



# Hegel and the Idea of the Dialectic

Week 9. 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017  
*The Science of Logic*

# Class aims

- Recap on the development of the *Phenomenology*
- Discuss the essential features of Hegel's Idealism
- Introduce the *Science of Logic*
- Evaluate the dialectical method in concepts
- Get to the heart of the fundamental link between freedom and thought in Hegel's mind



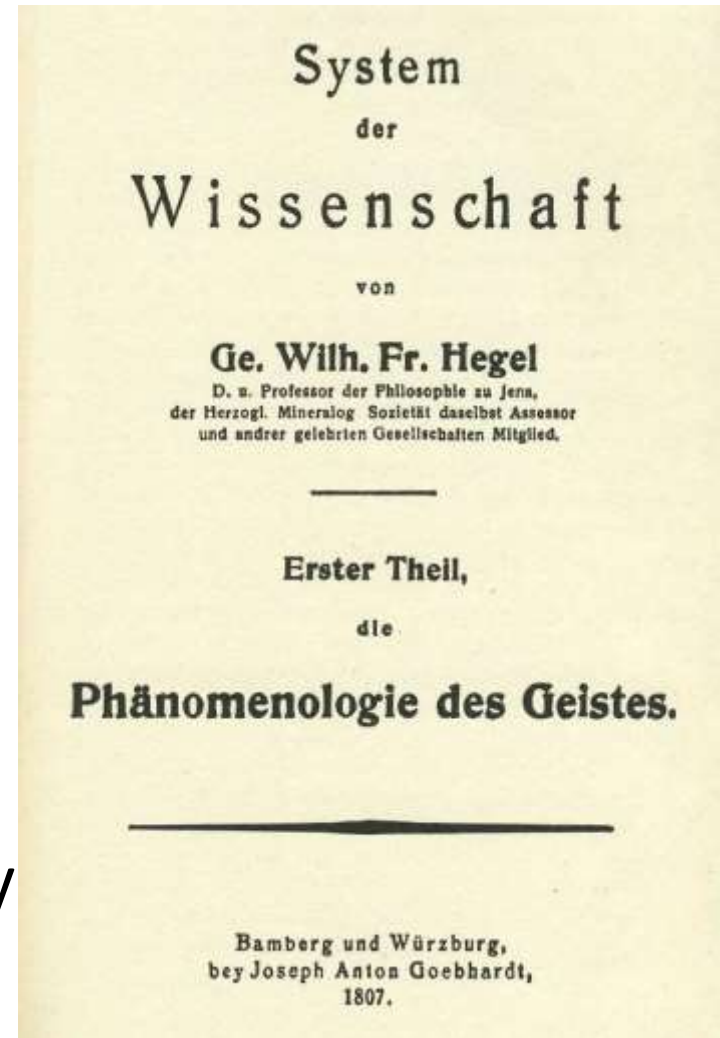
# Class recap

- 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



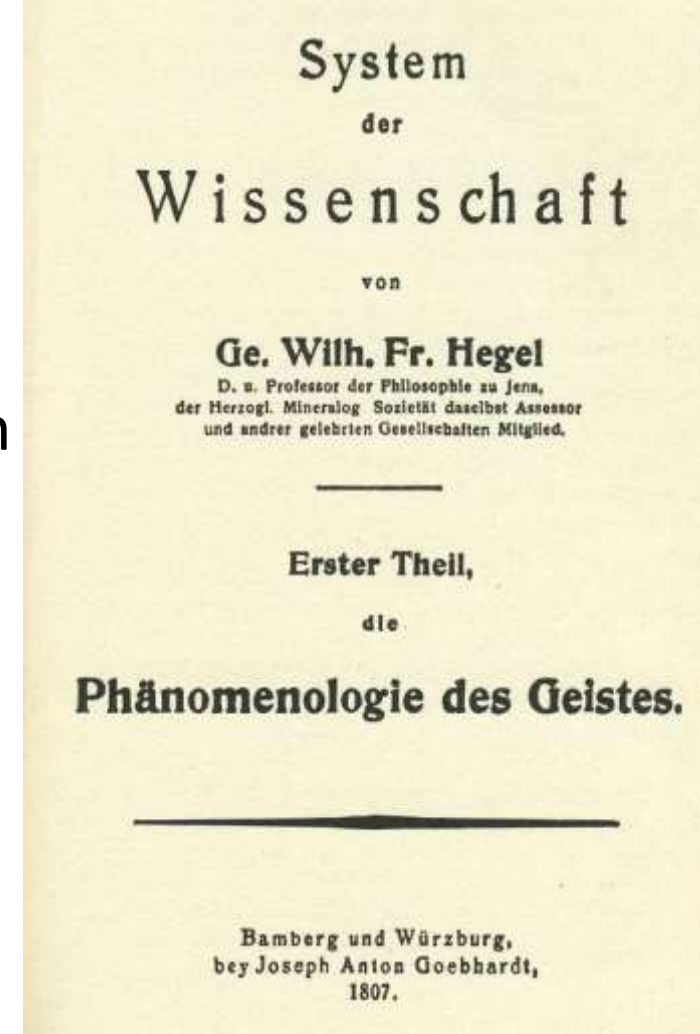
# Absolute Knowing

- 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'.



# 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).





Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's  
**Wissenschaft der Logik.**

Herausgegeben

von

Dr. Leopold von Henning.

Erster Theil.

**Die objektive Logik.**

Zweite Abtheilung.

**Die Lehre vom Wesen.**

Wie Königl. Württembergischen, Großherzogl. Hessischen und der freien Stadt  
Frankfurt Privilegium gegen den Nachdruck und Nachdruck-Verkauf.

Berlin, 1834.

Verlag von Duncker und Humblot.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's

**W e r k e.**

Vollständige Ausgabe

durch

einen Verein von Freunden des Verewigten:

D. Ph. Marheineke, D. J. Schulze, D. Ed. Gans,  
D. Lp. v. Henning, D. F. Gotthe, D. R. Richter,  
D. F. Förster.

Vierter Band.

*Talento dei metafora logica logica.*  
Sophocles.

Wie Königl. Württembergischen, Großherzogl. Hessischen und der freien Stadt  
Frankfurt Privilegium gegen den Nachdruck und Nachdruck-Verkauf.

Berlin, 1834.

Verlag von Duncker und Humblot.

# The *Science of Logic* - context

- *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) – University of Jena closed
- Hegel has illegitimate son, and is forced to work as a newspaper editor in Bamberg for one year, then works as a philosophy teacher at a high school in Nuremburg from 1808-15
- In 1811 he marries Marie Helena Susanna von Tucher, and has two sons, Karl Friedrich Wilhelm in 1813 (later edits the second edition of Hegel's *Lectures on the philosophy of world history* in 1840), and Immanuel Thomas Christian in 1814. His illegitimate son Ludwig Fischer joins the household in 1817, having become orphaned.
- Publishes the *Science of Logic* in three volumes over 1812, 1813 and 1816.
- A month after being married, he writes: 'on the whole – apart from a few modifications still to be desired – I have now reached my earthly goal. For what more does one want in this world than a post and a dear wife?'

# The *Science of Logic* - context

- Three books: *Being* (1812), *Essence* (1813) and *The Concept* (1816)
- Not as well received by critics as *Phenomenology*
- A work that challenges traditional logic e.g. laws of identity and non-contradiction
- Commences from a sceptical premise that formal logic infers and assumes too much. Its basic categories and methods need to be demonstrated first
- Goal: to begin philosophy without presuppositions - 'science should be preceded by *universal doubt*, i.e. by total *presuppositionlessness*'



# The *Science of Logic* - excerpt

- What does Hegel claim he has demonstrated with the *Phenomenology* that now makes 'scientific progress' possible? (Intro)
- '*Logic is pure science*' (178) – what is Hegel trying to argue?
- What kind of challenge to traditional philosophy is Hegel trying to mount?

# Problems with logic

- The goal of Logic is truth, but for too long logic presupposed so much.
- E.g. All men are mortal  
Socrates is a man  
Therefore Socrates is mortal
- Formal logic presupposes rules of deductive inference e.g. X will follow Y, or that a particular (Socrates) must share the universal under which it is subsumed
- It only shows how to make valid inferences, not true ones (e.g. *all men have tickly coughs... Socrates has a tickly cough*)
- Formal logic assumes that fundamental distinctions drawn by our understanding are valid: that 'infinity is different from finitude, that content is something other than form, that what is inner is other to what is outer' – but these rules of thought and inference have not been demonstrated

# Logic is truth

- Hegel's Idealism commits him to arguing that thought is objective reality.
- When logic studies thought, it is studying reality.
- The content of logic is 'the true genuine matter', it is 'the truth as it is, without husk in and for itself', and 'this content shows forth God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite mind'.
- Hegel is rejecting the view that true reality is found in nature and people. Ultimate reality is found in rational thought – therefore a study of the structure of rational thought will reveal nature of reality.

# New era of freedom

- *Phenomenology*: 'It is not difficult to see that ours is a time of birth and transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and stands prepared to submerge it in the past and in the labour of its own transformation.'
- *Science of Logic*: the 'new spirit which has arisen in science no less than in actuality'.
- A new spirit and consciousness of freedom and self-determination is being realised in society, politics, aesthetics and philosophy
- This freedom is founded on our consciousness of being free and self-determining...
- Therefore metaphysics can clarify our consciousness of our own freedom
- Thus a new Logic explaining how thought self-determines can be of service to this new era of freedom

# How does the *Logic* work?

- The Logic is Thought's knowledge of its own essence, the essence which exists concretely in the *process* of reality.
- It begins with what is indeterminate and without presuppositions
- *Being*: the first concept, is thought in which nothing is determined.
- Thought always *is*, prior to or abstracted of every other aspect of it (think of Descartes' cogito).
- Being must think of something – but as it is indeterminate, what it thinks of is *Nothing*.
- Starting with being, Hegel's logic passes through a necessary succession of concepts leading to the Absolute Idea (self knowledge).



# Being, Nothing, Becoming

- They become ensnared: to think of *being* is to think of nothing; and *nothing* has being in thought. Nothing is not-being.
- Being and not-being allow the first determinate difference, but this distinction can only be thought if being and not-being are understood as one, indistinguishable – a ‘strange’ (Houlgate) confusing thought.
- Thus ‘it is only to the extent that we can say what something is *not*, that we can say what it actually *is*’.
- The dialectical movement:
  - The concept of being is wholly indeterminate
  - The concept of indeterminate (empty) being passes into not-being

# Thinking through contradictions

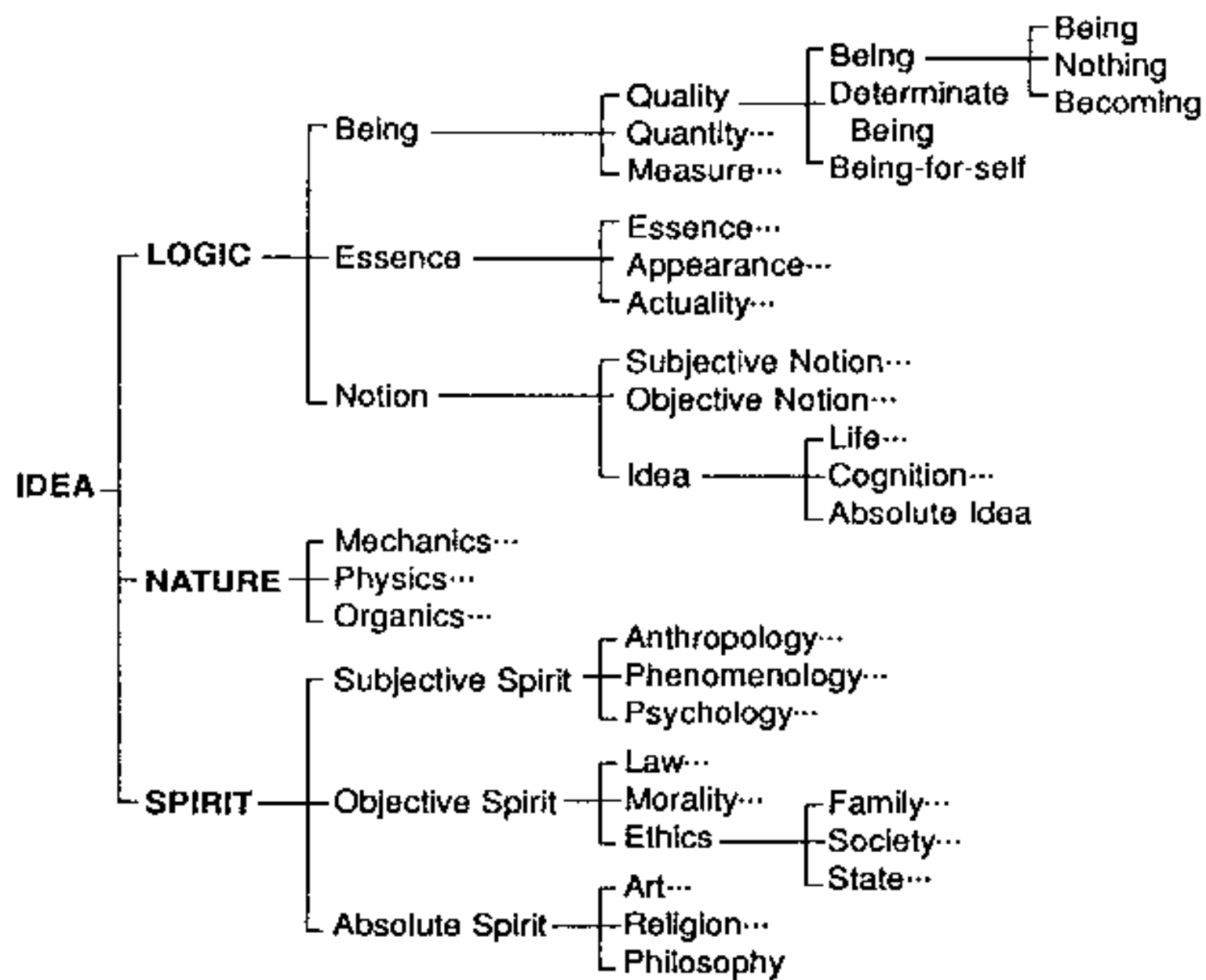
- The mind passes from being to not-being and not-being back to being – and this movement between the two is *Becoming*.
- Becoming is the synthesis of being and not being – i.e. it is their truth.
- At each stage, thought thinks through contradictions in its concepts by discovering their complexity. It develops, identifying determinacy in quality, quantity, specificity, form, content, possibility, actuality, and necessity, etc.
- In the last part of the *Logic*, on the ‘logic of the concept’, determinacy lies in having a rational or conceptual structure.
- The categories of thought are not merely determinations of determinate being, but determinations of thought.
- The ***absolute idea*** thus emerges as the concept of self-determining reason itself

# Thinking through contradictions

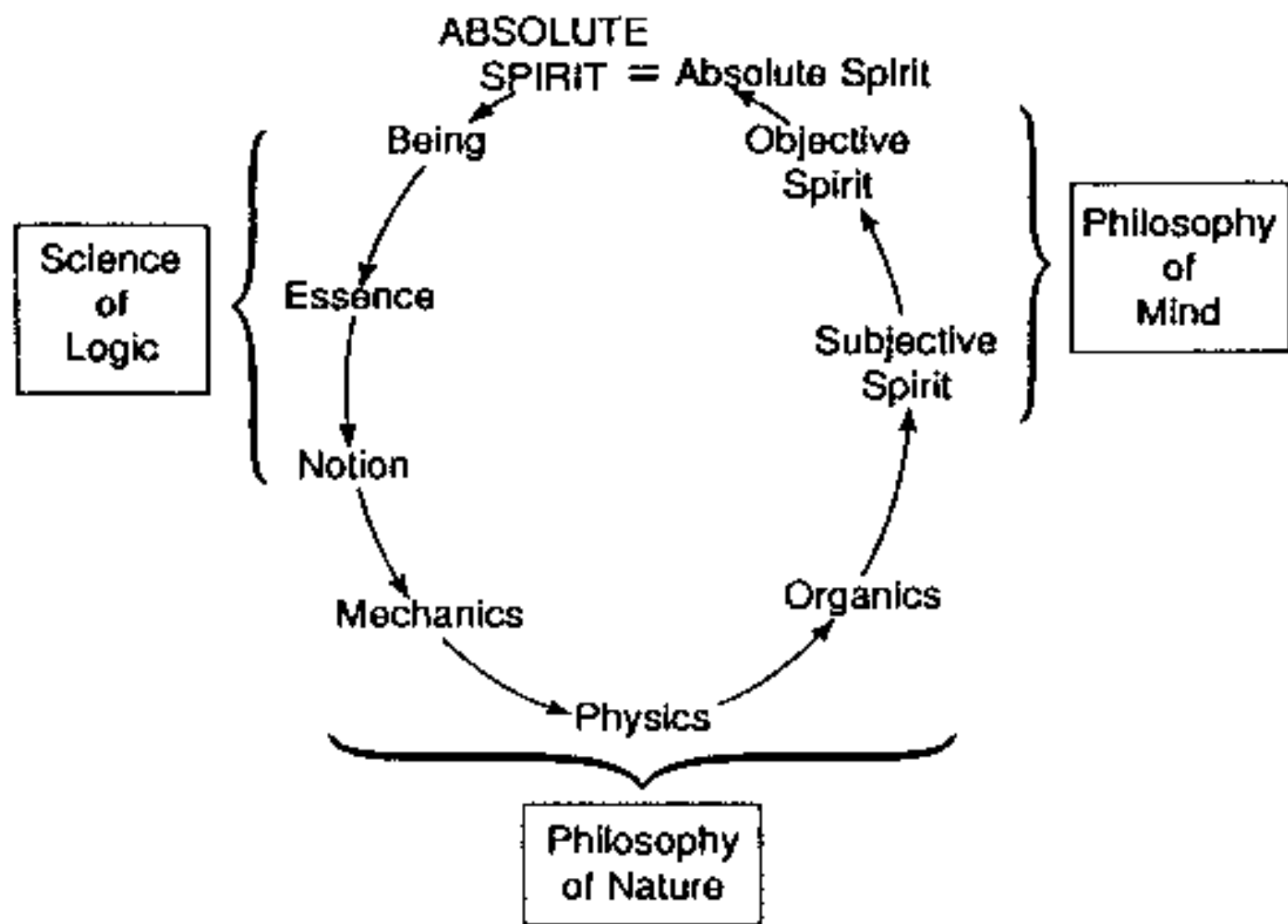
- Contradiction as understood by Hegel does not bring things to an end but drives them forward.
- We must surrender any dogmatic assumptions about the nature or underlying rules of consciousness, logic etc., and equally that thought might only be natural, limited, finite, perspectival
- '[W]e must submit ourselves to the movement of thought itself. If that leads us to thoughts which are strange and unsettling, so be it; that is a risk which we, as self-critical thinking beings, must accept. To refuse what must be thought is, in Hegel's view, to be guilty of unself-critical stubbornness or 'fear of truth.' (Houlgate)

# Thought requires giving up...

- We need to let thought determine itself in our thinking, not insist that we are the ones doing the thinking or in control of its path.
- We must let go, and so let the categories determine themselves and think through us. Concepts are neither 'tools' nor revealed 'cosmic entities' (Houlgate), but 'intrinsic, dynamic determinations of thought which it is the task of a fully self-critical science of logic to disclose and think through'.
- What makes Hegel's logic hard to accept is that we are most often used to assuming that we are free to think for ourselves – he identifies and challenges the arbitrariness of our categories and concepts, while identifying an underlying reality of thought which realises itself through us.
- We allow thought to immanently realise itself through us, like a movement of music or drama.
- Seeking 'fixed, static meanings' in Hegel is 'like trying to grasp a bar of soap with wet hands' (Houlgate)

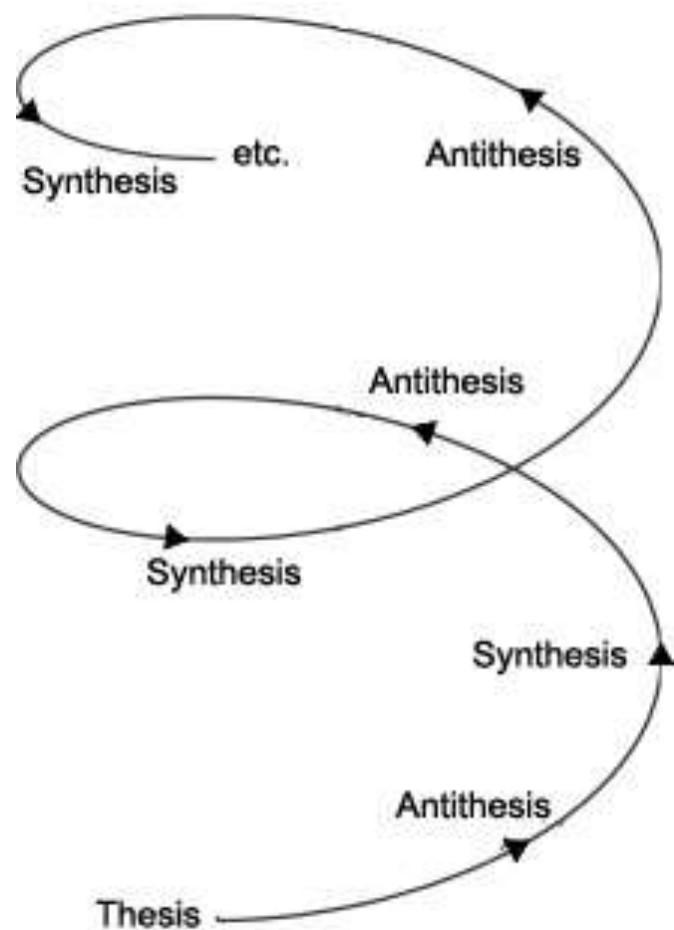




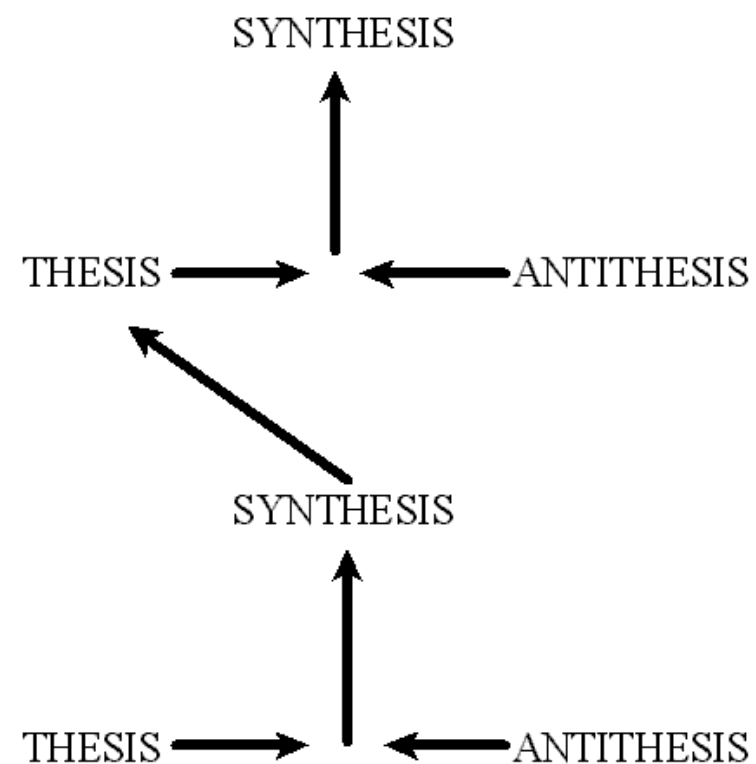


# The idea of freedom

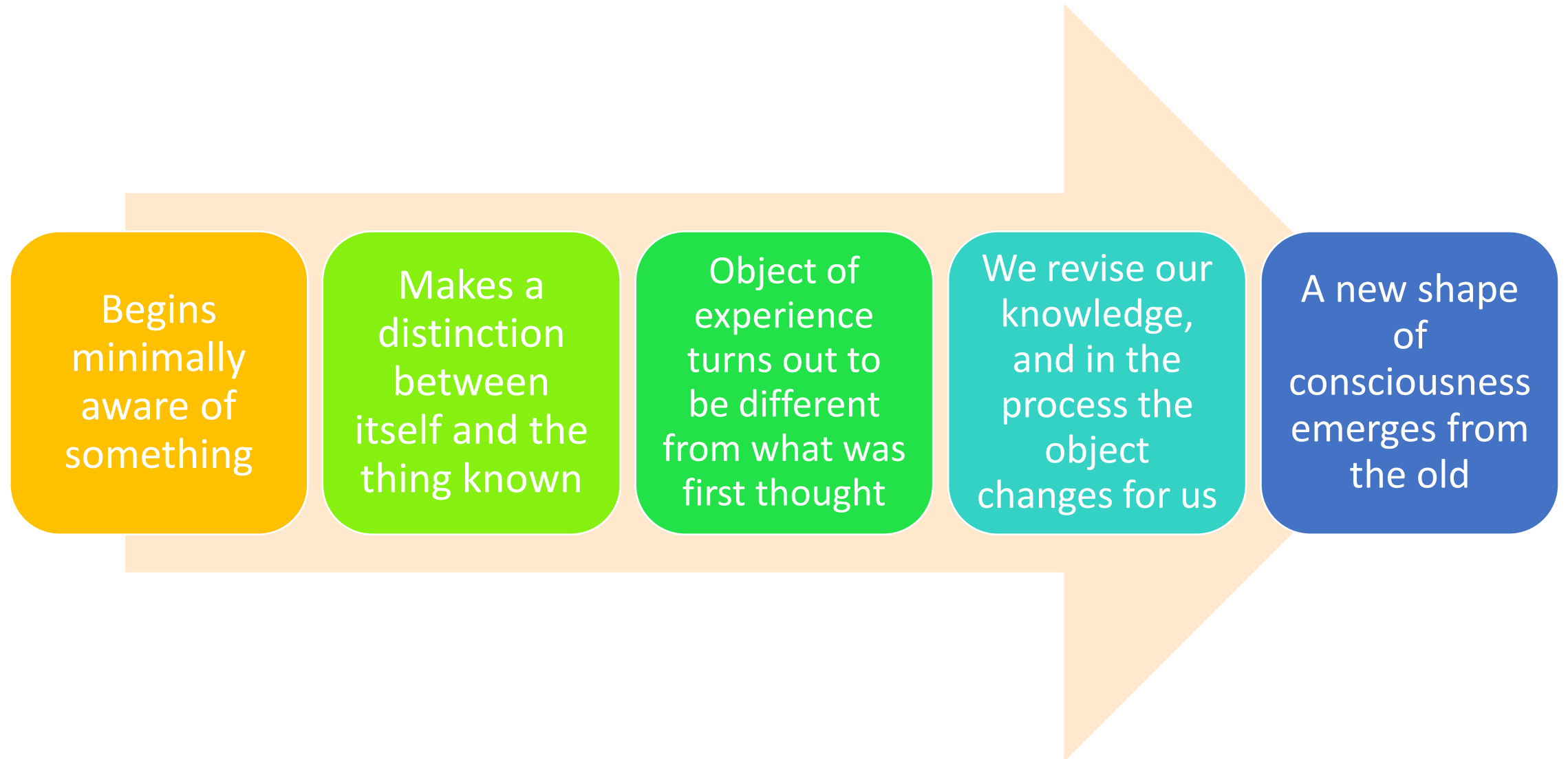
- The Philosophy of Right and, to an extent, the Phenomenology of Spirit, perform a similar process of self-determination as occurs for Thought in the Science of Logic
- This time, the “Idea” to be developed is that of “freedom” itself
- That is, we let the idea of freedom develop itself dialectically – and this is itself a process of “free self-determination”



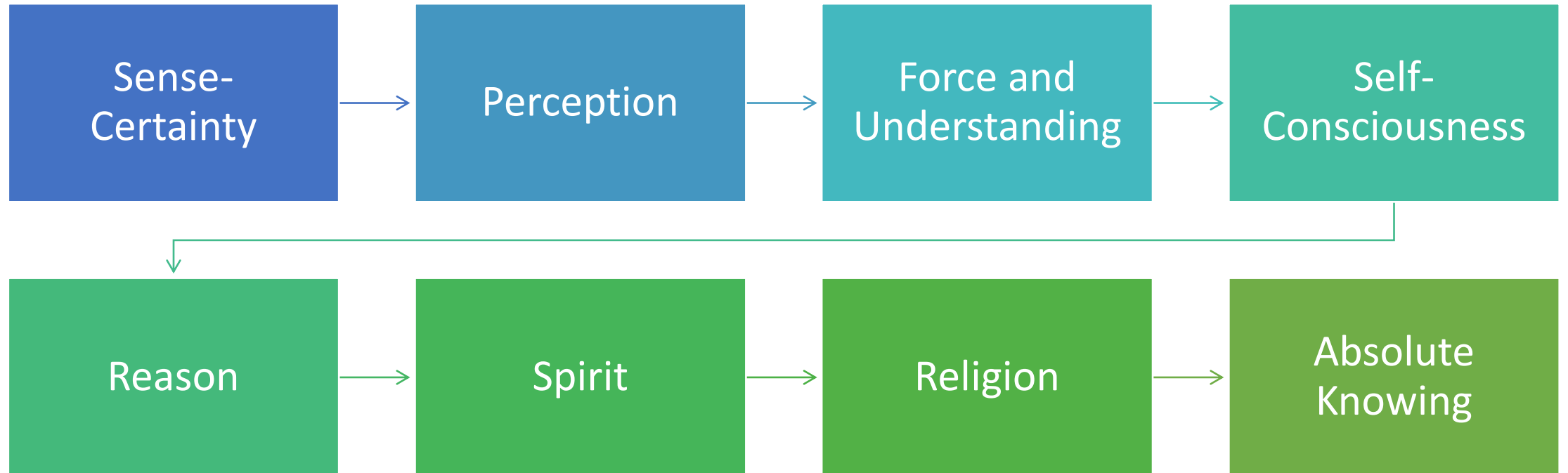
## HEGELIAN DIALECTIC



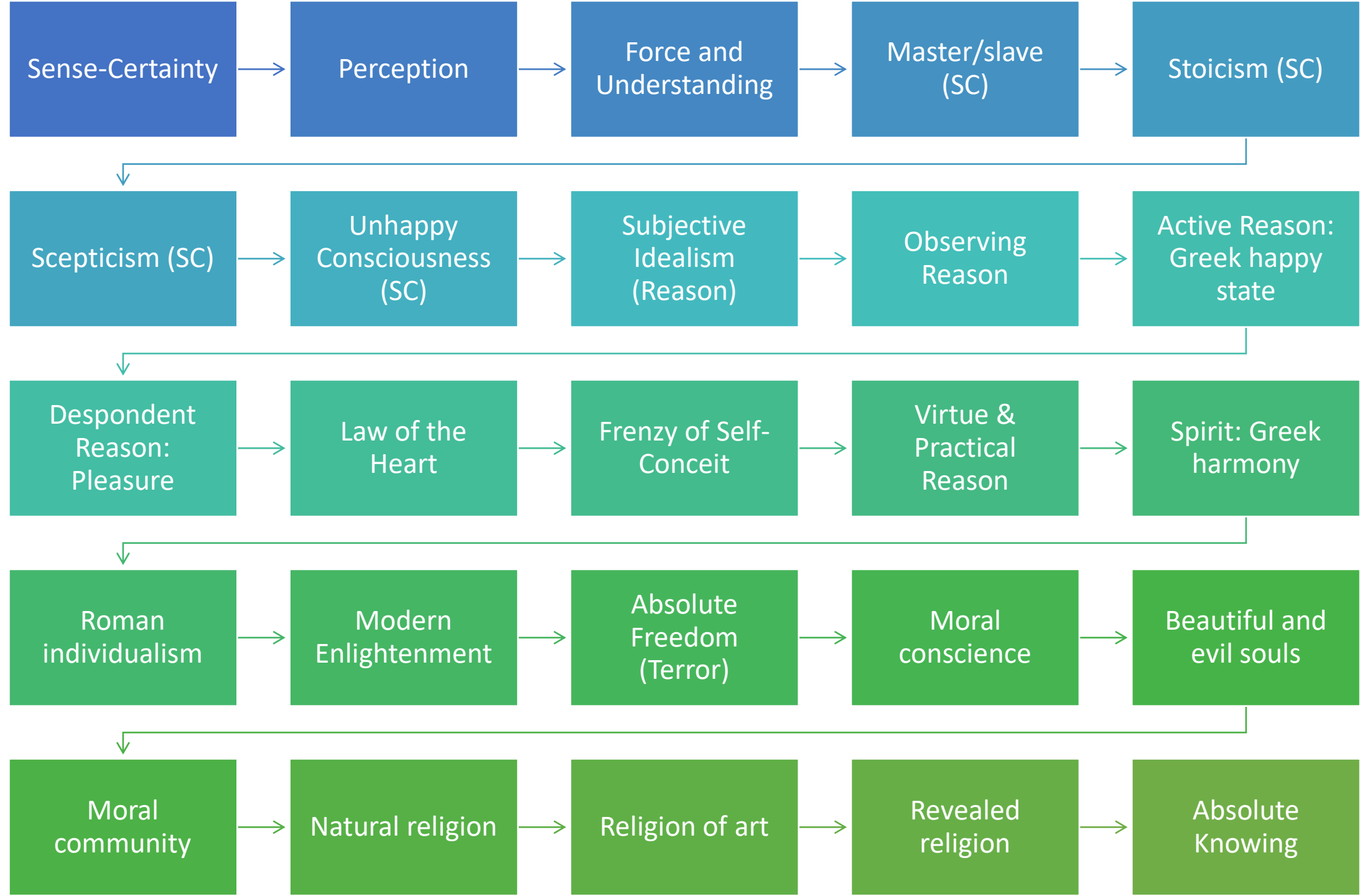
# Dialectical stages of consciousness



# *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)



# Class recap

- Recap on the development of the *Phenomenology*
- Discuss the essential features of Hegel's Idealism
- Introduce the *Science of Logic*
- Evaluate the dialectical method in concepts
- Get to the heart of the fundamental link between freedom and thought in Hegel's mind





# Next week

- Next week, we will turn to the *Philosophy of Right*
- We'll focus on excerpts from the Preface, Introduction and Book One: Abstract Right
- Please read a good secondary guide!
  - Singer, *Hegel: Short Introduction*, Chapter 2
  - Houlgate, *Hegel: A Short Introduction*, Chapter 8
  - Thom Brooks, "Political Philosophy" in *Hegel: Key Concepts*, ed. Baur, Ch5
  - Houlgate, Introduction to Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*
- Any questions? Please email [dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk](mailto:dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk)