Scepticism and Presuppositionlessness:

Hegel and the Problem of Beginning

Robert John Dunphy

PhD Philosophy

University of Sussex

August 2018

University of Sussex

Robert John Dunphy

PhD Philosophy

Scepticism and Presuppositionlessness: Hegel and the Problem of Beginning

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with what I call "the problem of beginning." This problem expresses the difficulty involved in getting the type of critical, rational thinking proper to philosophical work underway in a manner that is not problematically arbitrary. This amounts to a dilemma between beginning dogmatically by depending upon unexamined presuppositions, and beginning dogmatically with some fundamentally arbitrary assertion. After motivating the problem and explicating it in some detail in the introduction, I identify a number of possible, but unappealing ways to respond. In Chapter 1 I argue that, motivated by his relationship with Pyrrhonism, Hegel is engaging with this same problem at the start of his *Science of Logic*. I identify a distinctive form of a solution to the problem in Hegel's work which amounts to isolating a beginning which is both *presuppositionless* and *non-arbitrary*, or, in his terminology, both *immediate* and *mediated*.

In Hegel's work I identify two different possible ways in which the form of this solution can be fleshed out. They differ in terms of what they designate as the element of *mediation* in the beginning. In the first case, this element is stated to be the project of phenomenology, as carried out in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the second case, this element is characterised as a project of "consummate scepticism," but left problematically underdeveloped. In Chapter 2 I present reasons for rejecting the suitability of the former, and in Chapter 3 I attempt to sketch a project of "consummate scepticism" which would be capable of functioning as the element of mediation in a manner capable of producing a working, "Hegelian" solution to the problem of beginning. I draw the thesis to a close by considering both the costs and opportunities which follow from this reconstructed solution, especially concerning the establishment of idealism.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Before I begin, presuppositionlessly or otherwise, I must express some heartfelt thanks.

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Tanja Staehler. She has been unwaveringly supportive and positive, and it has always been a pleasure to spend time with her and her family (in the UK or in Germany), to hear about and read her work, and to engage with her responses to mine. Producing this thesis would have been far, far more difficult, I am sure, without her supervision.

My time at Sussex has been shaped by some brilliant people, many of whom have had a profound influence upon my philosophical development during that time, or occasionally provided a welcome distraction from it. I would like to thank Denis Chevrier-Bosseau, Alex Elliott, Tim Carter, Jana Elsen, Michael Morris, Tony Booth, Gordon Finlayson, Paul Davies, Christos Hadjioannou, Chris Ferguson, Arthur Willemse, Jacob Berkson, Andre Almeida, Ane Engelstad, James Stockman, Eugenia Lapteva, Richard Weir, Mahon O'Brien, Adrian Downey, Dimitri Kladiskakis, Valentinos Kontoyiannis, Elliot Rose, Stephie Sheridan, Tom Marshall, Jakub Kowalewski, Rachael Shaw, Ivo Dragoun, Tom Godfrey, Jonathan Lee, Anna Wimbledon, and Lorenzo Giovannetti. I am also grateful to have been able to participate in a small Hegel reading group at the University of Brighton with Tom Bunyard and Toby Lovat which was extremely stimulating and enjoyable.

I should especially like to thank Patrick Levy and Gabriel Martin for making me feel so welcome when I first arrived at Sussex, and for participating in regular reading groups and philosophical bouldering sessions; and Ezra Cohen, with whom I have been lucky enough to teach and from whom I have learned a great deal over the last few years.

I should also like to mention a number of other close and important friends without whom the years spent working on this thesis and related topics would not have been nearly so enjoyable: The Best Men, Kerris Cooper, Becky Holloway, Sam Wilson, Simon Cowley, Georgie Barnett and Ellie Penny and Laika. My brothers, Alex and

James, have also been the best of company in Brighton during the last few years. I am very lucky to have them.

During the final year of the thesis I have also been privileged to spend a lot of time (though not enough!) with my partner, Inken Pretzel, whose company is never anything less than wonderful, and who is more inspirational and lovely than she realises. She has improved my German a lot, to boot.

Lastly, my deepest thanks must go to my parents. Without their love and support there is absolutely no way that this work could even have been begun, let alone completed. I dedicate this thesis to them, and to the memory of Bumper, who sadly didn't see it finished, but who would have been proud.

Abbreviations and Notes on Language

Works by G.W.F. Hegel:

GW   *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag)

EL   *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) Cited by paragraph number and page reference followed by page reference to *GW 20*: (*EL* §X, p.X/p.X)

EPS   *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller (revised M Inwood) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

G&W   *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. H.S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1977)

PhG   *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) Cited by Miller paragraph number (§) followed by page reference to *GW 9*: (*PhG* §/p.X)

VGP II Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6, Volume II: Greek Philosophy, trans. R.F Brown and J.M. Stewart, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

VGP III Lectures on the History of Philosophy Volume III, trans. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Humanities Press, 1983)

VSP   "On The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One" in *Between Kant and Hegel*, eds. G. Di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), pp.311-362 Cited by Harris page reference followed by page reference to *GW 4*: (*VSP,* p.X/p.X)

VL   *Lectures on Logic*, trans. C Butler (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008)

WL   *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1969) Cited by Miller page reference followed by page reference to *GW* 21 for the

Doctrine of Being: (*WL*, p.X/21: p.X); to *GW 11* for the Doctrine of Essence: (*WL*, p.X/11: p.X); and to *GW 12* for the Doctrine of the Concept: (*WL*, p.X/12: p.X)

I have made very few alterations to the translations I have used. I prefer to render *Voraussetzungslosigkeit* as "presuppositionlessness" and *Begriff* as "concept." With the exception of rendering *Wissenschaft* as "Science" when it is being used in a technical sense, I have resisted the tendency among some translators to capitalise certain terms when translating Hegel into English.

Works by Sextus Empiricus:

PH *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. J. Annas and J. Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) Cited as follows: (*PH* I.i.1) where these numbers correspond respectively to book, chapter, and Fabrician section-number.

Annas and Barnes refer to sceptical "modes" rather than "tropes." I have continued to use "modes" when citing the work of others, including Hegel, on Pyrrhonian scepticism.

For the sake of consistency, everything has been rendered in UK English, even if the source is written in US English.

Chapter 0: Introduction – The Problem of Beginning

0.0 Introduction

The introduction to this work is structured in the following manner:

0.1 The Threat of Arbitrariness at the Beginning: In which I lay out the motivation for engaging with the problem of beginning in terms of avoiding arbitrariness and the threat of scepticism and begin to formulate the problem.

0.2 Epistemology and the Problem of Beginning: In which I clarify the sense in which the problem of beginning is to be thought of as an epistemological problem, and compare it to the problem of the criterion and the regress problem.

0.3 The Problem of Beginning as an Agrippan Problem: In which I deepen the comparison of the problem of beginning with the problem of the criterion and the regress problem and categorise all three as kinds of "agrippan problems". I also attempt to provide a concise formulation of the problem of the beginning in ordinary and formal language.

0.4 Hegel, Philosophy, and the Problem of Beginning: In which I state my basic motivation for engaging with Hegel on the topic of the problem of beginning, give some explanation of the nature of my reading of Hegel and the role it plays in my attempt to solve the problem of beginning, and finally make some attempt at a statement of philosophical methodology. Here I endorse an "aspi-rationalism" as a less demanding approach than Hegel's rationalism or his belief that philosophy ought to occur as "Science."

0.5 Plan of Chapter: In which I lay out the basic structure of each of the three chapters which make up this work after this introduction.

0.1 The Threat of Arbitrariness at the Beginning

If we suppose that philosophy is to be loosely understood as a project of maximally general understanding[1] or sense-making[2] it might seem that the question of where and

---

[1] I am happy to endorse Sellars when he writes, 'The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest sense of the term hang together in the broadest sense of the term' (Sellars, 1963, p.1). I take this attitude to cohere with that of Hegel when he writes that, 'Generally speaking, philosophy may initially be defined as the *thoughtful examination* of things', before adding that,

how one should begin is one that arises quite naturally. It arises first and foremost, it seems to me, in the face of an obvious concern – that of arbitrariness. We might, in the course of our philosophical endeavours, our attempts to ''know one's way around'... in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred' (Sellars, 1963, p.1), develop any manner of impressive theoretical constructions, make robust inferences, even provide coherent and apparently satisfying answers to classical philosophical questions. Yet as long as the departure point for our own sense-making enterprise remains fundamentally questionable, as long as we have not made some effort to demonstrate the non-arbitrariness of the beginning, we might still ask ourselves why anyone should take what follows from that beginning to be true, whatever its other philosophical virtues. What, one might ask, differentiates our work from a sophisticated (or not-so-sophisticated) theory-fiction – something developed rigorously, but from a basically dubious or at least unexamined point of departure?

If philosophy as a project of sense-making or understanding is to be taken seriously, it must lay claim to having some purchase on reality, or on the true. *One* (among many) of the key tasks facing a project making such a claim and attempting to legitimately convince others of its overall validity might be that of securing its beginning – of rendering its beginning non-arbitrary. The simplest way of expressing this concern about arbitrariness is in the form of a possible response to a given philosophical theory or account: "Perhaps that follows from where and how you have begun, but what if I begin elsewhere, and otherwise?" The primary threat presenting itself at the beginning of a philosophical investigation, that of arbitrariness, could be expressed as the concern that we might be beginning with, or on the basis of, an unexamined presupposition (or set of presuppositions) which could derail our inquiry before it even gets off the ground. If beginning elsewhere or otherwise might be just as reasonable, then any claim we make to having gained purchase on reality or to be presenting the truth is undermined. This problem has the form of a classical sceptical concern - that of equipollence.

'philosophy represents a peculiar way of thinking, in virtue of which thinking becomes knowing and a knowing that comprehends things.' (*EL* §2, pp.28-29/p.40)

[2] Moore suggests that "to make sense" can imply more than just 'to understand', but also 'to be intelligible', 'to admit of understanding', perhaps even 'be rational' (Moore, 2012, p.5). Moore is giving an account of "metaphysics" (or perhaps even of metametaphysics), but I see no reason not to ascribe this usage of "sense-making" to philosophy more generally. In fact, Moore also applies his analysis of "making sense" to the purpose of philosophy itself (See Moore, 2017, p.45). Moore notably also extends his analysis of the term in an explicitly Deleuzian direction, with an emphasis on the creation of new concepts. I am not adopting a stance on this last issue here.

In short, the concern about equipollence motivates the following principle: if there are (at least) two competing alternatives with nothing to recommend one over the other(s), then it is epistemically irresponsible to commit to one of those alternatives. Rather one ought to suspend judgement on the matter, at least for the time being. The classical statement of this position can be found in Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*.[3] Perin has argued that Sextus' account of the necessity of suspending judgement in the face of equipollence is to be interpreted in terms of the normative demands of reason (rather than being part of a causal-psychological account, for example).[4] If this is right then the force of the problem of the beginning is made clear in another way: If you cannot demonstrate that the beginning of your inquiry is not arbitrary, then you *ought not to begin*. That is to say, failing to resolve the problem of beginning might leave us stuck, unable to philosophise while remaining responsible epistemic agents.

The concern about arbitrariness, then, is intimately connected to the question of the status of presuppositions or *assumptions* at the beginning of an inquiry. It might seem as though an obvious solution presents itself at this point. If the threat of arbitrariness is due to beginning by relying upon unexamined presuppositions, then we should simply resolve to begin without presupposing anything at all.[5] Yet aside from quite legitimate questions about how this is to be achieved or how feasible a task it is at all, we should also ask what it is that differentiates presuppositionlessness from being just another form of arbitrariness. Consider two philosophers investigating a problem in metaphysics, for example.

Philosopher 1: "In approaching this problem I will draw upon up-to-date findings of the natural sciences as well as the evidence of our ordinary experience of the world and our rational intuitions about what makes sense in the field of metaphysics. I presuppose this body of evidence in order to justify the position from which I begin to work on this particular problem."

---

[3] See *PH* I.iv.8-10
[4] See Perin, 2010, Ch.2
[5] We should be wary of overstating this case, however. If presuppositions are taken to be a problem, so that having no presuppositions at all counts in favour of a beginning, then the absence of presuppositions might be taken as supporting reason which is presupposed by an apparently "presuppositionless" beginning, rendering the notion incoherent.

Philosopher 2: "In approaching this problem I presuppose nothing. I have simply started thinking about the problem and I hope to resolve it without relying on presuppositions or previously attained evidence of any kind."

Again, if we put aside for now other questions about Philosopher 2's method, it can still seem as though her approach is open to the charge of arbitrariness, not because it presupposes something problematic, but because it can rely on no presuppositions functioning as reasons[6] to *justify* it or render it non-arbitrary. In fact, wherever Philosopher 2 *does* begin her investigation, it seems now that that point could be characterised not as depending on some unjustified presupposition, but as constituting an unjustified presupposition itself.[7] Philosopher 1 is open to questions about the legitimacy of what she has presupposed, both in terms of method and in terms of content, but is at least attempting to render the beginning of her investigation non-arbitrary by supporting it with a body of reasons or evidence in the form of her chosen presuppositions.

A certain impasse has been reached when considering how to begin. If we begin with a certain presupposition (or set of presuppositions), it seems we can always wonder whether or not these themselves are legitimate, undermining the claim of Philosopher 1, for example, to have rendered the beginning of her investigation non-arbitrary by means of what she has presupposed. At the same time, if we resolve to begin in a presuppositionless manner, then we have nothing to rely upon with which to declare the beginning of our investigation non-arbitrary.

Let me state this impasse more clearly: If we attempt to begin an investigation in a non-arbitrary manner then it seems that we must problematically rely on presuppositions. If we attempt to begin in a presuppositionless manner, then there is nothing that renders the investigation non-arbitrary. In either case it seems that the claim of the investigation which follows to be accurately capturing the truth of its object is undermined or open to sceptical concerns. We can call this the "problem of beginning"

---

[6] Throughout this work I use "reasons" and "presuppositions" in an inclusive sense which could encompass supportive arguments, empirical evidence, axioms, motivating desires... In short anything which can count as a reason or a presupposition for some belief, proposition, principle, position or concept. Where appropriate I will indicate if I have a specific usage in mind.

[7] As Hegel puts it, 'The difficulty of making a *beginning*, however, arises at once, since a beginning is *something immediate* and as such makes a presupposition, or rather is itself just that.' (*EL* §1, p.28/p.39)

and attempting to resolve it in its most general form, or as it applies to thinking in general, is the primary task of this work.

I take it that, considered in its most general form as the question of how to begin thinking philosophically or rationally at all, the problem of beginning does not discriminate between the problematic status of presuppositions in terms of content, or in terms of method.[8] And indeed, it is in this context that the problem really bites – since philosophical or rational thinking demands that one be justified in terms of the concepts or categories one deploys in thinking, as well as in terms of the method according to which one carries out that deployment.[9] The problem of beginning arises when one recognises the difficulty of carrying out such a project, either of the deduction of a set of rational concepts or categories, or of setting out the method according to which thought is to analyse, arrange and interrogate its various categories and judgements, without problematically presupposing, relying upon, or otherwise smuggling in some presuppositions in terms of conceptual or logical content or method on the one hand, or simply asserting some content or statement of method in an arbitrary fashion on the other.[10]

Before continuing to clarify the status and nature of the problem of beginning, it is worth attempting in a preliminary manner to head off a potential objection to the orientation of this work. Surely, it will be objected, in philosophy or in any other area, one cannot really *begin* thinking. We have all of us always already begun thinking.[11] We operate already with a vast array of terms, concepts, beliefs, rules, and so on. Nothing I say here should be thought to come into conflict with this. I grant that of course we have always already begun thinking. As a philosophical project, however, we are here interested not just in everyday thinking, but in thinking rationally and

---

[8] And indeed, in Hegel's case there is even more reason to reject presuppositions of either kind, as he famously wishes to collapse the distinction in the context of his *Logic* (See, for example, *WL*, p.54/21: p.38).

[9] As such this project, as an attempt to engage with this problem, amounts to an exercise in pure reason, or in a priori thought.

[10] Chapter 1 of this work argues that the problem of beginning in this sense occurs at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*. That work itself is a quintessential example of an attempt to develop (or, in fact, deduce) a fundamental set of logical concepts or categories, and to examine and render explicit the methodological demands immanent to that set of concepts. A good discussion of the purpose of Hegel's *Logic* in these terms, and of its relationship to Kant's attempted deduction of the categories, can be found in Houlgate, 2006, pp.9-28)

[11] The use of the phrase "always already" here should not lead the reader to think that this is a covert reference to Heidegger, and that therefore "thinking" is being used in a technical sense. Here it refers to reflective or rational cognitive activity very generally.

rigorously. It will not be possible in this work to develop a comprehensive account of what is involved in rational thought or rationality, but in a preliminary manner we can acknowledge that, among other things, this means thinking in a way that is explicitly anti-dogmatic or critical, that is not content to take for granted without question the content of what we have already thought, and is keenly aware that to do so is to open oneself to sceptical objections, or to the charge of arbitrariness. Instead the rigour or rationality we are interested in here aims to secure the content of its thoughts against the sceptic or against the charge of dogmatism as much as is possible, and to generate robust inferences to non-arbitrary and considered philosophical positions. Are there not elements of rigour and of rationality in our everyday thinking? This too I am happy to concede, even that valuable philosophical work might perhaps be done on the basis of those resources alone,[12] but it seems indisputable that our everyday thought is also shot through with dogmatism, error, and arbitrariness. This point, I think, does not require a defence. Considering whether it might be possible to begin thinking in such a manner that avoids this problematic, dogmatic status is our concern here.

I acknowledge of course that this attitude could render the term "beginning" slightly confusing, since from what I have said already it is clear that something precedes the beginning which is of interest here: natural or everyday thinking. This need not render the term paradoxical or inappropriate however. Compare for example the student who, in her third year of study, motivated perhaps by concerns about the competitive job market, begins to really take seriously and to put effort into the task which she previously had carried out with very little real focus or urgency. "It was at that point", she might say, "I really *began* to study." And, presumably, it is at that point that the *value* of that study is assured. The same might be said of the beginning of rigorous,

---

[12] This I think is quite a widespread view. It is often paired with a kind of fallibilism regarding justification, for example in the work of Sellars, who writes, '[E]mpirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy though not *all* at once' (Sellars, 1963, p.170). I do not wish to insist that the only philosophy worthy of the name is that which follows from a rigorous interrogation of the question of beginning, and therefore that when philosophers do simply start from where they are and attempt, using the cognitive resources at their disposal, to render their various commitments increasingly defensible and consistent (or indeed refine or replace them when they appear problematic), as Sellars does, is somehow not properly philosophical. I will say simply that such work seems far more likely to be open to the concerns about arbitrariness and scepticism mentioned above than work that has interrogated its beginning and the status of its presuppositions more rigorously. I should also point out that insisting on the importance of the beginning is not the same as committing oneself to a foundationalist account of justification, as Sellars perhaps seems to think.

philosophical thinking. The problem of beginning arises when we are concerned to think *well*.

The exact nature of the relationship between natural or everyday thinking and the beginning of the rigorous, philosophical thinking which interests us will be investigated at greater length in Chapters 2 and 3. For now I need to say only one more thing about the content of natural or everyday thought: it is clear already in this introduction that I am utilising the rational resources of everyday thought to some extent in order to motivate the problem of beginning. This much is necessary to see that the problem of beginning is a problem at all. That the problem is motivated by an attempt to avoid arbitrariness, and that arbitrariness invites scepticism has, it seems, been "presupposed." I am happy to own this, and to acknowledge that philosophy very often consists in the sharpening and intensifying of rational tendencies present in natural or everyday thought. In this case the intensifying of the quite natural tendency to notice that there is no reason to assign warrant to a proposition which either has no reasons in its favour or which has only unjustified presuppositions in its favour has led us to consider the status of the beginning of thinking altogether.[13]

I shall not attempt any real defence of the legitimacy or value of this basic rationality here. It seems to me that it is the *sine qua non* of philosophical work. The interlocutor who attempts to dispute such a basic rational norm as the value of avoiding arbitrariness is flirting with irrationality, and it is not clear that, *qua* irrationalist, they have the right to demand a rational justification for the position they dispute.[14] It would

---

[13] It might be thought that philosophy must necessarily proceed in a circular manner then, first by presupposing certain basic rational norms, using those to motivate or formulate philosophical work, and then revising and restating those norms on the basis of philosophical accounts of rationality. Engaging with the problem of beginning would in that case be merely a radical instance of this procedure. Is this to say that there is something inescapably circular about philosophy after all? It depends. If those everyday elements of rational thought play a motivating role in relation to the beginning, but their content plays no philosophical role (that is to say – if they motivate us to engage in a project of beginning to think rigorously, but the actual formulation of that beginning owes nothing and does not presuppose the validity of those norms), then the charge of circularity might be defused. But if, on the other hand, that basic, everyday rationality is genuinely presupposed and plays a philosophical role at the beginning, perhaps we should accept that there is some ineliminable circularity even to systematic philosophical endeavour. The question then becomes whether this is something that should worry us. It might be that the answer is no, if all that is being presupposed is the basic insistence that one ought not to commit to arbitrary positions, that is, positions not well supported by legitimate reasons. If one feels no need to respond to the irrationalist who denies this (since if they demand that you do so they betray their irrationalism), one will feel no anxiety about what is presupposed when engaging with the problem of beginning here. I treat this issue further in the following section of this chapter.
[14] Aristotle suggests that, 'it is absurd to seek for an argument against one who has no arguments of his own about anything, in so far as he has none; for such a person, in so far as he is such, is really no better than a vegetable' (Aristotle, 1933, p.165).

however undoubtedly be valuable to support this work with a more detailed interrogation of the basic rational norms of everyday thought which motivate philosophical investigation, or with a study of the nature of that motivation, but this cannot be accomplished here. For now I shall move on to further clarify the nature of the task I have set myself in this work, and the relationship between the problem of beginning and other fundamental problems in epistemology.

0.2 Epistemology and the Problem of Beginning

I understand this task to be an epistemological one in that it is the attempt to resolve a problem concerned with justification or reason-giving and responding to scepticism. In this way (and in various other ways, as will become apparent), it is similar to other fundamental epistemological problems such the regress problem or the problem of the criterion. Like these problems, the problem of beginning is motivated by certain specific concerns:

- The regress problem as it is usually construed arises if one is concerned with the nature of evidential support or supporting reasons for a belief or proposition. In particular the regress problem is concerned with the possibility of there being such a thing as adequate support for a proposition.

- The problem of the criterion as it is usually construed arises if one is concerned to identify whether or not a possible belief measures up to a proper criterion of truth, and whether or not a possible criterion of truth adequately categorises true beliefs.

- The problem of beginning arises if one is concerned to demonstrate that the point of departure for one's investigation is not arbitrary or does not rely problematically on presuppositions.

It seems as though all of these kinds of concerns can occur in practically any area of intellectual inquiry, inside and outside philosophy. As such, when I categorise the problem of beginning as an epistemological one, the sense of "epistemology" I am operating with is the wide one concerned with questions of the nature of justification and the threat of scepticism which can occur in any area of rational activity, rather than

the narrow one which concerns the viability of a specific kind of knowledge, such as that of the "external world" or of "other minds." I am not interested here in examining the theoretical background against which these narrower epistemological questions tend to be posed. I should simply like to say that there is no reason to restrict the use of the term "epistemology" only to the narrower sense.

As such, just as with the regress problem and the problem of the criterion, we should distinguish two tiers of investigation into the problem of beginning. There is the approach to these problems at the *general* level, where one attempts to demonstrate, in the case of the regress problem that there can be such a thing as evidential support or adequate reason-giving *at all*, in the case of the problem of the criterion that it is indeed possible to measure beliefs against a properly secured criterion of truth *at all*, and in the case of the problem of beginning that it is really possible to begin an investigation in a manner which neither relies problematically on unexamined presuppositions nor is simply arbitrary *at all*. At this level the corresponding threat of scepticism is also general. In the case of the regress problem it represents the possibility that there is no such thing as proper evidential support or justification. In the case of the problem of the criterion it represents the twin possibilities of never being able to measure beliefs against a criterion of truth, nor ever arriving at the correct criterion of truth against which to measure beliefs. In the case of the problem of beginning it represents the possibility that one might never be able to properly secure the beginning of one's investigation, and therefore that claims to have gained some purchase on reality or on the truth in what follows from that beginning are always to some extent undermined.

There is also the approach to these problems at the *specific* level. Here one investigates these problems as they arise in a specific context. It is important to allow that, although it is important to do the more abstract work in order to demonstrate that these epistemological problems are resolvable at all at the general level, how one actually goes about resolving particular specific instances of them may differ from context to context. It may be that we conclude that what constitutes adequate evidential support for a theory in the natural sciences differs from what constitutes adequate evidential support for a theory in political science, both in terms of the kind of evidence and in terms of the manner in which that evidence supports the theory. Similarly, our approach to the problem of the criterion when considering moral judgements may differ

radically from our approach to the same problem when considering perceptual judgements. It may be then that there will be a similar variety of concerns when considering how to begin across different disciplines at the specific level. The corresponding threat of scepticism will be accordingly specific, and potentially therefore less devastating. It is possible to conclude that the problem of the criterion can be solved in the case of perceptual judgements, but is irresolvable in the case of moral judgements, for example.

As I made clear in **0.**1, this work is concerned with resolving the problem of beginning at the *general* level. That is to say that it attempts to demonstrate that it is possible to begin thinking or begin rational inquiry in a non-arbitrary manner *at all*. I take it that a sceptical response to this problem is effectively disastrous for all rational activity, inside and outside philosophy, just as a sceptical response to the regress problem would be. I shall not investigate in any detail how the solution to the problem of beginning at the general level I present here contributes to specific instances of the problem, for example in asking how and where one begins to investigate a specific topic in the philosophy of biology. In a preliminary manner, however, we can say that resolving the problem of beginning as it applies to thinking in general means at the very least that specific instances of the problem may legitimately presuppose the beginnings of an account of rigorous philosophical thinking. The extent to which this is useful is still questionable, and may to a large extent depend on the extent to which one considers the various sciences to be systematically related to one another.[15]

Before going further into the structure of the problem of beginning and its similarities to the other epistemological problems mentioned so far, a brief cautionary note: as its subtitle suggests, much of this work is occupied with the philosophy of Hegel and his engagement with the problem governing this investigation. I begin to justify this focus in **0.4**, but here I should acknowledge that a principle frequently

---

[15] It may be that the problem of beginning is much less severe in specific circumstances, even without a systematic attitude towards the dependence of particular sciences upon more fundamental ones. It may be that it is possible, for example, to give an account of perceptual judgements which takes them in some sense to be presuppositionless, if they are not *inferred* from perceptual experience, and non-arbitrary, if the availability of the world to the perceiver functions as a reason for belief precisely in a non-inferential manner. I shall not explore this possibility here, as my focus is on the problem of beginning in its most general form, as a problem for how to begin thinking rationally at all, where a similar kind of potential resolution cannot arise. This itself might suggest that, as well as being identified structurally as an agrippan problem as I argue in **0.3**, the problem of beginning in its most general form might also belong to that set of problems which emerge when reason is applied to itself, and that it is this – the difficulty of beginning when considering the reflexivity of reasoning – which gives it its especially fiendish character.

associated with Hegel is one to the effect that an *epistemological position always implies a metaphysical position*.[16] If this were true then in attempting to resolve the problem of beginning even at the most general level, I would somehow also be committing myself to some position or set of positions in metaphysics, or regarding what is. I do not believe that this is what is happening here, but this need not represent some radical break with Hegel (not that that is always a bad thing). To avoid misunderstanding here we should remember that this claim about epistemological positions implying metaphysical positions is derived from Hegel's approach to the problem of the criterion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*[17] and need not be generalised to the wide sense of "epistemology" operative here. This topic is addressed in greater detail in **2.3.3**, but for now we need simply to understand that the sense of "epistemology" operative when commentators take Hegel to claim that epistemological positions imply metaphysical ones is a specific one concerning the cognition of some object. Put very simply the claim is that making a claim about how one comes to cognise an object requires some conception of what objects are *like*, which amounts to a metaphysical claim. This does not mean that engaging at the abstract level with questions concerning the structure of reason-giving or justification in general as I am doing here (and as Hegel does too, of course) need commit one straight away to any metaphysical positions whatsoever.

0.3 The Problem of Beginning as an Agrippan Problem

Cling has helpfully described and formalised both the regress problem and the problem of the criterion in an attempt to demonstrate their similarity. In his (2009) he suggests that they are both instances of a more general structure or form of epistemological problem which he calls 'The paradox of reasons' (Cling, 2009, p.338). The same suggestion is made by Sankey who instead names the general problem-form 'The Agrippan Trilemma' (Sankey, 2011, p.562). I shall refer to the general problem-form as that of "agrippan problems"[18] and here I suggest that the problem of beginning

---

[16] See, for example, Westphal, 1988, pp.175-176. See also *PhG* §85/pp.59-60

[17] See *PhG*, §§84-85/pp.59-60

[18] This is because the "trilemma" formulation is not the most general formulation of the problem-form. In fact at its most simple it is a kind of dilemma, between, as Kajamies puts it with reference to the regress problem, the unsatisfactory nature of 'incurably conditional support' and the impossibility of 'unconditional' support. (See Kajamies, 2009, p.533) In **1.2** I show that Hegel too is aware of this.

is another, distinct instance of an agrippan problem.[19] The general form of these agrippan problems can be traced back to Aristotle (Aristotle, 1960 p.37), but the "agrippan" title refers to its presentation in Sextus Empiricus' account of the "five modes of scepticism" in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*[20] which he allocates simply to the 'more recent Sceptics' (*PH* I.xv.164) but which Diogenes Laertius allocates to a sceptical philosopher named Agrippa (Diogenes Laertius, 1925, IX, 11, p.88).

The general problem-form is a familiar one. It has appeared already in my presentation of the problem of beginning in **0.1.** At its simplest it consists in the unattractive yet apparently unavoidable dilemma between a position which is problematically arbitrary and a position which is supported, but in such a way that that the support is essentially questionable or 'incurably conditional' (Kajamies, 2009, p.533). That is to say, support that really constitutes no adequate support at all. Of course, as suggested above, the concern about incurably conditional support is really that this is just another form of arbitrariness.[21] If it is called a "trilemma" then this is to distinguish between, in the cases of the regress problem and the problem of the criterion, two different, yet equally problematic forms of incurably conditional chains of support: repeating and non-repeating ones. A non-repeating chain is what we usually call an infinite regress – an endless sequence of different reasons which, if the notion of such a sequence is really comprehensible, seems incapable of ever adequately supporting a belief or proposition.[22] A repeating chain describes a situation in which, sooner or later, the belief or proposition to be supported is drawn upon in order to support itself. This is usually referred to as "begging the question." This distinction

---

[19] It might be suggested that the problem of beginning only occurs when considering the foundations in a given foundationalist response to the regress problem or the problem of the criterion, but this is not the case. There is no reason that the advocate of a coherentist or infinitist response to either of those problems should not also be concerned with where they begin their reason-giving activity. The coherentist about justification or support might claim to be less concerned about beginning, if she supposes that the reason or belief with which she begins is not important, so long as it ends up cohering with other reasons or beliefs, but this raises the spectre of incompatible, yet equally coherent sets of beliefs (See, for example, Fogelin, 1994, pp.154 & 159-159). Providing a solution to the problem of beginning, one might suggest, could potentially play a supplementary justificatory role and relieve such concerns.

[20] See *PH* I.xv.164-177. Sextus' presentation of the form of an agrippan problem is examined in **1.2.**

[21] To be even more explicit, another way of phrasing the problem of beginning is exclusively in terms of arbitrariness, assuming that arbitrariness invites scepticism: Either a beginning is problematically arbitrary because it relies on an unexamined presupposition (or set of presuppositions) to support it, or it is problematically arbitrary because it presupposes nothing at all. Something similar could be said in the case of the regress problem – either a belief is arbitrary (and therefore unjustified) because it is not supported by any reasons, or it is arbitrary because the reasons supporting it offer only incurably conditional support.

[22] That at least, has been the dominant presumption since Aristotle if not earlier, but see Aikin's (2011) for a defence of an "infinitist" theory of justification in relation to the regress problem.

between forms of incurable support applies to the regress problem and the problem of the criterion, but I do not believe that it applies to the problem of beginning, as I shall demonstrate shortly.

Here I shall cite Cling's presentation and formalisation of the motivation for the regress problem, as an exemplar of an instance of an agrippan problem, before adding my own presentation of the motivation for the problem of beginning and formalising it in kind.

> '(R1) *Evidential Support is Possible*. It is possible that some proposition is evidentially supported by a proposition. $\Diamond(\exists x)(\exists y)Sxy$.
>
> (R2) *Supporting Propositions are Supported*. Necessarily, if a proposition P_1 is evidentially supported by a proposition P_2, then there is a proposition P_3 that evidentially supports P_2. $\Box(\forall x)(\forall y)(Sxy \rightarrow (\exists z)Syz)$
>
> (R3) *Regresses Block Support*. Necessarily, if it must be that any proposition P_1 is evidentially supported by a proposition P_2 only if P_1 and P_2 are the first two members of an endless sequence of propositions, each of which is evidentially supported by its successor, then no proposition can be evidentially supported by any proposition. $\Box[\Box(\forall x)(\forall y)(Sxy \rightarrow ERxy) \rightarrow \neg\Diamond(\exists x)(\exists y)Sxy]$' (Cling, 2009, p.334)[23]

Of course, the regress problem occurs when one notices that, despite each being apparently reasonable, the three propositions R1-R3 are jointly inconsistent. It seems that only any two of the three can be true at once. This leaves us ultimately with the type of dilemma characteristic of what I am calling agrippan problems. As Kajamies puts it, the dilemma, assuming that we are resisting the sceptical option, is between the unsatisfactory nature of 'incurably conditional support' (repeating or non-repeating regresses) or the impossibility of 'unconditional' support (arbitrary foundations) (Kajamies, 2009, p.533). I shall return to the regress problem in Chapter 3. For now, we can pose the motivation for the problem of beginning in a similar way, in order to exhibit its similar agrippan structure:

(B1) *It is possible to begin thinking in a non-arbitrary fashion*. It is possible that there is some beginning-thought such that it is non-arbitrary. $\Diamond(\exists x)(Bx \wedge \neg Ax)$

---

[23] Cling does not provide a key for his predicates, but they are clear enough in the context of his paper. S = supports, ER = endless regress. It is curious that Cling's (R2) uses universal quantifiers for both variables, as this suggests that it is occupied with all propositions which are supported by all propositions, rather than all propositions which are supported by some proposition(s). It may therefore be that this is an error in Cling's formulation, but I have not altered it in recounting it here.

(B2) *A thought requires that something be presupposed to render it non-arbitrary.* Necessarily, if a thought is non-arbitrary, then there is some presupposition rendering it non-arbitrary. $\Box(\forall x)((\neg Ax) \rightarrow (\exists y)(Pxy))$

(B3) *Presuppositions themselves undermine the non-arbitrary status of a beginning.* Necessarily, if it must be the case that in order for a thought to be non-arbitrary it must presuppose something that renders it non-arbitrary, then it is not possible to begin thinking in a non-arbitrary fashion. $\Box[\Box(\forall x)((\neg Ax) \rightarrow (\exists y)(Pxy)) \rightarrow \neg\Diamond(\exists x)(Bx \wedge \neg Ax)]$[24]

As in the case of the regress problem, these propositions are all apparently reasonable, yet inconsistent. It seems that only any two of them can be true. This leads to exactly the same type of dilemma characteristic of agrippan problems: Assuming one is resisting scepticism, one must either begin with the support of some unjustified presuppositions, the status of which undermines the value of the support that they offer, or one begins without any support, which seems problematically arbitrary. I shall briefly indicate why we might take the three propositions to be reasonable.

(B1) is reasonable since we do not take ourselves always to be operating with problematically arbitrary content in our rational activity. We would, I take it, at least like to think that we have begun thinking in an epistemically responsible or rationally justifiable manner, or that it is possible to do so.

(B2) is reasonable since, as explained already, to simply begin without presupposing anything to which one can appeal to justify one's point of departure leaves one wide open to the charge of arbitrariness. No answer is available when the sceptic asks, "Why have you not begun elsewhere, or otherwise?"

---

[24] Predicate key as follows: B = beginning, A = arbitrary, P = presupposes. Cling's presentation of the motivation for the regress problem differs slightly in that his (R3) introduces a new predicate, ER, to motivate the problem. I believe that the motivation for the problem of beginning does not require such an addition, because it is not necessary to demonstrate that presuppositions at the beginning for thought must tend towards some kind of regress in order to be problematic, as I explain below.

It might be thought here and in what follows that I am equivocating between the arbitrariness of the *act* of beginning to think and the arbitrariness of the thought or thoughts with which one begins. I have formulated the propositions in the way that seemed least awkward, but I accept that I am running the risk of appearing to equivocate in such a way. I would ask the reader to accept that my concern is always with the arbitrariness of the thought itself, and not with the act of thinking, which can be as arbitrary as one likes for the purposes of this project. Thus, whenever I have written about "beginning to think in a non-arbitrary fashion", this really means beginning to think with some beginning-thought which itself is non-arbitrary." Continual use of such a formulation struck me as simply too awkward.

(B3) is reasonable since to presuppose something at the beginning is itself to acknowledge that what one appeals to in order to justify one's point of departure is merely assumed. Nothing can be said to justify the presupposition, and therefore no answer is available when the sceptic asks, "Why have you not begun by presupposing something else, in some other manner?"

Accordingly it *seems* that one's options, given the inconsistency of (B1), (B2) and (B3), are as follows.

Deny (B3) – Insist that it is possible to begin with some unjustified presupposition or presuppositions, and that this need not undermine the non-arbitrary status of one's beginning. This might sound reasonable, perhaps especially if what is presupposed is something very rarely or even perhaps never questioned, but it is difficult to see how this strategy can avoid the determined sceptic who will latch onto the fact that nothing has been said in favour of the chosen presupposition over some other presupposition.[25]

Deny (B2) – Maintain the possibility of beginning without presupposing anything, and maintain at the same time that this beginning need not be considered arbitrary. The idea of a presuppositionless beginning certainly has a certain allure to it, for an obvious reason – it avoids the threat the sceptic poses to someone denying (B3). Yet it seems to me that the sceptic is at this point liable to remind someone denying (B2) that a presuppositionless beginning is in fact a beginning with *nothing* counting in its favour. There is then nothing at all to appeal to when the sceptic asks why beginning elsewhere or otherwise might not be preferable. It is not obvious how to respond to this threat.[26]

This seems to leave us with denying (B1), which amounts either to scepticism or to dogmatism. In this case we accept that whether we begin with or without some presupposition (or set of presuppositions), our philosophical endeavour is inescapably

---

[25] Deleuze suggests that this might be Descartes' strategy in the *Meditations*, by relying on the "subjective presupposition" of the *cogito*. He is clearly unimpressed by this strategy and effectively plays the part of the sceptic in asking why Descartes should be any more justified in helping himself to this presupposition than to another (his example is the definition of the human as a "rational animal"). Deleuze seems to understand Hegel in effect to be doing the same at the beginning of the *Logic* as Descartes does in the *Meditations*, though I cannot identify the "subjective presupposition" Deleuze claims to detect in Hegel's account of the "pure thinking" at the beginning of the *Logic*. (See Deleuze, 2004, p.164)

[26] This seems to me to be the way Houlgate understands Hegel's response to the problem of beginning (See Houlgate, 2006, especially Chapters 2 and 3). In **3.1** I explain why I disagree with this account.

vitiated by some degree of arbitrariness. If this conclusion causes us to suspend judgement over the results of that endeavour, then we are behaving as sceptics, and are effectively epistemically stranded. If, on the other hand, we simply accept (and in effect ignore) the arbitrary status of the endeavour, but continue anyway, then we are behaving as dogmatists.[27] This last option in particularly strikes me as philosophically inexcusable.[28] As I shall explain in **0.4** I am of the opinion that anti-dogmatism ought to be the overriding principle of philosophical work.

That concludes the basic statement of the problem of beginning. I take it that I have demonstrated that it originates in a natural anti-dogmatic concern – that of avoiding arbitrariness. I have argued that it is therefore to be conceived of as an epistemological problem in the sense that it concerns the rational or justificatory status of our intellectual efforts. In addition, I have suggested that although problems of this kind can occur in specific contexts, my interest in this work will be in the problem of beginning at the *general* level, or with the question of whether or not one can begin thinking in a non-arbitrary fashion *at all.* Furthermore I have made some attempt to demonstrate that the problem of beginning is a distinctive instance of an agrippan problem, sharing a common structure with the regress problem and the problem of the criterion.[29] At the heart of this structure is a dilemma between two equally unappealing alternatives, both of which seem to invite a sceptical response – arbitrariness on the one hand and unsatisfactory dependence on presuppositions (or incurably conditional support) on the other. I have posed the problem of beginning in the form of three

---

[27] It is customary in works dealing with ancient scepticism to point out that "dogmatism" did not carry the negative connotations then that it does now, being just a term for a philosopher who accepted certain doctrines as true. However, since we see in the structure of agrippan problems given in Sextus' work the outline of an argument to the effect that any dogmatist holds to their position on illegitimate grounds, it seems reasonable to me to maintain, at least to an extent, the pejorative connotations of the modern use of the term here.

[28] This concern might be mitigated to some extent if we adopt a fallibilist approach to beginning, of the kind I attributed to Sellars' approach to justification earlier. Fallibilism, whereby one accepts a degree of arbitrariness, or the presence of unjustified presuppositions at the beginning of one's investigation, but hopes to mitigate this dogmatism by holding that all such elements are in principle revisable over the course of the investigation, may well go some way towards undoing the threat of dogmatism. A serious investigation into the problem of beginning, however, as I am attempting here, remains unsatisfied even with the dogmatism of the fallibilist, remaining concerned as well that, even if the content of the beginning is revisable, beginning from somewhere arbitrary may still be to set off down quite the wrong track.

[29] There is no suggestion made here that these three exhaust the list of agrippan problems. Cling, in his (2009), suggests that this problem structure might very well occur not only in the cases of evidential support and criteria for truth, but also in cases of accounts of how or why propositions are true, epistemic principles which imply that beliefs count as justified, accounts of why a particular state of affairs is a possible one, and factors that would make a belief valuable, irrespective of its truth (See Cling, 2009, p.338). To this list I have merely suggested that we add the case of how to begin non-arbitrarily.

propositions which I take to be at least *prima facie* reasonable, yet which appear to be jointly inconsistent. Furthermore, I have suggested that any of the three obvious responses to this inconsistency seem problematically open to sceptical objection (or simply amount to scepticism themselves).

Before moving on I shall anticipate what I take to be a source of possible confusion. It might be asked at this point why the distinction between the two illegitimate forms of "incurable conditionality" or of dependence of an unsatisfactory kind on presuppositions, common to presentations of the regress problem and the problem of the criterion, should not apply to the problem of beginning. Why should there not be two different ways in which what is presupposed at the beginning can stymie the legitimacy of that beginning – either because what is presupposed is the first presupposition in an infinite regress of non-repeating presuppositions, or because what is presupposed is the first presupposition in a circle, so that the beginning begs the question? What this line of thought misses is that the problem of beginning is in a sense *simpler* than the regress problem; what is at stake is not the structure of supporting reasons or presuppositions, but the question of the legitimacy of presuppositions at the beginning *at all*. If, in order to render the beginning non-arbitrary, we have to presuppose something, the issue does *not* become that of what that presupposition presupposes. If it were to do that, then we would not really be considering the issue of beginning, so much as the issue of support, or the regress problem.[30]

The problem of the criterion and the regress problem appeal to difficulties such as begging the question or infinite regresses to demonstrate that the kind of reasons or support which we invoke in each of those cases is problematic, or incurably conditional (and so not really adequate reasons or support at all). But the incurable conditionality of what is presupposed at the beginning is automatically incurably conditional by virtue of the fact that it is presupposed *at the beginning*. An infinite regress or a vicious circle is not needed to demonstrate that what is presupposed at the beginning is presupposed in such a way as to render it unjustified. This is just what it means to presuppose something at the beginning. The problem of beginning is "simpler" because, in the case of beginning, it seems that avoiding arbitrariness implies that it is illegitimate to begin

---

[30] Maker seems to me to make this mistake when considering Hegel's problem of beginning. He writes that 'the justification for beginning with this given determination rather than another will require either an infinite regress or vicious circularity...' (Maker, 2005, p.6).

with presuppositions, and illegitimate to begin without them! Still, this difference aside (and of course there are other differences between the regress problem and the problem of the criterion as well) it should still be clear that the problem of beginning is a distinctive agrippan problem – different in focus from the regress problem and the problem of the criterion, but sharing with them at its heart a dilemma between simple arbitrariness and arbitrariness which comes from depending problematically on unjustified presuppositions.

I have already suggested that the problem of beginning should be characterised in the following manner: that attempts to begin in a non-arbitrary fashion are compromised by their reliance upon presuppositions, and that attempts to begin in a presuppositionless fashion are themselves problematically arbitrary. The distinctive attempt to solve the problem of beginning I take up in this work is the apparently paradoxical challenge of conceiving at the most general level of a beginning which is *presuppositionless and at the same time non-arbitrary*. In Hegel's terminology this is the idea of a beginning which is "immediate" and at the same time "mediated". In the context of the expression of the problem in terms of propositions (B1), (B2) and (B3) above, it should be clear that this means that the central strategy of my attempt at a "Hegelian" resolution to the problem of beginning consists not in finding a way to make the rejection of one of those propositions epistemically respectable, but (paradoxically, again) in attempting to render the three consistent after all, though this is no straightforward task. I spell out the form of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning in **1.4**, and make some attempt to formalise it.

0.4.0 Hegel, Philosophy, and the Problem of Beginning

Among philosophers who engage with the problem of beginning, I believe that the most serious approach, as well as the most intriguing and radical response or attempted solution, comes from G.W.F Hegel in his *Science of Logic*. More specifically, the problem of beginning is exactly what is at stake in "With What Must the Science Begin?"[31] – the essay with which Hegel opens the Doctrine of Being, the first book of the *Logic*. Because of the level of his engagement, and because of the ingenuity of his

---

[31] Hegel refers to his philosophy as *Wissenschaft*, which would normally be translated as "science". In English this term is often understood to refer only to the natural sciences, though this is not the case in German. It is slightly awkward, but to avoid confusion I have found it best to render *Wissenschaft* as "Science" when referring to Hegel's own philosophy, and "science" for other all other uses of the term. In the latter case whether the term is being used to refer to the natural sciences or other areas of study will be made explicit unless it is already clear from the context.

response, in my estimation at least, a rigorous account of Hegel's presentation of and attempted solution(s) to the problem of beginning constitutes the major part of this work. Ideally there would be time to develop this account into a comparative study with other, competing accounts of how to begin in philosophy, but such a task falls beyond the possible scope of this work and will have to be postponed. I am satisfied that Hegel's work on the problem remains perhaps the most important to date, and thus that the concentration on his work exhibited here represents a reasonable approach for one interested in defusing the sceptical threat posed by the problem of beginning. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the primary objective of this work is to attempt to solve the problem of beginning. I also intend to make some contributions to the literature on Hegel's work on this problem (and on his relationship with scepticism more generally, as well as various related issues such as that of the relationship between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*) but this objective is secondary in importance.

The engagement with Hegel the reader finds here will be at times sympathetic and at times critical. I have tried not to misrepresent him, and so large portions of the work consist in interventions in debates in the secondary literature on how best to interpret Hegel across a number of topics. I have tried to ensure that the response(s) to the problem of beginning provided by Hegel are presented in their strongest possible form. Where I disagree with his position or believe that his response could be improved in a way that Hegel misses I shall indicate this explicitly. I have no strong interest in providing an anachronistic or otherwise warped picture of Hegel, even if to do so might resolve issues in his response to the problem in question. Despite our differences, the influence of Hegel's work on the response to the problem I suggest in Chapter 3 will be obvious to the reader. As such I will from time to time characterise the position I develop as "Hegelian" in its spirit or its form, but will take care to distinguish these occasions from those where I am attempting to faithfully characterise Hegel's own views.

Before beginning the investigation proper, either into resolving the problem itself, or into Hegel's work on it,[32] I shall say a little about how I understand Hegel's general philosophical approach. After a brief overview of Hegel's attitude towards

---

[32] The two are not treated separately; I develop a solution to the problem of beginning by way of a critical interrogation of Hegel's work on the problem.

philosophical method, I make a series of comparisons of his approach with the contemporary anti-dogmatism of Aikin, especially as developed in his (2011). I adopt a number of features from both accounts to characterise the approach I have taken to the problem of beginning in this work.

0.4.1 Hegel, Science and Rationalism

As I noted earlier, Hegel uses the term "Science" to refer both to his philosophical position and to elements of his philosophical method.[33] The primary purpose of this section is to provide some characterisation of what Hegel means by "Science" (or simply "philosophy"), and to consider to what extent we should endorse those same positions or philosophical approaches. Firstly, in terms of identifying a particular position, it is noteworthy that one of the stated aims of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to bring ordinary thinking to 'the standpoint of Science' (*PhG* §78/p.56). He clarifies the nature of this standpoint (or model of cognition: the preface to the *Phenomenology* is entitled "On Scientific Cognition") in the following manner:

> 'The standpoint of consciousness which knows its objects in antithesis to itself, and itself in antithesis to them, is for Science the antithesis of its own viewpoint' (*PhG* §26/p.23).

This suggests that not only does Science indicate a specific model of cognition, but that this model involves identifying (possibly in a technical sense of the term) cognising or knowing with the cognised or known object. This suggests that Science entails some species of idealism.

Hegel also states that Science aims to 'cognise the absolute' whereby 'the absolute alone is true, or the truth alone is absolute' (*PhG* §75/p.54). This suggests that Science also amounts to a commitment to a project of metaphysics – of giving an account of what is, and to a particular theory of truth. This account of truth is one that 'maintain[s] that the truth has only the concept as the element of its existence' (*PhG* §6/p.12) and that 'The true is the whole' (*PhG* §20/p.19). This in turn suggests that truth is to be understood according to the structure of Hegel's metaphysics of what he calls "the concept" and that this structure is a holistic one.

---

[33] One can see how these two elements are tied together, for example, in Bowman's description of Hegel's "speculative Science" as 'a systematic critique and overcoming of traditional ontological (categorical) thought in service of an alternative, revisionary metaphysics' (Bowman, 2013, p.7). It is clear here that Science indicates both a methodological project of systematic critique and, at the same time, the establishment of certain philosophical (e.g. metaphysical) doctrines.

Putting aside for now the question of exactly what is meant by a metaphysics of the concept,[34] by idealism, or by a holistic theory of truth, I wish only to note that in attempting to solve the problem of beginning in this work I share with Hegel a profound dissatisfaction with the idea of taking anything for granted at the beginning, or of relying on unjustified presuppositions.[35] On that basis, although the issue of Hegel's Scientific model of cognition and of the idealist metaphysics which seem to go along with it will be discussed to some extent in due course, they will certainly play no role at the beginning of this investigation. For the time being then, I shall disregard the above senses of the term "Science".

Secondly, we should distinguish between two senses of "method." In the first case this refers to the general character of Hegel's philosophical approach – what it takes to be virtues in philosophical investigation and what it does and does not rely upon in terms of principles. This sense constrains Hegel's approach to the problem of beginning right from the start. In the second case this refers to the more specific account of philosophical method which Hegel develops over the course of the development or expression of his philosophical system. This is perhaps most explicit in the material on method presented in the final chapter of the *Science of Logic*. In this vein Hegel will suggest that the 'movement of pure essences constitutes the nature of Scientific method in general' (*PhG* §34/p.28). By this Hegel means to say that he understands philosophy to consist primarily in the examination of concepts and their own immanently generated

---

[34] It seems fair to say that contemporary scholarship is still very much divided over the nature of Hegel's metaphysics. Often it is suggested that there is a divide between "non-metaphysical" readings (e.g. Pippin (1989), Pinkard (1994), Zambrana (2015)) and "revised metaphysical" metaphysical readings (e.g. Houlgate (2006), Stern (2008), Kreines (2015)). This division is terminologically problematic, as it is by no means clear that all of the authors often placed in the first camp are really presenting a "non-metaphysical" account of Hegel. It is also overly simplistic, since it papers over a number of genuine disagreements about Hegel's metaphysics to be found within commentators working within one side of this apparent divide.

In conceiving of the problem of beginning as an epistemological problem, addressing the issues which inform the debates on the nature of Hegel's metaphysical position and methodology is not my primary aim. Where appropriate or necessary, I will indicate where questions about Hegel's metaphysics might be relevant to this work, and indicate my preferred reading of Hegel to the appropriate extent. By way of anticipation I can say that I tend to read Hegel being strongly committed to the rationalist position that an exercise in *a priori* reason can inform us about the fundamental nature of reality, although I am not as optimistic as some commentators who attribute this position to Hegel when it comes to assessing its viability.

[35] See *EL* §78, p.125/p.117: '[A]l... presuppositions and prejudices must be surrendered at the entry to Science... For it is in Science that all such determinations must first be examined'.

transformations according to a logic not imposed upon them by the philosopher, but which belongs essentially to the concepts themselves.[36]

The nature of the movement of concepts which Hegel takes the Scientific method to trace is understood explicitly in terms of a procedure of '*determinate negation*' (*PhG* §59/p.52). Perhaps the clearest exposition of this procedure in general terms is to be found in §§79-82 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia Logic*. There the reasoning involved is described as "dialectical" or "speculative," and much is made of the difference between two different modes of thinking, corresponding to the terms "understanding" (*Verstand*) and "reason" (*Vernunft*). An understanding of all of this, it would seem, is necessary to fully grasp what is involved in Hegel's Scientific method.[37]

Hegel does note, however, that it is problematic to invoke these kinds of methodological claims at the beginning of the investigation, writing of philosophical method that 'its proper exposition belongs to logic' (*PhG* §48/p.35) itself, and cannot be invoked to constrain the nature of the logical investigation from the beginning. To do so, of course, would simply be to make a series of unjustified assertions about method which Hegel's interlocutor would not be bound to accept. As he himself notes, '*One bare assurance is worth just as much as another*' (*PhG* §76/p.55). We should note in passing, though, that Hegel has sometimes been accused of making just this mistake.[38]

This account of method is developed explicitly on the basis of the self-development of logic which has preceded it (and is therefore not required in order for the work of Hegel's *Logic* to be done in the first place (including the work of solving the problem of beginning), even if it *does* provide a much deeper and more comprehensive understanding of that material once the methodological considerations are applied reflectively back over the material which preceded them[39]). As such, just as

---

[36] This holding back on the part of the philosopher Hegel describes as a 'refusal to intrude on the immanent rhythm of the concept, either arbitrarily or with wisdom gained from elsewhere' (*PhG*, §58/p.42) A good explication of this approach in terms of "letting go", can be found in Houlgate, 2006, pp.157-159

[37] I do not propose to comment on it at any length here for the sake of brevity, but it should also be noted that Hegel's comments on method in the preliminaries to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* and elsewhere can be understood as nothing more than a reflective generalisation of the recognisable ways in which the logical content he investigates has turned out to develop. Most importantly, it cannot be understood as an external methodological framework or form of inquiry, to be applied to a distinct content. (cf. *WL*, p.43/21: p.27 and p.54/21: p.38, for example)

[38] See Houlgate, 2006, pp.32-35 for a robust defence of Hegel against this charge.

[39] See Nuzzo, 2011 for an account of the relationship between the "method" of the *Logic* clarified at its end, and the operations of the *Logic* at its beginning, and of the two readings of that material this enables

with the notion of Science understood as referring to a substantive position above, although some elements of this developed account of Scientific method will be addressed here (in **1.2.2**, **1.5**, and **3.4**, for example), it will *not* be presupposed at the beginning. I am not therefore operating at the start with a concept of the "dialectic", for example, nor with an account of the types of thinking characteristic of the "understanding" and of "reason" (or of the relationship between the two).

All that concerns us here then is the first sense of "method" – those methodological or metaphilosophical concerns which constrain (and perhaps motivate) Hegel's engagement with the problem of beginning in the first place. Some of these I have already endorsed in setting out the problem of beginning. Foremost among these is the intention to avoid arbitrariness. As Hegel writes,

> 'While engaged in thoughtful contemplation... it soon becomes apparent that such activity includes the requirement to demonstrate the *necessity* of its content... and to make or accept *presuppositions* or *assurances* regarding it appears illegitimate.' (*EL* §1, p.28/p.39)

This emphasis on the importance of demonstrating the necessity of philosophical content, and on a principle of avoiding arbitrary presuppositions suggests that anti-dogmatism is chief among the philosophical virtues for Hegel.

This suggestion is further supported by Hegel's warning that,

> 'The study of philosophy is... much hindered by the conceit that it will not argue... This conceit relies on truths which are taken for granted and which it sees no need to re-examine; it just lays them down, and believes it is entitled to assert them, as well as to judge and pass sentence by appealing to them' (*PhG*, §67/p.46).

I fully endorse here Hegel's commitment to the necessity of presenting arguments in support of philosophical positions, and of avoiding the temptation to take questionable principles for granted.[40]

(the "linear" reading, in which the methodological considerations are not presupposed, and the "circular" reading, in which they are).

[40] In **0.1** I effectively suggested that a principle of avoiding dogmatism or arbitrariness could reasonably be assumed at the outset. This seems less problematic than other candidates for principles without which one could not proceed at all, the principle of non-contradiction being a good example. Hegel's own relationship with contradiction notwithstanding, it is possible for someone holding to the principle of non-contradiction to have their position legitimately questioned by a dialetheist, and vice versa. It is not obvious that a similar conversation could occur between a person committed to avoiding arbitrariness and a radical dogmatist who felt no need to give reasons for their position without the dogmatist betraying that very position by giving reasons for it.

In **0.1** I suggested that in philosophy we are interested in making some claim on the truth, or on reality. We have already seen that Hegel is of this opinion. Philosophy, Hegel thinks, 'has truth for [its] object' and 'may presuppose... an interest in [its objects] from the outset' (*EL* §1, p.28/p.39). We can endorse this here in its basic form without yet having any developed philosophical theory of truth in terms of the structure of the concept, correspondence with an external reality, or some other option in mind.

Hegel's position is that,

> 'True thoughts and Scientific insights are only to be won through the labour of the concept. Only the concept can provide the universality of knowledge which is neither common vagueness nor the inadequacy of ordinary common sense, but a fully developed, perfect cognition... capable of being the property of all self-conscious reason' (*PhG*, §70/p.48).

As I have already stated, we need not consider Hegel's commitment to an account of "the concept" in terms of a holistic metaphysical idealism at this point, but there are also elements of his philosophical method on show here. Firstly, again there is a strong anti-dogmatism detectable in his dissatisfaction with vagueness and appeals to common sense. Secondly there is also, separable from its metaphysical connotations, the suggestion that it is conceptual work which is the source of "true thoughts" or knowledge. This is to say that, at least at the beginning, philosophy is a question of purely a priori reasoning. Insofar as the problem of beginning springs from a project of examining thinking by way of pure thinking or pure reasoning, we can identify Hegel as a rationalist.[41]

That the thinking involved ought to be a priori in character seems, for Hegel, to fall out of his commitment to avoiding arbitrariness. Any reasoning which relies upon input from experience will immediately be vitiated by dogmatism insofar as that input amounts to material the validity of which is then presupposed. Hegel expresses clear disdain for 'Philosophies that want to base themselves on anthropology, facts of consciousness, inner intuition or outer experience' precisely because 'they assume those

---

[41] He may also be a rationalist in the sense of believing that a priori reason is the source of metaphysical knowledge, but I will not be considering this question here, save briefly in **3.5**

determinations to be *unqualifiedly true'* (*EL* §16, p.45/p.58) – which is to say that they rest upon mere presuppositions again.[42]

At this point we have seen some of the characteristics of Hegel's philosophical method or approach and it seems to constitute an uncompromising rationalism. At its heart is an intention to grasp the truth by way of a priori reasoning, a principle of avoiding arbitrariness, and the demand that the necessity of the content of thought be demonstrated.

0.4.2 Aspirationalism

My own approach here is in some ways less demanding than Hegel's. Instead of committing from the outset to his vision of Science and his thoroughgoing rationalism, I shall adopt what can be called an "aspi-rationalism." I owe the use of the term to Aikin (2011).[43] In this section I spell out some of the characteristics of Aikin's own "aspirationalism"[44] and compare it to Hegel's rationalist anti-dogmatism, pointing out both commonalities and differences. Where Aikin's approach seems more viable than Hegel's own I endorse the former. However, it seems to me that it is also the case that elements of Hegel's work could be used to deepen or radicalise Aikin's anti-dogmatism. I shall spell out how I think that this could be the case and the resulting methodological hybrid will constitute the aspi-rationalism with which I have approached this work.

Here is Aikin's basic statement of his aspirationalism:

'[K]nowing and rational believing are consequences of some relatively rigorous belief management with the ends not only of getting the truth and understanding it but having a legitimating story to tell about it.' (Aikin, 2011, p.2)

It seems clear that Hegel's rationalism and his labelling of philosophy as "Science" go some way beyond "relatively rigorous belief management." '[*P*]*roof'*, he says 'is indispensable for Scientific philosophy' (*EL*, p.5). This demand for proof follows from the commitment we have already seen him make towards a philosophy which demonstrates the *necessity* of its positions. It does not merely argue for them, nor

---

[42] This will not prevent Hegel, on the basis of a philosophical rationalism he takes to have begun in a manner which is both presuppositionless and non-arbitrary, later engaging with the input of the natural sciences on the basis of that philosophy, but nature of that relationship falls beyond my concerns here.
[43] Especially Chapters 1 and 5
[44] Aikin does not hyphenate the term as I have done. It is in fact not entirely clear whether or not his own use of "aspirationalism" is meant to play on the term "rationalism" as I have taken it to for my own purposes. I have inserted the hyphen to make my own use of the term unambiguous.

even merely argue *convincingly* for them, but it argues *irrefutably* for them, so that they are grasped as necessary or proven.

There is a good reason to remain closer to Aikin here and to direct our philosophical efforts towards the best possible argument that we can, rather than conceding at the beginning to Hegel's demand for proof and necessity. This is simply that the latter at least could be taken to imply a presupposition that this kind of certain, comprehensive philosophical knowing is possible. It may be that one could defend him against this charge, but we should certainly be wary of the possibility that stringent methodological demands like those of Hegel might end up violating the demand for presuppositionlessness which plays such an important role in thinking about the problem of beginning. It is reasonable to hold certainty up as an ideal, and attempt to address, in this case, the problem of beginning as rigorously as possible, while suspending judgement over the possibility of complete success in this philosophical endeavour. If it should turn out later in the attempt to solve the problem of beginning that what has been achieved is worthy of the title of "fully developed, perfect cognition", then this would be wonderful, but to assume that this is possible at the beginning would already be to undermine the attempt to solve the very problem which is our focus here. Because of this, the more modest demands of an aspi-rationalist approach seem to me to be a safer option than to begin with Hegel's demand for nothing less than proof.

As I suggested earlier, there are also elements of Hegel's anti-dogmatic approach which inform the aspi-rationalism adopted here because they seem to me represent an improvement on Aikin's own aspirationalism. An example can be provided by attending to the way in which Aikin shares Hegel's commitment to a project of justification in the service of truth. Aikin expresses this commitment in the following way:

> 'Having good reasons for our views is a good thing... On the assumption that a good reason for a commitment is a reason counting in favour of its truth, believing for good reasons is a means for having true beliefs. (Aikin, 2011, p.8)

We should note that we are not entitled to the assumption that Aikin helps himself to in this passage. The problem of beginning is not straight away that we might begin with something untrue, but that we might begin with something arbitrary. Since nothing counts in favour of something arbitrary over some other proposed beginning,

we are forced to suspend judgement over the matter.[45] Having a good reason in favour of a beginning, therefore, constitutes a simpler good (so long as it does not also undermine that beginning's claim to be presuppositionless): that having good reasons for a commitment (e.g. a beginning) entitles one to *hold* to that commitment and explore the inferences that can be made from it rather than suspending judgement. It is this attitude that will motivate the aspi-rationalism adopted in this work. The account of how this project then connects to the question of truth must come later. For now it is enough to note that being able to rationally hold a belief is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for being able to rationally hold a true belief.

There is also a further difference between Aikin's aspirationalist approach and Hegel's own anti-dogmatism which is worth attending to. Aikin's approach is expressed in terms of the aim of avoiding dogmatically held beliefs. Hegel would no doubt support this goal, but he also seems to think that our anti-dogmatism can go one step further than something like Aikin's rigorous belief management in that we can also be occupied with the development and justification of a properly rational set of concepts or categories which can *then* occur in beliefs or judgements, rather than assuming that we can only assess concepts in the context of beliefs.[46] Following the solution of the problem of beginning, this project of developing and justifying concepts constitutes the primary task, at least of the first two books of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.[47]

The aspi-rationalism adopted here shares with Aikin a commitment to a version of the principle of inferential justification (**PIJ**).[48] He expresses this in the usual terms

---

[45] Here the influence of Pyrrhonian scepticism on the aspi-rationalist approach is evident again.

[46] This is to say that I take Hegel to be committed to the idea that some kind of inferential relations obtain between bare concepts, without those concepts having to occur in a judgement or proposition in order for it to be possible for inferences to be made. I cannot explore here the extent to which this reading conflicts with those of commentators such as Brandom or Redding who insist that Hegel anticipates Frege's "context" principle (see Brandom, 1994, p.92 and Redding, 2007, p.114), save to say that while the account of the way in which concepts entail one another in the first two books of the *Logic* seems indeed to run the risk of such conflict, acknowledging this need not commit one to disagreeing with Brandom or Redding when they claim to exhibit original or important steps in the development of logic or philosophical semantics, perhaps even anticipations of insights commonly attributed to Frege, being made by Hegel in his account of the judgement or of the inference in the Doctrine of the Concept. The idea that the dialectical account of concepts presented in the *Logic* operates by way of a series of inferences might also strike some as problematic (e.g. Rosen, 1982, pp.74-77), although much turns on exactly what is meant by "inference" in this context.

[47] Aikin does remark that 'Each argument here is a function of our concepts... but do we have the right concepts?' (Aikin, 2011, p.5), but does not seem to pursue the matter further. Hegel's *Science of Logic* is arguably an attempt to identify and clarify "the right concepts" for use in judgement and in argumentation, hence the focus on that text in this work.

[48] See Aikin, 2011, p.14 An earlier version can be found in Fumerton, 1995, p.36

of reasons for propositions, but since we are here remaining open to the Hegelian possibility of discussing the justification of sub-propositional categories or concepts themselves, I will phrase the principle as I wish to endorse it in this work in terms of reasons for holding to some "commitment" where that term can apply to propositions or to sub-propositional concepts.

PIJ: *S* is justified in holding to some commitment *c*, only if (i) there is some reason *r*, that *S* is justified in committing to and (ii) *r* is a reason for *S* in favour of *c*.

This seems to me to cohere with Hegel's insistence, noted above, that a philosophical position is one that must be *argued* for, since to do so is to invoke reasons in its support.[49] We have also seen this principle tacitly at work in **0.1-0.3** of this work. The reason that the problem of beginning arises is that we are only justified in committing to some beginning for thought if that beginning is supported by some reason or presupposition. This seems to imply that a presuppositionless beginning cannot ever be justified, or ever be non-arbitrary. In addition, we are only justified in committing to the beginning if we are justified in committing to the presupposition(s) we depend on for the non-arbitrariness of that beginning. But, since by definition something presupposed at the beginning is not a candidate for justification, our attempt to render the beginning non-arbitrary by supporting it with some reason or presupposition also fails to provide us with a beginning that we are justified in committing to.

Perhaps the heart of an aspi-rationalist approach, and this is where I agree most strongly with Aikin, is in its elevation of the goal of anti-dogmatism above that of anti-scepticism. As he writes, 'If you are working hard to avoid dogmatism, your standards for justification tick up. If you're working to avoid scepticism, your standards tick down' (Aikin, 2011, p. 48). The attempt to solve the problem of beginning which I provide in this work follows from this ideal – that philosophy should be primarily involved in combating dogmatism and avoiding arbitrary assumptions. I think it is clear that Hegel shares this attitude. He is also convinced that a comprehensive system of philosophical knowledge is possible, despite the deliberate effort to 'tick' the standards of justification up as high as they can go and therefore to invite the threat of

---

[49] See Kreines, 2015, pp.241-243 for further arguments to the effect that Hegel's approach to the problem of beginning is informed by the demand that philosophy avoid arbitrariness and always be able to argue for its positions. Kreines, however, is of the opinion that Hegel solves the problem of beginning by appealing to idea that philosophy is ultimately circular. In **1.4.2** I explain why I reject this view.

scepticism.[50] Aikin is not quite as optimistic as Hegel. In putting forward his distinctive infinitist approach to solving the regress problem, for example, he accepts that aspiring towards extremely high standards of justification 'makes scepticism more likely', but writes that, 'If infinitism is a viable response to the regress problem and *doesn't* push us towards scepticism, then *all the better.*' (Aikin, 2011, p.49)

If one were to rather clumsily replace "infinitism" with "a theory of a presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning" and "the regress problem" with "the problem of beginning" in the passage just cited, one would be left with a fairly good statement of the aspi-rationalist approach I have taken in this work.[51]

I would like to finish this section with one final word in terms of philosophical approach or methodology. In **0.3** I recognised that one might attempt to go some way towards mitigating the threat of dogmatism or scepticism presented by the problem of beginning by denying (B1), but adopting a fallibilist approach to the issue of justification and suggesting that we begin with something hypothetical or experimental. I stated there that the serious attempt to solve the problem of beginning exhibited here is motivated by dissatisfaction with the concession to dogmatism that this move embodied. It seems to me that this is an attitude shared by Hegel, who writes, explicitly in the context of the issue of beginning,

> 'Unmistakeably, it is right to declare the usual manner of working with presuppositions and provisional assumptions a hypothetical and problematic procedure. Still, while right, this observation does not alter the character of such a procedure, but instead, immediately articulates the insufficiency of it.' (*EL* §10, p.38/p.51)[52]

---

[50] I begin to explore Hegel's own relationship with scepticism in **1.2**.

[51] Towards the end of **0.1** I suggested that the demand for philosophical rigour which motivated engagement with the problem of beginning had its origin in practices of justification in ordinary or everyday thinking, and that the move to philosophy involved the radical strengthening of these demands. This seems to be Aikin's understanding of aspirationalism too, when he writes that 'Philosophy... arises out of this natural aspirational notion of justification. Philosophical reasoning is different only in the degree of scrutiny demanded of our discussions.' (Aikin, 2011, p.178)

[52] Hegel is even more explicit in the *Science of Logic*, where he writes that, 'The... beginning is neither an arbitrary and merely provisional assumption, nor is it something which appears to be arbitrarily and tentatively presupposed, but which is subsequently shown to have been properly made the beginning' (*WL*, p.72/21: p.58). Winfield, reading this passage, takes Hegel to be asking 'if we cannot regard how we are proceeding as legitimate, why should whatever we reach have any authority?' (Winfield, 2012, p.35).

Insufficient for what purpose? For that of a maximally rigorously anti-dogmatic approach to philosophy.[53] Although I cannot attribute this suspicion of fallibilism to Aikin, it too feeds into the aspi-rationalism I have adopted in approaching this work.

0.5 Plan of Chapters

In **Chapter 1** I identify and explicate Hegel's statement of the problem of beginning. I trace his concern with sceptical problems from his early engagement with Pyrrhonian scepticism in his 'The Relationship Between Scepticism and Philosophy' to his *Science of Logic* and his *Encyclopaedia Logic*. I claim that his presentation of the problem of beginning is influenced by Sextus Empiricus' account both of the regress problem as it occurs in the presentation of the five modes of scepticism, and of the two modes of scepticism which follow in Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. In doing so I further support the claim made in **0.3** that the problem of beginning is an instance of an agrippan problem, enlisting Hegel as an ally.

I then proceed to sketch the form, but not the substantive content of Hegel's proposed solution to the problem of beginning. The heart of this solution is to identify a

---

[53] By reading Hegel's approach to the problem of beginning as fundamentally anti-fallibilist, I might disagree to some extent with notable a notable "pragmatist" interpretation of his work by Stern. Stern suggests that, 'Hegel's point is that at the outset of any inquiry, in some ways both he and the critical philosopher are taking something for granted... but the Hegelian approach is to be preferred because that way we at least stand some chance of actually getting to the truth' (Stern, 2008, p.221). The thrust of this claim is to attribute to Hegel (based more on a reading of the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* than of the beginning of the *Logic*) the view that it is unnecessary or fruitless to attempt to overcome sceptical concerns at the beginning of one's inquiry. This seems to me to diminish the earnestness of Hegel's engagement with scepticism, his demand for demonstrations of necessity, and his concern to avoid arbitrariness exhibited in the preliminaries to the *Encylopaedia Logic* (see, for example, *EL* §1). On Stern's reading the only kind of sceptical doubt it is appropriate to entertain at the beginning of the logical investigation is not one occupied with demonstrating its necessity against any possible sceptical concern, but only 'the doubt that comes about when we are confronted by the fact that what we thought about the world cannot be made to work coherently, forcing us to change our minds' (Stern, 2008, p.224). This is very much to treat the concept or concepts with which we begin as hypotheses, content not to undertake an evaluation of them until their coherence happens to break down, or possibly until we are presented with a competing conception.

My rejection of this approach is not, however, to deny that there is a certain "fallibilisim" of this kind to Hegel's dialectical procedure in both the *Phenomenology* and in the *Logic* in that forms of consciousness in the former and logical categories in the latter are indeed sublated because of fundamental incoherences or insufficiencies interior to themselves. This sublation generates newer forms of consciousness or concepts which do not share the same weaknesses, but none of this has the character of an experimental, *ad hoc* fallibilism of the pragmatist kind. Rather the process has the character of a deduction, since the character of the new content is necessitated entirely by the dialectical transformation of the older, itself a function of the older's essential inherent instability. Nor does the fact that, e.g. the *Logic* operates with a *kind* of fallibilism, so that its opening concept *is* found to be radically insufficient, detract from the claim that this concept is held to be the only *possible* concept with which to begin because of its character as being at the same time presuppositionless and non-arbitrary. It is accordingly in no way a "hypothesis," since Hegel commits to it precisely because it resolves the sceptical concerns embodied in the problem of beginning.

thought which is *at the same time both immediate and mediated* (Hegel's terminology), or *both presuppositionless and non-arbitrary* (my terminology) as a candidate for being the beginning of thinking in a manner that avoids the threat of scepticism. This is crucial as this is also the form of the solution which I will endorse in this work, though I differ from Hegel in some of the details, principally on the manner of what constitutes the mediation in question, or what renders the beginning non-arbitrary.

Finally, I identify two candidates in Hegel's work for fulfilling the demands of the form of his proposed solution to the problem of beginning, one from the *Science of Logic* and one from the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. The first of these suggests that the beginning of thinking is to be mediated by or to presuppose the immanent critique of "natural consciousness" Hegel undertakes in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The second instead suggests that the beginning of thinking is to be mediated by or to presuppose a "negative science" characterised as a "consummate scepticism." Examining these two possibilities is the task of the next two chapters.

In **Chapter 2** I examine the first of the two possibilities arrived at in Chapter 1. Here the solution to the problem of beginning is held to consist in thought constituted by the co-incidence of the immediate "empty thinking" of the beginning of the *Logic* and the outcome of the immanent critique of natural consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. I first spend some time trying to arrive at a convincing account of the relationship between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the beginning of his *Logic*. I find much to recommend the account defended by Maker and Winfield whereby the *Phenomenology* amounts to an auto-eliminating presupposition of the *Logic*.

There is then an interlude where I spend some time considering the possibility that Hegel might have revised his opinion of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic*, as this could have consequences for my analysis of that relationship and its role in resolving the problem of beginning. I conclude that there is insufficient evidence to say with any great confidence that Hegel radically re-evaluated his assessment of the role the *Phenomenology* plays in relation to the beginning of the *Logic* and that we must suspend judgement on the matter for the time being.

Finally I present a series of reasons for thinking that, despite attempts from commentators like Maker and Winfield to make the *Phenomenology* compatible with

the beginning of the *Logic*, it is in fact incapable of doing so, at least in such a way as to enable Hegel to solve the problem of beginning. I conclude the chapter by declaring the first of Hegel's formulations of a solution to the problem of beginning a failure accordingly. These reasons that this account fails can also be read as a list of conditions a successful solution would have to meet.

In **Chapter 3** I turn to the second solution I draw from Hegel's work, presented in outline in Section 78 of his *Encyclopaedia Logic*. The purpose of the chapter is to see whether this solution can succeed where the attempt examined in the previous chapter failed. The form of the solution remains the same, but here the role of the *Phenomenology* has been replaced with a project Hegel characterises as a "negative science" referred to "consummate scepticism." Immediately I am confronted by a difficulty: no sooner than Hegel outlines this possibility, he dismisses it. It therefore remains radically underdeveloped. The first part of this chapter is therefore taken up by arguing that Hegel is wrong to dismiss this solution so quickly, and in fact that his dismissal risks not taking seriously the account of the problem of beginning he so brilliantly expressed in the *Science of Logic*.

The remainder of this chapter is taken up with developing a vision of what a consummate scepticism could look like and seeing whether or not it, coupled with the afore-mentioned "empty thinking" of the beginning of the *Logic*, could amount to a viable solution to the problem of beginning. I develop an account of scepticism which I suggest avoids the problems which prevented the immanent critique of natural consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology* from playing the role of mediation, or of functioning as a presupposition to render the beginning of thought non-arbitrary. This account of scepticism owes a certain amount to the Pyrrhonian tradition with which Hegel was so occupied. In this context I insist upon on a "rustic" rather than "urbane" scepticism. I also make the case for a "zetetic" scepticism, which I argue might feed into the beginning of thought in just such a way as to render the beginning non-arbitrary without compromising its presuppositionless status. This solution to the problem of beginning, I claim, clearly departs from Hegel's own position, but remains committed to the form of a solution to the problem of beginning I take him to have provided. As such I label it a "Hegelian" solution, even if it is not exactly Hegel's own.

I then suggest that the proposed solution to the problem of beginning might be described as pushing "scepticism through the looking glass," where this term describes the manner in which the solution to the problem of beginning begins to license Hegel's notion of speculative reason (*Vernunft*).

Having solved the problem of beginning, I remain with Hegel's *Logic* in order to examine one of the consequences for that work which follows from my revised "Hegelian" solution. I argue that the disagreements I have had with Hegel on how to solve the problem of beginning have one immediate and significant consequence – it is no longer legitimate to maintain *from the beginning* a commitment to idealism.

The work concludes with a number of reflections on the challenges facing the project of understanding and assessing the project of Hegel's *Logic* on the basis of the solution to the problem of beginning put forward in this work, as well as alternative possibilities for presuppositionless thought.

Chapter 1: Pyrrhonian Scepticism and the Beginning of Hegel's *Logic*

1.0 Introduction

In the introductory chapter, after spending some time introducing the problem of beginning, I claimed firstly that this is a problem with which Hegel engaged with great seriousness, and secondly that the form of Hegel's solution(s) to the problem of beginning consisted in the idea of a beginning that was *presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary*. In this chapter, accordingly, I first demonstrate Hegel's engagement with the problem of beginning before proceeding to examine the basic form of his proposed solution. I then move to identify two importantly different statements of his proposed solution, both instances of the general form of a presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning, but differing on the topic of the means by which to render that beginning non-arbitrary.

This chapter is organised as follows:

1.1 The Beginning of the *Science of Logic*: In which I introduce the problem at the heart of "With What Must the Science Begin?" – the essay which opens the first book of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. I take a brief look different takes on Hegel's problem of beginning in the extant literature and take a preliminary look at the relevant passage from the text itself.

1.2 Hegel and Pyrrhonian Scepticism: In which I survey Hegel's engagement with Pyrrhonian scepticism in order to support the claim that his engagement with the problem of beginning springs from his engagement with Pyrrhonian scepticism more generally.

1.3 The Two Modes and the Problem of Beginning: In which I argue that Hegel's presentation of the problem of beginning owes its formulation to Sextus' account of the two modes in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism.* This lends support to the claim that the problem of beginning is an agrippan problem in the sense clarified in the previous chapter.

1.4 The Form of Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Beginning: In which I set out the form of Hegel's proposed solution to the problem of beginning and identify two different statements of that solution. In both cases the solution is to begin in a manner which is both presuppositionless and non-arbitrary, or both "immediate" and "mediated," but the two differ according to what they take to

play the role of ensuring the non-arbitrary status of the beginning – the role of mediation.

1.1.0 The Beginning of the *Science of Logic*

The *Science of Logic*, while prompting any number of rich disagreements over the nature of its method, its outcome, and its relationship to metaphysics or ontology, is at least uncontroversially meant to be a "logic," which is to say it is 'the science of pure thought' (*WL*, p.60/21: p.45). Its subject-matter is first and foremost the basic categories or concepts with which thought operates and their interrelations.[54] The central purpose of the work is to give a rigorous interrogation of the fundamental concepts with which we operate in order to demonstrate their coherence and sufficiency. This Hegel attempts to do by tracing a 'necessary development' (*WL*, p.40/21: p.18) running through the series of concepts he exhibits, so that the work as a whole amounts to a deduction of the various concepts and their interrelations.[55] All of this is to say that logic as Hegel envisages is has a reflexive character, as it is an examination of thought by means of thought. Hegel is quick to notice that this presents difficulties, since it would seem that the resources we would make use of in analysing some subject-matter are not available to use in this case, since they themselves are under examination:

> 'Logic... cannot presuppose any of these forms of reflection and laws of thinking, for these constitute part of its own content and have first to be established within the science.' (*WL*, p.43/21: p.27)

On the basis of the claims made in **0.1** and **0.2** about the problem of beginning in its most general and apparently irresolvable form arising precisely in this kind of reflexive scenario, we should therefore be alert for signs that Hegel is engaging with that problem, understood as a dilemma between problematic reliance on presuppositions and arbitrary assertion.

---

[54]See, for example, the preliminaries to the *Encyclopaedia*, where Hegel declares logic to be concerned with '*thoughts* and *categories*, but more precisely *concepts*' (*EL* §3, p.31/p.42) and distinguishes these from the representations, desires, actions and other cognitive activities which make use of such concepts.

[55] Of course, we are always already making use of concepts in thinking, but the concern motivating the *Logic* is that, because we have simply taken for granted the use of some concepts without properly examining them, we may be using them illegitimately, or without a proper grasp of those concepts and their interrelations. As Hartmann puts it, the approach to concepts taken in the *Logic* is one of the 'transformation of what is found, or granted as a fact or as a deliverance of science or naive philosophy, into a reconstruction in the form of rational necessity' (Hartmann, 1993, p.244).

Perhaps this entire project is prompted by something Hegel says at the beginning of the Doctrine of Being in the *Science of Logic*, in the first paragraph[56] of the essay entitled "With What Must the Science Begin?" There he writes,

'What philosophy begins with must be either *mediated* or *immediate*, and it is easy to show that it can be neither the one nor the other; thus either way of beginning is refuted.' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53)

The general structure of the essay moves swiftly from a discussion of this slightly mysterious sounding dilemma to an explanation of why logic must in fact begin with the concept of '*pure being*' (*WL*, p.69/21: p.55), but before examining the nature of this movement, which I shall do in detail in **1.4.1**, we should look more closely at this passage. Deciphering Hegel's meaning here is the primary objective of sections **1.1-1.3**.

Hegel's wording in setting up the dilemma cited above suggests a rather gloomy prognosis for philosophy, if it is to have the kind of Scientific character Hegel clearly desires it to, that is, if it is 'to demonstrate the necessity of its content' (*EL* §1, p.28/p.39). This is clearly a statement of *a* "problem of beginning," but we cannot yet claim that it is the same problem which I introduced in the previous chapter, although I shall argue in **1.3** that it is exactly the same. Whatever its exact meaning, it is clear that resolving this problem is of great importance for Hegel. This is perhaps simply because his is the paradigmatic example of a *systematic* philosophy; he is not merely committed to the idea that we are able to comprehend the truth across a range of subjects which he will go on to address in terms of logic, ontology, the philosophy of nature, psychology, phenomenology, politics, ethics, religion, aesthetics, history and so on, but also that, rather than being radically distinct areas of enquiry, or only loosely related, these are to be grasped holistically on the basis of a single, sprawling, systematic philosophical inquiry.[57] As the title of the essay in question makes clear, this inquiry has a beginning. It seems then that the validity of the entire system (and its various significant

---

[56] Though only in the second edition of the text. In the first edition Hegel places it slightly later, after the material connecting the *Logic* to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is possible that his rearranging of the material relates to a revision of the role of the *Phenomenology* in relation to the rest of the system. I examine this possibility in **2.2**

[57] The heart of this system is presented, of course, in the three iterations of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* in 1817, 1827, and 1830. There is a good overview of Hegel's commitment to systematic philosophy in Stewart, 2008, pp.76-80

philosophical claims) might turn on Hegel beginning it in a satisfactory manner, which means resolving this problem of beginning.[58, 59]

1.1.1 Assorted Hegelian Problems of Beginning

The first difficulty we face in understanding the nature of Hegel's "problem of beginning" is that the expression (or a number of similar variants) occurs in relation to a number of different problems in secondary literature on Hegel's work. I do not mean here to give the impression that there is more disagreement on this topic than actually exists. In some cases it is simply that a different problem from the one under consideration here is the focus of the author's attention, but that they have seen fit to identify this other problem as concerned with "beginning." It is worth characterising a few brief examples merely to distinguish them from the problem of beginning which occurs in the passage cited at the start of this section.[60]

Staehler writes that 'The paradox of beginning consists in the fact that we can only see the beginning retrospectively. Outside of philosophy, we cannot come to an understanding of it; prior to philosophy, we can only begin in a non-philosophical fashion – but if that is the case we will never be able to enter into philosophy' (Staehler, 2017, p.6). Staehler adds that this is to paraphrase a passage from "With What Must the Science Begin?" It is clear though that it is not the passage concerning whether or not one begins with something mediated or immediate, but a later passage concerning the

---

[58] This is a deliberately dramatic statement, of course. If it seems that the importance of the problem of beginning to Hegel's thought is being over-inflated here, one might mitigate this effect to some extent either by focusing on the anti-sceptical outcome which Hegel seems to think follows from the character of his construction of speculative reason, which he seems at times to think renders his philosophy immune to genuine opposition (I pay some attention to this idea in **1.2.2**), or by noticing that what I have said here is entirely compatible with the idea that elements and arguments from Hegel's work could be extracted piecemeal and found to be of philosophical value by those not interested in the validity of the overall system.

[59] This might be thought to be in tension with Hegel's comments, added in the preface to the second edition of the *Science of Logic*, warning against the ''thoroughness' which is so satisfied with itself' which obsesses over the beginning of the *Logic* and refuses to engage any further until the validity of the opening concepts have been 'firmly established' (*WL*, p.41/12: p.19) It seems to me though that this line of criticism is in fact aimed at detractors who insist upon bringing external and unjustified criteria to bear upon judging the account of the concepts of being, nothing, and becoming, and is not meant to detract from the importance of the problem of beginning as Hegel understands it. It is true that resolving the problem of beginning leaves one only with the simplest of concepts, and tells one very little about the richness of Hegel's philosophical work which follows it, but the problem of beginning is still nevertheless a vital one, as evidenced by the presence of an entire essay on the topic at the beginning of the Doctrine of Being.

[60] This is not exhaustive. Scarfe's (2003), for instance, examines yet another "problem of beginning" in Hegel's *Logic*, the problem of whether it is preferable to begin with the concrete content of some intuition or with the abstraction of pure thought, which I do not discuss here. It is arguably related to the decision to treat the problem of beginning as a problem of pure reason which I addressed in **0.1-0.2**.

impossibility of clarifying the nature of cognition prior to or outside of what Hegel calls Science.[61]

The distinction made here between a distinctively philosophical mode of cognition and the form of cognition belonging to natural or non-philosophical consciousness does not concern us at this point (hence Hegel's comment that 'it is the nature of cognition simply as such which is considered within the science of logic' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.54)). This question is arguably the central focus of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which then appropriately turns out to be the major object of Staehler's attention, rather than the *Logic*. Immediately following the passage which Staehler paraphrases from the *Logic* is a discussion of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* itself, and this does point us towards a critical question: If the issue of a distinctively philosophical mode of cognition is the focus of the *Phenomenology*, and the result of this investigation is presupposed by and constrains the investigation of the *Logic*, does this betray Hegel's avowal just cited to consider the nature of cognition "simply as such"? Discussion of this issue must wait until **2.3.0-2.3.3**. For now it is enough to note that this question of beginning in a distinctively philosophical or "Scientific" fashion, or according to a distinctive criterion or form of consciousness, is not immediately at stake when considering the problem of beginning outlined in **0.1-0.3**. As such, what Staehler calls the "paradox of beginning" is a different problem from the one I claim to find in Hegel's comments about the impossibility of beginning either with something immediate or with something mediated.

Moder attends to the same problem as Staehler, calling it 'the question of an absolute beginning' (Moder, 2017, p.24), but he also seems to focus on yet another problem of beginning. He notes first that, 'Hegel's *Science of Logic* begins with the logic of pure being. The fundamental, and for Hegel most essential thesis is that being is the same as nothing' (Moder, 2017, p.18). But, he thinks, it is difficult to know where to go from this beginning: 'It is hard to declare anything about pure being and pure nothing. As soon as we give them a determination or definition, they have already evaded us in their purity' (Moder, 2017, pp.18-19). The concern then, for Moder, is that of how to generate determinacy and movement from out of concepts or categories

---

[61] 'But to want the nature of cognition clarified *prior* to the Science is to demand that it be accomplished *outside* the Science; *outside* the Science this cannot be accomplished...' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.54)

which seem to refuse these notions.[62] He writes, 'The fundamental impossibility... to speak determinately about pure being and pure nothing – constitutes the beginning proper of Hegel's logic' (Moder, 2017, p.19). This "problem of beginning" is also Henrich's primary focus in his 'Anfang und Methode der Logik', where he famously concludes that dialectic of being and nothing requires determinations of reflection (which Hegel discusses explicitly only in the second book of the *Logic*) in order to function.[63]

If Staehler's Hegelian paradox of beginning pointed us towards the vexed issue of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* and the implications of this relationship for Hegel's consideration of what I am calling the problem of beginning, Moder and Henrich's focus indicates a simpler relationship between problems. They are interested in the way in which the first category of Hegel's *Logic*, that of '*Being, pure being*, without any further determination' (*WL*, p.82/21: p.68), leads on to or implies a series of other logical categories. The movement between the categories of being and nothing, and then on to the category of becoming, is often taken to be the first step of Hegel's distinctively "dialectical" logical procedure, if not to function as archetypal example of a dialectical or speculative inference.[64] It might seem natural then to consider how one moves from the first category – that of "pure being" onwards to be the "problem of beginning." But the problem of beginning which is at stake in this work is the problem which comes *before* Moder's problem. Certainly we must ask how Hegel proposes to develop a system of logic from out of the concept of pure being, but first we must ask how he is justified in beginning with pure being at all. How does this thought – "pure being" – resolve the impossibility of beginning either with something immediate or with something mediated? In order to answer this question we must make sure that we understand the meaning of the passage under investigation here.

---

[62] Pippin also notes that this problem of beginning – the move from being to becoming – 'has certainly become the most frequently discussed and most often criticised aspect of [Hegel's] own *Logic*.' (Pippin, 1989, p.182)

[63] See Henrich, 1971, p.75-84

[64] Although there is good reason to resist this idea, as the movement from being to nothing to becoming is in some respects quite an unusual one in the context of the *Logic*. In particular, it seems uniquely difficult to conceive the type of thinking Hegel characterises in terms of the "understanding" being able to hold either the concept of pure being or pure nothing in opposition to one another before dialectical or rational thinking can exhibit the movement between them.

Houlgate, in his (2006) focuses his attention less on the passage concerning the impossibility of beginning with something immediate or with something mediated, but heavily on Hegel's assertions to the effect that the beginning of thought must be presuppositionless. Two of the most notable examples of this claim, cited by Houlgate,[65] are Hegel's assertions that 'the beginning... *may not presuppose anything*' (*WL*, p.70/21: p.56) and that 'Science should be preceded... by *total presuppositionlessness*' (*EL* §78, p.125/p.118). This problem, of beginning with some unjustified presupposition, has been examined at length in the introductory chapter to this work, although there it was only one side of what I called the problem of beginning. Houlgate takes Hegel's insistence upon a presuppositionless beginning seriously. If there is a problem of beginning, for him (once one has accepted the illegitimacy of beginning by taking something for granted), it is the following: 'If we are to examine thought without presupposing that it has any particular structure, operates with any particular concepts, or is governed by any particular rules, what are we to understand thought to be? What is to be the object of its examination?' (Houlgate, 2006, p.31). Houlgate's answer to this question amounts to an explanation of why Hegel begins the *Logic* with the concept of pure being,[66] but the reader sympathetic to the expression of the problem of beginning in the previous chapter to this work will still want to know why it is that a purely presuppositionless beginning should not be considered merely arbitrary. One might also want to ask what has become of Hegel's statement to the effect that one cannot begin with something immediate, since the category of pure being is characterised by Hegel as 'the indeterminate immediate' (*WL*, p.81/21: p.68) or as 'indeterminate immediacy' (*WL*, p.82/21: p.68).

Similarly to Houlgate, Watts, although in an essay which is ultimately critical of Hegel's approach to the question of beginning, writes that, 'Hegel's "paradox of beginning," then, is simply this: any inquiry begins by making an assumption of some kind, and yet it is distinctive and proper to philosophical inquiry that it begins without making an assumption of any kind' (Watts, 2007, p.11). This too is a statement to the effect that the problem of beginning is that the beginning must be presuppositionless, but that it is difficult to see how it can be. Again this differs from my statement of the problem of beginning in the previous chapter in that the focus is entirely on

---

[65] See Houlgate, 2006, p.29
[66] 'In Hegel's view, free, self-critical thought that suspends all its presuppositions about itself is left with nothing to think but itself, its own simple *being*.' (Houlgate, 2006, p.31)

presuppositionlessness, without also attending to the worry that it seems that a truly presuppositionless beginning must be considered problematically arbitrary. In terms of applying this statement or those of Houlgate considered above to the passage from "With What Must the Science Begin?", one might read the prohibition against beginning with something mediated as a prohibition against beginning by relying on some presupposition, but it is not clear, on this kind of account, what Hegel's problem with beginning with something immediate is, save that he seems to state that it is not possible for an inquiry to do so (I take it that this claim is a normative one).

Interestingly though, later on in his paper, Watts engages at some length with Kierkegaard's (in his guise as Johannes Climacus) criticism of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and suggests that, 'the basic structure of Climacus' objection takes the form of a dilemma. Insofar as we begin immediately, we forfeit any discursive justification for beginning where we do. But as soon as we start a process of reflection in order to do that, we forfeit the possibility of beginning immediately' (Watt, 2007, p.22). This, despite being presented as a *criticism* of Hegel's approach to the issue of beginning, sounds rather a lot like the problem of beginning I set out in the previous chapter. On the one hand, if we begin with something immediate, that beginning appears arbitrary, while on the other hand, if we attempt to render it non-arbitrary by justifying it, the beginning is no longer presuppositionless.[67] It seems clear, however, that Watts understands this dilemma as a problem *with* Hegel's account of beginning − not as the problem of beginning which Hegel takes himself to be posing and then resolving. I shall return to this in **1.3**.

At this point I shall turn back briefly to the passage that concerns us. The second difficulty we face in grasping Hegel's problem of beginning is to understand exactly what Hegel means by asserting first the necessity, and then the impossibility of beginning either with something immediate or with something mediated.

---

[67] Houlgate also discusses Climacus' objection, although his focus is less on the issue of the extent to which "reflection" is used to *justify* an immediate beginning, but instead on the argument that the attempt to begin with something immediate *requires* an act of reflection, but that this in turn undermines the immediate status of that beginning, so that the notion of an immediate beginning is shown to be incoherent, although he does not consider the objection to be a powerful one, either because he takes it to invoke without justification the notion of the necessity of an infinitely extending process of reflection, or because he does not think that the sense in which the *act* of reflection or abstraction on behalf of the thinker need be taken to undermine the immediacy of what is thought (See Houlgate, pp.88-93). I find this response convincing. Watts considers this line of criticism as well, but after the dilemma I have drawn our attention to here.

1.1.2 The Problem of Beginning in "With What Must the Science Begin?" – Preliminary Investigation

The passage in question seems to me to have been unjustly neglected in many commentaries on Hegel's *Logic*.[68] One of relatively few commentators who have paid specific attention to it is Maker,[69] perhaps most notably in his *Philosophy Without Foundations*, where he associates the term "immediacy" with the '*pure knowing*' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.58) discussed at the beginning of the *Logic*, and the term "mediation" with the work accomplished by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Maker, 1994, p.79). Maker, then, approaches the passage in question primarily in the context of understanding the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* within Hegel's work. I think that we should first approach the problem in its own terms, and then see how resolving it might involve a discussion of the relationship between the two texts. I shall return to Maker's account in **1.3** and **1.4.1**, however, as it seems to me very much to be on the right track.

The first thing to notice when reading the passage in question is that Hegel is not exactly speaking in his own voice here. Instead he is giving voice to the problem in such a way that clearly renders it irresolvable.

(P1) One must either begin with something immediate or with something mediated.

(P2) One cannot begin with either.

(C) Therefore beginning is impossible.[70]

There is nothing unusual about posing a problem in this way before going on to present one's proposed resolution, usually either by challenging a crucial inference or by rejecting a premise. And this is clearly an impasse Hegel thinks he has a way out of. This is made evident simply by the fact that the book which opens with the statement of this problem does not end straight away once the apparent impossibility of beginning has been stated. It is clear then that Hegel does not think that the problem of beginning is insurmountable. He begins, and develops a large body of work on the basis of this

---

[68] There seems to be no discussion of it, for example, in McTaggart (1910), Henrich (1971), Rosen, (1982), Johnson, (1988), Pippin (1989), Butler (1996), Burbidge (2006), Houlgate (2006), and Trisokkas (2014), and only a very brief mention or allusion in Burbidge (1981), Carlson (2007), and Tabak (2017)

[69] As well as Maker, Wolff (1996), Winfield (2012), Menahem Rosen (1992) and Stanley Rosen (2014) pay explicit attention to this passage. I shall return to them in **1.3**.

[70] See also Wolff, 1996, pp.240-241, for a slightly more in-depth rephrasing of this argument.

beginning. In stating the apparent impossibility of beginning he is giving an impression of the importance and difficulty of the problem, before he moves to resolve it.

The issue we face is that Hegel does not do a great deal straight away to make explicit the meaning of the terms utilised in the expression of the problem. He says that "it is easy to show" that one cannot begin with something immediate or with something mediated, but he does not make clear why this is the case. If we are to understand Hegel's proposed solution to this problem, we need to do more to understand the problem itself.

There are two obvious avenues of inquiry at this point. The first is to consider in more general terms Hegel's usage of the terms "immediacy" and "mediation" to see whether or not this can shed any light on the statement of this problem. The second is to examine the relevant passages from the remainder of 'With What Must the Science Begin?" especially those following shortly after the expression of the problem. This will give us a sense of Hegel's solution to the problem, which might then in turn shed some light on the meaning of the problem itself. I will spend some time exploring these possibilities in sections **1.3** but before doing so I must take a detour in order to provide some of the necessary background to my interpretation of Hegel's problem of beginning.

As I have made clear, I believe that that Hegel's statement of the impossibility either of beginning with something mediated or with something immediate is a statement of the problem of beginning as I have explicated it in **0.1-0.3**. There are a number of possible objections that should be overcome in order to make this case, but one of the first springs from my contention that this problem is an agrippan one – that it belongs to a set of fundamental epistemological problems sharing a structure detailed by sceptics in the Pyrrhonian tradition, in particular Sextus Empiricus.

This contention is likely to prove objectionable as an interpretation of the problem which opens "With What Must the Science Begin?" because there is not one explicit mention of Sextus or of Pyrrhonism more generally in that essay. This is not true of either the *Science of Logic* or the *Encyclopaedia Logic* in their respective entireties, but some argument is clearly required in order to demonstrate the influence of Pyrrhonian sceptical thinking on Hegel's problem of beginning. The first step in doing so is to say something about Hegel's concern with the Pyrrhonian tradition more generally.

1.2.0 Hegel and Pyrrhonian Scepticism

One of my primary aims in this chapter is to argue that Hegel is prompted to engage with the issue of beginning in the way that he does by sceptical concerns about justification and arbitrariness which he inherits from his engagement with ancient scepticism in the Pyrrhonian tradition,[71] as embodied primarily in the work of Sextus Empiricus.[72] Hegel's engagement with scepticism does not only *prompt* a concern for the problem of beginning, but also *shapes* his formulation of the problem, giving it the form of a distinctive agrippan problem. A crucial step in supporting this claim is to establish that the tradition of ancient scepticism exercised a significant influence on Hegel's thought. Before doing so, however, it is worth briefly surveying some of the attention that has been paid to Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism in recent secondary literature.

1.2.1 Survey – Secondary Literature on Hegel's Engagement with Pyrrhonian Scepticism

In 1989 Forster noted that, 'There is a long tradition in the literature on Hegel which either overlooks his profound interest in epistemology or explicitly holds that he was dismissive or careless about it. This is in large measure attributable to a failure to pay sufficient attention to Hegel's critical interpretation of the sceptical tradition' (Forster, 1989, p.3). Happily, in the intervening years much has been done to remedy the situation. Here I mention a few good examples:

- Forster's (1989) did much to reaffirm Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism. He spends some time attending to Hegel's early essay in the *Critical Journal*, "On the Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy,"[73] drawing out Hegel's concern with classical sceptical equipollence problems, and then extends this analysis to the motivation behind Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which

---

[71] When discussing the scepticism that is of interest to Hegel I will use the terms "ancient" and "Pyrrhonian" interchangeably.

[72] The other two classical agrippan problems I mentioned in **0.2** can be found in Sextus' work (For example: the regress problem in *PH* I.xv.164-177 and the problem of the criterion in PH.II, iv.18-20). It is worth reiterating that If Hegel satisfactorily resolves the problem of beginning this does not mean that the form of his solution can immediately be applied to other, similar problems such as the regress problem. Resolving that problem would require a much fuller account of the nature of justification and reason-giving. Resolving the problem of beginning may not provide this, but it does allow Hegel's systematic work to get underway, and a wider anti-sceptical project is certainly among its goals. For one example of an exploration of this project, see Trisokkas, 2012, especially Part 3.

[73] Dudley, in his (2003) goes further into the details of Hegel's relationship to specific ancient sceptical philosophers and the distinctions he makes between them.

he interprets as an attempt to resolve an equipollence problem[74] between the model of cognition peculiar to Hegel's Science and the model of cognition typical of ordinary or natural consciousness.[75]

- Franks, in his (2008), discusses the influence of ancient scepticism upon Hegel's early Jena work in particular,[76] and in his (2005) generalises this account to a discussion of the formative influences on German Idealism as a whole.[77]

- Staehler, in her (2003) and (2017) makes the case that Hegel's account of "Sense-Certainty" in the *Phenomenology* derives its model from Sextus' account of the ten modes of the 'older sceptics' (*PH* I.xiv, 35), in particular in terms of the structure of Sextus condensation of the ten modes to three, 'deriving from the subject judging... from the object judged' and 'combined from both.' (*PH* I.xiv.38)[78,79]

---

[74] Or perhaps an "apparent" equipollence problem (See Forster, 1989, p.148). In **1.2.2** I provide some criticism of Forster's take on the problem of beginning in this context.

[75] In **2.1** I suggest that this way of setting up the project of the *Phenomenology* renders it incompatible with the idea that the beginning of the *Logic* is presuppositionless.

[76] Franks also disagrees interestingly with Forster's account of the "modern scepticism" of Schulze considered by Hegel to be inferior or misguided. See Franks, 2008, pp.54-58

[77] Both works are especially valuable in reconstructing the influence of ancient scepticism at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, although Franks' focus only on Hegel's earlier Jena writings prevents him from paying any attention to the sceptical influence on Hegel's concern for the issue of beginning, either in the *Phenomenology* or in the *Logic*.

There may also be reason to question the distinction Franks draws between what he calls "Pyrrhonian scepticism" and "Agrippan scepticism" in Hegel's appraisal of ancient scepticism. Franks claims that they are fundamentally different kinds of scepticism, differentiated by their 'upshots' (Franks, 2008, p.59), with the former being a matter effectively of ethics, and the latter in fact having no clear "upshot" in Franks' paper, but it seems to me that the distinction Hegel is making is primarily one about their scope. Hegel, regardless of whether or not he is right about the ancient sceptics, seems to differentiate Franks' "Pyrrhonian scepticism" from Franks' "Agrippan scepticism" by supposing the former to be extended by its proponents only towards 'the dogmatism of ordinary consciousness' (*VSP*, p.330/p.214), while supposing the latter to be extended *mistakenly* by its proponents towards 'philosophy itself' and 'reason', despite the fact that, by Hegel's estimation in 1802, this additional extension is bound to fail. Indeed, given this failure in Hegel's eyes, this distinction seems to me to amount to little more than a historical one between two groups of sceptical philosophers, rather than a distinction between two fundamentally different kinds of scepticism.

[78] See, for example, Staehler, 2017, pp.27-28

[79] The comparison is persuasive, although presumably Hegel's understanding of the ten modes as oriented towards "ordinary consciousness" generally would lead us to think that they might have some application, either in terms of generating a sceptical suspension of judgement, or, in the context of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, some determinately generated new content, beyond the context of sense-certainty alone. Indeed, Sextus' account of the ten modes bears on matters of perception (*PH* I.xiv.91-99), the constitution of natural objects (*PH* I.xiv, 135-140) and matters of ethics and religion (*PH* I.xiv.145-161). One might therefore agree wholeheartedly with Staehler's analysis, while wondering whether or not one might not also find evidence of Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism across a number of other diverse parts of the *Phenomenology*. I cannot pursue this matter here.

- Westphal, in his (1989) examines the influence of Sextus' account of the problem of the criterion on the *Phenomenology*.[80] Westphal provides to my mind the best account of Hegel's engagement with the problem of the criterion, and of the complex approach to the problem in its iteration as the problem of the criterion of natural consciousness in §85 of the *Phenomenology*.[81] He expands upon this to provide and interpretation of that work as an argument for a realist position in epistemology.[82]

- The papers collected in Fulda and Horstmann's (1996) are especially valuable in combating the misguided notion that Hegel had little concern for matters concerning scepticism and epistemology. It includes examinations of Hegel's interpretation of both ancient and modern sceptical philosophy, the influence of scepticism on Hegel's *Phenomenology* and on his *Logic*, as well practical questions about the aims and consequences of sceptical thought.[83]

- Heidemann's (2007) attempts to develop a comprehensive engagement with the concept of scepticism by way of an examination of Hegel's engagement with it across his work. Of particular interest is the distinction he makes between

---

[80] His analysis of the influence of ancient scepticism upon Hegel's epistemology seems to go no further than this examination of the *Phenomenology*, however. This might in part be explained by the fact that Westphal interprets Sextus in a way diametrically opposed to the way that Hegel does. Westphal reads the scepticism of Sextus as in every case assuming a distinction between appearance and reality, while Hegel accuses Schulze, who made the same claim, as grossly misrepresenting the ancient sceptics. Instead Hegel goes so far as to deny that they were operating with such a distinction (Compare Westphal, 1989, p.11 with *VSP*, p.321/p.205). In fact, it seems to me that there is room for Sextus to generate the sceptical suspension of doubt in some cases by observing such a distinction, and in other cases by not observing it, but I shall not argue for that here. Westphal's reading of Sextus, however, could explain the restriction of his account of Hegel's interaction with scepticism to the work which most explicitly engages with models of cognition which make the same kind of distinction Westphal finds in Sextus.

[81] See Westphal, 1989, pp.103-111

[82] The epistemological realism Westphal ascribes to Hegel is primarily one which asserts the mind-independence of the objects of cognition, but does not challenge the claim that 'the fundamental structure of the world is conceptual' (Westphal, 1989, p.145). It seems to me more important to understand that the *Phenomenology* is aimed at establishing at least the rudiments of this latter, metaphysically idealist position, than to detect in it an argument for epistemological realism. The resources for developing such an account seem to me to fall properly within an account of the philosophy of spirit. In **2.3.3** I argue that the establishment of idealism in the *Phenomenology* is incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for *Logic*, while in **3.5** I suggest that an improved solution to the problem of beginning should leave us open to the possibility of an epistemological realism which is not compatible with metaphysical idealism.

[83] Of particular interest in this context is Wolff's paper, 'Die 'Momente' des Logischen und der 'Anfang' der Logik in Hegels philosophischer Wissenschaft', which gives an account of Hegel's statement of the problem of beginning and of his proposed solution. I differentiate my interpretation from Wolff's in **1.3** and **1.4**

"internal" and "external" scepticism,[84] the latter corresponding to sceptical opposition to a philosophical position (for example the metaphysical and epistemological realist, unwilling to accept Hegel's characterisation of the standpoint of Science in the preface to the *Phenomenology*), and the former to the idea that scepticism might be incorporated as a moment within philosophical reasoning (as Hegel suggests in *EL* §82) in such a way that this reasoning might be to some extent "immunised" against sceptical doubt.[85] Heidemann concludes that there is much of value in the Hegelian notion of a scepticism internal to philosophical reason, but ultimately argues that Hegel fails in his attempts to overcome the challenge of an external scepticism.[86]

- Trisokkas, in his (2012) offers a detailed reconstruction of Hegel's account of judgement or of 'propositions of reason' as overcoming a sceptical challenge he identifies as specifically Pyrrhonian. This book is particularly interesting in that its central argument is directed towards reading material from the Doctrine of the Concept[87], the third book of the *Science of Logic* as constituting Hegel's genuine refutation of (a distinctive interpretation of Pyrrhonian) scepticism.[88] Trisokkas' expression of the problem posed by scepticism, or the "Pyrrhonian

---

[84] See Heidemann, 2007, pp.324-327

[85] See, e.g. Heidemann, 2007, pp.134-136

[86] The problem of beginning as I present it in this work should be considered an instance of a kind of external sceptical challenge, on Heidemann's terms, since it concerns whether or not Hegel is justified in even beginning to develop his account of philosophical reasoning or his logic. He may well, therefore, agree with the conclusion of Chapter 2 of this work – that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* fails to resolve this challenge. What I suggest in Chapter 3 is an alternative approach to resolving this kind of external scepticism. Heidemann would call this type of approach 'eliminative scepticism' (Heidemann, 2007, p.132), and I believe that both he and Fulda (1975) are too quick to dismiss this possibility.

[87] Scarfe's (2003) is also directed towards analysing the positive role of scepticism as moment in speculative reasoning in the Doctrine of the Concept (specifically in terms of characterising the position of "absolute idealism"), but not so explicitly in terms of answering the challenge posed by the Pyrrhonian sceptic. This again amounts to an analysis of what Heidemann called "internal scepticism," but leaves the challenge posed by the sceptic to the very validity of the mode of reasoning which claims to incorporate scepticism within itself unanswered. The strength of Trisokkas' book is that it takes up this latter challenge and attempts to locate a response to it within Hegel's *Logic*.

[88] My presentation of the problem of beginning in this chapter as an agrippan problem, which is to say, a kind of Pyrrhonian sceptical problem, might not necessarily come into conflict with Trisokkas' account of Hegel's engagement with scepticism in the Doctrine of the Concept. One might suggest that there could be two conditions on justification in the context of the *Logic* for Hegel, and that Trisokkas' work is oriented towards analysing the former, while an answer to the problem of beginning constitutes the latter. As such, this work could be read as a supplement to Trisokkas' book, although this involves disagreeing with him at times concerning what is at stake at the beginning of the *Logic*, and concerning the role played by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. A proper exploration of the relationship between solving the problem of beginning and the justification of claims made in the *Logic* falls beyond the scope of this project.

problematic," as he calls it, is fairly idiosyncratic,[89] but one of the corollaries of his contention that it is Hegel's account of judgement which really answers the sceptic is that he is therefore bound to believe that those, like Forster or Westphal, who think that Hegel's primary engagement with sceptical or epistemological concerns occurs in the *Phenomenology* have either misunderstood the nature of the problem, the nature of the 1807 text, or both.[90] This level of disagreement, of course, could be seen as a signal of the rich nature of the literature that has now developed surrounding the theme of Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism.

On this basis one might go so far as to say that the idea that Hegel was influenced by and took seriously the study of scepticism (especially ancient or Pyrrhonian scepticism) can now be considered something of an orthodoxy in Hegel scholarship. I shall now move to provide an overview of Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism, attempting while doing so to isolate the salient features of that tradition to which Hegel attends.

1.2.2 Hegel's Engagement with Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Its Key Features

We might distinguish three levels of engagement with a historical tradition like that of Pyrrhonism. The first would be the major studies, where explicit, sustained engagement is exhibited. The second would be those occasional mentions which indicate that a particular influence is at work, but in either a more implicit or simply a less significant manner. The last level would be the kind of engagement I suggest occurs at the beginning of the *Logic*, where no explicit indication is given, but the material presented exhibits, either in form or in content, the influence at work if one is alert to it. It may be that *relevant* engagement at the first two levels can offer support for instances of engagement at the third.

---

[89] Trisokkas recreates the challenge posed by the Pyrrhonian sceptic by insisting that any commitments or assertions about the world are made in what he calls '*the universe of discourse*' (Trisokkas, 2012, p.37). He furthermore insists, for reasons that are to me not quite clear, that these assertions or judgements must be first be made in 'a state of 'immediacy'' (Trisokkas, 20142, p.37), before they are considered reflectively – in relation to other judgements. Because they are first of all "immediate", he thinks, there is no way of choosing between a judgement and its negation. Thus all judgements are equipollent, and scepticism follows. While it is certainly interesting, I do not propose to consider Trisokkas' account of "the universe of discourse" and his distinction between "immediate" and "mediated judgements here, and my engagement with Pyrrhonism in the next section makes no use of Trisokkas' reconstruction.

[90] He writes that, 'the phenomenological project does not resolve the Pyrrhonian problematic... if one wants to find out whether Hegel is justified in his positing of the cognitive standpoint of thought as the standpoint of science, one has absolutely nothing to gain by referring to and examining the *Phenomenology of Spirit*' (Trisokkas, 2012, pp.91-92)

The principal episodes of Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism are now well known, although some of the more subtle indications of engagement and influence have received less attention. Chronologically speaking the major instances consist of (i) his essay on scepticism and philosophy from 1802, (ii) the influence of scepticism on the project of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially detectable in its introduction, and (iii) Hegel's various lectures on ancient Greek philosophy during the 1820s in Berlin. In terms of the second and last levels of engagement mentioned above, it is perhaps principally in the context of the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic* that there is more work to be done to exhibit the engagement with sceptical problems, but here too progress is being made.[91] I will now trace this interaction with ancient scepticism on Hegel's part, attempting to extract material which might serve as evidence supporting the interpretation of the beginning of the *Logic* in terms of an agrippan problem.

As early as 1802[92] Hegel published an essay in the *Critical Journal* that he edited with Schelling which was in part a fairly vitriolic review of Schulze's multi-volume *magnum opus* on sceptical philosophy and in part an attempt to clarify Hegel's own understanding of the key features and commitments of ancient scepticism and its relation to his conception of philosophical reason. In this essay, "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy: Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One" one first encounters some of the hallmarks of Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism. Notably, Hegel is of the opinion that the Pyrrhonian sceptical tradition is superior to the scepticism of the moderns as it is more radical, more thoroughgoing.[93] As commentators such as Forster have pointed out,[94] Hegel tends to characterise the "modern" sceptical project as arising with the task of undermining the dogmatic presupposition in favour of cognition's veridical access to its objects, but then calls into question the validity of the presuppositions required in order to motivate such a sceptical inquiry, principally a hard and fast distinction between our cognition of an object and the object itself. In addition, he regards the Pyrrhonian

---

[91] See Scarfe (2003), Heidemann (2007), (2010) and (2011), and Trisokkas (2012), mentioned above in **1.2.1**

[92] Trisokkas writes that 'when Hegel graduated from the Tübingen Theological Seminary in 1793 he was obsessed with the task of resolving the Pyrrhonian problematic' (Trisokkas, 2012, p.43), but does not say what evidence he has for this claim.

[93] For example, he allows that 'the ancient sceptics had no dogmas or basic propositions' (*VSP*, p.343/p.227) while attributing to the modern scepticism of Schulze the reliance upon '"grounds", regardless of the fact that they are completely dogmatic theses' (*VSP*, p.344/p.227).

[94] See, for example, Forster, 1996, pp.67-71

tradition as being more radical precisely because, he believes, it calls such a distinction into question. He writes,

> 'What our most recent scepticism always brings with it, is… the concept of *a thing*, that lies *behind* and *beneath* the phenomenal facts… But for [ancient] scepticism… Since it holds back altogether from expressing any certainty or any being, it does not, on its own account, have any thing, any conditioned of which it could have knowledge; and it is not obliged to shove either this certain thing, or another one that would be behind it, into the shoes of philosophy, in order to bring about its fall.' (*VSP*, p.337/p.221)

It is clear here that Hegel associates something like a crude variant of metaphysical realism and an accompanying correspondence model of cognition with modern or 'dogmatic' scepticism, while maintaining that ancient or Pyrrhonian scepticism is free of these presuppositions.[95] Certainly this would be to render the resources of ancient scepticism potentially more relevant to the reflexive project of the *Logic*, since the distinctive assumption Hegel identifies as that of modern scepticism, that the subject-matter must be fundamentally distinct from our conception of it, seems simply inapplicable when considering the examination of thought by thought itself.

In "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy," Hegel's conception of philosophical reasoning is one that he believes renders it immune even to the most radical scepticism, by virtue of its *incorporation* of scepticism within itself. Hegel claims in that essay that 'scepticism is in its inmost heart at one with every true philosophy' and affirms a philosophy that accordingly 'is neither scepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once' (*VSP*, pp.322-323/p.206). Thus one of the key characteristics he finds among certain ancient philosophers, perhaps most obviously Plato,[96] is the ideal of a 'philosophy that includes scepticism within itself' (*VSP*,

---

[95] Hegel's division between 'ancient' and 'modern' scepticisms is invoked here principally for the purposes of clarifying his understanding of Pyrrhonism, rather than endorsed as a genuine division that can be pointed at in the history of philosophy. The reality is no doubt rather murkier, firstly because it is not clear that one cannot find instances of something like what Hegel would regard as a "modern" distinction between our cognition of an object and the object itself in the work of some of the ancient sceptics, not least Sextus himself (e.g. '[W]e say what is apparent to us and do not make firm assertions about the nature of externally existing things.' (*PH*. I.xxviii.208)), and secondly because it threatens to obscure or misrepresent the differences between the scepticisms of modern philosophers. We can see the kind of difficulties which follow from taking Hegel's distinction between ancient and modern scepticisms to accurately categorise two internally homogenous traditions in Forster's misreading of Schulze as a '"veil of perception"' sceptic (Forster, 1996, p.69), to which, as I mentioned above, Franks offers a corrective in his (2008).

[96] Hegel suggests that Plato's *Parmenides* is a 'perfect and self-sustaining document and system of ancient scepticism' (*VSP*, p.323/p.207). He described is in these terms, however, because 'This scepticism does not constitute a particular thing in the system, but is itself the negative side of the cognition of the absolute, and directly presupposes reason as the positive side' (*VSP*, p.323/p.207). As I shall go on to

p.330/p.213). On the basis of such an ideal, Hegel claims in this essay that even the most potent argumentative weapons of the sceptics 'are completely useless against philosophy' (*VSP*, p.335/p.218).

Here perhaps is the earliest explicit declaration on Hegel's part not only that he considers a distinctive philosophical account of reason, later to be described as "dialectical" or "speculative", to be immune to the challenge provided by ancient scepticism, but that it achieves this by way of including some vital aspect of sceptical methodology within itself, in such a way that the fundamentally negative character of sceptical argumentation, such that it requires one to relinquish a particular commitment and suspend judgment over the matter[97] is transformed into something positive, so that it instead plays a role precisely in *enabling* one to assert with certainty that something is the case.[98]

This emphasis on the kind of positive assertions that contain or incorporate the sceptical within themselves as a negative moment indicates Hegel's adherence to what Heidemann refers to as a 'metaphysics of unification' (Heidemann, 2011, p.81). A proper treatment of this metaphysics and its development in Hegel's later philosophy falls beyond the scope of this work, although the key implication of the phrase is that the fundamental structure of reality is of a kind that unifies or holds together opposed determinations. So it is that Hegel writes in "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy" that reality, which he here refers to as 'the rational', 'includes... finite opposites, which are mutual counterparts, within itself' (*VSP*, pp.336-337/p.220).[99]

---

suggest, while Hegel does not abandon this ideal (of scepticism as the negative side of speculative thinking, incorporated within the latter) in his later work, the attempts in the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* to justify Hegel's philosophical position, from which he engages in the afore-mentioned "cognition of the absolute," suggest that he comes to see the importance of addressing an additional sceptical concern which comes from the opponent thinking from outside of the terms of his philosophical position.

[97] See *PH* I.iii.7 and *PH* I.iv.8, for example.

[98] Hegel suggests that the scepticism which occurs within genuine philosophy functions not by the generation of ordinary oppositions, so that one does not know which position to affirm, but by opposing the concepts employed in a 'cognition of reason' in such a way that; 'it must become evident that these concepts are together sublated, or in other words they are united in such a way, that they contradict themselves' (*VSP*, p.324/p.208). Some effort must be made to understand the operation of scepticism and then Hegel's distinctive account of reason before this passage can be clarified, but it should be clear on the surface that Hegel conceives of something negative (the opposition or contradiction of concepts) to be transformed into something positive (their unification) in a philosophy or a reasoning which contains the sceptical within itself. See Trisokkas (2012) for what is effectively a book-length attempt to understand how this occurs and in what sense it can therefore be said that Hegel is refuting the Pyrrhonian sceptic.

[99] For some further comments on the nature of Hegel's fundamental metaphysics in this context, see Heidemann, 2011, pp.81-82. Also relevant is Trisokkas' claim that 'The rational is a *relation*, not a

In terms of the kind of thinking that such a metaphysics demands, what is clear is that Hegel views a certain perspective, that of "reflection", "finite knowing", "the understanding" (*Verstand*) or even, at times in the essay from 1802 in question, "dogmatism" as importantly limited in its ability to grasp the nature of reality. Its limitation consists in its focus upon static, finite, and fundamentally opposed concepts or logical determinations. Such thinking sets up or posits such oppositions between concepts, like that between finitude and the infinite, or identity and difference, as fundamental and insuperable, but also merely as an external relation. It then holds fast to the opposition and declares instances of their co-incidence to be instances of incompatibility or incomprehensibility, and retreats into a suspension of judgement. The type of thinking Hegel will call "reason" (*Vernunft*) is, on the other hand, characterised by the tendency to identify an intrinsic relation between the two opposed determinations, so that one 'only exists through and in this relation to another' (*VSP*, p.335/p.219) and then to unify the opposed determinations in some higher-order concept. This unification of opposed determinations is what Hegel will refer to as "sublation" [*Aufhebung*]. In this context Hegel writes that,

> '[I]f in any one proposition that expresses a cognition of reason [*Vernunft*], its reflected aspect – the concepts that are contained in it – is isolated, and the way that they are bound together is considered, it must become evident that these concepts are together sublated, or in other words they are united in such a way, that they contradict themselves; otherwise it would not be a proposition of reason but only of understanding [*Verstand*].' (*VSP*, p.324/p.208)[100]

What is therefore fundamental to the scepticism which is of interest to Hegel is a radical tendency towards the generation of oppositions; oppositions of the kind that, for the sceptic, or from the perspective of "the understanding" induce scepticism and a suspension of judgement, but from the perspective of "reason" can be unified into the positive assertion of concepts which unite what previously appeared to be incompatible determinations within themselves.

---

relatum' (Trisokkas, 2012, p.62), which might suggest a kind of structural character to Hegel's metaphysics, although I cannot explore that possibility here (See Bowman, 2013, Ch.1, where he draws upon Horstmann).

[100] As Hegel himself makes clear in *EL* §§79-82, this opposition between understanding and reason is not total. The understanding has a vital role to play *within* Hegel's account of reason, as the capacity to isolate a concept before we move to examine the way in which that concept negates itself. Hegel's critical remarks, therefore, are directed only at instances of thinking which remain *only* at the level of the understanding, and do not explore the dialectical resources of thought which exceed it.

The core of the most radical scepticism, Hegel seems to think, occurs in the presentation of the five and of the two modes of "the later sceptics."[101] These are presented most famously in Book I of Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. It is therefore crucial to say a little about the context in which they occur and the role they play for Sextus before continuing with Hegel.

If there is anything that could be identified as a signature methodological principle[102] of Pyrrhonian scepticism it is the inducement of a suspension of judgement concerning some matter by means of production of a state of "*isostheneia*" or "equipollence": Against a given philosophical claim or dogmatic assertion, an opposing claim or counter assertion is made with equal force, or made equally persuasively, with the result that it becomes clear, contrary to the perspective of the dogmatist making the original claim, that the matter cannot (at least, not yet) be decided.[103] From this position we are forced to suspend judgement on the matter in question, or at least, we will do so if we are attempting to be epistemically responsible.[104] Sextus writes, 'By 'equipollence' we mean equality with regard to being convincing or unconvincing' (*PH* I.iv.10). The means by which a state of equipollence is brought about is the use of a series of argumentative tropes or modes which are organised by Sextus into groups of ten "older" modes, and five and two "later" ones.[105] Hegel indicates that the later modes are the more sophisticated and rigorous sceptical tools, writing that, 'There are no better weapons against dogmatism... Against dogmatism they must necessarily be victorious' (*VSP*, p.335/pp.218-219). This suggests that it is the kind of thinking occurring in the

---

[101] I pointed out in **0.3** that Diogenes Laertius, but not Sextus, attributes the five modes to a sceptical philosopher called Agrippa. Barnes supposes that Agrippa must also be the source of the two modes (see Barnes, 1990, p.117, n.3)

[102] Hegel, following Sextus (*PH* I.vi.12), refers to this as the 'principle of scepticism' (*VSP*, p.325/p.208), but we should be wary of this phrasing. In fact, precisely because of Sextus' emphasis on the zetetic nature of Pyrrhonian scepticism, (e.g. *PH* I.i.3 and *PH* I.iii.7) we should think twice before attributing to any ancient sceptic the idea that this claim, 'to every account an equal account is opposed' (*PH* I.vi.12) functions as a principle that is set out in advance. Sextus in fact makes clear that this is declaration of equipollence can be applied only retrospectively to those claims we have so far examined: 'When we say 'Opposed to every account there is an equal account', we mean by 'every' every one we have inspected' (*PH* I.xxvii.202). In "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy" Hegel is perhaps too quick to accept this *as* a principle, not merely in terms of epistemology, but also as a metaphysical principle.

[103] As Forster points out, Sextus does not always require opposing *arguments* for claims to be equipollent. Merely asserted propositions can also be equipollent (I would presume that they must be). See Forster, 1996, p.65, n.5. I also suggested in **0.4.2** that Hegel goes one step further in his *Logic*, and allows for bare concepts to be equipollent, without requiring that they occur in the context of a proposition.

[104] Perin has argued convincingly that the language whereby Sextus suggests that the sceptic is "forced" to suspend judgement can be understood at least in some cases in terms of the normative demands of reason, rather than indicating a merely causal story. See Perin, 2010, pp.36-42

[105] See *PH* I.xiv, I.xv and I.xvi, respectively.

later sceptical modes in particular which Hegel sees as important to incorporate into philosophical reasoning.[106] On that basis I will provide a quick summary of the five, and then the two modes.

I follow Fogelin and others in dividing the five modes into two 'challenging' modes which are supposed to bring the veracity of a given philosophical or dogmatic claim into doubt, and 3 'dialectical'[107] modes which seem to render problematic any attempted justification which might be given in support of the claim in question.[108] These three, as a general problem for justification or reason-giving, make up what is often referred to as the "agrippan trilemma."[109]

The first mode is that of "dispute" or "disagreement." It is the acknowledgement of a division of opinion among philosophers and laymen concerning matters of inquiry. Presumably its chief function is to disallow any appeal to authority or common acceptance. The third mode, that of "relativity," is also the general characteristic of the earlier "ten modes"[110] of scepticism. The chief function of this mode is to bring about awareness of the possibility that one might not be justified in one's beliefs. This is in response to the realisation that one's thoughts and perceptions are relative, either in accordance with subjective variables, with objective variables, or with a combination of the two. In any case, once the possibility of opposing thoughts or perceptions has been established, the question becomes one of deciding on the truth of one (and the falsity of the other). This is treated as a question of justification. If one wishes to assert P rather than ¬P then the sceptical question becomes that of how one justifies one's belief that P rather than ¬P.

To this question modes two, four and five apply. As we saw in the brief discussion of the regress problem in **0.2-0.3**, the combined force of the modes making

---

[106] Hegel attempts to show how the five modes, rather than constituting problems for his model of philosophical reasoning, rather fit within it because 'their rational aspect is already in reason'. See *VSP*, pp.336-337/pp.219-220)

[107] "Dialectical" is not being used in a technical, Hegelian sense here; Fogelin is referring to the fact that he believes that, in utilising the modes, which concern the justification of beliefs, Pyrrhonists are not adopting them dogmatically as epistemic principles, but instead taking up the dogmatists own epistemic principles in order to show them that their position is incoherent.

[108] See Fogelin, 1994, p.116

[109] I pointed out in **0.3** that this term is sometimes used to refer to the regress problem, but it seems to me that the account of the five modes in the *Outlines* can be read as providing the general form of what I have called an agrippan problem, rather than being only an expression of the regress problem. Sextus refers back to the five modes, for example, when discussion the problem of the criterion in *PH* II.iv.20.

[110] See *PH* I.xiv.35-163

up the afore-mentioned trilemma is intended to render any justification that could be given for P rather than ¬P or vice versa effectively arbitrary. Of course, once the claim turns out to be arbitrary then we find ourselves in the situation described above in terms of equipollence, with no reason to prefer P to ¬P. At this point it seems that we must suspend judgement on the matter, at least for the time being. Sextus describes the second mode, that of the infinite regress, thusly:

> 'In the mode deriving from the infinite regress, we say that what is brought forward as the source of conviction for the matter proposed itself needs another such source, which itself needs another and so on *ad infinitum*, so that we have no point from which to begin to establish anything, and suspension of judgement follows.' (*PH* I.xv.166)

It is more natural to read the reference to the issue of "beginning" here in terms of the absence of foundations for justification than in terms of a statement of the problem of beginning I explicated in the previous chapter. The claim to which I am building is that Hegel's problem of beginning conforms to a distinctively agrippan structure which it inherits from Pyrrhonian scepticism, rather than that Hegel finds a statement of the problem of beginning *in* some ancient work or other. He is of the opinion that, 'It is only in recent times that thinkers have become aware of the difficulty of finding a beginning for philosophy' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53).

Sextus' account of the fourth mode, that of 'hypothesis' proceeds as follows:

> 'We have the mode of hypothesis when the Dogmatists, being thrown back *ad infinitum*, begin from something which they do not establish but claim to assume simply and without proof in virtue of a concession.' (*PH* I.xv.168)

"Hypothesis" here does not have the same meaning as in its use in the contemporary natural sciences. Rather it signifies an unjustified assertion or a presupposition.[111] This amounts to a statement of the unsatisfactory nature of arbitrary belief, which I suggested in the previous chapter is at the heart of anti-dogmatism, and occurs in each of the agrippan problems examined there.

Finally, Sextus describes the fifth mode, that of "circularity or "reciprocity":

> 'The reciprocal mode occurs when what ought to be confirmatory of the object under investigation needs to be made convincing by the object under

---

[111] Hegel tends to render Sextus' "hypothesis" as "*Voraussetzung"* – "presupposition".

investigation; then, being unable to take either in order to establish the other, we suspend judgement about both.' (*PH* I.xv.169)

This then, is the classical statement of the form of the agrippan trilemma: When asked about what justifies our belief that P rather than ¬P we fall either into an infinite regress of reasons or a vicious circle of reasons. As neither of these is satisfactory we are forced to simply assert P without justification, but then ¬P can be simply asserted equally convincingly, and this situation of equipollence forces us to suspend judgement on the matter. I suggested in **0.3** that this model can describe either the regress problem or the problem of the criterion, but that the division between the unsatisfactory nature of an infinite regress and a vicious circle of reasons was inapplicable to the problem of beginning because presuppositions occurring at the beginning of an investigation were by definition unjustified. Accordingly, I suggested that the basic structure of an agrippan problem was in fact a dilemma between arbitrary assertion and inadequate, or "incurably conditional" support. This dilemma is in effect a simplified statement of the trilemma presented in the five modes, and Sextus presents it himself in the form of the two modes of the later sceptics.

Sextus says of the two modes that,

'Since everything apprehended is thought to be apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else, they are thought to introduce puzzlement about everything by suggesting that nothing is apprehended either by means of itself or by means of something else.' (*PH* I.xvi.178)

It is clear, I think, that the two modes are a distillation of the trilemma found in the five modes.[112] Hegel agrees, writing that the two modes 'are only the preceding modes reduced to a more general form' (*VSP*, p.335/p.218). If something is apprehended or comprehended[113] by means of itself, or *immediately*, then nothing is

---

[112] This claim is in tension with the way in which Barnes reconstructs the two modes. For Barnes, the mode whereby one comprehends something by means of something else corresponds either to the infinite regress or to vicious circularity, but the mode whereby one comprehends something by means simply of itself corresponds not to hypothesis or arbitrary assertion, but to the mode of disagreement (see Barnes, 1990, pp.117-119). Barnes is quite right to point out that Sextus suggests that the problem with grasping something by means of itself is because this tends to produce 'a dispute which is undecidable' (*PH* I.xvi.178), but it seems to me that the natural way to interpret this is to infer that the *reason* that the dispute is undecidable is because what is being asserted in this case has been done so in an arbitrary fashion. The dispute is therefore merely an indicative symptom of the problematically arbitrary status of the assertion in question. This interpretation also has the benefit of maintaining the distinction between the challenging and formal modes in the case of the five modes explicated earlier.

[113] "Apprehended" might suggest that Sextus is concerned only with matters of perception here, but he makes it clear the modes apply to 'objects of perception and of thought' (*PH* I.xvi.178). There is therefore

given in support of it. It amounts to a hypothesis or an arbitrary assertion. If, on the other hand, something is apprehended or comprehended by means of something else, or as *mediated*, then this something else constitutes a presupposition which will be inherently questionable, either because it tends towards an infinite regress or vicious circle of presuppositions or, I have suggested, simply because it occurs at the beginning of an inquiry.

There are three absolutely crucial things to take away from this brief discussion of Hegel's "The Relationship of Scepticism and Philosophy" and of the five and the two modes. The first of these is that Hegel believes that these modes are at the heart of what is most challenging about ancient scepticism in the way that they enable one to construct oppositions between claims or concepts. The second is that Hegel already, as early as 1802, believes that this scepticism has an intimate relationship with philosophical or speculative reason, but at this point only in that reason, as Hegel uses the term, is fundamentally occupied with the generation of and subsequent unification of conceptual oppositions, and *not* that philosophical reasoning might need to contend with some kind of sceptical opposition itself. The third is that the kind of challenge provided by the five modes, and perhaps even more clearly by their reduction to the form of the two modes, is precisely the problem-form constitutive of what I called "agrippan problems" in **0.3**. What remains troubling, at this point, is that Hegel gives no indication that the issue of beginning is of any epistemological significance in this context. In "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy," the possibility of an account of reason which resolves all sceptical quandaries by way of its unificatory character is more or less simply asserted.[114] No additional epistemological story is told in order to flesh out or justify such a model of reason before an interlocutor who does not already accept its validity. As Heidemann puts it, 'it is not evident how a superior form of infinite cognition [reason] that supersedes finite cognition [understanding] can be justified' (Heidemann, 2011, p.83). Recalling Hegel's anti-dogmatic commitments

---

no reason to suppose that the two modes cannot be applied to a purely rational project like that of Hegel's *Logic*.

[114] See *VSP*, pp.336-337/pp.219-220, where Hegel repudiates the possibility of sceptical criticism by asserting, rather than justifying the "infinite" character of reason.

indicated in **0.4.1**, this comes as a surprise. Where is the demonstration of the necessity of this model of reason?[115]

To demonstrate the necessity of the content of Scientific thought in 1802, Hegel seems content simply to explain to a sceptical interlocutor that their opposition to his position or their rejection of his method is illegitimate, because they do not comprehend that the kind of one-sided or abstract opposition they provide is in fact no opposition at all, since such one-sided determinations will prove to be encompassed within, rather than opposed to the claims of reason, as described earlier.

This appears to commit Hegel to some kind of coherence theory of justification in the face of the sceptic, but in doing so also requires that his opponents be willing to operate temporarily at a hypothetical level.[116] "I know it *seems* to you that your position is fundamentally opposed to mine," Hegel seems to be saying to the sceptical interlocutor, "but put it aside for now. Accept provisionally my perspective, my commitments, my method, and eventually you will come to see that your original opposition was no real opposition at all." We saw already in **0.4.2** that such an approach no longer seems satisfactory to Hegel by the time of writing the *Science of Logic*. To operate at the level of hypotheses, in the hope that the ultimate coherence or holism of what is generated will resolve any sceptical opposition, might still be to simply ignore the radical sceptic who asks, "What if you had begun elsewhere, or in some other manner, and developed some alternative system which might compete with this one? Have you really demonstrated the necessity of the content to which you are committed?"

There is good reason to think that this question is of increasing importance to Hegel in the years that follow the publication of "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy." Demonstrating that this is the case brings us to the next clearly significant engagement on Hegel's part with ancient scepticism: The *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As I indicated in **1.2.1**, the *Phenomenology*, especially its introduction, has perhaps been the

---

[115] Although, of course, Hegel may simply not have felt the need to fully substantiate his account of philosophical reason in what was intended primarily to be a review of Schulze's work, confident that he (and perhaps also Schelling, at the time), would carry out this larger task elsewhere.

[116] "Hypothesis" and "hypothetical" should not be taken here as a reference to the Pyrrhonian mode of hypothesis discussed above, that is to say as a characterisation of fundamentally arbitrary assertion, but should rather be understood in the context of Hegel's critical remarks on the idea of beginning with a hypothesis in *EL* §10, which I discussed at the end of **0.4.2**.

principal object of attention for those commentators and critics interested in Hegel's relationship with scepticism.

In the preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel makes it clear that he conceives of the operation of Scientific philosophy (the distinctive account of reasoning discussed above) as requiring that one be committed to a particular "standpoint" which crucially involves a reflexive model of cognition, so that the cognising is in some important sense identified with what is to be cognised. As such it is opposed to the standpoint of natural or ordinary "consciousness" where this is taken to refer to the idea that the objects with which thinking is concerned are fundamentally distinct from thinking itself. As he writes, 'The standpoint of consciousness which knows its objects in antithesis to itself and itself in antithesis to them, is for Science the antithesis of its own viewpoint' (*PhG* §26/p.23). An opposition is present here which did not seem to be taken so seriously in "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy", one between a standpoint which insists that the objects of thought are distinct from thought, and another, the standpoint of Science, which denies this and understands the activity of thought as a fundamentally reflexive activity. As I mentioned in **0.4.1**, this identification of thinking and its objects appears to commit Hegel to some form of idealism.

We have already seen in "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy" that Hegel is committed to the view that the form of philosophical reasoning and the set of philosophical positions that are to be developed on the basis of this standpoint are intended to be scepticism-proof when properly understood, for reasons that have something to do with their tendency to incorporate conceptual oppositions within themselves, but here, unlike in the earlier essay, Hegel is willing to acknowledge that it is *also* necessary to justify the position from which he is operating to a sceptical opponent who is not convinced of the legitimacy of the assumptions required to motivate this account of reason in the first place. It is in this vein that he writes that, 'the individual has the right to demand that Science should at least provide him with the ladder to this standpoint [of Science]' (*PhG* §26/p.23).[117] This is precisely what Hegel seemed not to be terribly interested in doing in "The Relationship of Scepticism to

---

[117] It may not be the case that the *Phenomenology* is the earliest instance of engagement with this concern on Hegel's part. Harris suggests that the presentation of a history of successive philosophical viewpoints in *Faith and Knowledge* to some extent anticipates the method of the *Phenomenology*, despite being written closer to the time of Hegel's essay on scepticism (see Harris' introduction to *G&W*, pp.3-4). Something similar might be said about Hegel's Jena lectures on logic and metaphysics.

Philosophy", and he seems to admit the insufficiency of the earlier approach to his opponents when he writes in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* that, faced with an opponent who does not share or who questions the Scientific standpoint,

> 'Science can neither merely reject it as an ordinary way of looking at things, while assuring us that Science is a quite different sort of cognition for which that ordinary knowledge is of no account whatsoever; nor can it appeal to the vulgar view for the intimations it gives of something better to come. By the former *assurance*, Science would be declaring its power to lie simply in its *being*; but the untrue knowledge likewise appeals to the fact that *it is*, and *assures* us that for it Science is of no account. *One* bare assurance is worth just as much as another.' (*PhG* §76/p.55)

This last sentence reiterates the inadequacy of arbitrary assertion, examined already in the introductory chapter to this work, and in the discussion of the fourth of Sextus' five modes above. Hegel is here clearly aware that there is an epistemological task to be undertaken – that of justifying the position from which he begins to philosophise proper to an opponent who does not accept it. He labels the collection of positions he considers opposed to the standpoint of Science 'natural consciousness' (*PhG* §77/p.55), and characterises the project of the *Phenomenology* as that of 'the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science' (*PhG* §78/p.56). A vital change has occurred. Hegel has by no means retreated from his claims about a model of philosophical reason which contains scepticism as a moment within itself,[118] but he has come to see that there is an additional sceptical challenge to be met if the content of his positive philosophy is to be properly justified. This is again an opposition, but it is not the opposition of one first-order claim against another, or one concept or thought-determination against another. Instead the opposition is between standpoints, or models of cognition or thinking. It nevertheless seems necessary for Hegel to overcome the sceptical challenge inherent in this opposition, before he can go on to claim that, from the perspective of the standpoint of Science, he has developed a form of thought, or "reason" which contains sceptical opposition or negation as a moment within itself (and indeed, that reality is such that such a model of thinking is adequate to it).

It is the *method* by which Hegel then criticises the opposition to his own preferred standpoint, and in so doing justifies his own position, that has received the most attention from commentators like those mentioned in **1.2.1** interested in his

---

[118] Indeed, he never does. See, e.g. Heidemann, 2010, pp.164-168, for an examination of this claim in the context of Hegel's mature philosophy as it is presented in the *Encyclopaedia*.

relationship with scepticism.[119] Hegel describes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a project of 'thoroughgoing' or "self-completing" scepticism (*sich vollbringender Skeptizismus*) (*PhG* §78/p.56).[120] Heidemann describes this as 'a form of scepticism that systematically guides consciousness through a series of tentatively true knowledge claims until the shape of absolute, true knowing is obtained (Heidemann, 2010, pp.163-164).'[121] This method, by which different variants of natural consciousness are tested and criticised, receives more attention in Chapter 2 of this work.[122] What is of interest at this point is just that Hegel has accepted the necessity of an additional epistemological or justificatory task for his philosophy: That of justifying the standpoint from which the logical investigation operates.

This issue, of demonstrating the necessity of the standpoint one is to adopt for philosophical thinking proper, which begins with the *Logic*, appears to correspond to the idea of securing the beginning of the *Logic*.[123] The task is conducted in the *Phenomenology* for the most part in the face of actually existing sceptical opposition – the fact that there are various theoretical or perhaps commonsensical attitudes towards cognition or the relation of thinking to its objects which Hegel might group together and label "natural consciousness" – which one can encounter in discussion with other people.[124] It may certainly be necessary for Hegel to overcome the opposition provided

---

[119] See Westphal, (1989) Chs. 7-9, for example.

[120] One of the forms of consciousness examined in the *Phenomenology* also receives the title "scepticism" (see *PhG* §§202-206/pp.119-121), but this is an instance of a standpoint opposed to Hegel's own, reflexive one. Its content therefore does not contribute to the establishment of a sceptical challenge facing Hegel beyond the general opposition of the standpoints of natural consciousness to that of Science. To discuss it here would only muddy the waters.

[121] Strictly speaking, it is not only a series of tentatively true knowledge claims, but also a series of tentatively true claims about the criteria of knowledge which is examined in the *Phenomenology*. I discuss this in **2.3.3**.

[122] We can note in passing, though, that Hegel's remarks in *PhG* §§78-79/p.56-57 concerning a scepticism that 'is not a merely *negative* procedure', but instead operates by way of a '*determinate* negation' which is characterised by having some positive result ('a new form has thereby immediately arisen', he says), shares with Hegel's account of reason already mentioned the idea that a sceptical construction of oppositions which is interior to a mode of thinking can yield ultimately anti-sceptical results.

[123] This is suggested by the fact that the thinking with which the *Logic* begins is designated by Hegel as "pure knowing", and the he writes in the *Logic* that the *Phenomenology* 'demonstrates the necessity, and so the truth of the standpoint occupied by pure knowing' (*WL*, pp.68-69/21: pp.54-55). I will say more about the idea of "pure knowing" in **1.4.1**.

[124] In this sense Forster sometimes refers to the project of the *Phenomenology* as that of freeing Hegel's Scientific thought 'from the *appearance* of vulnerability to... sceptical problems' (Forster, 1989, p.148). This might be taken to imply that the justificatory project of the *Phenomenology* is not necessary to the beginning of the *Logic*, but eliminates an opposition that only appears to be a real threat. As Forster is aware though (see Forster, 1989, pp.112-113), this would be to suggest that one must begin the *Logic* in the manner only of a provisional or hypothetical acceptance of its content, and await the demonstration against the sceptic which will come later. It has already been made clear that Hegel considers this an unacceptably dogmatic procedure.

by these positions, but if he is really to demonstrate the necessity of the content of his science of logic, it is not enough to overcome the opposition to the beginning of his project offered by actually existing opponents, but to demonstrate the certainty of the beginning of his philosophical project itself, in such a way that should overcome *any possible* sceptical objection.[125] We should also note that the challenge of securing the beginning against any sceptical opposition does not *have* to be understood in terms of the establishment of a particular standpoint. It just happens to be the case that this is how Hegel appears to construe the challenge in the context of the *Phenomenology*.

It seems reasonable to suspect that these thoughts might be behind the emphasis on the problem of beginning with which Hegel opens the Doctrine of Being which is not straight away phrased in terms of occupying a particular standpoint, but more fundamentally in terms of the question of how to begin at all. I shall also argue in **2.1** and **2.3.3** that interpreting the *Phenomenology* as the justification of a particular cognitive standpoint (that of Science) is difficult to reconcile with the idea that the beginning of the *Logic* be presuppositionless. This difficulty need not occur if the approach to beginning in the *Logic* operates by demonstrating the necessity of that beginning itself, but without having to do so by way of the establishment of a substantive model of cognition.[126]

At this point, however, there is nothing more to suggest that this problem of beginning in the *Logic* has any relation to the Pyrrhonian sceptical tradition, so we must wait until we have examined the more subtle engagement with scepticism in that work to see whether there is evidence to suppose that its beginning should also be interpreted in terms of a Pyrrhonian sceptical problem. I shall turn to that momentarily, but I should first offer a brief word on the third of Hegel's third clearly significant engagement with ancient scepticism.

---

[125] Hegel gives the impression that this might be achieved by suggesting that the *Phenomenology* is in fact a *comprehensive* examination of every possible form of consciousness. In the *Logic*, for example, he writes that the *Phenomenology* 'goes through every form of the *relation of consciousness to its object* and has the concept of Science for its result' (*WL*, p.48/21: p.32). It is reasonable to ask how certain Hegel can be that the *Phenomenology* is really comprehensive in this sense (Cf. Westphal, 2003, p.46). In any case, his move to consider the problem of beginning on its own terms at the start of the *Logic* would seem to constitute an additional step on Hegel's part towards defending his philosophical approach against sceptical objection in general, rather than starting by taking up some objection from a position clearly opposed to his own.

[126] It in this vein that I provisionally recommend Maker's approach to the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* in **2.1**, because he understands the standpoint attained at the end of the *Phenomenology* in entirely *negative* terms.

Since my goal is to establish the influence of Hegel's engagement with Pyrrhonian scepticism and the dilemma of the two modes on the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*, it is not especially helpful to say much about what he has to say on the topic of scepticism in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* as they were delivered some years after the publication of the first edition of the *Logic*. Nevertheless, it is notable that Hegel continues to emphasise the connection of the later modes, constitutive of the structure of agrippan problems, to his account of reason. He writes that they 'pertain to thinking, to the dialectic of the concept.' (*LHP II*, p.312). This indicates clearly that, despite his increased attention on the question of beginning and on justifying his philosophical position to a sceptical interlocutor in the years that followed the publication of "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy", Hegel remains committed to the idea that incorporating scepticism and its generation of equipollent oppositions as a moment within philosophical reasoning is of significant epistemological value. I will return to the question of *how* one establishes this incorporation in **3.4**.

I shall turn now to Hegel's less substantive, or more implicit engagements with ancient scepticism in the context of the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic* before moving on to argue in **1.3**, with the support of the evidence surveyed in this section, that it is reasonable to understand the problem of beginning which occurs at the start of Hegel's *Logic to some extent* in terms of the influence of Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism, despite the lack of any explicit say-so on Hegel's part.[127]

The influence of ancient sceptical thought is perhaps clearer in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. References to it occur a number of times in the preliminaries to that work. At times Hegel is reiterating the view that we have seen him express already, that genuine philosophical reason contains the sceptical as moment within itself, and that this enables it to generate some positive assertion by way of the unification of the determinations opposed to one another by the sceptic.[128] Hegel also acknowledges this influence of the ancient sceptics upon the idea of speculative or dialectical reasoning in the final chapter of the *Science of Logic*. There again we find Hegel claiming that 'the more cultivated scepticism' of the later sceptics (i.e. of those responsible for the

---

[127] That is to say that the level of engagement at the beginning of the *Logic* corresponds to the last of the three levels I distinguished at the start of this section.

[128] See §§*EL* 81-82 for Hegel's characterisation of this manoeuvre.

development of the five and two modes), extends dialectic, or the construction of equipollent oppositions 'not only to the immediate so-called facts of consciousness and maxims of common life, but also to all the notions of science' (*WL*, pp.831-832/12: p.243). It would not be completely unreasonable to characterise the project of Hegel's *Logic* as that of extending dialectical oppositions to "all the notions of science," so it would seem that Hegel is really acknowledging Pyrrhonism as a direct forbear to the work at the heart of his system.[129]

At other times in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* he seems to be reiterating the anti-sceptical force of this notion of reason, or dialectical reasoning, in much the same way as he did in "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy".[130] These remarks are slightly troubling, in that they might suggest that Hegel for some reason has ceased to be concerned with the project of demonstrating the viability of his philosophical thinking to a sceptical opponent who either objects to the standpoint being presupposed, or objects to the beginning in some other way, or that Hegel is content for these purposes to rely upon the resources offered by a model of philosophical reason which contains the sceptical as a "dialectical" moment within it. As Heidemann points out, 'An obvious objection would be that sceptical doubt does not coincide with dialectical negation because the conception of dialectical negation presupposes the truth of dialectical logic, something the sceptic calls into doubt' (Heidemann, 2011, p.96). As we have seen, without an answer to this objection it would seem that Hegel must be

---

[129] As in *EL* §81 though, it should be pointed out that the ancient sceptics here are still understood to fall short of the kind of dialectical reasoning Hegel believes he has developed. This is principally because a) the equipollent constructions of the sceptics are conceived as occurring between two presupposed concepts, claims or arguments, and thus constitute merely an external relation, rather than tracing the transformation of a concept *into* its opposite on its own steam, and b) because this opposition has no positive *result* for the sceptics, beyond a suspension of judgement (and perhaps some tranquillity for the sceptic if she is lucky). See *WL*, pp.832-838/12: pp.243-248 for Hegel's description of what is involved in a positive dialectical or speculative inference. This material overlaps with *EL* §79-82, but with the added benefit of appearing clearly as a retrospective analysis of the form that the material of the logic has itself imposed upon reasoning, rather than appearing in the preliminaries to the *Encyclopaedia* in a manner that risks having readers assume that Hegel is setting out a method he has illegitimately presupposed before-hand, and then demanding that the material of the logic conform to it.

[130] So, for example, Hegel suggests that 'the high scepticism of antiquity' is not legitimately deployed against 'the forms of reason' because it must 'imput[e] to them something finite in order to get hold of them' (*EL* §24, Add 3, p.63), so that it thereby misses its target, as it is now not dealing with what Hegel calls reason, but the type of thinking he calls the understanding. He reiterates the same point later on, saying that 'it is in fact only the finite, abstract thinking of the understanding that has to fear scepticism and cannot withstand it, whereas philosophy, by contrast, contains the sceptical within it as one of its moments, namely as the dialectical' (*EL* §81, Add 2, p.131). The Felix Meiner *GW* does not include the additions.

committed to what, on his own terms, is a problematically provisional or hypothetical approach to the claims of the *Logic*.

The alternative, of course, is to reconsider what Hegel says in the *Logic* about the problem of how to begin, to see whether there is an attempt there to overcome sceptical opposition to the beginning of the *Logic*.[131] If there is, and it is successful, then Hegel is free to develop his account of reason within that work and still affirm its anti-sceptical force, but it is still vital that he has satisfied the additional condition of overcoming the opposition to the sceptic who questions the validity of the beginning of that project. The question remains, though, as to whether the problem of beginning in the *Logic* ought to be interpreted itself in the light of Hegel's engagement with Pyrrhonian scepticism.

There is a passage in the *Science of Logic* which I am inclined to think offers strong support for an interpretation of the problem of beginning which occurs at the start of that work in the terms of a classical sceptical agrippan problem. Hegel suggests, early in the discussion of "pure quantity,"[132] that,

> '[P]rofounder insight into the antinomial, or more truly into the dialectical nature of reason demonstrates *any* concept whatever to be a unity of opposed moments to which, therefore, the form of antinomial assertions could be given. Becoming, determinate being, etc., and any other concept, could thus provide its particular antinomy, and thus as many antinomies could be constructed as there are concepts. Ancient scepticism did not spare itself the pains of demonstrating this contradiction, or antinomy in every notion which confronted it in the sciences. (*WL*, p.191/21: p.180)

This passage is especially helpful, and not just because it reiterates the point that Hegel owes to the ancient sceptics the idea that all logical concepts are fundamentally dialectical. It is helpful because it very clearly states that this character, of being composed of opposing determinations, applies to *every* concept. There is no doubt therefore that we are to understand the concept of "pure being" with which the *Logic* begins in these terms, and that the opposition which produces the concept of pure being

---

[131] Heidemann concurs with this line of reasoning, moving from the insufficiency of merely asserting the validity of a dialectical model of reason with supposed anti-sceptical consequences to considering the importance of the problem of beginning: 'In the end, this line Hegelian line of argument gets back to the heart of the problem of 'presuppositionlessness'' (Heidemann, 2011, p.97).

[132] More specifically, this remark occurs in a discussion of the insufficiency of Kant's account of the antinomy of the indivisibility and infinite divisibility of time, space, and matter, but this context is not significant, since the remark of interest is merely straightforwardly a statement about the dialectical nature of concepts in general, according to Hegel.

is to be understood in terms of an ancient sceptical opposition or dilemma. I shall argue in **1.3** that this opposition is the dilemma between beginning with something immediate and beginning with something mediated, and that therefore it is appropriate to understand Hegel's problem of beginning as an agrippan problem of the kind explicated in **0.3,** intended to secure the beginning of his philosophical project against the possibility of sceptical dissent, but for now I shall draw this section to a close.

I hope to have demonstrated here that Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism plays at least two crucial epistemological roles in his philosophy. The first is that Hegel views his incorporation of scepticism as a moment within his model of philosophical reason as fundamental to the immunity of that model of reason to sceptical objection. The second was that, despite this claim to immunity, Hegel came to see that it was still necessary for him to justify the beginning of his logical project to a sceptical interlocutor (real or hypothetical) who was unwilling to provisionally accept that beginning in order to see later that their opposition was invalid. In addition, I have argued that those elements of ancient scepticism that Hegel regards as being most crucial to *both* of those projects are precisely those which constitute the form of an agrippan problem: the accounts of the five and of the two modes. I shall now return to the examination of the problem of beginning we found at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* and argue that it is Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism which provides us with the correct interpretative lens through which to view Hegel's statement of that problem.

1.3 The Two Modes and Hegel's Problem of Beginning

We shall now return to Hegel's problem of beginning as it occurs in "With What Must the Science Begin?" I entitled **1.1.2** the "preliminary investigation" of the problem. Accordingly, I will therefore strive in this section to provide what could be called the "definitive investigation" of the problem.

We return to the problem of beginning knowing that Hegel's engagement with ancient scepticism directs him towards a concern with precisely that issue. We also know that he understands the value and the radical challenge of Pyrrhonism to lie in its capacity to generate sceptical oppositions between claims or concepts. Finally, we know

that the primary tools by which such oppositions are generated, the five and two modes, yield dilemmas of the kind I labelled "agrippan problems" in **0.3**.

Here again is Hegel's statement of the problem of beginning:

'What philosophy begins with must be either *mediated* or *immediate*, and it is easy to show that it can be neither the one nor the other; thus either way of beginning is refuted.' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53)

And here is his restatement of that problem in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*:

'While engaged in thoughtful contemplation... it soon becomes apparent that such activity includes the requirement to demonstrate the *necessity* of its content... and to make or accept *presuppositions* or *assurances* regarding it appears illegitimate. The difficulty of making a *beginning*, however, arises at once, since a beginning is something *immediate* and as such makes a presupposition, or rather it is itself just that.' (*EL* §1, p.28/39)

My primary contention in this section is that we can map the form of Sextus' two modes, which is to say the form of a dilemma constitutive of an agrippan problem, onto Hegel's statement of the problem of beginning, and that therefore Hegel's problem of beginning is exactly the same as the problem of beginning I set out in **0.1-0.3**. And Hegel is clearly setting up a dilemma in both statements of the problem. Either one begins with something mediated, which, in the language of the *Encyclopaedia* presentation of the problem, amounts to relying illegitimately on presuppositions at the beginning, or one begins with something *immediate* which Hegel says would itself just *be* a presupposition, by which it seems he means, would be nothing more than an arbitrary assertion, although I shall provide further evidence for this interpretation shortly. This already amounts to a statement of the problem of beginning in the similar terms to those I used to express the problem in the introductory chapter to this work.

We know too that "With What Must the Science Begin?" ultimately answers the question in its title with the answer – the concept of "pure being." Seeing how this thought satisfactorily resolves the problem of beginning with which the essay begins is the task of **1.4.0-1.4.2**, but we have already seen in the last section that Hegel is of the opinion that *every* concept in the *Logic* is the result of some antinomy or opposition, and that he explicitly invokes the influence of the ancient sceptics in making this remark. From this I conclude that, although we do not know yet exactly in what sense the concept of pure being represents a resolution to the dilemma with which the *Logic* begins (whether it be, in the language used in **0.3**, the rejection of (B1), (B2), or (B3), or

still some other resolution), the *dilemma itself* is to be understood as an instance of the two modes, or as an agrippan problem. This again suggests that I am right to identify Hegel's problem of beginning with the one set out in **0.1-0.3**.

In **1.1.2** I suggested that we might look at Hegel's usage elsewhere of the terms "mediation" and "immediacy" to enable us to decipher his statement of the problem of beginning. We should be wary of relying too heavily on this strategy. The terms are used often by Hegel, and there is no guarantee that particular, technical usages of the terms will apply in the context of the beginning of the *Logic*. Given his hostility to the presence of assumptions or presuppositions at the beginning of the work, and his insistence that logic's content must 'be established within the science' (*WL*, p.43/21: p.27), to rely upon terms clarified later in the *Logic* in order to get the beginning to function risks rendering the project circular in a manner that Hegel would certainly have considered vicious. Still, we have already seen one successful use of this strategy, by considering Hegel's alternative statement of the problem of beginning from the *Encyclopaedia*. There it was clear that what Hegel referred to in the *Science of Logic* as "mediation" indicated the reliance upon presuppositions to support the beginning, and it was quickly made clear why this was problematic – to do so seemed illegitimate from the perspective of the demand to demonstrate the necessity of the thinking in question. This is the same point I made in the previous chapter concerning the illegitimacy of relying upon presuppositions at the beginning of an inquiry. If they are presupposed at the beginning, *especially* at the beginning of a project like that of Hegel's *Logic* which cannot rely upon the results of other sciences,[133] they are thereby not candidates for justification, and this undermines any support that they might offer to the beginning in question.[134]

---

[133] Hegel writes that, in contrast to logic, the content of other sciences 'does not make an absolute beginning but is dependent on other concepts and is connected on all sides with other material' (*WL*, p.43/21: p.27).

[134] This interpretation of what is wrong with beginning with something mediated, clarified by Hegel's comments on the illegitimacy of the presuppositions that are relied upon in such a case, seems to me to be a better one than that proposed by those like Menahem Rosen, who think that the issue with beginning with something mediated is that it is therefore not in fact the beginning (See Rosen, 1992, p.40). Stanley Rosen and Michael Wolff make the same, I believe, mistaken, claim (See Rosen, 2014, p.82 and Wolff, 1996, p.241). Winfield is a little harder to pin down on this distinction, as his comments suggest *both* interpretations. According to him, the problem with beginning with something mediated is that 'we start with something that does not really come first but is already dependent on something else to which we are just not paying attention' (Winfield, 2012, p.34).

I have clarified towards the end of **0.3** the sense in which I take the problem of beginning with something that relies upon presuppositions to be about the status of presuppositions *at the beginning*, and not about

With the term "immediacy," however, it would be easy to run into the kind of difficulty mentioned above. Many concepts are described as being an "immediacy" by Hegel, the concept of "essence" for example.[135] Yet it is clear that it would be inappropriate to import content from Hegel's account of essence, which comes much later in the *Logic*, back into the beginning of the work. The other strategy I suggested in **1.1.2**, however, was that of looking just a little further ahead in the text of "With What Must the Science Begin?" to see if the sense of the problem is clarified there. What we find is that Hegel does explore the two possibilities mentioned in his expression of the problem of beginning. The language in which he does so, and how he gets from this exploration to the concept of pure being, is ultimately reconciliatory, but as that pertains to his solution to the problem I will not attend to those elements for the moment.

First Hegel suggests a 'beginning... which is represented as having come to be through mediation... and there is presupposed pure knowing as the outcome of finite knowing' (*WL*, pp.69-70/21: p.56). Leaving aside for now the meaning of the terms "pure knowing" and "finite knowing" in this context, this reiterates the idea discussed above that beginning with something mediated involves beginning by relying on a presupposition, and we have already seen that the sense in which that might be considered problematic coincides with my presentation of the problem of beginning in **0.1-0.3**. Next, Hegel suggests that,

> 'if no presupposition is to be made and the beginning itself is taken *immediately*, then its only determination is that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such. All that is present is the resolve, which can also be regarded as arbitrary, that we propose to consider thought as such.' (*WL*, p.70/21: p.56)

This clarifies the matter. In the context of the problem of beginning, "immediacy" implies "presuppositionlessness." What is more, Hegel explicitly states that a presuppositionless beginning can be regarded as arbitrary.[136] We are now in

---

where the beginning is. The latter alternative, which Rosen, Rosen and Wolff read into Hegel suggests that it is not really the problem of beginning which is at stake, but the regress problem, considered specifically from the perspective of one searching for foundations.

[135] See *WL*, p.411/11: p.260. Nowhere else, however, does "immediacy" imply *presuppositionlessness*. At the beginning of the *Logic* this is *explicitly* the case.

[136] Menahem Rosen makes the same suggestion concerning Hegel's remarks surrounding beginning with something immediate: 'from this viewpoint the beginning has no justification, no ground; in short, it is an arbitrary idea selected from many by the thinker' (Rosen, 1992, p.40), or that beginning with something immediate amounts to 'dogmatism relying on immediate rational intuition' (Rosen, 1992, p.33). Wolff also makes this point, writing that 'the logical beginning must be a necessary beginning, and as a necessary beginning must be the result of previous deliberations' (Wolff, 1996, p.241). Stanley Rosen, on the other hand, thinks that the problem of beginning with something immediate is that 'everything...

position to see exactly why, in the context of beginning either with something mediated or with something immediate, "it is easy to show that it can be neither one nor the other." If we begin with something mediated then we rely problematically on unexamined presuppositions, which undermines the attempt to render that beginning non-arbitrary by relying on the support of those presuppositions. If, on the other hand, we begin with something immediate, or presuppositionless, then the beginning can be considered problematically arbitrary.[137] In both cases, it seems that no good answer is available to the sceptic who asks, "Why should I not begin elsewhere, or in some other fashion?"[138] It can be "neither one nor the other", therefore, not because it is *impossible* to begin in either manner, but because it is epistemically irresponsible, at least from the perspective of one committed to the ideal of a scientific philosophy as Hegel is.[139] It should now be clear that Hegel's problem of beginning is exactly the same as the problem of beginning set out in the introductory chapter to this work.[140]

We also see now that Watts' account of Hegel's problem of beginning, and his subsequent criticism of Hegel on that basis (examined in **1.1.2)**, beg the question against

---

contains *both* immediacy and mediation' (Rosen, 2014, p.83, referring to *WL*, p.68/21: p.54), so that such a beginning is strictly speaking impossible. Hegel will indeed go on to affirm this principle, but it is far from obviously true at the beginning, so it cannot be what is meant to strike us as problematic about beginning with something immediate.

[137] Also noteworthy is Wolff's elucidation of the problem, which I believe coincides with my own. He understands it as having the following format: (1) If we are to begin logically, the beginning must be either with something mediated or something which is not mediated. (2) We cannot begin with something mediated (though, as I suggest above, I believe he misstates why this is the case). (3) We cannot begin with something that is not mediated. (4) Therefore, we cannot begin logically (I am paraphrasing Wolff, 1996, p.241).

[138] Accounts of Hegel's problem of beginning which focus solely on the presuppositionless or immediate alternative are presumably motivated by the thought that it is minimalistic, presuppositionless or empty status of such a beginning which recommends it over any other beginning. As I pointed out in **0.1** though, the sceptic is simply under no obligation to accept this recommendation, and indeed, its over-emphasis risks transforming it into a presupposition itself: "A presuppositionless beginning has an inherent justificatory advantage over any other beginning." Any presuppositionless beginning depending on this principle, of course, is not really presuppositionless.

[139] The language of "impossibility" could thereby be deployed with the aid of a hypothetical formulation: *If* one demands from philosophy that it demonstrate the necessity of its content, *then* it is impossible to begin either with something mediated or immediate.

[140] It is also arguably this dilemma, between mediation and immediacy, or between arbitrary presuppositionlessness and inherently inadequate support, which Maker is engaging with when he attempts to reconstruct the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* in a way that makes sense of Hegel's apparently contradictory claims to the effect that the beginning of the *Logic* must presuppose something (specifically, the work done by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Sprit*), and that the *Logic* must be presuppositionless. Maker, however, notices the claim about the impossibility of beginning with either mediation or immediacy only in passing, as he approaches the issue of beginning only by way of the question of the relationship of the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic*. (See Maker, 1994, pp.71-82). To me, this seems to amount to focusing on the *solution* to the problem of beginning before clarifying the problem itself. Thus, while Maker has a great deal that is interesting to say about Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, his account of the problem itself is inadequate, as he never really makes clear why it should be so easy to refute a project that begins either with something immediate or with something mediated.

his opponent. Watts understood Hegel to be occupied solely with attaining a presuppositionless status for the beginning of the *Logic*, and objected (with some help from Kierkegaard) not only because he believed that the attempt to arrive at a presuppositionless beginning would automatically undermine the presuppositionless status of the beginning, but also because 'Insofar as we begin immediately, we forfeit any discursive justification for beginning where we do' (Watts, 2007, p.22). We can now see that, rather than this being a problem *with* Hegel's account of the beginning of the *Logic*, this *is* just the problem that Hegel is very consciously trying to resolve there. Satisfied that he has satisfactorily criticised Hegel's account of beginning, Watts does not in fact examine Hegel's proposed solution to the problem at all.

It is important to reiterate, however, that the claim that Hegel's problem of beginning is a classical agrippan one is not to say that he takes the problem itself to be an ancient sceptical problem. It is to say that he takes the *form* of the problem from the ancient sceptics, and applies it to the question of beginning. In doing so, he is in effect synthesising an ancient epistemological format with a distinctively modern epistemological concern. As he says, 'It is only in recent times that thinkers have become aware of the difficulty of finding a beginning in philosophy' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53) Hegel's remarks on Descartes in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, where he credits him with the idea of 'setting aside all former presuppositions and beginning in a free, simple... way' (*LHP III*, p.221), might lead us to think that Hegel has the period beginning with Descartes[141] in mind when he speaks of "recent times," but the matter is not quite so straightforward.

Hegel goes on to indicate two senses in which he takes the issue of beginning to have been at stake before these "recent times," neither of which correspond to the issue of '[t]he beginning as such' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53) for logical inquiry which is at stake in the *Logic*. These two senses seem to correspond to the search for a basic metaphysical principle which could be described as 'the beginning of *everything*' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53) and the search for an explicitly subjective foundation for knowing – 'thought, intuition, sensation, ego, subjectivity itself' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53).[142] The latter, of course, sounds

---

[141] In the *Lectures on Logic* we also find Descartes being invoked specifically in the context of *EL*§78 and the question of scepticism and question of how to begin (See *VL* p.71).

[142] From the perspective of this second sense, Hegel suggests the issue of beginning is 'a particular, inessential way of introducing the discourse' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53). This too sounds rather like Descartes, in that the cogito is the beginning of a response to questions about how we can know about the way the

very much like a reference to Descartes, but when Hegel goes on to describe 'the modern perplexity about a beginning' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53), he describes quite a distinctive position: one which insists on the coincidence of the two senses of beginning (in terms of objective and subjective *principles*) just mentioned. The modern concern for beginning, then, is one whereby 'the *subjective* act has also been grasped as an *essential* moment of objective truth, and this brings with it the need to unite the method with the content, the form with the principle' (*WL*, p.67/21: p.53). In other words, the *urgency* that the question of beginning has for the modern thinkers whom Hegel has in mind is connected to their idealism: the view that subjectivity and objectivity are to be identified, so that the subject shares 'the universal logical structure of the objective world' (Rosen, 2014, p.72), as Rosen puts it. Of course, quite how this perspective is understood falls beyond the scope of this discussion, but its presence here suggests that when Hegel is talking about a distinctively "modern perplexity about a beginning" he has in mind not the period since Descartes, but only German Idealist philosophy.[143]

Ultimately, we can see why someone committed to identifying the principles and structure of knowing with the principles and structure of reality as such would have such a strong motivation to investigate the question of beginning; it would mean that in developing a priori knowledge of the basic concepts of thought on the basis of a secure beginning they were also developing a priori knowledge of metaphysics. But these comments are really just about why the question of beginning should matter especially to the idealist, and it is presumably a contingent historical accident that idealism was dominant in German philosophy at the time Hegel is writing about the question of how to begin;[144] Hegel is not suggesting that the nature of the problem of beginning *requires* that one be already invested in idealism. And indeed, it is hard to imagine Hegel insisting that one must dogmatically adopt idealism before even considering the

---

world is, but the fact that the cogito functions as an epistemological foundation in this sense does not tell us anything straight away *about* how the world is. One might push back against this claim to some extent by suggesting that that the account of the cogito has immediate implications for Descartes' metaphysical dualism, but I think that one certainly does not learn much about Descartes fundamental metaphysics from the fact that he thinks that scientific knowing rests upon the cogito.

[143] Hegel's phrasing does not suggest that this matters only to the proponent of the *right* kind of idealism, which is presumably his own, but to anyone committed to this identification of the subjective and the objective, however inadequately they might actually make sense of the idea. Thus this remark presumably extends back at least as far as Fichte, if not possibly as far as Reinhold who, as Franks points out 'serves for Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel largely as an example of how *not* to carry [the project of establishing idealism] out (Franks, 2005, p.203, n.7).

[144] I am putting aside possible challenges to this statement which might spring from Hegel's idiosyncratic approach to the history of philosophy.

question of beginning. There is nothing therefore to stop us considering the problem of beginning merely as a problem for how to begin thinking, without automatically committing ourselves to any metaphysical implications *straight away* on that basis. And sure enough, this seems to be Hegel's point when he continues by saying, 'Here we have only to consider how the *logical* beginning appears' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.54) and returns to the discussion of beginning with something mediated or with something immediate. Hegel's logical problem of beginning, then, is the application of an ancient sceptical problem-form to an issue, he thinks, of particular modern pertinence, but as a problem for logic, or for thinking, its validity as an issue to be investigated is presumably timeless.

At this point my interpretation of Hegel's problem of beginning is complete. I have argued that it has the form of a classical agrippan problem and therefore owes its existence to some extent to Hegel's engagement with Pyrrhonian scepticism. Despite this classical form, the problem of beginning is considered by Hegel to be a distinctively modern concern. The problem amounts to a dilemma between two apparently exhaustive and yet unsatisfactory options. On the one hand one can begin with something immediate, or presuppositionless, but then one can appeal to nothing in support of this beginning. On the other hand, one can begin with something mediated or something that one seeks to render non-arbitrary by relating it to some presupposition or set of presuppositions, but this presupposition itself remains fundamentally unjustified, thus undermining the attempt to render the beginning non-arbitrary. I have therefore claimed that Hegel's problem of beginning should be understood along the lines of the problem of beginning I set out in the introductory chapter to this work. For the remainder of this work, therefore, I shall proceed on the understanding that Hegel's problem of beginning *is* the problem of beginning explicated in **0.1-0.3**.

We have also seen that Hegel believes that he resolves the problem of beginning by appealing to the concept of "pure being," although we have not yet examined how this resolution comes about. In **0.3** I listed three obvious avenues for response to the problem: Deny proposition (B3) and attempt to deny that a beginning with nothing supporting it was problematically arbitrary; deny proposition (B2) and attempt to deny that something presupposed at the beginning is inherently problematic; or deny proposition (B1) and simply deny that a non-arbitrary beginning is possible at all, and either attempt to cope with the situation, or give up. I think it is clear that none of these

options is appealing to Hegel, so in the final section of this chapter I shall attempt to give a preliminary interpretation of the form of his proposed solution to the problem of beginning, a variant of which I will come to endorse by **3.4**. We can call this Hegelian solution the idea of a *presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning*.

1.4.0 The Form of Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Beginning

Hegel's proposed resolution of the problem of beginning does not make any concessions to dogmatism. Nor does it require him to downplay the problematic nature of a reliance upon presuppositions at the beginning of the logical inquiry. Nor again does it require him to assert blindly that a purely immediate or presuppositionless beginning is automatically justified. The form of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, instead, consists in an attempt to render the three statements with which I expressed the problem of beginning in **0.3** compatible. That is to say that Hegel believes that it is possible to begin in a non-arbitrary way, that there is something problematic about reliance upon presuppositions, *and* that a merely presuppositionless beginning would be arbitrary. Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, although the presentation of the solution sounds paradoxical, consists in locating a beginning for thought which is both presuppositionless *and* which presupposes something which renders it non-arbitrary.[145] This is to say, using his terms, that it is both mediated *and* immediate, and, crucially, that the co-incidence of these two determinations enables each to overcome the problematically arbitrary status of the other.[146]

The strategy suggested in **1.1.2**, of looking a little further ahead in the text of "With What Must the Science Begin?" in order to elucidate the meaning of the problem of beginning, is just as applicable now that we are concerned with identifying the shape of Hegel's proposed resolution to that problem. The key passage occurs very shortly after the statement of the problem. Hegel says of 'both immediacy and mediation... that these two determinations reveal themselves to be *unseparated* and inseparable and the

---

[145] Alternatively one *might* therefore say that, in the right, very specific circumstances, Hegel is in fact rejecting both (B2) and (B3) from **0.3**: In a presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning, we have a beginning which is presuppositionless without thereby being arbitrary, *contra* B2, *and* which presupposes something to render it non-arbitrary without that presupposition thereby undermining the non-arbitrary status of the beginning, *contra* B3.

[146] I hope that my hyphenation of "co-incidence" and its derivatives in this context does not seem like an unnecessary affectation. I find that it helps emphasise that the two elements are not merely coming into *relation* with one another, but genuinely uniting. This is important in rejecting a potential criticism of my account in **1.4.2**.

opposition between them to be a nullity' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.54).[147] This claim has broader philosophical implications, beyond the issue of how to begin, but here we should focus only on the solution to the problem at hand.

In declaring the opposition between immediacy and mediation to be a "nullity" Hegel's procedure in "With What Must the Science Begin?" becomes clear. As I suggested in **1.1.2**, Hegel has set up an apparently insoluble problem, only to then challenge one of the assumptions upon which the presentation of the problem rested, thereby indicating the approach to solving it. "It looks as though you must begin (*exclusively*) either with mediation or immediacy," Hegel is saying, "but if that is the case then beginning is impossible. *If*, however, we give up this presumption concerning the exclusivity of mediation and immediacy[148] and instead examine the possibility of beginning with some thought which can be reasonably characterised in terms of *both* of these elements, it may be that we can begin after all."

A number of others have identified the key role being played by the overcoming of the opposition between mediation and immediacy in Hegel's account of the beginning of the *Logic*, perhaps most notably Maker, who investigates 'the necessary mediation which brings us to the point of an immediate beginning' (Maker, 1994, p.76). I shall return to Maker's account of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning below in this section, and in **2.1**.[149] It seems to me though, that the issue of the intimate relationship between mediation and immediacy as it occurs in the specific context of the problem of beginning requires a more rigorous investigation than it has so far received in the extant secondary literature on the topic. I attempt to provide this here.

What follows the statement rejecting the opposition of mediation and immediacy in the *Logic* is an attempt on Hegel's part to lay out exactly how this key move makes possible a beginning for thought which is non-arbitrary, or not open to sceptical objection. He identifies and describes the two elements,[150] first mediation and then

---

[147] In the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel writes of immediacy and mediation that 'although both moments *appear* to be distinct, *neither of them* may be absent and they form an *inseparable* combination' (*EL* §12, p.40/p.52).

[148] See also *EL* §65, p.115/p.106)

[149] Menahem Rosen also takes Hegel to endorse some variant of the claim that 'the dialectical beginning proves to be both mediate and immediate.' (Rosen, 1992, p.41). See also Burbidge, 1981, pp.37-38 and Stanley Rosen, 2014, pp.82-83

[150] I will refer to immediacy and mediation as "elements" of the beginning throughout this work. Hegel uses the term to refer to the determination of immediacy in the context of the beginning of the *Logic*: 'The

immediacy, and explains that their co-incidence or co-occurrence yields the first concept or category proper of the *Logic*, that of pure being. He does something similar, I believe, in §78 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. Before looking at how it is that Hegel does this in each case, we should pause and remember what it is that this solution needs to do in order to render this beginning, the concept of pure being, scepticism-proof, or non-arbitrary, so that some alternative beginning could not be put forward with equal weight.

In **0.3** I presented three propositions. (B1) affirmed that there was some thought with which one could begin thinking which was non-arbitrary. (B2) affirmed the necessity of some presupposition or mediation to render a thought non-arbitrary. (B3) affirmed that presuppositions themselves undermined the claim to non-arbitrariness of a beginning, suggesting that a beginning must be presuppositionless, or immediate. In proposing that the solution to the incompatibility of these three propositions lies in identifying a beginning which consists of the co-incidence of the elements of mediation and immediacy, Hegel's claim must therefore be the following: for a beginning to be truly non-arbitrary, it must presuppose something, or be mediated by something that renders it non-arbitrary, *but in such a way that this presupposition or mediation does not undermine or clash with the status of the beginning as at the same time presuppositionless or immediate*; and, it must be presuppositionless or immediate, *but in such a way that this presuppositionless or immediate status does not undermine or clash with the element of mediation or presuppositions rendering the beginning non-arbitrary.*[151] Put more concisely,

(S) *The beginning must be presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary (or immediate and mediated).* It is possible that there is some beginning-thought such that it is rendered non-arbitrary by some presupposition, *and* such that it is not also rendered arbitrary by a

---

beginning is *logical* in that it is to be made in the element of thought that is free and for itself, in *pure knowing*' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.54).

[151] Were the epistemological scope of this work wider, it might be that I should attempt to forge links between the form of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning and approaches to other agrippan problems which could also be phrased in terms of the combination of elements of mediation and immediacy. Candidates in the context of the regress problem might include Haack's defence of what she calls "foundherentism" regarding the justification of empirical judgements in her (1993) and Aikin's defence of what he calls "impure infinitism" in his (2011), although he explicitly does not restrict this to the justification only of empirical judgements. Sadly, this kind of comparative work falls far beyond the scope of this inquiry. It is worth noting in passing though that these efforts indicate that Hegel is not the only one to suppose that the co-incidence of elements of mediation and immediacy can perform a valuable justificatory service precisely by ameliorating the deficiencies present when each element is taken alone.

reliance upon presuppositions. $\Diamond(\exists x)[(Bx \wedge ((\exists y)(Pxy) \rightarrow \neg Ax) \wedge (\neg(\exists y)(Pxy) \rightarrow \neg Ax)]$[152]

This of course sounds rather paradoxical, but if it can be rendered intelligible, then I believe that it coheres with all three of apparently incompatible propositions mentioned above. It asserts that there is some non-arbitrary thought with which one can begin (B1), it accepts that such a beginning must presuppose something to render it non-arbitrary (B2)[153] and it can acknowledge the problematic nature of presuppositions for a beginning and accordingly insists that a non-arbitrary beginning must be in some sense presuppositionless (B3).[154]

One thing that must be pointed out is that the rejection of the opposition between mediation and immediacy on Hegel's part must be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for solving the problem of beginning. If it were sufficient, this would imply that simply any thought which exhibited both of these elements would be an acceptable place to begin. Since Hegel clearly thinks that in some sense the two are present in *every* concept,[155] and that there is only one appropriate concept with which to begin the *Logic*, it must be something specific *about* the mediation and immediacy which co-incide in the concept of pure being which solves the problem of beginning.[156]

The questions that must now be answered in order to render the form of Hegel's solution intelligible are as follows: (i) What is the element of immediacy? (ii) What is the element of mediation? (iii) How do they co-incide in such a way as to eliminate the

---

[152] It is possible that here the resources of standard formal notation are straining to capture the nature of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, calling into question the value of this formalisation. It is likely that this would not surprise Hegel, given his attitude towards the 'dull and spiritless' formal logic of his day (*WL*, p.52/21: p.37). Still, it seems reasonable to include it in the attempt to demonstrate clearly that the solution to the problem of beginning coheres with (B1-B3) from **0.3**.

[153] This reiterates the commitment to the **PIJ** emphasised in **0.4.2**.

[154] As I noted above, one could alternatively phrase this solution as, in very specific circumstances, the rejection of B2 and B3. This ambiguity I take to follow from Hegel's rejection of the assumption that immediacy and mediation must exclude one another.

[155] It would no doubt be worthwhile to produce a sustained treatment of the way in which the model of philosophical reason which Hegel goes on to develop involves combining the motifs of mediation and immediacy in a philosophically interesting and significant way, but if this doctrine of Hegel's must be relied upon in order to solve the problem of beginning in the first place then it should be clear that his project itself begs the question. Hegel himself notes that 'The entire second part of the Logic, i.e. the doctrine of *essence*, deals with the essential, self-positing unity of immediacy and mediation' (*EL* §65, p.116/p.107). I take it that the conclusions of the Doctrine of Essence clearly cannot be used to justify the beginning of the Doctrine of Being which precedes it without the project becoming problematically circular.

[156] This again highlights the dangers of the strategy of relying on other uses Hegel makes of the terms "immediacy" and "mediation" to interpret his approach to the problem of beginning.

problems which occur when beginning with either alone? It is presumably the answer to this last question which really provides us with a satisfactory solution to the problem of beginning. The bare bones of this solution, we can hypothesise, will be that the mediated element in the beginning remedies or alleviates the arbitrariness of the element of immediacy taken alone, while the element of immediacy does the same for the arbitrariness threatened by the element of mediation. We have yet to see how this is to work, but we can suppose that in such a situation, because the thought in question does not have the character of a problematic arbitrariness, a situation of equipollence does not arise; no "refutation" takes place and no suspension of judgement occurs.[157] Instead, Hegel can assert the concept of pure being with the character of certainty and his system can at least *begin* in a scepticism-proof fashion.

1.4.1 Two Formulations of Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Beginning

I will not claim to have satisfactorily answered the third of the above questions until the end of **3.4**, but we can turn to the first two questions now, by way of an examination of what Hegel goes on to say in "With What Must the Science Begin?" As I stated earlier, Hegel proceeds to identify the two elements of mediation and immediacy, and to argue that they co-incide in the concept of pure being. Here is an abridged excerpt of that material, with the discussion of the element of mediation indicated with a [1], and the discussion of the element of immediacy indicated with a [2]:

> '[1]It is *mediated* because pure knowing is the ultimate, absolute truth of *consciousness*... [T]he phenomenology of spirit is the science of consciousness... Logic, then, has for its presupposition the science of manifested spirit, which contains and demonstrates the necessity, and so the truth, of the standpoint occupied by pure knowing...
>
> Here the beginning is made with [pure] being which is represented as having come to be through mediation, a mediation which is also a sublating of itself; and there is presupposed pure knowing as the outcome of finite knowing, of consciousness… But [2] if no presupposition is to be made and the beginning itself is taken *immediately*, then its only determination is to be the beginning of logic, or of thought as such. All that is present is simply the resolve, which can

---

[157] If the sceptic asks "Why should I not begin elsewhere, in some other fashion?" we can win the argument, as she cannot generate an equipollent opposition. If she claims that her beginning has some argument for it, we can claim that it is not presuppositionless as it must be. If she claims that her beginning is presuppositionless, we can claim that she has no arguments for it, and some are required. If she claims both, she agrees with us and there is no opposition, assuming that there is only one possibility for a presuppositionless, non-arbitrary beginning.

also be regarded as arbitrary, that we propose to consider thought as such... so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground... Consequently it must be purely and simply *an* immediacy, or rather merely *immediacy* itself... The beginning therefore is *pure being.*' (*WL*, pp.68-70/21: p.56)

This material is worth unpacking, but before I do so, I wish to provide another abridged passage in which I take Hegel again to be presenting his solution to the problem of beginning. This time the material comes from the *Encyclopaedia Logic*[158] As before, I have identified the discussion of the element of mediation with a [1] and the discussion of the element of immediacy with a [2]:

> 'The *opposition* between a self-standing immediacy of content or knowing and a mediation that is equally self-standing but incompatible with the former must be set aside, for one thing because it is a mere *presupposition* and an arbitrary assurance. [1] Similarly, all other presuppositions or prejudices must be surrendered at the entry to Science, whether they be taken from representation or from thought...
>
> *Scepticism*, as a negative science applied to all forms of knowing, would present itself as an introduction in which the vacuousness of such presuppositions would be exposed… [2] The demand for such a consummate scepticism is the same as the demand that science ought to be preceded by *doubting everything*, i.e. by complete *presuppositionlessness*. This demand is actually fulfilled in the resolve *to engage in pure thinking* and through the freedom that abstracts from everything and grasps its pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking.' (*EL* §78, p.125/pp.117-118)[159]

First, a word on the similarity of these two formulations of the solution to the problem of beginning: Both are preceded by an emphasis on the value of rejecting the opposition between mediation and immediacy. Both describe two possibilities, only labelled explicitly as mediation and immediacy in the first passage, admittedly, but in both cases clearly contrasting *some* kind of preparatory work which is in both cases to be *presupposed* with something simple or pure which is in both cases characterised as *presuppositionless*. In both cases these two elements lead us to the concept of pure being, explicitly in the case of the first formulation,[160] while in the *Encyclopaedia* there

---

[158] The passage is almost identical in all three editions of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.

[159] I have altered Brinkmann and Dahlstrom's translation very slightly here, just to render *Voraussetzungslosigkeit* as "*presuppositionlessness*" rather than, as they have it an "*absence of any presupposition.*"

[160] It is in the context of analysing Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning that Wolff parses the structure of the first of the passages above in the following manner: '(1) p or not p; (2) if p, then q; (3) if not p, then q; (4) therefore q' (Wolff, 1994, p.241). This does not seem quite right, since it maintains the original opposition between mediation and immediacy (Wolff's "p or not p") and relies simply upon the fact that the consideration of either element leads us to the same conclusion, pure being (Wolff's "q")

is a brief anticipatory characterisation of the kind of reasoning which will occur in the *Logic* (*EL* §§79-82) and of the scope of the first book of the *Logic* more generally (*EL* §§83-84) before it is made explicit that, having rejected the opposition between the elements of mediation and immediacy, we are now in a position to begin with the concept of pure being (*EL* §85).

What differentiates the two formulations, I think, is not the characterisation of the element of immediacy, but that of the element of mediation. Since the element of immediacy remains constant, I will elaborate upon that first, before looking at the different accounts of mediation, or the different accounts of what the (presuppositionless) beginning must presuppose.

By its very nature, it may be that there is not *all* that much one can say about the element of immediacy in the beginning. It is especially dangerous to appeal to other uses of the term "immediacy" on Hegel's part. To pick some examples more or less at random, we can find Hegel describing the concepts of 'difference' (*EL* §117, p.180/p.148), 'concrete existence' (*EL* §123, p.190/p.156), 'matter' (*EL* §128, p.195/p.155) and 'relationship' (*EL* §135, p.202/p.159) as '*immediate*', but it is clear that none of these are candidates for being the concept with which the *Logic* begins. It must be that the immediacy at the beginning of the *Logic* is a special case (the same will go for the element of mediation), so I must make some effort to characterise it.[161]

Both formulations above feature a number of terms in common. The first is the notion of purity. In the first formulation the element of immediacy, which is described as the "outcome" of the element of mediation, is called "pure knowing."[162] Similarly, in the second formulation it is described as *pure thinking.*" This emphasis on purity should perhaps not be surprising, since we have seen that the concept that is to be thought at the beginning is that of "pure being." A lengthy discussion of this concept

---

(Wolff is aware of the importance of rejecting the opposition between mediation and immediacy, and in fact thinks that it is required in order for what he labels as premise (2) to be coherent, but his presentation is deficient nonetheless). In fact this is unsatisfactory in two principal ways: It does not make sense of Hegel's insistence on the importance of *rejecting* the opposition between mediation and immediacy, as I have said, but it also does not really tell us anything about the way in which the co-incidence of the two elements, or the fact that both seem to result in the concept of pure being, does anything to negate the problematic nature or starting with either.

[161] Arguably the most obvious difference between the immediacy of the beginning of the *Logic* and any other immediacy occurring within it is that none of the others are described as "presuppositionless." Indeed, they all presuppose the development of *Logic* up until the point at which they occur, while, 'if... the beginning itself is taken *immediately... it may not presuppose anything*' (*WL*, p.70/21: p.56)

[162] See also *WL*, p.49/21: p.33

goes beyond what I want to achieve here, but we should notice that it is a concept which seems to have no *content*. As Hegel puts it in "With What Must the Science Begin?", 'the beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalysable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy, and therefore *as being*, as the completely empty being' (*WL*, p.75/21: p.62). This characterisation of the concept which the element of immediacy grasps as "empty" is reiterated in the discussion of pure being proper, where Hegel, instead of "pure knowing" or "pure thinking," uses the term 'empty thinking'(*WL*, p.82/21: p.69).

This description of "pure knowing" as a kind of "empty thinking" connects it to two other important terms shared by the characterisation of the element of immediacy across both formulations. The first is the idea that what is at stake in the element of immediacy is the idea of considering "thought as such", and the second is that this has the character of something "simple." In the second formulation these two are combined as the task of grasping "the simplicity of thinking." It seems that what Hegel has in mind is the idea of a purely reflexive thought, a thought where we simply think or grasp thought itself, but without characterising it in any way, or without that thought having any content at all, beyond the simple understanding that thought *is*, or is occurring. This of course includes that characterisation or content associated with the fact that *we* are doing the thinking.[163] As Hegel puts it more fully, the thought which he identifies as that of the element of immediacy 'is pure indeterminateness and emptiness. There is *nothing* to be intuited in it... Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only thus empty thinking' (*WL*, p.82/21: p.69).

Let us put aside for now whether the idea of an empty or pure thought strikes us as a genuine possibility. Hegel is clear that he conceives of pure knowing as the outcome of the element of mediation, or of what the beginning presupposes. An adequate answer to the question about the coherence of the idea of empty thinking must therefore wait until we have examined the two accounts of mediation and seen what it is

---

[163] Houlgate, although he does not seem to emphasise the co-incidence of the elements of mediation and immediacy at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* as I have done, characterises the immediacy at the beginning of the *Logic* in Cartesian terms, with the suggestion being that Hegel's idea of empty thinking is something like a radicalised *cogito*, without the assumption that the thinking in question must be done by an "I", and the assumptions about subjectivity which go along with this notion. As Houlgate puts it, 'not "I think, therefore I am", but "thinking, therefore *is*."' (Houlgate, 2006, p.32). It is possible that even this might be to say too much, if it is taken to indicate some content in the form of an *argument* for the necessity of thinking which would compromise the purity or simplicity of the thought.

that they result in.[164] I will say that the idea of a thought purged in some manner or other of any content does not strike me straight away as absurd. What is important for now is that we acknowledge that Hegel's claim is that, although this immediacy is the outcome or result of some mediation, in being radically empty, pure, simple, or 'indeterminate' (*WL*, p.82/21: p.68), it makes no reference to the mediation which "demonstrates" its "necessity", or which it presupposes. Hegel clearly thinks that this entitles him to characterise the element of immediacy as "presuppositionless." Analysing and evaluating these claims about how it is that this element of immediacy can retain its presuppositionless status while presupposing some mediation which necessitates it,[165] and therefore crucially renders it non-arbitrary, must wait until the competing accounts of the element of mediation have been examined, and until we have said more about how the two elements can co-incide.

On that note, something potentially problematic in the context of Hegel's account of the element of immediacy is the acknowledgment on his part of the possibility of some degree of arbitrariness. As he says, the element of immediacy amounts to the resolve "which can also be considered arbitrary" that we propose to consider thought as such. What are we to make of this, given that I have argued that Hegel's entire approach to the problem of beginning is motivated by the attempt to avoid arbitrariness? I think that there are two possible ways to render this passage unproblematic for my account. The first is to notice that it sounds as though what is being described as arbitrary is not the thought, but the resolve on our part to think. If this is the case then there is no problem, because *why* one has decided to pursue some line of questioning should have no bearing on the justificatory status of what is thought.

If, however, one were not to accept this, and to insist that the element of immediacy itself is being characterised as potentially arbitrary, then it seems that this could be read in such a way that it supports my interpretation, rather than undermining

---

[164] Accordingly, in Chapter 2 the idea of pure knowing will be examined in connection to the idea of absolute knowing as the conclusion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, while in Chapter 3 it will be examined in connection to the idea that the Pyrrhonian sceptic, as Sextus puts it, 'come[s] to hold no beliefs' (*PH* I.vii.13) There might be further possible avenues for examining the coherence (in terms of psychological possibility) of the idea of empty thinking in the study of the Buddhist notion of "Śūnyatā" as it is applied to meditative practices, but I am not qualified to speculate on whether or not this would be fruitful.

[165] I use "necessitate" within the context of justification to indicate something like the idea of "proof." If the element of mediation has *necessitated* the beginning, then it has justified it to the extent that it is no longer legitimate at all to think an alternative.

it. Hegel says only that the element of immediacy "can" be considered arbitrary. I would suggest that this "can" indicates the two possibilities for considering the problem of beginning. If one has retained the opposition between immediacy and mediation and attempts to begin simply with the immediacy of empty thinking, then it will be problematically arbitrary. If, however, one gives up the assumption of the afore-mentioned opposition, and engages in the immediacy of empty thinking on the basis of a mediation which necessitates it and co-incides with it, then the charge of arbitrariness will not apply.

At this point I should identify the two competing accounts of the elements of mediation. In both cases this is more straightforward than attempting to grasp the notion of empty thinking, as Hegel is quite explicit. In the first formulation, from the *Science of Logic*, the element of mediation is identified with the investigation of consciousness which Hegel carries out in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This investigation of consciousness, or of "finite knowing", as Hegel says, results in or co-incides, in its conclusion or outcome, with the immediacy of pure knowing or empty thinking.[166] This of course amounts to the famous puzzle about how it is that Hegel, in the passage above, is able, more or less in the same breath, to say both that the beginning of the *Logic* is presuppositionless, and that it presupposes the work of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[167] It is through the examination of this question, rather than the problem of beginning itself, that Maker approaches the beginning of the *Logic*. Thus we see Maker asking, 'How then are we to understand the *Phenomenology* as the presupposition for presuppositionless science, as the necessary mediation which brings us to the point of an immediate beginning?' (Maker, 1994, p.76). Although his approach has differed somewhat from my own, I take it that here Maker too is engaging with Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning.[168]

---

[166] This point is also made clearly by Wolff in his characterisation of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning (see Wolff, 1994, pp.241-242). He also agrees with the characterisation of the element of immediacy in terms of pure thinking. Although he makes use of material from the *Encyclopaedia Logic* in clarifying Hegel's procedure in "With What Must the Science Begin?" Wolff does not attend to the different presentation of the solution to the problem of beginning I claim to find there.

[167] Hegel earlier makes the same claim, to the effect that the 'absolute beginning' of the *Logic* presupposes the work carried out in the *Phenomenology,* and that this work is 'nothing other than the deduction of it' in the introduction to the *Science of Logic* (*WL*, pp.48-49/21:pp.32-33).

[168] See also Maker, 1993, pp.88-89, where he explicitly connects his concerns about the relationship between the beginning of the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* to the passage where Hegel expresses the problem of beginning examined here in **1.3**.

At this point, regarding the first formulation of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, we have identified both the element of immediacy (empty thinking), and the element of mediation (the examination of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*), although we have said nothing about how the examination of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* proceeds. We have also seen that the nature of the co-incidence of the two elements is to be understood in terms of how it is that the element of immediacy can presuppose the element of mediation without thereby undermining its claim to presuppositionlessness, while the element of mediation can demonstrate the necessity of the element of immediacy, but in such a way that its own status as a presupposition does not undermine that very project of demonstrating the necessity of the beginning. Of course, this formulation succeeds or fails according to whether or not this is a picture which can successfully be made sense of. The elaboration and evaluation of this first formulation will therefore be the task of Chapter 2 of this work, and Maker's attempts to resolve the troublesome question of the relationship between the beginning of the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* will make him a key interlocutor in that chapter.

Turning now to the element of mediation in the second formulation of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, it is clear that the *Encyclopaedia* formulation does not preserve the role of the *Phenomenology*. That work is not mentioned in §78 at all. Instead it is replaced as the element of mediation in the beginning with the idea of a "negative science" which Hegel refers to as a "consummate scepticism."[169] Although a different project has been substituted for that of the *Phenomenology*, the general structure of the solution is the same. Consummate scepticism appears to describe a procedure, the result or outcome of which is the "*presuppositionlessness*" of the element of immediacy we have seen Hegel describe as pure knowing or as empty thinking. Unlike the first formulation, there is also a little more by way of indication of how this result is reached. A consummate scepticism, Hegel seems to suggest, would be a scepticism which could be applied to every claim to knowledge and proceed to undermine or demonstrate the "vacuousness" of the presuppositions or assumptions

---

[169] I suppose, given the characterisation of the *Phenomenology* as a "self-completing scepticism" mentioned in **1.2.2**, one *might* suppose that the reference here to a "consummate scepticism" *is* a reference to the *Phenomenology*. I can see no reason for Hegel to be so subtle in referring to his earlier work here, so this possibility, which I have not seen endorsed by any commentator, does not strike me as likely.

involved, until all such presuppositions had been eliminated, resulting in a state of presuppositionlessness.[170]

Of course, this too does not tell us anything about how successful one could be in elaborating such a "negative science", nor, just as in the case of the presentation of the first formulation, how precisely the co-incidence of the conclusion of this consummate scepticism with empty thinking would enable Hegel to avoid the pitfalls of beginning either with the element of mediation or of immediacy alone. As such, the examination of *this* possibility will be the task of Chapter 3 of this work.

But at this point the reader familiar with §78 of the *Encyclopaedia* might accuse me of misrepresenting Hegel by suggesting that the comparison of this passage with those from "With What Must the Science Begin?" implies that Hegel puts forward two distinct presentations of the problem of beginning. This is because, no sooner has Hegel entertained the possibility of having a consummate scepticism play the role of the element of mediation in his solution to the problem of beginning, than he appears to reject it, writing,

> 'But this path would be not only unpleasant, but also superfluous since the dialectical element is an essential moment of the affirmative Science... Moreover, scepticism would have to find the finite forms in a merely empirical and unScientific way and take them up as a given.' (*EL* §78, p.125/pp.117-118)

There are two potential problems for me here. The first is that Hegel does seem to think that there is a problem with the idea of a negative science of consummate scepticism, in that the presuppositions it aims to challenge would have to be taken up as "given." This problem does not mean that Hegel is not putting forward a distinctive candidate for a solution to the problem of beginning here though, it just means that it is one that he thinks does not work. On that basis, examining it in Chapter 3 of this work, and seeing why it should be a problem for this potential element of mediation that it find the presuppositions it is to undermine "in a merely empirical and unscientific way" so problematic is still a worthwhile endeavour.[171]

---

[170] Of course, there is also a clue about the nature of the procedure in the first formulation, which is Hegel's claim that the mediation of consciousness is a "sublating of itself," but I shall save the investigation of this idea for the next chapter.

[171] I am arguably not the first to notice that Hegel appears to entertain two different candidates for the element of mediation in his solution to the problem of beginning. Fulda does something similar in his (1975), but phrased as two different possible "introductions" to the *Logic*. He entertains the notion that

The second problem might be more severe. Hegel appears to be suggesting not only that consummate scepticism is not a good candidate for playing the role of the element of mediation in the beginning of the *Logic,* but that it is "superfluous." This looks as though he is retracting his insistence, so clear in "With What Must the Science Begin?", on the presence of elements both of mediation and immediacy in order to solve the problem of beginning. I will examine both of these concerns in **3.1**, but it is safe to say, in an anticipatory vein, that if in the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel is insisting that it is possible to begin merely with immediacy, then by my presentation of the problem in **0.3** and by his own presentation in "With What Must the Science Begin?", his *Encyclopaedia* account of the beginning of the *Logic* must be regarded as problematically arbitrary.

At this point I take myself to have identified the form of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning: he declares that the elements of mediation and immediacy co-incide in the concept of pure being in such a way as to remedy or alleviate the arbitrary character which would occur were either element alone present. I have also identified two different expressions of this solution, differentiated according to the characterisation of the element of mediation. Exploring and assessing these two possibilities is the work of the next two chapters, but I shall pause briefly here to criticise a number of competing accounts of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*, and to anticipate a number of possible objections to my interpretation.

1.4.2 Competing Accounts Criticised, Objections Anticipated

With the both the nature of the problem of beginning and the form of Hegel's solution clarified, if not yet fleshed out, we are in a position to suggest where approaches to the beginning of the *Logic* taken by others might go wrong.

The first kind of problem will occur when the focus of the interpreter falls too heavily on the side of the element of immediacy, or the status of the beginning of the *Logic* as presuppositionless. If the validity of the beginning Hegel makes in the *Logic* turn purely on its presuppositionless status, then it falls afoul of proposition (B2) from **0.3**. It seems to me that Houlgate risks getting into this kind of trouble when he writes that,

there are two possible introductions to the *Logic*, the *Phenomenology* (by appeal to *EL* §25) and scepticism (by appeal to §78). See Fulda, 1975, pp.21-49. Fulda accepts Hegel's reasons for rejecting the possibility of the sceptical introduction. I will discuss this in **3.1**.

'Hegel points out that there is a direct route into speculative logic. All one needs to do is freely suspend and abstract from all determinate presuppositions about thought and being and render explicit whatever is entailed by the indeterminate thought (of indeterminate being) that results from this act of abstraction.' (Houlgate, 2005, pp.49-50)

I will say a little more about Houlgate's account of the beginning of the *Logic* in **3.1** and **3.5**, but the claim here does seem problematic, given the arguments developed thus far. Houlgate seems to be suggesting that as long as one *decides* to think pure being, or engages in empty thinking, *without* demonstrating its necessity, the beginning of the *Logic* is secure. But the point that proposition (B2) is meant to emphasise is that, without some presupposition which justifies this empty thinking, why should we consider it as anything other than arbitrary? At this point one could simply suggest some alternative, non-empty thought as a place to begin with just as much right. So the problem of beginning is not solved in this manner. Something, some element of mediation, *must* be presupposed to render the beginning non-arbitrary.

It would be equally problematic, of course, to begin by focusing purely on the element of mediation, and neglecting the importance of the element of immediacy, or presuppositionlessness. Looking back some way we find McGilvary making the following surprising claim: 'Hegel nowhere makes the claim that this science is without presupposition' (McGilvary, 1897, p.512). Instead, McGilvary suggests, 'Logic presupposes the *Phenomenology*, and the *Phenomenology* presupposes ordinary consciousness with its sensuous cognition; and thus logic indirectly presupposes sensuous experiences.' (McGilvary, 1897, p.511)

But this will not do either. If all that there is to the beginning of the *Logic* is the reliance, ultimately, upon ordinary cognition, which is simply taken for granted, then this clearly falls afoul of proposition (B3) from **0.3**. There is nothing, on McGilvary's reading, to prevent an opponent suggesting an alternative presupposition or set of presuppositions, and beginning differently upon their basis. The beginning therefore *must* be in some sense presuppositionless, so that the element of immediacy resolves the otherwise problematic reliance upon presuppositions, whether they belong to the work of the *Phenomenology* or to a project of consummate scepticism.[172]

---

[172] McGilvary seems to think that Hegel's talk of "presuppositionlessness" is just a way of characterising the concept of pure being, but as we have seen in 'With What Must the Science Begin?' and in §78 of the

There is another approach which has often been taken to the problematic status of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*. That is to appeal to the idea that the project of the *Logic* is in some sense a *circular* one. Hegel writes that 'The essential requirement for the science of logic is not so much that the beginning be a pure immediacy, but rather that the whole of the science be within itself a circle in which the first is also the last and the last is also the first' (*WL*, p.71/21: p.57).[173]

Some have seized upon this notion to suppose that what ultimately secures the beginning of the *Logic* against sceptical opposition is the fact that Hegel connects its conclusion to its beginning, claiming that 'logic... in the absolute idea, has withdrawn into that same simple unity which its beginning is; the pure immediacy of being' (*WL,* p.842/12: p.252). It is not my intention here to attempt a sketch Hegel's notion of the "absolute idea," but I will say that motif of circularity in this passage appears to me to have to do with guaranteeing the complete or holistic character of the logical system he has expounded, and says nothing explicit about the importance of this characteristic for securing the beginning. Similarly, in the passage from the beginning of the *Logic* concerning the circular nature of the project cited above, this circularity is an essential requirement for the project of logic itself, presumably as a whole, *not* an essential requirement for beginning.

There are two ways that one might interpret the idea that Hegel relies upon the circular nature of the *Logic* to secure the beginning. The better one is that Hegel asks us to read the *Logic* in a provisional manner, putting aside our qualms about the beginning only to have them eventually soothed by the satisfactory nature of the end of the project and the way in which it shores up the beginning and renders it no longer questionable. But we already know that Hegel judges such a procedure to be unacceptable, and almost immediately afterwards insists that 'The said beginning is neither an arbitrary and merely provisional assumption, nor is it something which appears to be arbitrarily and tentatively presupposed, but which is subsequently shown to have been properly made the beginning' (*WL*, p.72/21: p.58), so this cannot be the right interpretation. The other way to read these claims would be to suppose that Hegel genuinely thinks that it is legitimate to have the beginning depend for its justification upon that which it itself is to

---

Encyclopaedia, Hegel undeniably attaches epistemic weight to the idea that the beginning must be presuppositionless, beyond the term just functioning as a peculiar descriptor for the concept of pure being.
[173] See also *EL* §15, p.43/p.56

play a key role in justifying. This would straightforwardly be to make Hegel guilty of circular reasoning, and seems extremely uncharitable.

We must therefore reject accounts of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* which appeal to the circular nature of the work to secure that beginning. Carlson, for example, understands the passage in which Hegel sets out what I have identified as the problem of beginning as Hegel insisting upon a *choice* between beginning with mediation or with immediacy. As he puts it, Hegel 'chooses immediacy' and that he then 'justifies the choice because what is here presupposed is (much later) proven... His philosophy will take us in a circle. If the beginning is also the end, then the beginning is justified' (Carlson, 2007, pp.26-27).

Similarly, Menahem Rosen suggests that, 'in the beginning [of Hegel's *Logic*] there is only opinion... we do understand in the end only' (Rosen, 1992, p.49) and that 'the paradox of the beginning... is here settled by the circular progression (Rosen, 1992, p.36). These interpretations, and those of others who make variants of the same claim,[174] seem to confuse two different lines of thought in Hegel's work. They take Hegel's appeal to the idea that the circular or complete nature of the work is playing some sort of justificatory work for the *Science of Logic,* taken as a whole, and suppose that this is relevant to the justificatory work demanded by the task of solving the problem of beginning.[175]

Before concluding I would like to attempt to anticipate two potential objections to my presentation of Hegel's engagement with the problem of beginning in this chapter. The first objection would be simply to dispute the claim that the concept of pure being occurs as the co-incidence of the elements of mediation and immediacy, because Hegel clearly states that pure being is not mediated. So, for example, he writes, in the context of the account of pure being that, 'the first beginning cannot be anything

---

[174] See, for example, Rockmore, 1986, pp.89-90, or Kreines, 2015, pp.241-245

[175] I cannot explore here the sense in which Hegel takes the claims made in the *Logic* to be in some sense justified by the circular structure of the work. For an attempt to do this, see Trisokkas, 2012, pp.107-110. If, however, one were to remain concerned that appealing to the circular structure of the *Logic* was somehow insufficient to justify the claims made therein (either because of concerns about circular or coherentist accounts of justification generally, or because it would seem to imply a problematically "provisional" procedure on Hegel's part), what I offer in this work might be seen as a supplement to the circular nature of justification in the *Logic*. In this case, one might suggest, the major condition on justification in the work comes from its circular nature, while the minor condition is that this circle is developed on the basis of a presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning. The elaboration of this idea falls beyond the scope of this work.

mediated' (*EL* §86, p.136/p.122).[176] It is also true that the account of pure being which proper which follows the essay, "With What Must the Science Begin?" makes mention only of the immediacy of pure being, and says nothing of mediation. But this does not detract from the fact that, in that essay, Hegel has described pure being 'as having come to be through mediation' (*WL*, p.69/21: p.59).

The way to understand Hegel's insistence only on the immediacy of pure being, then, is to accept that this concept is both mediated and immediate, but once this has been accepted, in considering the concept of pure being on its own terms it is vital to attend to its simple immediacy. Hegel makes this clear when, having already described pure knowing as the outcome or conclusion of some mediation, he then writes that 'taken in this way... *pure being*, this absolute immediacy has equally the character of something absolutely mediated. But it is equally essential that it be taken only in the one-sided character in which it is pure immediacy, *precisely because* here it is the beginning' (*WL,* p.72/21: p.59). This fits with my presentation of Hegel's solution of the problem of beginning: The beginning must be presuppositionless in such a way that, although it requires some presupposition to render it non-arbitrary, its presuppositionless status undoes the problematic nature of a reliance upon presuppositions. Thus, when considering pure being, given that this concept is the solution to the problem of beginning, we should expect it no longer to refer back to the mediation which it presupposes, and to be considered as a simple immediacy.

One might argue further against the idea that the concept of pure being solves the problem of beginning insofar as it contains elements of both immediacy and mediation, by claiming that Hegel explicitly disallows such a possibility when he rejects the possibility that the beginning could consist 'in a relation of distinct moments... [whereby] it therefore contains *mediation* within itself' (*WL*, p.74/21: p.61). He adds that

> 'the beginning cannot be... anything containing a relation *within itself*. For such presupposes an internal process of mediation and transition of which the concrete, now become simple, would be the result. But the beginning ought not itself to be already a first *and* an other; for anything which is in its own self a first *and* an other implies that an advance has already been made.' (*WL*, p.75/21: p.62)

---

[176] See also *EL* §86 *Add.1*, p.137

It might be thought that here Hegel is explicitly ruling out the idea that pure being could be the co-incidence of mediation and immediacy, *especially* if, as I have suggested, that co-incidence consists in the *result* of the mediation being identified with the element of immediacy (whether by way of the sublation of consciousness in phenomenology or the negation of presuppositions in scepticism). But as we have seen, this procedure is precisely what he has suggested in his presentation of the first formulation of the solution to the problem of beginning only a few pages earlier. Additionally, we saw in **1.2.2** that Hegel was of the opinion that *every* concept in the *Logic* ought to be conceived of in terms of the unity of opposing moments. Does the passage above mean that Hegel is contradicting himself?

This passage should be put in context. Here Hegel is explicitly entertaining the notion of beginning *not* with pure being, but with some common notion or '*general idea*' (*WL*, p.73/21: p.60) such as the idea of beginning itself. Hegel rejects this possibility, of a beginning which 'presupposes as familiar the idea of beginning' (*WL*, p.74/21: p.61) precisely for the reasons he gives above, that such a general idea will always be to some extent complex, or contain relation within itself. If this relation is taken to result in the unity of that idea, so that it is then treated as simple, or as an immediacy, this immediacy clearly falls short of the radical immediacy Hegel demands for the beginning.[177] As such it would fail to satisfy proposition (B3) in my presentation of the problem of beginning.

How is it then that the characterisation of pure being as both mediated and immediate does not also imply that the concept has a relation within itself, that it is "first *and* other" and so no longer a good candidate for the beginning? The answer to this question must lie in the nature of the *genuine co-incidence* of the elements of mediation and immediacy in the concept of pure being, so that the concept does not consist in the relation of one to the other, but their genuine unity. Of course, we cannot decide whether or not the result either of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or of a consummate scepticism can in fact be made to co-incide with the empty thinking of the beginning of the *Logic* satisfactorily in such a way as to avoid this concern until we have the results of the next two chapters of this work.

---

[177] I have already noted that Hegel will use "immediacy" to describe various other concepts which would not be good candidates for places to begin, so that the "immediacy" of the beginning must be a special case. This is spelled out in the account of pure thinking or empty knowing above in **1.4.1**.

The other potential objection that I would like to mention briefly is the possibility that I might be right to insist that the beginning of the *Logic* must be both mediated and immediate, but wrong to think that the element of mediation precedes and results in that of immediacy. Instead, one might claim, that the reverse is the case. The key to understanding how the concept of pure being is the solution to the problem of beginning, on this account, would be the fact that it is an immediacy which mediates itself, or which is mediated by what it gives rise to. So, for example, Gadamer writes of the beginning of the *Logic*,

> 'Nothing may be presupposed in it, and it clearly reveals itself as primary and immediate. But it still is a beginning only if it begins a development, and thus it is determined as a beginning only if it begins that development, which is to say that it is 'mediated' by the latter.' (Gadamer, 1993, p.231)

Gadamer has in mind the "mediation" which occurs when the concept of pure being famously reveals itself to be the same as the concept of '*pure nothing*' (*WL*, p.82/21: p.69). I do not wish to discuss this transition now, but it seem clear that he is drawn to this account because he, as we saw that Moder does in **1.1.1**, takes the issue facing the reader of the beginning of the *Logic* to be 'the idea of Being, the identity of it with Nothing, and the synthesis of the two opposed ideas of Being and Nothing, called Becoming' (Gadamer, 1993, p.231). And later in the same piece we see Gadamer referring to 'the fact that the *Logic* begins with Being and Nothing' (Gadamer, 1993, p.235). But, as I have argued at length, it does not. The *Logic* begins with mediation and immediacy. It is only once one has resolved the problem of beginning in these terms that one is entitled to the concept of pure being, and is free to explore the sense in which it might *also* be mediated by the concepts which succeed it.

I hope it is clear that insisting otherwise would again be to commit Hegel to some sort of provisional procedure of the kind we have already seen to be unacceptable, whereby he would assume the immediacy of pure being, and then only afterwards find it also to be mediated.[178] Having dispensed with these potential objections, I shall draw this chapter to a close.

---

[178] One could attempt to respond to this by appeal to the idea that the concept of pure being is, in a sense, "always already" mediated by pure nothing. As Hegel says, 'being – does not pass over but has passed over – into nothing' (*WL*, pp.82-83/21: p.69). I do not find this response convincing. One still needs to be justified in holding the concept of pure being, which is to say one needs to have solved the problem of

1.5 Conclusion

At this point I take it that I have provided an explanation of how it is that Pyrrhonian sceptical concerns prompt Hegel's engagement with the problem of beginning, and structure the way in which he poses the question in terms of mediation and immediacy. In particular I have argued that Hegel's problem of beginning is structured by the arguments of the two modes found in Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. This amounts to the claim that it is an agrippan problem, as defined in **0.3**. Indeed, I have argued here that it is the same problem as the problem of beginning I set out in that introductory chapter. To reiterate, Hegel's problem – that a beginning must be either immediate or mediated and that neither is satisfactory – is the same as the problem of beginning in the previous chapter: that a beginning must be either presuppositionless (but then arbitrary) or non-arbitrary (but then not presuppositionless) and that neither is satisfactory.

I have also indicated the general form of a Hegelian solution, indeed Hegel's solution, to the problem of beginning: the beginning must be both presuppositionless and presuppose something which demonstrates its necessity. It must presuppose something so that its presuppositionlessness cannot be characterised as merely arbitrary, and it must be presuppositionless so that it cannot be accused of relying problematically on presuppositions. In Hegel's terms, the beginning must be both mediated and immediate.

This solution was rendered possible by abandoning the assumption that mediation and immediacy must be exclusively opposed. This tells us something else that is interesting about the beginning of *Logic*. The assumption that Hegel abandoned seems characteristic of the type of thinking that Hegel, as we saw in **1.2.2**, refers to as that of the "understanding." This suggests that, in entertaining the idea of a concept which is both mediated and immediate, or in going along with Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, we are beginning to engage in the type of thinking Hegel characterises as "reason," or as "dialectical" or "speculative." So, in a discussion of reason in the introduction to the *Logic* he writes, 'It is in this dialectic... in the grasping

---

beginning, in order to then note, in the analysis of the concept, that it is always already mediated by pure nothing.

of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative, that speculative thought consists' (*WL*, p.56/21: pp.40-41).

This "grasping of opposites in their unity" certainly sounds like the co-incidence of the elements of mediation and immediacy which I have insisted upon in my account of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning. Of course, if this solution requires us to presuppose the validity of a model of speculative reason, Hegel is in trouble. Instead, it must be the case that if – when we consider, without any prejudice for or against a notion of speculative reason, either the investigation of the *Phenomenology*, or that of consummate scepticism, we come to see that their conclusions co-incide with "empty thinking," – then we are not only solving the problem of beginning, but also beginning to legitimise Hegel's notion of speculative reason. I shall return to this idea in **3.4**.

Finally, I have suggested that Hegel presents two different formulations of this solution. In both cases the element of immediacy is described in terms of the "empty thinking" or "pure knowing" which characterises the simple reflexivity of the indeterminate thought we find at the beginning of the *Logic*. What differentiates the two cases is the identity of the element of mediation. In one case the role of the element of mediation in the beginning is played by the investigation of consciousness which takes place in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and in the other it is played by a "negative science" of "consummate scepticism". The next two chapters will look at these two different formulations in detail, starting in Chapter 2 with the version which makes use of the *Phenomenology*.

Chapter 2: Mediation I – The *Phenomenology of Spirit*

2.0 Introduction

In the introductory chapter to this work I claimed that Hegel's demand for his philosophical system to assume a 'Scientific' character led him towards strict epistemic standards concerning how the various philosophical claims to which he is committed are to be justified. In the last chapter I examined the way in which these standards manifested themselves in Hegel's concern for the issue of how to *begin*. I explained that Hegel identifies a quandary facing anyone considering how to begin in thought – a quandary I identified with the problem of beginning spelled out in **0.1-0.3**. I argued that this itself is an instance of a broader, "agrippan" problem-structure with its roots in ancient scepticism. The shape of Hegel's solution to this problem, or proposed manner of beginning, was to identify a thought which was at the same time immediate – consisting in thought's simple apprehension of itself, so that it did not rest on some unexamined and problematic presupposition, and mediated – the result of some argument or set of reasons which would secure the beginning against the charge of mere arbitrariness. In my preferred terminology, this amounts to the demand that the beginning be both presuppositionless and at the same time non-arbitrary.

I then identified what seemed like two distinct presentations of this beginning in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia Logic* – one in which the role of the element of mediation was to be played by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and one in which this role was identified with a project of "consummate scepticism". I will turn to the idea of a "consummate scepticism" and the problems accompanying this account in the next chapter; this chapter is an examination of the plausibility of understanding the *Phenomenology* as fulfilling this justificatory role (that of mediation) in relation to the beginning of the *Logic*. It involves wading into and making some attempt to stake out a position in two established debates in the literature on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: (i) the question of the relationship of the *Phenomenology*, as "introduction" to the rest of the system, and to the *Logic* in particular; and (ii) the question of Hegel's (possibly) changing attitudes to the role played by the *Phenomenology* between 1807 and 1831.

This chapter is divided into three parts:

2.1.The *Phenomenology* as the Element of Mediation in Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Beginning: In which I consider two problematic approaches to

conceiving of the relationship of *Phenomenology* to the *Logic* and then suggest that the interpretation put forward by Maker makes the most sense of the idea that the *Phenomenology* might be thought to play the role identified in the previous chapter as that of the element of mediation in the beginning of the *Logic* successfully.

2.2. **Interlude – Did Hegel Change His Mind about the Role of the *Phenomenology?*** In which I provide a survey of some of the primary reasons for thinking that Hegel might have revised his opinion of the role and value of the *Phenomenology* in the years following its publication. I shall argue that the evidence for radically revising the assessment of the *Phenomenology* as the introduction to Hegel's system is inconclusive and that we ought to suspend judgement on the matter for the time being.

2.3. **Some Reasons for Thinking that the *Phenomenology* Cannot Justify Hegel's Position at the Beginning of the *Logic*:** In which I make a more substantive philosophical case against the suitability of the *Phenomenology* for playing the role identified in the previous chapter as that of the element of mediation in the beginning of the *Logic* – that is to say the role of justifying the beginning of the *Logic*. I conclude that since the *Phenomenology* is unable to play this role, the first presentation of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning identified in the previous chapter fails, and that we must consider an alternative candidate for the element of mediation in Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning.

One brief word before moving into **2.1**: At stake in this chapter is the viability of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* understood as a part of a very specific epistemological project. But even if it is found wanting as far as that project goes, this is certainly not to dismiss the *Phenomenology* wholesale. It is to say little to nothing concerning the various pedagogical, ethical, religious, socio-political, historical, existential or alternative epistemological materials which receive at least some treatment under the work's sizeable purview. Much of that material has been extraordinarily influential. I am also willing to acknowledge that some readers might even consider the epistemological elements of the work among its less interesting components, though there we are bound to disagree.

2.1. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the Element of Mediation in Hegel's Solution to the Problem of Beginning

To recap, in the previous chapter the thought with which the *Logic* was to begin was found to be the coincidence of two moments or elements – mediation and immediacy. The element of immediacy was identified with thought's sheer reflexivity – the idea that thought might simply consider thought itself, without any other content, determination or methodological consideration. I indicated that Hegel uses the terms "pure knowing" or "empty thinking" to refer to this element. In terms of the element of mediation Hegel writes that,

> '[T]he beginning is made with being which is represented as having come to be through mediation, a mediation which is also a sublating of itself; and there is presupposed pure knowing as the outcome of finite knowing, of consciousness.' (*WL* pp.69-70/21: p.56)

The element of mediation is clearly identified with the activity of finite knowing or consciousness sublating itself. I also explained that, at least in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel explicitly identified this mediation of finite knowing, or of consciousness, with the project of his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The *Phenomenology* was envisioned as the introduction to Hegel's system,[179] and the account given so far furnishes one of the senses in which it functions as an introduction: The *Phenomenology*, it would seem, is an introduction to the system in an epistemological sense: As the mediation of what Hegel refers to as 'natural consciousness' (*PhG*, §77/p.55) – our dogmatic or everyday understanding of how thought relates to the world – the *Phenomenology* of *Spirit* leads us to the standpoint referred to at the end of the *Phenomenology* as 'absolute knowing' (*PhG*, §808/p.433), or at the beginning of the *Logic* as '*pure knowing*' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.54): the standpoint of "Science" or philosophy proper, whence thought's pure, reflexive consideration of itself can begin.[180] This identification of the absolute knowing of the *Phenomenology* with the pure knowing of the *Logic* is at the heart of the version of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning examined in this chapter, since it is the

---

[179] In the advertisement for the *Phenomenology,* for example, Hegel writes that the work 'examines the *preparation* for Science.' (Cited in Pinkard and Baur's translation of *PhG*, pp.468-469 (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) I am otherwise using Miller's translation in this work)

[180] For interpreters who understand Hegel's *Logic* also to be a work of metaphysics, this is also to say that the epistemological project of the *Phenomenology* has a role to play in justifying Hegel's basic metaphysical position. See, for example, Horstmann: 'the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* is interested in the epistemological problem of object reference because of its potential for justifying his favoured metaphysical position.' (Horstmann, 2008, p.49)

sublation of the former, understood as the element of mediation, into its negation, the latter, understood as the element of immediacy, and thus into their unity in Hegel's concept of "pure being" which guarantees the co-incidence of those two opposing elements by which Hegel claims to solve the problem of beginning. It is not enough, however, simply to assert the validity of this sublating process. It must be exhibited and examined and found to be a coherent move.

This account – whereby the argument of the *Phenomenology*, which the *Logic,* by Hegel's own admission, 'has for its presupposition' (*WL*, p.68/21: p.54), leads us to the immediacy of the beginning of the *Logic* – amounts to saying that the *Phenomenology justifies* the beginning of the *Logic*. Rather than being merely an arbitrary exercise in thought, exhibiting a reflexive model of cognition we are under no obligation to accept, and focusing only on the most empty determination of thought itself, which as content we are equally not obliged to accept, the beginning of the *Logic* is justified, or even necessitated by the mediation of natural consciousness – the transformation of our everyday model of cognition into that of Science and the generation of absolute or pure knowing. Under examination in this chapter, then, is how successfully the *Phenomenology* can be said to play this justificatory role, or how successful the *Phenomenology* is in allowing us to make sense of the coincidence of mediation and immediacy at the beginning of the *Logic*.

As I mentioned before, the *Phenomenology*, an enormously ambitious work, is not exhausted by an account of how it fulfils this epistemological or justificatory role. Forster, for example, identifies eleven distinct tasks which he believes Hegel sets about completing in the *Phenomenology*, and classifies them under three headings – epistemological tasks, pedagogical tasks, and metaphysical tasks.[181] We need not concern ourselves here with the specifics of Forster's characterisation. It is enough to note that, while there is a lot more going on in the *Phenomenology* than just the epistemological task of justifying the beginning of the *Logic*, it is only this task with which I am principally occupied here.

Here is a problematic sketch of how the *Phenomenology's* fulfilment of its justificatory role might be thought to work:[182] Hegel, having decided on a model for

---

[181] See Forster, 1998, p.14

[182] This problematic sketch, and the improved account I shall consider after, can, I think, be given without paying attention to the different accounts of the project of the *Logic* the *Phenomenology* is thought to

Scientific or philosophical thought, which crucially involves in some sense the identification of knower and known, or subject and substance[183], notes that this model differs from the model of cognition common to everyday thought, in which the knower is identified with a subject on the one hand, and what is known is identified with an object, quite *distinct* from the knowing subject, on the other.[184] According to the latter model the activity of knowing would primarily be occupied with the challenges of crossing the divide between subject and object. As such he proceeds, by way of a method of "immanent critique"[185] to demonstrate that this dogmatic model of cognition – that of natural consciousness – is inconsistent, and that its various inconsistencies, properly examined, transform it dialectically, by way of a long and tortuous series of '*determinate* negation[s]' (*PhG*, §79/p.57),[186] into the very model of Scientific or philosophical cognition which it was originally thought to oppose. At this point, having attained a properly justified model for thought, the activity of the *Logic* can begin.

---

justify. There is a great deal of difference, for example, between conceiving of the Hegel's *Logic* as a transcendental deduction of the categories of thought, not *all* that far removed from Kant, and a stronger ontological account whereby the categories of thought are identified with the categories of being. The point is that, however conceived, the *Logic* is supposed to have a presuppositionless beginning which is to some extent justified by the *Phenomenology,* and it is this justification which is under examination here.

[183] See *PhG* §17/p.18

[184] Hegel describes this model, that of "natural consciousness", as one in which consciousness 'knows its objects in antithesis to itself, and itself in antithesis to them'. (*PhG* §26/p.23)

[185] A brief word on the method of immanent critique, for which the *Phenomenology* is often taken to function as an archetype (but see Finlayson, 2015): It is clearly possible to identify in the method of the *Phenomenology*, whereby Hegel takes up the presuppositions of natural consciousness and considers them in their own right, rather than holding them to an externally imposed philosophical criterion, an echo of a particular Pyrrhonian sceptical approach to the claims of the dogmatist: finding that their knowledge claims give way according to their own principles, rather than examining them in the light of a set of principles to which the sceptics themselves would also have to be committed. This is how Fogelin, for example, following Frede, reads Sextus (See Fogelin, 1994, p.8). My understanding is that Hegel's move is the more radical of the two, in that while he seems genuinely to be proposing simply to examine natural consciousness for what it is, according to its own principles, I, unlike Fogelin, believe that the sceptics, at least as represented by Sextus, remain themselves committed to principles concerning adequate justification which they share with the dogmatists they oppose, but since the correct interpretation of Sextus is not what is at stake here, I shall defend that view another time, but see Perin, 2010, pp.44-50 for a suggestion to this effect.

[186] The specifics of what is involved in the notions of "immanent critique" and of "determinate negation" receive some treatment in **2.3.2** and **2.3.1** respectively. For the time being we can acknowledge Hegel's characterisation of the method of criticism in the *Phenomenology* as one whereby 'we do not need to import criteria, or to make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry' because 'Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself' (*PhG* §84/p.59). We can likewise acknowledge Hegel's characterisation of the demonstration of the unsatisfactory character of the model of natural consciousness as proceeding negatively, but not *merely* negatively. In this vein he criticises the scepticism which, in opposing mutually inconsistent views, 'only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results.*' Instead the negative movement Hegel identifies between forms of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is characterised as taking its result 'as the result of that from which it emerges... in that case it is itself a *determinate* nothingness, one which has a *content.*' (*PhG* §79/p.57, See also *WL*, pp.832-838/12: pp.243-249 and *EL* §§79-82)

This sketch, some variant of which will not be unfamiliar to anyone who has spent time immersed in the literature on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is problematic for two reasons. 1) If Hegel has decided in advance on a model of cognition for the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* is dedicated to its justification, this conflicts with his comments in the introduction to the *Logic* to the effect that the method and form of logical enquiry cannot be set out in advance of its exposition:

> 'Logic', he says, 'cannot presuppose any... forms of reflection and laws of thinking, for these constitute part of its own content and have first to be established within the Science. But not only the account of Scientific method, but even the concept itself of the Science as such belongs to its content, and in fact constitutes its final result; what logic is cannot be stated beforehand'. (*WL* p.43/21: p.27)

It would also be to make the idealist status of Hegel's philosophy (however understood) into a substantive presupposition of the *Logic*, which one might think would contradict Hegel's aspirations towards presuppositionlessness.[187] Nevertheless, with his construal of the *Phenomenology* as resolving a sceptical equipollence problem between pre-established models of cognition, this seems to me precisely to be the understanding that Forster has of the justificatory role played by the *Phenomenology*.[188] 2) Even if we retreat from phrasing the investigation of the *Phenomenology* as a method of deciding in favour of one of two pre-established models (a phrasing to which, in fairness, Hegel's preface does lend itself at times[189]), this sketch remains problematic in that it seems to characterise the position attained at the end of the *Phenomenology* as a substantive cognitive model, described in terms of the identity of subject and substance, developed dialectically from (and therefore in some sense containing) the various

---

[187] Not everyone will accept this. In **3.5** I examine Houlgate's view that a minimal idealism is the only metaphysical position available to one committed to a presuppositionless beginning.

[188] See Forster, 1998, pp.159-160, and pp.167-174, and Forster, 1989, pp.104-106, and Ch.9 in general. In both works he presents the task of the *Phenomenology* as that of resolving a classical sceptical equipollence problem – deciding between two models of cognition which are held up for examination in advance. It should already be clear that this model conflicts with the idea that either the *Phenomenology* or the *Logic* are properly presuppositionless in their approaches to their respective subject matters. Horstmann, too, seems to understand the role of the *Phenomenology* in this problematic manner. See Horstmann, 2008.

[189] See, in particular, *PhG* §26/pp.22-23 – the discussion of Science's approach to natural consciousness. The only way to make sense of this in an unproblematic manner, it seems to me, is to recognise that the Preface is written on the basis of having completed the work of the *Phenomenology*, so Hegel is already writing from his Scientific perspective, and conceiving here of its opposition to the position of natural consciousness retrospectively. This does not require him to be holding to a model of Scientific cognition in advance while undertaking his examination of natural consciousness in the main body of the work.

formulations of consciousness and spirit which preceded it.[190] Why should this be problematic? Well, aside from the fact that, as one can see from the passage quoted above, the concept of Science or the form of Scientific reflection is declared by Hegel only to be developed within and on the basis of the logical investigation itself and not to be given beforehand, the presence of a substantive model of cognition at the beginning of the *Logic* would seem to remain incompatible with Hegel's declarations concerning the presuppositionless status of that investigation, as it would seem to constitute a fairly significant presupposition.

A more explicit way of expressing the problem encountered in the above sketch is this: in order for the element of mediation to be able to co-incide with the element of immediacy at the beginning of the *Logic* so as to render it non-arbitrary without robbing it of its immediate or presuppositionless status, the mediated element, despite being the result of the entirety of the development of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and despite needing to be able to necessitate the pure knowing with which the *Logic* begins, seems as though it cannot amount to anything which would constitute a substantive presupposition from the perspective of the *Logic*, either in terms of the form or content of the inquiry. Were it to amount to such a presupposition it would seem to risk clashing, rather than co-inciding with the element of immediacy.

This puzzle, that of how to reconcile mediation and immediacy or presuppositionlessness with the presence of a presupposition, is ultimately the same as the one facing the reader of the *Logic* confronting Hegel's remarks in "With What Must the Science Begin?" Within the space of three pages, Hegel writes that the *Logic* has for its presupposition the *Phenomenology*, and that it is without any presuppositions whatsoever: 'Logic, then, has for its presupposition the science of manifested spirit, which contains and demonstrates the necessity...of the standpoint occupied by pure knowing and of its mediation' (*WL*, pp.68-69/21: pp.54-55) then, a little later, that 'the beginning... *may not presuppose anything,* cannot be mediated by anything' (*WL*, p.70/21: p.56). Resolving this problem would seem to be at the heart of understanding

---

[190] I take it that this is the position of, for example, Stewart. See Stewart, 2000, pp.455-468. Trisokkas might also endorse this position in his (2012), although in his case it is a little harder to determine. He admits that at times he is disagreeing with Hegel's own assessment of the *Phenomenology*. He does not believe that the *Phenomenology justifies* the beginning of the *Logic* (Trisokkas, 2012, p.92), but he does think that it proves that the cognitive standpoint of the beginning of the *Logic* 'is the only *possible* scientific cognitive standpoint.' (Trisokkas, 2012, p.91). I shall return to Trisokkas' account towards the end of **2.3.3**.

how the *Phenomenology* can fill the epistemological role of justifying the beginning of the *Logic* by functioning as the element of mediation in that beginning, and of how it is that the elements of mediation and immediacy are thought to co-incide at the beginning of the *Logic*. An elegant solution, and to my mind perhaps the best possible candidate for making sense of the *Phenomenology* as the necessary[191] epistemological introduction to the *Logic* is put forth by Maker in his book *Philosophy Without Foundations: Rethinking Hegel*. It has also received further support from Winfield.[192]

The key to Maker's interpretation, then, lies in explicating a sense in which the *Phenomenology* really is the necessary presupposition to the *Logic*, and therefore in some sense justifies it, but in a special manner which still allows us to characterise the *Logic* as presuppositionless.

Maker writes,

'I aim to show that Hegel proposed to introduce the standpoint of autonomous reason and philosophical science through a radical and consummately destructive *critique* of foundational epistemology.' (Maker, 1994, p.13)[193]

Later he will argue that Hegel's project is that of securing the Scientific character of philosophy by way of 'a systematically deconstructive critique of foundationalism' (Maker, 1994), p.50). These two phrases – "a destructive critique of foundational epistemology" and "a systematically deconstructive critique of foundationalism" – indicate the specific manner by which Maker's account purports to resolve the problem being considered here. This is because the two phrases just quoted are nothing other than Maker's characterisation of the project of the *Phenomenology* itself. "Foundational epistemology" is Maker's term for the dogmatic model according to which natural consciousness attempts to justify its knowledge claims – in other

---

[191] The question of whether the *Phenomenology* is a *necessary* introduction to the *Logic*, or whether it might be possible in certain circumstances to do without it without thereby compromising the security of the logical investigation is ongoing in the literature on Hegel. Winfield and Maker clearly believe the *Phenomenology* to be necessary. Houlgate, for example, does not, though he still considers it an introduction, primarily in terms of its pedagogical function (See, for example, Houlgate, 2005, p.50). My own position, informed chiefly by the importance Hegel seems to attach to the coincidence of mediation and immediacy at the beginning of the *Logic*, is that the *Phenomenology* can *only* be considered unnecessary to the project of the *Logic* if something else takes its place in providing the element of mediation. As such, this chapter and the next constitute my arguments for this view.

[192] See Winfield, 2011, Winfield, 2012, p.40, and Winfield 2013, p.21 & pp.377-8

[193] Dove, in his (1982) seems to be making the same suggestion as Maker, though Maker's treatment is more extensive and detailed.

words, the very thing being undone by way of the immanent critique of the *Phenomenology*.

Without getting into an extended discussion of Maker's characterisation of foundationalism and the anti-foundationalism that he believes Hegel to espouse, we can see that what is distinctive about Maker's presentation of the project of the *Phenomenology* is that it is an explicitly *negative* one. As he says, 'both the *Phenomenology* as introduction, and absolute knowing as the deduced concept, must be understood *negatively*' (Maker, 1994, p.71).

In the sketch I presented earlier, two possibilities were suggested and rejected – that Hegel begins with two opposing substantive models of cognition and critiques one, thereby justifying the other, requiring him to have presupposed the form of Scientific inquiry in advance, or that Hegel begins with a substantive model of cognition characteristic of natural consciousness, and from that develops a substantive model of cognition characteristic of Science, or absolute knowing, which seems difficult to square with the demand for a presuppositionless beginning. *Here*, however, the suggestion is that Hegel begins with a substantive model of cognition characteristic of natural consciousness, but instead of ending up with a substantive alternative model, he ends up simply with the *total collapse* of the model of natural consciousness and its associated content. Maker calls this the 'radically negative outcome' (Maker, 1994, p.93) of the *Phenomenology*. According to Maker, what is signified by "absolute knowing" is really just the *elimination* of the presuppositions of natural consciousness. As Maker puts it,

> '[T]he task of the *Phenomenology* as introduction to science is the *critical* task of showing that... consciousness, as a determinate and presupposed structure, comes to eliminate itself.' (Maker, 1994, p.78)

The presupposition of the *Logic*, then, is not the developed cognitive model or standpoint of Science. Instead the presupposition of the *Logic* is simply the auto-elimination[194] of the presuppositions of natural consciousness.

---

[194] The elimination is an "auto-elimination," of course, because the *Phenomenology* is a kind of immanent critique, as I mentioned before. The criticisms of natural consciousness are not made by Hegel by examining them from the standpoint of a competing perspective and finding natural consciousness wanting, but by examining the claims of a given form of natural consciousness and finding that they are incompatible with the criteria of truth proposed by that very form of natural consciousness itself. The following revisions both to the nature of the claims being made and to the criteria by which to measure

It is on this basis that, by way of Maker's interpretation, one might connect the mediation of the *Phenomenology* to the immediacy of thought – the mediation has justified the beginning of the *Logic* by deducing it from the collapse of natural consciousness, but the result of that mediation is indeterminate and immediate – it necessitates a situation in which thought must think itself without any determinations already in place. This is to say that the *Phenomenology* justifies the beginning of the *Logic* because the end result of the former just *is* the beginning of the latter. In this way it would seem that mediation and immediacy can co-incide unproblematically. To be a little clearer – Maker's negative reading allows Hegel's absolute knowing, rather than being a problematically substantive model of cognition, to be identified with the mere immediacy of empty thought found at the beginning of the *Logic*. As Hegel puts it, in absolute or pure knowing thought has 'sublated all reference to an other and to mediation; it is without distinction and as thus distinctionless ceases itself to be knowing; what is present is only simple immediacy' (*WL*, p.69/21: p.55). This is Maker's picture of the co-incidence of immediacy and mediation at the intersection of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*.

This solution in fact presents itself as resolving at least two apparent contradictions in Hegel's presentation of the relationship of the *Phenomenology* and *Logic*.[195] The first, now dealt with at some length, is that of the *Phenomenology* functioning as presupposition for a beginning which is conceived of as presuppositionless. The second (and related) problem, perhaps not made quite so explicit so far, yet equally worrying at first glance, is that Hegel presents the *Phenomenology* as the deduction of the 'concept of Science',[196] while at the same time insisting that the concept of Science cannot be assumed at the beginning of the *Logic*, but is instead the result of that investigation.[197] We have seen how Maker's position resolves the first problem, and its resolution of the second is very similar: by rendering absolute knowing in purely negative terms, Maker allows for the concept of Science, or the model of Scientific inquiry present at the beginning of the *Logic*, that is, the concept

---

those claims are thereby generated by natural consciousness itself, and not by the Hegelian phenomenologist. Hegel outlines this method in *PhG* §§85-87/pp.59-61. Insofar as Maker believes that the ultimate result of these revisions is the *elimination* of natural consciousness itself, it is therefore an auto-elimination.

[195] See Maker, 1994, p.72

[196] '[T]he *Phenomenology of Spirit...* has the concept of Science for its result.' (*WL*, p.48/21: p.32)

[197] 'The Concept itself of the Science as such belongs to [logic's] content, and in fact constitutes its final result'. (*WL*, p.43/21: p.27

deduced in the *Phenomenology,* to be effectively empty. Insofar as the position gained at the end of the earlier work is simply that of the collapse or auto-elimination of the presuppositions of natural consciousness, the concept of Science here has no real form or content. It is in effect merely a space for thought to think itself in a presuppositionless or immediate manner. The fully determinate, worked-out concept of Science Hegel will announce retrospectively at the end of the Doctrine of the Concept, its proof having been one with the exposition of logic itself.[198] As Winfield puts it,

> 'These two claims [that the *Phenomenology* is the deduction of the concept of Science, and that only logic can be the deduction of the concept of Science] seem contradictory unless the concept of science that the *Phenomenology* introduces is very negative in character, consisting of the elimination of the opposition of consciousness.'[199] (Winfield, 2013, pp.377-8)

Maker and Winfield's position seems to me to provide a neat and to some extent compelling solution for dealing with the problem of the presupposition of the presuppositionless beginning, and the related problem concerning the deduction of the concept of Science. In the language governing this investigation, it seems to provide a good account of how immediacy and mediation might coincide in Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning. Despite this, in **2.3** I will suggest a number of reasons for thinking that, despite its ingenuity, it fails to provide a coherent picture of how the *Phenomenology* can function as the element of mediation at the beginning of the *Logic*. Before doing so, however, I want to spend a little time examining another possibility – that even if Hegel did espouse such a view in 1812, when the first edition of the Doctrine of Being was published, he might well later have reconsidered or even moved

---

[198] See *WL*, pp.824-844/12: pp.236-253: 'The Absolute Idea'. Much of this seems to me to be a reiteration of the idea, presented minimalistically at the beginning of the work, that logic involves thought thinking itself, but now with a far more determinate a fuller concept of what thought is, and what is involved (in terms of method and content) in it going about thinking itself.

[199] The phrase "opposition of consciousness" requires some clarification. It could be taken to refer to the opposition of natural consciousness to the standpoint of Science, which might then suggest that Hegel is indeed guilty of approaching the *Phenomenology* with a view to deciding between two competing but pre-established standpoints. Alternatively it could refer to the oppositional structure of natural consciousness itself. I take it that Winfield is using the phrase in the latter sense, and the context in which Hegel uses the phrase supports that decision:

> 'The concept of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than the deduction of it... as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the *object* from the *certainty of itself* is completely eliminated... Thus pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness' (*WL*, p.49/21: p.33)

It seems then that Maker and Winfield are on the right track here. It is the opposition of subject and object espoused by natural consciousness which has been eliminated, and not the pre-existing opposition of natural consciousness to the cognitive model of Science.

away from relying on the *Phenomenology* to play the justificatory role sketched above in solving the problem of beginning.

2.2.0 Interlude – Did Hegel Change His Mind about the Role of the *Phenomenology?*

Since at least as early as Haering's *Hegel: Sein Wollen und sein Werk,*[200] a large and sophisticated body of literature has developed around questions concerning the possibility that Hegel's appraisal of the role of the *Phenomenology*, and consequently its location within or connection to the various iterations of his philosophical system,[201] might have changed or shifted at various points between 1807 and 1831.[202] I cannot really do justice either to that body of work or to the issues with which its collected authors are grappling here.[203]

In the context of this chapter I am principally interested in making sense of the idea that the *Phenomenology can* justify the starting point of Hegelian Science in the manner indicated by my exposition of the solution to the problem of beginning in Hegel's *Logic* in **1.4.1**. It does not seem to me that it is necessary to deal extensively with historical claims to the effect that Hegel in fact later discarded the idea of the *Phenomenology* fulfilling this justificatory role in order to achieve my goals here. The concern, of course, is that if Hegel in fact *did* later abandon the idea of the *Phenomenology* fulfilling the role of justifying the beginning of the *Logic* then this might mean that there is a more interesting or philosophically viable presentation of Hegel's account of how to begin which I am wilfully ignoring. I do not believe that this is the case. As indicated in the introductory chapter to this work, I am inclined to treat the problem of beginning as a genuine one, and this commits me to identifying

---

[200] Haering's position is that due to problems with the original conception of the *Phenomenology* as an introduction to the system, Hegel eventually abandoned the *Phenomenology* altogether. Fulda suggests Haering's account of the problematic composition of the *Phenomenology* which underlies the latter's narrative concerning Hegel's (negative) reappraisal was 'invented'. (Fulda, 2008, pp.21-22)

[201] This is different to the question of whether or not Hegel's conception of the *Phenomenology* changed during its composition. For a discussion of this issue see Forster, 1998, Ch. 13-17

[202] These accounts are necessarily speculative to some degree (in the vulgar, non-Hegelian sense of "speculation") depending on how thoroughly their proponents have investigated not only Hegel's published work on the matter, but also his various extant manuscripts and correspondence, searching for clues as to his appraisal of the *Phenomenology* at various times. By my reckoning no *conclusive* evidence has yet been provided to recommend a particular position on the matter. Forster's account in his (1998) is an especially diligent investigation of this issue, and will receive some treatment in this section.

[203] A helpful critical survey of some notable positions is provided in Forster, 1998, especially pp.549-555. Forster is heavily invested in denying the idea that Hegel later substantially revised his assessment of the purpose and worth of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. He continues to defend this position in Ch.19 of his (1998)

something as playing the justificatory role identified in Chapter 1 as that of "mediation" in an account of beginning. This in turn automatically commits me to the following view: *If* Hegel did later reinterpret the beginning of his systematic philosophy so that either the *Logic* can begin without *anything* playing a justificatory role in the way that the *Phenomenology* was earlier intended to,[204] or indeed that the *Phenomenology*'s introductory role was later conceived of as relying on or presupposing elements of the philosophy to which it was to function as introduction,[205] then these presentations would fail to adequately resolve the problem of beginning identified in "With What Must the Science Begin?"

Nevertheless, it would seem over-hasty to ignore the possibility that Hegel later revised his attitude toward the *Phenomenology* altogether, not least because discussion of this topic might point us towards problems for the *Phenomenology* conceived of as a project of justification, as I conceive of it here. I will therefore briefly indicate, non-exhaustively, some of the reasons for supposing that Hegel might have later shifted his appraisal of the *Phenomenology*, or moved away from conceiving of it as the introduction (in a justificatory sense) to his Scientific philosophy, before indicating what seems to me to be a good reason for thinking that we are unlikely to satisfactorily resolve this historical question. At that point I shall move on to the third part of this chapter and present some reasons for thinking that, although the beginning of the *Logic* requires some kind of justification, the *Phenomenology* is not well-suited to this task.

Starting with perhaps the most obvious, here is a selection of standard reasons for thinking that Hegel might have moved away from relying on the *Phenomenology* to

---

[204] On a related note, I engage critically with Houlgate's account of the beginning of the *Logic* in **3.1**. Houlgate believes that the *Logic* does not require the *Phenomenology* or anything else to justify its presuppositionless beginning. I should say though that his account does *not* seem to commit him to the idea that this was a position Hegel arrived at only after the publication of the *Phenomenology*, as a result of changing his mind. This is, however, very clearly Heidemann's position (See Heidemann, 2011, p.92). Heidemann explicitly conceives of the *Phenomenology* as having an epistemological role to play, but believes that it fails, which might indeed motivate Hegel, if he were to become aware of this failure, to change his position. Houlgate seems to me to conceive of the *Phenomenology* primarily as a pedagogical rather than epistemological project and so, on that basis anyway, would have no strong reason to suppose that Hegel altered his appraisal of that text in later years.

[205] This is, for example, Fulda's position. See Fulda, 1975, especially pp.79-115. This idea, that the *Phenomenology* might presuppose elements of the philosophical doctrine it was to justify, Forster, writing in 1998, calls 'the popular reading' (Forster, 1998, p.271). I am not sure that the same moniker could be reasonably applied today, and this is just as well as I do not think that there is much to recommend such a position. It is one thing to suggest that Hegel's systematic philosophy can be apprehended as in some sense circular *after* the position has been justified, but to suggest that the justification itself relies on elements of the position which is to be justified seems to me to invite the charge of a circularity which could only be considered vicious.

justify the beginning of the *Logic*, and indeed, his systematic philosophy as a whole (some may be more compelling than others):

2.2.1. The various *Encyclopaedia* presentations of Hegel's system appear to begin not with phenomenology, but with logic.

2.2.2. Something called a 'Phenomenology of Spirit', apparently recycling some of the material from the 1807 *Phenomenology*, reappears in the *Encyclopaedia*, but in its third part, not at the beginning.[206]

2.2.3. "In §25 of the Berlin editions of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel suggests that some of the content of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* overlaps with the content of philosophical Science. This *could* be read as an admission on Hegel's part that he had come to see that the *Phenomenology* could not function as originally intended. This would be the case if its exposition required that it rely (however surreptitiously) on that material which it was intended to introduce (or even justify)."

2.2.4. In §78 of the *Encyclopaedia*, already mentioned in **1.4.1**, Hegel appears to restate the problem of beginning *without* reliance on the *Phenomenology*.

To reiterate, I am not suggesting that these four exhaust the reasons given by those like Haering, Fulda, or Heidemann for thinking that Hegel changed his mind (in various ways) about the introductory role of the *Phenomenology*.[207] They are enough, I hope, to indicate something of the complexity of the issue, and more importantly to direct us towards some concerns that *we* might have, regardless of Hegel's appraisal, concerning the *Phenomenology*'s ability to justify the beginning of the *Logic*. I am not seeking to resolve these historical or interpretative challenges here. Against **2.2.1**, **2.2.2** and **2.2.3** I will mention Forster's attempted defence of the idea that the introductory

---

[206] *EPS* §§413-439. Specifically, material in this section, though much more brief, appears to correspond to some material from the chapters 'Consciousness', 'Self-Consciousness' and 'Reason' in the 1807 *Phenomenology*.

[207] I do not, for example, enter into a discussion here of Hegel's 1831 note concerning a proposed second edition of the *Phenomenology*. That a second edition was intended at all might be taken as evidence that Hegel continued to think that the text had *some* role to play, against those like Haering who, as mentioned earlier, argued that Hegel abandoned the *Phenomenology*. Yet the matter is not so simple, as the content of the note might be taken to suggest that Hegel's evaluation of the text has shifted since 1807. The note appears in English in Forster's (1998), p.646. Forster also discusses its ramifications in that text and defends his thesis that Hegel did *not* alter his evaluation of the *Phenomenology,* nor its position in relation to this system (On the suggestion that "Logic is *behind* consciousness" – See Forster, 1998, p.279 especially and Ch.6 generally. On the suggestion that the text is "relative to the former time of its composition" –See Forster, 1998, p.559 especially and Ch.19 generally).

role envisaged by Hegel for the *Phenomenology* remained fundamentally unchanged, but it in my brief discussion of **2.2.4** I will give my reason for retreating from Forster's conclusion and suspending judgement on the matter.

2.2.1 "The various *Encyclopaedia* presentations of Hegel's system appear to begin not with phenomenology, but with logic."

It is certainly the case that all three 'mature' presentations of Hegel's system – the *Encyclopaedia*s of 1817, 1827 and 1830 – do not begin with the *Phenomenology*. Instead, after a series of preliminaries which do not repeat the course of the *Phenomenology*, the systematic presentation of Hegel's system begins with logic. This could well be taken, and indeed has been by many,[208] to suggest that the introductory function of the *Phenomenology* has been abandoned. And indeed, it chimes with the note Hegel adds in 1831 to the original preface to the *Science of Logic* that he intends no longer to refer to the *Phenomenology* as 'the first part of the *System of Science*' (*WL*, p.29/21: p.9).

Yet if we put aside until the discussion of **2.2.4** the possibility, seemingly apparent in §78 of the *Encyclopaedia*, of beginning the *Logic* without anything functioning in the same manner as the *Phenomenology*, this concern is perhaps not especially compelling. If, as Forster has argued,[209] the *Phenomenology*, *qua* introduction, was intended to be independent of Hegelian Science,[210] then one need not necessarily expect it to appear again at the beginning of the *Encyclopaedia*. One could still quite reasonably, it seems to me, think that Hegel's intention is for readers to work their way through the *Phenomenology* as an introduction to and justification of the standpoint or beginning of Science, and then to look to the *Encyclopaedia* for the exposition of Science itself. In accordance with this reading Forster suggests, not unreasonably, that Hegel's step away from titling the *Phenomenology* the "first part" of the system is little more than attempt to avoid confusion on the part of his readers.[211]

In addition, we might also suggest that the preliminaries to the *Encyclopaedia*, while not going so far as to recreate the dialectical evolution of natural consciousness

---

[208] Forster identifies Haering, Fulda and Pöggeler in particular, as holding to variants of this view. (Forster, 1998, p.553)
[209] See Forster, 1998, Ch.6
[210] I have already indicated above that the alternative strikes me as implausibly circular.
[211] See Forster, 1998, p.554

presented in the *Phenomenology*, do still, in their account of a succession of historical, philosophical positions preceding Hegel's own, at least suggest that there is some value (though whether primarily pedagogical or epistemological it is harder to say) in tracing a development from non-Scientific thought to Science. An earlier form of this kind of history of successive philosophical viewpoints appeared in Hegel's 1802 piece, *Faith and Knowledge*, which, as Harris suggests, anticipates the task and method of the *Phenomenology* to some extent.[212] The absence of the *Phenomenology* (at least explicitly) from the beginning of the various *Encyclopaedia* presentations of the system, then, is at least far from conclusive evidence that its epistemological introductory function has been abandoned.[213]

2.2.2 "Something called a 'Phenomenology of Spirit', apparently recycling some of the material from the 1807 *Phenomenology*, reappears in the *Encyclopaedia*, but in its third part, not at the beginning."

It is also certainly the case that §§413-439, in the third part of the *Encyclopaedia* - the *Philosophy of Spirit* – contain something called a "Phenomenology of Spirit" which appears to rehearse (though not identically) some of the significant steps from the first three parts of the 1807 *Phenomenology*. The relocation of this material might very well cause us to suspect that Hegel, while still interested in a "phenomenology of spirit" as part of an account of the development of thinking, might nevertheless have abandoned entirely the idea that it was to function in an introductory or justificatory capacity. Solomon, for example, meditating on the inclusion of phenomenology in the third part of the system, concludes not only that Hegel must have changed his mind about the role of phenomenology, but even that the Hegel of the *Encyclopaedia* might have considered his earlier view of the *Phenomenology* as an introduction 'an embarrassment' (Solomon, 1983, pp.3-5).[214]

The force of this concern – that the *Encyclopaedia* phenomenology of spirit might suggest the abandonment of the introductory role allocated to the *Phenomenology*

---

[212] See Harris' introduction to *G&W*, pp.3-4

[213] Fulda, in fact, seems to read *EL* §25 as an endorsement of the introductory role of the *Phenomenology* on Hegel's part (Fulda, 1975, p.18). To me Hegel's language seems more neutral.

[214] Solomon's view is that the *Phenomenology*, rather than being a mere introduction, is an adequate and distinctive work on its own. This might accord to some extent with Merleau-Ponty's claim that 'from a certain point of view, phenomenology is the whole truth.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1997, p.9). Such accounts of the text, while possessed of various merits of their own, are not especially helpful for investigating the justificatory role allocated to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* here.

– depends on the identification of the two "phenomenologies". And there are those willing to identify the two. Derrida, for instance, while acknowledging 'the complexity of the relations between the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*' (Derrida, 1982, p.120, n.11) seems reasonably happy to identify the 1807 text with the *Encyclopaedia* phenomenology, noting that 'the *Encyclopaedia...* inscribes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* between the "Anthropology" and the "Psychology"' (Derrida, 1982, p.120).

Yet the various iterations of this kind of view have been repeatedly challenged. Forster, for example, argues that not only are the two phenomenologies distinct, the *Encyclopaedia* phenomenology is 'required' according to the 'original self-conception' of the 1807 text (Forster, 1998, p.522). This is because, as Forster remarks, 'the *Phenomenology* indicated towards its end... that there would be a scientific re-treatment of its principal subject-matter, consciousness, within Hegelian Science's Philosophy of Spirit' (Forster, 1998, p.522). Forster cites §806-7 of the *Phenomenology* in support of this view, although it seems to me that the more relevant section is in fact §808 where Hegel notes that Science 'must then study spirit returning to itself... in the long procession of historical cultures and individuals.' Of course, this description covers more of the *Philosophy of Spirit* than just the sections on phenomenology.

Houlgate, too, is resistant to the idea of identifying the 1807 *Phenomenology* with the *Encylopaedia* phenomenology. 'The difference between the two phenomenologies is subtle, but significant', he says, having already made clear that while the 1807 *Phenomenology* or 'pure phenomenology... precedes speculative philosophy', the 'philosophical phenomenology' of the *Encyclopaedia* 'presupposes the science of logic and the philosophy of nature' (Houlgate, 2005, p.176) According to Houlgate, while the 1807 *Phenomenology* studies 'the *experience* that consciousness itself logically generates, its philosophical counterpart uncovers what is logically implicit for the speculative philosopher in the *ontological structure* of consciousness' (Houlgate, 2005, pp.176-177). Here Houlgate's reading appears to coincide with Forster's, and with the afore-mentioned remarks of Hegel himself at the end of the *Phenomenology*. I would therefore conclude that the existence of the *Encyclopaedia* phenomenology is no good reason to suppose that Hegel abandoned the introductory role (however understood) allocated to the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

2.2.3 "In §25 of the Berlin editions of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel suggests that some of the content of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* overlaps with the content of philosophical Science. This *could* be read as an admission on Hegel's part that he had come to see that the *Phenomenology* could not function as originally intended. This would be the case if its exposition required that it rely (however surreptitiously) on that material which it was intended to introduce (or even justify)."

In §25 of the later (Berlin) editions of the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel returns to the issue of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and Science, writing that the earlier text 'began with the first, simplest appearance of the spirit, namely *immediate consciousness*, and developed its dialectic up to the standpoint of philosophical Science, the necessity of which is shown by this progression' (*EL* §25, p.66/p.68). This certainly seems to conform to the picture, various versions of which were identified in the first part of this chapter, whereby the *Phenomenology* is (among other things) a project of justifying or demonstrating the necessity of the standpoint of Science – the position from which one begins to think philosophically, as detailed in the beginning of the *Logic*. But then things get a little more complicated: 'it was not possible to remain content with the formal aspect of mere consciousness' (*EL* §25, p.66/p.68), Hegel says. '...[T]he development of the *basic content*, of the objects of the distinctive parts of the philosophical science likewise falls within the development of consciousness, which at first seems to be restricted to a merely formal aspect... what belongs to the concrete parts falls to some extent already within the introduction' (*EL* §25, pp.66-67/p.69).

Hegel seems to be saying here that despite his original intention only to examine the forms of cognition constitutive of natural consciousness and eventually move to the standpoint of Science, in fact some of the content of what was to be examined systematically by Scientific thought already appears within the *Phenomenology*, perhaps especially in the chapters on spirit. The temptation here is to read this as an *admission* on Hegel's part that, since his supposedly introductory project of justifying Science spilled over into Scientific content already, it cannot in fact function as an introduction or justification according to the manner originally envisaged, because it must make use of material it was intended to justify, *in order* to carry out that justificatory work. This would then be an admission of a circular reasoning on Hegel's part. From that one might again conclude that Hegel must have changed his mind about the introductory role of the *Phenomenology*.

Forster, however, presents what seems to me to be a compelling account of this issue which undermines the idea that Hegel's comments in §25 constitute evidence for a shift in position. Forster's point is to remind us that the *Phenomenology* is not merely a project of discrediting the presuppositions of natural consciousness in favour of the standpoint of Science. It is at the same the narrative of natural consciousness' own *sublation*, so that it *becomes* Science over the course of the text.[215] And indeed, Hegel writes in "With What Must the Science Begin?" that the mediation of natural consciousness is 'also a sublating of itself' (*WL*, p.69/21: p.56). Accordingly, as Forster points out, the progression of the *Phenomenology* is both negative and positive.[216] It is negative in that the position(s) of natural consciousness give way or are negated according to their own inconsistencies, but positive in that this '*abolition*' (Forster, 1998, p.283) of natural consciousness is simultaneously its dialectical development into the standpoint of Science.[217] I think that Forster's point is that it is perhaps not a *problem* for Hegel that Scientific content is appearing as the *Phenomenology* progresses. Quite the opposite – it would be deeply strange, if not problematic itself if this were *not* to occur: the closer consciousness gets to the position of Science, the more Scientific the content of its position should be. This agrees, as Forster is aware, with Hegel's own comments concerning the *Phenomenology* as the 'coming-to-be of Science' (*PhG*, §27/p.24) in the preface to the *Phenomenology*.

I believe that Forster's account of the *Phenomenology* as the sublation of natural consciousness is accurate, and makes good sense of Hegel's remarks in §25 of the *Encyclopaedia*. However, there remains the not insignificant question, to be examined in the third part of this chapter, of how to square this picture of the *Phenomenology* as the development of ever more Scientific *content*, with the demand that the beginning of the *Logic* which it is to justify be at the same time *presuppositionless*.

2.2.4 "In §78 of the *Encyclopaedia*, already mentioned in **1.4**, Hegel appears to restate the problem of beginning *without* reliance on the *Phenomenology*."

I shall draw this section to a close with an example which it seems to me might in fact lead us to think that we might not be able to adequately answer the question of

---

[215] See Forster, 1998, Ch.7
[216] See Forster, 1998, pp.283-284
[217] This anticipates to some extent one of the criticisms of Maker's interpretation of the *Phenomenology* I make in **2.3.1**.

whether or not Hegel, in the years following the publication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, decided that it could not play the introductory role he originally intended it to. The simplest way to express this is to return to two passages examined in the course of getting to grips with Hegel's problem of beginning examined in **1.4**. There we saw Hegel writing in the *Logic* that 'Here the beginning is made with being which is represented as having come to be through a mediation, a mediation which is also a sublating of itself; and there is presupposed pure knowing as the outcome of finite knowing, of consciousness' (*WL*, pp.69-70/21: p.56). This suggests fairly unequivocally that the beginning of the *Logic* presupposes and is mediated by the work of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This seems to fit with the standard idea suggested in the first part of this chapter, in agreement with Forster, Stewart, Maker, Winfield and various others, that the *Phenomenology* was intended as an introduction in a justificatory sense to the system, and that 'With What Must the Science Begin' accordingly takes the *Logic* and the system as a whole to rely upon or presuppose the earlier work.

Yet as early as 1817 Hegel writes the following: '*Scepticism*, as a negative science applied to all forms of knowing, would present itself as an introduction in which the vacuousness of such presuppositions would be exposed... The demand for such a consummate scepticism is the same as the demand that Science ought to be preceded by *universal doubt*, i.e. by total *presuppositionlessness*. This demand is actually fulfilled in the resolve *to engage in pure thinking* and through the freedom that abstracts from everything and grasps its pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking.'[218]

As we saw in the previous chapter, this formulation of the task of beginning makes no mention of the *Phenomenology* at all. A project of 'consummate scepticism'[219] is identified, but the passage suggests that even this project is in fact surplus to requirement, and that the *Logic* requires nothing but the "resolve" to think in order to justify its beginning.[220] I will investigate the possibility of a consummate

---

[218] In the 1817 *Encyclopaedia* this is §36. In the 1827 and 1830 editions it is §78. The text remains almost completely unchanged.

[219] It occurs to me that one might in fact read this reference to 'consummate scepticism' as in fact indicating the "thoroughgoing" or "self-actualising" scepticism of the *Phenomenology*. I have not encountered this view in any of the literature, however, and I see no good reason for Hegel to be quite so indirect if it is in fact the *Phenomenology* that he has in mind here. If that were to be the case though, it might very well provide evidence for the idea that Hegel changed his mind about the introductory role of the *Phenomenology*.

[220] The underdetermination of this notion of "resolve" is seen as a 'shortcoming' of Hegel's account of beginning by Heidemann. (See Heidemann, 2011, pp.96-97)

scepticism in Chapter 3, but for now we can simply note that these two passages taken alone would seem to provide ammunition for thinking that at some point between 1812, when the first edition of "With What must the Science Begin?" was published, and 1817 Hegel has dropped the idea of the *Phenomenology* justifying or introducing the beginning of the *Logic*. Yet there is a problem for this interpretation, which is that despite repeating the 1817 formulation in the 1827 and 1830 editions of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel also explicitly reaffirms the role of "mediation" allocated to the *Phenomenology*, and the sense in which it is presupposed by the *Logic* in the 1831 second edition of the "With What Must the Science Begin?"[221]

We may never be able to satisfactorily resolve this riddle. Hegel seems to suggest in 1812 that the *Phenomenology* is *required* in order to begin logic, in 1817, 1827 and 1830 that we can begin the *Logic* without the *Phenomenology*, and in 1831 that the *Phenomenology* is *still* required. Forster argues that this problem is resolved by claiming that several (though not all) of the tasks central to the *Phenomenology* were '*relative to the historical context in which it was written*' (Forster, 1998, p.557). Thus, according to Forster, some of the more pedagogical tasks – for example, of encouraging readers still bound to the erroneous presuppositions of natural consciousness to think Scientifically – had diminished in urgency by the time Hegel came to be publishing the various versions of the *Encyclopaedia*, perhaps in part due to the *success* of Hegel's philosophy. Forster thinks that this explains 'Hegel's diminished enthusiasm for the *Phenomenology*' (Forster, 1998, p.557) in the *Encyclopaedia* presentations of his system. At the same time, though, Forster does not conceive of the epistemological task of 'providing a proof' (Forster, 1998, p.14) for or properly justifying the standpoint of Science as being historically relative in the same way. Thus the continuing relevance of this epistemological task, he thinks, explains Hegel's continuing enthusiasm for the *Phenomenology* in the second edition of "With What Must the Science Begin?"

Forster's claim about the historical relativity of certain tasks in the *Phenomenology* is an interesting one, although I do not intend to investigate it any further here. I do not see, however, that it really does much to explain the matter at hand. I think that one could quite happily accept Forster's claim that certain tasks are

---

[221] 'With What Must the Science Begin?' is re-written and reordered in the second edition, but the points concerning the *Phenomenology* remain unquestionably the same. Hegel's *Lectures on Logic* also seem to reaffirm the role of the *Phenomenology*, but while discussing §§87-88 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic* (See *VL*, p.93).

historically relative to the time of the *Phenomenology*'s composition while others are not, yet still be equally mystified as to why Hegel *seems* to discount the *Phenomenology* as a justificatory introduction in 1830, and affirm it in 1831. The missing step, in Forster's account, it seems to me, is to explain why the view that some tasks have been to some extent completed, while others are not historically relative in the same way, should manifest itself in such a stark division of expression across texts dealing with the same material. Rather than go along with Forster on this point then, I am inclined to suspend judgement here over the question of whether or not Hegel changed his mind about the justificatory role played by the *Phenomenology*.

Provisionally I will state the following, before moving on to examine philosophical reasons for thinking that the *Phenomenology* is not able to function as an introduction to the beginning of the *Logic* in the sense of 'epistemic justification' (Heidemann, 2008, p.19), as Heidemann refers to it: If we recall Forster's distinction between "pedagogical", "epistemological", and "metaphysical" introductory tasks in the *Phenomenology*, it does seem to me that an under-examined option in the literature on the historical question of whether or not Hegel revised his evaluation of the role of the *Phenomenology* is the possibility that he might in fact have abandoned the *Phenomenology* as *one* kind of introduction, but maintained it as another.[222] If, for example, we agree with Heidemann that §78 of the *Encyclopaedia* sounds very much as though Hegel has shifted his view of the beginning from that expressed in the first edition of "With What Must the Science Begin?" then we could, I suggest, come to think that Hegel has abandoned the epistemological introductory elements of the *Phenomenology*, but retained the pedagogical ones. Such a suggestion seems to me to at least *fit* with the evidence examined over the course of this interlude, as well as sitting more comfortably with a) Hegel's (unfulfilled) commitment to a second edition of the *Phenomenology* and b) the repeated commitment to the justificatory introductory role of the *Phenomenology* in the second edition of "With What Must the Science Begin?" *if* (and here a little interpretative license is required) the sense in which the *Logic* "presupposes" the work of the *Phenomenology* is taken to have shifted from something like Forster's epistemological *and* pedagogical sense to something like Houlgate's

---

[222] Forster's account of the "historical relativity" of the *Phenomenology* in Ch.19 of his (1998) might present itself as a variant of this kind of reading, though my suspicion is that he would not want to express it in quite this manner. Forster's claim is not that Hegel changed his mind about the *Phenomenology*'s suitability for various introductory tasks, but that he viewed those tasks as partially *accomplished* by it, and therefore diminishing in urgency.

purely pedagogical one. Further investigation of this possibility will have to be carried out elsewhere.

At the beginning of this interlude I indicated my belief that an account of the beginning of the *Logic* which does not require at least *something*, if not definitely the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to justify it or play the role of the element of mediation identified in Chapter 1, would fail to adequately resolve the problem of beginning. For now it is enough to note that if Hegel did shift in his appraisal of the *Phenomenology* in the way I have just briefly suggested he perhaps could have, it is, as far as I am concerned, a mistake on his part to have done so. At this point I propose to return to Maker's account of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* identified in **2.1**, and examine reasons for thinking that, despite its ingenuity, it still fails to make sense of how the *Phenomenology* can justify, or function as the element of mediation in, the beginning of the *Logic* according to the interpretation of the problem of beginning given in Chapter 1.

2.3.0 Some Reasons for Thinking that the *Phenomenology* Cannot Justify Hegel's Position at the Beginning of the *Logic*

Having engaged in as much detail as seems necessary here with the possibility that Hegel might have reappraised the justificatory role allotted to the *Phenomenology*, I now propose to return to Maker's radically *negative* account of that work in order to explain why I believe that, despite their ingenuity in making sense of the apparent contradictions in Hegel's account (the idea that the *Phenomenology* is the presupposition of a presuppositionless Science and the idea that the *Phenomenology* is the deduction of the concept of Science while at the same time the deduction of such a concept falls only under the purview of the Science itself), Maker, and Winfield, ultimately fail to render the idea that the *Phenomenology* can play the epistemological or justificatory role demanded by the form of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning as it is presented at the beginning of the *Logic* a convincing one. Since their radically negative interpretation seemed to be the best way to make sense of the idea that the *Phenomenology* could play the role of the element of mediation in Hegel's account of beginning in the *Logic*, I will conclude that the *Phenomenology* cannot successfully play the role that it seemed Hegel intended it to, and that therefore his first presentation of the solution to the problem of beginning fails.

I intend to provide a number of reasons for thinking that the *Phenomenology* cannot play such a role in relation to the *Logic*. In doing so, I am taking Hegel's insistence that the beginning of the *Logic* be presuppositionless, both in terms of content and in terms of the form of its inquiry, seriously, and supposing that what follows is incompatible with this demand for presuppositionlessness.[223] In brief, these reasons are as follows:

2.3.1 The presence of multiple projects, already-Scientific content, and *determinate* negation within the *Phenomenology* render it incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for logic.

2.3.2 The characterisation of and approach to natural consciousness in the *Phenomenology* constitutes a questionable presupposition, and this in turn renders the work incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for logic.

2.3.3 The project of the *Phenomenology* is one of securing what Hegel conceives of as the standpoint of Science – one that does not fall prey to the "problem of the criterion" in the way that he takes the position of natural consciousness to do so. This goal is incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for logic.

2.3.1. Multiple Projects, Already-Scientific Content, and Determinate Negation

In the first part of this chapter I mentioned that Forster, in his account of the *Phenomenology*, identifies eleven specific tasks to be accomplished in that work under three headings. Again, I do not propose to delve into the specifics of Forster's account here, but I think that he is right to identify (one might say "at least", to be safe) three different strands at work in the text. Forster labels the three kinds 'pedagogical', 'epistemological' and 'metaphysical' tasks.

Central to the *Phenomenology* is '[t]he task of leading the individual from his uneducated standpoint to knowledge' (*PhG* §28/p.24). It seems obviously right to identify a pedagogical element in the text. Famously, Hegel believes that the standpoint of Scientific thought is radically different to that of natural consciousness or everyday

---

[223] And indeed, Hegel famously wishes to collapse this form/content distinction regarding the work of logic. He writes, for example, that 'the method which I follow in this system of logic... is not something distinct from its object and content' (*WL*, p.54/21: p.38). On this basis, the idea that Hegel's *Logic* might be presuppositionless in terms of its initial content (the thought of pure being), but be able to legitimately presuppose something at the level of method, or of the form of the inquiry, becomes nonsensical.

belief. 'The standpoint of consciousness', he writes, '...is for Science the antithesis of its own viewpoint' (*PhG* §26/p.23). This might not be to suggest anything about what is required to justify or validate the Scientific position – Hegel's concern could be simply that, for one used to thinking in a commonsensical manner, the propositions of Science, however internally coherent and philosophically viable they may be in themselves, will appear problematically bewildering and alien. He expresses this difficulty in a colourful manner: 'When natural consciousness entrusts itself straightway to Science, it makes an attempt, induced by it knows not what, to walk on its head... the compulsion to assume this unwonted posture and to go about in it is a violence it is expected to do to itself, all unprepared and seemingly without necessity' (*PhG* §26/p.23). It is worth noting in passing that this passage does not seem to state that simply beginning with Science is *impossible*, but only that it would be very difficult.[224] What Hegel is calling for here is a project of the education and preparation of an individual used to the type of thinking characteristic of natural consciousness, so that they are better able to comprehend the Scientific philosophy he will begin to present in the *Logic*.

This pedagogical task, which involves taking natural consciousness' own (dogmatic) 'self-certainty' (*PhG* §26/p.23) – its surety of its own position – and seeing how this position itself is warped until its self-certainty becomes that of Science instead, might well involve some justificatory work, but this is not to say that it is the same project as setting out to *justify* the position of thought adopted at the beginning of the *Logic*. Houlgate, for example, does not distinguish this pedagogical kind of role in an absolute manner from questions of justification, and I think that he may be right not to do so: teaching somebody that *P* and justifying *P* to somebody might not always be the same thing, but there is often significant overlap. Houlgate maintains that the *Phenomenology* is not *necessary* to the beginning of the *Logic*, but is only required for those currently too wedded to the dogmatism of natural consciousness to engage in Scientific thought. This *contingent* pedagogical task, however, he refers to at times as

---

[224] A little later Hegel does use the word 'impossible' to describe the idea of taking a shortcut from natural consciousness to Science (*PhG* §29/p.25), but this is within the context of discussing the education of one tied to the dogma of natural consciousness. In fairness, it does not necessarily follow a) that Hegel thinks that *no-one* can bypass the pedagogical journey of the *Phenomenology* or b) even if a) were true, and the education provided by the *Phenomenology* were necessary for everyone, that this would mean that the epistemological role of the *Phenomenology* is possessed of the same necessity, so that the *Logic* is unjustified without it, rather than merely inaccessible. My reasons for thinking that that the *Logic would* be unjustified without something playing the epistemological role of the *Phenomenology* are, as I have said, tied to the problem of beginning presented at the beginning of the *Logic*, rather than Hegel's remarks in the preface to the *Phenomenology*.

one of 'justification' (Houlgate, 2006, pp.144-145). I propose therefore to reserve the term 'epistemological task' for the idea that the *Phenomenology* is *necessary* to justify the beginning of the *Logic*, as I have argued in **1.4** that Hegel's first presentation of the form of the solution to the problem of beginning suggests that it is, and as various commentators including Maker and Winfield think that it is, while allowing that there can still be a justificatory element subservient to the pedagogical tasks of the *Phenomenology*, but that such an element is has no bearing on the justificatory status of the beginning of the *Logic*.

Hegel *seems* to suggest a distinctive epistemological role for the *Phenomenology* when, in the introduction, he claims that it is not adequate simply to reject natural consciousness out of hand in favour of Scientific thought, writing that '*One* bare assurance is worth just as much as another' (*PhG* §76/p.55). It seems as though the standpoint of Science must be justified, and that of natural consciousness simultaneously rigorously refuted. Forster certainly seems to understand the *Phenomenology* as epistemologically necessary to the *Logic* on the basis of such remarks.[225] Yet there is room, I think, to interpret these remarks of Hegel's as concerned not with the necessary justification of the beginning of the *Logic*, but with the contingent, pedagogical project of justifying that position only to those who are not able or willing to attempt the admittedly difficult task of beginning Scientific thought outright. This is Houlgate's reading, and it can be extended to much of what Hegel has to say in the Preface and Introduction to the *Phenomenology* (See Houlgate, 2006, pp.144-148).

To insist that the *Phenomenology* has a necessary, epistemological role to play in relation to the *Logic*, then, I think that one will be better served by attending to those passages at the beginning of the *Logic* which appear to demand that the *Phenomenology* function as the presupposition of that work. I have already done this in my account of the first presentation of the solution to the problem of beginning in **1.4.1**. This leads to those difficulties in juggling the demand that the *Logic* be presuppositionless and the demand that it presuppose the *Phenomenology* which in turn led me, in the first part of

---

[225] See Forster, 1989, p.101, for example.

this chapter, to consider the radically negative interpretation endorsed by both Maker and Winfield as the best candidate for possibly resolving those tensions.[226]

Already it may be that the presence of both pedagogical as well as epistemological elements in the *Phenomenology* is enough to put pressure on the idea that this work can mesh successfully with the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic*. Let us suppose that the epistemological elements conform to Maker and Winfield's radically negative interpretation. It is not obvious that a pedagogical procedure of transforming the standpoint of natural consciousness into that of Science can be characterised in the same way. Hegel himself, as I mentioned earlier, refers to the 'task of leading the individual from his uneducated standpoint to knowledge' (*PhG* §28/p.24). The question is, can such a journey, which Hegel famously characterises as ascending a 'ladder' (*PhG* §26/p.23), really be understood in purely negative terms? The metaphor of the ladder might be taken to suggest that at each rung something is gained – some ever-clearer glimpse of the true, Scientific model of thought. But then it might equally be claimed that the ascent of the ladder represents the emergence from, or the climb out of the dogmatism of natural consciousness. This second suggestion is much more amenable to being interpreted in a negative fashion. Perhaps the education of natural consciousness consists in nothing other than encouraging it to divest itself of those dogmatic certainties which have prevented it from engaging in a properly presuppositionless way of thinking.[227]

To help us decide the matter, it might be helpful, very briefly, to consider a moment of development from the narrative of the *Phenomenology*, to see whether or not

---

[226] See Winfield (2011) for an attempt to justify the claim that the *Phenomenology* is necessary to the *Logic* in this sense. In this paper Winfield suggests and then rejects two candidates for taking a shortcut and beginning the *Logic* without the *Phenomenology*. I explain what I think is wrong with Winfield's approach in the final part of this section.

[227] There are a number of moments in the preface to the *Phenomenology* in which Hegel appears to discuss the progression of the *Phenomenology* as a negative one. Perhaps the most obvious candidate is this: 'the advance from this system [i.e. that of the experience of consciousness] to the Science of the *true* in its *true shape* seems to be merely negative' (*PhG* §38/p.30). The presence of the word "seems" should put us on our guard here though. It quickly becomes clear that the "negative" being identified in the advance of the *Phenomenology* does not permit us to claim on this basis that the *Phenomenology*'s advance is itself *purely* negative. We need only look forward to §59 in the preface and then to §79 in the introduction to find Hegel undermining the idea that the progression is "merely negative" by explicating his notion of *determinate negation* which yields 'a positive content as well.' (*PhG* §59/p.42). I will say more about this below.

it conforms to this purely negative pedagogical reading.[228] Consider the movement from the account of "Force and the Understanding" to "The Truth of Self-Consciousness". The principal lesson for consciousness is clear here, even if the specific movement which generates it is not: When previously consciousness understood itself to be engaged in knowing something distinct from itself – an immediate *this*, the many-propertied object of perception, the inner appearance of a supersensible "true world" – now it recognises that in truth the object of knowledge involves the subject itself.[229] This in itself it seems to me would count as a positive step – some new knowledge is gained.[230] And even if one were to translate this discovery into the negative language of purely the *loss* of the purely external object for knowledge, even this would be in part to misrepresent Hegel here, since the external figures of consciousness 'have at the same time no less been preserved' as 'moments of self-consciousness' (*PhG* §167/pp.103/104)

We could look a little further still, to the moment at which self-consciousness is driven to recognise that its knowledge of itself is a matter of recognition between inter-dependent self-consciousnesses.[231] This move, at which Hegel's account of self-consciousness becomes plural, or social, seems even more difficult to explain in purely negative terms. And indeed, Winfield's insistence on reading the *Phenomenology* simply as the *elimination* of dogmatic knowing does not appear at the forefront of his account of self-consciousness and its move towards mutual recognition. He writes, for example, that 'from its very experience of desire consciousness has discovered that it can only succeed in knowing its object as in truth being consciousness itself, if what consciousness confronts is something that negates itself as other and thereby is another consciousness.' (Winfield, 2011, p.92) This new "discovery" seems not to fit without some tension into a narrative which consists only in the elimination of dogmatic knowledge.

If it seems difficult to read Maker or Winfield's insistence on the radically negative significance of the journey of the *Phenomenology* into every element of it, why should that be a problem? Why can we not simply maintain that the epistemological elements of the work are to be understood only negatively while the pedagogical ones

---

[228] Of course, it does not matter if one can point to other moments where the pedagogical lesson can be couched in purely negative terms. All that is required is to point to one instance where it is not (though I think it is clear that there are many).
[229] See *PhG* §163-167/pp.100-104
[230] Hegel calls self-consciousness a 'new shape of knowing'. *PhG* §167/p.103
[231] See *PhG* §177-178/pp.108-109

(and indeed, the "metaphysical" ones) are not? There is not time to treat this adequately here, but I cannot believe that such a procedure would strike any serious reader of the *Phenomenology* as plausible. There may be, as Forster suggests, recognisably different tasks being worked upon in that text, but it does not follow from that that we can artificially separate the epistemological, pedagogical and metaphysical strands and lie them side by side, in the form of three distinct (and shorter) books. All of the various shapes of consciousness examined in the *Phenomenology,* as well as the dialectical manoeuvres from one to another, have their origin in the simple, immediate model of knowing found in "Sense-Certainty" (*PhG* §90-91/p.63), and have their consummation in the model of "Absolute Knowing" (*PhG* §804-805/pp.431-432). The narrative, therefore, despite its complexity, is surprisingly linear. If one wants to identify an epistemological point being made, for example, when Hegel says 'there has arisen for consciousness the idea of *Reason*, of certainty that, in its particular individuality it has being absolutely *in itself*, or is all reality' (*PhG* §230),[232] one must also remember that this follows relatively shortly after the account of the discovery of the inter-dependence of self-consciousnesses which I mentioned in terms of pedagogical development above.[233] Even if one wants to understand the achievement of "reason" negatively, it would seem that this achievement still relies upon, and in fact in some sense *contains* the more positive account of the development from consciousness, to self-consciousness, to inter-dependent self-consciousnesses which went before, so that the epistemological achievement is inextricably wrapped up with the pedagogical. Because of this, it does not seem likely to me that one can maintain a purely negative epistemological account in that work in isolation from more positive pedagogical (or metaphysical) elements.

This problem for the idea of a radically negative epistemological role for the *Phenomenology* – that its pure negativity might be contaminated somehow by the other elements at work in the text – would require fleshing out rather more before it was enough to convince us to abandon Maker and Forster's interpretation altogether. Instead though, I propose to move on to the presence of properly Scientific elements in the *Phenomenology*, as I believe that it is clear that these are not compatible with the

---

[232] The epistemological point presumably is that, on the basis of this new position, which Hegel will characterise in §232 as 'idealism', consciousness for the first time has a kind of *certainty* about reality, with which it now identifies, though of course things soon become more complicated again.

[233] The characterisations of "reason" and of "self-consciousness" I give here are no doubt inadequate, and the emphasis first on epistemology and then on pedagogy is certainly artificial. I am quite willing to allow that both elements are at work at both moments, but this supports my point.

radically negative account and its relationship with the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic* being considered here.

We should keep in mind the passage from the *Encyclopaedia Logic* in which Hegel says that '...the development of the *basic content*, of the objects of the distinctive parts of the philosophical science likewise falls within the development of consciousness, which at first seems to be restricted to a merely formal aspect... what belongs to the concrete parts [of Science proper] falls to some extent already within the introduction' (*EL* §25, pp.66-67/p.69). This claim was examined in **2.2.3**. There it was rejected as a reason for concluding that Hegel had changed his mind about the role of the *Phenomenology*. Here, however, I am suggesting something else – that this admission cannot be squared with the demand that the *Logic* have a presuppositionless beginning.[234]

Considering this claim, it certainly seems that Hegel is right here. By the end of the *Phenomenology* Hegel has elaborated a number of reasonably substantive philosophical claims about Spirit,[235] touching on morality, culture, religion,[236] and perhaps most importantly of all, he has made the not insignificant claim that, in "absolute knowing", natural consciousness has finally given way to a form of knowing which fulfils the promise Hegel made in the preface (but only on the basis of the work being prefaced) – that of 'grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*' (*PhG* §17/p.18).[237] This is a metaphysical statement of idealism – of the identity of thought and being (however understood).

---

[234] Also relevant here is Hegel's remark in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* that 'the way to Science is itself already *Science*.' (*PhG* §88/p.61) which signifies two related things: 1) that the procedure is one of determinate negation, which is to say that it is partly *positive* (see *PhG* §87/p.61) and 2) that the elaboration of the development of the forms of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, to the phenomenologist at any rate, if not to any individual consciousness described there, is itself already a Scientific investigation (of the experience of consciousness). For the reasons I give in this section, I take this remark, on the basis of those two points, to render the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* to be a problematic one.

[235] Indeed, as Houlgate points out, a fully determinate notion of Spirit *is* the principal and substantive conclusion of the *Phenomenology*. (See Houlgate, 2006, pp.161-2) This does not mean that he does not also understand the *Phenomenology* to be in the business of undermining the presuppositions of natural consciousness (indeed, he compares it to Descartes' first *Meditation* for just that reason. See Houlgate, 2013, p.8), but it does mean that he does not understand this procedure according to Maker and Winfield's radically negative model.

[236] See, for example, Forster, 1998, pp.193-204 for an account of the "absolute identity" of God with humanity and nature in the *Phenomenology*. Or Pinkard, 2011, pp.102-105 for an account of the 'morality' section as a demonstration of Hegel's theory of conceptual content as fundamentally *social*.

[237] See also §803 for Hegel's expression of this fulfilment.

This material, which Hegel admits belongs to the "basic content of Science", is not all "metaphysical" in the way we usually use the term, but that is not the issue here.[238] The issue is rather the problematic presence of "Scientific" content before the beginning of Scientific inquiry. Or perhaps better, the issues are twofold: (i) That this content appears in the *Phenomenology* makes it extremely difficult to read that work as *just* the elimination of the presuppositions of natural consciousness as it seems that both Maker and Winfield want to,[239] and that (ii) consequently, if the position reached at the end of the *Phenomenology* is one which contains a great deal of Scientific content, not least a commitment to idealism, then any "beginning" which follows from and relies upon the conclusion of that work clearly cannot be said to be "presuppositionless".[240]

The third point to make here in terms of criticism of Maker and Winfield's negative reading (and, by implication, the suitability of the *Phenomenology* for playing the role of the element of mediation in the beginning of the *Logic*) has already been hinted at a number of times. It is arguably the most straightforward point of this section: Hegel's account of the procedure of the *Phenomenology* as one of "determinate

---

[238] An obvious example of the presence of already-Scientific content in the *Phenomenology* is the role played by the concept of the "true infinite" in *PhG* §§160-165/pp.98-102 in motivating the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. This concept receives its proper elucidation only in the *Logic* (*WL* pp.143-150/12: pp.130-137). This concept *need* not be understood in explicitly metaphysical terms, even if it can be. What is problematic is its presence in what precedes its logical development, as this suggests a problematically circular way of proceeding on Hegel's part.

[239] And as I said earlier, if they are prepared to allow for the presence of other elements beside the purely negative epistemological work in the *Phenomenology*, then it seems to me that they will have their work cut out in explaining how the these other elements, which are surely inextricably bound up with the epistemological material which is their focus, do not contaminate the pure negativity so vital to their interpretation. It seems to me that they would have to make Hegel's comment that the development of Scientific content 'take place behind consciousness's back' (*EL* 25, p.67/p.69) do a great deal more heavy lifting than it appears able to. I think that it is reasonable to understand Hegel here to mean that the development of this Scientific content should not be recognised as such by the natural consciousness undergoing the developmental journey of the *Phenomenology*, but not that this content does not still play an integral part of that development, which it seems Maker and Winfield would need him to mean in order for this content not to clash with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning occurring on its basis.

[240] This point occurs to Houlgate, who writes, 'The project of the *Logic* is not to analyse what is involved in the determinate idea of being as "reason" (or "spirit"), even though absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology* culminates in this idea.' (Houlgate, 2006, p.162). He takes this point to directly contradict Maker's reading, adding, 'I believe that between the end of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* there must occur an act of abstraction in which we specifically set aside the determinate conception of being and spirit reached at the close of the *Phenomenology*' (Houlgate, 2006, p.162). See also Houlgate, 2005, p.101). Houlgate can believe this because he does not think that the beginning of the *Logic* requires anything to play the epistemological role of securing or justifying its beginning, a conclusion which my understanding of Hegel's problem of beginning will not allow me to accept. I think that Houlgate might point towards Hegel's remark about the sufficiency of 'the resolve *to engage in pure thinking* and through the freedom that abstracts from everything' (*EL* §78, p.125/p.118) as evidence for this idea of an act of abstraction which occurs between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, but as I have already indicated, I do not think that an *act* or a resolve is a good candidate for playing the role of mediation Hegel's formulation of the problem of beginning demands (in **1.4.2**, although I make it more sufficiently in **3.1**).

negation" is *explicitly* not one of pure negativity, or of only the elimination of the dogmatic presuppositions of natural consciousness. It is worth quoting Hegel at length here:

> '[T]he exposition of the untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely *negative* procedure.' Such a view of the procedure, Hegel says, 'is just the scepticism which only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results*. For it is only when it is taken as the result of that from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a *determinate* nothingness, one which has a *content*. The scepticism that ends up with the bare abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot get any further from there, but must wait to see whether something new comes along and what it is, in order to throw it too into the same empty abyss. But when, on the other hand, the result is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself.' (*PhG* §79/p.57)

It seems that Maker's interpretation of the procedure of the *Phenomenology* would reduce the negative procedure of the *Phenomenology* to what Hegel here calls "scepticism", and by that clearly he means something which would stall the progress of consciousness altogether. Instead it is clear that determinate negation is *not* purely negative; it is at the same time productive, in that it causes a new form of consciousness to appear, and to be explored in turn. Yet more than that, it also clearly carries the (determinately) negated content of the previous form with it in some sense. This is what was meant earlier when we saw Hegel claiming that the figures of consciousness of an external object were in some sense "preserved" in the move to self-consciousness.[241] This account of a dialectical progression is clearly not one in which the positions of natural consciousness are simply discarded or *eliminated* along the way.

---

[241] Both Maker and Winfield acknowledge the presence of determinate negation in the *Phenomenology* (Winfield, 2011, p.7; Maker, 1994, p.131), but neither seems to understand it to be in conflict with the idea of what Maker calls the 'radically negative outcome' (Maker, 1994, p.93) of that work. Indeed, Maker claims that his account agrees with Hegel's remarks concerning determinate negation at the beginning of the *Logic* (See Maker, 1994, p.79). To my mind it does the opposite: 'Because the result, the negation, is a *determinate* negation it has a *content*. It is a fresh concept but higher and richer than its predecessor; for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter, therefore contains it, but also something more, and is the unity of itself and its opposite.' (*WL*, p.54/21: p.38, (Miller renders *bestimmte* "specific" here)). The only way to make this fit with Maker's account which one might suggest, is to suppose the entire course of the *Phenomenology* to be one, giant instance of determinate negation, with absolute knowing as its negative outcome – a negative outcome which, considered in another light, shows itself to be positive just *as* the beginning of the *Logic*. Maker's comments suggest this (see Maker, 1994, p.92), but this ignores the fact that the process of determinate negation occurs over and over again throughout the *Phenomenology* – thus its conclusion already contains the positivity resulting from the negation of the various forms of consciousness examined throughout the text.

To clarify, the problem here is not necessarily the presence of a dialectical progression before the beginning of Science. This would be an issue if dialectical movement were *stipulated* to be constitutive of Science, since we know from Hegel's comments in the introduction to the *Logic* that the method of Science cannot be determined before its beginning. This is not the case here since the process of determinate negation is not stipulated in advance by Hegel. He finds that it simply *occurs* in the exposition of the shapes of natural consciousness, and remarks upon it in the introduction.[242] The problem here is instead that the nature of determinate negation is such that, by the time the *Phenomenology* concludes in absolute knowing, the form of consciousness or of spirit is not the radically empty one demanded by Maker and Winfield,[243] the journey having been one only of the elimination of all of the presuppositions of natural consciousness, but one in which *all* of the previous shapes of consciousness are preserved in absolute knowing and its account of spirit.[244,245]

At this point I have presented various reasons for thinking that Maker and Winfield's radically negative account of the *Phenomenology* is not one which makes sense of the text. Since in **2.1** I also suggested that their approach was the best candidate for making sense of the idea that the *Phenomenology* can play the role of the element of mediation required by Hegel's formulation of the solution to the problem of beginning,

---

[242] As such, the presence of determinate negation in the *Phenomenology* might not fall afoul of the concern in expressed in **1.5**; that the solution to the problem of beginning cannot require us simply to *presuppose* the validity of a model of thinking in which opposing determinations can be unified.

[243] '[A]bsolute knowing consists in a removal of representation and the confrontation with the given, whose only positive result is a pure self-knowing... which comprises the element of logic, where determinacy is the concept. As such, absolute knowing is otherwise indeterminate in the same way in which Hegel identifies logic and philosophy in general at the beginning of philosophical investigation' (Winfield, 2011, p.380). I am not satisfied that Winfield's account of the content of absolute knowing is plausible given that absolute knowing arises on the basis of a procedure of determinate negation. In addition, Winfield does not seem concerned that there might be a difficulty in moving from the explicitly *determinate* concept of spirit in absolute knowing to the explicitly *indeterminate* concept of being in the pure knowing of the *Logic*. He claims simply that the latter 'emerges' from the former (Winfield, 2011, p.381). Without a satisfactory account of this emergence, and how it undoes all of the determinate content of all of the moments passed over in the *Phenomenology* insofar as they are preserved in absolute knowing, I do not think that we can unproblematically connect Winfield's account of the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic*.

[244] '[T]his content [of absolute knowing] is nothing else than the very movement just spoken of; for the content is Spirit that traverses its own self and does so *for itself* as Spirit by the fact that it has the 'shape' of the concept in its objectivity' (*PhG* §799/p.428). Of this concept (of spirit) Hegel adds that, 'In the concept that knows itself as concept, the *moments* thus appear earlier than the *filled* whole whose coming-to-be is the movement of those moments.' (*PhG*, §801/p.429) If the moments mentioned here are the forms of consciousness examined across the *Phenomenology*, then the content of absolute knowing is "*filled*" with the content of the movement that has produced it. This I take to be incompatible with the empty "pure knowing" of the beginning of the *Logic*.

[245] I take it that this is the case regardless of whether one understands the *Phenomenology* to be a transcendental inquiry as, say Stewart does (See Stewart, 2000, pp.21-25), or more of an 'immanent approach' as Houlgate does. (See Houlgate, 2013, p.7)

I might at this point declare that the *Phenomenology* cannot perform this role. That will indeed be the conclusion of this chapter, but before reaching that point I would like to present two additional points which, while not tied so explicitly to Maker and Winfield's account of the *Phenomenology*, also seem to render that work incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for the *Logic*. My hope is that these might serve to convince those who remain wedded to an alternative understanding of the *Phenomenology* that it still cannot perform the role of justifying or securing the beginning of the *Logic*.

2.3.2 The Characterisation of Natural Consciousness

The characterisation of "natural consciousness" which Hegel gives at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, that of what he calls "sense-certainty", is a strangely minimalistic one. In this section I shall suggest that insisting upon this minimal account of natural consciousness as constituting the starting point of the phenomenological examination amounts to the imposition of Scientific standards or criteria upon natural consciousness in exactly the way that Hegel considers to be illegitimate.

It might seem as though, if there *is* a way in which the beginning of the *Logic* can be presuppositionless, and yet depend on something else, an element of mediation which renders it non-arbitrary, this "something else" must also be in some sense presuppositionless. Otherwise the beginning of the *Logic* would depend ultimately on a presupposition after all. The simple answer to this problem is to rely on the status of the *Phenomenology*'s inquiry as one of immanent critique. The Hegelian phenomenologist operates with no presuppositions, so the thought goes, because she merely sets out to examine natural consciousness *on its own grounds* – not according to any pre-existing criteria held by the phenomenologist. Staehler, for one, understands the approach of the *Phenomenology* to be motivated by the desire to overcome sceptical concerns, and to conform to the ideal of presuppositionlessness.[246] This certainly appears to be Hegel's conception of what he is doing in the *Phenomenology*. In the introduction to that work Hegel makes it clear that 'Consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself' (*PhG* §84/p.59). Were it otherwise, and we were evaluating natural consciousness on the basis of our own philosophical or Scientific criteria of validity, Hegel writes that the

---

[246] See Staehler, 2017, pp.23-4.

dogmatic position of natural consciousness to which he is opposed 'would not necessarily have to recognise the validity of such a standard' (*PhG* §83/p.59). Instead, Hegel suggests that 'not only is a contribution by us superfluous... since what consciousness examines is its own self, all that is left for us to do is simply to look on' (*PhG* §85/p.59). By relying only on the material and criteria provided by natural consciousness itself, has Hegel ensured that his phenomenological project is presuppositionless in the way that it needs to be?

While the point about immanent critique is undoubtedly an important one, I am not sure that it is enough to put to bed entirely the concern that the *Phenomenology* might itself be relying on certain presuppositions. The procedure, presumably, requires natural consciousness to be an actually existent way of conceiving of the world, regularly encountered and available for investigation by the phenomenologist. Were it not, Hegel would not need to spend time justifying his conception of Science in opposition to it. My intention is not to say that, by relying on the presuppositions of natural consciousness, the Hegelian phenomenologist is in some sense illegitimately presupposing them. At most it is a tentative entertaining of the position to see whether or not it is a consistent one. I am prepared to allow for now that this procedure might be characterised as presuppositionless.[247] More worrying, I think, is the *characterisation* of natural consciousness that we find in Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

There is an obvious parallel here with the phenomenological approach of Husserl.[248] Of course, one could easily overstate the similarities, at the cost of the accuracy of one's account of either project (or both), but it seems fair to say that in both cases the position of natural consciousness is identified as a dogmatic one, and that the critical approach to it aspires to the character of presuppositionlessness,[249] motivated by some kind of sceptical concern, in order to be considered rigorous or Scientific. Furthermore, in both cases one of, if not *the* central objects of criticism is the position, common to both of their characterisations of natural consciousness, which presumes

---

[247] It is in this sense that Merold Westphal, for example, describes the *Phenomenology* as a project of 'criticism without presuppositions' (Westphal, 1998, p.15).

[248] See Staehler's (2017), for a comparison of Husserl and Hegel in terms of their phenomenological contributions. Chapters 1 and 4, are particularly relevant here. The former details the engagement with scepticism shaping their respective methods, while the latter is occupied with their respective approaches to natural consciousness at its most basic level.

[249] Husserl is committed to some idea of a presuppositionless investigation as early as the writing of his *Logical Investigations.* See Husserl, 2001, pp.177-9 for his early account of a presuppositionless phenomenological inquiry.

that consciousness is fundamentally engaged in knowing an object fundamentally distinct from, or external to it.[250] Yet there are also significant differences between their two characterisations of natural consciousness. The one on which I would like to focus here is the comparative *richness* of the picture of natural consciousness to which they attend.

For Husserl, even if, early in *Ideas I*, his central concern with natural consciousness (or the "natural attitude") is its tendency to posit the world as distinct from consciousness, he is far from believing that this point exhausts the natural attitude to which he is attending.[251] In his 1910-11 lectures on *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Husserl begins by giving an account of the natural attitude which encompasses not just the division between the "I" and the world, but a sense of the "lived body", spatio-temporality, empathy and the other-relation, as well as an understanding of the basis of the natural sciences.[252] Husserl's procedure, then, is to give at least a fairly rich description of the natural attitude across a range of its important aspects, before executing his phenomenological pirouette and seeking to remedy the dogmatism he finds there. It seems that we might expect something similar from Hegel. We know that he understands natural consciousness to be opposed to Science and that he believes that the way to demonstrate the problems with the position is to compare it rigorously with itself. Yet Hegel's approach does not have much in common even with Husserl's briefest survey of the various distinctive elements of natural consciousness. Instead he begins with a radically minimalistic account of the position.

Hegel characterises his approach to natural consciousness at the beginning of the introduction to the *Phenomenology* in the following way:

> 'The knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply *is*. Our approach to the object must also be *immediate* or *receptive*; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself.' (*PhG* §90/p.63)

---

[250] Compare, for example, *PhG* §84/p.59 with Husserl 1983, pp.56-7
[251] See Husserl, 1983, p.56 to find Husserl suggesting the possibility of 'continuing the pure description and raising it to the status of a systematically comprehensive characterisation, exhausting the breadths and depths of what can be found as data accepted in the natural attitude'.
[252] See Husserl, 2006, pp.1-12

This demand, to bring nothing *to* natural consciousness, but to attend to it and inhabit it and see if it is consistent, reiterates the motif of a project of immanent critique.[253] Yet there is material even in this short passage that seems not to be justified merely by the demand for such a project.

We know from the beginning of the *Logic* that Hegel believes that we, in the pursuit of a Scientific, certain system of thought, are compelled to begin with the immediacy of being.[254] The alternative, beginning with something mediated (for the most part, at any rate), means beginning with something presupposed or assumed, which opens the beginning to sceptical attack. Such a motivation, translated to the context of the *Phenomenology*, again explains why we should simply take up natural consciousness as we find it, and not mediate it by requiring that it conform to a pre-existing standard of truth. That much is clear. It is far less clear, however, why we should *also* make this same demand concerning immediacy of natural consciousness itself. Insofar as it is *not* Scientific thought, natural consciousness is under no obligation, as far as I can see, to begin with immediacy. Indeed, the fact the Hegel requires of it that it does so, and therefore begins the *Phenomenology* with the emaciated figure of sense-certainty, rather than with an account of natural consciousness according to something like the variety of everyday lived experience,[255] suggests that he is coming perilously close to contravening the rules of his own approach, and

---

[253] Russon characterises this approach thusly: 'To let experience show itself, then, the philosopher must approach experience simply with the question, "What is the immediate given form of experience?"' (Russon, 2011, p.48). Russon also characterises the method of the *Phenomenology* as a 'project of passivity' (Russon, 2011, p.48). This is correct in that it captures the demand that the phenomenologist not intercede in the account of natural consciousness or evaluate it according to a pre-existing standard, but one should also bear in mind that the project is simultaneously an active one, as great exertion may be required on behalf of the phenomenologist to attend to every detail of each shape of consciousness as it presents itself, and to rigorously follow its development. Russon's further account of the passivity involved in Hegel's immanent critique of natural consciousness does capture this active element as well, not least through his interesting comparison of the idea with that of the picture of religious devotion signified by the word "Islam" (Russon, 2011, p.63, n.4)

[254] '[T]hat which constitutes the beginning, the beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalysable, taken in its simple, unfulfilled immediacy, and therefore as *being*, as the completely empty being' (*WL*, p.75/21: p.62). We should remember, of course, that this remark about the unanalysable nature of being is made only after demonstrating that it occurs as the coincidence of the elements of immediacy and mediation.

[255] It might be objected that, across the *Phenomenology* taken as a whole, Hegel does indeed provide an extremely rich and varied account of natural consciousness. This is certainly true, but it does not explain why he chooses to *begin* merely with sense-certainty. This objection is doubly dubious because Hegel is not justified in presuming in advance that the richer picture of natural consciousness will emerge dialectically from sense-certainty, or that the various ways in which natural consciousness understands the world should be dialectically related to one another (this last point, in particular, certainly would not be among the contents of the beliefs attributable to the natural consciousness Hegel is examining by "simply looking on."

demanding that natural consciousness begin with immediacy because it is the *Scientific* thing to do.[256]

Even if the choice of sense-certainty as a starting point is not taken as evidence that Hegel is illegitimately making philosophical demands of the structure of natural consciousness in such a way that it betrays the ideal of immanent critique, we must still ask why Hegel begins in such a position. Stern, for example, simply writes that, 'It is clear that Hegel thinks that this is the most elementary and fundamental way we have of thinking about how the mind relates to the world, which is why he begins the *Phenomenology* here' (Stern, 2002, p.43). It is not unreasonable to want to begin with something elementary or fundamental, to be sure, but at the same time I think that it should be admitted that the picture of cognition which Hegel calls sense-certainty is fairly limited in its ability to characterise the everyday kinds of natural consciousness which might be opposed to something like Hegelian Science. It lacks even the idea that its object is a '*thing with many properties*' (*PhG* §112/p.71) – an attribute that only appears in Hegel's narrative after the move to "perception" – yet this idea is certainly to be found (albeit perhaps on dogmatic grounds) in fairly basic forms of actually existing consciousness.[257]

I am inclined to think that this means that Hegel's phenomenologist is not "simply looking on". They have interceded in order to reduce natural consciousness to what *they* take to be its most fundamental form (a claim which itself is in need of justification). In so doing, rather than providing an immanent critique of natural consciousness, I think Hegel is instead providing an immanent critique of an *abstraction*

---

[256] DeVries' (2008) gives an interesting interrogation of the starting point of sense-certainty. He understands it as a demonstration of the inadequacy of attempting to begin an account of knowledge by appealing to acquaintance with *individuals*, noting that that each "This" which sense-certainty takes itself to examine turns out in fact to be a universal. Perhaps because he understands Hegel's starting point to have been selected purely in order to be undermined, deVries does not expend any effort in criticising Hegel's starting point, but his interpretation suggests to me that he is attributing to Hegel the philosopher, rather than to natural consciousness, the decision to begin with sense-certainty. This supports the criticism I am making here.

[257] See also Staehler, 2017, p.81-83 – Although not in the explicitly critical tone I am using here, Staehler notes that the object of sense-certainty is 'no object in the genuine sense' and that 'sense certainty is rather a particular aspect of perception that is singled out.' Staehler suggests that the reason for this "singling out" is that Hegel is drawing attention to the fact that 'In order for me to know about something and to pass certain judgements, something has to be given to me.' If this is the case, then I believe that it supports my concern that Hegel is violating his own demand simply to "look on", and not play an active role in determining the character of what he calls "natural consciousness". As an aside, Staehler's more phenomenologically oriented reading of the sense-certainty chapter contrasts interestingly with that found in DeVries 2008, and in other pragmatist or neopragmatist appropriations of Hegel on the topic of the given.

he has made from natural consciousness. This abstraction – the simple model which maintains a cognising "I" on the one hand and a distinct object of cognition on the other, is his target because it is the antithesis of his Scientific model of cognition. If this means that he begins the *Phenomenology* with two competing models already in place, then its claim to presuppositionlessness is certainly in trouble (this point was made in **2.1**). Even if he has not, it seems to me that we do not currently have a good reason to think that we should not call the abstraction of sense-certainty not "natural consciousness", not even a dubious and methodologically problematic distillation of natural consciousness, but a kind of *presupposition*. Because of this, it seems difficult to agree that the project of the *Phenomenology*, which is now characterised as making a specific presupposition of its own, can successfully coincide with the presuppositionless immediacy present at the beginning of the *Logic*.

At this point I would like to move to my third and final reason for thinking that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* cannot play the role of the element of mediation in the beginning of the *Logic*. It is simply this – the resolution of the problem of the model of cognition, or the appropriate standpoint (this is also Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion as it occurs within the *Phenomenology*), is incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning if the former is to be resolved before the latter takes place. If one wants to resolve the problem of beginning in Hegel's fashion, one cannot rely on a substantive resolution of the problem of the criterion in order to do so.

2.3.3 Securing the Standpoint of Science

The *Phenomenology*, as we have already seen, is the '*education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science' (*PhG* §78/p.56). In doing so, according to Hegel in the *Logic*, the *Phenomenology* 'demonstrates the necessity, and so the truth, of the standpoint occupied by pure knowing' (*WL*, pp.68-69/21: pp.54-55). Arguably the primary task of the *Phenomenology*, then, as we saw already in **1.2.2**, is that of securing the standpoint of Science, or securing the Scientific model of cognition. This model, we have also seen, is the purely reflexive one whereby thought has itself for its object.[258] In the language of the chapter on "absolute knowing," the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* which must coincide with the pure knowing of the beginning of the *Logic* if Hegel is to solve the problem of beginning, Hegel describes this reflexive

---

[258] See also *EL* §17, p.45/p.17: '[H]ere *thinking* would have to be made the object of thinking.'

standpoint by saying that, 'Spirit attains to a knowledge of itself... as it is both in *essence and in actuality*, or *in and for itself*' (*PhG* §794/p.425).[259] This account of self-knowing spirit, presumably, is the fulfilment of the discussion of the standpoint of Science indicated in the preface to the *Phenomenology,* which was described as the antithesis of the standpoint which knows its objects in antithesis to itself, i.e. the standpoint of natural consciousness.[260] Finally, we have seen that the way *Phenomenology* gets from the standpoint of natural consciousness to the standpoint of Science is by way of immanent critique, by evaluating the experience of natural consciousness according to its own criteria.[261]

This immanent investigation of natural consciousness, both of its various claims and its criteria for evaluating claims, famously turns out to involve a discussion of the classical (agrippan) problem of the criterion. Moreover the resolution of that problem as it occurs for natural consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is at the heart of the immanent critique of natural consciousness by which Hegel arrives at and demonstrates the validity of the standpoint of Science. In this section I will examine the consequences of the way in which Hegel overcomes the problem of the criterion as it occurs for natural consciousness for the compatibility or incompatibility of the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* with the beginning of the *Logic*.

It is not my intention in this section to advance a new interpretation of Hegel's attempted solution to the problem of the criterion, nor to evaluate that solution as presented by others. Because of this, I will not be spending more time than is necessary in reconstructing Hegel's approach to this problem here. My principal goal is to argue that, insofar as that solution involves asserting the truth of a distinctive model of cognition, or cognitive standpoint, commitment to the truth of this assertion is incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for thought.

That Hegel is exploring the problem of the criterion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* and that he sets out his strategy for resolving the problem in the introduction to

---

[259] He also writes that 'this is absolute knowing; it is spirit that knows itself in the shape of spirit' (*PhG* §798/p.427).
[260] See *PhG* §26/p.23
[261] '[C]oncept and object, the criterion and what is to be tested, are present in consciousness itself' (*PhG* §85/p.59).

that work, is commonly accepted.[262] Little work is required to demonstrate this claim, but first we should clarify the nature of the problem. According to Chisholm's influential modern formulation, the problem of the criterion arises when we consider two separate questions:

> '(A) '*What* do we know? What is the extent of our knowledge?'
>
> (B) 'How are we to decide whether we know? What are the *criteria* of knowledge?'' (Chisholm, 1973, p.12)[263]

The problem, of course, is that answering (A) seems to require knowledge of (B) – we appeal to criteria of knowledge in distinguishing cases of knowledge from non-knowledge; while answering (B) seems to require knowledge of (A) – we appeal to particular instances of knowledge in order to validate a proposed criterion. It should be apparent that this quickly prompts the threat of arbitrarily asserting either a particular instance of knowledge or a particular criterion without justification, the threat of an infinite regress of first-order knowledge claims and criteria, or the threat of reasoning in a vicious circle – the familiar alternatives corresponding to instances of agrippan problems.[264] More specifically, as Cling points out, the problem is both an epistemological one and a meta-epistemological one. In the former case, it presents a problem for the possibility of first-order knowledge claims (that we perhaps cannot know certain propositions), and in the second case it presents a problem for knowledge about knowledge (that we perhaps cannot know certain propositions about knowledge). Cling, however, goes on to point out that,

> 'Since propositions about knowledge are a proper subset of propositions and since epistemic principles can be criteria for distinguishing true from false propositions about knowledge, this [meta-epistemological problem] is a special case of the general problem' (Cling, 2014, p.162).

---

[262] See, for example, Dancy's popular *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, where the discussion of the problem of the criterion is introduced by way of an appeal to Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

[263] Chisholm understands the problem as a question of priority between the answers to these two questions. This reading is quite common (See, for example, Van Cleve's (2011)), but it seems to suppose a particular approach to the resolution of the problem – a foundationalist one (in either of what Chisholm would call the "methodist" or "particularist" alternatives). It is worth noting that not every approach to this problem will insist that its resolution should be in terms of a question of priority between instances of first-order knowledge and knowledge of criteria in the way Chisholm supposes. I take it that someone proffering either a coherentist or infinitist solution to the problem of the criterion will not be committing to establishing the priority of one over the other in this way.

[264] Recall the appeal to both Cling's (2009) and Sankey's (2011) in **0.3** to argue that the options constitutive of agrippan problems occur in a number of distinct problems including the regress problem, the problem of the criterion, and the problem of beginning.

This will be important when I discuss Trisokkas' take on this matter at the end of this section.

That Hegel (and natural consciousness itself) is dealing with these two questions in the *Phenomenology* is made clear in the introduction to that work. He gives a reasonably explicit statement of the problem:

> '[A]n examination consists in applying an accepted standard, and in determining whether something is right or wrong on the basis of the resulting agreement or disagreement of the thing examined; thus the standard is accepted as the *essence* or as the *in-itself*... But here... neither Science nor anything else has yet justified itself as the essence or the in-itself; and without something of the sort it seems that no examination can take place.' (*PhG* §81/p.58)

This expression of the problem poses a difficulty for Hegel, because on this basis it is not obvious how he can go about examining natural consciousness. He cannot merely assert his Scientific standpoint as a criterion or standard against which to judge natural consciousness, but he cannot judge natural consciousness without a standard or criterion against which to measure.

This challenge, of course, motivates the adoption of the method of immanent critique. Hegel is saved from having to assert the priority of an answer either to Chisholm's A question or Chisholm's B question in the investigation of natural consciousness because natural consciousness itself provides both first-order knowledge claims *and* criteria against which to test them. Thus Hegel writes, 'But not only is a contribution by us superfluous, since concept and object, the criterion and what is to be tested, are present in consciousness itself' (*PhG* §85/p.59). The questions associated with the problem of the criterion – "*What* do we know?" and "How do we decide what we know?" now fall to natural consciousness itself. The problem is slightly different though: natural consciousness asserts its criteria and its knowledge claims dogmatically, but the question it faces is that of whether or not the two agree, or whether they are adequate to one another, rather than strictly a worry about priority. The job of the phenomenologist then is "simply to look on" as natural consciousness checks that this is the case. If it turns out not to be the case, this iteration of natural consciousness has been found wanting on its own terms, and Hegel can dispense with it without having illegitimately imposed a standard upon it from outside in order to do so.

The most detailed and sophisticated account of the manner in which natural consciousness tests itself in the face of the problem of the criterion is that offered by Westphal, originally in his 1988 essay, 'Hegel's Solution to the Dilemma[265] of the Criterion'.[266] I cannot provide such a detailed account here, but I will outline what seem to me to be the key points of Hegel's description of the way in which natural consciousness tests itself.

Hegel writes that,

'For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the true, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth.' (*PhG* §85/p.59)

This is merely to assert that natural consciousness is the source both of first-order knowledge claims *and* of criteria for evaluating those claims. He then goes on to say that,

'Upon this distinction… the examination rests. If the comparison shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object. But, in fact, in the alteration of the knowledge, the object itself alters for it too' (*PhG* §85/p.59)

Thus, natural consciousness examines instances of what it takes to be knowledge, and checks them against its criteria for what counts as knowledge. If it should prove that what turns out to be involved in knowing some object exceeds or differs from natural consciousness' dogmatically asserted criteria for knowledge, the latter must be revised, in order to be able to evaluate instances of the kind of knowledge now confronting it. So for example, the form of natural consciousness Hegel calls "sense-certainty" understands the objects that it knows to be 'a pure 'this', or the single item' (*PhG* §91/p.63). That is to say it knows only radically simple objects, without any qualities or

---

[265] Westphal's choice of the term "dilemma" is perhaps influenced by Chisholm's presentation of two alternatives to scepticism in this case – methodism and particularism. If we take these two to be instances of foundationalist responses (depending on whether the foundation is a criterion or a (set of) first order knowledge claim(s), then the possibility of coherentist or infinitist approaches to the problem of the criterion would mean that it is at least a "quadrilemma", and that is before we start distinguishing variants of these other approaches. I shall stick with "problem".

[266] Another interesting perspective, which takes Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion to be a kind of infinitism, is given by Aikin in his (2010). Aikin's approach is difficult to evaluate in this context. He seems rather quickly to identify the 1807 *Phenomenology* with the associate material in the *Encyclopaedia* presentations of the *Philosophy of Spirit*. This means that Aikin understands Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion to involve traversing all three parts of Hegel's systematic philosophy (infinitely). This is rather different to the approach taken here, which understands the 1807 *Phenomenology* to be an introduction, and understands Hegel to take himself to have established the cognitive standpoint of Science (and thus resolved the problem of the criterion) *before* and not on the basis of entering into the systematic philosophy proper.

determinateness. Accordingly, its conception or criteria of knowing amounts to the idea of 'an *immediate* pure connection' (*PhG* §91/p.63).

However, it soon turns out that knowledge claims judged to be good ones on the basis of this criterion in fact fail. Hegel's example is the claim 'Now is night' (*PhG* §95/p.64), which, if it *is* in fact night, seems to be something that can be asserted simply and immediately, and be true. If it is considered in the day time, however, this claim, despite being uttered in just the same simple, immediate manner, turns out to be false. Because of this, as Hegel suggests in the passage from §85 above, sense-certainty must revise its criteria of knowledge, in order to adequately categorise claims of the kind "now is night." The result is that knowing has now to be understood according to criteria that allow it to make sense of "universal," rather than merely singular, immediate knowledge-claims, to grasp that assertions of the kind "now is night" concerns an object – "now" – which refers to a plurality of instances, some of which are night, and some of which are not.[267]

But, as Hegel says, revising the criteria of knowledge has also led to a revised conception of *what objects are like*. Just as the criterion of knowing no longer concerns merely "immediate pure connection" but the grasping of an instance of a universal, the conception of objects sense-certainty is working with is no longer that of a simple "this", but a '*thing with many properties*' (*PhG* §112/p.71), as "now," for example can apply to all kinds of different times. But as sense-certainty no longer holds either to the conception it had of objects or to the conception it had of the criteria for knowing those objects, it is in fact no longer the form of natural consciousness – sense-certainty – that it was. It has given way to a new form of natural consciousness that Hegel calls "perception." At this point the testing of natural consciousness by natural consciousness begins all over again.

Another important point is made by way of Hegel's observation that when natural consciousness alters its account of knowing, "the object alters for it too." It suggests that the revision of one's conception of knowing will have consequences for one's commitments at the level of metaphysics. This makes sense: if one makes some claim about what is involved in knowing objects, one at least *implies* some claim about what

---

[267] Hegel says that this is a 'now which is an absolute plurality of nows' *PhG* §107/p.68

objects are like (that they are the sort of thing amenable to this kind of knowing).
Westphal phrases this contention of Hegel's in the following manner:

> 'Now any epistemic principle implies certain constraints on what the objects of
> knowledge could be. Therefore the adoption of an epistemic principle brings
> with it a concomitant ontological principle' (Westphal, 1988, p.176).

I shall return to this important point in arguing why it is that I do not think that
the project of securing the standpoint of Science which occurs within the
Phenomenology is compatible with the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic*
below.

The no doubt inadequate rendering of the testing of sense-certainty above
indicates that the narrative of the *Phenomenology* is one of continuing revision, not just
of first-order knowledge claims, but just as much of proposed criteria for knowledge,
and of models of cognition which set up these criteria.[268] The way in which the
mismatch between criteria and knowledge claims not only demonstrates the invalidity
of, or *negates* a particular iteration of the standpoint of natural consciousness, but also
revises it so that a new iteration is produced which retains the lessons of the previous
one, amounts to a demonstration of the notion of determinate negation, discussed above,
as it operates within the *Phenomenology*.[269]

The end result of the *Phenomenology*'s lengthy chain of determinate negations
of both knowledge-claims and criteria of knowledge is the attainment of a position in
which knowing and its object finally agree with one another, but this turns out to be the
position in which the division of the object 'for consciousness' and the positing of the
object as it is '*in itself*' (*PhG* §85/p.59) which prompted the questioning and revision
both of the accuracy of first-order knowledge claims and of the criteria by which they
are evaluated – the division characteristic of the standpoint of natural consciousness,
that is – has been overcome. This position, reached in "absolute knowing," is Hegel's
standpoint of Science, the validity of which, as the only remaining alternative, and as a

---

[268] This journey Hegel describes (from the perspective of natural consciousness) as 'the pathway of *doubt*,
or more precisely as the way of despair' (*PhG*, §78/p.56). The despair, for natural consciousness, is not
just at its frustrated efforts to justify various first order knowledge claims, but at the 'the loss of its own
self' (*PhG* §78/p.56), for the cognitive standpoint itself is revised – not just the first-order knowledge
claims.
[269] It seems clear that the manner in which concepts are revised in the *Logic* is also an instance of
determinate negation, but it cannot be one that relies upon the distinction between knowledge and the
criteria of knowledge to motivate it.

position in which the problem of the criterion cannot even arise, is now supposed to be secure.

This standpoint, as I mentioned in **0.4.1** and **1.2.2**, amounts to an expression of some kind of idealism – it is a standpoint which recognises the identity of knowing and what is known, or thought and being. In the introduction to the *Logic* Hegel writes that, 'as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the *object* from the *certainty of itself* is completely eliminated.' He goes on to add that, according to this Scientific standpoint, 'the absolute truth of being is the known concept and the concept as such is the absolute truth of being' (*WL*, p.49/21: p.33). This statement of idealism seems to follow from the establishment of the standpoint of Science, and it also chimes with the notion expressed above, that, in Westphal's words, "the adoption of an epistemic principle brings with it a concomitant ontological principle."

At this point we have a picture of the manner in which the *Phenomenology of Spirit* renders the beginning of the *Logic* non-arbitrary. It does so by securing the idealist cognitive standpoint on the basis of which logical enquiry operates. Insofar as this can be read as operating by dispensing with the cognitive standpoint(s) of natural consciousness, there may still be the possibility of interpreting Hegel's approach to the problem of the criterion in the *Phenomenology* in terms amenable to Maker's suggestion that the work has a "radically negative outcome." The question on which to focus now is this: Is the establishment of this cognitive standpoint something which can be legitimately presupposed without coming into conflict with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning, or not? This is different from the principal concern of **2.3.1.** There the concern was that the assertion of various first-order knowledge claims about Spirit established by the end of the *Phenomenology* a) ruled out the reading of absolute knowing as "radically negative" and b) rendered that end incompatible with the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic* because of the *content* of those first-order claims. Here the concern is whether or not the cognitive standpoint generated by the end of the *Phenomenology*, with which first-order claims about logic are to be considered, *itself* is incompatible with the beginning of the *Logic*.

It would be helpful for the purposes of answering this question to bring up a contrast that Houlgate makes use of in his discussion of the beginning of the *Logic* –

that between what he calls 'the presuppositions of presuppositionless thought' (Houlgate, 2006, p.54) and what he calls '*founding* presuppositions' (Houlgate, 2006, p.60). The former are those presuppositions or conditions which Houlgate thinks can be in place, perhaps in a sense even be necessary to the beginning of the *Logic*, without compromising its presuppositonless status. These include things like the desire on the part of the philosopher to enter into a properly presuppositionless logical enquiry, those contingent historical and social factors which make it possible to dedicate one's time to such a project, perhaps even the development of a philosophical tradition which prizes autonomy and anti-dogmatism in thinking. These are permitted, Houlgate thinks, because they do not 'determine in advance the course that... philosophy will take' (Houlgate, 2006, p.61). This is because, however necessary it is to the logical or Scientific project that there be willing and able philosophers to pursue it, for example, this itself should not affect the content or method of the enquiry. A founding presupposition, according to Houlgate, would be the kind of presupposition that does exactly this – which constrains the horizons of the inquiry in some manner (by stipulating in advance some logical, metaphysical, or methodological principle, for example), and therefore contradicts the inquiry's claim to be presuppositionless. The central question here, then, is whether Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion and establishment of the standpoint of Science is to be understood as a legitimate "presuppositon of presuppositionless thought" or whether it is an illegitimate "founding presupposition".

What follows is an argument designed to demonstrate that Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion – the isolation of the cognitive standpoint of Science in absolute knowing and the elimination of its various rivals, subsumed under the name of natural consciousness – is indeed incompatible with the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic,* and that it does indeed constitute what Houlgate would call a "founding presupposition" – one which problematically determines in advance the logical enquiry which is to follow.[270]

---

[270] It is thus also a further argument against Maker's idea that deduction of the concept of Science in the *Phenomenology* can be understood radically negatively. Maker is of the opinion that 'science, in beginning with the deduced concept as pure knowing begins neither in nor with a knowing or with any *structure* of knowing at all'. (Maker, 1994, p.73) Here I attempt to show that the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* leaves us very much with a structure of knowing, along with the metaphysical implications of such a structure, which are even more problematic from the perspective of the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic*.

1) The *Logic* is (in some sense) a presuppositionless project of both logic and metaphysics or ontology. (**Premise** – Hegel calls the project 'the science of logic which constitutes metaphysics proper' (*WL*, p.27/21: p.7). His various comments to this effect (for example *EL* §24, p.58/p.67): '*Logic* thus coincides with *metaphysics*'), coupled with the text itself, which lays out and describes the categories of being, nothing, becoming, existence, something, other, finitude, infinity, etc. should suffice to make this point, even if the exact nature of the metaphysical status of logic is left unclear here.[271])

2) Because it is intended to be presuppositionless, it can presuppose no logical *or* ontological principles, as such principles cannot be established before (or from without) the logical enquiry itself. (**From 1** - When he states that the 'general concepts and fundamental determinations' of logic cannot be presupposed, 'for these constitute part of its own content and have to be established within the science' (*WL*, p.43/21: p.27) we can be sure that Hegel is ruling out the possibility of pre-established ontological principles here just as much as he is ruling out the possibility of pre-established logical principles, since he thinks that they coincide.)

3) The *Phenomenology*'s establishment of the standpoint of Science involves establishing an epistemic principle. (**Premise** - By this I mean the principle embodied in "absolute knowing" – that genuine knowing is a reflexive activity of thought upon thought. Absolute knowing stipulates that true knowledge occurs only when knowledge becomes identical with its object, or, as Hegel says, when 'Spirit attains to a knowledge of itself' (*PhG* §794/p.425).)

4) Epistemic principles of this kind imply concomitant ontological principles (**Premise** – This was clarified above – an account of knowledge implies an account of the sort of thing that is there to be known).

5) *Therefore* the *Phenomenology*, to the extent that it resolves the problem of the criterion in absolute knowing, establishes an ontological principle. (**From 3 and 4** – Again, without stipulating exactly how this is to be understood here, this ontological principle is the assertion of the identity of thought and being, since *what* is to be known is thought itself. This suggests that the *Phenomenology*, in

---

[271] For the purposes of this argument, how one answers the vexed question of the exact meaning of these statements does not matter. What matters is simply that, however understood, the *Logic* is also a project of metaphysics.

constituting an argument for a particular cognitive standpoint, also constitutes an argument for a kind of idealism.)

6) *Therefore* the *Logic* cannot presuppose the cognitive standpoint of absolute knowing with which the *Phenomenology* concludes. (**From 2 and 5** − This is because, in also constituting an ontological principle − an assertion of a kind of idealism − the establishment of the cognitive standpoint of Science becomes a "founding presupposition". This is problematic firstly because all ontological principles are to be established within the science of logic if it is to be presuppositionless, and secondly because it constrains the horizons of the ontological inquiry of the *Logic* in advance, by stipulating that whatever else it should turn out to be over the course of the *Logic*, "what is" is fundamentally thought, or fundamentally conceptual in some sense.)

This argument amounts to my final reason for thinking that the *Phenomenology* cannot unproblematically be presupposed by the *Logic*, and thus is unsuited to play the role of the element of mediation in the latter's presuppositionless beginning. And yet this does seem to be exactly the difficulty that Hegel gets himself into, by claiming that 'it is a *presupposition*' of the *Logic* that 'the opposition in consciousness between a self-determined entity, a subject, and a second such entity, an object, is known to be overcome; being is known to be the pure concept in its own self, and the pure concept to be the true being' (*WL*, p.60/21: p.45). On the basis of claims of this kind, it seems that Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning as he presents it in the *Science of Logic*, with its reliance upon the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the element of mediation in the beginning, must fail.

Before concluding, I wish just briefly to mention a few points from Trisokkas' account of the *Phenomenology* in his (2012) as they might be thought to undermine the force of this argument.

Trisokkas is broadly in agreement concerning many of the key features which we have already examined − that the *Phenomenology* is a project of eliminating the cognitive standpoint of natural consciousness in favour of that of Science[272], that this project proceeds by interrogating each form of natural consciousness to see whether its knowledge-claims agree with their objects, and revising the relevant conceptions of both

---

[272] See Trisokkas, 2012, p.76

objects and knowledge when they do not,[273] that epistemic principles and claims stipulated by the forms of consciousness examined in the *Phenomenology* imply concomitant ontological principles and claims,[274] that the cognitive standpoint of Science involves asserting the identity of thought and being,[275] and that Hegel (at least at times) seems to think that the *Logic* requires that this cognitive standpoint has been justified over and against its competitors (natural consciousness).[276]

However, Trisokkas also seems to disagree with the account I have given in a number of places. Firstly, he argues that what he calls the "rich content" of absolute knowing – the various sublated knowledge-claims about spirit which it contains – were only held to be true on the basis of their demonstration according to the criteria set up by the various forms of natural consciousness. Trisokkas thinks that, from the cognitive standpoint of Science to which one is committed at the end of the *Phenomenology*, one is no longer entitled to assert the truth of the rich content.[277] I do not propose to investigate this claim here, but I note that, if Trisokkas is right, this is perhaps an argument against my criticism of Maker and Winfield and their "radically negative outcome" for the *Phenomenology*, but not against the idea that Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion – the establishment of the idealist cognitive standpoint of Science itself (rather than its rich content) – is incompatible with the beginning of the *Logic*.[278]

Secondly, Trisokkas claims that the *Phenomenology* does not in fact prove that the cognitive standpoint reached at the end of the *Phenomenology* is the correct, or Scientific one. Instead, he claims that all that has been proven is that it is 'the only *possible* scientific cognitive standpoint' (Trisokkas, 2012, p.91). I think that this amounts to saying that Hegel has not in fact solved the problem of the criterion, and that this will only be done once the various first-order claims made on the basis of this standpoint are proven to be true within the context of the *Logic*. Again, it may be that Trisokkas is right here, but it does not undermine the force of my argument – it is still

---

[273] See Trisokkas, 2012, p.78
[274] See Trisokkas, 2012, p.77
[275] See Trisokkas, 2012, p.75
[276] See Trisokkas, 2012, pp.71-2
[277] See Trisokkas, 2012, p.89
[278] Another way to make this point is to say that, using Chisholm's terminology, this would mean that, at the start of the *Logic*, Hegel is entitled to a methodist solution to the problem of the criterion. The point is that this is just as incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for thought as particularist solution.

the case that a particular standpoint has been isolated, that this standpoint implies an ontological principle, and that this principle is then being presupposed by an inquiry which is not meant to presuppose any such principles.

Thirdly, Trisokkas seems to be denying that asserting the validity of a cognitive standpoint or a criterion for knowledge is really itself a knowledge claim. He writes that,

> 'Thought [by which he means what Hegel will call the standpoint of Science] and consciousness are *cognitive standpoints*, general frameworks for the inquiry into truth, *not truth-claims*. When Hegel posits the identity of thought and being, he does not characterise an object or an aspect of *what there is*; rather he postulates the most general character of a certain framework for inquiry into the truth of what there is' (Trisokkas, 2012, p.76).

If Trisokkas is right here then I have a problem, for it seems to undermine the claim above about Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion amounting to what Houlgate would call a founding presupposition. If Trisokkas is right, nothing is being asserted as true (an ontological principle or otherwise) at the end of the *Phenomenology*. That would make it far easier to render it compatible with the beginning of the *Logic*.

But it seems to me that Trisokkas is not right here; assertions of the truth of a cognitive standpoint or a criterion of knowledge might not be first order knowledge claims, but they are knowledge claims nevertheless, merely, as Westphal puts it 'second-order knowledge claims about what knowledge is and how to distinguish it from error' (Westphal, 1988, p.174). Similarly, frameworks of inquiry, or criteria for knowledge, are a part of "what there is". The alternative, presumably, would be to claim that the cognitive standpoint of Science, in some sense, *is* not, but it is not clear what that would mean. We should recall Cling's comment cited earlier that "propositions about knowledge are a proper subset of propositions". Knowledge claims about knowledge (for instance, knowledge claims about the criteria of knowledge, or about cognitive standpoints) are a proper subset of knowledge claims. Trisokkas denies this, but he does not seem to me to have a good reason or argument in favour of doing so. Furthermore, it leads him to make the following, rather surprising claim:

> '[T]he identity of knowing and being can be immediately said to be true [on the basis of the argument of the *Phenomenology*]. Yet it is only a trivial truth, since it does not encompass the rich content of this element' (Trisokkas, 2012, p.93).

As I have said earlier, I am happy for now to suppose that Trisokkas is right that the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* does not entail the truth of the "rich content" of absolute knowing, but it still seems straightforwardly false to claim that the identity of thought (or knowing) and being is a *trivial* truth, or that it does not determine in advance logical and ontological conclusions which are to follow from it. For one thing, it would seem very clearly to place the following constraint on Hegel's metaphysics: that *being can have no extra-conceptual dimension*. I remain satisfied that this constitutes a "founding presupposition" and is incompatible with the idea that the *Logic* has a presuppositionless beginning.

2.4 Conclusion

To conclude, I have attempted in this chapter to interrogate the possibility that the investigation of natural consciousness in the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* might successfully play the role of the element of mediation Hegel relies upon to render the beginning of the *Logic* non-arbitrary without at the same time undermining its claim to being presuppositionless.[279] Ultimately, I have given a number of reasons for thinking that the *Phenomenology* cannot play this role. Those reasons again were the following:

1. The presence of multiple projects, already-Scientific content, and *determinate* negation within the *Phenomenology* render it incompatible with the idea of a presuppositonless beginning for logic.

2. The characterisation of and approach to natural consciousness in the *Phenomenology* constitutes a questionable presupposition, and this in turn renders the work incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for logic.

3. The project of the *Phenomenology* is one of securing what Hegel conceives of as the Scientific model of cognition – one that does not fall prey to the problem of the criterion in the way that he takes natural consciousness to. This goal is incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for *Logic*.

---

[279]I do not think that the arguments of this chapter concerning the *Phenomenology* and its relationship to the beginning of the *Logic* turn importantly on the kind of metaphysical position one ascribes to Hegel. The claim about the illegitimacy of establishing an ontological principle in advance of a presuppositionless logical-ontological inquiry should hold regardless of whether one understands Hegel's metaphysical position to be a very strong, rationalist account of the fundamental categories of being as Houlgate does (see Houlgate, 2006, pp.115-137), or a more Kantian metaphysics concerning the possibility of objects of experience as Pippin does (see Pippin, 1989, pp.6-11), or still some other interpretation.

As such, I conclude that this version of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning – which relies upon the *Phenomenology of Spirit* playing the role of the element of mediation in the beginning to render it non-arbitrary – must fail, since it cannot co-incide with the element of immediacy, or presuppositionlessness, but instead renders the *Logic* problematically dependent upon questionable presuppositions itself.

In the next chapter I return to the alternative formulation of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning outlined in **1.4.1**. According to this formulation, the role which, as we have seen here, the *Phenomenology* is unsuited to play, is instead played by a project of "consummate scepticism." As well as exploring how this might work, I shall also argue that this solution does not fall prey to the same objections levelled at the *Phenomenology* above. That is, a project of consummate scepticism need not be committed to other, non-epistemological projects at the same time, need not include already-Scientific content, does not proceed by way of determinate negation, is not guilty of positing a questionable conception of natural consciousness which would constitute a problematic presupposition, and does not commit one in advance to a particular standpoint which would be incompatible with the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic*.

Chapter 3: Mediation II – Consummate Scepticism

3.0 Introduction

In **1.4.1** I identified two formulations of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, differentiated according to what they identified as the element of mediation which was to co-incide with the element of immediacy, or the "empty thinking" of the beginning of the *Logic*. In Chapter 2 I examined the possibility that the investigation of natural consciousness which Hegel carries out in the *Phenomenology* might play the role of the element of mediation in Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning, focusing primarily on Maker's suggestion that this could be the case if the investigation of the *Phenomenology* were to be understood as "radically negative."

By the end of Chapter 2 I had set out a number of reasons for thinking that such an attempt to solve the problem of beginning by appeal to the mediation provided by the investigation of the *Phenomenology* must fail. My primary aim in this chapter is therefore to see whether the second formulation of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning can fare any better. In this second formulation the element of mediation which is to co-incide with the immediacy of empty thinking is identified as a "negative science" of "consummate scepticism." Because, as we saw in **1.4.2**, Hegel is in fact quick to dismiss the possibility of consummate scepticism, there is rather less material to work with in this chapter. For this reason the attempt to outline and assess the possibility of a project of consummate scepticism will draw on fewer Hegelian resources, although I shall try to render it as amenable to his project as I am able to. This means that the sketch of a solution to the problem of beginning which I outline in this chapter can be described as a "Hegelian solution," but not as "Hegel's solution," as its elaboration involves parting ways with him to some extent. Because of constraints regarding the length of this work, the account of consummate scepticism presented in this chapter can be little more than a sketch, but I hope that it is enough for us to make some evaluation of this possibilities afforded to a potential solution to the problem of beginning by this "negative science."

This chapter is structured as follows:

3.1 Hegel's Dismissal of the Possibility of a Negative Science of Consummate Scepticism: In which I reconsider Hegel's reasons for rejecting the possibility of a consummate scepticism, first mentioned in

1.4.1, and suggest that Hegel should not have been so quick to dismiss this possibility.

3.2 Pyrrhonian Scepticism: In which I suggest that the resources for developing a consummate scepticism which can function as the element of mediation in a Hegelian solution to the problem of beginning might be found in Pyrrhonian scepticism, if we consider such a scepticism to be a "rustic", or radical, rather than "urbane" scepticism, and a "zetetic" rather than "Academic" scepticism.

3.3 Scepticism and the Regress Problem: In which I suggest that the regress problem might push us towards a consummate scepticism if anti-sceptical responses to the problem fail.

3.4 The Solution to the Problem of Beginning: In which I suggest that the sketch of consummate scepticism provided in this chapter might allow us to solve the problem of beginning, and consider the possibilities for the establishment of Hegel's notion of "reason" which follow from this.

3.5 The Question of Idealism: In which I consider the consequences for Hegel's idealism which follow from replacing the *Phenomenology* as an introduction to the system with a project of consummate scepticism. I ultimately argue that the solution to the problem of beginning endorsed in this work necessitates a suspension of judgement on the question of idealism at this point.

3.6 Conclusion: In which I draw this work to a close, and consider the further tasks and opportunities prompted by its conclusions.

3.1 Hegel's Dismissal of the Possibility of a Negative Science of Consummate Scepticism

It will be helpful to re-state here the second formulation of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning:

> [A]ll... presuppositions or prejudices must be surrendered at the entry to Science, whether they be taken from representation or from thought...

> *Scepticism*, as a negative science applied to all forms of knowing [*Erkennen*], would present itself as an introduction in which the vacuousness [*Nichtigkeit*] of such presuppositions would be exposed… The demand for such a consummate scepticism is the same as the demand that science ought to be preceded by *doubting everything*, i.e. by complete *presuppositionlessness*... This demand is

actually fulfilled in the resolve *to engage in pure thinking* and through the freedom that abstracts from everything and grasps its pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking.' (*EL* §78, p.125/pp.117-118)

There is no need here to re-state the account of the element of immediacy indicated in this passage as the idea of grasping "the simplicity of thinking," as, I hope, this has been satisfactorily accomplished in **1.4.1**. What is of interest here is the account of the element of mediation. Just as in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel exhibits a concern here that the various everyday forms of knowing or cognition (*Erkennen*) might be problematically dogmatic, resting as they do upon mere presuppositions or prejudices, the vacuousness, invalidity, or *nullity* (*Nichtigkeit*) of which can be demonstrated.

The possibility entertained here as the element of mediation which the beginning of the *Logic* might presuppose is the idea of a "negative science" which could be applied to the dogmatic content of knowledge claims in order to carry out the demonstration of the arbitrary or invalid status of the presuppositions upon which they rest. Furthermore, the possibility is entertained that this negative science might be unlimited in its scope, so that its conclusion amounts to a negative relation to *all* dogmatic forms of knowing, resulting in a state of presuppositionlessness. To this negative science is given the name "consummate", or "accomplished scepticism" [*vollbrachte Skeptizismus*]. The term itself suggests the idea that the scepticism in question is one which could be completed or finished.

Already there is the sense that with the idea of a consummate scepticism, or of a negative science, Hegel is suggesting something that sounds as though it might have a 'radically negative outcome' (Maker, 1994, p.93), and so constitute a presupposition which "eliminates" itself, perhaps in a manner better suited to co-inciding with the element of immediacy or presuppositionlessness at the beginning of the *Logic* than the outcome of the *Phenomenology* turned out to be; but before we can consider this possibility, we must look at Hegel's reasons for rejecting this possibility. As we saw in **1.4.1**, Hegel says of this idea of a consummate scepticism that,

> '[T]his path would be not only unpleasant, but also superfluous since the dialectical element is an essential moment of the affirmative Science... Moreover, scepticism would have to find the finite forms in a merely empirical and unScientific way and take them up as a given.' (*EL* §78, p.125/pp.117-118)

As I suggested in **1.4.1**, there are two objections on Hegel's part to the idea of a consummate scepticism here. The first is that there is something problematic about the idea of encountering the dogmatic presuppositions which are to be challenged in an "empirical and unScientific" way" and "taking them up as given." What Hegel objects to here is not the possibility of sceptically negating some presupposition as one happens to encounter it ("empirically" or otherwise) in its everyday, dogmatic usage. Indeed, he suggest that 'The high scepticism of antiquity' (*EL* §24 *Add 3*, p.63) does precisely this. Despite this acknowledgement, the concern about taking up dogmatic knowing as it is given does suggest a certain pessimism on Hegel's part concerning the likelihood that we can ever really be sure that we *have* accomplished the goal of this negative science.[280] The suggestion, presumably, is that we would be better served by approaching knowledge claims and the concepts that they utilise in a "Scientific" manner, so that we can be assured that our treatment of them is complete and rigorous.

There are presumably two candidates for carrying out a Scientific consideration of these finite forms of cognition. One is the examination of concepts in the *Logic* itself. As Hegel says, 'In the course of the logical development [on the following pages], each and every form of finite thought will come up and, indeed, as they step forward according to the necessity [of that development]' (*EL* §24, *Add 3*, p.63, square brackets added by Brinkmann and Dahlstrom). But we are not concerned yet with the virtues of Hegel's reconstruction of the various concepts of logic, but *only* with demonstrating the invalidity or arbitrariness of dogmatic presuppositions. It is presumably Hegel's claim that a proper, logical examination of the concepts in question *would* demonstrate the deficiencies of our usage of those concepts as they are given in everyday thought, but he can hardly be relying upon this claim in giving an account of the mediation which precedes the *Logic* without obvious circularity.

The other candidate is the examination of dogmatic knowledge claims in the *Phenomenology*, which, as we have seen, *is* intended to be of a Scientific character, but I have already argued in **2.3.2** that it is illegitimate for Hegel to insist that the examination of the dogmatic presuppositions of natural consciousness conform to the demands of his Scientific approach, at pains of rendering the work incompatible with

---

[280] Strangely, though, Hegel does suggest that the ancient sceptics demonstrate 'that all these forms contain a contradiction within themselves' (*EL* §24 *Add 3*, p.63), which *is* suggestive of the idea of a *consummate* scepticism.

the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic*. In fact, this seems to suggest that it is *necessary* to approach these dogmatic presuppositions in an "unScientific" way.[281] It seems then we must conclude that, however difficult it may be to ensure that a sceptical approach which takes up the presuppositions of dogmatic thought merely as they are given will be a *consummate* one, this is the approach which is the best candidate for playing the role of the element of mediation in solving the problem of beginning.

The second objection from Hegel is that the project of consummate scepticism is "superfluous", and that it is so "since the dialectical element is an essential moment of the affirmative Science." This sounds puzzling, indeed, potentially more puzzling that his suggestion, examined in the previous chapter, that the *Logic* must be presuppositionless and at the same time presuppose the work of the *Phenomenology*. It is puzzling because here, straight away after insisting again that, 'The *opposition* between a self-standing immediacy of content or knowing and a mediation that is equally self-standing but incompatible with the former must be set aside' (*EL* §78, p.125/p.117), Hegel suddenly seems to want to do away with the element of mediation. Indeed, he seems to be suggesting, in a manner quite unlike that of "With What Must the Science Begin?", where the immediacy of pure knowing was explicitly described as the outcome of a process of mediation, that it is sufficient for the beginning of the *Logic* simply to begin with our resolve, or our decision to engage in pure or empty thinking.

Now, as I stated in **1.4.1**, and again in **2.2.0**, my analysis of the problem of beginning, given both in my own terms in **0.1-0.3**, and in Hegel's terms in **1.3**, seems to suggest that an adequate solution to the problem of beginning *cannot* rest simply in the affirmation of the element of immediacy, or of presuppositionlessness. To do so is to invite the charge of arbitrariness. Still, it does undeniably seem that Hegel is opening himself to this charge here. One commentator who has defended Hegel's idea of a

---

[281] Both Fulda (1975, p.25) and Staehler, (2017, pp.24-25), inquire into how it is that Hegel is able to describe scepticism as a "science," and as "unscientific" in *EL* §78. To me the natural way to read this passage is just that the first usage of the term "science" is the general one which refers to any legitimate area of study, while the second usage, where scepticism is described as "unscientific," refers specifically to the requirements Hegel makes of a science of logic in particular. For this reason I have rendered it "unScientific."

I noted in **1.4.1** that Fulda in his (1975) follows Hegel in his rejection of the suitability of a sceptical introduction to beginning of the *Logic*. This is because he agrees with Hegel that it is problematic that scepticism is "unScientific" and takes the forms of knowing merely as given (See Fulda, 1975, p.27), but thinks that this does not apply to the *Phenomenology*, the value of which he retains as an introduction, even though it looks, in *EL* §78, as though Hegel is doing away with the necessity of an introduction, or some mediation, at all. I have already given my reasons for rejecting the suitability of the *Phenomenology* for this role.

purely presuppositionless beginning at length is Houlgate, so I will look very briefly at his account of the beginning of the *Logic* understood in terms purely of immediacy or presuppositionlessness, to see if it is somehow possible for Hegel to avoid the charge of arbitrariness when he insists that a project of consummate scepticism is "superfluous."[282]

Houlgate writes,

'Hegel points out that there is a direct route into speculative logic. All one needs to do is freely suspend and abstract from all determinate presuppositions about thought and being and render explicit whatever is entailed by the indeterminate thought (of indeterminate being) that results from this act of abstraction.' (Houlgate, 2005, pp.49-50)

---

[282] There might be a danger of misrepresenting Houlgate's account here, since there clearly is a sense in which he thinks that certain presuppositions are required by Hegel's logical project, but which are compatible with the presuppositionless beginning of the *Logic*, as I mentioned in **2.3.3.** Perhaps, in that case, one might think, Houlgate too is committed to the idea that the beginning must be both mediated and immediate, but in such a way that these alternative presuppositions can play the necessary role of the element of mediation, thus making sense of Hegel's claims about the superfluity of a project of consummate scepticism? As it happens, I do not think that this is Houlgate's view, but I shall argue here that the presuppositions he has in mind could not play this role in any case.

Houlgate has in mind simply those elements which must be in place in order for a project like Hegel's to take place. He suggests that the *Logic* has various 'historical and hermeneutic presuppositions, but these do not predetermine the course or the outcome of speculative logic' (Houlgate, 2006, p.71). In particular he understands the drive towards presuppositionless thought in Hegel to be the outcome of modern philosophy's general self-critical trajectory. He suggests that the history of philosophy in Germany, particularly Kant's critical attitude towards the categories of metaphysics and Fichte's suggestion that the categories of thought be deduced from the nature of thought itself, prompts Hegel's attempt to construct a presuppositionless philosophy and is therefore "presupposed" by it, even though it plays no role in determining the character of, or what follows from, the presuppositionless beginning (See Houlgate, 2006, p.68). This is connected to another claim Houlgate makes: that 'Presuppositionless philosophy... presupposes precisely a readiness on the part of the reader [or the philosopher themselves] to suspend all his or her presuppositions about thought and being' (Houlgate, 2006, p.60). I think that Houlgate is right on both accounts here: a project of presuppositionless thought does require thinkers willing to engage in such a project, and historical conditions do play a part in bringing about such a situation.

Could such a 'historical necessity' (Houlgate, 2006, p.69) or indeed, the simple presence of a self-critically inclined philosopher, be enough to motivate a philosophical voiding of the presuppositions of natural consciousness, as a consummate scepticism is intended to do? Perhaps, but this is not enough to render the position such a project would result in non-arbitrary, which is crucial to solving the problem of beginning. Houlgate writes that 'presuppositionless philosophy is necessitated by the given *historical* interests of modernity' (Houlgate, 2006, p.69). But as philosophers considering how to begin we have no reason to suppose that given historical interests are anything other than contingent. The same can be said of the will on the part of a given philosopher to begin from total presuppositionlessness. If modern philosophy exhibits a general self-critical trajectory, this at most provides exculpation rather than justification for the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for thought. Nothing has been said which *demonstrates* that the self-critical philosopher is more justified in abandoning her presuppositions than the dogmatic thinker of natural consciousness is in clinging to hers. To be clear, this is not a problem for Houlgate, as in describing these "presuppositions" he is not attempting to characterise an element of mediation which renders the beginning non-arbitrary, but attempting to defend the presuppositionless status of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* from Hegel's critics.

It is presumably the last sentence from the passage from *EL* §78, quoted above, which Houlgate has in mind here, with its reference to the "resolve" to think purely. It looks as though this "act of abstraction" from all presuppositions is intended by Hegel to replace the need for a project of consummate scepticism like the one I have insisted upon, and that this need not vitiate the beginning of the *Logic*.[283] Elsewhere, Houlgate understands the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* in Cartesian terms, which one might think suggests that the demonstration of the necessity of the beginning of the *Logic* is still occurring:

> 'Now consider what is the least that can be said about thought – the least we can *think* about thought – to begin with… The least that thought can think about itself is simply that it *is*. The outcome of Hegel's turning of Cartesian doubt against thought itself is thus not the conviction that I am, but merely the ineradicable thought that thought is.' (Houlgate, 2005, pp.31-32)

An act of abstraction on the part of the philosopher, understood in this way, seems to me still to remain arbitrary. The fact that one has *decided* to think the least that can be thought about thought does not render that thought non-arbitrary. Instead of an appeal to an act, it in fact seems that a better analogy with Descartes' procedure would be to emphasise that the cogito is reached only on the basis of the method of doubt. But then the importance of the act diminishes. What would render the beginning non-arbitrary is not the decision to embark upon a method of doubt, but the sceptical arguments of that method themselves. Indeed, if the arguments occur to us and gain some purchase on our thinking, then it may be that it is the resolve or the decision to think purely which becomes superfluous, since it is simply necessitated by the force of the sceptical arguments.[284] Houlgate, and perhaps Hegel here, seem to want to achieve

---

[283] One might then suggest that it is something about the *act* or the resolve itself which can function as the element of mediation in the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*. I think that the wording of the passage from the *Encyclopaedia* could suggest this interpretation. It does not seem likely, however, that an *act* or a resolve to act can render the content of a thought non-arbitrary. Among those who have entertained this possibility in the context of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* the consensus seems to be negative. McGilvary, for example, writes that, 'such a contingent resolve is itself a presupposition, and a very insecure presupposition upon which to found an absolute science' (McGilvary, 1897, p.512). Heidemann, entertaining the notion that this "resolve" of Hegel's might be intended to replace the justificatory role played by the *Phenomenology*, concludes that the theoretical status of the resolve to think purely or to abstract from presuppositions is not sufficiently clarified, and thus that it vitiates both Hegel's attempt to guarantee a presuppositionless beginning which is to operate without appeal to the *Phenomenology*, and his attempt to resolve sceptical doubts by incorporating scepticism as a moment into speculative thought. See Heidemann, 2011, pp. 92-97

[284] There are limits to the feasibility of comparing a project of consummate scepticism to the method of doubt, as Descartes does exhibit a distaste for the task of a long and tortuous sceptical examination of beliefs, writing that, 'it will not be necessary for me to show that all my opinions are false, which is something I could perhaps never manage' (Descartes, 1996, p.12). Instead Descartes effectively *decides*

the results of a sceptical investigation without the sceptical inquiry itself. This attitude is what I shall refer to in **3.2.2** as that of an "Academic" sceptic, as opposed to the zetetic attitude I will suggest is required by a project of consummate scepticism.

I think that we should agree with Houlgate that it is possible to engage in the kind of empty thinking characteristic of the element of immediacy at the beginning of the *Logic*, and thus that the beginning is presuppositionless, but if we want the investigation to be non-arbitrary, or if we want to solve the problem of beginning, then we must resist Hegel's claim about the superfluity of the element of mediation here, and insist that *something* must necessarily play this role.

As for Hegel's claim that the superfluity of a consummate scepticism is linked to the fact that there is a dialectical or negative element to his positive presentation of speculative reason, or that presuppositions are also evaluated and negated within logical science, these latter issues simply seems to me not to be relevant at this point. As I suggested in **1.5**, Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning cannot rest on the presupposition that his account of speculative reason is valid. This would be just as incompatible with the idea that the beginning be presuppositionless as any of the reasons which caused us to reject the suitability of the *Phenomenology* for playing the role of the element of mediation in the solution to the problem of beginning in Chapter 2. On this basis I would say that we should reject Hegel's second reason for dismissing the possibility of consummate scepticism.

There is arguably a third objection Hegel makes, concerning the prospects of a consummate scepticism, which is that carrying out such a project would be "unpleasant," presumably because the exhaustive nature of such a procedure, especially given that it would involve taking up dogmatic presuppositions merely as they are given, would be very long and tiresome. If, however, it plays a necessary role in providing a solution to the problem of beginning, it may be that this unpleasantness is simply a price that must be paid.[285]

---

to question what he takes to be fundamental principles, which does indeed bring him closer to Houlgate's Hegel.

[285] It may be, however, that this objection could be strengthened to one about the practical impossibility of such a project, similar to what Aikin calls 'ought-implies-can' arguments against infinitism (Aikin, 2011, p.51). I cannot explore this possibility here, but I see no reason to think that we must accept that "ought implies can," at least in epistemology.

At this point I have rejected Hegel's reasons for dismissing the possibility of a negative science of consummate scepticism. Of course, because he does dismiss it, there is rather less in the way of Hegelian resources to analyse in evaluating this possibility than there was in the case of the *Phenomenology*. The primary task of this chapter is now to try to provide a sketch of a consummate scepticism which would be as amenable to Hegel's project and to the form of his solution to the problem of beginning as possible, even if it means departing somewhat from the letter of Hegel's own text.

3.2.0 Pyrrhonian Scepticism

Given the examination of the importance, for Hegel, of the Pyrrhonian sceptical tradition provided in **1.2.0-1.2.2**, a natural place to look for resources in elaborating a theory of consummate scepticism is in the tradition of Pyrrhonian scepticism, and in contemporary work on problems inherited from this tradition. We could remember Hegel's suggestion concerning Sextus' account of the five modes, that, 'There are no better weapons against dogmatism' and that, 'Against dogmatism they must necessarily be victorious' (*VSP*, p.335/p.219). This suggests that Hegel is of the opinion that the arguments of the five modes, the distillation of which, as we saw in **1.2.2**, gives us the form of agrippan problems, is suited to the undermining of presuppositions, which is the very task to which a consummate scepticism must be applied.

It is also clear, in the "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy," that Hegel is thinking especially of the presupposition which claims that the type of thinking he described as that of the understanding (*Verstand*) is the only legitimate type of thinking. This, as we have seen, is the attitude which takes the concepts it uses for granted and holds them fixed, in immovable opposition to one another. In this vein Hegel makes it clear that he thinks that the arguments of the five modes should be directed towards 'the dogmatism of ordinary common sense;' and that 'all of them concern only the finite, and the understanding' (*VSP*, p.332/p.215).

There are actually two related claims being made about scepticism in "The Relationship of Scepticism to Philosophy", both of which were discussed in **1.2.2**. The first is that Hegel thinks that scepticism is only legitimately applied to ordinary or natural consciousness with its dogmatic attachment only to the understanding (as opposed to Hegel's idea outlined in *EL* §§79-82 of a thinking which makes use both of the understanding and of the dialectical or speculative capacities of reason (*Vernunft*)).

We can accept this, since a consummate scepticism is to be directed, just as the *Phenomenology* was, against natural consciousness, or our every dogmatic thought. And it is true that ordinary, dogmatic thought is not operating after the fashion of Hegelian speculative reason. It does not matter at this point whether or not Hegel is right that his concept of reason is immune to sceptical argumentation, firstly because consummate scepticism will not encounter the claims of reason in the course of undermining the dogmatic presuppositions of natural consciousness, and secondly because, as I suggested in **1.5**, Hegel cannot be relying upon the validity of his notion of reason to solve the problem of beginning.

The second claim is that scepticism itself is only operative at the level of the understanding. It is involved, as we saw in **1.2.2**, in the construction of oppositions among claims, but in the sense that causes us to withdraw from asserting either claim, and to suspend judgement,[286] rather than the sense in which dialectical reason explores the possibility that a concept might immanently negate itself,[287] which involves no retreat or suspension of judgement. It is in this sense that Hegel writes that, 'the authentic scepticism does not have a positive side, as philosophy does, but maintains a pure negativity in relation to knowledge' (*VSP*, p.330/p.213). It looked, in EL §78, as though Hegel might consider this to be a deficiency of scepticism in comparison with philosophical reasoning, but here it seems to count in favour of consummate scepticism being fit for purpose. We saw, in **2.3.1**, the difficulties which sprang from having a process of *determinate* negation as the element of mediation in the beginning, but if scepticism is operative only at the level of the understanding, then the negation involved is merely *abstract*, one might say, rather than determinate.

The problem with determinate negation, from the point of view of a potential solution to the problem of beginning, is that it cannot have what Maker called "a radically negative outcome." But perhaps the suspension of judgement which comes about by the Pyrrhonian sceptical abstract negation of presuppositions puts itself forward as just such a radically negative outcome. This is suggested by Franks' characterisation of Hegel's assessment of Pyrrhonian scepticism: 'What does Hegel

---

[286] Sextus describes scepticism as 'suspensive' or "ephectic," precisely to emphasise that the result of sceptical negation is a suspension of judgement (*PH* I.iii.7).
[287] See *EL* §81, pp.128-129/p.119

think is the *upshot* of Agrippan scepticism...? A rigorous answer would be: *nothing at all*' (Franks, 2008, p.72).

Franks' characterisation suggests the possibility indicated in *EL* §78: that a consummate scepticism would be one whose negative result – the suspension of judgement over presuppositions – would go so far as to become universal, so that we are left with no thought to commit to. As Sextus says, the sceptics 'come to hold no beliefs' (*PH* I.vi.12). The principal suggestion of this chapter is that this "negative science" is a good candidate for co-inciding with the immediacy of empty thinking at the beginning of the *Logic*. I shall now suggest, still in the context of Pyrrhonism, that a consummate scepticism capable of playing this role must have two features. It must be "rustic," rather than "urbane," and "zetetic," rather than "Academic."

3.2.1 A Rustic, not an Urbane Scepticism

This distinction is made by Barnes, who writes the following in a discussion of Sextus:

'[W]hat, if anything, may the Pyrrhonist of the *Outlines* believe?

Two rival answers to that question define two types of Scepticism. The first type I shall call, following Galen, *rustic Pyrrhonism*. The rustic Pyrrhonist has no beliefs whatsoever: he directs epoché towards every issue that may arise. The second type of Scepticism I shall call *urbane Pyrrhonism*. The urbane Pyrrhonist is happy to believe most of the things that ordinary people assent to in the ordinary course of events: he directs epoché towards a specific target – roughly speaking towards philosophical and scientific matters. (Barnes, 1998, pp.61-62)[288]

The debate about whether it is proper to interpret Sextus himself as a rustic or as an urbane sceptic is not my concern here.[289] What is important is to argue that the rustic or radical alternative is conceivable. A consummate scepticism must be one that results, as Sextus puts it, in a 'suspension of judgement about *everything*' (*PH* I.xiii.3, my emphasis). This must be understood in the same sense as Hegel's demand that *all*

---

[288] The term "epoché", which I have rendered in the Latin alphabet, is the term used by the sceptics to refer to the suspension of judgement, motivated by the equal weight of the opposing contentions being considered.

[289] The number of passages in which Sextus appears to give voice to one kind of scepticism or the other lends weight to the idea that he is merely presenting a collection of sceptical arguments and positions, without attempting to render them a consistent perspective.

presuppositions be given up at the beginning of philosophy, 'whether they be taken from representation or from thought' (*EL* §78, p.125/p.117).[290]

There might be two reasons why one might defend an urbane scepticism over a rustic one. The first would be that one believes philosophical and scientific beliefs to be of a fundamentally different kind to everyday beliefs, so that they can be held apart in such a way that arguments which have sceptical consequences for the former have no such consequences for the latter. But there is no good reason to think that this is the case. If sceptical arguments such as the regress problem mentioned in **0.3** are concerned with calling into question the evidence or the reasons we have for our beliefs, it seems clear that they can apply to everyday beliefs just as much as to scientific and philosophical ones.[291] It also seems likely that at times scientific and philosophical beliefs will have everyday beliefs as a part of their evidence,[292] but there is no reason to think that a determined sceptic should cease their questioning or negating of presuppositions merely because the belief they are now confronted with concerns everyday matters. It seems then that we should reject the idea of a hard and fast distinction between scientific or philosophical and everyday beliefs.

The second reason to hold only to an urbane scepticism is if one is motivated by fundamentally anti-sceptical goals to limit the reach of scepticism. In this case one is simply accepting a certain amount of dogmatism or arbitrariness about belief as the price that one must pay. This is Fogelin's "neo-Pyrrhonian" position. He suggests of the neo-Pyrrhonian that,

> 'When they hypothetically enter the philosophical perspective, they will be inclined to say that nothing is known... For the most part, however, they will occupy a normal perspective where sceptical scenarios... are simply ignored. They will then speak and act in common, sensible ways.' (Fogelin, 1994, p.99)

But the suggestion that perhaps we ought to be satisfied with not attempting to interrogate everyday beliefs runs counter to the entire anti-dogmatic thrust of this investigation as laid out (broadly in agreement with Hegel) in **0.4.1-0.4.2**. We should reject this possibility then, although we should note that it is motivated by Fogelin's

---

[290] This claim of Hegel's echoes Sextus' suggestion that the sceptic opposes 'what appears, or what is thought of' (*PH* I.xiii.31).

[291] Fogelin, although he defends an urbane scepticism, would accept this point, as he thinks that 'the epistemological enterprise, when relentlessly pursued, not only fails in its efforts, but also, Samson-like, brings down the entire edifice of knowledge around it' (Fogelin, 2004, p.164).

[292] The reverse may also be the case, so that examining everyday beliefs with a high degree of scrutiny might reveal that they rest on philosophical commitments, however unexamined.

belief that 'Pyrrhonian doubts, once raised, seem incapable of resolution' (Fogelin, 1994, p.203), a belief which very much supports the possibility of a consummate scepticism.

Perin argues that the Pyrrhonian sceptic might in fact have certain, non-dogmatic beliefs, just so long as they are beliefs 'about how things *appear* to one to be' (Perin, 2010, p.61). This seems like an extremely modest form of urbane scepticism. I think though, that Hegel's take on Pyrrhonism suggests a scepticism which is not even committed to maintaining beliefs about how things appear, and so which is truly "rustic."

If the admission of beliefs about how things appear relies upon a presupposed distinction between how things appear and how they *really* are, this certainly is questionable. As I have already suggested in **1.2.2**, Hegel takes one of the virtues of ancient scepticism to be precisely that it is not dogmatically committed to such a presupposition, and we should endorse that here. It might be that Hegel is too quick to presuppose that the opposite is the case, or that there is no strong distinction between appearance and reality, and to attribute this position to the sceptic when he says, 'When the sceptic said "The honey may be just as well bitter as sweet," there was then nothing placed behind the honey that was meant' (*VSP,* p.321/p.205). We, however, do not need to make a presupposition *against* the idea of a distinction between appearance and reality to detect here the possibility of a scepticism even concerning beliefs about how things appear. Hegel is suggesting that even beliefs about how things appear might be considered arbitrary and therefore candidates for a suspension of doubt.[293]

The concern might be expressed that, if this consummate scepticism is supposed to apply to *every* kind of belief or presupposition, then it might not in fact be possible to consistently adopt this attitude. I take it that this is to suppose that a consummate scepticism is an "Academic" (and therefore an inconsistent) scepticism. I shall now suggest that it should instead be considered as a process of zetetic inquiry, and that this resolves this concern.

---

[293] This possibility might fruitfully be connected to Hegel's rejection of the sufficiency, taken in isolation, of statements of the kind, "Now is Night", mentioned in **2.3.3**, but I cannot explore this possibility here.

3.2.2. A Zetetic, not an Academic Scepticism

At the beginning of the *Outlines* Sextus characterises three different approaches to philosophical investigation: The dogmatic, the "Academic"[294] and the sceptical or "zetetic."[295] (*PH* I.i.3). We are already familiar with dogmatism: this is the position of ordinary consciousness under scrutiny from the sceptic, holding to beliefs on the basis of presuppositions the sceptic attempts to negate or oppose, and thereby render arbitrary. The Academic is one who, in the face of sceptical concerns about dogmatic belief, asserts that knowledge is impossible. I think that this is supposed to be an obviously problematic position, firstly because it is a negative dogmatism – The "Academic" is committed to a claim that she cannot adequately justify, and therefore holds arbitrarily. Consummate scepticism, as I am characterising it, is not committed to this claim.

The second reason it is supposed to be problematic is that it is not just a dogmatic claim, but an inconsistent one if it amounts to saying "I know that knowledge is impossible." If this is the substance of sceptical criticism, then the dogmatist has little reason to listen. But there is no need for the sceptic, even the consummate sceptic for whom all dogmatic beliefs collapse into a state of presuppositionlessness, to be committed to this kind of claim. This is because Sextus indicates the possibility of a third approach: a zetetic one, where what is meant by this is an approach that has the character of an ongoing investigation rather than a blanket statement either for or against the possibility of knowledge. Rather than making a universal sceptical claim outright, as the Academic did, the zetetic sceptic constructs sceptical oppositions and induces or motivates a suspension of doubt concerning arbitrary beliefs or presuppositions one at a time, as they encounter them in their inquisitive, epistemological activity. As Sextus says, 'the Sceptics are still investigating' (*PH* I.i.3).

This suggests a possibility for consummate scepticism. It may be that all it needs to do in order, at least potentially, to arrive without inconsistency in a place of presuppositionlessness, is to be relentlessly committed to anti-dogmatism and to investigate beliefs, reasons and presuppositions thoroughly on that basis. If it should *turn out*, after a long and, as Hegel says, perhaps "unpleasant" journey, that we have

---

[294] In describing this position as "Academic", Sextus may not be being fair to various sceptical philosophers of the Academy who did not commit themselves to this extreme, negative dogmatism.
[295] Sextus describes scepticism as "zetetic" in *PH*.I.iii.7. Annas and Barnes render it as "investigative."

eventually exhausted all of the available dogmatic presuppositions, then we have arrived, *non-arbitrarily*, at a result which can co-incide with empty thinking and provide a solution to the problem of beginning.

The emphasis on the zetetic nature of this scepticism, even if it means taking up presuppositions "in a merely empirical and unscientific way," as Hegel says, further highlights why it is unsatisfactory for him to regard such a project as "superfluous" and to suggest that presuppositionlessness is achieved simply by the resolve to think purely, or to do away with all presuppositions. If this is because Hegel has presupposed in advance that all dogmatic presuppositions *must* give way before sceptical argument, then this takes him far too close towards a problematically "Academic" scepticism. And this kind of attitude is perhaps suggest by his claim, concerning the five modes, that, 'Against dogmatism they must necessarily be victorious' (*VSP*, p.335/p.219). In constructing a consummate scepticism we should avoid claims of this kind, and merely apply sceptical argumentation to dogmatic claims as we find them.

This also tells us how to approach the "sceptical principle," that, 'to every account an equal account is opposed' (*PH* I.vi.12). It cannot be dogmatically asserted *as* principle by the sceptic. At most the claim must be that this appears to be the case (so far), for every claim or presupposition made at the level of ordinary or dogmatic consciousness. But even then of course the thought seems quite counter-intuitive. Surely we encounter situations all the time in which there are two competing arguments for two competing positions, and while perhaps neither argument is absolutely conclusive, one is clearly *better* than the other, so that the accounts are not equal and a sceptical suspension of judgement does not seem necessary? To see what a consummate scepticism can say in response to this we must engage further with the substance of sceptical arguments.

At this point I have indicated the character that a consummate scepticism would need to have if it is to successfully play the role of the element of mediation in solving the problem of beginning. It must be rustic or radical, so that it applies to *all* dogmatic presuppositions, and it must be zetetic, so that it negates presuppositions one at a time, rather than declaring illegitimately in advance that they are vacuous or null. But I have said nothing about the arguments by which such a consummate scepticism is to carry out this process of negation, except to gesture with Hegel at Sextus' use of the five

modes. It is therefore necessary to say a little more about sceptical argumentation, in order to render the idea of a consummate scepticism a reasonable one.

3.3 Scepticism and the Regress Problem

I have identified the *task* of a consummate scepticism: that of constructing oppositions between dogmatic presuppositions, and taking this so far that a universal suspension of judgement occurs. I must therefore say something in favour of the possibility of the kind of argument appropriate to this task. As Sextus says, 'it will be apposite here to say how suspension of judgment comes about' (*PH* I.xiii.31).

It was clear from the discussion of the five modes of ancient scepticism in **1.2.2** that Hegel considered them to be the most powerful argumentative tools available to the sceptic. And the presentation of the five modes, or of the trilemma distilled from them, is clearly intended by Sextus to be the means by which dogmatic presuppositions or arbitrary commitments are exposed, and a suspension of judgment prompted. We could consider his presentation of the second mode as an example:

> 'In the mode deriving from the infinite regress, we say that what is brought forward as the source of conviction for the matter proposed itself needs another such source, which itself needs another and so on *ad infinitum*, so that we have no point from which to begin to establish anything, and suspension of judgement follows.' (*PH*. I.xv.166)

The attention here is clearly to the presuppositions upon which dogmatic claims rest, with an eye to undermining those presuppositions and thus demonstrating that the claim is arbitrary. The trilemma described in **1.2.2** is formed by coupling this mode to the fourth and fifth modes to suggest that an attempt to support some claim is unsatisfactory if the reasons or presuppositions tend towards an infinite regress, turn out to be circular, or terminate in an arbitrary hypothesis. This amounts to a general argumentative strategy that can be applied to any claim, to see whether it is genuinely supported or whether it is arbitrary. The trilemma, then, has a potentially universal scope.

We see now why it is potentially applicable even in those cases, mentioned in **3.2.2**, which do not look equipollent. The threat of this trilemma is just that it might be applied to potentially any claim and find that it is ultimately held arbitrarily. Thus, to a very determined sceptic, it might not matter if one side of an opposition appears to have *more* evidence supporting it, or elaborated by way of more sophisticated reasoning: if

the arguments eventually point towards a regress, become circular, or terminate in something for which no support is given, then both sides are held arbitrarily. In such a situation the appropriate course of action is to suspend judgement.

The arguments of the five modes also proceed by way of undermining reasons or presuppositions. For any claim, sceptical attention is directed towards the presuppositions on the basis of which that claim is made, and then towards the presuppositions on the basis of which those presuppositions are held, and so on. This indicates at least the possibility of a scepticism that might apply itself to any and every claim and proceed, by a process of undermining all of the presuppositions supporting those claims, to induce a suspension of judgement of universal scope. This suggests itself as a good candidate for the kind of argument which would be required by "a negative science applied to all forms of knowing in which the vacuousness or nullity of presuppositions would be exposed," to paraphrase from Hegel's second formulation of his solution to the problem of beginning.

This tendency to undermine reasons or presuppositions is indicated by the tendency in contemporary epistemology to refer to the trilemma distilled from the arguments of the five modes as the "regress problem," which I discussed briefly in **0.2-0.3**. I also reproduced Cling's expression of the regress problem, phrased as a problem for evidential support, in **0.3**, which may be a useful reference point for this section.

Consummate scepticism as a genuine possibility, then, turns on there being no good anti-sceptical response to the arguments of the five modes, or to the regress problem, at least from the perspective of the understanding, or natural consciousness. This indicates another important feature of consummate scepticism: if a consummate scepticism must be zetetic in its procedure, so too must we be zetetic in defending it. This means that, for as long as contemporary epistemologists continue to provide new theories of justification, the task of defending the possibility of a consummate scepticism must carried out again and again.

Of course, I cannot possibly hope to do more here than to suggest that the possibility of a consummate scepticism is a real one. An argument against all extant anti-sceptical positions would obviously fall beyond the boundaries of this project.[296] It

---

[296] But see Cling's (2008) for a strong rejection of many major non-sceptical responses to the regress problem.

does look, however, as though the sceptical possibility is alive and well in the context of contemporary epistemology. Fogelin, as we have seen, in his (1994), his (2003), and his (2004), defines 'the philosophical problem of justification as the attempt to take seriously and then avoid the consequences of Agrippa's Five Modes.' On that basis he concludes that 'recent philosophical writings on justification have made no significant progress... Things are now largely as Sextus Empiricus left them almost two thousand years ago' (Fogelin, 1994, p.11).

More recently still, Cling has suggested that there is no good solution to the regress problem, at least as long as we 'value reasons that are nonarbitrary from our own point of view or we value rational intellectual autonomy' (Cling, 2009, p.340). I think it is clear from the discussion of the approach taken in this work in **0.4.1-0.4.2** that in the approach to the idea of consummate scepticism here that I think that we should value both of these.

Since the project of criticising anti-sceptical responses to the regress problem falls beyond the scope of this work, I shall draw this section to a close by suggesting how that problem might be thought to induce a universal suspension of judgement. The thought is this: It seems at least *prima facie* plausible that, in applying the argument of the regress problem rigorously and suspending judgement over presuppositions as one goes along, eventually one will run out of presuppositions to which to appeal.[297] Sooner or later one will suspend judgement over the claims of the natural sciences, over the dictates of common sense, over the axioms of mathematical and logical languages, over the information provided by the senses, over moral or ethical principles and intuitions, over all of our assumptions even about what constitutes a belief, or a reason, or a proposition itself.[298] Sooner or later, one might think, such a zetetic project would take

---

[297] This might be disputed by a defender of a infinitist response to the regress problem such as Aikin who endorses the possibility of 'giving (or having) reasons on to infinity' (Aikin, 2011, 72). Addressing this concern falls under the zetetic task of disputing anti-sceptical responses to the regress problem, which I cannot carry out here.

[298] A concern that might be raised here is that the regress problem, in Cling's expression of it cited in **0.3**, is expressed as a problem for inferential or justificatory relations between propositions only. As I mentioned in **0.4.2**, Hegel, in his *Logic*, seems to be committed to the possibility of exploring inferential relations between concepts themselves, outside of the context of judgements. Furthermore, in the Doctrine of the Concept, Hegel deduces the form of the proposition, or the judgement, on the basis of an account which, up until that point, had been operative at the level of concepts only (see *WL*, pp.621-624/ 12: pp.51-54. See also Trisokkas, 2012, pp.220-221). I cannot explore this possibility here, but one sympathetic to Hegel's claims might therefore not object in principle to the idea that sceptical questioning could move in the opposite direction, from questioning judgements to questioning concepts. Even without

us somewhere where it would be very difficult to say or think anything *determinate* at all. This would be an aporia, a place[299] where the suspension of judgement has become universal.[300]

3.4 The Solution to the Problem of Beginning

In **2.4** I suggest three primary reasons for thinking that the narrative of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was unable to successfully play the role of the element of mediation demanded by the form of Hegel's solution to the problem of beginning. Those reasons were as follows:

1) The presence of multiple projects, already-Scientific content, and determinate negation within the *Phenomenology* render it incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for logic.

2) The characterisation of natural consciousness in the *Phenomenology* constitutes a questionable presupposition, and this in turn renders the work incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for logic.

3) The project of the *Phenomenology* is one of securing what Hegel conceives of as the Scientific model of cognition – one that does not fall prey to the problem of the criterion in the way that he takes natural consciousness to. This goal is incompatible with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for *Logic*.

It seems to me that the characterisation of consummate scepticism provided in this chapter does not fall prey to any of these criticisms. In the case of 1) there is no reason to suppose that a project of consummate scepticism as characterised here need also be involved, for example, in the propagation of pedagogical or metaphysical claims. It should also be clear that no philosophical or Scientific claims are being made. A consummate scepticism as exhibited in the argument of the regress problem is concerned merely with the interrogation and negation of dogmatic presuppositions.

This brings us to the last point mentioned in 1).As I indicated in **3.2.0**, scepticism, for Hegel, remains at the level of the type of thinking characteristic of the

---

the appeal to Hegel, it is at least not obvious that sceptical questioning, of the kind exhibited in the regress problem, could not be applied to our understanding of basic concepts.

[299] If it is a place, that is. Were one to make the analogy between the space of reasons and physical space then this point would presumably correspond to old hypotheses about the "Big Crunch," in which all of space (and all of its content) collapses into itself and implodes.

[300] Although he, with Hegel, rejects the possibility of a consummate scepticism, this situation is perhaps suggested by Fulda's characterisation of 'the self-destruction of scepticism' (Fulda, 1975, p.31).

understanding. This is to say that the negation involved in scepticism – the construction of oppositions among dogmatic presuppositions which prompts one to suspend judgement over or retreat from a dogmatic claim – is only an *abstract* negation. It has no positive result, after the fashion of the determinate negation operative in the *Phenomenology*. As such the result of a consummate scepticism can be *purely* negative. It need not conflict with the idea of a presuppositionless beginning for thought in the way that Hegel's phenomenological approach did.

In the case of 2) it should be clear that no presupposition is being made by the sceptic about the structure or character of natural consciousness or dogmatic thinking. This is a function of scepticism's practice of encountering dogmatic claims, as Hegel put it, "in a merely empirical and unScientific way." This is enough to motivate a suspension of judgement over those dogmatic claims, without any need to rely upon the presupposition of a particular characterisation of natural consciousness, or the suspect demand that we approach natural consciousness in a Scientific manner.

Finally, in the case of 3) it should be clear that consummate scepticism as I have characterised it here is not engaged in attempting to resolve the problem of the criterion, nor to establish a Scientific model of cognition. Hegel took the establishment of the Scientific model of cognition to be 'the liberation from the opposition of consciousness which the science of logic must be able to presuppose' (*WL*, p.51/21: p.35), but the problem was precisely that Hegel took this liberation to consist in establishing the opposite of the "opposition of consciousness." If instead one is prompted to suspend judgement over the matter, this is sufficient liberation to enable the empty consideration of thought by thought, without claiming to have established a Scientific model of cognition in a manner which conflicts with the idea of presuppositionlessness.

Something important becomes clear now. In **2.1** I stated the appeal of the manner in which Maker attempted to reconcile the project of the *Phenomenology* with the beginning of the *Logic*, which amounted to an attempt to render workable the first formulation of the solution to the problem of beginning. Maker suggested that the *Phenomenology* be read as the mediation or auto-elimination of the presuppositions of natural consciousness, in such a way that it necessitated the beginning of the *Logic* (so as to render it non-arbitrary), while not amounting to any kind of substantive presupposition itself (so as to enable the beginning to be presuppositionless). In light of

the reasons given above, I have argued that Hegelian phenomenology cannot successfully be thought to play the role Maker assigned to it. However, because consummate scepticism is not open to any of those charges, and because it genuinely can be thought to have exactly the kind of "radically negative outcome" which Maker attributed unsuccessfully to the *Phenomenology*, I now suggest that consummate scepticism *can* be thought to play the role of the element of mediation at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*, even if this is not a possibility that Hegel ultimately explored himself. The way that it would do this is to appropriate, though this time successfully, the model Maker applied to the *Phenomenology*. A properly rustic, properly zetetic, consummate scepticism could be characterised, in its prompting of a universal suspension of judgement, as the auto-elimination of all dogmatic presuppositions.

One might criticise this suggestion by emphasising the theoretical and conceptual resources required to motivate a consummate scepticism or the regress problem. The response to this line of thought, briefly, has two parts. The first is to reiterate the suggestion, first made in **0.1**, that the resources for motivating the regress problem or the problem of beginning – at the most minimal a tendency to recognise that there is something problematic about arbitrary claims – can be found in everyday thinking or natural consciousness itself. To that extent consummate scepticism, like phenomenology, can be considered a project of "immanent critique." The second is to endorse the idea, already being put forward implicitly at the end of **3.3**, that a consummate scepticism could ultimately be extended to the resources it makes use of, for example in advancing the arguments of the regress problem to negate dogmatic presuppositions. It is in this sense that Sextus suggests that sceptical arguments 'can be destroyed themselves, being cancelled along with what they are applied to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too' (*PH* I.xxviii.206).

At this point I believe that we have the shape of a potentially successful "Hegelian" solution to the problem of beginning, developed from the second formulation of the solution which Hegel himself rejected. The concept of pure being is to be conceived of as both mediated and immediate, non-arbitrary and presuppositionless. It is presuppositionless or immediate since it is thought thinking itself without any determinate content: It is pure, empty reflexivity. It is mediated or non-arbitrary in that

this empty thinking is guaranteed and necessitated by the sceptically induced collapse of all dogmatically held presuppositions.

The solution to the problem of beginning also has another important implication. I mentioned in **1.5** that the solution to the problem of beginning turned on rejecting the exclusive opposition of the elements of mediation and immediacy, which meant a move from the type of thinking Hegel characterises as that of the understanding (*Verstand*) to that of reason (*Vernunft*).[301] But of course, the solution to the problem of beginning could not function by appeal to a *presupposition* in favour of the legitimacy of Hegel's notion of reason. This means that the development into the type of thinking which Hegel will call reason must happen organically in the realisation that the element of mediation co-incides with that of immediacy.

Heidemann encounters this issue in trying to comprehend Hegel's claim that 'philosophy... contains the sceptical within itself as one of its moments, namely as the dialectical' (*EL* §81 *Add 2,* p.131). Hegel's suggestion is the negative, oppositional relation between concepts or claims, taken by the understanding, amounts to only to scepticism and abstract negation, while taken from the perspective of reason, amounts to the sublation of that opposition, or a determinate negation. The idea, clearly, is that sceptical thought, with its fixed oppositions, for example between mediation and immediacy, can become incorporated in dialectical or speculative reasoning, where the presumption of the irreducibly exclusive opposition, for example again between mediation and immediacy, is given up.

Heidemann is not convinced that Hegel can move from a position of scepticism (or the thinking merely of the understanding) to a position of dialectical or speculative reason. This is because he takes Hegel to have abandoned the idea of an introduction or presupposition to the beginning of the *Logic* in favour of 'the 'resolve to think purely'' (Heidemann, 2011, p.92). Heidemann writes,

> 'If this 'resolve' were to successfully offer immediate access to pure thought, which dialectic is a vital part of, Hegel would be in a position convincingly to justify his dialectical take on scepticism. However, the shortcoming is that he does not clarify the theoretical status of the 'resolve'.' (Heidemann, 2011, p.97)

---

[301] See Nuzzo, 2010, pp.12-17 for the suggestion that, in the context of the *Logic*, we should understand the understanding and reason not as faculties (which, after all, would imply presuppositions about subjectivity or consciousness), but as "formal moments" in a dynamic logical process.

I have already given my reasons for rejecting the idea that a "resolve" can successfully necessitate the beginning of the *Logic* in **3.1**, but it seems to me that in re-establishing the possibility of scepticism as the necessary presupposition to the *Logic*, the following suggestion might be made: in being prompted to a universal suspension of judgement, we find ourselves effectively without presuppositions. In *considering* this state, we might notice that the purely negative outcome of a consummate scepticism *is at the same time* the positive, pure thinking of thought by thought itself. In other words, at this point, without appealing to the legitimacy of speculative reason as a presupposition, the thinking of the understanding becomes aware of the possibility of reason, and the *abstract* negation of consummate scepticism becomes the *determinate* negation of the dialectic. One might say, in this case, that we begin to legitimise the idea of Hegelian speculative reason by pushing scepticism "through the looking glass" into dialectical reason.[302]

Before drawing this work to a close, I would like to briefly consider one of the implications this solution to the problem of beginning has for our reading of the *Logic*, specifically concerning the metaphysical status of the claims being made in that work.

3.5 The Question of Idealism

Thus far in this work I have attempted to avoid discussion of the metaphysical status of the claims of Hegel's *Logic*. Our focus has been on the epistemological problem of beginning only. It is clear, however, that Hegel does attribute some metaphysical status to the claims he makes in the *Logic*. As I noted in **2.3.3**, he refers to the project as 'the science of logic which constitutes metaphysics proper' (*WL*, p.27/21: p.7) and states that '*Logic*... coincides with *metaphysics*' (*EL* §24, p.58/p.67). It is uncontroversial that Hegel makes these claims. Where the debate occurs is in how to interpret them. As much as is possible I still wish to avoid wading into debates about Hegel's metaphysics here, since I cannot possibly do the issue justice in this work.

I do wish, however, almost by way of an appendix to the solution to the problem of beginning presented in this work, to briefly explore the consequences which follow from this solution for one particular metaphysical issue in the context of Hegel's

---

[302] In a sense, the mediation of consummate scepticism leaves us with nothing. Considered positively, though, this is pure knowing, or the consideration of the concept of pure being. One might suggest, then, this reverses Hegel's presentation of the concepts of pure being and pure nothing in the beginning of the *Logic*.

philosophy: the establishment of idealism. I mentioned in **0.4.1**, **1.2.2**, and **2.3.3** that Hegel's establishment of what he called the Scientific model of cognition, amounted to the assertion that, 'the absolute truth of being is the known concept and the concept as such is the absolute truth of being' (*WL*, p.49/21: p.33). This identification of thought and being is a statement of idealism. It is through this lens that some commentators have understood Hegel's comments about the metaphysical status of the *Logic*. If thought and being have been identified, then the elaboration of the fundamental structure of thought in the *Logic* might also be taken as the elaboration of the fundamental structure of reality. This is the interpretation Stern calls '*conceptual realism*' (Stern, 2008, p.76) and which Bowman glosses as 'to be is to be intelligible' (Bowman, 2013, p.28).[303] This account of idealism is obviously not of the kind which supposes the dependence of reality upon its apprehension by a subjective mind. It is realist in the sense that it implies that the world would remain just the same were all of the thinking entities to pop suddenly out of existence (except that those entities would be gone). Its idealism consists in the claim that reality is conceptually structured,[304] with, presumably, the epistemological implication that knowing about the world around us is a matter of ensuring that concepts in the mind and conceptually structured objects in the world match. This is obviously a problematically broad and sparsely detailed description of the conceptual realist interpretation of Hegel's idealism, but providing a detailed exploration of the notion falls beyond my intentions here.

There is also no opportunity here to adequately justify a preference for this kind of account of Hegel's metaphysics over its competitors, so for the purposes of this chapter I will take it that Hegel intends his idealist metaphysics to be read broadly as a conceptual realism in the fashion outlined above.[305] With this commitment clarified, I shall turn back to the question of the establishment of this idealist position.

There are three obvious candidates for establishing this idealist position in Hegel's work. The first is the possibility that idealism is established by the argument of

---

[303] Other defences of a conceptual realist reading of the metaphysical status of the *Logic* might include Houlgate (2006), Kreines (2015), Giladi (2016) and Knappik (2016). Listing them in this fashion may risk downplaying their differences, but the task of elaborating those differences falls beyond the scope of this enquiry.

[304] Houlgate expresses this thought by suggesting that, 'The categories analysed by Hegel are... both forms of thought *and* structures of being as such' (Houlgate, 2006, p.436).

[305] I am also saying nothing here about Hegel's claim that 'The proposition that the finite is ideal constitutes idealism' (*WL*, p.154/21: p.142). For discussions of this remark, see Houlgate, 2006, pp.428-432 and Stern, 2008, pp.57-66.

the *Phenomenology*, so that the *Logic* begins on the basis of idealism. This is exactly the possibility which we rejected in **2.3.3**. This means, of course, that this possibility may be exactly the one that Hegel intended, but that in criticising the suitability of the *Phenomenology* for the purposes of solving the problem of beginning, we have landed in a position where we must reject the possibility, regardless of Hegel's attitude.[306,307] The *Phenomenology*, concluding in the establishment of the Scientific model of cognition, may amount to an argument for idealism, but, consummate scepticism, concluding in a universal suspension of judgement, does not.

The second possibility for establishing idealism does not rest upon the work of the *Phenomenology*, but asserts that idealism is somehow immediately necessitated by the beginning of the *Logic* itself. On this reading, the category of pure being *is* indeed empty thought's most basic conception of itself, as I suggested in **1.4.1**, but it is also the most basic conception of *being in general*. Following the conceptual realist reading of Hegel's idealism, we would then say that, as the *Logic* progresses, thought's conception of itself and thus its account of the basic structure of reality becomes steadily more complex until it is resolved in the account of the 'absolute idea' (*WL*, pp.824-844/12: pp.236-253). Over the course of this development, the conception of the conceptual structure of thought is continually being revised and rendered more sophisticated, but one thing is never in doubt: that this conceptual structure applies just as much to reality itself as to thought.

But how is the identity of thought and being guaranteed, on this account? It cannot rest simply in the fact that Hegel has named the concept "pure being." This could just as well be taken to mean that we are talking about the pure being *of* simple thought, with no implications for reality in general. Houlgate has defended this second possibility for establishing idealism purely on the basis of the idea that the beginning of

---

[306] It is worth noting, however, that I have not argued against the possibility that there is a perfectly valid argument for idealism in the *Phenomenology* (there may well be), only that, if the beginning of the *Logic* is to be non-arbitrary, it cannot presuppose the arguments of the *Phenomenology*, and therefore that the conclusion of an argument from idealism in the earlier work cannot be relied upon when reading the *Logic*.

[307] Despite my focus on the conceptual realist interpretation of Hegel, this rejection of the possibility for establishing idealism on the basis of the *Phenomenology* may be just as problematic for someone like Pippin, who instead understands the categories of the *Logic* to be 'conditions for the possibility of experience' (Pippin, 1989, p.103) in a more-or-less Kantian sense, but coupled with the idea that the *Phenomenology* has demonstrated that no alternative categorical scheme is possible, thus rendering the threat of scepticism 'although logically coherent, epistemically idle' (Pippin, 1989, p.250). Thus, without the presupposition of the *Phenomenology*, this alternative approach to Hegel's idealism in the *Logic* will also run into trouble.

the *Logic* is presuppositionless. I shall now present a brief, critical interrogation of his account.

As we saw in **3.1**, Houlgate believes that it is sufficient for the *Logic* to begin purely immediately, without the presupposition of the *Phenomenology*. How then does he safeguard Hegel's insistence on the identity of thought and being? In his account of the thought with which Hegel begins the *Logic* Houlgate's answer becomes clear: The identity of thought and being is simply the least that one can think. This is to say that, in the absence of any presuppositions at all, thought, at the beginning of the *Logic*, has no choice but to suppose itself to be identical with being. He makes this claim very explicitly:

> '[I]n a fully self-critical, presuppositionless logic we cannot start out from anything more than the indeterminate being of thought, yet neither can we presuppose at the outset that being as such (or 'existence') is anything beyond the being of which thought is minimally aware... we have no warrant to assume that the being of which thought is aware is anything less than *being as such*... This may seem to some to be presumptuous. How can thought be certain that it is able to bridge the gap between itself and being and disclose the true nature of what there is? From the point of view of the self-critical philosopher, however, this question is illegitimate, for we are not entitled to suppose that there is such a gap in the first place. The fully self-critical philosopher may not assume that being is anything beyond what thought itself is aware of. Consequently he or she may not assume that thought is aware of anything less than being itself.' (Houlgate, 2005, pp.44-45)

This is Houlgate's reason for supposing idealism to be in place at the beginning of the *Logic*. The presupposition that being is other than thought is just that – a presupposition. A presuppositionless beginning for thought, in that case, will do without it. This means that the identity of thought and being is secured in the appropriately indeterminate and minimal sense. It seems to me that this is half-right. If we begin by supposing that "being" is also something in excess of thought, this would no doubt constitute a questionable presupposition. This is to agree with Houlgate. But exactly the same can be said of the presupposition that thought exhausts being – that they are identical. Houlgate's "fully self-critical philosopher" instead should be committed at the beginning to suspending judgement on the matter. This is the position that my proposed solution to the problem of beginning lends itself to. If we begin from a universal

suspension of judgement, this includes a suspension of judgement over the issue of the identity or non-identity of thought and being.[308]

Houlgate might counter here, I think, by doubling down on his claim above, that the fully-critical philosopher, at least at the beginning, may not assume that being is anything other than what thought is aware of. The response to my objection would then be that this minimalist idealism, which amounts simply to thinking recognising itself as *being*, actually presupposes less than my account, whereby thinking must suspend judgement over two possibilities, a) that thought exhausts being, and b) that being includes but exceeds the being of thought. It might seem as though more conceptual resources are presupposed in spelling out this suspension of judgement than in stating that minimal idealism. I would respond to this by saying that this depends on what is meant by thought's grasping of its being according to Houlgate. It cannot involve a commitment to a) and the repudiation of b), or it requires just as much in the way of conceptual resources as the suspension of judgement, in which case Houlgate's account of the beginning presupposes no less than mine. But if it is not a commitment to a) and the repudiation of b), if it is merely thought noticing that it itself *is*, then no commitment to either a) or b) has been made. Either could still turn out to be true. In effect this would be to agree with me and to begin with a suspension of judgement. But then idealism is not secured.

There is another, associated concern I have about Houlgate's approach. I mentioned in **2.3.3** that Houlgate argues that there can be certain "presuppositions of presuppositionless thought" which do not problematically determine the course of the thought that follows from them. This is in contrast to what Houlgate calls a 'founding presupposition' (Houlgate, 2006, p.62). This would be precisely the kind of presupposition which would inform or constrain the logical inquiry from the beginning, thereby infecting it with dogmatism. If the thought of pure being is understood simply as thought's own, empty reflexivity, quite without content, then it would not seem a candidate for being a "founding presupposition." If, on the other hand, we render it with Houlgate as 'thinking, therefore *is*' (Houlgate, 2006, p.32), as a statement of the identity of thought and being, then it becomes a substantive metaphysical commitment to

---

[308] This objection to Houlgate is also raised by Stern (Stern, 2008, pp.221-222, n.33), though he mentions it only in objecting to Houlgate's Cartesian reading of the beginning of the *Logic*. Stern instead defends a broadly pragmatist account of Hegel's enterprise which, I think, does not accord with the presentation I have given here of a "Scientific" commitment to maximal epistemic responsibility.

idealism. This obviously constrains the logical inquiry to follow in the following manner: no matter what happens, no matter what concepts we develop dialectically, being has been determined in advance as inescapably conceptual, through and through.

So it seems as though we should reject this second possibility for establishing idealism in the *Logic*. This leaves us with a third possibility: that the idealist status of the *Logic* might be necessitated by the development of the *Logic after* the beginning. This would be the case if, for example, the development of the *Logic* were in some sense to render the idea of an extra-conceptual element of reality nonsensical or incoherent. That is a possibility I cannot examine in any detail in this work, although I accept that it is a genuine one.[309]

Remaining open to this final possibility, however, means that the idealist status of the *Logic* is *not* secured from the beginning. In this case, it seems to me that the most epistemically responsible way to begin reading the *Logic* is *merely* as a logic – as an account of the necessary structures of thought, without any making any commitment either way as to the possibility that these might or might not be the necessary structures of reality, or the necessary conditions on the possibility of experiencing an object, or any other idealist formulation. This might mean occasionally reading against the grain of Hegel's text, if his remarks concerning the coincidence of logic and metaphysics are taken to mean that the idealist status of the *Logic* ought to be secured from the beginning, either on the basis of the *Phenomenology* or after the fashion of Houlgate's approach. Still, it seems that it might be worth this cost if it means avoiding committing the project to an arbitrary or dogmatic metaphysical endorsement.

A reading of the kind suggested here is perhaps indicated by Hartmann, who approaches the *Logic* as 'a pure categorical theory' taking place 'within the immanence of thought' (Hartmann, 1993, pp.252-253), or by Maker who claims that 'the logical categories or determinacies found in the *WL* are the categories or determinacies of pure thought or thinking alone... without the coming into play of the notion that they 'stand for' some alleged 'real objects'' (Maker, 1993, p.277). The vital difference of what I am

---

[309] In suggesting that there might be some degree of hope for the Hegelian idealist faced with this prospect, one might be tempted to make a very loose analogy with the work of Husserl, where we find an example of a beginning which styles itself as presuppositionless (See Husserl, 1983, §18, p.33), which begins explicitly from a suspension of judgement on the question of realism and idealism (See Husserl, 1983, §32, n.30), and yet which develops into an explicitly idealist metaphysics (see Husserl, 1960, §41, p.86).

suggesting from these non-metaphysical readings, however, is that it comes with no insistence that this is how we must *continue* to read the *Logic*. Instead I claim that we should remain completely open to the possibility that the argument of the *Logic* will render it necessary to adopt a strong metaphysical idealist interpretation of the text as a whole after all.

But perhaps we should still be deeply concerned, even by this apparently epistemically modest proposal for an approach to the *Logic*. This is because, if the status of the "being" that thought thinks in the beginning is left undetermined, might this not be to open the door again to certain sceptical concerns? If we are not sure, at least for the moment, whether we are dealing with being as such, or merely with the being of thought, beyond which might lie a fundamentally non-conceptually structured world, does this amount to robbing the claims being made in the *Logic*, at least for now, of their Scientific status? We saw in **0.4.1** that Hegel thinks that a science of logic should 'demonstrate the *necessity* of its content' (*EL* §1, p.28/p.39), but if I am suggesting that we must operate with a degree of uncertainty regarding the status of that content, it might looks as though we are falling short of that necessity.

One might go some way towards responding to this worry by insisting that we still have an unbroken line of thought from scepticism into dialectical or speculative logic. The development of this logic, it seems clear, is intended by Hegel to be possessed of the force of necessity.[310] One category *entails* the next, so it would seem that there is only room to refuse a step in the *Logic* on grounds of internal inconsistency. This is a significant claim, and not one that I can evaluate here.[311] Let us suppose for the sake of argument that this is indeed how Hegel's logic is to operate, and in addition that there is in fact nothing at all to object to throughout the *Logic*, from pure being to absolute idea. The *only* uncertainty then, if we have begun while suspending judgement on the question of the identity of thought and being, is whether or not the account of being which Hegel develops over the course of the entire *Logic* is exhaustive of the basic structure of reality in the manner Hegel's idealism seems to demand. It does seem to me that this matter cannot be resolved at the beginning. This means that *at least for*

---

[310] Hegel characterises the development of philosophical claims, at least at the level of logic, in the following way: 'the whole progression in philosophising (insofar as it is a methodical, i.e. a *necessary* progression) is nothing other than merely the *positing* of what is already in a concept.' (*EL* §88, p.141/p.125)

[311] See Houlgate, 2006, pp.35-53 for a defence of this idea.

now, we must proceed from Hegel's beginning while still open to the possibility of something like what Pippin calls 'transcendental scepticism' (Pippin, 1989, p.107): the concern that, however coherent or even apparently necessary the conceptual or categorical scheme we develop is, there remains the possibility that it might not entirely accurately capture reality. If the Hegelian rationalist remains unsatisfied with this approach, I must fall back on the aspi-rationalism I endorsed in **0.4.2**, and suggest that the possibility of some scepticism is a price that must be paid if we are to insist on beginning in a truly anti-dogmatic manner.

This third possibility seems to me to be the only possible way to establish the *Logic* as a work of idealist metaphysics if we accept the solution to the problem of beginning outlined in **3.4**. At this point I will make a few concluding remarks and draw this work to a close.

3.6 Conclusion

To sum up, in this chapter I have suggested that, appropriately fleshed out, the idea of a negative science of consummate scepticism might be able to successfully play the role of the element of mediation in Hegel's second formulation of the problem of beginning. It might be able to do this if it is a rustic, zetetic scepticism, and if the zetetic, sceptical practice upon which it insists is also applied successfully to purported non-sceptical responses to arguments like those of the regress problem

Put as concisely as possible, the problem of beginning might be solved by the co-incidence of the result of a sceptically induced suspension of judgement over all presuppositions and the minimal reflexivity of pure or empty thought. The sceptical undermining of dogmatic presuppositions renders non-arbitrary the empty thought of the beginning by necessitating it, while the fact that scepticism has this radically empty thought for its result means that scepticism is an auto-eliminating presupposition, so that the beginning is also presuppositionless, or does not rely problematically on presuppositions. I have therefore called this idea that of a presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning.[312]

I also suggested that this solution to the problem of beginning should lead us to set out in our consideration of Hegel's deduction of fundamental concepts in the *Logic* with a suspension of judgement concerning the metaphysical import of these claims.

---

[312] One might also call it having one's presupposition-cake and eating it too.

Although it is possible that the security of Hegel's claims to the effect that the *Logic* is also the elaboration of an idealist metaphysics might be ensured in the work which follows from the beginning, we should begin by considering the deduction of fundamental concepts in the *Logic* as just that: the exposition of the necessary structures of thought, without having decided whether or not these structures also obtain in reality, or instead are merely the means with which we must mediate our understanding of the world, which itself is fundamentally independent of those conceptual structures.

Although I must draw this work to a close here, there are still a number of challenges and opportunities facing us on the basis of the solution to the problem of beginning presented in this work. I would like to briefly indicate a few of them now:

The first challenge consists in appealing to an additional condition one might place upon a solution to the problem of beginning, unconsidered in this work. It is the following: A good solution to the problem of beginning ought to yield a beginning which is not just non-arbitrary, but is capable of being the beginning *of* something; of a project of thinking which produces valuable results, in the area of logic at least. In this work I have argued that Hegel's second formulation of the solution to the problem of beginning, appropriately developed, renders the concept of pure being non-arbitrary, *and*, in making the transition from the negation of all presuppositions to the positive conception of thought considering simply itself, that it appears to *begin* to license the kind of dialectical transitions Hegel takes to be constitutive of speculative reason.

What should be done on this basis is to see whether this openness to the possibility that the content of thought might determinately negate itself, in the context of the consideration of the concept of pure being, might prove productive. This is simply to say that, now that we know that we can begin non-arbitrarily, we ought to begin to read Hegel's *Logic*. In the first instance we ought to see what can be made of the transitions between pure being and pure nothing, and into the concept of becoming, but if this dialectic is found to be successful, it should not be taken to indicate the validity of dialectical reasoning in general. This is in part due to Hegel's insistence that the method of logic 'is not something distinct from its content; for it is the inwardness of the content, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which is the mainspring of its advance' (*WL*, p.54/21: p.38). This implies that it might be quite possible for us to find that the concepts of pure being, pure nothing and becoming exhibit dialectical

relations between themselves as Hegel suggests that they do, only for the procedure to grind to a halt at that point so that no further progress is made.

But we should also be wary of taking the dialectic of being, nothing, and becoming as a template for speculative reason in the *Logic* because it is in fact a very peculiar example of what Hegel describes as the 'three... *moments of every properly logical content*' (*EL* §79, p.125/p.118). This is because the concepts of pure being and pure nothing seem to resist what Hegel identifies as the first moment, whereby 'they can all be brought under the first moment, i.e. *that of the understanding,* and thus separated and kept apart' (*EL* §79, p.125/p.118). This presumably is true of every other concept examined in the *Logic*: it is possible, by way of the understanding, for us to take hold of a concept and fix it in artificial isolation from other concepts, before reason can consider the tendency of that concept to immanently negate itself, and then consider the positive result of that negation and give rise to some other concept.[313] But this is impossible in the case of pure being and pure nothing, because they have *always already* transitioned into the other. As Hegel says, 'being – does not pass over but has passed over – into nothing, and nothing into being' (*WL*, pp.82-83/21: p.69).

The concepts of pure being and pure nothing appear to be radically unstable in a manner that no other concept in the *Logic* is, so the account of their relation seems unsuited to function as anything like a model by which to understand speculative reason.[314] In fact, this radical instability suggests, curiously, that Hegel's claim is that the concept which provides the solution to the problem of beginning, with which we can begin thinking in a non-arbitrary manner, is one that has always already undermined itself. I cannot explore this significance of this any further here, although it makes it very clear that Hegel's justificatory procedure *within* the *Logic* cannot be described as a foundationalist one, even if the presence of a presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning has an important role to play.

---

[313] See also *EL* §§81-82, pp.128-133/pp.119-120

[314] This is linked to another interesting feature of these two concepts. Although Hegel does not find it necessary to presuppose the form of a judgement or a proposition in performing his deduction of concepts in the *Logic*, utilising the concepts laid out in the *Logic* in the form of judgements reiterates the distinction between pure being and pure nothing on the one hand, and the rest of the concepts of the *Logic* on the other. There are presumably a number of true judgements we can make using the concepts of identity, difference, actuality, any number of quantitative concepts, and so on. But the radically unstable nature of the concepts of pure being and pure nothing mean that there is no possibly true judgement that we can make using either of them. There is nothing which *purely* is, or *purely* is not. The dialectic of being, nothing and becoming seems to suggest that when we say of something that it *is*, the *least* we can possibly mean by that is that it becomes.

Ideally our goal, after solving the problem of beginning, would be, on that basis, and mindful of Hegel's comments about the unity of logical method and content, to come to a decent account of reasoning and justification on perhaps three levels: Firstly at the level of the deduction of concepts; secondly at the level of what Hegel refers in the preface to the *Phenomenology* as the 'speculative proposition' (*PhG* §61/p.43) and which he treats at length in the Doctrine of the Concept in the *Logic*;[315] and thirdly at the level of ordinary judgements about the world around us.

Another challenge to be faced is to decide upon the matter raised in **3.5**. In our consideration, with Hegel, of the structure of our basic concepts, we must, in addition, attempt to come to some conclusion on the question of the application of those concepts to reality. If we should be unable to come up with a convincing case for holding that the fundamental structure of thought should be the same as the fundamental structure of reality, then we are faced with an additional epistemological challenge, the classical challenge of demonstrating that our thought can grasp the world as it is in itself, despite Hegel's disdain for such a project.[316]

In reading Hegel's *Logic* we should also be mindful of the possibility that the framework or structure of concepts elaborated there might turn out not to be fully adequate for the task he assigns to it: that of giving, as Hartmann puts it, 'an account of the determinations of the real, or of what is' (Hartmann, 1993, p.244). If we should find it necessary to part ways with Hegel's elaboration of our fundamental conceptual structure, the challenge would then be to see if other opportunities would be open to us in considering what we can develop on the basis of the second formulation of the solution to the problem of beginning. Perhaps it will prove necessary to allow for some empirical input into the development of our conceptual structure, although this would seem to reintroduce concerns about arbitrariness. Perhaps we will find reason to abandon the notion of a necessary or fundamental conceptual structure, and reconsider the project of logic in more creative terms.[317]

---

[315] See *WL*, pp.623-663/12: pp.53-89. See also Trisokkas, 2012, Chs.8-12
[316] Hegel's famous remarks to effect that 'what calls itself fear of error reveal itself rather as fear of truth' (*PhG* §74/p.54) in this context turn on his suggestion that such a concern or project *presupposes* the distinction between cognition and the absolute, or thought and being. I think it is clear from my engagement with Houlgate in **4.1** that it is possible to confront this possibility – that we might have to demonstrate that thought can grasp the world as it is in itself – without being guilty of the kind of presupposition Hegel has in mind.
[317] See Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pp.2-11, or Moore, 2012, pp.595-600

If not by appeal to empirical input in the development of the structure of concepts, perhaps we might turn to the resources of Husserlian phenomenology, to see whether a fundamentally different method, although one which, as we have seen in **2.3.2**, appears to share the Hegelian commitment to presuppositionlessness, might offer us valuable resources in ensuring that a presuppositionless, yet non-arbitrary beginning is the beginning *of* something of worth.

Bibliography

Aikin, Scott, "The Problem of the Criterion and Hegel's Model for Epistemic Infinitism" *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.4 (2010), pp.379-388

Aikin, Scott, *Epistemology and the Regress Problem*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2011)

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, *Volume I*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933)

Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics. Topica*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960)

Barnes, Jonathan, *The Toils of Scepticism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Barnes, Jonathan, 'The Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist', in *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* eds. Burnyeat, M and Frede, M (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company), pp.58-91

Bowman, Brady, *Hegel and the Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Brandom, Robert, *Making It Explicit*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994)

Burbidge, John, *On Hegel's Logic,* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981)

Burbidge, John, *The Logic of Hegel's Logic*, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006)

Butler, Clark, *Hegel's Logic: Between Dialectic and History*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996)

Carlson, David Gray, *A Commentary to Hegel's Science of Logic*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Chisholm, Roderick, *The Problem of the Criterion*, (Milwaukee, MI: Marquette University Press, 1973)

Cling, Andrew, "The Epistemic Regress Problem" *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 140, No.3 (2008) pp.401-421

Cling, Andrew, "Reasons, regresses, and tragedy: The Epistemic Regress Problem and the Problem of the Criterion" *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 4, (2009), pp. 333-346

Cling, Andrew, "The Epistemic Regress Problem, the Problem of the Criterion, and the Value of Reasons" *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 45 (2) (2014), pp.161-171

Dancy, Jonathan, *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985)

Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Patton, P (London: Continuum, 2004)

Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Tomlinson, H, and Burchell, G (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994)

Derrida, Jacques, "The Ends of Man" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Bass, A (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982)

DeVries, Willem, "Sense-certainty and the "this-such"" in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide,* ed. Moyar, D and Quante, M (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.63-75

Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers, Volume II*, trans. Hicks, R.D (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925)

Dove, K., "Phenomenology and Systematic Philosophy" in *Method and Speculation in Hegel's Phenomenology,* ed. Westphal, M (NJ: Humanities Press Inc, 1982)

Dudley, Will, "Ancient Skepticism and Systematic Philosophy" in *Hegel's History of Philosophy*, ed. Duquette, D (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), pp.87-106

Finlayson, James Gordon, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 22, (2015), pp.1-25

Fulda, Hans Friedrich, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*, (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1975)

Fulda, Hans Friedrich, "*Science of the phenomenology of spirit*": Hegel's program and its implementation'in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide,* ed. Moyar, D and Quante, M (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.21-42

Fogelin, Robert, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

Fogelin, Robert, *Walking the Tightrope of Reason: The Precarious Life of the Rational Animal*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Fogelin, Robert, "The Skeptics are Coming! The Skeptics are Coming!" in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism*, ed. Sinnott-Armstrong, W (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Forster, Michael, *Hegel and Skepticism*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1989)

Forster, Michael, "Hegel on the Superiority of Ancient over Modern Skepticism" in *Skeptizismus und Spekulatives Denken in der Philosophie Hegels*, eds. Fulda, H F and Horstmann, R-P (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), pp.64-84

Forster, Michael, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

Franks, Paul, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2005)

Franks, Paul, "Ancient Skepticism, Modern Naturalism, and Nihilism in Hegel's Early Jena Writings" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nintheenth Century Philosophy* ed. Beiser, F (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.52-73

Fumerton, Richard, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995)

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "The Idea of Hegel's *Logic*" trans. Smith, P, C., in *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments Volume III* ed. Stern, R (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.221-242

Giladi, Paul, "Hegel's Metaphysics as Speculative Naturalism" in *Hegel and Metaphysics: On Logic and Ontology in the System*, ed De Laurentiis, A, (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2016)

Haack, Susan, "Double-Aspect Foundherentism: A New Theory of Empirical Justification" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol.3 No.1 (1993), pp.113-128

Haering, Theodor, *Hegel: Sein Wollen und sein Werk II*, (Leipzig: Teubner Verlag, 1938)

Hartmann, Klaus, "Hegel: A non-metaphysical view" in *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments Volume III* ed. Stern, R (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.243-258

Heidemann, Dietmar, *Der Begriff des Skeptizismus: seine systematischen Formen, die pyrrhonische Skepsis und Hegels Herausforderung*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007)

Heidemann, Dietmar, "Substance, Subject, System: The Justification of Science in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide,* ed. Moyar, D and Quante, M (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.1-20

Heidemann, Dietmar, "Doubt and Dialectic: Hegel on Logic, Metaphysics, and Skepticism" in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, ed. Limnatis, N (London: Continuum, 2010), pp.157-172

Heidemann, Dietmar, 'Hegel on the Nature of Scepticism' *Hegel Bulletin*, Volume 32(1-2), (2011) pp.80-99

Henrich, Dieter, *Hegel im Kontext*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971)

Horstmann, Rolf-Peter, "The *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a "transcendentalistic" argument for a monistic ontology" in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide,* ed. Moyar, D and Quante, M (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.43-62

Houlgate, Stephen, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005)

Houlgate, Stephen, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006)

Houlgate, Stephen, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reader's Guide*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Husserl, Edmund, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Cairns, D (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1960)

Husserl, Edmund, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book*, trans. Kersten, F, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983)

Husserl, Edmund, *Logical Investigations, Volume 1*, trans. Findlay, J.N, (Oxford: Routledge, 2001)

Husserl, Edmund, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology: From the Lectures, Winter Semester, 1910-11*, trans. Farin, I and Hart, J.G, (Dordrecht, Springer, 2006)

Johnson, Paul Owen, *The Critique of Thought: A Re-Examination of Hegel's Science of Logic*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988)

Kajamies, Timo, "A Quintet, a Quartet, a Trio, a Duo? The Epistemic Regress Problem, Evidential Support, and Skepticism" in *Philosophia*, Vol. 37, (2009), pp.525-534

Knappik, Franz, "Hegel's Essentialism. Natural Kinds and the Metaphysics of Explanation in Hegel's Theory of 'the Concept' *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 24, Issue 4 (2016), pp.760-787

Kreines, James, *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and Its Philosophical Appeal*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

Lauer, Christoph *The Suspension of Reason in Hegel and Schelling*, (London: Continuum, 2010)

Maker, William, *Philosophy Without Foundations*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994)

Maker, William, "Understanding Hegel Today" in *G.W.F. Hegel: Critical Assessments Volume III* ed. Stern, R (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.259-291

Maker, William, "Hegel's Logic of Freedom" in *Hegel's Theory of the Subject*, ed. Carlson, D.G (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.1-18

McGilvary, Evander, "The Presupposition Question in Hegel's Logic" *Philosophical Review*, Vol.6 No.5 (1897), pp.497-520

McTaggart, John, *A Commentary on Hegel's Logic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910)

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 'Philosophy and non-philosophy since Hegel' in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Silverman, H (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), pp.9-83

Moder, Gregor, *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017)

Moore, Adrian, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Moore, Adrian, "Sense-Making From a Human Point of View" in *The Cambridge Companion to Philosophical Methodology*, eds. D'Oro, G and Overgaard, S (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Nuzzo, Angelica, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How Does Hegel's *Logic* Begin? in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, ed. Limnatis, N (London: Continuum, 2010), pp.12-30

Nuzzo, Angelica, "Thinking Being: Method in Hegel's Logic of Being" in *A Companion to Hegel* eds. Baur, M and Houlgate, S, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), pp.111-139

Perin, Casey, *The Demands of Reason*: *An Essay On Pyrrhonian Scepticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Pinkard, Terry, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Pinkard, Terry, "Spirit as the "Unconditioned"" in *A Companion to Hegel* eds. Baur, M and Houlgate, S, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), pp.91-107

Pippin, Robert, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

Redding, Paul, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Rockmore, Tom, *Hegel's Circular Epistemology*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986)

Rosen, Menahem, *Problems of the Hegelian Dialectic. Dialectic Reconstructed as a Logic of Human Reality*, (Boston, MA: Kluwer, 1992)

Rosen, Michael, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

Rosen, Stanley, *The Idea of Hegel's Science of Logic* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014)

Russon, John, "The Project of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" in *A Companion to Hegel* eds. Baur, M and Houlgate, S, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), pp.47-67

Sankey, Howard, 'Epistemic relativism and the problem of the criterion' *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 42, Issue 4, (2011), pp.562-570

Scarfe, Adam, "The Role of Scepticism in Hegel's "Doctrine of the Concept"" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol.17, No.2 (2003), pp.77-91

Sellars, Wilfrid, *Science*, *Perception and Reality*, (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1963)

Solomon, Robert, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1983)

Staehler, Tanja, 'The Historicity of Philosophy and the Role of Skepticism' in *Hegel's History of Philosophy*, ed. Duquette, D (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003), pp.107-120

Staehler, Tanja, *Hegel, Husserl and the Phenomenology of Historical Worlds*, (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017)

Stern, Robert, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, (London: Routledge, 2002)

Stern, Robert, *Hegelian Metaphysics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Stewart, Jon, *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Systematic Interpretation*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000)

Stewart, Jon, "Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a Systematic Fragment" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Ninetheenth Century Philosophy* ed. Beiser, F (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.74-93

Tabak, Mehmet, *The Doctrine of Being in Hegel's Science of Logic: A Critical Commentary*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Trisokkas, Ioannis, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Hegel's Theory of Judgement*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012)

Van Cleve, James, "Sosa on easy knowledge and the problem of the criterion" *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 153, Issue 1, (2011), pp.19-28

Watts, Daniel, "The Paradox of Beginning: Hegel, Kierkegaard and Philosophical Inquiry" *Inquiry*, Vol.50, Issue 1 (2007), pp.5-33

Westphal, Merold, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology: Third Edition*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998)

Westphal, Kenneth, "Hegel's Solution to the Dilemma of the Criterion" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* Vol.5, No.2 (1988), pp.173-188

Westphal, Kenneth, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989)

Westphal, Kenneth, *Hegel's Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003)

Winfield, Richard Dien., 'Is Phenomenology Necessary as Introduction to Philosophy?' in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Volume 65(2) (2011), pp.279-298

Winfield, Richard Dien, *Hegel's Science of Logic: A Critical Rethinking in Thirty Lectures* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012)

Winfield, Richard Dien, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Rethinking in Seventeen Lectures*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013)

Wolff, Michael, "Die 'Momente' des Logischen und der 'Anfang' der Logik in Hegels philosophischer Wissenschaft" in *Skeptizismus und Spekulatives Denken in der*

Philosophie Hegels, eds. Fulda, H F and Horstmann, R-P (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1996), pp.226-243

Zambrana, Rocío, *Hegel's Theory of Intelligibility*, (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2015)