

a 'thinking thing' that certain, and hence true, knowledge is possible. It is because of this that the certainty of all knowledge rests upon the foundation of the *cogito*. Descartes, as we have said already, is a kind of 'individualist' about knowledge. For him, knowledge is only possible because the subject is completely *given* to itself in the very activity of thought. Descartes's account of our subjectivity is a metaphysical one, since although our knowledge is likened to a building that requires strong foundations, these foundations themselves rest upon the metaphysical structure of the self. Of Locke, Hume and Kant, only Hume really moves decisively away from this view, by embracing an outright empiricism even with regard to human identity. Kant, in contrast, retains the subject at the centre of his theory of knowledge. But he does so only at the cost of formalizing it. The subject becomes 'transcendental', but in becoming such it ceases to have content (the transcendental subject is not a concrete self, like Descartes's *cogito*, but a structure of rules that stipulate conditions necessary for thinking to be possible). Kant's own view is open to numerous possible criticisms. We can encounter such criticisms by way of looking at the writings of other thinkers, principally Hegel and Nietzsche. So it is to them that we now turn.

1 Hegel's Dialectical Account of Knowledge

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) was the most important German thinker of the generation that immediately followed Kant. Hegel's philosophical thought constitutes a complex but highly rewarding body of work. It is ambitious in its scope: Hegel's concerns include the areas of aesthetics, knowledge, metaphysics, political theory, and the nature of religion. Although his early writings exhibit an interest principally in Kantian ethics and theology, the mature Hegel came to appreciate the importance of the metaphysical preconditions of knowledge offered by Kant in the *first Critique*. One might say that Kant's epistemology forms the historical moment from which Hegel's mature thought emerges, especially as it is expressed in two of his key works: the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and part one of the *Encyclopaedia* (1817, with the final version published in 1830). In fact, Hegel regarded his own thought as taking Kant's achievement one stage further. In Hegelian terms, one might say that a fruitful encounter with Kant necessarily means going beyond him.

If there is one important contrast between Kant and Hegel, it lies in their respective conceptions of the metaphysical structure that underlies our cognition of physical objects. For Kant, as we have seen, metaphysics essentially involves the elucidation of the *a priori* forms of thought that make synthetic knowledge of objects and their relations possible. The key thing about this structure is that it is *fixed*. One might say that on a Kantian view what is essential for knowledge to be possible can be spelled out in terms of the formal conditions that govern our sensibility and understanding, and then finalized by way of their unification through the structure of the transcendental subject. Once they are correctly determined, these conditions cannot be susceptible to change, for they constitute the necessary and universal conditions that make human knowledge possible. Kant himself regards this model as performing what can be termed a 'Copernican Revolution' in metaphysics:

We must . . . make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge . . . We should then be proceeding precisely on the lines of Copernicus' primary hypothesis. Failing of satisfactory progress in explaining the movements of the heavenly bodies on the supposition that they all revolved around the spectator, he tried whether he might not have better success if he made the spectator to revolve and the stars to remain at rest. A similar experiment can be tried in metaphysics, as regards the intuition of objects. (*Critique*, Bxvii)

Where Copernicus's experiment with the hypothesis that the earth orbits the sun, and not vice versa, yielded important results,¹ so Kant aims to achieve something similar in metaphysics. Doubtless, that there is a certain irony in all of this should not be missed. Where Copernicus, by Kant's own admission, holds that it is the spectator who is in a state of motion (it is we on earth who are moving, not the sun), Kant's model does precisely the opposite. For Kant, it is objects that must conform to the demands of our understanding, not the other way around. In the last instance, the transcendental subject is, for this reason, the fixed point of reference within the Kantian system of knowledge. Nevertheless, Kant's account can with some justice be called 'scientific' in spirit. By taking the achievement of Copernicus as his paradigm, Kant is effectively stating that philosophers, too, need to place their understanding of the nature of knowledge on a foundation that in its own way is as solid as the principles that ground the physical sciences. It is this commitment, however, that serves to indicate the difference between Kant and Hegel. Where Kant's juridical notion of the rules that govern the understanding has its inspiration in the fixed, and hence timeless, physical laws that govern the behaviour of bodies, Hegel looked to the dynamic (or in his terms 'dialectical') structure of thought as being fundamental to our knowledge. According to Hegel's conception, thinking is inherently *historical*, and it is this insight that decisively separates him from Kant.

From the time even of his earliest writings, Hegel's approach, in contrast to Kant's, embraces the view that *change* is an essential element in thought and, indeed, reality. A key feature of all of Hegel's thinking, as we have said, is an emphasis on the historical nature of existence. This is most famously expressed in the Hegelian *dialectic*. Where Kant believes that the categories of the understanding, and by implication all forms of rational and logical argument, must conform to the dictates of a fixed logical structure, Hegel regards even logic itself to be a manifestation of human history and culture. In other words, for Hegel, even logic cannot be regarded as an isolated or timeless formal structure that allows us to articulate the a-historical relations between different representations or propositions. Instead, logical thought is a kind of cultural achievement, just as religious thought, political life, or legal and governmental forms are all also manifestations of human activity. Logic is only what it is because it is also part of a greater web of human social existence, and human social existence is mapped out in terms of its relationship to the material world of nature. When we talk of such matters as 'logic' what we are considering is a kind of human achievement that is the direct result of the interaction between humans and their environment. This relationship is not static. It is a *dynamic* one. This is because humans, as conscious beings, respond to the world around them with understanding, and understanding the world is an *active engagement with it*. We can, and do,

move from one mode of understanding that is limited in some manner to another mode of understanding that illustrates or overcomes the limitations inherent in the first mode. It is in this dynamic movement of human thinking in relation to the world that Hegel locates what is essential not only about conscious thought but about reality itself. For, when we think in terms of logic we do so in the context of an understanding that operates in terms of a historically unfolding relationship between consciousness and the world. When Hegel talks of matters such as 'logic', he is always doing so in the context of change, since all human achievements are the product of historical development. This process of development is articulated through what Hegel calls the 'dialectic'. The dialectic, which is discussed most famously in the *Logic* (see below), is Hegel's attempt to deal with a number of problems that arise from his analysis of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is best, therefore, to approach the dialectic by considering some important aspects of the *Phenomenology* first.

1.1 The critique of 'immediacy'

Amongst other things, Hegel's account of the development of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*² demonstrates how he departs from the kind of approach to subjectivity adhered to by Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant. The subject matter of philosophy, Hegel notes in section 73, is 'the actual cognition of what truly is'. But such cognition is not to be derived directly from the immediate certainty of subjective experience. Hegel is happy to agree with the empiricists that subjective sense-experience is the starting point of thinking. But, he argues, this beginning posits a dichotomy between thinking and what is known that must be overcome if we are to attain absolute (or true) knowledge. Indeed, the notion of a 'phenomenology' is itself only a starting point. This is because Hegel is attempting to present an account of how the phenomenon of 'natural consciousness' arises from the realm of nature and in turn becomes self-conscious. A phenomenology is therefore only a kind of prelude to philosophy proper, and it is the latter that aims to elucidate how absolute knowledge is possible for self-consciousness.

The aim of a phenomenological account of consciousness is to examine what it is that the self-consciousness of mind or spirit (*Geist*) regards itself to be. The next task is to show that it is in the very nature of spirit to transcend its own limitations dialectically, and thereby yield true knowledge: 'It is this coming-to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge*, that is described in this *Phenomenology* of Spirit. Knowledge in its first phase, or *immediate Spirit*, is the non-spiritual, i.e. *sense-consciousness*. In order to become genuine knowledge... it must travel a long way and work its passage' (*Phenomenology*, para. 27). The phenomenon of 'natural consciousness' contains within itself the germ of true knowledge but can never be equated with it; rather, it must strive to attain such knowledge by arriving at a completed experience of itself, the awareness of what it really is in itself' (para. 77). In following this path, natural consciousness starts with the purportedly 'simple' *immediacy* of sense certainty: it is immediately receptive to objects of sense-experience, in so far as such

objects are regarded first and foremost by it as simply existing. However, in the event, this very *certainty* proves itself to be the most abstract and poorest truth. All that it says about what it knows is that it *is*' (para. 90). Stating that something merely is, that it has being, does not really say very much about it. Hence, we might say that the claims of immediate sense-certainty are only trivially true.

Hegel adds that such certainty also yields the 'I' of thinking; but again, this 'I' remains limited: 'consciousness is "I", nothing more, a pure "This"'. A further examination of immediate certainty tells us something more. Any moment of such certainty is really only an '*instance*' of a relationship between the 'I' and what is sensed. What we have, in fact, are two 'Theses': the 'I' and what is apprehended by it through sense-experience. In this way, what seemed to be immediately given shows itself to be already *mediated* by the relationship that exists between thought and its object. This mediation is then found to exist in *all* thought determinations of immediacy. For example, we can think of an object given by immediate sense certainty as existing *here* and *now*. But what is 'now'? If we answer 'Now is Night', we can, says Hegel, test its veracity by writing it down: 'We write down this truth; a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our preserving it. If *now*, *this now*, we look again at the written truth we shall have to say that it has become stale' (*Phenomenology*, para. 95). 'Now' is no longer night but day, and so the 'now' that was true in virtue of the fact that it existed is no longer; hence, it is no longer true. Even when we seek to allude to something in this mode of immediacy the truth that we aim to express by way of it slips away in the very act: 'The Now is pointed to, *this Now*. "Now" has already ceased to be in the act of pointing to it' (para. 100). Likewise, we can say the same for any other claim to immediate certainty. All involve a 'here', a 'this', etc., and all show themselves to become no longer true through the fact that they are always already mediated by conditions that transform the simple immediacy of a given moment into something mediated by other moments. In this way, the purportedly '*pure being*' of immediacy shows itself to be 'something to which negation and mediation are essential' (para. 99). Any claim of universality that might be attributed to immediate certainty shows itself to be flawed. Equally, the essential requirement that thought has an object which exists, whether or not it is being thought about, is overturned. This is because all sense-certainty depends upon the existence of thinking, not the object that is being thought about: 'Its truth is in the object as *my* object, or in its being *mine* [*Mein*]; it is, because *I* know it' (para. 100).

Hegel has already pointed out that the 'I' is a limited notion. However, we might still be tempted by these reflections to regard the relation of immediacy as residing *not* in the object of thought, but in the 'I' that thinks. It is, after all, 'the immediacy of my *seeing*, *hearing*, and so on' that appears to remain the constant condition of the determination of objects as existing (*Phenomenology*, para. 101). But the same problem arises for the 'I' that thinks: 'in this relationship sense-certainty experiences the same dialectic acting upon itself... I, *this "I"*, see the tree and assert that "Here" is a tree; but another "I" sees the house and maintains that "Here" is not a tree but a house instead.' This is another way of saying that whenever we speak of 'I' we in fact necessarily invoke 'all "Is"', not one particular 'I'. What is essential about sense-certainty, it follows, is to be found neither in the object that is thought, nor in

the particular 'I' that thinks about an object. What is essential with regard to sense-certainty is to be located in the *totality of moments that go to make it what it is*: 'it is only sense-certainty as a *whole* which stands firm within itself as *immediacy*' (para. 103). However, if it is the 'whole' that is immediate, then what seems to be immediately given in any particular sense-experience is always mediated by this totality. To put it another way: the particular is always mediated by the universal.

1.2 *Self-consciousness and subjectivity*

An essential component in this totality is self-consciousness. But self-consciousness is not to be understood as the consciousness of a particular 'I' that thinks, for such an 'I' is not of itself a completed unity. Instead, Hegel argues, this totality is to be interpreted in terms of the *universal* conditions that underlie all self-consciousness. These conditions are themselves the consequence of mediation, for self-consciousness is no mere given. It is the outcome of processes of organic life. Self-consciousness, in other words, emerges from conditions that are antecedent to it: it springs from life, from the existence of organisms that initially are not conscious of themselves as existent beings. Such beings, we can infer, have a determinate relation to the material world they inhabit: they consume it, they live in it, they are themselves consumed by other beings. Self-consciousness emerges from these conditions. Beings equipped with the ability to have sensory impressions ultimately encounter themselves in terms of the external world, which is seen as a resource for the purpose of survival. Thus, self-consciousness only becomes what it is in virtue of its relation with the realm of sense-experience. It follows that self-consciousness is a kind of unity that is nevertheless at the same time only possible through the fact that it understands itself in terms of the dichotomy between subject and object. 'Consciousness, as self-consciousness . . . has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception . . . and the second . . . [is] . . . *itself*' (*Phenomenology*, para. 167). Self-consciousness is not something that arrives in the world fully formed. It is the result of an engagement with that world.

Self-consciousness experiences itself first and foremost by encountering what is other than it: its existence is mediated³ by the existence of this other. In turn, this other is understood in terms of its suitability for appropriation. At the most basic level, this concerns whether or not something can be eaten: '*as being for itself* . . . it comes forward in antithesis to the universal substance . . . and . . . preserves itself by separating itself from its inorganic nature, and by consuming it' (*Phenomenology*, para. 171). Self-consciousness thereby regards the objects of its sense-experience in terms of its own needs; it cannot at first understand them apart from itself. But such objects do have an independent existence, and this too is discovered by encountering them: 'Self-consciousness which is simply *for itself* . . . will . . . learn through experience that the object is independent' (para. 168). To put it bluntly, objects in the world do not always yield to our needs and desires but can frustrate them.

As something which exists '*for itself*', self-consciousness can be characterized as 'desire' (para. 174). It wishes to seize hold of the other and subordinate it to itself and thereby to discover itself in the other through using it as a means of

self-preservation. The **consumption of something as food** is the most obvious example of this. But this is **only one manifestation** of desire. The desire of self-consciousness to see itself preserved in the world is a desire for a kind of universality. In other words, Hegel is claiming that any self-conscious being regards the world in terms of itself and itself alone. Yet, at the same time, every self-conscious being is finite and knows that it is, since it understands that there are objects in the world that are not it. Such a being must nevertheless preserve itself, and one other way of doing so is by reproduction. Elsewhere, Hegel refers to this kind of relation as 'the Genus-process': it is the 'entering into relationship with an other which is itself a living individual, so that in the other it is in relationship with itself'.⁴ So, in the other, self-consciousness finds itself: the kind of life that it is an instance of reproduces itself by encountering another self-conscious being and uniting with it.

The essence (i.e. the true significance) of desire and '*being for itself*' is not to be found in immediate self-awareness because desire and the gratification that accompanies it are 'conditioned by the object' that is desired (be it food, or another being as means of reproduction). Ultimately, however, '*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*' (*Phenomenology*, para. 175). To put the matter more plainly: a self-conscious being discovers what it is neither by way of pure introspection, nor by means of appropriating the world around it. What is essential to self-consciousness can only be discovered by it when it enters into a relationship with another individual self-conscious being. Self-consciousness, in short, discovers itself in and through an 'I-Thou' relation. This is because all self-consciousness 'exists only in being acknowledged' (para. 178). The 'I' needs, therefore, to be *recognized* by another 'I' in order for it to understand what it truly is; any 'I' that thinks is always a 'Thou' for another. What any 'I' turns out to be is an 'I' that is also and at the same time a 'We' (para. 177). Hence, the purportedly 'simple immediacy' of the 'I' is only possible because 'I' is mediated by its relationship with 'We'.

Hegel's analysis of self-consciousness leads him to conclude that individual subjectivity is itself continually mediated by conditions that extend beyond the boundaries of simple sense-certainty and individuated consciousness. What is purportedly given as the immediately certain knowledge of sense-experience rests upon the fact that such experience is mediated by its object. In turn, individual self-consciousness discovers that it, too, is not simply present to itself in an unmediated relation of certainty. Any self-conscious being requires the acknowledgement of other self-conscious beings in order for it to truly be what it is. The outcome of Hegel's account of the dialectical unfolding of spirit, therefore, is to show that individuated subjective experience cannot serve as a satisfactory foundation for knowledge. Elucidating the conditions of knowledge involves not merely telling us what an individual subject must be like in order to possess knowledge (the rational subject of Descartes's '*cogito*'). Nor is it simply a matter of discussing the important roles that experience and subjectivity must play in our knowledge (issues which the empiricists and, following them, Kant sought to clarify). According to Hegel, such an account must show that subjective conditions **are themselves**, and in their very nature, *objective* conditions. **Subjectivity emerges from these objective conditions** and the analysis of this **emergence tells us that there is no pure, individuated**

Each particular 'I' finds itself grounded in the requirement that it be recognized by other 'Is', other selves. Equally, self-consciousness is not something that is independent of its world: it is part of it, and discovers what it truly is through the fact that it engages with that world.

1.3 Hegel's criticisms of empiricism and Kantian subjective idealism

As should by now be evident, Hegel's account of the nature of knowledge follows the pattern set by his analysis in the *Phenomenology* of the emergence of self-consciousness. Our knowledge is generated as the historical manifestation of an ongoing engagement between human beings and the world. Hegel has a number of things to say about the attitudes of the empiricists or a thinker such as Kant in this connection. Let us look at his comments about them as they are presented in the *Logic*.⁵

With regard to empiricism, Hegel contends that this philosophy can be interpreted as a consequence of addressing the requirement that human knowledge should aspire to a 'concrete content' (*Logic*, section 37). Instead of seeking to ground human knowledge in thought, the empiricists sought to derive all knowledge from experience as a means of preserving this concreteness: 'In Empiricism there lies this great principle, that what is true must be in actuality and must be there for our perception' (section 38). The empiricist position, according to Hegel, ultimately rests upon the view that what is to count as true knowledge is derivable from the 'immediate presence' of subjectivity in the world. A subject that thinks is located in the world. It is the supposedly immediate certainty that springs from the subject being situated in this way that the empiricist holds to justify their contention that all knowledge is derived from the embodied presence of thought in experience. So, 'In Human scepticism, the truth of the empirical, the truth of feeling and intuition is taken as basic; and, on that basis, he attacks all universal determinations and laws, precisely because they have no justification by way of sense perception' (section 39).

There is, it follows, a good and bad side to empiricism (*Logic*, section 38). On the one hand, an 'important principle of freedom' is voiced from the empiricist perspective: what counts as 'knowledge' must rest upon our ability to recognize it for ourselves in our own experiences. For this reason, subjectivity must also recognize its own active role in knowledge. On the other hand, the empiricist approach restricts itself to what is finite (i.e. to given experiences, as Hume does when developing his sceptical position). The problem is that in seeking to interpret reality in this way empiricism at the same time *presupposes* metaphysical categories that cannot themselves be derived from any given experience. What Hegel terms 'the fundamental illusion of scientific empiricism' exhibits this latter tendency. Scientific empiricism always uses the 'metaphysical categories of matter, force, ... of one, many, universality, and the infinite, etc.', and then proceeds in the most 'uncritical and unconscious manner' to derive conclusions from them without addressing the fact that these cannot themselves be derived directly from experience. Empiricism, it follows, remains a valuable but limited philosophy.

In Hegel's view, it is to Kant a credit that he highlights these problems. But Kant himself still maintains the empiricist approach in so far as the concepts of universality and necessity (which, as we have seen, define *a priori* knowledge) are for him still *disclosed* to us through experience, even if their source lies elsewhere (in that they cannot be derived from experience and are thus independent of it). In effect, says Hegel, Kant constructs an account that renders *all* experience a matter of subjectivity, since all possible experience, and so what is to count as 'knowledge', ends up by being understood solely in terms of our subjective abilities. In consequence, Kant collapses the empiricist distinction between our thought and our knowledge of experience by arguing that the subjective conditions of our sensibility and understanding are also the objective conditions of all possible knowledge (*Logic*, section 41). As a result of Kant's synthesis of the rationalist and empiricist approaches all that is left of a mind-independent realm is the 'thing-in-itself' (the noumenon). In turn, Hegel argues,

Kant's investigation of the thought-determinations suffers essentially from the defect that he did not consider them in and for themselves, but only to see whether they were *subjective* or *objective*. In ordinary language, to be 'objective' is to be present outside us and to come to us from outside through perception. Kant denied that the thought-determinations (cause and effect, for instance) were 'objective' in this sense, i.e., that they were given in perception; instead he regarded them as pertaining to our thinking itself or the spontaneity of thinking, and so in *this* sense as subjective. (section 41, addition 2)

So, Kant's analysis of the *a priori* conditions of experience falls short in so far as he does not provide an immanent analysis of these conditions by considering them in themselves. Instead, Kant merely provides an account of these conditions in their relation to subjectivity and objectivity such that the distinction between the objective and subjective poles ends up by being dissolved. What, on a Kantian view, counts as 'objectivity' in fact remains essentially 'subjective', since the pure forms of intuition are determined by *us* in a purely subjective manner that is cut off from the world. That is why, for Kant, all knowledge is necessarily only knowledge of appearances: the 'thing-in-itself' must remain forever closed off to us because it is our shared subjective abilities that confer objectivity on our knowledge of experience.

Hegel's response to this is to outline an approach in which objectivity is once again given its due, since 'the true objectivity of thinking consists in this: that thoughts are not merely our thoughts, but at the same time the *In-itself* of things and of whatever else is ob-jective.' Such a claim may initially appear to be woefully opaque, so it is worth considering briefly. Thoughts, Hegel is claiming, are never merely subjective. In line with his contention later on in the *Logic* that reality and thinking pertain to the same logical structure, Hegel is arguing that thinking is itself something that is in its very nature objective. At this point in the *Logic*, Hegel says that his discussion entitles him to claim that the word 'objectivity' in fact has a tripartite significance. First, what is objective concerns what is 'externally present' to us when we think (the objects of our sense perceptions). Second, Hegel believes that Kant is right in claiming that objectivity is also a matter of the universal and necessary conditions that govern how thought must conceive of its objects. Third,

however, objectivity *also* concerns 'the *In-itself* as thought-product, [that is,] the significance of what is there, as distinct from what is only thought by us'. In other words, it is true that the activity of thinking is what produces the concept of an independently existing 'object', of something that is understood as existing 'in-itself'. But the notion of something as existing 'in-itself' is not limited in its significance to the status of a mere projection of individual consciousness. The objects of thought also concern what *exists in-itself as it is posited by thinking*. This is because 'the things of which we have immediate knowledge are mere appearances, not only *for us*, but also *in-themselves*' (*Logic*, section 45, addition). There is, in other words, no need to posit a gulf separating appearances from a mind-independent reality. This is because appearances *are* reality in the process of coming to be. Hegel therefore rejects Kant's account of the metaphysical conditions of our knowledge because Kant ultimately understands these conditions as being wholly subjective in their determination. We can understand Hegel's criticism of Kant in the following manner. Kant is a transcendental idealist, but he remains an empirical realist. Kant's commitment to empirical realism implies that metaphysical issues are always to be addressed in relation to subjectivity alone, for it is our subjectivity that is taken by him as the necessary condition of experience. For Hegel, in contrast, metaphysics must be shown to be *objective* in the sense that it applies equally as the necessary condition of both what exists *and* how it is thought.

We have seen that Kant ultimately turns to the *form* of subjectivity (the transcendental subject) as providing the ground upon which the concepts of the understanding rest. For Kant, the categories, which confer objectivity upon all our knowledge, are ultimately derived from the transcendental unity of self-consciousness. In turn, the objectivity of our knowledge resides in the fact that certain universal and necessary conditions must be fulfilled whenever a subject thinks about objects (and so has representations of them). For Hegel this fact implies that Kant's conception of thinking remains essentially *subjective*. This is its limitation. Kant ignores the possibility of thought transcending its own particularity, since the possible knowledge that we can have remains, for him, ultimately subordinate to the conditions that govern the nature of our subjectivity: our knowledge of objects must always conform to the subjective conditions that *we impose upon them*. In Hegel's view, Kant is right in so far as he argues that questions of objectivity must be conjoined to the *a priori* conditions of our sensibility and understanding, and hence our subjectivity. However, as we have already noted, Hegel claims that the dynamic movement of thought itself is not to be regarded as a matter of arbitrariness or mere subjective contingency. Rather, thought shares a common logical structure with the world. It is because of this fact, Hegel argues, that objectivity is possible for thought.

Likewise, the claim that knowledge can be grounded in the immediate self-awareness of the transcendental subject remains, for Hegel, problematic. Kant subordinates our possible knowledge of experience to the rules that govern our sensibility and understanding. Because of this it is true to say that, for Kant, all possible sense experience, and likewise knowledge of such experience, is mediated by these rules. Kantian philosophy 'points to the *original identity* of the "I" within thinking (the transcendental unity of self-consciousness) as the determinate *ground* of the concepts of the understanding' (*Logic*, section 42). 'The categories rest upon **this ground**, in so

far as they are derived from the *pure spontaneity* of thought that characterizes the transcendental self. But in **arguing this Kant's philosophy** 'took the easy way in its *finding* of the categories' (section 42, remark). Grounding the categories in the transcendental subject, as Kant does, is an easy way out of the problem of addressing the issue as to where the categories find their foundation because any appeal to such a conception of the subject ultimately rests upon nothing more than mere self-evidence. But, says Hegel, when understood as a purely self-evident and *given* unity, the transcendental subject is, in the last analysis, 'totally abstract and completely undetermined'. Kant's account of the subject, in short, remains bereft of any real content. As such, the Kantian transcendental subject cannot itself pertain to the kind of objective status that it must have in order for it to bequeath objectivity on experience. To put the matter in slightly different terms, one might say that Kant's conception of the unity of the transcendental subject is devoid of real content because it is in fact a kind of 'thing-in-itself', not an object of possible experience. We cannot know ourselves (the 'I' that thinks) as an object of experience, since it is the 'I' that is the necessary condition of all possible experience. This problem is, once again, a consequence of Kant's drawing a distinction between subjective conditions and objective conditions. In the transcendental subject this distinction collapses, for the transcendental subject is the foundation for these conditions. Since, for Kant, we can only *know* appearances, not things in-themselves, it follows that subjectivity must remain for him essentially unknowable, and its rationality is thereby rendered empty and without content.

1.4 Representation

Hegel's discussion of the nature of subjectivity also has implications for the notion of 'representation'. We have seen that thinkers such as Descartes, Locke and Hume all start with the view that representations are fundamental to knowledge. For Descartes, the central issue concerns how the mind (as a thinking substance) can have true representations of the world (material substance). In the last analysis, this possibility rests upon the foundation of the *cogito* as the primary representation of consciousness. One might say that, for Descartes, the 'I think' in effect expresses the fact that pure self-consciousness is capable of representing itself to itself: in the 'I think' what is affirmed is a correspondence between thinking and self. This correspondence is, in its own turn, the foundation of human knowledge, but suffers from the fact that it remains trapped in the simple immediacy of itself: only God can get Descartes out of the problem of how thinking actually engages with the world of sensory experience. For empiricism, our ideas are representations that we derive directly from experience, and they are all representations of particular experiences. The Kantian move is to argue that such representations as we may have ultimately rest upon non-experiential conditions (i.e. upon rules that exist independently of experience and which govern our abilities both to have sense-experience and to think the relations between concepts). Representations remain fundamental to Kant's account of knowledge, but the issue of *how* we derive our representations is no longer for him a merely 'representational' matter.

on the Hegelian view, is of course linked to the question of how we have sense-experience. But representations do not of themselves pertain to a relation of pure immediacy to objects that we perceive through intuition. Our representations are mediated by the dialectical movement of thought itself and are produced by this movement. For Hegel, representations are not therefore given by the subjective conditions of our understanding (the Kantian transcendental subject), but are instead to be regarded as the mediated products of thought processes. Thus, philosophy, on Hegel's view, must begin by first doubting that any objects of experience can be given directly through representation: 'Philosophy lacks the advantage, which the other sciences enjoy, of being able to *presuppose* its *objects*' as given immediately in representation' (*Logic*, section 1). No 'method' can be presupposed whereby we can claim the right, as philosophers, to construct an account of knowledge on the basis of an empirical model of how we have experience. True, says Hegel, philosophers, to some degree, presuppose this. Hegel is happy to admit two things here. First, he affirms that our representations of objects are produced *prior* to our concepts of them 'in the order of time' (i.e. temporally). We cannot, in other words, have concepts of objects unless we already possess representations of them. Second, Hegel also claims that all thinking can only become knowledge by 'going *through* representation and by converting itself *to* it'. But representation itself falls short of what thinking can do. The reason for this is that mere representations can never yield the *content* of what is being thought through them. We start, therefore, with representation because it is most familiar to us, but this presupposition exists only in order to be overcome in the dialectical engagement between thinking and its own limitations. The purpose of starting with representations only shows itself *subsequently*: 'philosophy puts... can be regarded as *metaphors* of thoughts and concepts' (section 3). Although thoughts and concepts *follow* representations in a temporal sense in so far as concepts, in the order of time, come after representations, it is thoughts and concepts that have *logical priority* over representations. The true significance of our ability to have representations only shows up when we think about this issue by way of concepts. Through conceptual thought we do not merely 'understand' our representations, we engage in an attempt to conceive or grasp them in a manner that endows them with significance. One might say that only when we think what it *means* to have representations (which implies the *concept* of 'representation'), will the true significance of the fact that we do have them come to light.

1.5 The Hegelian dialectic

We are now in a position to grasp the precise significance of Hegel's conception of dialectic. On the one hand, the dialectic represents the logical process of the unfolding of conscious thought as it engages with the material world through sense experience. On the other hand, however, this process is also reflected in the material world itself, in so far as brute physical reality also conforms to the dialectic of the

logical structure of the dialectic. This amounts to the *metaphysical* claim that reality is itself governed by the rules which constitute logic. Following the analysis of self-consciousness outlined in the *Phenomenology*, logic, as a human achievement, is nevertheless a direct consequence of thought encountering the world and, indeed, arises out of that encounter. In this way, Hegel seeks to close the gulf that Kant drew between noumena ('things-in-themselves') and phenomena (the objects of our experience – 'appearances'). He is, it follows, staking an ambitious claim. Where Kant urges us to rest content with knowledge of appearances only, Hegel argues that it is possible for us to have knowledge of the world as it really is, since how it appears to us is essentially connected with how it is. In other words, for Hegel it is possible for the subjective conditions of thought to correspond to the objective conditions of reality.

Hegel is therefore interested in the kinds of epistemological question that Locke, Hume and Kant address, but wishes to overcome the limitations of their respective approaches. Here are two examples of the kind of question that Hegel is interested in: (1) is the judgement expressed in a proposition true because what it states corresponds to the way things are or because it satisfies conditions of understanding given by *a priori* structures in the mind (e.g. that it is not contradictory and is consistent with other judgements of this kind, etc.)? (2) is it possible for us to have knowledge that would be everywhere and unconditionally true, or is our knowledge relative to the perspectives we might have at any given moment? We can put this last question in more Hegelian terms: can we have absolute knowledge, or is our knowledge always condemned to particularity? Hegel's response to questions like these is to argue that both of the possibilities contained within them (*either* correspondence or non-correspondence, *either* universality or particularity) form part of a larger scheme. In short, he is arguing that each possibility can be synthesized into a larger unity by transcending the 'either-or' relation contained within it. So, for Hegel, our knowledge can correspond to reality, because both consciousness and the world share the same logical structure. Equally, all knowledge claims are relative in so far as they are articulated from specific standpoints, but again, these standpoints themselves comprise a larger, and hence unified, structure. This structure is given by way of the *dialectic*. We can clarify these points by way of a brief examination of sections 79 to 83 of the *Logic*.

According to Hegel, the formal structure of logic is comprised of three 'sides' or 'moments'. Hegel is thereby contending that logic itself is a unity comprised of these three moments. These moments are not, therefore, separate 'parts', but together make up this unity. The first moment is 'understanding' (*Logic*, section 80). This is not pure empirical sensation (which animals also have and which is, in one sense, concrete, since it concerns actual experience). Rather, understanding is a conceptual moment in thought through which objects are *identified*. This allows for (1) the particular (that is, specific objects, and hence also the purposes that relate to one's dealings with such objects) to be known by way of being conceptualized; and (2) the universal to be postulated by way of abstracting concepts from the concrete experiential particulars to which they refer. Understanding is essential to thought in both its theoretical and practical domains. For example, in the realm of nature, it is through understanding that we posit 'distinctions... between matters, forces, kinds, etc., and they are marked off, each on its own account, in isolation from one another'.

Likewise, in the realm of practical conduct, it is because someone possesses understanding that they are able to determine what in particular interests them, to have purposes and to pursue those purposes to the exclusion of other interests.⁸ However, what is always posited through understanding is abstract because the understanding works by way of individuating and isolating particulars. The act of understanding always involves *abstraction*. We encounter particulars in the world around us, and on the basis of these particulars we formulate universal (i.e. general) judgements – in Hegelian terms, we posit the universal or 'Absolute' on the basis of particulars. Every act of individual understanding, therefore, always seeks to go beyond itself. Thought for Hegel, we might say, by its very nature craves universality. When, through understanding, the universal is posited, a necessary consequence of this is that the concepts employed are split off from their connection with empirical reality as a precondition of their being abstracted in the first place. The moment of understanding is, it follows, a limited one, in so far as the universal as it is posited within this moment is incapable of satisfying the need for truth that the very notion of 'universality' presupposes. Realization of this factor leads to the next moment in logical thought.

The second moment is called '*dialectic*' (*Logic*, section 81). This is a negative and self-conscious stage, in which conceptual abstraction (which, as we have already noted, represents the tendency of thought toward the universal) is realized to be limited and self-contradictory. Every universal abstraction is sundered by its particularity.⁹ This leads to the realization that the universal notion contained within it is not concrete and therefore not real. Again, Hegel makes it clear that the dialectical moment is not to be undervalued: 'It is in general the principle of all motion, of all life, and of all activation in the actual world. Equally, the dialectical is also the soul of all genuinely scientific cognition.' Life itself is dialectical to the extent that all life involves change. And all scientific thought, likewise, is dialectical to the extent that its critical possibility rests upon the ability of thought to transcend its own limitations. To put it another way, for Hegel, life and hence thought both contain the possibility of an '*immanent*' transcendence of their own limits. The notion of the '*immanent*' is fundamental here, for what Hegel is in effect contending is that existence is a kind of process which is continually overcoming itself. On such a conception one does not need to look 'outside' the world, or outside thought, in order to find the basis of universality and truth. The universal is always already present within them both. The universal is that which drives what is particular, and thus finite, to transcend its own finitude: 'the finite is not restricted merely from the outside; rather it sublates itself by virtue of its own nature, and passes over, of itself, into its opposite'.¹⁰ Absolute knowledge, or truth, is therefore possible for thought, since true knowledge is not to be understood as a relation between an inwardly oriented Cartesian self and an external world, but instead as the coming together of the two. This coming together is to be found in every moment of thought. So, for example, when we say of all humans that they are alive and yet also mortal, we might be tempted to regard death as being something that arises from 'external circumstances', i.e. as being unconnected with life. But the proper interpretation is that life as such bears the germ of death within itself, and that the finite sublates

itself because it contradicts itself inwardly.¹ In this way Hegel can argue that life itself is dialectical in that it contains within it its own opposite (death). If taken no further, the second '*dialectical moment*' corresponds to the sceptical position endorsed by Hume, i.e. the view that absolute knowledge of the world is impossible. The reason for this is that the dialectical moment will always reveal the inherent contradiction between the universal and the particular contained within thought. Just as life contains the germ of death within itself, so every universal claim will end up by being shown to contain its opposite (finitude), and so to fall short of the truth. However, reason allows the process to be taken one step further in the final moment.

The third moment is called the '*speculative or positively rational*' stage (*Logic*, section 83). The collapse of conceptual fixity arrived at in the second moment can now be overcome by way of reason. Reason posits new hypotheses which escape the contradictions thrown up by (and inherent in) the understanding, and does so *on the basis of them*. The third moment is *immanent*, since it occurs within thought itself and is not related to anything outside it. In Hegel's terms, this represents a movement away from the domain of mere concepts (the domain of the understanding) to the *Idea*, which is for him genuinely and concretely universal. It is universal because through the *Idea* reason is capable of perceiving the truly universal. Through reason it is realized that what is universally true about reality is the process of *change*. This process involves a movement from the comprehension of finite objects in the world to a comprehension and knowledge of the underlying and universal conditions in which their existence is grounded, i.e. what is usually termed '*becoming*'. In Hegel's view, it follows, reality is not to be understood in terms of static foundations, rules or principles upon which our empirical knowledge of the world of sense experience rests. Rather, reality is a self-driven and immanent process of change or becoming in which particulars come together in an ever more comprehensive rational synthesis.

From this it should be clear that Hegel's account of the nature of our knowledge rests upon a metaphysical account of the nature of reality, or what is more often referred to as an 'ontology'. What needs to be grasped concerning Hegel's view is that he is claiming that true knowledge is possible because the conditions that govern our knowledge are also the conditions of reality itself. In so far as thought has objectivity it does so because the world of nature shares this feature in common with conscious thinking. This is not to say that nature is 'conscious' and therefore thinks. On the contrary, 'man is distinguished from what is merely natural by virtue of thinking' (*Logic*, section 24). But nature can be understood as 'a system of thought without consciousness . . . an intelligence which . . . is petrified'. The world is not pure thought but 'a system of thought-determinations' in that 'there is reason in the world, by which we mean that reason is the soul of the world, inhabits it, and is immanent in it, as its own, innermost nature, its universal' (section 24).

The third moment of the dialectic represents a stage that is nearer to truth than the second moment of understanding because it can accommodate the fact of change and transience within a more unified view. The third moment is not a final moment, however. New contradictions will emerge and the process will reassert itself all over again:

Each of the parts of philosophy is a philosophical whole, a circle that closes upon itself; but in each of them the philosophical Idea is in a particular determinacy of element. Every single circle also breaks the restrictions of its element as well, precisely because it is inwardly [the] totality, and it grounds a further sphere. The whole presents itself therefore as a circle of circles, each of which is a necessary moment . . . the whole Idea . . . appears in each single one of them. (*Logic*, section 15)

Only when truth is arrived at (i.e. when reason has reached the stage of complete self-knowledge, when the 'circle of circles' has been produced) may the process stop. This final stage Hegel calls the moment of Absolute Spirit or Mind (*Geist*). It is because the unfolding of the dialectic is to be understood as being grounded in the *Idea* of the Absolute that Hegel's thought is generally characterized as a form of 'idealism'. In his own terms, his approach embodies an 'absolute idealism', as opposed to the 'subjective idealism' expounded by Kant in the first *Critique*, since the conditions which determine and govern thought are also the conditions which determine the nature of reality.

1.6 The Absolute and self-consciousness

Hegel argues for the view that knowledge can only be understood in terms of the dialectical unfolding of thought. The aim of knowledge is to attain pure self-consciousness by reaching the end of this process. It is this moment (the third moment of the dialectic) which is called the 'Absolute'. Here, consciousness would become truly transparent to itself: it would know itself for what it is absolutely, and so the dialectical process of mediation would cease. Effectively, then, the Hegelian system embodies not only a metaphysics of becoming, but a theological account of the nature of existence, for the universal is, in fact, the 'divine Idea' (i.e. God) (*Logic*, section 45, addition). It is clear from this that Hegel's metaphysics is *purposive*. He regards history as embodying the development of consciousness toward self-knowledge, and that is its purpose. To this extent, Hegel's philosophy shares a common feature with that of Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant. All of these thinkers approach questions of knowledge from the standpoint of *consciousness*, and in turn take self-consciousness to be an essential and defining component of what it is that constitutes knowledge. There are, in fact, some good reasons for believing this. Surely the term 'knowledge' is an attribution made by conscious beings such as ourselves, and all talk of 'knowledge' itself presupposes self-consciousness at some level. However, this view might itself be regarded as a metaphysical one. Just because the world of material relations has produced conscious beings in the form of humans it does not necessarily follow that humans are the *necessary consequence* of these material processes. We might be contingent beings: creatures who are a kind of 'accident'. One might therefore ask: is it really the case the material world 'needs' consciousness in order to fulfil itself, as the Hegelian account implies? Equally, is it really adequate to offer an account of the meaning of consciousness in its own terms, or do we need to think in terms of 'unconscious' forces governing our supposedly transparent sense of self? Questions like these are Nietzschean questions.

2 Nietzsche, Knowledge and the Demands of Life

We have already seen, at the beginning of chapter 1, that Nietzsche is a thinker who expresses doubts about the validity of 'immediate' certainties (such as the Cartesian 'I think'). In doubting their value in this way he also questions their value for our understanding of the nature of human knowledge. Likewise, we have seen that one Nietzschean contention is that what we call 'knowledge' might come down to nothing more than a matter of 'familiarity'. What people *mean* when they make a knowledge claim ('I know X') is really no more than that they are already familiar with it in some manner or other, or can render it in familiar terms. However, this is by no means all there is to Nietzsche's view of knowledge. Although he ultimately contends that what we 'know' is to be understood in terms of the influence of the kinds of practices and habits we adopt in everyday life, the manner in which Nietzsche develops this approach is both interesting and, at times, complex. To put it another way: Nietzsche is a very difficult thinker to tackle. The difficulty is something that springs from two factors. On the one hand, he often cannot resist the temptation to develop his ideas in ironic and sometimes caustic terms.¹¹ Equally, Nietzsche is a philosopher whose thinking is frequently marked by a restless urge for development. He is happy for a while with one perspective, but soon regards it as falling short in some way. Or sometimes an insight is given a turn that produces conclusions that are the opposite of what one might expect from it. To this extent, Nietzsche never offers what one could call a 'theory of knowledge' in the sense in which thinkers like Kant do. Indeed, he tells us 'Philosophy reduced to "theory of knowledge", in fact no more than a timid epochism and doctrine of abstinence – a philosophy that never gets beyond the threshold and takes pains to *deny* itself the right to enter – that is philosophy in its last throes, an end, an agony, something inspiring pity' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, section 204).¹² Nietzsche, therefore, regards philosophizing as an activity wherein one ought to try to offer more than mere 'theories' about knowledge. In the last analysis, for him, philosophy is a form of 'legislation': it does not say how reality is, but seeks to control it by interpreting it.¹³

Because of the very diversity of his approaches, some interpreters have come to see Nietzsche's writings as embodying an overall incoherence, as being 'unsystematic'. Sometimes he will say one thing; another time he will say something that appears to contradict that earlier claim. It is true that Nietzsche is frequently scathing about other philosophers whose work embodies a theoretical 'system' (as those of Kant and Hegel do). A will to construct systems is, for him, a sign that something rather questionable is in the offing. Intellectual honesty, on a Nietzschean view, one might say, means accepting the fact that life is never 'systematic': it never adds up to a coherent Hegelian whole. At the same time, there is much in Nietzsche's thought which, in spite of what is often taken to be his dismissal of Hegel, has a 'dialectical' turn to it. Nietzsche loves contradictions, for they show us things that are interesting about the way in which we think, and also the limitations of our thinking. Likewise, he develops an account of metaphysics which has something in common with Hegel's. For Nietzsche and Hegel alike, reality is essentially a process of 'becoming'. We Germans are Hegelians even if there never had been any Hegel, insofar as we (unlike