

## HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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A good many years ago, the Scottish philosopher and historian George Elder Davie (then my teacher) explained to me that reading a difficult book resembled carrying a plank. If one gets the centre of gravity of the plank wrong, said Davie, the plank is awkward and difficult to carry. If, however, one gets the centre of gravity firmly on ones shoulder the load is balanced and the weight of the plank is easy to support. In the same way, a book becomes intelligible if (setting aside subsidiary issues) its conceptual centre of gravity is clearly grasped.

The book that Davie was referring to when he made this explanation was David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*. I am not sure that I have ever, to my own satisfaction, succeeded in identifying the *Treatise's* centre of gravity. (Davie himself appears to identify not one centre of gravity but two: scepticism and common sense philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the tension between scepticism and common sense *is* the centre?) Here, the book that concerns us is not Hume's *Treatise* but Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The present paper sketches a suggestion about how the *Phenomenology's* centre of gravity may be seen.

Before turning to the *Phenomenology*, I indicate how the (metaphorical) idea of a conceptual *centre of gravity* will be viewed. By a work's *centre of gravity*, I understand something more than the *line of thought* that it follows or the general *perspective* that it employs. Identifying a work's centre of gravity is what makes its line of thought and its general perspective clear.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Davie *The Scotch Metaphysics* (London: Routledge 2001), ch 1.

Identification of a work's centre of gravity involves, I propose, bringing into focus the *issue* (or *set of issues*) that determines the course of discussion in the work concerned. At different points in the work, this issue or set of issues may be formulated with greater or lesser clarity (although the idea of a work's *centre of gravity* is not to be equated with the idea of a specific passage of text). Arguably, the author of a work must (by definition) be conscious of the *speech acts* that he or she is performing;<sup>2</sup> however, the same author need be aware only intermittently of the *issues* (or *set of issues*) that operate as a centre of gravity in what he or she says.<sup>3</sup>

Evidently, these comments on the idea of a centre of gravity are sketchy and have an informal rather than systematic status. (My reference to a work's *course of discussion* needs, for example, further development. It is a phrase that seems to me helpful, in the present connection, because – as Charles Taylor has suggested<sup>4</sup> – the reader of a philosophical work is in effect an 'interlocutor' in the discussion that the work contains.)

No less evidently (and quite apart from questions arising from the idea of a *centre of gravity*), severe difficulties are attached to an attempt to single out pivotal issues in a work as complex and as controversial as Hegel's *Phenomenology*. In making such an attempt, I feel these difficulties keenly. I am aware that every concept in the *Phenomenology* (and perhaps every sentence) has been the focus of sustained scholarly debate. I am aware that, running through this scholarship, there are deep conceptual and political fissures which make non-controversial claims all but impossible. Not least, I am aware of dangers of arbitrariness and oversimplification when offering general statements about a book so many-faceted and so rich in implications – and which is over 500 pages long.

If I nonetheless persist in my attempt to identify a centre of gravity in the *Phenomenology*, it is because such an attempt seems to me inevitable. Each reader of the *Phenomenology* attempts, in and through the act of reading, to

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<sup>2</sup> On the question of whether an author necessarily intends, and is conscious of, the speech acts that he or she is performing, see J. Tully (ed.) *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988) pp 151-6, 264-5.

<sup>3</sup> The formulations in the present paragraph are my own and not Davie's. Davie has left no systematic statement of his approach to reading or interpretation. However, the *issue* (or *set of issues*) that I refer to is close in meaning to what Davie – in his written work and in conversation – terms a 'crux'.

<sup>4</sup> See C. Taylor in Tully.1988, pp 218-28.

identify a conceptual centre of gravity that allows him or herself to have a sense of what Hegel says. Reading a philosophical work is (I suggest) not unlike getting to know a human individual: interacting with the individual, one asks oneself what is *essential to the individual* or – in the English phrase – what “makes the individual tick”. Reading a philosophical work, similarly, one asks oneself what issue (or set of issues) counts as fundamental through the twists and turns that the author’s exposition takes.

Which issues (or which set of issues) lie at the centre of the *Phenomenology*? As a starting-point for my discussion, I note a criticism directed by Robert Williams against Alexandre Kojève’s influential Hegel-interpretation. Williams comments that the *Phenomenology* ‘is supposed to function as the self-accomplishing skeptical introduction to Hegel’s system’ whereas Kojève mistakenly sees the *Phenomenology* as providing a ‘philosophical anthropology’.<sup>5</sup> Introduction to Hegel’s system? Or philosophical anthropology (i.e. theory of “man”)? Leaving questions of detail aside, we may agree that Williams’s formulation identifies two prevalent ways in which the *Phenomenology* has been interpreted.

Let me start with the suggestion that the *Phenomenology*<sup>6</sup> is primarily an introduction. On the title-page of its first (1807) edition, the *Phenomenology* is described as the ‘first book [*Erster Theil*]’ of a ‘System of Science [*System der Wissenschaft*]’. Hegel’s ‘System of Science’ did not then exist – at any rate, in a published form. Unpublished writings from Hegel’s Jena period – his *System of Ethical Life* and his various lecture-outlines – give a pre-*Phenomenology* indication of the shape that the ‘System’ would eventually take. In the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1817, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1831), Hegel presents his ‘System’ in its mature form.

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<sup>5</sup> R. R. Williams *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1997) pp. 66-7.

<sup>6</sup> In what follows, I refer to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* [PS] and his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* [Enc] by paragraph numbers. In the case of the *Phenomenology*, the paragraph numbers are those of A. V. Miller’s translation (*Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977). Occasionally, I have made minor changes in Miller’s translation..

These comments suggest, perhaps, that the *Phenomenology's* centre of gravity lies not in the *Phenomenology* itself – but in the ‘System’ which it introduces. Stated differently, they suggest that the *Phenomenology* is to be interpreted in the light of the *Encyclopaedia*, or with the *Encyclopaedia* in mind. A problem with this suggestion is, however, that the relation between the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopaedia* remains unclear. In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel claims that, although the *Phenomenology* attempts to move from simple to more complex levels of consciousness, ‘much that properly belongs to the concrete branches [of science] is prematurely dragged into the introduction’ (*Enc* 25). Later in the *Encyclopaedia*, there occurs a section on ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ but – as commentators have frequently noted – this section covers only the equivalent of *Phenomenology* chapters 1-V. That is, it covers the *Phenomenology's* sections on ‘Consciousness’, ‘Self-consciousness’ and ‘Reason’ (but not ‘Spirit’). A final mystery regarding the *Phenomenology's* relation to Hegel’s system arises from a footnote that Hegel added to the *Science of Logic* in 1831. There, we are told that the title ‘first part of the System of Science’ will not be repeated in an edition of the *Phenomenology* that is forthcoming.<sup>7</sup> In 1807, it seems, the *Phenomenology* counted as ‘part’ – albeit an introductory ‘part’ – of Hegelian science. In 1831, Hegel in effect banishes the *Phenomenology* from the canon of scientific (or systematic) texts.

In order to bring out the seriousness of Hegel’s conceptual difficulties in relating his introduction to his system, we may return to Williams. In Williams’s view, the *Phenomenology* is supposed to function as an introduction that is (in his words) ‘skeptical’ and ‘self-enclosed’. Williams’s use of the term ‘skeptical’ highlights epistemological themes in the *Phenomenology*, and suggests a progression where relatively simple views are discarded once that need for relatively more complex views has become plain. Williams’s term ‘self-enclosed’ refers to the circumstance that, in Hegel’s view, the *Phenomenology* is a text that is free-standing: in a famous passage, Hegel tells us that ‘the individual has the right to demand that science should...provide him with the ladder to this [scientific] perspective, should show him [the individual] this standpoint within himself’ (*PS* 26). The difficulty implicit within this passage is that, if the ‘ladder’ is to be reliable, it must be scientific; and that, if the individual already occupies a

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<sup>7</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (London: Allen and Unwin 1969) p 29.

scientific standpoint, the ladder is needless. If the ‘ladder’ is not scientific, a reader who has climbed it has no reason to trust what he or she sees. Following this line of thought to its conclusion, a choice appears to confront Hegel. EITHER the *Phenomenology* must be sacrificed, leaving the *Encyclopaedia* to speak on its own (the choice that Hegel’s 1831 footnote appears to endorse). OR the *Phenomenology* must be acknowledged as a scientific text regardless of what its relation to the *Encyclopaedia* might be.

Mention of this second alternative indicates where, perhaps, a case for regarding the *Phenomenology* as a ‘philosophical anthropology’ might be made. If the *Phenomenology* is already scientific, might it not be read as a work that presents a scientific view of “man”? Such a suggestion seems to be ruled out if we regard the *Phenomenology* as predominantly a ‘skeptical’ and epistemological text. But should the *Phenomenology* be viewed in this manner? Epistemology is (we may suggest schematically) *theory of theory*; but *theory of practice* is presented in many of the *Phenomenology*’s best-known pages. In chapter VI, on ‘Spirit’, Hegel presents a (select) history of Europe from the Ancient *polis* to the French Revolution and beyond. In chapter IV, on ‘Self-consciousness’, Hegel explores themes – desire, recognition, struggle, work, freedom – whose practical status is plain. By ‘a self-consciousness’, we may suggest, Hegel means not an abstract intellect – as Marx supposes – but a human individual who is as “practical” as Marx would wish.<sup>8</sup> From the standpoint of a reader of the *Phenomenology*, the question is not whether there is a “practical” strand in Hegel but how, in the *Phenomenology*, “theoretical” and “practical” strands interrelate.

It is time for me to stop making critical observations and to present – in however sketchy a fashion – my own view of the *Phenomenology*’s argument. My suggestion is that, owing to his conception of the theory-practice relation, Hegel understands *epistemology* (theory of “man” as a theoretical being) and *anthropology* (theory of “man” as a practical being) not as mutually exclusive but as two sides of the same thing. My overall claim in the present paper is that an important centre of gravity in the

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<sup>8</sup> Marx rightly perceives that, for Hegel, “man” = “self-consciousness. Wrongly, however, he concludes from this that in Hegel’s view ‘the self is only *abstractly* conceived man, man produced by abstraction’. My suggestion is that, when Marx presents “man” as an intrinsically practical being whose feet are ‘planted on the solid earth’ and who exhales and inhales ‘all the powers of nature’, the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* would be in full agreement. (See K. Marx *Early Writings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1974, pp. 387, 389.)

*Phenomenology* is the question: in what relation do *theory* and *practice* stand?

Hegel's answer to the question "How do theory and practice relate?" is, I suggest, a distinctive one. To see the force of his answer, we need to have a sense of how inconclusive "conventional" epistemology is. (By "conventional" epistemology, I understand epistemology that views theory not as practice-related but as a practice-independent realm.) In addition, we need to have a sense of the richness and, so to say, the many-sidedness of practical life. Hegel (I propose) attempts to supply the first of these senses in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* (on 'Consciousness'). He attempts to supply the second of these senses in (especially) *Phenomenology* chapters IV and VI. Later in my paper, I comment on the way in which Hegel's argument unfolds in sections of the *Phenomenology*. Here, I indicate how – I consider – the conceptual structure of Hegel's answer may be seen.

I suggest that the *Phenomenology*'s answer to the question "How do theory and practice relate?" can be summarised in two sentences. Neither sentence is excessively long but, without explanation, both sentences are opaque. In the first place, Hegel maintains that *uncontradicted freedom* and *uncontradicted recognition* exist when – and only when – they exist together: they exist in and through one another. (This is the "practical" or *anthropological* part of his argument.) In the second place, Hegel maintains that, where *uncontradicted freedom* and *uncontradicted recognition* exist, truth appears. (This is the part of his argument that integrates "theoretical" and "practical" – or *epistemological* and *anthropological* – issues.)

In what follows, I comment on each of the three just-mentioned themes – *freedom*, *recognition* and *truth* – in turn. My comments are (I am aware) brief and all-too-schematic.

### 1. *Hegel's conception of freedom*

In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel declares that 'of the absolute, it must be said that it is essentially a *result*' (PS 20). This

declaration reads oddly. *Absolute* being is (I take it) *free* being: but how can *free* being be a *result*? The oddness disappears if absolute (or free) being is seen as *its own* result – or as *result of itself*. If Hegel's declaration is understood in this fashion, what it tells us is that *freedom* is to be seen in a manner that involves *self-determination*. The notion of *self-determination* is, I suggest, deeply rooted in Hegel. It is present when, for example, he comments (in his lectures on the philosophy of history) that 'man' – unlike 'the animal' – 'acts in accordance with *ends* and determines himself in the light of a general principle. It is up to him to decide what end to follow'.<sup>9</sup> Animals may (for Hegel) be free in the sense that they achieve goals that are instinctively implanted in them. Humans, however, may be free in the sense that they choose their purposes. Hegel's thought is that, in choosing their purposes, humans choose themselves.

The notion of *self-determination* has various logical peculiarities. The most striking of these is that, when we describe an individual as determining him or herself, the individual is – so to say – referred to twice-over: as the individual *who is determined* and as the individual *who does the determining*. Because the individual may *change* him or herself through self-determining action, the individual *who is determined* and the individual *who does the determining* may differ – and yet remain one and the same. This circumstance has led writers on self-determination to make use of formulations that (intentionally) contain contradiction. Sartre, for example, refers to an individual *who is what he is not, and is not what he is*. Hegel, to the same effect, sees action as involving a *unity of unity and difference* (e.g. *PS* 167). What contradicts (or "alienates") freedom is not, for Hegel, contradiction *per se* but immobility or fixity through which self-determining action is denied or undermined.

A second logical peculiarity is less evident. It becomes apparent when the notion of self-determination is viewed in a strict or literal way. Taken literally, a being that determines itself is a being that results from itself *alone*; moreover, it is a being that *can result from nothing other than itself*. (If it existed by courtesy of anything else, it would be determined by it – and it would cease to be self-determining.) Some such line of thought may, I suggest, underlie passages where Hegel writes of the 'tremendous power of the negative': 'the life of spirit is not' – says Hegel – 'the life that shrinks from

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<sup>9</sup> Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975) p 49. (See, similarly, Marx on man's 'species being' *Early Writings* p 328.)

death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it' (*PS* 32). Spirit, or self-determining being, 'has power to maintain itself in contradiction' (*Enc* 382). Whatever may be the basis of passages such as these, they have – I suggest – a direct implication for the way in which a condition of *unfreedom* is to be envisaged. For Hegel, a condition of *unfreedom* is not a condition where freedom is literally absent, but one where *freedom exists* – but in a *contradicted* or “alienated” fashion. It is freedom existing in the mode of being denied.

So far, my schematic comments may seem to imply a starkly *individualist* view of self-determination. In Hegel's view, however, such a view of self-determination would be a mistake. Although it may be that, as I have suggested, self-determining being *can result from nothing other than itself*, the “self” which does the “determining” is pictured by Hegel in social and interactive – rather than in solitary and atomistic – terms. Human individuals do the determining,<sup>10</sup> but these same individuals exist in a “dialogical” (rather than a “monological”) way. In Hegel's words: ‘A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness* [that is: a self-consciousness exists for *another* self-consciousness]. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness’ (*PS* 177). This “dialogical” and, as it were, intrinsically plural conception of human individuality has strong implications for how self-determining freedom is to be seen.

If human individuality is intrinsically “dialogical”, freedom begins to contradict itself if it is pictured in a “monological” way. If individuals are seen as free *in spite of one another*, as in conceptions of “negative” liberty, each individual's ‘sphere’<sup>11</sup> of freedom presses upon, and delimits, the freedom that other individuals possess. A *delimited* freedom is no longer a freedom that exists on its own terms or, in other words, determines itself. In his pre-*Phenomenology* writings, Hegel rejects a conception of freedom that turns on the idea of limits: ‘If the community of rational beings were essentially a limitation of true freedom, the community would be in and for

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<sup>10</sup> This part of my sentence is meant to deny an “idealist” interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, where what *does the determining* is a (more-or-less theistic) global subject or super-individual or “grand totalizer”.

<sup>11</sup> I take the term ‘sphere’ from Fichte *Foundations of Natural Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) p 48. (Hegel criticises the Fichteian idea of ‘spheres’ in his *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York 1977, pp. 144-8.



itself the supreme tyranny'.<sup>12</sup> In place of such a conception, Hegel argues that freedom may exist not *in spite of*, but *in and through*, an individual's relations with others: as in a good conversation or rewarding interaction, an individual's capacities for self-determination may be strengthened by the circumstance that other individuals exist.

It is at this point in my sketch of what I take to be Hegel's understanding of freedom that the theme of *recognition* comes on to the scene. Freedom that exists *in and through* relations with others is freedom that presupposes the interactive, to-and-fro process of mutual acknowledgement in which – I shall suggest – recognition exists. Not *every* pattern of recognition, or form of interaction, is, to be sure, compatible with the flourishing of uncontradicted (or non-alienated) freedom. For freedom to come into its own, and for uncontradicted or non-alienated freedom to exist, recognition's to-and-fro process must be untrammelled and (what is to say the same thing in a different fashion) individuals' freely-given recognition must be acknowledged in a free way. In a word, uncontradicted freedom exists only in and through mutual recognition. In one of the *Phenomenology's* most often-quoted passages, Hegel refers to a 'unity' of self-consciousnesses 'which...enjoy perfect freedom and independence: I that is We and We that is I' (*PS* 177).

## 2. Hegel's conception of recognition

A broad understanding of the Hegelian term 'recognition [*Anerkennung*]' may be gained by noting ideas that are associated with it: social existence, "dialogical" existence, interaction, acknowledgement (or acknowledgement-through-interaction) and so forth. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel introduces the term in this fashion. His reference to a self-consciousness that 'exists *for a self-consciousness*' prepares the ground for his declaration that 'self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being recognized' (*PS* 178). Although the broad meaning of Hegel's term may be easy enough to gather, however, difficult issues arise when the notion of 'recognition' is scrutinised in a more detailed way.

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<sup>12</sup> Hegel *Difference* p. 145. (For discussion of the passage, see R. R. Williams *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*, Albany: State University of New York 1992, p. 83.)

One set of issues concerns the place of ‘recognition’ in the *Phenomenology’s* overall argument. In chapter IV of the *Phenomenology*, on self-consciousness, Hegel’s introduction of ‘recognition’ is preceded by an account of ‘desire’ (PS 167-76): *desire* and *recognition* are presented as, in effect, two forms that ‘self-consciousness’ – practical human individuality – may take. What makes the theme of recognition crucial, and what allows Hegel to describe the introduction of recognition as a ‘turning-point [Wendungspunkt]’ in the *Phenomenology’s* discussion (PS 177), is that *recognitive* existence contains possibilities of uncontradicted freedom that are beyond the reach of *desiring* existence alone. Recognitive existence contains possibilities of freedom because, as I have suggested, it is *in and through* (rather than *in spite of*) relations with others that uncontradicted freedom may be reached.

The question of recognition’s place in the *Phenomenology’s* argument has a further aspect. In chapter IV, when he introduces ‘recognition’, Hegel first of all (in PS 178-84) outlines the general idea – or ‘pure concept [*reine Begriff*]’ – of recognition; then he describes the practical process through which, at first, recognition ‘appears’ (PS 185). He proposes that recognition comes into being through a life-and-death struggle (PS 187-8). The immediate result of this life-and-death struggle is, Hegel argues, the ‘one-sided and unequal’ form of recognition (PS 191) that characterises the relation of Master and Slave. In the present paper, I make no attempt whatever to comment on the *Phenomenology’s* much-discussed Master-Slave section.<sup>13</sup> Nor do I attempt to comment on Master-Slave passages in Hegel’s pre-*Phenomenology* writings<sup>14</sup> (although I consider that these earlier passages are the indispensable background that allows issues in the *Phenomenology’s* Master-Slave section to be seen). What I do offer, in the present paper, is a highly schematic suggestion about how the Master-Slave

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, A. Kojève *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York; Basic Books 1969) pp. 3-30, 38-43; G. A. Kelly ‘Notes on Hegel’s “Lordship and Bondage”’ in A. MacIntyre (ed.) *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, London: University of Notre Dame Press 1976, pp. 189-217; J. M. Bernstein ‘From consciousness to community: act and recognition in the master-slave relationship’ in Z. A. Pelczynski (ed.) *The State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984) pp. 14-39; R. Stern *Hegel and the ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’* (London: Routledge 2002) pp. 75-85; F. Beiser *Hegel* (London: Routledge 2005) pp. 185-91. This list of secondary sources is highly arbitrary and could be indefinitely extended.

<sup>14</sup> For Master-Slave passages in Hegel’s pre-*Phenomenology* writings, see G. W. F. Hegel *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York 1979) pp. 124-5, 137-8, 236-42; L. Rauch (trans.) *Hegel and the Human Spirit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1983) pp 110-8.

section of the *Phenomenology* relates to Hegel's discussion of *history* later in the same work. I suggest that, for Hegel, history *begins* with the emergence of 'one-sided and unequal' recognition and *ends* when mutual recognition – recognition that goes together with uncontradicted freedom – has been achieved. History is, in effect, the "work" of transforming 'one-sided' recognition into mutual recognition – a "work" that goes forward through numerous stages where forms of *misrecognition* (or of *alienation*) obtain.<sup>15</sup>

A final point about recognition's place in the *Phenomenology's* argument concerns terminology. In the paragraph that describes self-consciousness as existing '*for a self-consciousness*', and employs the formula of an 'I that is We and We that is I', Hegel refers to the 'concept of spirit [*Begriff des Geistes*]' in an intriguing way: self-consciousnesses' experience of relating to one another in an 'I that is We and We that is I' is, says Hegel an 'experience of what spirit is [*was der Geist ist*]' (PS 177).<sup>16</sup> This paragraph is, as we have seen, the run-up to the *Phenomenology's* first systematic of the term 'recognition'; and, this being the case, it is tempting to suggest that Hegel *defines spirit in terms of* recognition. It is tempting, indeed, to suggest that Hegelian spirit *is* recognition – at least, so far as Hegel's discussion in the *Phenomenology* is concerned. For my own part, I am sympathetic to these suggestions: whenever the *Phenomenology* writes of 'spirit', issues concerning recognition should come to mind. Certainly, I see no reason to think of 'spirit' as a collective subject or as, in effect, a grand puppet-master who pulls history's strings.

My comments about recognition's place in the *Phenomenology's* argument are offered mainly as suggestions. In the context of the present paper, the issue that I wish to emphasise regarding 'recognition' is one of a rather different kind. It is mainly conceptual rather than mainly textual, and concerns – so to say – the *internal dynamic* of recognition in its Hegelian sense.

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<sup>15</sup> My suggestion is, of course, indebted to Kojève's reading of Hegel: 'Man was born and History began with the first Fight that ended in the appearance of a Master and a Slave' (Kojève *Introduction* p 43). (In quoting this passage, I do not intend to imply agreement with all aspects of Kojève's interpretation.)

<sup>16</sup> For discussion of this passage's significance for Hegel's concept of 'spirit', see Williams *Recognition* pp. 2, 143.

For Hegel, the term ‘recognition’ has not merely a *cognitive* but a *constitutive* meaning. That is to say, recognition involves more than *knowing* something *about* the individual who is recognized. It involves *making* the recognized individual (or *constituting* the recognized individual) what he or she is. Hegel makes the *constitutive* dimension of recognition explicit when he says, in a passage that I have already quoted, that self-consciousness *is* or *exists* ‘only in being recognized’. But what conditions must be met, if the process of *constitution* is to take place?

The conditions are ones that concern freedom. In the first place, recognition counts as recognition only if it is freely given. In the second place, recognition counts as freely given only if it, itself, is recognized as being given in a free way. Taking these conditions together, we may conclude that *any* act of recognition requires that *both* of the just-mentioned acts of recognition are performed.<sup>17</sup> We may further conclude that, for an act of recognition (in its “constitutive” sense) to succeed, individuals must *freely recognize* the recognition that is *freely given* by other individuals. Individuals must (in Hegel’s words) ‘*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another’ (PS 184). Our final conclusion may be that, when we *recognize* the *recognition* that is given by others, we construe the giving of recognition as a free and self-determining act.

In sum: *uncontradicted* (or *non-alienated*) recognition is *mutual* recognition. When recognition exists on its own (uncontradicted) terms, it exists as a to-and-fro interaction through which self-determining action is acknowledged and constituted and enhanced. When this to-and-fro interaction is interrupted or distorted, or made to flow in limited and restricted channels, recognition exists only in a contradicted (or alienated) form. When recognition is ‘one-sided and unequal’, the contradiction is at its most extreme.<sup>18</sup> Between the extremes of *one-sided and unequal* recognition and *mutual* recognition, there exists – or rather, there has existed historically – a galaxy of situations where self-determining freedom is *misrecognized* in this or that way.

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<sup>17</sup> Hegel emphasises recognition’s symmetry when, in his presentation of recognition as a general idea, he says that ‘each [individual] does itself what it demands of the other’ and that ‘action by one side would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both’ (PS 182).

<sup>18</sup> In the relation of Master and Slave, where recognition is ‘one-sided and unequal’, the Master (in order to count as a Master) depends on recognition – recognition by the Slave – which at the same time he despises and denies.

My sketch of the *internal dynamic* – or, in Hegel’s word, the *process* - of recognition is admittedly abstract<sup>19</sup> but, I suggest, it sheds light on the suggestion that (for Hegel) individuals can be free not *in spite of*, but *in and through*, their relations with others. They can be free *in and through* their relations with others to the extent that mutual recognition exists. Freedom *in spite of* relations with others – “negative” freedom – is freedom that turns its back on the process of cognitive interaction, or makes its peace with an inadequate or incomplete form of cognitive interaction, and does not yet amount to freedom in a full and uncontradicted way.

In presenting (however schematically) what I take to be *Hegel’s conception of freedom* and *Hegel’s conception of recognition*, I have – in effect – attempted to execute a conceptual pincer movement. I have attempted to show that freedom exists on its own (uncontradicted) terms when mutual recognition obtains; and I have attempted to show recognition exists on its own (uncontradicted) terms only when *what is recognized* is self-determining freedom. Freedom (in order to *be* freedom) needs recognition, and recognition (in order to *be* recognition) needs freedom. The two arcs of my argument – the arc concerning *freedom* and the arc concerning *recognition* – come together in the idea of *mutual recognition*: when mutual recognition exists, then and only do *uncontradicted freedom* and *uncontradicted recognition* obtain. Freedom and recognition remain alienated, unless the unconstrained and undistorted flow of to-and-from mutually cognitive interaction dictates its own terms.

### 3. *Hegel’s conception of truth*

So far, my discussion has concentrated on “practical” themes in the *Phenomenology*. I have sought to show that the intersecting themes of *freedom* and *recognition* are fundamental to Hegel’s view of how the world of practice is to be seen. Now, I turn from questions about “practice” itself to questions about how, in Hegel’s view, “theory” and “practice” are related. My suggestion is that Hegel’s distinctive conception of practice allows the relation between theory and practice to be understood in an intriguing way.

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<sup>19</sup> As is Hegel’s picture of the general idea of recognition in *PS* 178-84.

In the *Phenomenology's* Preface, Hegel makes two claims that stand out because of their seemingly implausible nature. One is that Hegelian 'science' is 'at once exoteric, comprehensible, and capable of being learned by and all and appropriated by all' (*PS* 13). This claim strikes us as implausible because, surely, Hegelian 'science' is – however we view it – complex to a labyrinthine extent. The other is that 'it is the nature of truth to prevail when its time has come', that 'it appears only when its time has come' and that it 'never appears prematurely, nor finds a public not ripe to receive it' (*PS* 71). This claim strikes us as implausible because it seems to presuppose, in an "idealist" fashion, that 'truth' generates its own 'public' – or, stated differently, that "theory" determines the form that "practice" will take.

I suggest that these seemingly implausible claims admit of a plausible interpretation. If *something in the practical situation that individuals inhabit* gives them a purchase on the categories of 'truth' and 'science', they can be seen as already capable (before they turn a single page of the *Phenomenology*) of understanding what Hegel has to say. They will be individuals who are, indeed, 'able to attain to rational truth by way of the ordinary understanding' (*PS* 13) and they will count as a 'public' able to receive the 'truth' that the *Phenomenology* will expound. For Hegel, I suggest, the appearance of 'truth' – Hegel's own 'truth' included – has "practical" rather than merely "theoretical" conditions. Does this suggestion have a basis in Hegel's text?

I propose that it does. In a well-known passage, Hegel tells us that he wishes to 'help bring philosophy [love of knowledge] to the form of science [actual knowledge]' – and he indicates that this attempt is justified because the 'time' is now right (*PS* 5). To what 'time' does Hegel refer? According to a no-less famous passage in the *Phenomenology's* Preface, 'it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined... The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world' (*PS* 11). The 'new world [*neuen Welt*]' to which Hegel refers is the world opened by the French Revolution. This French Revolutionary 'new world' is the world where, according to Hegel, philosophy may be raised to the level of science. It is the world in which

science may be ‘exoteric’ and intelligible and where an audience or ‘public’ for truth is assured. Taking these just-quoted passages together, we gain a sense of the *Phenomenology* as a work where “theoretical” and “practical” themes are interwoven in a close way.

If, for Hegel, the appearance of truth has “practical” rather than merely “theoretical” preconditions,<sup>20</sup> can we say what these preconditions might be? Hegel’s view of the *Phenomenology* as a work written in the ‘new world’ opened by the French Revolution suggests where an answer to this question may be found. In chapter VI of the *Phenomenology*, the section where Hegel discusses the French Revolution (PS 582-95) is followed by a section which considers views and attitudes that have had currency in Hegel’s own post-French Revolutionary day. In the course of this consideration, Hegel refers to mutual recognition as a circumstance that allows theoretical conundrums – for examples, conundrums regarding ‘duty’ and ‘conscience’ – to be resolved.<sup>21</sup> It is in this section that Hegel (in a “semi-Wittgensteinian” fashion) characterises ‘language’ as ‘self-consciousness existing *for others*’ (PS 652), and it may not be fanciful to mix Wittgensteinian and Hegelian terminology and suggest that, for Hegel, philosophical *problems* count as philosophical *puzzles* as long as mutual recognition is in play.

However Hegel’s references to mutual recognition in the final section of *Phenomenology* chapter VI or to be interpreted, there is no doubt that, for Hegel, mutual recognition is a theme that may be invoked in the ‘new world’ that the French Revolution creates. In offering this comment, I do not mean to imply that (for Hegel) French Revolutionary freedom *just is* mutually recognitive freedom. Nor do I mean to imply that (in Hegel’s view) mutual recognition exists in the post-French Revolutionary ‘new world’ in an unsullied way. I do, however, consider that what Hegel says *in* the *Phenomenology* may be seen as a key to understanding what Hegel says *about* the *Phenomenology* – and that the ‘public’ which is ripe to receive ‘truth’ (PS 71) may, for Hegel, be a public amongst whom mutual recognition obtains. Hegel may consider that ‘philosophy’ can, at last, be raised to the level of ‘science’ (PS 5) because, in consequence of the French Revolution, an audience that *can be presumed to be mutually recognitive* exists.

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<sup>20</sup> Or, as Hegel says, ‘external’ as well as internal’ preconditions (see PS 5).

<sup>21</sup> On mutual recognition in the final section of *Phenomenology* chapter VI, see e.g. PS 640, 644, 653.

An implication of this line of thought is that the ‘science’ presented in the *Phenomenology* is a science that exists in “dialogical” terms. If ‘science’ makes its appearance only before a mutually recognitive audience, it exists only insofar as it is learned and appropriated in a *questioning* and *evalualitive* (rather than a merely passive and accepting) way.<sup>22</sup> To employ a term introduced much earlier, it exists only insofar as each member of its audience is a potential ‘interlocutor’. Here, I do not enter into the vexed question of whether Hegel understands ‘science’ in the same way in his *Phenomenology* and his later *Encyclopaedia*. However, confining myself to the *Phenomenology*, I propose that Hegelian ‘science’ can best be seen as turning on a “consensus” (rather than a “coherence”) conception of truth.

By a “coherence” conception of truth I understand one where a claim counts as true if, and only if, it forms part of a ‘completely rounded [conceptual] system’.<sup>23</sup> By a “consensus” conception of truth I understand one where the idea of truth is equated with the idea of agreement reached through open and unconstrained discussion. I am aware that the terms “coherence” and “consensus” are interpreted in various fashions (and that, in some usages, the former term encompasses the latter). I make no attempt to clarify these terms further here. In suggesting that the *Phenomenology* has stronger affiliations with a “consensus” than with a “coherence” theory of truth, my concern is to place Hegelian science against a very broad conceptual divide.<sup>24</sup>

How might a conception of science that is “dialogical” and based on mutual recognition operate? What form might such a science take? In

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Habermas’s picture of an ‘ideal speech situation’, where all individuals are seen as having equal chances of performing speech acts of the same kind. (See T. McCarthy *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, ambridge: Polity Press 1984, p. 308.)

<sup>23</sup> See B. Russell *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press 1967) p 70. In criticising a ‘coherence’ conception of truth, Russell sees himself as criticising Hegel (and, most probably, the Hegel of the *Encyclopaedia*).

<sup>24</sup> A specific point which I would like to note is that, in referring to agreement reached through ‘unconstrained’ and ‘open’ discussion, my aim is to provide a “consensus” theory with a defence against the standard charge of relativism. Agreement reached through open and unconstrained discussion is, in effect, the “best” agreement that can be reached at any given time. (To be sure, the such an agreement is open to change as fresh conversational voices are raised.) I take it that – by definition – ‘open’ and ‘unconstrained’ discussion takes place when mutual recognition obtains.



hazarding a reply to these questions, I return to what I said earlier about *recognition* and *freedom* and their interrelation.

I picture a condition of mutual recognition as (in effect) a discussion or conversation – one where each individual is *without remainder* constituted through recognition and where, at the same time, each individual retains his or her conversational (or recognitive) voice. Each individual is through-and-through social, and yet the determinism that is commonly associated with such views is avoided because *what is recognized* – what is *constitutively* recognized – is the individual's freedom. (This is what is meant by saying that individuals are free *in and through* their relations with others.) Individuals retain, in a polity of recognition, their capacity to make “conversational” interventions because recognition of an individual's freedom involves recognition of the voice in which the individual speaks.<sup>25</sup>

This picture, as so far presented, is incomplete because it does not bring the notion of *self-determination* into a sufficiently clear focus. If to recognize an individual's *freedom* is to recognize that individual's *self-determining action*, much more is involved than acknowledging (say) a specific sphere of action or a specific set of rights. More is involved, because to say that an individual determines him or herself is to say that *that individual* – everything about that individual – determines everything which that individual is.<sup>26</sup> To recognize an individual's self-determining action is, it follows, to recognize that individual in a full and “concrete” sense.<sup>27</sup> It is to acknowledge not merely the authenticity of the individual's *words* and *actions* but the authenticity of the individual's *experiences* as well. With this reference to *experiences*, so I suggest, the notion of a “dialogical” science comes on the conceptual scene.

A “dialogical” science is (I propose) one that recognizes or authenticates experiences – and does so through discussion, in a ‘mutual’ or interactive way. Such a science is not something that is *added to* mutual recognition, or

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<sup>25</sup> That is to say, it involves recognition of an individual's competence to perform a full range of speech acts. (See note 22, above.)

<sup>26</sup> This circumstance is, so to say, a further logical peculiarity involved in the idea of self-determination. (See the opening paragraphs of my section on Hegel's conception of freedom.)

<sup>27</sup> That is to say, it involves recognizing both the “universality” and the “particularity” of the individual. Comments on Hegel's understanding of how “universality” and “particularity” may be integrated are beyond the boundaries of the present paper.

something that *descends upon* mutual recognition in an “idealist” manner. Rather, insofar as its project is that of validating experiences, it forms an intrinsic part of mutual recognition itself. A Hegelian scientist, thus conceived, does not observe mutual recognition externally but stands in – and is constituted by – mutual recognition’s flow.

In suggesting that a “dialogical” science attempts to validate (or recognize) experiences, my aim is to bring together the idea of science or ‘Absolute Knowing’ and the notion of *phenomenology* – a notion not so far considered in the present paper. In his chapter on ‘Absolute Knowing’, Hegel himself characterises knowing (*Wissen*) as ‘this seeming inactivity which merely contemplates how what is differentiated spontaneously moves in its own self and returns into its unity’ (*PS* 804). Other than phenomenology, what might this seeming inactivity be? My further aim is to suggest that Hegel’s phenomenology is, intrinsically, an intersubjective phenomenology. Rather than attempting to observe sensations in solitary and Cartesian splendour, a Hegelian phenomenologist (a Hegelian scientist) adds a question to the descriptions of experience that he or she provides. The question is “It’s like this – isn’t it?”, and the individual to whom the question is addressed is the individual whose experience may or may not be validated in dialogical terms. In a mutually recognitive world, the individual whose experience is described remains an ‘interlocutor’ or, in other words, an individual who may speak back. Since the experience not merely of *oneself*, but of *others*, is invoked in “dialogical” descriptions of experience, a skill that Hegelian science presupposes is empathy or social imagination – or ‘sympathy’, in approximately Adam Smith’s sense.

Have my comments succeeded in identifying a centre of gravity in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*? Has my discussion made plausible the suggestion that issues concerning “theory” and “practice” lie at the *Phenomenology*’s core? At most, I have suggested some textual and thematic connections that may prove interesting in the light of a much lengthier and more painstaking discussion. If, however, an attempt to identify a centre of gravity is inseparable from the act of reading a philosophical work,<sup>28</sup> my comments

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<sup>28</sup> See my comments at the end of the first section of the present paper.

may serve to focus questions that arise when a reader grapples with Hegel's formidably complex text.

In the final section of my paper, I indicate how the *Phenomenology's* order of discussion may be seen if its conceptual structure is as I have described it. I comment on how the themes of "theory" and "practice" are presented by Hegel, as the argument of the *Phenomenology* unfolds. I have proposed that, in effect, uncontradicted freedom and uncontradicted recognition exist together, in and through one another – and so exist when recognition is of a 'mutual' kind. I have further proposed that truth (in the form of "dialogical" phenomenology) appears when mutual recognition is achieved. If the themes that I have indicated are indeed central to Hegel, in what form are they encountered when a reader makes his or her way through Hegel's text? My comments follow the *Phenomenology's* order of discussion.

Hegel's lengthy 'Preface', with which the *Phenomenology* opens, may dazzle a first-time reader rather than guide him or her towards a clear-cut line of thought. The Preface is difficult, from a reader's point of view, not because it says too little but because it risks saying too much in an out-of-order way. Hegel acknowledges this difficulty in the Preface's opening paragraphs. (In passing, we may note that the difficulty is exacerbated by the circumstance the Preface is, seemingly, a preface not merely to the *Phenomenology* but to Hegel's 'system of science' as a whole.) In my discussion of *freedom* and *recognition* and *truth*, I have made no attempt to present the Preface in a rounded fashion. Instead, I have drawn attention to passages that highlight themes and issues in what Hegel has to say. One theme on which the Preface sheds light is self-determination (see *PS* 20, 32). Another is the theme of truth's appearance (in the form of 'science') to a 'public' amongst whom, in the 'new world' opened by the French Revolution, mutual recognition obtains (*PS* 5, 11, 71). This latter theme may be underscored. If dialogical science appears only to a mutually recognitive 'public', this same science counts as intelligible – or, in Hegel's term, 'exoteric' (*PS* 13) – only for as long as at least traces of mutual recognition exist. Proverbially, Hegel's writings are immensely difficult. My comments about intelligibility prepare the way for the intriguing suggestion that, perhaps, Hegel's writings strike us as difficult because we no longer inhabit mutually recognitive times. Perhaps the immense difficulty of Hegel's

writings, and the *Phenomenology* especially, has a world-historical component? Be this as it may, the *Phenomenology* is a “reflexive” work: in the *Phenomenology* itself, Hegel accounts for the historical emergence of the audience (or ‘public’) that may find it comprehensible. By its own arguments, such a work ceases to be exoteric and becomes esoteric<sup>29</sup> if and when (with an erosion of mutual recognition) times change.

Before leaving the *Phenomenology*’s Preface, a final passage may be quoted. Towards the end of the Preface, and shortly before his comments on ‘truth’ and its ‘public’, Hegel observes that the nature of humanity ‘is to press onward to agreement with others’; human nature, he says, ‘only exists in an achieved community of consciousness [or consciousnesses]’ (*PS* 69). This passage, I suggest, points towards the themes of mutual recognition, and of a truth that may make its appearance if the open and undistorted communication of mutual recognition obtains.

From the *Phenomenology*’s dazzling ‘Preface’, a reader turns to its much-more-closely-focused ‘Introduction’ – which outlines the idea of phenomenological ‘method’ (*PS* 81). I make no attempt to summarise issues raised in the Introduction here. However, I note that, if the Preface threatens to disorient a reader through its broad scope, the Introduction runs the risk of being misleading for the opposite reason. Commentators have sometimes claimed that what the Introduction introduces is not the *Phenomenology* as a whole but merely its first three chapters (which discuss ‘Consciousness’).<sup>30</sup> Whether or not this claim is valid, it is undeniably the case that the Introduction concentrates on questions about knowledge (or “theory about theory”) and that this emphasis on epistemological issues is continued in *Phenomenology* chapters I-III. A reader who takes the Introduction at its (seeming) face value, and who follows through Hegel’s discussions of ‘Sense-certainty’, ‘Perception’ and the ‘Understanding’, may reasonably form the impression that the *Phenomenology* will continue as a book about knowledge through-and-through. Such a reader is unprepared when Hegel

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<sup>29</sup> The picture of Hegel as an ‘esoteric’ theorist emerged in the Young Hegelian period (see Bruno Bauer, as excerpted in L. S. Stepelevich, ed., *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983, pp. 177-86). The challenge faced by Young Hegelians was, in effect, to understand and to apply Hegel’s insights in a bourgeois (and thence non-mutually-recognitive) world. A ‘public’ for whom Hegelian science may be ‘exoteric’ no longer existed.

<sup>30</sup> For a classic discussion, see K. R. Dove ‘Hegel’s Phenomenological Method’ *Review of Metaphysics* Vol. 23 (1970), pp. 615-41.

shifts from “theory about theory” to “theory about practice” – a shift which, I suggest, occurs when discussion of ‘self-consciousness’ gets under way.

Turning, now, from the *Phenomenology’s* Preface and Introduction to its sequence of chapters, I comment on how this shift in attention may be seen. “Theoretical” questions, which predominate in chapters I-III, are addressed again (from a different angle) in chapter VIII of the *Phenomenology* (headed ‘Absolute Knowing’): between these opening and closing sections of Hegel’s discussion, a reader encounters passages on a wide range of “theoretical” and “practical” themes. Chapter IV (on ‘Self-consciousness’) considers topics – desire, recognition, etc. – whose “practical” status has been emphasised: by ‘a self-consciousness’, I have suggested, Hegel understands a human individual in a deeply practical sense. Chapter VI (on ‘Spirit’) presents a history of changing patterns of recognition, from the Ancient Greek *polis* up to (and including) Hegel’s own post-French Revolutionary day. Between these “practical” chapters, there occurs Hegel’s puzzling account of ‘Reason’ (*Phenomenology* chapter V), which first of all discusses claims to knowledge and then – starting from its section on the ‘Actualisation of Rational Self-consciousness’ – considers practical themes.<sup>31</sup> Hegel’s account of ‘Religion’ (in *Phenomenology* chapter VII) is likewise a discussion whose significance is difficult to assess. Standard interpretations have presented Hegel as a theorist favourable to religion, but an alternative may be to stress (in Kojève’s words) the ‘essentially atheistic character of Hegel’s dialectical philosophy’<sup>32</sup> and to read chapter VII as, so to say, a “Feuerbachian” account of theism that becomes possible once (following the French Revolution) recognition is attained. I find this latter reading view of the chapter persuasive but, but I do not discuss it here.

In the light of these comments, how should we understand the relation between the primarily “theoretical” discussion with which the *Phenomenology* opens and the “practical” discussion that Hegel launches in chapter IV? If my comments on “theory” and “practice” are justified, it seems that the work starts (in chapters I-III) by exploring issues concerning knowledge that *cannot fully be understood* until, later, the terms of discussion are broadened and “theory” is seen in a “practical” – ultimately, a

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<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the perplexities to which I refer, regarding *Phenomenology* chapter V, are mine alone. If so, it is best that I acknowledge them here.

<sup>32</sup> Kojève ‘Hegel, Marx and Christianity’ *Interpretation* Vol. 1 (1970), p 36.

mutually recognitive – frame. Does this mean that Hegel’s discussion has got ahead of itself, presupposing what later sections of the *Phenomenology* were supposed to show? I suggest that no such charge of vicious circularity is justified if – and, so far as I can see, only if – the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* are read as an immanent critique. An immanent critique sets out to demonstrate “from the inside” that an issue admits of no resolution as long as it is approached *in its own terms* or *in a conventional way*. In *Phenomenology* chapters I-III, Hegel sets out to demonstrate “from the inside” that epistemologies which are current in the eighteenth century – various sorts of empiricism, Kantianism – fail to make clear how claims to knowledge may validly be made. Standard epistemologies picture a purely “theoretical” consciousness or intelligence confronting a “to-be-cognised” or ‘to-be theorised’ object. Such a picture abstracts from practice and, in doing so, from the dialogical community of conscious beings amongst whom cognition subsists. To be sure, the themes of practice and of human plurality are not explicitly referred to in chapters I-III. What does happen in chapters I-III is, however, that *by their own inner logic* and *under their own steam* the claims of standard epistemologies – which is to say, monological and merely theory-based epistemologies – break down. Hegel has opened the *Phenomenology* with an emphasis on “theory” that is atypical, because he wishes to demonstrate through immanent critique that standard (monological and merely theory-based) approaches are inadequate – and that a fresh (dialogical and practical) beginning needs to be made. As it were, he opens the *Phenomenology* “pretending” to be an epistemologist so that later, in chapter IV, the mask may be set aside.

Is there the slightest evidence that the *Phenomenology*’s opening chapters are to be understood in the way that I have suggested? Two striking passages appear in a thought-provoking light if my suggestion is accepted.

In one, which comes towards the start of chapter IV, Hegel tells us that, ‘with self-consciousness’, we have ‘we have...entered the native realm [*einheimische Reich*] of truth’ (PS 167). Read hastily, the passage seems to say that consciousness (or awareness of external objects) *is* self-consciousness (or awareness of oneself) – and, if this is Hegel’s meaning, “idealism” of one sort or another is implied. Read less hastily, however, in the light of what has been said about the intrinsically *practical* nature of Hegelian self-consciousness, the passage says that the ‘native realm’ of truth is the practical world. Marx’s ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ appears as, in effect, a

direct continuation of the position that this passage in the *Phenomenology* affirms.

The other passage is from the last paragraph of chapter III, where (famously) Hegel imagines his audience gazing at a theatre curtain – and confronting *itself*, when the curtain is drawn: ‘It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves’ (*PS* 165). Again, the passage appears to have “idealist” overtones: what supposes itself to be consciousness turns out to be self-consciousness. Again, however, these overtones disappear if ‘we’ who discover ourselves behind the curtain of appearance turn out to be (much to our astonishment) beings who exist in practical terms.

Moving from the earlier to the later steps in the *Phenomenology*’s argument, I note that (so far my overall interpretation is concerned) much turns on how Hegel’s transition from mutual recognition (at the end of chapter VI) to absolute knowing (in chapter VIII) is to be seen. I have suggested that chapter VI of the *Phenomenology* traces recognition’s history up to the point when, through the French Revolution, recognition that is mutual is achieved. Even if this understanding is granted, and even if (for the sake of argument) questions about the part played by the chapter on ‘Religion’ are set aside, difficulties remain about how, in the *Phenomenology*, issues concerning mutual recognition and issues concerning absolute knowing intermesh. In the final section of chapter VI, Hegel discusses philosophical problems in the light of mutual recognition; but the problems that he addresses concern *moral* or *ethical* philosophy only, and little or nothing is said about problems of truth and cognition. This part of Hegel’s discussion remains undeveloped; and, in the silence caused by the ensuing absence, all manner of “idealist” and theistic fancies can be advanced. My proposal is that this silence may be felt by a consensus (rather than a coherence) conception of truth. This proposal is, I concede, uncertain in that it draws inferences from passing comments and rounds out what (I consider) Hegel *should have* said if the *Phenomenology* to tell a cogent and self-consistent conceptual tale. It is a proposal which Skinner terms the ‘mythology of coherence’.<sup>33</sup> And yet.

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<sup>33</sup> Q, Skinner ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of ideas’ *History and Theory* (1969 ) pp. 17-22; see Tully *Meaning and Context*: pp. 38-43. Skinner’s approach to a text and the approach which I ascribe to Davie stand – it is needless to say – poles apart.

The force of this “and yet” is, in my view, considerable. A reader who seriously attempts to grapple with the argument of the *Phenomenology* has no alternative but to try to identify centres of conceptual gravity in the course of his or her attempt; and, before such a reader, rudimentary outlines of a consensus theory of truth start to take place. The 'crux' (see note 3, above) of the *Phenomenology* is a claim to the effect that theory and practice form a unity and, once the theme of mutual recognition has been foregrounded, the notion of a consensus theory of truth calls for consideration. Unless the identification of a crux or centre of gravity is identified, a reader ceases to be an 'interlocutor'.<sup>34</sup> Not merely the obligations but the privileges of an interlocutor are considerable, and these privileges I invoke here.

Together with these rather rather general reflections, a more specific reason for adopting an “and yet” approach to the *Phenomenology* may be given. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the *Phenomenology* is an incomplete and unfinished work. According to an anecdote or possible legend or perhaps-accurate historical memory, Hegel took refuge in the streets of Jena, with the final instalment of the *Phenomenology* in his pocket, as Napoleon’s soldiers entered Jena and buildings burnt.<sup>35</sup> Did the manuscript in Hegel’s pocket include a draft of the short and, perhaps, hastily-written chapter on ‘Absolute Knowing’? According to the same anecdote, Hegel completed the *Phenomenology* on the evening before the Battle of Jena (which signalled Napoleon’s victory over the Holy Roman Empire) took place. Whether or not this anecdote is literally true, it communicates a sense that the *Phenomenology* was written under pressure of personal and political crisis. If the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* was marked by the pressure of such crisis, and if its chapter on ‘Absolute Knowing’ was written urgently and in haste, what alternative have we but to search beyond the boundaries of Hegel's text – and to persist in our search whether or not a centre of gravity exists in a readily-documented way?

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<sup>34</sup> See Taylor as quoted at note 4, above.

<sup>35</sup> The anecdote (literally accurate or not) of the battle of Jena and the *Phenomenology*'s completion is presented in – for example – E. Caird *Hegel* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1883), p 66. I refer to Caird not because I favour his generally-idealist interpretation of Hegel because I wish to suggest, half seriously, that Scottish Hegelianism is a plant whose roots are deep.







