



Hegel and the Idea of the Dialectic

Week 8. 27th February 2017

Absolute Knowing? *Phenomenology* round-up

Class aims

- Recap on the link between individual and communal freedom in 'Spirit'
- Present the necessary development via religion of Philosophy
- Question whether Hegel really has taken us to the true stance of philosophy and 'absolute knowing'
- Reflect on the course of the *Phenomenology* and evaluate its arguments in sum



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
- 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



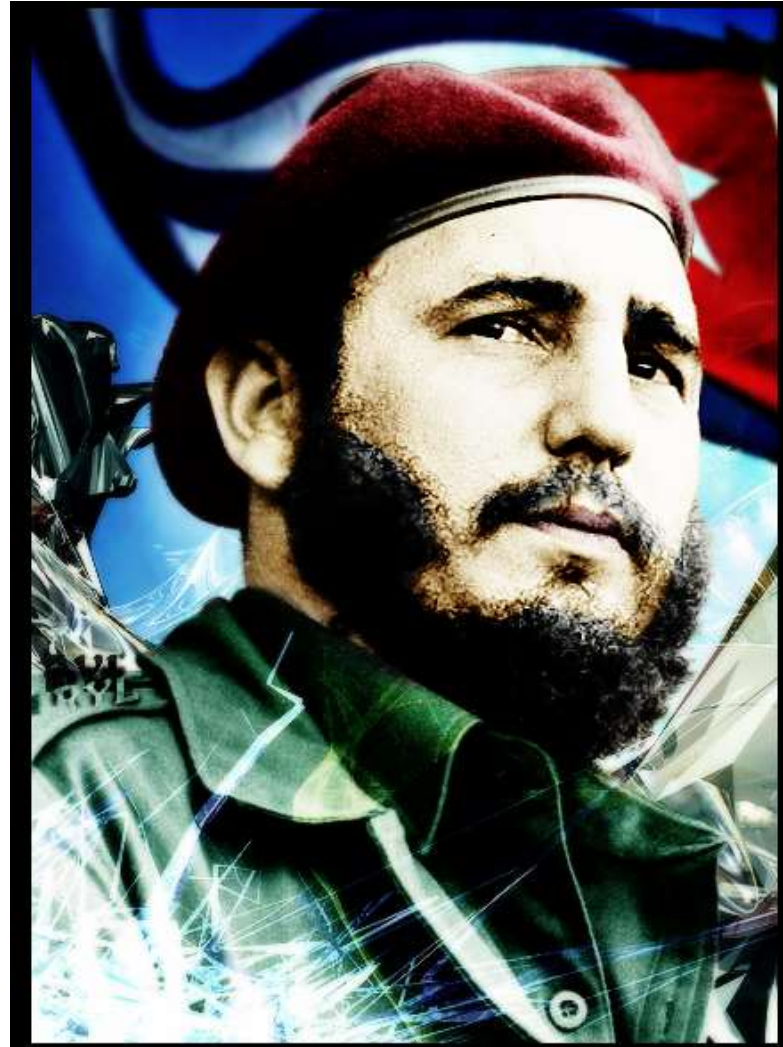
Phenomenology of Spirit - recap



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.

From the Heart to Self-Conceit...



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)

Spirit!

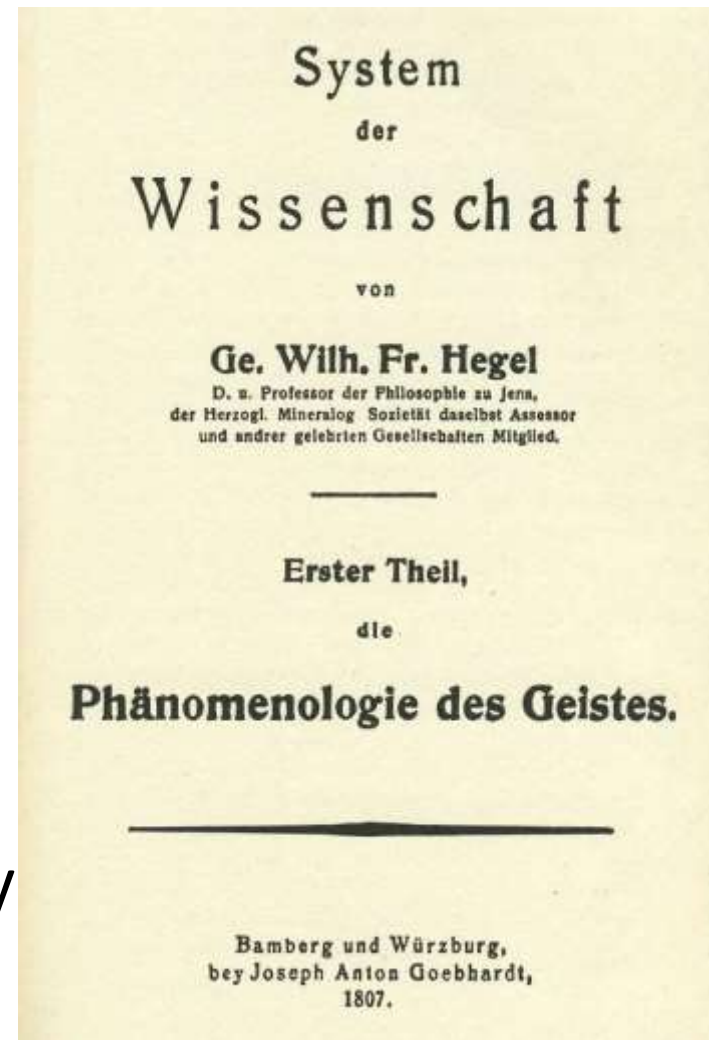
- ‘Spirit is the *ethical life* of a nation in so far as it is the *immediate truth* – the individual that is a world. It must advance to the consciousness of what it is immediately, must leave behind it the beauty of ethical life, and by passing through a series of shapes attain to a knowledge of itself. 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)

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.’

Absolute Knowing

- In this final short chapter, Hegel presents the final shape of consciousness, 'Absolute Knowing', which emerges out of Religion
- The metaphors and 'picture-thinking' of religion are dropped, which made God 'other' to humanity
- Philosophy understands its object, human self-consciousness *as* being, to be fully objective and fully united with consciousness.
- In becoming philosophical, consciousness explicitly turns into 'absolute knowing', '*pure* self-recognition in absolute otherness'.



Religion



Religion

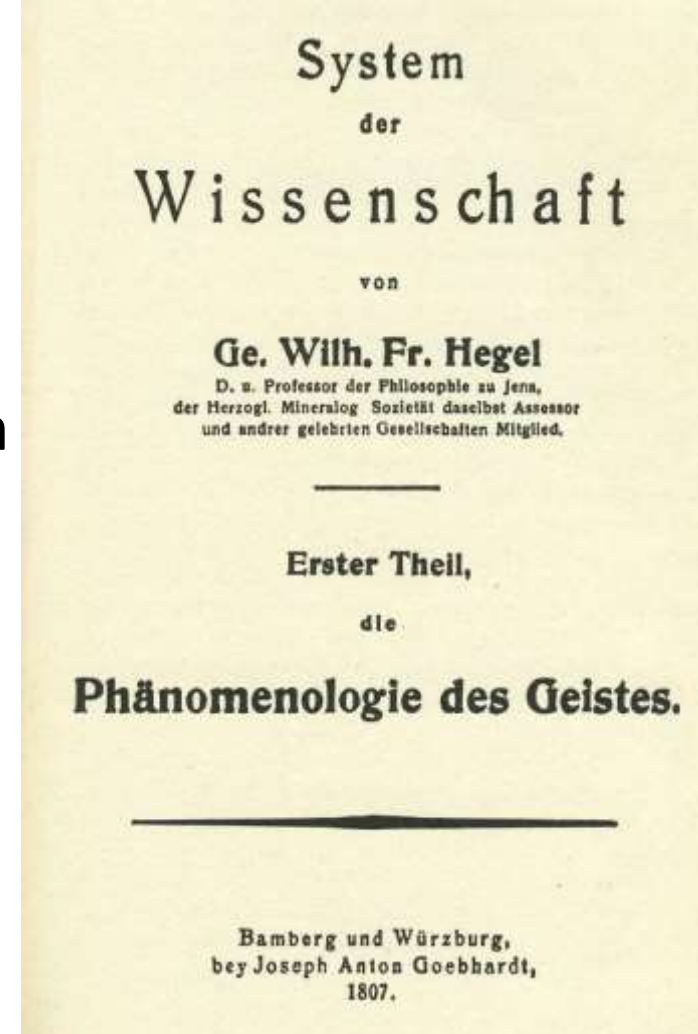
- Moral spirit inevitably leads to viewing a self apart from others: the *beautiful soul*, the *evil hypocrite* and the *judge*
- Confession, forgiveness and reconciliation allows for mutual recognition, a truly moral community
- Religion goes beyond morality in locating 'divine' reason not in human self-consciousness but in something beyond, that which is 'absolute Being', and constitutes being itself
- But this absolute Being isn't separate from human life, like the Unchangeable earlier, a transcendent object; instead religious consciousness holds itself to be absolute being's own self-consciousness.
- Through religion, humans give expression to what they consider the ultimate truth about themselves.

Religion

- Yet it is also higher than just a human state of greater awareness: it *is* absolute being that has become, through religion, self-knowing Spirit; absolute being that has become conscious of itself in and as religion.
- ‘in this religion the divine Being is known as Spirit, or this religion is the divine Being’s consciousness of being Spirit’. (Hegel)
- Natural religion: light, then plants and animals: warring, selfhood
- Religion of art: ancient Greece, free self-conscious individuals, communicated in language and literature
- Revealed religion: Christianity, internalised, immanent through the Holy Spirit
- Relies on a ‘picture-thinking’, distorting a true understanding of God as instead a ‘Father’, ‘Son’, an Other to humanity, whereas this absolute being conceived is instead human self-consciousness
- ‘in this picture-thinking, reality does not receive its perfect due, viz. to be not merely a guise but independent free existence’.

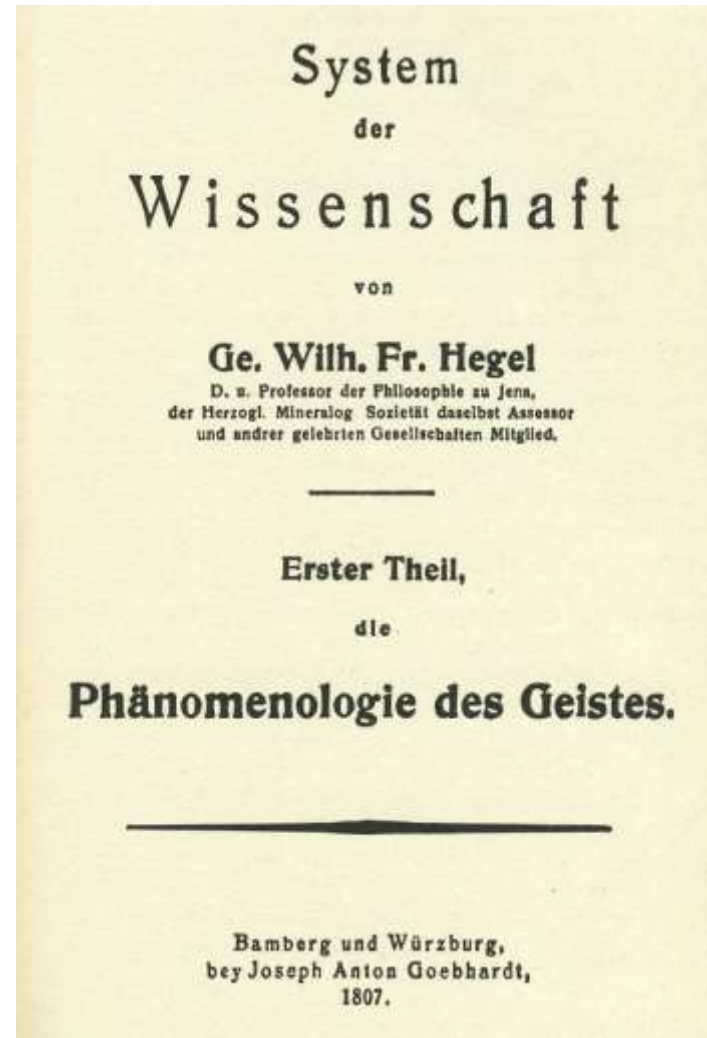
Absolute Knowing

- Holy Spirit dissolves boundary between divine and human
- Philosophy recognises a profound identity between being and consciousness: while being becomes self-conscious through human beings, it is more than human life
- It recognises being to be identical in structure to human self-consciousness.
- For Hegel, 'in this self-like *form* existence is immediately thought, the content is the Concept' (805).
- Being is 'identical in form to thought in so far as it is absolute *reason* or 'Concept'.' (Houlgate).



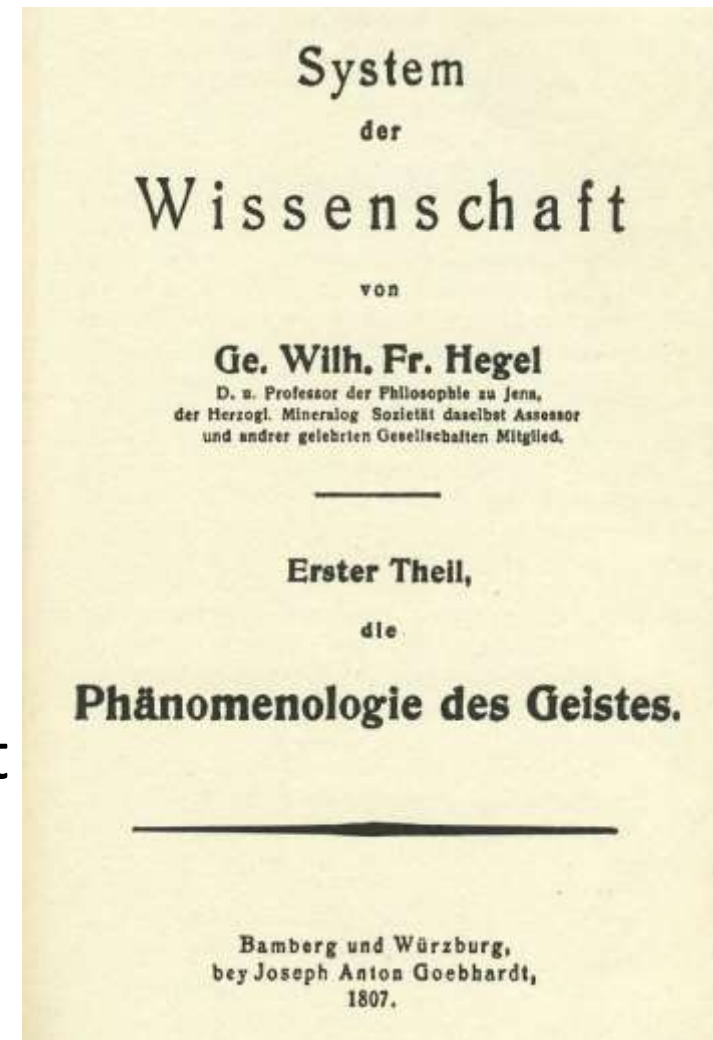
Absolute Knowing

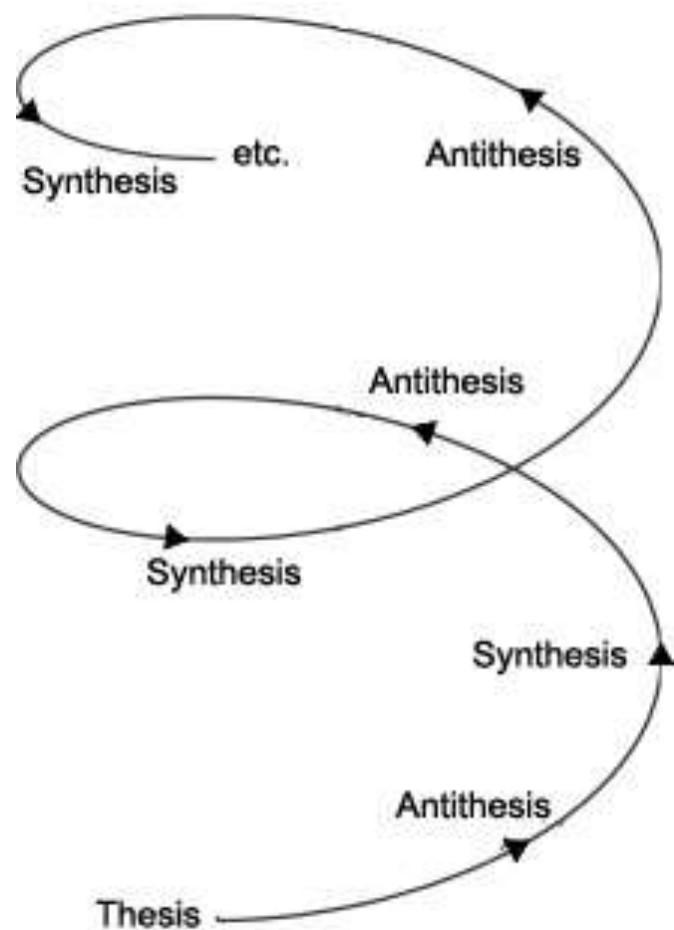
- ‘The *content* of this picture-thinking [at the level of religion] is absolute Spirit; and all that now remains to be done is to supersede this mere form, or rather, since this belongs to *consciousness as such*, its truth must already have yielded itself in the shape of consciousness’ (788)



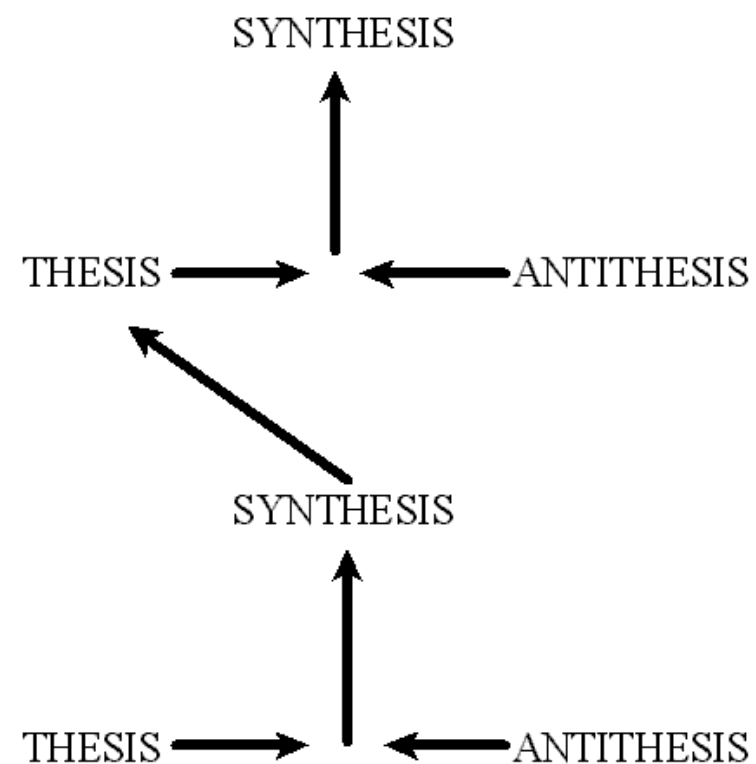
Absolute Knowing

- How does self become one with or 'sink into' substance (804)? What does this unity of Spirit/Self and Substance mean?
- Why is it so important that the 'difference of consciousness' has now been overcome? (805) What is the 'immediate unity of self-knowledge resulting'?
- What does Hegel mean by a 'Becoming' out of a succession of Spirits (808), in which Self has sought to know perfectly what it is?
- What do you think, in all, Hegel has tried to lead us to?

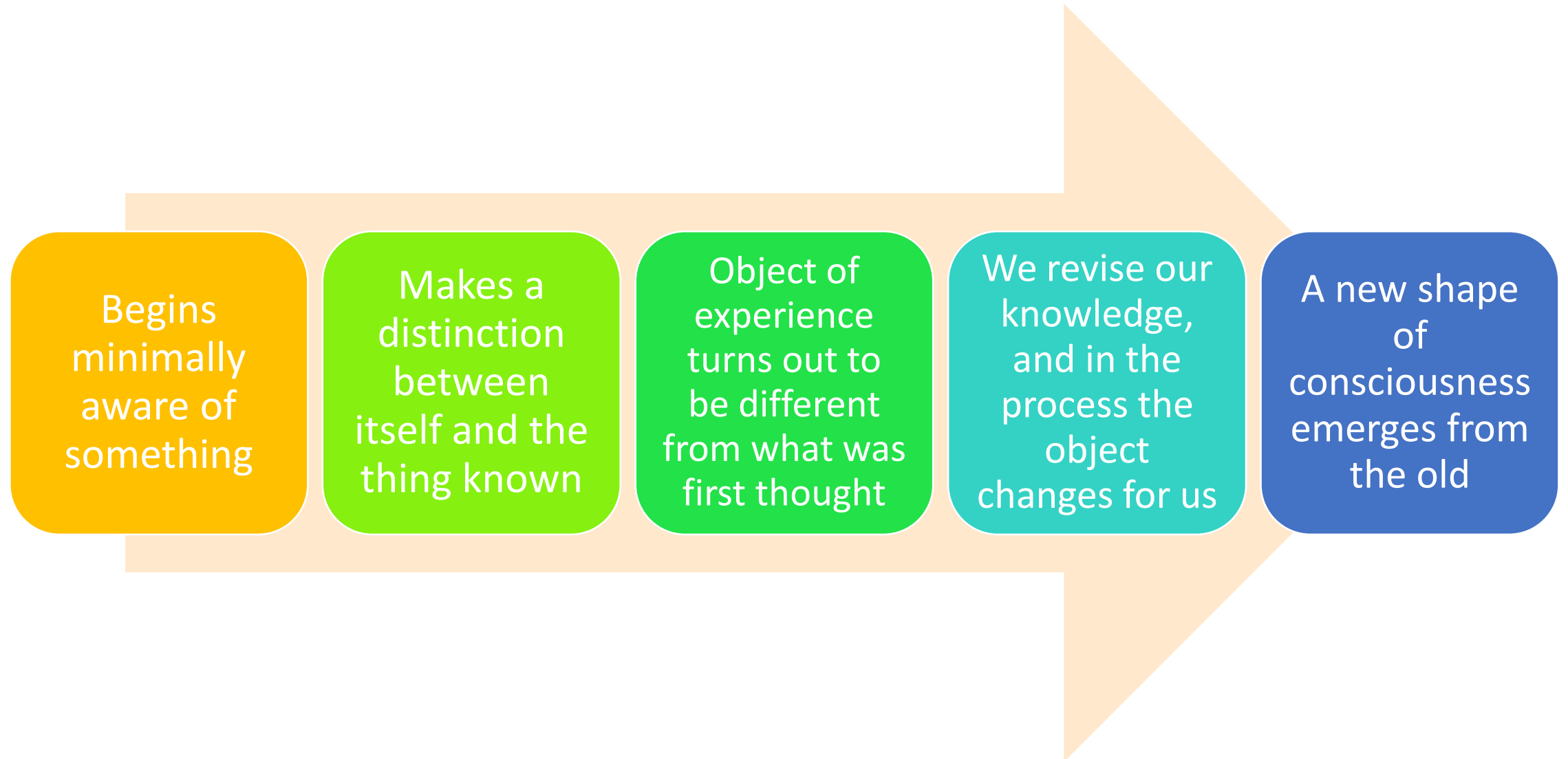




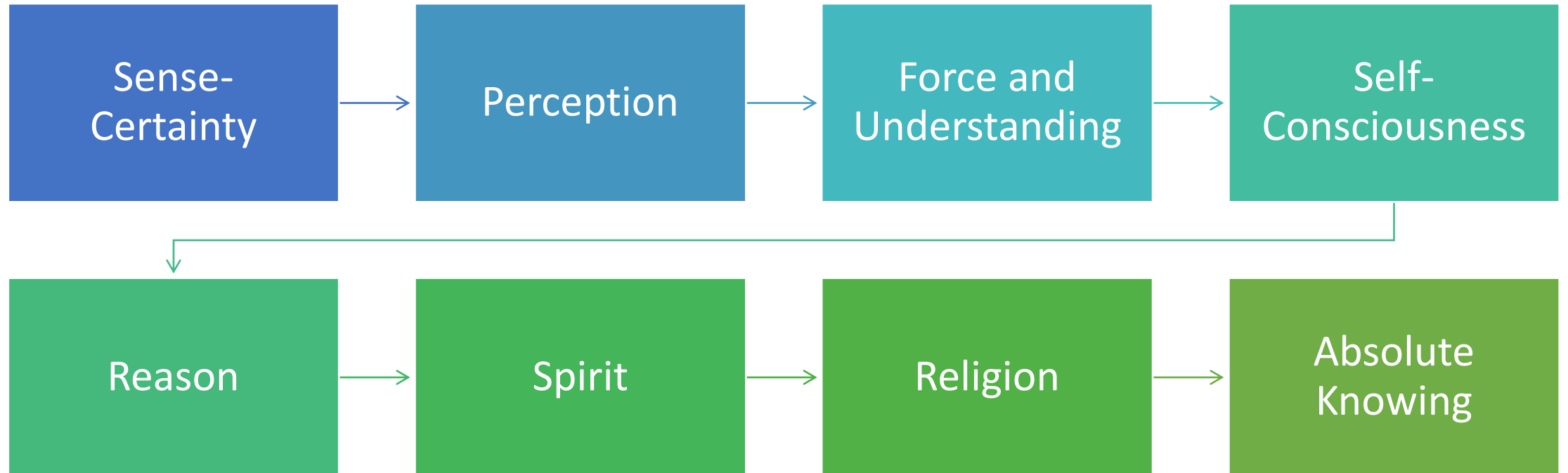
HEGELIAN DIALECTIC

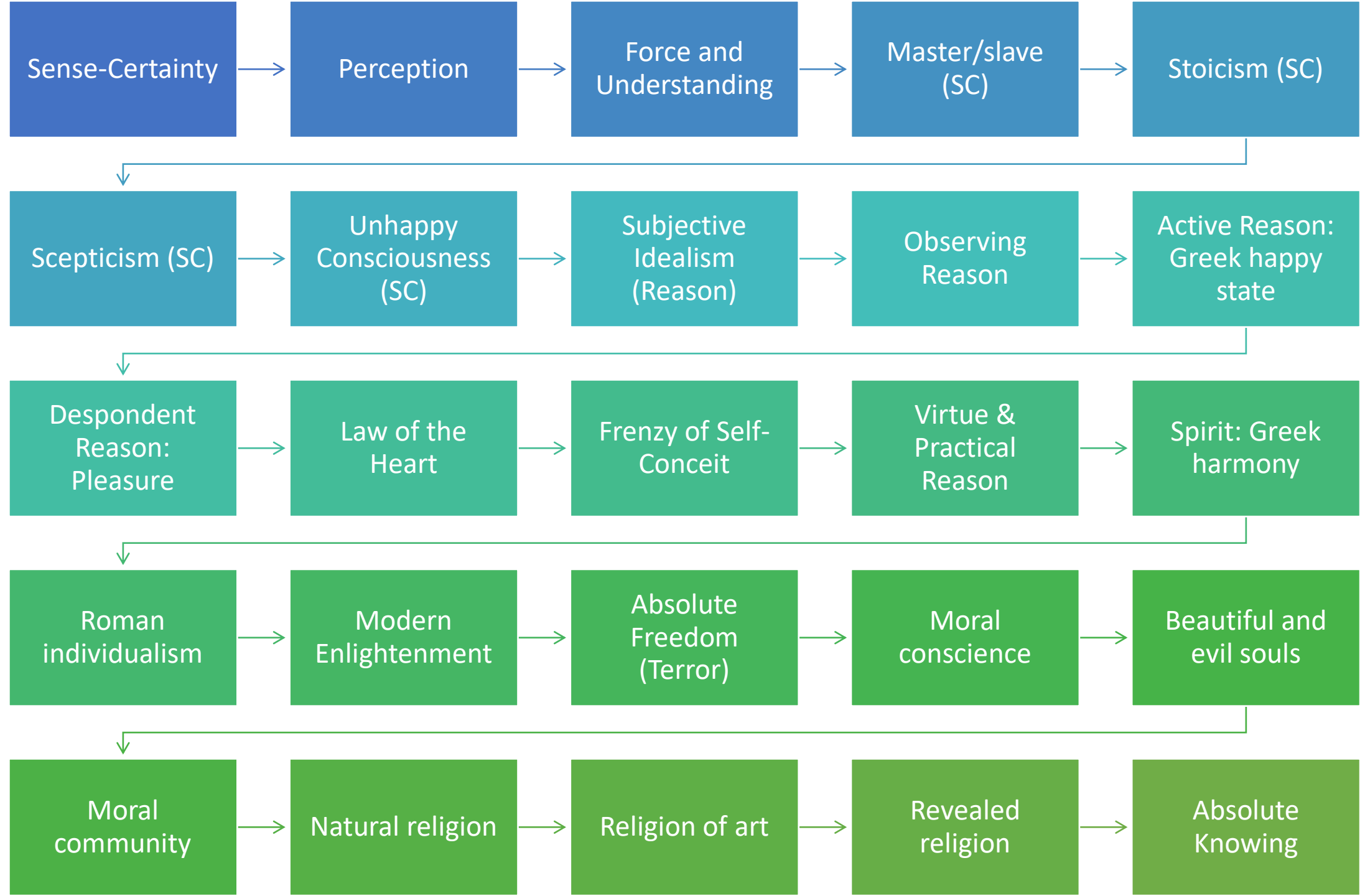


Dialectical stages of consciousness



Bildungsroman





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 separate from it, 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.

What has Hegel tried to show?

- But is this race rigged towards philosophy? Does it emptily reassert the dogmatic, transcendent metaphysics Kant debunked?

What has Hegel tried to show?

- A presuppositionless and speculative philosophy, the perspective from which '*Science*' can begin
- Philosophy is not the product of the philosopher's mind – rather, philosophy understands the world to be immanently structured by reason, which is absolute
- The world is the work of the rationality we know at work in ourselves.
- Through philosophy, being is no longer a mere postulate of consciousness but known as actual (1), a 'free actuality', but also one which is identical in form to human reason and thought (2).
- Through uniting consciousness with its object, consciousness becomes speculative thought, in which 'being is known to be the pure Concept in its own self, and the pure Concept to be true being'.

What has Hegel tried to show?

- Consciousness begins with its object as what is other and outside to itself
- It mutates to self-consciousness, its self as the negation of what is other.
- In reason it transforms to view an implicit unity (of rationality) between self and other.
- Spirit makes this object explicitly rational and universal: both self and other are understood as self-conscious reason, and exist in a world of universal reason, e.g. ethical world of laws and customs.
- As Spirit becomes more aware of itself as rational it becomes more alienated from the world; this alienation is bridged in its desire to create a world of self-conscious reason through revolutionary freedom.
- But this leads it to view its own pure self as the one true realisation of such universal reason. It conflates its own subjectivity and self with its object.

What has Hegel tried to show?

- Through confession and reconciliation this moral conscience learns to let go of itself.
- Whereas conscience understands itself to be universal reason, religion understands itself to be universal reason that has become conscious of itself – a slight shift.
- Universal reason isn't just co-extensive with absolute being (conscience), under religion they are identical, with the former becoming self-conscious through humanity.
- But religion renders it as God, other to humanity, and philosophy makes explicit the oneness. Both universal reason and actual being constitute the same actuality.
- Under philosophy, humanity is being that has become self-conscious; and being has the same logical form as self-conscious thought, that of the Concept.

Critical interpretations

- A 'primarily critical, deconstructive text' (Houlgate)
- '*via negativa* for consciousness' (Stern)
- Return to pre-Kantian dogmatic metaphysics (Charles Taylor)
- Or supersedes Kant in critically identifying historical and cultural conditioning of reason (Pippin, Pinkard etc.)
- Or gives a new basis for metaphysics and conceptual realism (Stern, Houlgate), via Aristotle and Spinoza
- Or couched in a 'mystery method' to 'deceive and bewitch offers' into a seductive vision of conservative power? (Popper)

‘the astonishing stroke of Hegel, who ...
dared to teach that species of concepts
develop out of each other’

– Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

‘Hegel ... destroyed the illusion of the
subject’s being-in-itself and showed
that the subject is itself an aspect of
social objectivity.’

- Adorno, *Lectures on Negative
Dialectics*

‘If I were to say that the so-called
philosophy of this fellow Hegel is a
colossal piece of mystification which will
yet provide posterity with an
inexhaustible theme for laughter at our
times, that it is a pseudo-philosophy
paralyzing all mental powers, stifling all
real thinking, and, by the most
outrageous misuse of language, putting in
its place the hollowest, most senseless,
thoughtless, and, as is confirmed by its
success, most stupefying verbiage, I
should be quite right.’

- Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of
Morality* (1840)



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Next week

- Next week, we will turn to the *Science of Logic* for one week only (!)
- We'll focus on excerpts from the Introduction and Book One
- Please read a good secondary guide! There are many
 - Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, Chapter 2
 - Nathan Ross, "Metaphysics", in *Hegel: Key Concepts*, ed. Bauer, Chapter 2
 - For more depth, Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity*, Introduction and Chapters 1-3
 - Wikipedia entry is OK but try the above first
- Any questions? Please email dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk