contributes to the absolute’s determinacy. On the other hand, *all* determinacy of the absolute, including its determination as human consciousness, is produced in the encyclopedia-system, so the 1807 phenomenology, if its function were to contribute to the absolute’s determinacy, would become redundant. Given all this, the demand that the absolute comes to itself first through its other remains ungrounded (or, if you prefer, arbitrary or dogmatic).

I have examined Heidegger’s two explanations of the absolute’s leap into human consciousness and found them unconvincing. In this way, we have reached the point where if one follows Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, phenomenology’s function as a beginning or ground of the system of science appears to be arbitrary. It is labelled “arbitrary” because it is *not* successfully privileged over the view that the absolute comes to itself by

explicitly positing itself and then developing its determinacy through this simple positing. The “arbitrariness” of the *leap* into the 1807 phenomenology results from the fact that the beginning of *the absolute* with logic, conceived of as the sole beginning of “philosophy” or “metaphysics” or “the system of science,” has not been undermined by Heidegger’s reasons.

A final note: the preceding discussion has produced a result whose relation to Heidegger’s own philosophical concerns is somewhat peculiar. In a classic comparative study of Hegel and Heidegger, Dennis J. Schmidt convincingly shows that throughout his philosophical career Heidegger struggled with finding a way to distinguish his position from Hegel’s.²⁷ The *Phenomenology* presented a particular problem for Heidegger because, as Houlgate’s interpretation clearly indicates, it has at least the semblance of being an account of the lived experience of “ordinary,” “natural” consciousness and of being a *non-philosophy* or a *non-metaphysics*. If this were true about the *Phenomenology*, Heidegger’s thesis that metaphysics consumes all thought about lived experience or non-philosophy would be threatened. Hegel, the arch-metaphysician, would grant the existence of an independent domain of non-philosophy. This is why Heidegger chose to interpret the *Phenomenology* metaphysically. Yet, it would have been much easier for him if he accepted the already existing scholarly position that the *Phenomenology*, for Hegel, was an error and that the encyclopedia-system provided a correction of that error. If Heidegger accepted this view, all that would remain would be the encyclopedia-system, which is undoubtedly a logocentric account of the truth of being and, therefore, contrasts sharply with Heidegger’s own phenomenology, which acknowledges the independence and significance of *Dasein*’s lived experience for the thinking of being. Why, then, did he not simply accept this “error” theory? To my mind, he did not accept it for all the *philological* reasons I mentioned in the second section of the present article. It is the presence of those reasons, in combination with his need to distinguish his position from Hegel’s, that led Heidegger to develop a metaphysical interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. The upshot of all this is that, while Heidegger would achieve his purpose in a much easier way if he accepted only the encyclopedia-system as Hegel’s “proper” philosophy, his strong belief that Hegel did not excise the *Phenomenology* from the system of science even after Hegel produced the encyclopedia-system *forced* Heidegger to come to grips with the “anomalous” project of Hegelian phenomenology.

²⁷ Schmidt, *The Ubiquity*.

VIII. Phenomenology as Epistemological Metaphysics?

In this final section I investigate the possibility of “combining” Heidegger’s and Houlgate’s interpretations so as to justify phenomenology as a beginning of the system of science. Recall that Houlgate interprets the *Phenomenology* in epistemological terms and denies that it is part of Hegel’s “philosophy” or metaphysics. For him, the 1807 phenomenology does not present the truth of being, to wit, it is not part of absolute knowledge. We have seen that Houlgate’s interpretation is problematic because it cannot square with the fact that the 1807 phenomenology has substantially the same content as the encyclopedic phenomenology, which undoubtedly has a “philosophical” or metaphysical status. Heidegger’s interpretation is preferable to Houlgate’s if the emphasis is put on the metaphysical status of the 1807 phenomenology. Yet, if the emphasis is put on the arbitrary character that the 1807 phenomenology acquires in Heidegger’s interpretation, Houlgate’s interpretation is preferable to Heidegger’s: in Houlgate’s interpretation, phenomenology begins with the positing of an undeniably existing form of consciousness, sense-certainty, which simply reflects on *itself*, that is to say, it reflects on whether it satisfies *its own* standards as a standpoint of knowledge. Houlgate’s interpretation seems to lack the arbitrariness Heidegger’s interpretation imposes on the 1807 phenomenology: there seems to be nothing arbitrary in the notion of consciousness’s examining *itself* as a standpoint of knowledge, or, at least, this is not as arbitrary as one’s demand that the absolute must come to itself first through its other.

Could these two interpretations be combined so as to gain what is convincing and eschew what is unconvincing in each? It may be suggested that Houlgate’s interpretation of the 1807 phenomenology as the journey of natural consciousness from sense-certainty to absolute knowledge could be accommodated into Heidegger’s interpretation if one refused to couple it with Houlgate’s view that this journey does not have a metaphysical character and does not belong to Hegel’s philosophy. Of course, this suggestion could not square with Heidegger’s explicit denial that phenomenology concerns natural consciousness’s ascent to absolute knowledge. Yet, if one refuses to accept this—admittedly problematic²⁸—view of Heidegger, a combination of Houlgate’s epistemological interpretation and Heidegger’s metaphysical interpretation might seem possible. This would be a combination that takes the 1807 phenomenology to be an “epistemological metaphysics” or a “metaphysical epistemology” in the sense that it thematizes, *pace* Houlgate, natural consciousness as *a form*

²⁸ See PS, 15, 49, 64; Williams, “Hegel and Heidegger”; Sinnerbrink, “*Sein und Geist*”; Trisokkas, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism*, 71–92.

of the absolute and, *pace* Heidegger, consciousness's self-examination as the absolute's own attempt to come to itself first as the *justified* standpoint of knowledge.

Houlgate insists that not everyone is determined by such natural consciousness, that some find the beginning with (explicit) absolute knowledge more appealing than the beginning with relative knowledge. Nevertheless, one can understand phenomenology as describing the historical development of human consciousness *in general*. This history of natural consciousness is the history of the absolute as it *leaps* into itself at the historical moment of a consciousness determined by sense-certainty and then develops through the historical process as determined by perception, understanding, self-consciousness, unhappy consciousness, reason, absolute freedom, conscience, the beautiful soul, art, and religion to the standpoint of "philosophy" or explicit absolute knowledge, where it can begin presenting itself as the truth of being (or the truth of beings) in the sphere of the identity of thought and being. This interpretation of phenomenology is epistemological because it understands phenomenology as the *examination* of natural consciousness or relative knowledge as a possible *standpoint of knowledge*. Yet, it is also metaphysical because natural consciousness *is* the absolute or spirit, and the examination undertaken is undertaken by the absolute or spirit *itself*. The absolute, by examining itself as natural consciousness (the non-identity of thought and being), *proves* to *itself* that it cannot generate knowledge (the truth of being or the truth of beings) as natural consciousness, and therefore that the only proper standpoint of knowledge—*i.e.*, the standpoint from which the truth of being or truth of beings could be exposed—is the beginning with logic, or, put differently, with the explicit absolute or being-as-*logos* (the identity of thought and being).

But what about "the most crucial of all questions?" *Why*, in this "combined" interpretation, should the absolute come to itself *first* through consciousness? *Why* should there be a phenomenological *beginning* (a *leap*)? The discussion above has demonstrated that Heidegger's answer, which is that the absolute *by definition* must come to itself first through its other, is arbitrary. Since in Houlgate's interpretation consciousness's dialectic occurs because consciousness desires to *justify* or *ground* its position as the standpoint of knowledge, what follows from this and the identification of consciousness with the absolute is that, in the "combined" interpretation, the absolute is determined not by "the will to show itself" (*simpliciter*) or the will to show itself through its other but rather by the will to show itself—*at the beginning of logic*—as the *justified* or *grounded* standpoint of knowledge. In other words, the absolute *should* begin with phenomenology because *only in this way* can it *begin* its explicit exposition *as justified or grounded*. The whole history of natural consciousness is the

exposition of the historical process through which the absolute, as Heidegger puts it, “absolves” or liberates itself from relative knowledge, to which it is attached (HPS, 15)—*not so as to simply appear* (it could appear also by beginning immediately with logic), but rather so as to appear, firstly and explicitly, *as the justified or grounded standpoint of knowledge* (which would not occur if it began immediately with logic, for no reasons or grounds for its explicit positing would exist). The historical journey of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* would in this case provide the reasons or grounds for the system of science conducting a second beginning, this time with logic.

If the “combined” interpretation were accepted, the leap into the 1807 phenomenology would be explained and, as a consequence, the history of human consciousness, rather than the *explicit* absolute or *pure logos*, would be the ultimate ground of Hegel’s system of science. Or, at least, it should be acknowledged that Hegel does not subsume the history of human consciousness under an all-encompassing domain of explicit absoluteness or pure *logos*.²⁹ Yet, I am not confident that the “combined” interpretation should be accepted without further improvements, a work that certainly cannot be undertaken here. The problem has to do with the fact that the modified “will” of the absolute, namely the will to appear *first* as the *justified* standpoint of knowledge, stems from the belief that a justified standpoint is better or more appropriate than an unjustified one. Yet, what is the justification or ground of this belief? Given that the “combined” interpretation remains mute on this, it seems that the demand for justification is simply an unjustified demand of reason (another name of the absolute or spirit, according to Heidegger). The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the system of science’s *whole* content is generated from the logical beginning (the system of science’s second beginning), independently of whether it is justified or unjustified. Even the history of human consciousness can be generated from an (initially) unjustified logical beginning, an immediate positing of pure *logos*. Therefore, as things stand, it seems that even the suggested “combined” interpretation results in arbitrariness.

IX. Conclusion

“What is the Phenomenology of Spirit?” Heidegger asks in 1942. His reply is that it is metaphysics, an exposition of an episode in the life of a metaphysical entity called “the absolute” or “absolute knowledge” or “spirit” or “reason.” Not everyone agrees with Heidegger’s metaphysical reading of the *Phenomenology*. Houlgate, for one, proposes an

²⁹ See Williams, “Hegel and Heidegger,” 141.

epistemological interpretation of the *Phenomenology*: it presents the ascent of natural consciousness or relative knowledge to absolute knowledge through its attempt to establish itself as the true standpoint of knowledge. On the one hand, Houlgate's interpretation cannot square with the presence of encyclopedic phenomenology in Hegel's "system of science," which is metaphysical in character and has substantially the same content as the *Phenomenology*. On the other hand, Heidegger's interpretation ends up grounding the *Phenomenology* in the rather arbitrary belief that Hegel's system of science must begin with the *Phenomenology* because the absolute, by definition, must come to itself first through its other (consciousness), which is the absolute itself hidden in the structure of relative knowledge. An interpretation that "combines" Heidegger's and Houlgate's interpretations and thereby understands the *Phenomenology* as "epistemological metaphysics" or "metaphysical epistemology" proposes that the ascent of natural consciousness to absolute knowledge through its epistemological self-examination is the absolute's own ascent to its justified self. Yet, this "combined" interpretation also grounds the *Phenomenology* in a rather arbitrary belief, namely the belief that it is better for the absolute to have a justified rather than an unjustified beginning.