



Hegel and the Idea of the Dialectic

Week 7. 20th February 2017
Reason, Spirit, and the French Revolution

Class aims

- Reason and its discontents: mapping out the journey from Unhappy Consciousness to Reason
- What Hegel means by Idealism, and why he criticises other versions of it
- The 'Law of the Heart' and Hegel's incisive critique of Rousseau
- Spirit's emergence out of Reason, and its Greek, Roman, Enlightenment and modern forms
- Hegel's critique of the 'Absolute Freedom' of the French Revolution, and its implications for political theory since

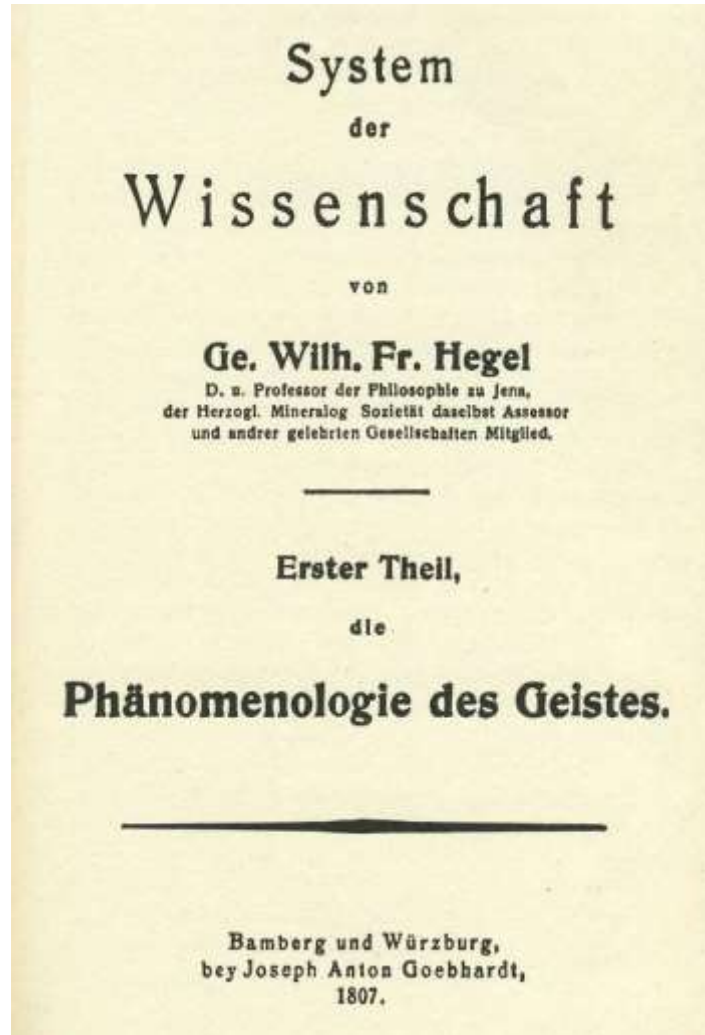


Class recap

- Recap on the master-slave struggle for recognition
- Discuss the three forms of self-consciousness which ultimately result in dissatisfaction and contradiction: Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness
- Evaluate the rebooted role of Reason
- Consider the significance of Hegel's critique of religion and reason in its context



Phenomenology of Spirit - recap



Self-Consciousness

- *Stoicism* negates things' concrete individuality and withdraws into its own concepts.
- *Scepticism* goes further, wherein thought is conscious of itself only through actively negating what is given to it.
- Scepticism oscillates between two contradictions (self-certainty, external doubt), which the unhappy consciousness resolves into a single, internally contradictory self-consciousness.
- It is unhappy because its freedom is invested in the active, insistent negation of otherness, givenness and contingency – thus freedom attempts to negate what is ultimately a feature of self-consciousness itself.
- This leads it to think that freedom might lie beyond the living self entirely, in a being called (after St Augustine) 'the Unchangeable', embodying self-consciousness's essence yet experienced as something alien and separate to its own changeable contingency and individuality.
- Thus its unhappiness lies in its alienation from what it considers its true freedom

Self-Consciousness

- Self-consciousness attempts to remove the alien otherness of external objects and to acquire objective content for itself.
- *Desire*, an endless process of consuming sensory objects;
- A struggle for *Recognition* by another self-consciousness and the enslavement of the vanquished by the victor;
- *Stoicism*, disregarding the external world, withdrawing into the self
- *Scepticism*, denying possibility of rational knowledge of the world
- *Unhappy consciousness*, projecting the essential features of oneself and the world into a transcendent realm
- *Reason*, the unification of consciousness and self-consciousness, resulting in interpersonal reciprocal recognition by self-conscious rational beings

Emergence of reason

- Uniting with the Unchangeable reinforces its own sense of having an individual will that is separate. It does not recognise the universal as itself.
- This changes in surrendering oneself to the Minister in 230. Why?
- Take a look at section 231...
- *How does Hegel argue for a new, positive role of reason out of the contradictions of the unhappy consciousness?*

Emergence of reason

- Through the priest one can conceive of the possibility of blessedness, of being back in touch with the rational order, a reconciliation that is still ‘a *beyond*’ (230), until it gains sufficient rationalistic self-confidence, recognises itself in the world of objects, and becomes ‘aware of its *unity* with this universal’ (231).
- Reason does not strive to negate the given, or the self, but affirms them, and finds true freedom in contingent, individual self-consciousness that is prepared to let go of itself, and open itself to the will of the universal.

Emergence of reason

- The significance of 231 is its turn to an optimistic account of reason. Somehow, the stance is that 'self-consciousness is Reason', because this self-consciousness grasps that the '*in itself*' is not located in a transcendent beyond (like the unhappy consciousness).
- Hegel's tricky argument in 230 is that surrendering one's will has a negative dimension that is obvious, but also a positive one, in proposing a universal will:
'For the surrender of one's own will is only from one aspect negative; in principle, however, or in itself, it is at the same time positive, viz. the positing of will as the will of an 'other', and specifically of will, not as a particular, but as a universal will.'

Emergence of reason

- Consciousness' will becomes 'universal and essential' in this surrender, but is not taken to be its, and the universal is not yet considered its own doing, so it still exists in 'pain'.
- But (231) Self-consciousness's relation to otherness becomes positive now. It has led to the posing of the 'single individual that is an *actual* consciousness', it has achieved unity with a 'universal', 'a unity which, for us, no longer falls outside of it since the superseded single individual is the universal'.
- Hence Hegel describes this new shape, Reason, as a 'third term' between two parts of a syllogism, in which 'the single individual has renounced itself' (its particularity is now a universal), and that the Unchangeable isn't an 'extreme' but part of it.
- Hence Reason's optimism: it now has 'the consciousness of the certainty of being all truth'.

Emergence of reason

- Reason takes its own individuality to be implicitly rational, and it finds its own patterns of rationality in the world.
- Thus for Hegel 'reason is the certainty of being all *reality*' or 'of being all truth'. It combines the subjective certainty of self-consciousness with the objective certainty of consciousness.
- 'Up till now it has been concerned only with its independence and freedom, concerned to save and maintain itself for itself at the expense of the *world*, or of its own actuality, both of which appeared to it as the negative of its essence. But, as Reason, assured of itself, it is at peace with them, and can endure them; for it is certain that it is itself reality, or that everything actual is none other than itself.'

Persuasive?

- *How does Hegel get here so quickly?*
- *It is weakly demonstrated how surrender to a mediator opens the way to reason.*
- *Little within historical learning or internal logical developments suggests this. Others would suggest wonder (Descartes perhaps), aporia (Plato), a desire to learn. Not surrender as such*
- *What other problems come to mind?*

From reason to Idealism

- Reason has a 'universal interest *in the world*, because it is certain of its presence in the world, or that the world present to it is rational'.
- It is the standpoint of idealism, which considers the world to have a rational and so ideal structure.
- Hegel now outlines the features of this Idealism...

Reason is Idealism

- Idealism is the stance of Reason. 'Reason is the certainty of consciousness that it is all reality' (233).
- Reason has this certainty in itself. The 'I' which is its object is its sole object, and is all reality: "I am I', in the sense that the 'I' which is an object for me is the sole object, is all reality and all that is present.
- Being the sole object for us, and that through which all reality and presence and given, this 'I' renders everything else a '*non-being*'.
- Thus 'self-consciousness is all reality, not merely *for itself* but also *in itself*, only through *becoming* this reality, or rather through *demonstrating* itself to be such'.

Reason is Idealism

- He recaps along its 'path': through the first three shapes, otherness as '*intrinsic being*' vanishes. In the struggle for recognition, freedom of Stoicism, and the 'liberation' of Scepticism, and the struggle for liberation for the consciousness divided itself, its '*for consciousness*' vanishes (subjectivity?) into '*consciousness itself*'
- It results in a final, important premise which Hegel will build from: 'that what *is*, or the in-itself, only *is* in so far as it is *for* consciousness, and what is *for* consciousness is also *in itself* or has *intrinsic* being.'
- This consciousness is Reason, which has the certainty of that truth.
- But it is only an '*immediate certainty*' (234) which asserts its truth thus, and so Hegel says that (233) it asserts but does not comprehend its own truth, and is 'incomprehensible' to others.

Critique of Schelling and Kant

- The dogmatic assertion that Reason is all reality is akin to that made of Schelling in the Preface. It simply asserts its certainty without demonstrating its case, as Hegel does dialectically.
- Hegel (235) then dismisses Kant's metaphysical deduction (indirectly, without reference) by claiming it an 'outrage on Science', being too arbitrary.
- His third critique is most important, and echoes his claim in the Preface to grasp the True both as subject and substance. Kant's thing-in-itself, and Fichte's 'external impetus' (*Anstoss*), depict actuality in a non-actual manner, and thus reintroduce scepticism.
- Hegel's argument is that reality is intelligible to consciousness because it is inherent in consciousness, not merely because the subject imposes a structure of reality over it. It is not mind-dependent or mind-imposed.
- This is conceptual realism: 'human consciousness reflects and makes known the fundamental conceptual order inherent in things as they are in themselves, rather than things as they are constituted by us' (Stern 101).

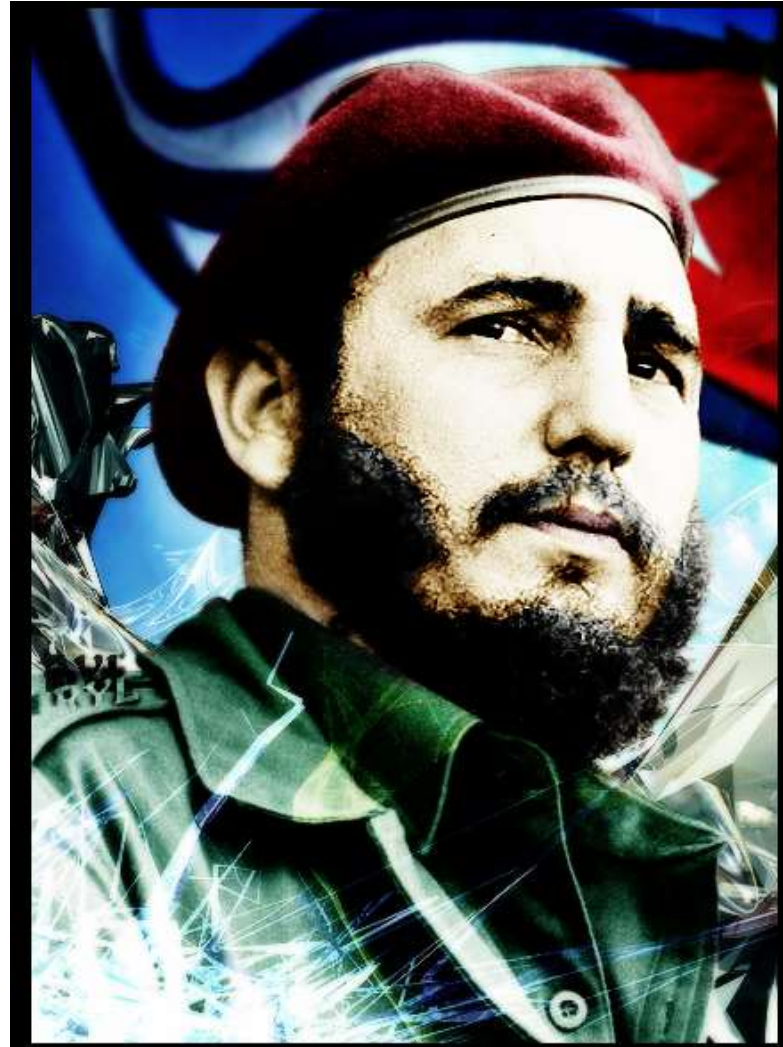
Reason and its discontents

- So Idealist Rationalism in Kant et al. is too subjectivist and open to scepticism
- Hegel then presents 'Observing Reason' of the early modern Scientific Revolution, but also argues its categories are too arbitrary and empty, and leap too far into the material world. Again what's missing is the fundamental unity of subject and substance.
- 'Observing Self-Consciousness' maps the laws governing human thought. These only explain *that* we do, not *why*. Criticisms of physiognomy and phrenology follow
- Ultimately, Hegel's interested in the difficulties of consciousness to bridge the gap between itself and other. Reason's desire to be 'at home in the world', without contradiction, cannot be at the expense of suppressing or overlooking contradiction.

Reason is not at home

- Hegel contrasts modern ideas about the individual and its place in the social world against pre-modern, less individualistic ones e.g. Greece.
- For the Greeks, an individual found satisfaction in the life of the *polis*, where there was no division between the individual and the customs of the society, no separation. A harmony of self and world.
- Modern individuality has caused this Greek world and its 'happy state' (354) to end and so must withdraw from it.
- The modern world has sought refuge in individual pleasures, rather than custom or nature – gives example of Faust.
- But the pursuit of pleasure ultimately results in unhappiness, when one seeks a more lasting good that involves the welfare of others...

From the Heart to Self-Conceit...



- ‘Others do not find in this content the fulfillment of the law of *their* hearts, but rather that of someone else; and, precisely in accordance with the universal law that each shall find in what is law *his* own heart, they turn against the reality *he* has set up, just as he turned against theirs. Thus, just as the individual at first finds only the rigid law, now he finds the hearts of men themselves, opposed to his excellent intentions and detestable’ (373)
- ‘The heart-throb for the welfare of humanity therefore passes into the ravings of an insane self-conceit, into the fury of consciousness to preserve itself from destruction . . . It therefore speaks of the universal order as a perversion of the law of the heart and its happiness, a perversion invented by fanatical priests, gluttonous despots and their minions, who compensate themselves for their own degradation by degrading and oppressing others, a perversion which has led to the nameless misery of deluded mankind’. (377)

The Law of the Heart

- Law of the Heart feels its own affirmation of the sovereign authority of the individual undermined by the power of church and state.
- The stance of Rousseau: that the world is inherently rational, once people listen to their own hearts over external authority.
- But it results in three key problems:
 - 1. it necessitates a new social programme that must take on a generalising, universal form at odds with the particularity of the 'law of the heart'. In being universal, it is no longer the individual's own (paraphrasing 372).
 - 2. others may not identify with its imposed social programme just as it did not with the Church/State, thus dismissing the 'hearts' of others (373)
 - 3. Others may defend the status quo against the new programme, thus its claim that status quo is alienated from will of individuals is false. (374)

Frenzy of Self-Conceit

- This is the zone of conspiracy theory, cynicism and misanthropy, embodied by Karl Moor in Schiller's *The Robbers*.
- The refusal of others to join in the battle against the establishment is down to the corrupting influence of evil social forces.
- The ideals of the social reformer are lost in hatred; self-interest is considered to be the 'way of the world'. Public order turns out to be a 'universal state of war'. Remind us of anything?
- Even a retreat to individual 'Virtue' and altruism in a world believed to be corrupt and self-interested leads to hypocrisy, as it separates the good of the individual from that of the community
- Reinforces an empty quietism of resignation that is ultimately smug and ineffectual

From the ethical-communal, comes Spirit

- Our moral actions are features of a wider set of interrelations
- Hegel's problem with it seems to be that, unlike the Greek ethical polis which he prefers, it does not accept the foundational nature of moral principles, but tries to ground them in an extra-moral test (categorical imperative). The ethical rules *just 'are'* (437, After Sophocles' *Antigone*), and are obeyed unreflectively. The individual aspect is lost.
- The onesidedness of Kantian reason, its failure to grasp the absoluteness and non-contradiction of object and content, is the failure which takes him to Spirit, counter-intuitively

From the ethical-communal, comes Spirit

- 'Ethical disposition consists just in sticking steadfastly to what is right, and abstaining from all attempts to move or shake it, or derive it. Suppose something has been entrusted to me; it is the property of someone else and I acknowledge this because it is so, and I keep myself unfalteringly in this relationship.'
- 'as soon as I start to test them I have already begun to tread an unethical path. By acknowledging the *absoluteness* of the right, I am within the ethical substance; and this substance is thus the *essence* of self-consciousness. But this self-consciousness is the *actuality* and *existence* of the substance, its *self* and its *will*.' (437)

Spirit!

- ‘Spirit is the *ethical life* of a nation in so far as it is the *immediate truth* – the individual that is a world. It must advance to the consciousness of what it is immediately, must leave behind it the beauty of ethical life, and by passing through a series of shapes attain to a knowledge of itself. These shapes, however, are distinguished from the previous ones by the fact that they are real Spirits, actualities in the strict meaning of the word, and instead of being shapes merely of consciousness, are shapes of a world.’ (441)

Spirit!

- This is consciousness aware of itself as the embodiment of reason. It is founded on a community of reciprocal recognition, in that it is self-conscious reason as it relates to another, also recognised as self-conscious reason.
- In this spiritual or ethical community, one recognises one another as specific individuals who also embody universal reason, *universal* in that it takes the form not of the individual heart, but of public law and custom, which govern the community (and all humanity).

Law and Custom

- While law and custom have particular forms, they are universal in constituting, the 'substance' or identity of each community member.
- They express the common identity of citizens and also protect individual identities. The laws are the concrete embodiment of the universal.
- It doesn't just recognise reason in itself and its other, but recognises itself and its other as self-conscious, universal reason.
- 'the laws proclaim what each individual is and does; the individual knows them not only as his universal objective thinghood, but equally knows himself in them, or knows them as *particularised* in his own individuality, and in each of his fellow citizens'.

Towards Absolute Freedom

- *Spirit* is marked by this communal element then. It is not self/consciousness in the abstract or individual, but self-conscious reason in the form of a whole community or world.
- Spirit in its various, logical but largely historical shapes, becomes more self-conscious. Initially it becomes divided between culture and the pure consciousness of faith, but this is resolved through *absolute freedom*, which knows itself explicitly to be universal reason, not just in embodied public laws, but in the abstract realm of pure thought and rational will.
- It understands itself to constitute spiritual actuality itself, with principles that are objectively valid, not just products of its own self-consciousness.
- It knows itself to be pure reason, and knows the spiritual world around it to be the creation of its *own* universal, rational will.
- Hegel: 'the world simply for it is its own will, and this is a universal will'.

Leads to the Revolution

- Its will is indeed universal and *general*, in that it is governed by pure reason, the same which animates everyone else in the community.
- This is effectively revolutionary, in that social hierarchies are dismantled through the prioritisation of universal reason and freedom. Under this general will, individuals are pressed not to pitch their individual wills against the whole.
- This rational community strives to fulfil the general interest – the French Revolution he imagines as closest to this....

Leads to the Revolution

- ‘Will is in itself ... the *self*-conscious essence of each and every personality, so that each, undivided from the whole, always does everything, and what appears as done by the whole is the direct and conscious deed of each’.
- ‘In this absolute freedom ... all social groups or classes which are the spiritual spheres into which the whole is articulated are abolished; the individual consciousness that belonged to any such sphere, and willed and fulfilled itself in it, has put aside its limitation; its purpose is the general purpose, its language universal law, its work the universal work.’



The Reign of Terror

- Why does absolute freedom lead to an abstract universality, and what are its features? (587-8)
- Why does such universality then lead to death, where dying is no more meaningful than 'cutting off a head of cabbage'? (590)
- How does Hegel criticise the French Revolution? (591)
- How does he argue that a new shape of 'moral spirit' emerges? (595)

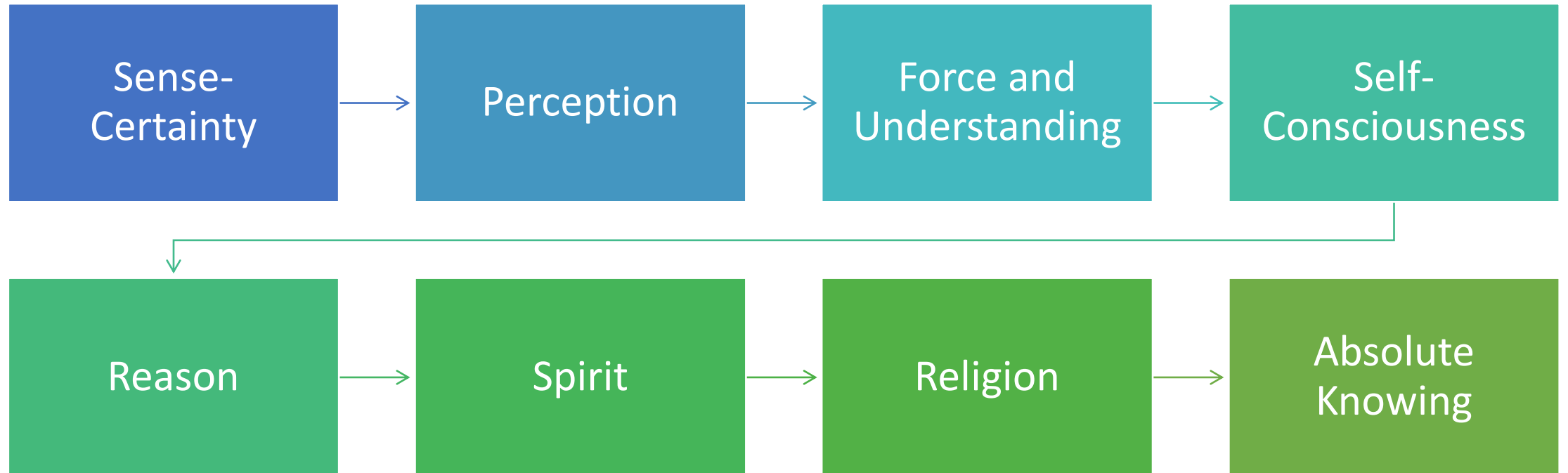
The Terror

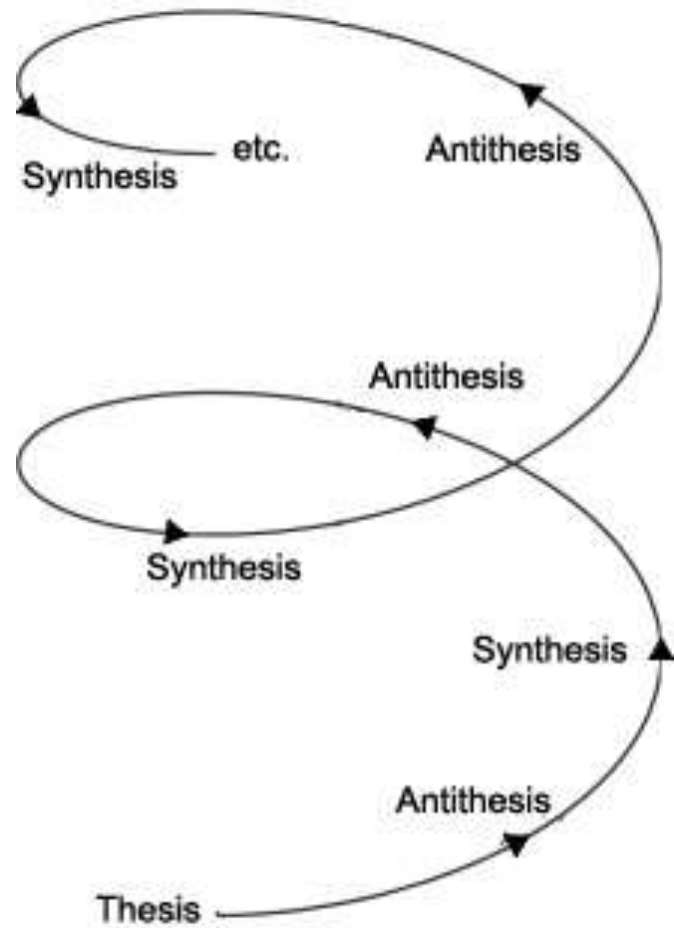
- The problem lies in its reliance on an abstract universal will which allows for no deviation or opposition to break loose. Anything not free or rational is subject to 'the *fury* of destruction'.
- The old order is destroyed, then any kind of individualism is attacked. The Revolutionary Terror results in death on a major scale, in which life has no more significance than 'cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water' (590).
- Those who strive to represent such a universal interest inevitably form a faction which is considered to represent instead a particular, individual interest, instead of the universal, and inevitably they are killed too. In turn the community of rational individuals is killed in great number.
- Despite this, free spirit has ensured that its own inner will is universal and rational through negating all individual wills – its inner will becomes pure. In this, the next shape emerges, *moral spirit*, where absolute freedom becomes pure thought.

Rounding up on Spirit

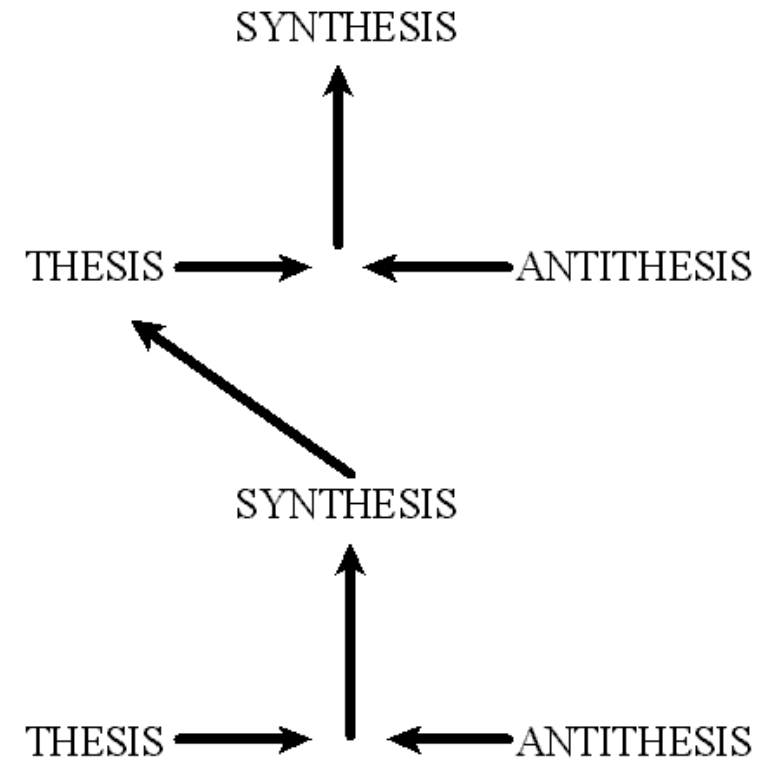
- Both *Antigone* and the Terror indicate the dangers of individuals being restricted by fixed social obligation.
- The Dialectic cuts through, development through conflict and sublation
- Danger is in restricting individuals from change and challenging their own social positions
- There is also danger in being insensitive to historical epoch and particularity, and role of social relations
- Unity of the ethical and political, subjective and objective: *subject* and *substance*
- *How compelling do you find Hegel's critique of Rousseau, the French Revolution, and efforts at social revolution more broadly?*

Bildungsroman

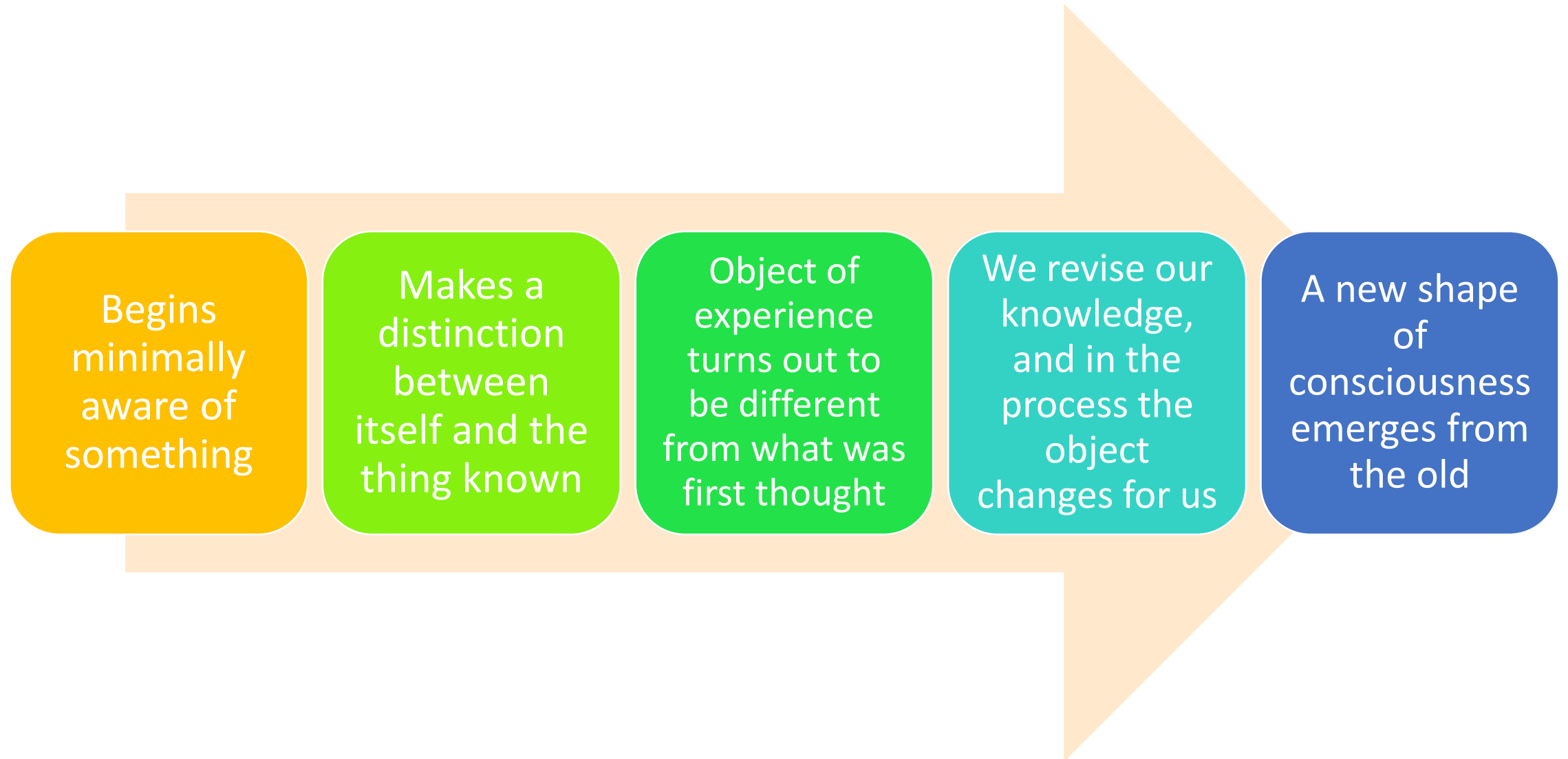




HEGELIAN DIALECTIC



Dialectical stages of consciousness



Idealism, an overview

- Absolute knowledge reached when mind realises that *what it seeks to know is itself*.
- Reality is constituted by mind, but at first mind doesn't realise this, and instead sees it as something independent and alien to it
- It seeks objective knowledge of reality, but fails because it misconceives reality as something apart from it and too mysterious to grasp.
- *Consciousness* → directed to objects, as given.
Self-consciousness → negates objects, as given.
Reason → finds itself implicitly present in the world itself, and values the world as rational, but individually focused.
Spirit → self-conscious universal reason, in a rational community

Idealism, an overview

- It succeeds when it realises that reality is its own creation, and that there is no beyond. It knows reality as directly and immediately as it knows itself.
- Individual minds are aspects of an inherently universal mind. This mind is inherently rational, and our reason is in perceiving the universality of reason through becoming aware of the rational, universal nature of our own intellects.
- Absolute knowledge is thus 'mind knowing itself in the shape of mind'. It is achieved when a given mind i.e. Hegel's (!) recognises that the nature of reality is its own creation.

Class recap

- Reason and its discontents: mapping out the journey from Unhappy Consciousness to Reason
- What Hegel means by Idealism, and why he criticises other versions of it
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- Spirit's emergence out of Reason, and its Greek, Roman, Enlightenment and modern forms
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Next week

- Next week, we will move onto Chapters 7-8, 'Religion' and 'Absolute Knowing'
- We'll focus mainly on what the end of the *Phenomenology* in 'Absolute Knowing' consists of, and will round-up the book in all.
- In class, we'll focus on sections 799-808.
- Useful guides:
 - Chapters 6 and 7 of Robert Stern, *Routledge Guidebook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*
 - Chapter 4 of Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*
 - Terry Pinkard, "Spirit as the "Unconditioned"" in the *Blackwell Companion to Hegel* (Moodle) is also a good guide on this week and next week's themes
- Any questions? Please email dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk