



Hegel and the Idea of the Dialectic

Week 4. 30th January 2017
Three forms of consciousness

Class recap

- 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

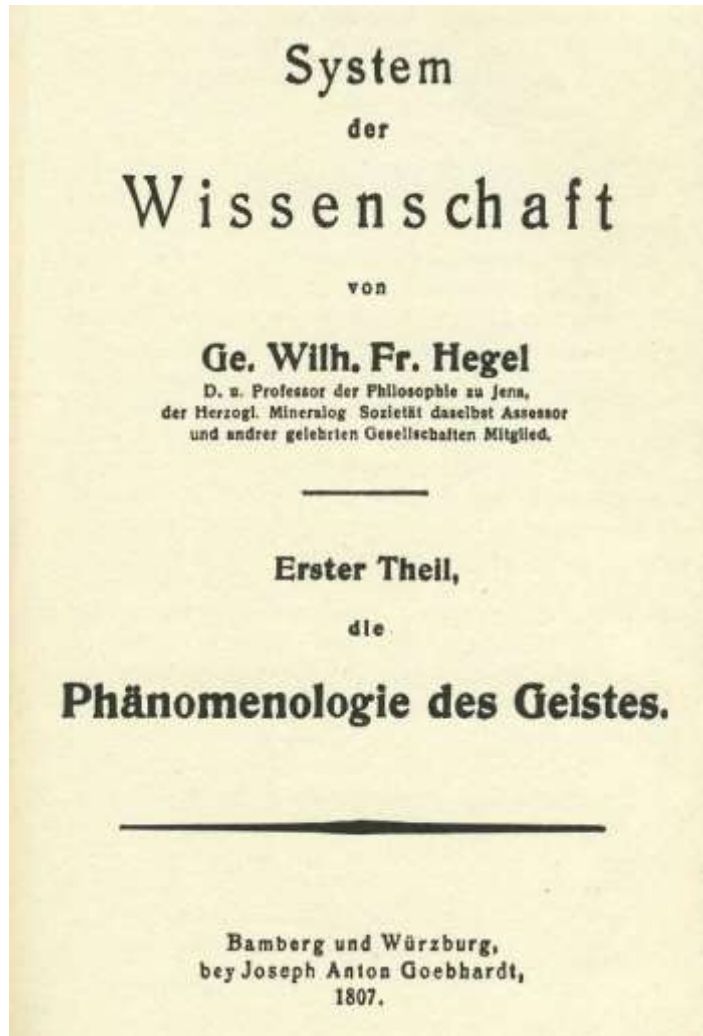


Class aims

- Understand how and why Hegel sets out to *educate* consciousness in the *Phenomenology*
- Discuss why consciousness begins in the immediacy of sense-certainty, and its problems
- Account for how Hegel internally describes the development of consciousness dialectically, through to Perception and Force
- Begin to discuss what Hegel means by *for itself*, *in itself*, the *Absolute*, *Speculation*, etc.



The *Phenomenology of Spirit*



‘the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science’

Phenomenology recap

- *Science of the Experience of Consciousness* (working title)
- 'Phenomenology' refers to how things appear, as opposed to what they are in themselves
- While the aim of philosophy is 'the actual knowledge of what truly is' – what he calls 'the absolute', we need to first explain how consciousness is able to recognise its object, and depart from the instrumentalist view
- This is like learning to swim – we must jump in, unlike Scholasticus!
- Sets out to explain how a mind appears to itself, through stages or 'shapes' of consciousness
- Goal is to educate or *lead* the reader from the stance of ordinary, 'natural consciousness' to one of a presuppositionless philosophy

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

What's the problem with presuppositions?

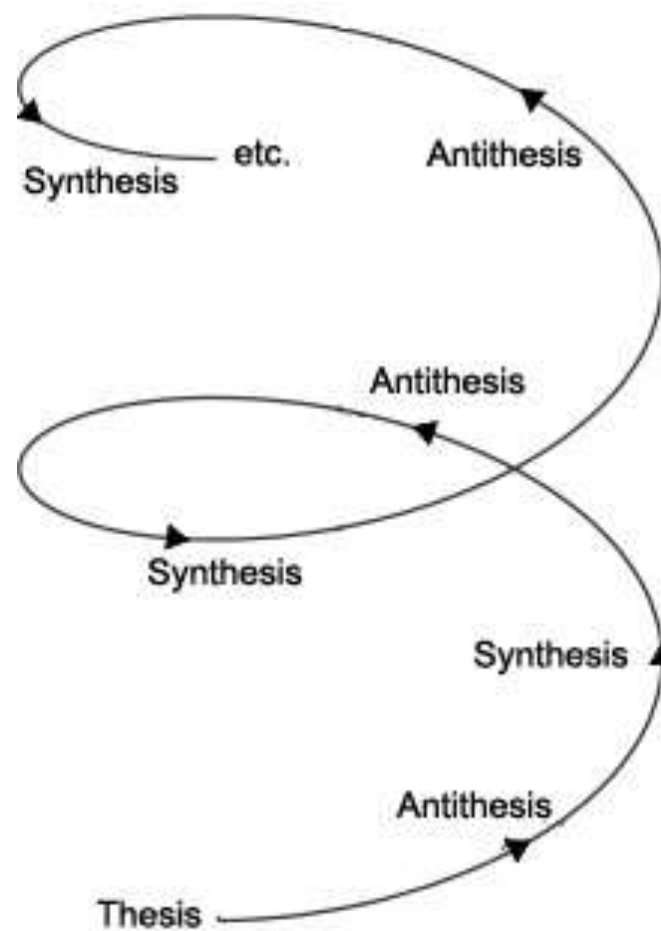
- Hegel's thought is concerned with allowing ways for thought to determine itself freely, self-critically, and autonomously
- This means shedding any kind of presuppositions or unverified claims about reason, the categories or the thing-in-itself (vs Kant)
- Like a theologian or artist (John Russon), Hegel seeks to articulate the nature of truth itself, not merely another interpretation of it
- Philosophy must therefore 'be preceded by *universal doubt*, i.e., by total *presuppositionlessness*' (Lesser Logic, 78) – scepticism
- It therefore begins with what is presented to it, the sheer immediacy of consciousness, and arises through stages to an ultimately presuppositionless philosophy

‘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)

- *What does Hegel want his philosophy to do? Discuss in groups of 2-3*



The Dialectic



‘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?

- The method of the development of thought is dialectical, a progressive movement through stages of internal contradiction
- It begins with one or more concepts or shapes of consciousness being taken as distinct and accurate: the state of understanding
- Through reflecting on the failure of this concept to accurately describe its object, contradictions emerge: stage of dialectical reason – the negation
- A higher concept or new shape then emerges which preserves or *sublates* the old forms: stage of speculative reason 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

Phenomenology - Introduction

- 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)
- 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



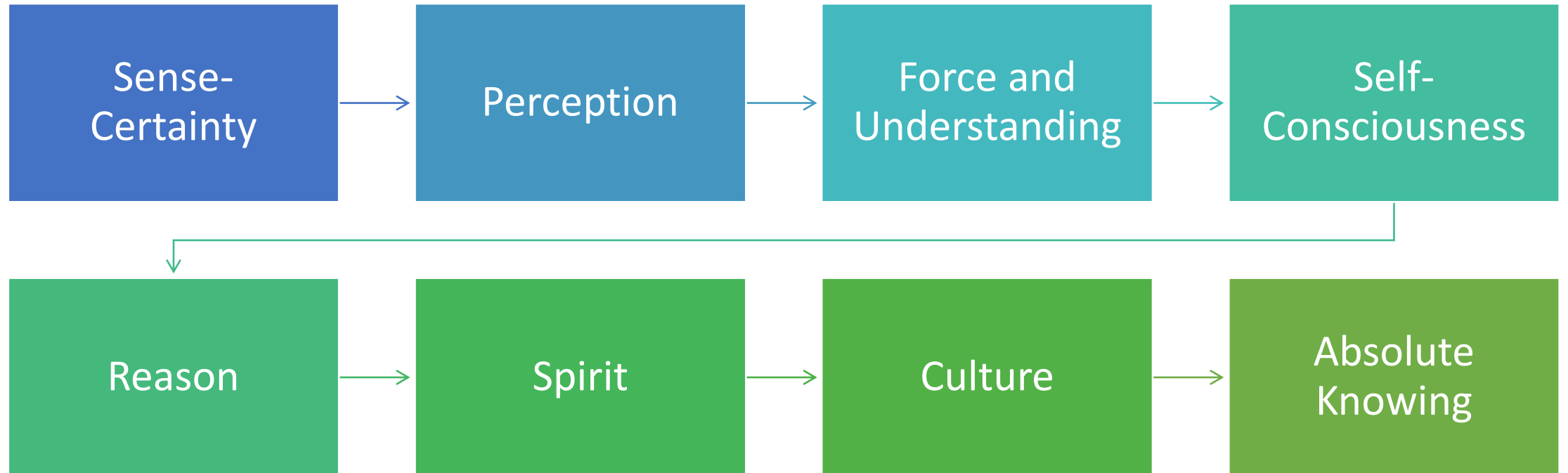
Hegel glossary

- ***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.

Hegel glossary

- The ***Absolute***: the actual knowledge of what truly is; what is complete, self-contained, all-encompassing. It does not hover above the phenomenal world, but is *the conceptual system embedded within it*.
- To ***determine***: to conceptualise, identify or specify it
- ***Determinate negation***: to identify something by what it is not. Negation consists of affirmation → negation → affirming the new.
- ***Reason***: identifies contradictions in the Understanding which it breaks down (dialectical) and resolves (speculative). Its ultimate purpose is to comprehend total unity. Vs Kant, reason is superior to the understanding.
- ***Speculation***: the perspective of reason above natural consciousness and the understanding, sublating the opposition between objective/subjective.

Bildungsroman



Educating Consciousness

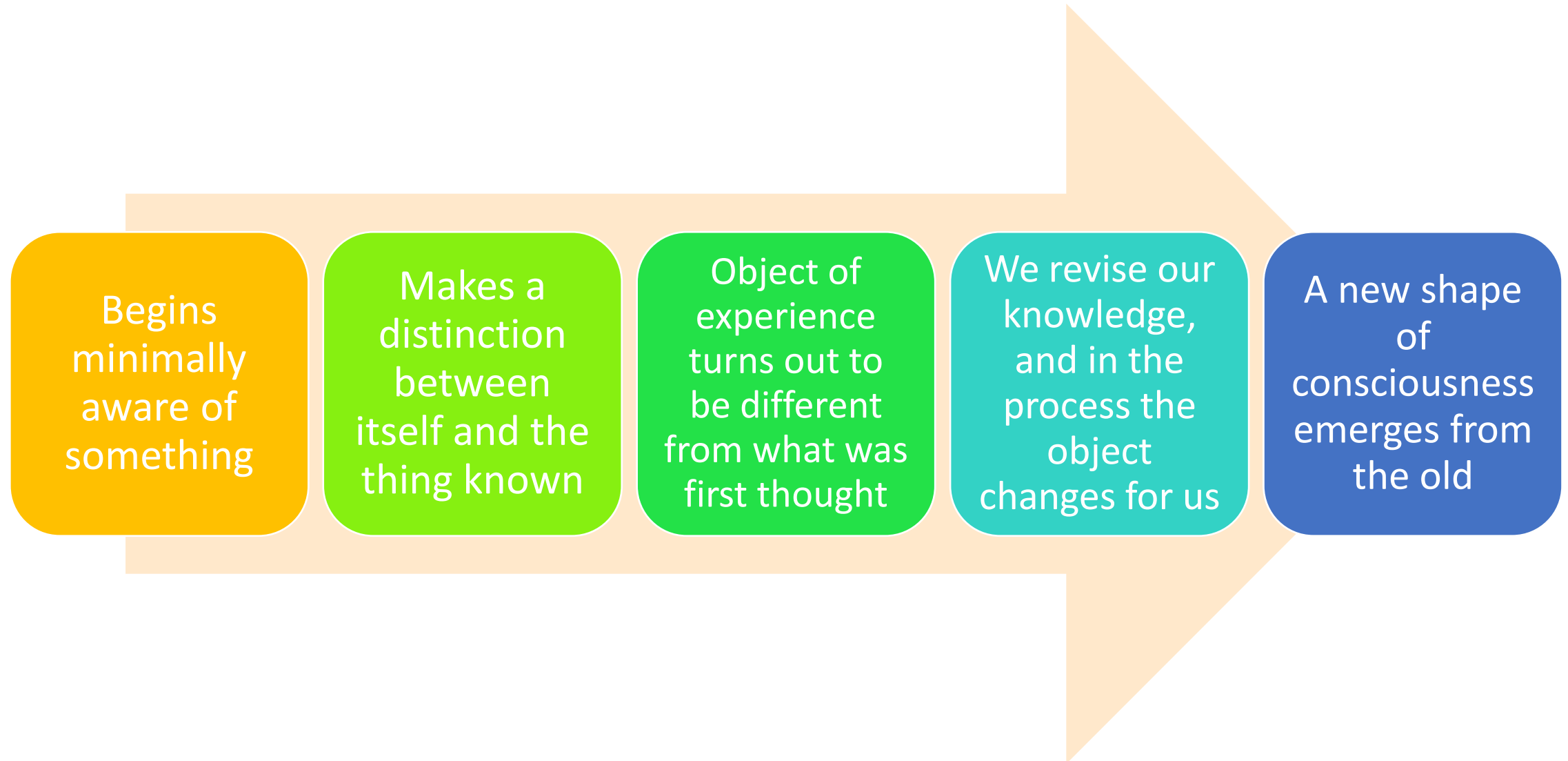
- We must 'watch on', or as Lauer puts it, we must allow consciousness to 'follow out its own implications'
- This involves describing each form or 'shape' of consciousness, made distinct by the nature of how it understands its object
- Any medium or shape of consciousness will alter how the object is understood. The effect of the mediation is key
- The *Phenomenology* therefore accounts for the disparity between what the experience is *in itself* (the Concept), and what the experience is *for itself* (its actuality)
- The disparity is manifested internally, through experience itself



Educating Consciousness

- It is through the attempt by a given form of consciousness to describe its experience that it reaches its own limitation. The object exceeds its ability to describe it
- It begins from the 'despair' of natural consciousness, following a developmental series of failures, eventually leading to absolute knowledge
- Within the given experience is an underlying structure not revealed by that experience
- 'it is through the *attempt* made by a given form of consciousness to describe experience that one is taught by experience how one *needs* to describe experience' (Russon)
- But Redding claims this is 'rigged': the dialectical development of consciousness is only understood by philosophical thought, using a method with an in-built destination of absolute knowing

Dialectical stages of consciousness

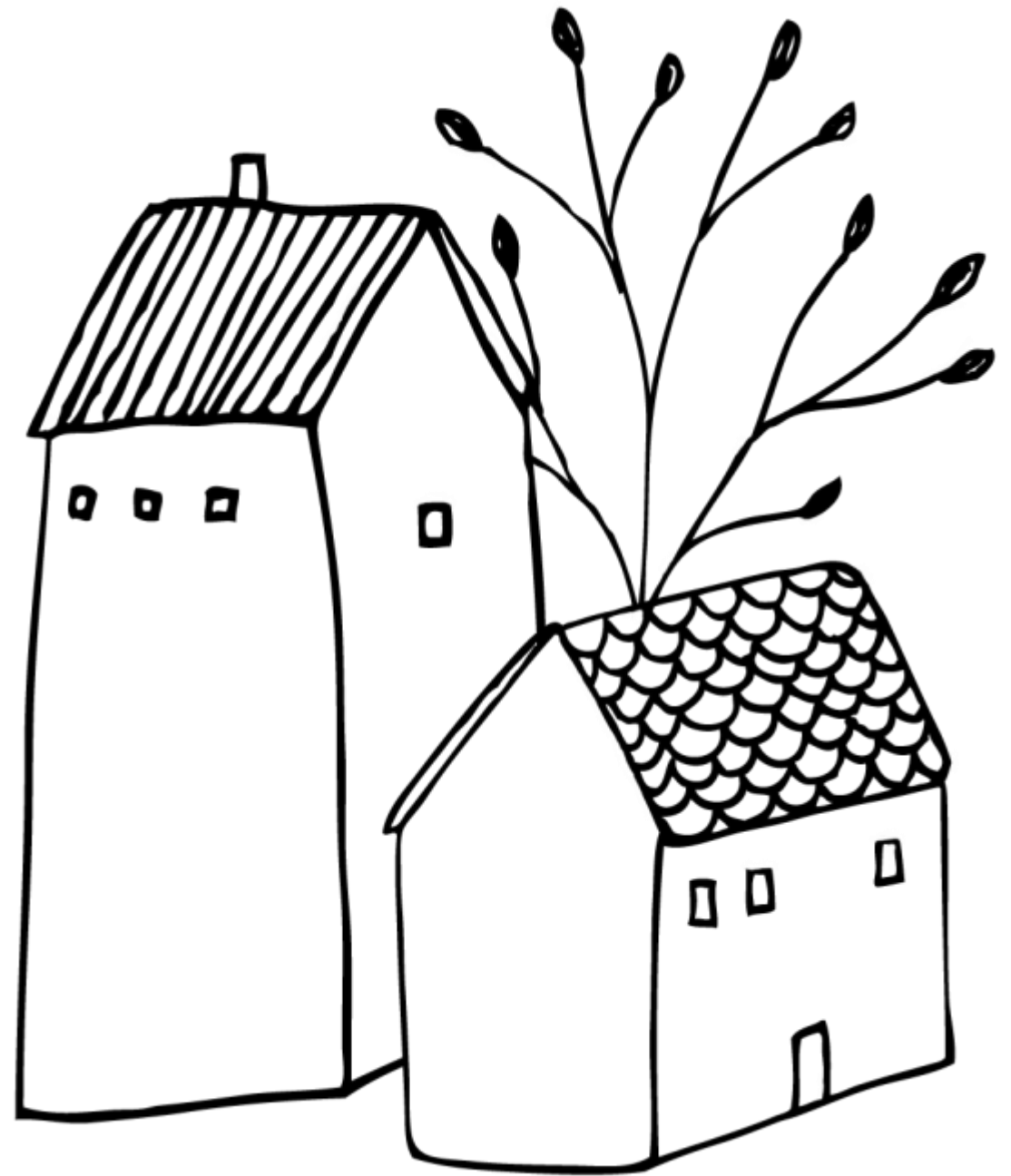


Shapes of consciousness

- 'it comes to pass for consciousness that what it previously took to be the *in-itself* is not an *in-itself*, or that it was only an in-itself *for consciousness*.' (Hegel, 85)
- 'Progress is achieved ... because consciousness is taken, by its own experience of the object, from what it first understands the object to be *in itself* to what it now *knows* the object to be or to what the object actually proves to be *for consciousness*.' (Houlgate)

Sense-Certainty

- In groups of 2-3, please discuss:
- Why does Hegel claim sense-certainty seems 'truest' but is in fact the 'poorest' truth? (91)
- Why does it never give an immediate experience of the object, but one that is always mediated? *Now/Night* (92-96)
- Why does sense-certainty inevitably lead to 'the universal' (99, 104-108)
- Why is its essence neither in the object nor the 'I', but relations that are actual, reflective and conceptual? (104)



Sense-Certainty

- Consciousness is aware of simply the immediate presence of the object, the *this, here, now*. Truest, perhaps...
- But this does not bring the unique specificity of the object to mind because it is indeterminate. All it supplies is an empty universal form of 'being this, here, now'. Its inability to describe the object of its consciousness makes it the poorest form
- By the time we attempt to describe *Now*, it has passed into what *has been*.
- Its inadequacy demonstrates, quoting Hegel, 'that the truth of its object is the universal'.
- So it shifts its focus to not merely *this*, but what *I mean* by this. But vs Kant, even this 'I' is indeterminate from other subjective viewpoints

- ‘Here is, e.g., the tree. If I turn round, this truth has vanished and is converted into its opposite: no tree is here, but a house instead. ‘Here’ itself does not vanish; on the contrary, it abides constant in the vanishing of the house, the tree, etc., and is indifferently house or tree. Again, therefore, the ‘This’ shows itself to be a *mediated* simplicity, or a *universality*.’ (98)
- ‘Sense-certainty thus comes to know by experience that its essence is neither in the object nor in the “I”, and that its immediacy is neither an immediacy of the one nor of the other; for ... the object and “I” are universals in which that “Now” and “Here” and “I” which I *mean* do not have a continuing being, or *are* not.’ (103)

Sense-Certainty

- Consciousness still seeks an immediate relation with the object, and so it excludes from its view all other objects and viewpoints
- 'I, *this* I, assert then the 'Here' as a tree, and do not turn round so that the Here would become for me *not* a tree' (104)
- We seek to identify and point out 'the Now', but in the process discover a 'plurality of Nows' (107) – not a single *this*, but 'all Thises, Heres, Nows' in general (102), in a temporal relation which taken together make the Now a 'universal'
- 'in the constantly sustained *experience* of the object the object reveals itself more and more as what it truly is' (Lauer)

Sense-Certainty

- Thus grasping that the object is a unified thing with manifold properties is *Perception*, our second shape, in which consciousness classifies objects according to a 'bundle' of universal properties (salt)
- Yet by discovering that *this* is inadequate to grasp the nature of the object, we are led to *Force and Understanding*, where we recognise a realm of things governed by invisible, universal forces and laws
- But this too becomes inadequate. For Hegel, 'gravity' and 'force' are not things we see existing in reality, but constructs made by our understanding to grasp reality. Consciousness however errs in recognising them not as constructs, but as objects to be understood.
- This now leads to the point where consciousness begins to reflect on itself, as it tries to understand its own conceptual/objective creations.

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Next week

- Next week, please read section A of Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology* on 'Self-Consciousness', particularly sections 178-196)
- Focus on the 'Master/Slave struggle' and the 'unhappy conscience'
- Useful guides:
 - Chapter 3 of Robert Stern, *Routledge Guidebook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*
 - Chapter 4 of Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*
- Any questions? Please email dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk