



# Hegel and the Idea of the Dialectic

Week 3. 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2017  
Introduction to the *Phenomenology*

# Class recap

- Understand what is meant by ‘dialectic’, and why it characterises Hegel’s philosophical, social and political thought
- Encounter Hegel’s formative influences (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Romanticism)
- Read passages from the “Lesser Logic” to gain a firmer grasp of his dialectical thinking
- Learn about the general character of Hegel’s thought, its aims and objectives

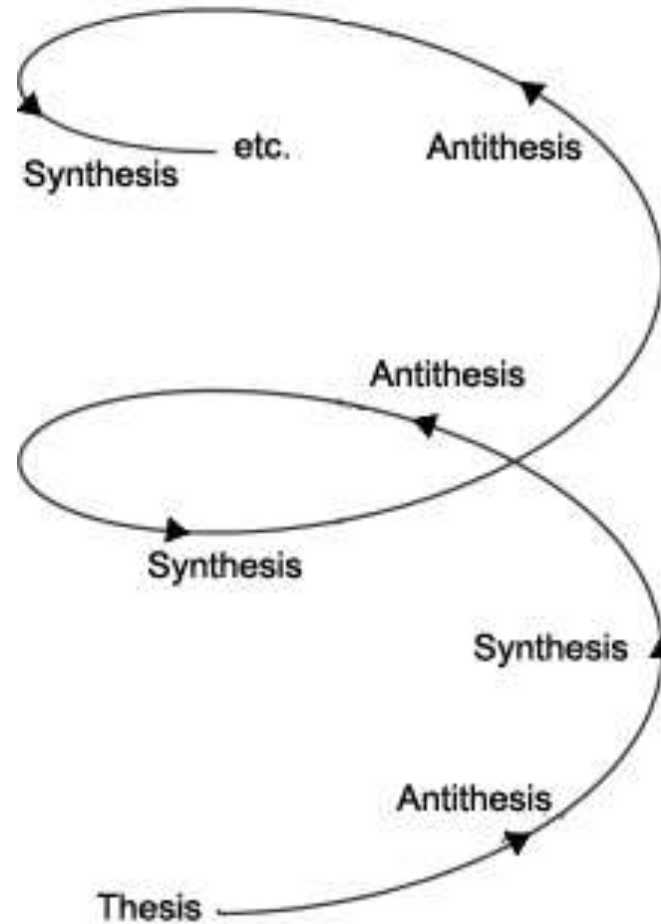


# Class aims

- Continue discussing the significance of Hegel's dialectic
- Assess his departure from Kant
- Introduce the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the nature of the work and its aims
- Read and discuss passages from the "Introduction"
- Understand what Hegel is arguing *for* and *against* in the Preface



# Recap: Dialectic and the Lesser Logic



‘The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter; in the same way when the fruit comes, the blossom may be explained to be a false form of the plant’s existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom. The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes these stages moments of an organic unity, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and constitutes thereby the life of the whole.’

- From the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

## Recap. What is the dialectic?

- Hegel establishes a new way of thinking, the dialectic, in which thinking advances by overcoming and incorporating its contradictions into a greater whole
- Hegel is concerned with how thought strives towards progress, totality through a continual, dynamic activity of thinking through and beyond its contradictions
- Thus a concept collides with its negation, resulting in its overcoming and resolution through the process of *sublation* (*aufhebung*)
- Progress travels by way of failure, and failure has a positive role: not just wrong or right, but 'one-sided', 'incomplete'

## Recap. What is the dialectic?

- The movement whereby we develop our understanding of ourselves is “Absolute Spirit”
- Previous moments are not complete failures: the internal contradictions in our conception of ourselves are revealed through error, but the content of these is not just negated but preserved in the next stage – “the negation of negation”
- This development is *geist*, and refers to us – our understanding of ourselves
- The ‘dialectic’ is the process of us working out what we are for ourselves – this is why he will say the essence of *geist* is freedom
- Freedom is the process of self-determination

# Moments of the dialectic

- The Logic – thought determines what itself is
- The Phenomenology of Spirit – Consciousness works out what itself is
- The Philosophy of Right/The Philosophy of History – our understanding of ourselves is “objectified” in culture, history and institutions



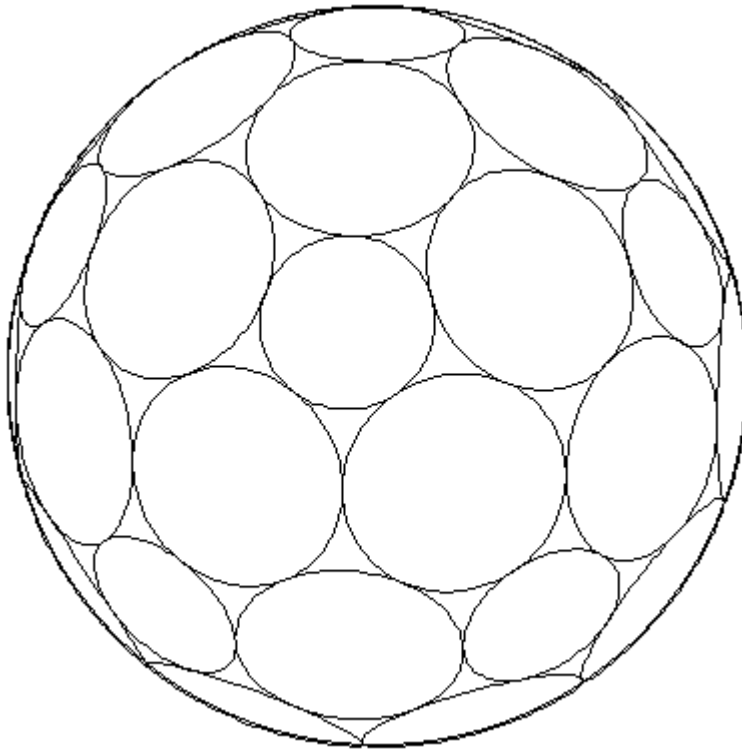


This I have learned. Never to my knowledge  
did you, all-preserving gods, like mortal  
masters, lead me providentially  
along a straight path.

The gods say that man should test  
everything, and that strongly nourished  
he be thankful for everything, and understand  
the freedom to set forth wherever he will.

- Holderlin, "The Course of Life"

## Recap: The Lesser Logic (*Encyclopaedia*)



# The “Lesser Logic” (11)

- The highest, most inward form of the mind’s life is thought, where thought itself is its object, not mere will or imagination.
- Thought intrinsically falls into contradictions as it lacks the certainty of its object. It is compelled to resolve these contradictions, and is able to do so through reflection.
- But the difficulty of thought has led to a ‘hatred of reason’, and a preference for ‘immediate’, sense-based knowledge (i.e. empiricism)

# The “Lesser Logic” (12)

- Thought begins from experience, but has to set itself up beyond and against it to rise beyond it, through an abstract Idea (the Absolute, or God).
- This requires a process of contradiction and mediation, going from sense to the abstract, from particulars to the universal.
- Yet science and experience provide materials for thought, and philosophy in turn gives them *freedom* of thought: a universal, *a priori* nature to connect facts into universal truths

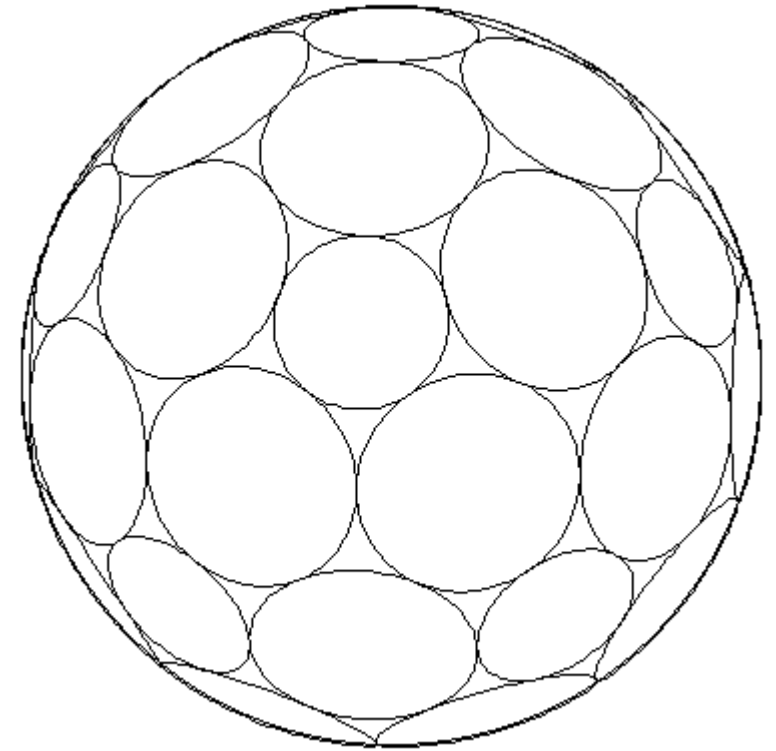
# The “Lesser Logic” (13)

- The history of philosophy also involves a continual dialectical development.
- Each philosophical system marks the development on previous ones, and is itself a particular expression of a universal, singular mind (*Geist*) whose nature is to bring itself into self-consciousness
- Each one is like a particular kind of fruit – say cherries – and to reject one because it cannot stand for all and be *The Philosophy* is absurd, holding one system to an impossible standard



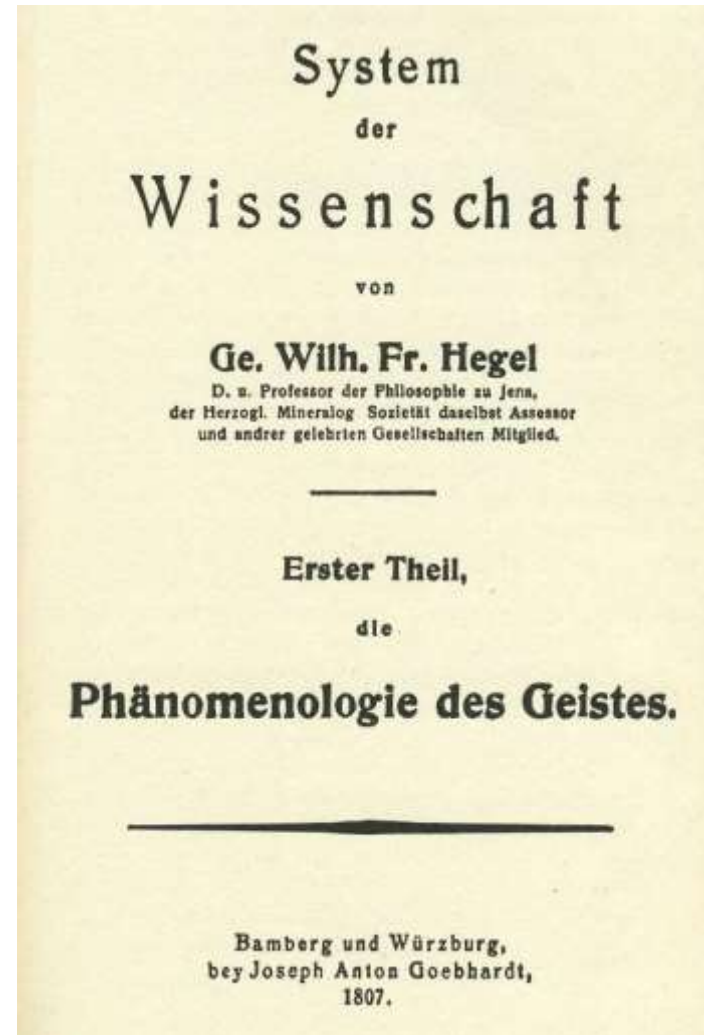
## The “Lesser Logic” (14-15)

- Philosophy cannot be coherent unless it acts as a totality or unity of all possible principles. Any partial or non-systematic philosophies are incomplete and inadequate (14)
- It must strive to be a ‘circle of circles’. Each particular circle contains the Idea in its totality, but the whole Idea is constituted by a number of particular ‘phases’ or circles, ideas which constitute necessarily its totality. (15)





# The *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)



# The *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)

- 'Phänomenologie des Geistes' – refers to mind or spirit
- *Science of the Experience of Consciousness* (working title)
- 'Phenomenology' – refers to how things appear to us, as opposed to what they are in themselves
- Term derived from mathematician Lambert, and developed by Kant
- Seeks to explain how a mind appears to itself, through stages or 'shapes' of consciousness, internally accounted for
- Lesser forms develop through reflection of their conflicts to become more adequate ones, which the *Phenomenology* traces over 8 chapters

# The *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)

- Seeks to lead the reader to the standpoint where proper philosophy ('Science') can begin
- While the aim of philosophy is 'the actual knowledge of what truly is' – what he calls 'the absolute', we need to first explain what knowledge is itself
- Some consider knowledge to be like an instrument used to measure the world – our cognitive capacities stand between consciousness and reality itself, which is inaccessible to us
- If the instrument is faulty or distorts what is considered, we end up in error
- Yet this 'instrumental' view sets up a distinction between appearance and the in-itself which leads to irrefutable scepticism.



1. What can I know?
2. What ought I to do?
3. What may I hope?

‘All principles of the pure understanding are nothing further than *a priori* principles of the possibility of experience, and all synthetic *a priori* propositions are related to the latter alone, indeed their possibility itself rests entirely on this relation.’

‘Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind’

‘... space and time, as the necessary conditions of all (outer and inner) experience, are merely subjective conditions of all our intuition, in relation to which therefore all objects are mere appearances and not things given for themselves in this way’.



# Influence of Kant

- Challenges of scepticism, defending Christian morality, and schisms in the new science between Newton and Leibniz
- Its Copernican shift is from assuming *cognitions must conform to objects* to instead how '*objects must conform to our cognition*'
- We can have a priori knowledge of the world precisely because it is dependent on the human mind. The sensible world is *constructed* by the mind out of passive sensory matter and a priori forms of reason, which structure its experience.
- **Not** what do we know about the world from experience? **Instead** we ask "how is experience possible?"

# Influence of Kant

- Experience must have a certain necessary structure in order to count as being experience at all
- Thus our minds are not passive in receiving impressions, but actively *construct* and participate in forming our experience
- A synthesis of concepts from the understanding (form) and intuitions from sensibility (content) is necessary for synthetic a priori
- Space and time are simply forms of intuition and are not real in themselves, giving only knowledge of appearances, not reality...
- Categories give subjective experience objective validity
- But theoretical philosophy must restrict itself to what can be known through possible experience. Everything beyond this is an all-too-human descent into 'transcendental ideas', which we can think, but not know



Königsberg i. Pr. Kant.

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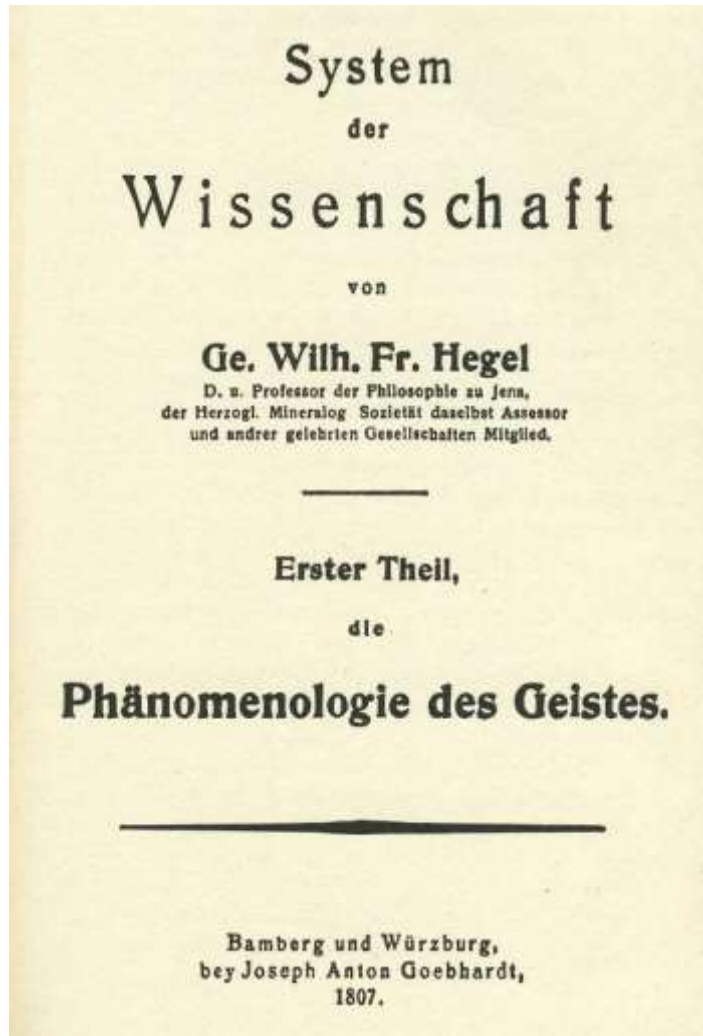
# Hegel after Kant

- Hegel is particularly influenced by Kant's Idealism and use of the categories
- 'the thought-determinations or *concepts of the understanding* make up *the objectivity* of the cognitions of experience' (*Encyclopaedia*)
- Yet Kant is more restrictive in his claims: while we can demonstrate that our concepts make possible objects as we experience them, we cannot prove that our concepts make possible objects as they are in themselves.
- Hegel and others will push further, asking:
  - *why* we cannot know the thing-in-itself
  - *how* Kant can argue *for* the categories, or the understanding as a faculty of judging, without first demonstrating the nature of these
- 'Kant's philosophy took the easy way in its *finding* of the categories', because he simply derived them from what he *assumed* thought to be'.
- Kant leaves us with a 'sack full of faculties'

# Hegel after Kant

- Kant's categories are too restrictive: they do not present knowledge merely as it exists *for us*, but present the structure of objectivity as such.
- *Thinking presents being*, through the categories.
- Appearance manifests the thing-in-itself:
- 'the true objectivity of thinking consists in this: that thoughts are not merely our thoughts, but at the same time the *In-itself* of things and of whatever else is objective'.
- The categories are also dialectical, developing through their opposites. Thought apprehends 'the unity of the determinations in their opposition'.
- Philosophy articulates the Absolute – an unconditioned, self-grounding system of concepts made concrete in actuality, in the world of experience
- Unlike Kant, Hegel wants a philosophy 'preceded by *universal doubt*, i.e., by total *presuppositionlessness*' (*Encyclopaedia*).

# The *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807)



'the detailed history of the process of training and educating consciousness itself up to the level of science'

# *Phenomenology of Spirit*

- The *Phenomenology* analyses the process whereby all possible forms of consciousness develop internally towards genuine knowledge
- Not merely knowledge of the appearance of reality, but reality itself
- Each form of consciousness reveals itself to be less than genuine knowledge – an error but a useful one, a ‘determinate negation’
- In discovering some form of consciousness to be inadequate, a new form of consciousness is ushered into being
- Consciousness will necessarily develop to a point where it will know reality itself, and be at one with it – total freedom

# *Phenomenology* - Introduction

- Take a look at the excerpts from the Introduction, and discuss in groups the following questions:
- What is the relationship between knowledge and consciousness (82, 84)?
- What does Hegel mean by 'being-in-itself' (82-83)?
- How does Hegel explain the 'course of experience' in 86, whereby consciousness knows its object?
- Why does Hegel argue that consciousness will eventually abandon the 'alien', 'what is only for it', and become absolute knowledge? (89)

‘this path is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, for which the supreme reality is what is in truth only the unrealized Notion . . . The series of configurations which consciousness goes through along this road is, in reality, the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science’ (78)



# Hegel glossary

- Being ***in itself*** – merely potential or implicit. Something is ‘in itself’ when considered separately from other things. In states of consciousness, it is unreflective. The in itself is mere potentiality: actuality requires determination, negation, relation with other things.
- (A thing is ‘***in itself for us***’ when we are considering it as separate from other things)
- Being ***for itself*** – reflective, explicit, self-comprehending, fully developed
- Being ***in and for itself*** – completely developed, both at home with itself, and finding itself in the other. The condition of the Absolute. God, Spirit actualised.

# *Phenomenology* - Introduction

- The world is inherently rational, i.e. intelligible to reason
- Absolute knowledge involves perceiving the world as inherently rational, comprehensible and 'home', and philosophy helps us by developing our consciousness so that we can perceive this
- To avoid scepticism, we need to abandon the 'natural assumption' that our cognitions provide a filter between us and reality, which leads to sceptical irrationalism
- Previous non-dialectical views lead to despair: dialectical model offers certainty:
- 'this path is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, for which the supreme reality is what is in truth only the unrealized Notion . . . The series of configurations which consciousness goes through along this road is, in reality, the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science' (78)

# *Phenomenology* - Introduction

- Hegel seeks a presuppositionless study of knowledge, which must begin with consciousness, internally (81)
- At each stage, consciousness knows something while simultaneously distinguishing the object of that knowledge as different from what it knows (82)
- Consciousness develops through overcoming its own internal problems: 'consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself' (84), and we can understand it through comparing its states
- Thus consciousness contains both its object and its understanding of it (the notion): 'But the essential point to bear in mind throughout the whole investigation is that these two moments, 'Notion' and 'object' , 'being-for-another' and 'being-in-itself', both fall within that knowledge which we are investigating.' (84)



# Phenomenology - Introduction

- When consciousness encounters an internal error, it modifies its own criterion of knowledge, and the object is transformed as well
- While we think that the world is presented to us in a new way, actually it is our form of consciousness which has transformed – ‘through a *reversal of consciousness itself*’ (87)
- Consciousness compares its actual knowledge of the object (what it is *for consciousness*), while Hegel ‘looks on’, seeking a criterion for what the object is ‘in itself’ (its truth) (84-5)
- Experience thus gives consciousness two objects: the in-itself presented to it, and the particular form the in-itself appears to it (its ‘being-for-consciousness’) (86)

# *Phenomenology* - Introduction

- Eventually it will get to a point where it no longer needs to go beyond itself: 'where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion' (80).
- This is knowledge of the absolute, where consciousness recognises the object as itself, intelligible to reason (89) – no longer separate
- In this way, Hyppolite and others claim the *Phenomenology* is an education novel or *bildungsroman*, describing the spiritual development of the reader through encountering states of consciousness
- 'so that it may purify itself for the life of the Spirit, and achieve finally, through a completed experience of itself, the awareness of what it really is in itself' (77)

# *Phenomenology* - Preface

- Written at the end, it also rejects previous philosophers (Descartes, Locke, Kant et al.) for attempting to investigate the nature of knowledge prior to knowing anything, leading to an infinite regress and scepticism
- Instead we should seek actual knowledge *as it occurs* in our real cognitive processes
- Philosophy should seek to 'lay aside the title '*love* of knowing' and be actual *knowing*' (5)
- Yet it must avoid succumbing to Romantic irrationalism and veneration of the divine, or claiming emptily that 'all is one' and contained in the Absolute (i.e. Schelling, 'the night in which all cows are black'), and instead explore what consciousness is to us

# Class recap

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## Next week

- Next week, please read Chapter 1 of the *Phenomenology* on 'Sense-Certainty' (sections 90-110) AND Chapter 2 of Robert Stern, *Routledge Guidebook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*
- If you have time, please read Chapters 2 and 3 too ('Perception' and 'Force and Understanding')
- In class we will discuss these three forms of consciousness
- Any questions, email me: [dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk](mailto:dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk)