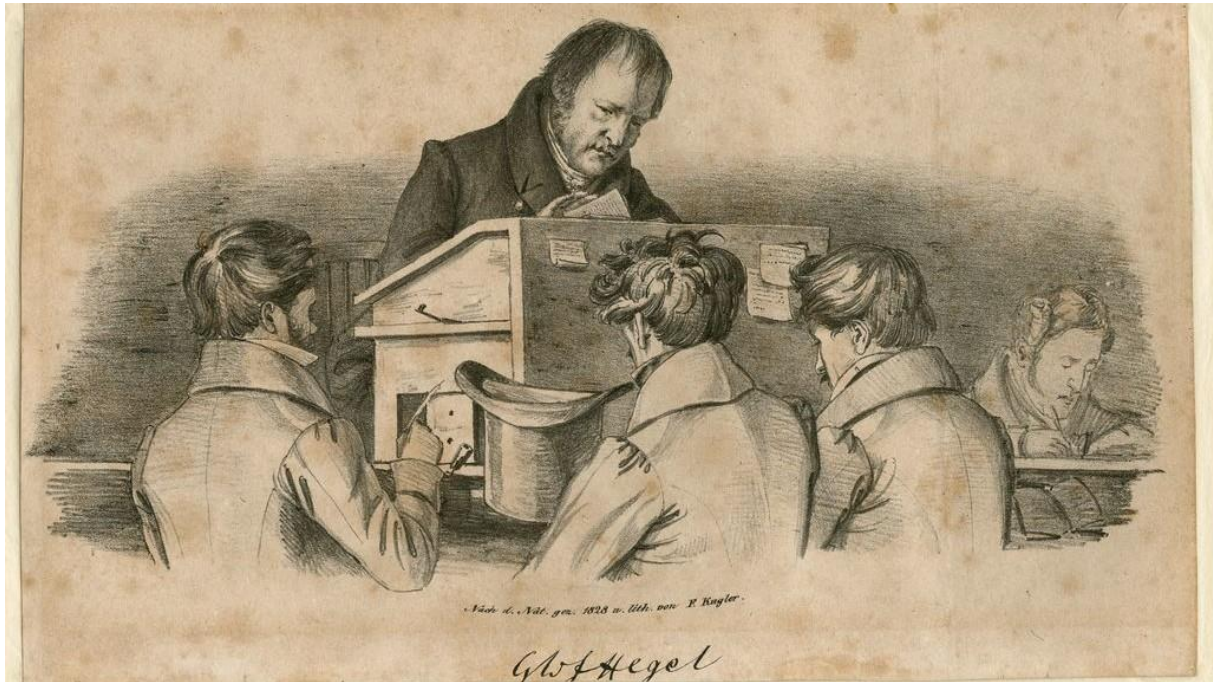


Hegel: A Complete Guide to History



Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has a good claim on being the most influential philosopher of all time. He is a philosopher of change, of progress, of history, of how our consciousness itself has changed, and, more than anything, of freedom itself.

Every philosopher that came after him has drawn on or responded to him in some way, but, more than this – the Cold War, communist regimes, liberal interventionism, conservative politics are all marked by the fingerprints of Hegel’s bold ideas.

To know Hegel is to know us, to know yourself, and, as we’ll see, to really know – a word we’ll come to interrogate – is a world-spanning, soul penetrating, painful, joyous, fulfilling journey that will change the foundations of how you think.

His most well-known work – 1807’s *The Phenomenology of Spirit* – is a modern epic, a heroic story, a heavenly ladder to, well, absolute freedom and absolute knowledge. It’s an education that spans the ages, a roadmap to the history of human thought, a story about how to become a philosopher – and a humble claim to know the mind of God and the universe too.

He summed up much of what was happening in the opening chapters of the modern age: what it means to be rational, to be empirical, to be romantic, to be emotional, to be modern and religious, to be heroic and do one's duty all at the same time. He wanted to unite the individual with the universal.

He's dense, impenetrable, infuriating, some say just a bad writer; some idealise him, others despise him, but to journey with him, as one commentator has said – to take on the task – is the most serious thing you can do in your life.

I want to show, while avoiding complex language as much as possible, how Hegel can change how you think, and show us how to see the historical in the personal, the big picture in the smallest action. Our fellow travellers will be ancient stoics, medieval Christians, modern scientists, unhappy souls and beautiful ones, romantic idealists, Napoleon, the reasonable thinker, the slave and the master.

And we'll do it all by starting from a single simple thought – your simple thought – and developing into an entire universe.

This is also the story of a man, lost on the moors, searching for civilization, on a journey to try to find the meaning of human history.

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The Context: End of Enlightenment

The Enlightenment, by the end of the 18th century, had swung wildly between rationalism and empiricism, between atheism, religion, and deism, between reason and emotion, individualism and communalism, culminating in a violent attempt to put philosophy into practice: the French Revolution.

For many, Immanuel Kant had provided the best answers about many of the controversies of the time.

He argued that we could reason about the world – we could think logically – but only about what was in front of us, only what we could perceive, see, smell, hear, touch – with our senses.

Beyond that, Kant says, on the big questions about the beginnings of the universe or knowledge of God, speculation is folly.

Kant, in a sense, puts up a wall. We know what we see – and we can think logically about things like mathematics – but we cannot go beyond that.

In fact, Kant says, we use our innate reason to construct a representation of the world around us – we bring our mind to bear on an object and recognise it by its properties – a leaf is a concept we have made up of greenness, leafiness, softness, born by trees. Through our reason – counting, judging, analysing – we make our idea of a leaf.

We do this with everything – and I mean everything – and it goes on behind the scenes – but, Kant said, we only have limited senses, a limited ability to perceive certain spectrums of light and sound, certain smells, certain sensitivities to the touch. Other animals have other limited senses. We are all subjective, finite, limited creatures.

We cannot really know what Kant called the thing in itself.

We are like worms hitting into rocks. Literally. Think about how different a worm's idea of a rock is than ours.

What evidence do we have to assume that our perception of the rock is any truer than the worm's? To some ultra-intelligent species, we could be that worm. In short, for Kant our experience is our experience. We have a perspective.

This means we can have truth but not absolute truth. And this where Hegel begins and what he rejects. The idea that we cannot access the world in itself – *ding an sich* – the thing-in-itself.

Hegel found this to be counterintuitive. We do feel like our knowledge of the world is true – mistaken sometimes, faulty, difficult, hard earned – but potentially true, nonetheless.

We do feel like, as moderns, we're progressively painting a more thorough, nuanced and accurate picture of the world. We know more about the worm and its senses, the rock its perceiving, the bird that eats it, its digestive system, how it flies, whether it's healthy for us to eat it or not, how to track it with technology we've built, and on and on and on; we seem to be able to expand our knowledge outwards, maybe infinitely.

And it's this on and on and on – this infinity – that Hegel is interested in. As a Romantic in his younger years and being friends with many in the Romantic movement in Germany, he believed that we weren't just mechanical separate things but that we were part of the universe and the natural world – that we are nature reflecting on nature itself.

This means there cannot be a separation between us and the world, between subject and object, between our reason and Kant's thing-in-itself, because we're a part of it, a continuation of it, we formed like clay from it.

The 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza was a big influence here because he also said we're all made out of the same stuff, the same substance.

Hegel said, 'When one begins to philosophize one must be first a Spinozist. The soul must bathe itself in the aether of this single substance, in which everything one has held dear is submerged'.

The job of the philosopher then is to work out the relationship between the substance of the universe – that goes on and on infinitely – and the individual particular finiteness of little old us.

The philosopher Frederick Beiser writes, 'Hegel affirms what Kant denies: that it is possible to have a knowledge through pure reason of the absolute or the unconditioned'.

Let's pause for a minute and think about that 'absolute' or 'unconditioned'.

Spinoza was scientifically minded. The universe is deterministic – causes lead to effects which lead to more causes which lead to more effects. The seed grows into a tree, the soundwave hits the eardrum, the wind blows the leaves.

Everything is conditioned by something else. To understand the worm, you have to understand its relationship to the soil, the wider moorland, the bird who eats it, the bird's history, where it migrates, the physics of flight, the biology of breathing. To have *absolute knowledge* we want to know those wider causes, more detailed knowledge, the context, the relationships.

Now, if we go one way down the line of dominoes we get to the first causes – geology, chemistry, the big bang, beginnings of the universe, questions about god – the absolute – we follow the finite to the infinite. The absolute is a net that's cast as wide as possible.

For Spinoza the absolute and God and nature were essentially synonyms – they meant the same thing. It wasn't that God was out there, transcendent, separate from the universe – God was imminent, revealed, part of every atom and every thought because all is conditioned by that absolute first cause.

This is why Schelling defined the absolute as 'that whose existence is not determined through some other thing' – it is the ultimate answer to the ultimate question.

But remember Kant says: NO! STOP! I told you, we can't get beyond our direct experience. So why are you talking about God, why metaphysics, why absolute answers? Philosophy should stick to what's immediately in front of our senses – only then can a true science be built up.

Now Hegel disagreed. In fact, he said Kant was scared. Petrified of the thing-in-itself, of going beyond his own nose. Kant builds a fence, 'a boundary between cognition and the absolute', because, Hegel says, he fears the absolute.

Hegel sees Kant and Spinoza as two ends of the same problem. If for Spinoza we're all part of one substance, we all came out of a first cause or big bang, if we're marbles being knocked

about by our desires, hungers, physics and biology – then how is it that we seem to us – in our minds – to be free.

On the other hand, if as Kant argued we're free because we're separate from that world out there – that thing-in-itself – if there's dividing line, like Descartes said, between mind and body, then how is it that we interact with the world at all?

Beiser writes, 'since freedom involves choice, the power to do otherwise, and since everything in nature is determined, such that it is necessary and cannot be otherwise, freedom is possible only if it is taken outside the sphere of nature entirely and placed in an intellectual or noumenal realm'.

But we cannot be separate from this – cut off like a guillotine – we're part of this, it's part of us, we do stuff, stuff's done to us in the world. The Hegelian question about the subject and the substance: how do we get from one to the other? How does one become the other?

Hegel had read Aristotle by eighteen and was influenced by the wider Greek idea of unity, harmony, that the parts made up a whole. The Romantics had this idea as well. We're all one, but modern life neglects this, it alienates us from nature, from ourselves, from each other.

The right question is: how do we adequately formulate what this means? If we're part of nature, what's special about humans? Alternatively, if humans are free, separate from nature, what does this mean?

Beiser sets the scene for the Romantics' influence on Hegel by writing that, 'The romantic ideal of excellence, of unity with oneself, consists of three basic components: (1) totality, that a person should develop all his or her characteristic human powers, (2) unity, that these powers be formed into a whole or unity, and (3) individuality, that this whole or unity should be individual or unique, characteristic of the person alone'.

Hegel is looking for absolute unity, complete knowledge, a contented happiness that finds itself not alienated but at home in the world. Hegel sees the world as an organic unity. And that includes us, ideas, others, animals, history and everything else in it. I desire fullness.

We want to be at home in a way that we don't understand knowledge as something separate from the world – subjects with ideas about an object and ideas that are ultimately out there – but instead as objects, ideas, knowledge that is both true, total, and mine.

Starting points: The Preface Problem

We must end at the beginning and begin at the end. I want you to imagine the absolute as bathing in the totality of the universe – all is one – but this also seems like a beginning. Let me explain.

It's like we can imagine everything is together in one firework, then the firework is set off, and we are as individuals one single spark, sent spiralling away, living brightly, fading, dying, grasping – looking towards the centre at all the other sparks – knowing we were, are, can be part of something bigger. The beginning is an end we want to get back to.

And this points to another part of Hegel's beginnings. That people like Kant and Hegel had got a lot right – they were analytical, rational, meticulous – but they were very abstract. As if to know a firework spark is to analyse its trajectory, its brightness, combustion – none of that explains what it's like to be at a fireworks display.

What philosophers seem to have left out is life, process, and history, in connecting that analytical piece of knowledge to the totality as a movement.

Hegel thinks that if we attend carefully to process we can understand how we're part of that great historical movement.

The Phenomenology of Spirit is a picture gallery of 'shapes of consciousness' as they move through that process – each shape of consciousness posits a particular absolutely true shape of truth, puts itself out there, risks and asserts itself, says *this is what I believe about the world*.

One entry point into Hegel is to ask what it means to reflect on the world.

Reflection – like a mirror – suggests a doubling. In thinking about what I think about the world I'm thinking about thinking – a kind of circular movement in which consciousness reflects on itself as self-consciousness. Reflecting suggests going outside of oneself to look at oneself but also to be outside the world so as to reflect on the world. Reflecting suggests a kind of unfolding.

This is why Hegel is an idealist – in the sense that he's thinking about our ideas of the world – that all of our experience is shaped like a prism through those ideas – and those ideas – those shapes of consciousness – shift somehow through the history. The question is how that shifting occurs, and does it have a logic.

We should always remember that Hegel is always talking about the question of knowledge. He's asking what is *true absolutely*. To do that we have to reflect on our ideas, our concepts. To take a flower I start thinking about its qualities, my relation to it, and I construct an idea of it, in the same way I pick up an idea like democracy or friendship and think about what *its* qualities are and construct an idea of it.

He's always taking an idea – in-itself, as if it's filed neatly in a folder – and asking is the way I think about this idea adequate, or is there something missing, that I haven't put in the folder?

Beiser says that, 'Reason must grasp each thing as if it were the entire world, and as if nothing else existed outside it'.

Hegel's point is that we're limited if we accept things in isolation. No discipline, set of practices, set of ideas, job or hobby, makes sense on its own. We can't understand language from a dictionary; the knowledge of the lumberjack and the meteorologist and the carpenter and the architect don't make sense disparately. They rely on each other, and knowing how they relate produces a greater, more absolute system of thought.

So let's see what we've got so far. We've got the limited individual and the total universe or substance, the subject and an object, the finite and the infinite, and the idea that as limited creatures our knowledge between these two rough poles is limited – that we cannot know the

thing-in-itself. And we have the question of what makes true knowledge – of taking what we know to be absolutely undeniably true and putting it in our folder.

And so this is where Hegel starts. We'll follow him now on this journey from simple conscious thoughts to self-consciousness, reason, Spirit, Religion and, ultimately, to Absolute knowing. And we'll see how each shape of consciousness grows out of the preceding one.

Consciousness

Where to start this journey? We could – like Descartes did – ask what is the most certain, immediate, sure type of knowledge? Something we can be absolutely sure of? That appears to consciousness simply and clearly, no questions asked. And by the way, we're going to get quite abstract for a moment, but bear with it, and we'll soon emerge out of the other side into something more concrete.

Hegel says that as thinking, truth seeking beings we want to know the world immediately. There's a sense in which we tend to trust our sensory experience more than other types of knowledge. I was there! I know what I saw! We have a witness! Immediate knowledge rather than mediated knowledge.

This difference between immediate and mediated is of fundamental importance for Hegel.

So let's start with that – with what he calls sense-certainty. Hegel presents to us a simple point in space and time – a here and a now. It's stripped of everything else, it's as simple as you can get – it's a *here* in space, *now* in time. He calls it the 'punctual present'.

But, he says, straightaway something odd happens when we try and do this. No sooner than I identify a moment in time, it recedes and is replaced by another moment in time. We constantly have to include a new moment in our concept of nowness – expand the nowness.

However we define our now, he says, it's never immediate, it's always mediated. The now is related to the not-now, to other nows.

Without a corresponding idea of *not-now*, now would be a single totalising, all-encompassing, mass. Nothing would make sense.

To ask what now means, we need to say this now was after I walked over here, and this now was before I picked some grass. Now exists as a relation – a positive now, and a negative not-now.

The same thing happens with a *this*. If we think of a single thisness, we quickly realise we need a not-this to understand this at all. Otherwise we'd be in this big blank box of thisness for all time.

A line is a line by not being a curve, black is black by not being the white that surrounds it.

So far the structure of sense-certainty is a this or now and a not-this or not-now – a positive and a negative. But this ‘shape of consciousness’ seems to have another feature. The proposition is, ‘I am certain that there is a moment called now and a thing called this’.

But if you think about what’s happening when you do this – and I really encourage you to do so, to really try and follow along in your head and try to take notice of how the ‘shape of consciousness’ seems to you – we’re already missing something – the *I* that accompanies the *now* and the *this*.

This means that not only is there a now and a not-now, a this and a not-this. but there’s also a me, a now, and a this. Our absolute sense certainty has three parts – and each part seems to leak into the other.

It seems, crucially, that there is no immediate sense-certainty. It’s always *mediated* by something outside of it. I am sense-certain of this rock going in my folder now. But there’s the question of where it came from, what’s outside the folder, and there’s me, putting it in the folder.

This is the beginning of the dialectical process – we have to go outside to come back in. And we can see that first proposition, that first ‘shape of consciousness’ – the idea that direct sense-certainty tells us anything, has already become something different.

We’re not going to go through every single shape of consciousness – that’s not the point anyway – but Hegel suggests that the next shape is *perception*.

Sense-certainty jumped outside of its confidence in the this and the now in another way. It couldn’t avoid thinking about particulars and universals. By saying this now, not that now, I have an idea of a universal now, that all particular nows sit under – a category or concept of nowness. The same applies to thisness.

If I say I sense through my fingers that this is hard because it's not soft I have formed concepts of hardness and softness – which aren’t about sense-certainty but are *ideas*, *concepts*, *universals*.

Particulars turn out to move outside of themselves into universals, the mediate becomes mediated. All attempts at sense-certainty turn into universals.

And so instead, perception tries to look at *things* as a collection of properties. This seems hard, brown, here, now, not pink, round, not alive – I’ll call it a rock. Perception is a gathering of sense-certainties into a coherent whole.

Hegel writes that perceptual objects are, '(a) the indifferent, passive universality, the Also of the many properties; (b) simple negation, or the One, the exclusion of contrary properties; and the many *properties* themselves, the relation of the two initial moments'.

Perception is a common sense idea: that there are wholes made up of parts.

But the contradiction is beginning to appear. How can a whole be made up of parts? It’s not really – it just is – it’s me that’s doing the analysing.

I'm saying this is brown, rough, cold, brown is found over here too, rough feels different to smooth, but all of these ideas of properties and their universals are really in me.

The problem with perception for Hegel is that, 'The thing is a One, reflected into itself; it is for itself, but it is also for another; and, moreover, it is an other on its own account, just because it is for an other'.

He says the object has a 'double life'. It doesn't quite stand on its own. And this is true for everything. This rock has a relationship to the ground I found it on, but only for me, the perceiver. The tree has a relationship to what I feel is the wind and what I see is a bird, but the idea that objects are simple, to be perceived, in themselves, without any relationship to other objects or to be quickly falls flat.

Perception is not simple – objects exists in a web, in relation to other things. And like sense-certainty, we end up going outside the object to understand it.

The philosopher Peter Kalkavage calls perception 'ontic liberalism'. Liberalism as in individualist – cut off from everything.

But this makes no sense. There are always individual properties related to universals, always us, and there is always relation-to-other – the rock and the ground, the bird and the tree. There becomes, importantly, instantly, a lot of background information.

Kalkavage says, 'Trying to stay "inside" an individual thing, taking it as something essentially for itself or on its own, as absolute, pushes me outside the bounds of the thing'.

Hegel's profound point is that we often think that direct experience is the purest, most immediate, most untainted form of knowledge. We drill down into the details of the evidential here and now. But Hegel reverses this. It's in fact the vaguest type of knowledge. Even at these simplest beginning states, we always have to go outside of direct experience to something else to explain that direct experience.

If we go outside of perception to think of relation, we have an idea of a kind of network. Things are conditioned by other things, things interact with one another, we explain things in reference to other things, things have a history, they come from somewhere, they often go somewhere. We relate heaviness to our concept of down, for example, things seem to get pulled to the ground. Day is warm, fire is warm, rubbing is warm.

We start to see there are laws that relate the so-called inside of one object with its outside. Hardness, for example, isn't in the object, it's a relationship between two objects pushing on each other. Sound, too. In fact, everything.

Again, objects seem to live a 'double life'. There's something going on behind appearances that can be understood.

One of Hegel's fundamental theses is that the particular comes first in existence and the universal comes first in explanation. I make sense of this by appealing to a wider universal idea like heaviness or colour or causality or summer.

Kalkavage says, 'By now, the This has been so thoroughly mediated that the sensuous world has lost all claim to being independent or for itself, something on its own. It is now only a flux and play of ever-shifting relations, sheer otherness'.

In other words, to understand any object and its history, we're beginning to have to pack quite a lot in the folder – and whatever we put in positively so far seems to be driven by what negates our idea of it. To simplify, if I don't include – this tree does *not* grow in arid conditions because X – then I haven't got absolute knowledge of the tree.

Remember, we're searching for the absolute truth. It might be helpful to recall Schelling's definition of the Absolute as 'that whose existence is not determined through some other thing'. Sense-certainty was determined by some other thing, single objects were determined by some other thing, so we keep casting the net wider.

But in all of these shapes of consciousness so far, it's always us casting the net – thinking about particular properties and universal ideas, organising, thinking, understanding. Every attempt to find the truth out there in the object fails and so Hegel turns us around to focus instead on us, the subject.

The Negation of the Negation

Let's take a little break before we continue and think about a question: Did Hegel have a method?

Hegel argues that you don't need to impose a method, but that if you attend carefully to experience itself – to being, logic, ethics – a process emerges, nonetheless. It emerges as movement, an organic engine, as life and thought itself.

As we just saw, each time consciousness tries to settle on an absolute way of understanding an object – and remember an object can be anything, including an idea – the concept we have seems to be propelled on *by its own logic*. He describes a 'pressing forward' or a striving towards 'true knowledge'.

Hegel talks about this as desire itself. That we have an innate desire – a love – of knowing. Kalkavage says, 'Hegel's goal is to transform philosophy as the love of knowing into actual knowing'.

By having to refer to something outside of itself, a concept develops to include what was excluded.

Hegel says that the result of this dialectical process 'is a new concept but one higher and richer than the preceding—richer because it negates or opposes the preceding and therefore contains it, and it contains even more than that, for it is the unity of itself and its opposite'.

As we moved from simple sense-certainty to perceiving objects with properties to forces and laws, the previous shape of consciousness was what Hegel calls 'sublated' (in the German *aufheben*).

This word is difficult to translate because it means to cancel but also to lift up and preserve. Sublation is the process through which we take the negation – the part that negates the posited definition of the concept – and *include it* in a new shape of the concept. He calls it the negation of the negation or ‘determinate negation’.

Negation is that which intrudes. We could think in terms of fragility. What negates the idea of a window? A brick smashing through it. How to negate that negation? Make the window stronger. What negates life? Illness? How to negate the negation? Pursue healthiness.

But these are concrete examples. Hegel’s claim is that if you look carefully at the structure of a concept, the idea, if not stable, will fall apart from *within*. Kalkavage says, ‘This is the key point: that in the genuine, dialectical thinking that is the Concept, thought generates its own content by producing differences from within itself’.

Our concept of the world pushes up against that Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’ but if it’s not quite right, the *real*, the substance of the universe, intrudes, pushes on the edges of our ideas. This is dialectical movement. One famous book on Hegel is called *The Restlessness of the Negative*.

Philosopher Sebastian Gardner writes that, ‘The negative is that which is different from, opposed to, other than. Negation is for Hegel determinate, as determinate as what is negated, and the phrase ‘determinate negation’ figures often. Hegel’s thought characteristically observes the dialectical sequence: (1) affirmation, (2) negation, (3) negation of negation = affirmation of something new’.

In the first part on consciousness, any attempt to conceptualise the object without referring to myself as involved the process failed. *I* am that negation – without me, looking, searching, touching, perceiving, the object is nothing. Which is why Hegel now needs to turn to the subject. I negate myself as negation by including myself in the process – I now need to ask, what am I doing here? In this process? Where am I going? What is it that’s propelling me forward?

Consciousness

What does it mean to be self-conscious? It’s difficult to get your head around. Consciousness was a simple subject perceiving an object. But each time consciousness did this it realised that there was also a self doing the perceiving. Try and think about this yourself: it’s the subject being aware of itself as a subject perceiving an object. Kind of like this.

Self-consciousness begins in despair; despair that it cannot get a grip on simple objects in the world without thinking about itself. And so it turns its attention to itself.

It sees objects as objects always for another. The taste is for me, the image is for me, the touch is for me. If we’re building that absolute knowledge, the *I* is involved in the concept of any object.

Beiser says that now, ‘This ego wants to show that it is all reality, and that everything exists only for it’.

Which is true, right? If we're honest. Your entire life, every experience, from a certain perspective, is just given to you – it's all for you – you can't get outside of yourself. It's *for you* in that all of your senses are directed by you. You move here, look at this, smell that. What directs this? Simple will, choice, *desire*.

Hegel says self-consciousness 'knows itself only through actions directed by desire'.

My desire moves me, its like energy, it's restless – in doing all the things we did in the consciousness section I myself, in Descartes words, become the 'master and possessor of nature'.

We have a command over objects. We can hold them in thought, discard them, we can destroy or even consume them – knowledge is about commanding the world. The will is free.

But there's already a problem. Our desire, our self-consciousness, seems to have no content of its own. Kalkavage says it's 'driven from within by a dynamic nothingness that compels me to fill the void that is myself and transform it into a something'.

Desire is always desire of some object or idea – X. So desire is *dependent* on some *thing* alien to it. I want to move my eyes to this object, I want to think of this, I want to eat this, I want to drink that.

The terrifying realisation is that while I have command of things I also need things.

What's incredible about self-consciousness is it has the same structure as we saw in objects. To analyse ourselves we jump outside of ourselves to objects. If we direct conscious experience to the self it's nothing but desire – and now, the thing that negates the self is *all* other things.

Remember we're talking about an idea of the self – pure and simple. And so we remove trees, landscape, even bodies and ideas from the picture. The only way to understand the self is to try and get rid of all thoughts of objects and ideas given to us.

Kalkavage says, 'Desire is the negative force by which the self seeks to cancel the otherness of the external world in order to affirm itself as absolute'.

But when I focus on myself after doing this, I am nothing, I am an empty concept with nothing of my own. The self, he says, 'repels itself from itself'. I am a circle. I = I.

Hegel's view on self-consciousness is that in searching for a self, we find only a rolling conveyor belt of objects and thoughts in consciousness, but this is not *self* at all. Where is this I? It seems to be nowhere.

And here's one of his bold claims: that true self-consciousness requires two self-consciousnesses.

At some point, wandering through the desert of self-consciousness, we come across an object that we cannot discard, destroy, or consume – another self-consciousness.

Recognition here is fundamental. That in seeing someone recognise me I have a concept of myself as recognised. I am now an object myself, to myself, out there in the world. Before, when I thought of me, I thought of empty consciousness of my thoughts of objects. Now when I think of me, I think of an idea of me that the world has too.

The two selves, he says, 'recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another'. Only in recognising itself being recognised in another does self-consciousness 'come out of itself'.

The philosopher Jean Hyppolite says, 'when life becomes for me another self-consciousness, a self-consciousness which appears to me at once alien and the same, a self-consciousness in which desire recognizes another desire and bears on it, then in this splitting and reproduction of itself self-consciousness reaches itself'.

This difficult part of the book is integral to Hegel because it's the beginning of Spirit - the beginning of the idea of I becoming We as a determining object in the world.

But this is a whole world of trouble for self-consciousness, too. Let's return to Schelling's formulation of the absolute: 'that whose existence is not determined through some other thing'. But here I find that the idea of me *is* determined by other things – by my desire, yes, but also by objects in the world, and by an idea of me that another self-consciousness has.

I am trying to prove myself as the basis of everything, of all ideas and knowledge. But here I have an idea of myself as an idea that I cannot control.

Hegel writes, 'For itself, it is absolute self-certainty; for the other, it is a living object, an independent thing in the medium of being; a given being, it is, therefore, seen as "an outside." Now this disparity must disappear-on each side-for each self-consciousness is both a living thing for the other and absolute self-certainty for itself'.

The basis of self-consciousness we recall is desire itself, autonomous, self-grounding, object-destroying desire. Fichte had said of idealism that, 'My will alone . . . shall float audaciously and boldly over the wreckage of the universe'.

But Hegel says, 'each self-consciousness must acknowledge the other as an autonomous subject, as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it'.

As each self-consciousness tries to prove its own desire as absolute, we enter one of Hegel's most famous sections: the struggle for recognition.

Hegel claims that I want to see myself recognised by another, but that requires keeping the other around, and vice versa, for the other recognised by me. There are two self-consciousnesses watching each other, registering each other's movements, leading, following. But which one leads? Which one follows? Which one is stronger? Which one has the right ideas?

This is Hegel's famous struggle for recognition, the life and death struggle. He claims that it 'is only through staking one's life that freedom is won'.

Multiple self-consciousnesses can ask *whose* apple is this? Whose land is this? Who will dominate when it comes down to it? What will I do to *prove* I am the one that is free?

Hegel's idea of recognition has been hugely influential as a proto-psychological theory. Hyppolite writes, 'historians can cite many causes for the struggle against others, but those causes are not the genuine motives of what is essentially a conflict for recognition'.

In short, we want to be recognised as free, as for-ourselves.

Recognition is acceptance by another. I stake a claim, I move here, the other watches, it doesn't do anything. It recognises that I've moved. I take a berry. I watch the other do the same. A country expands its borders. Someone asks a friend a favour. A child goes from being absorbed in the world of conscious experience of objects to a self-consciousness that its own will is opposed to parental authority. We all push the boundaries of what we can do, what will be accepted and recognised by the other, we all prod and inspect and poke at boundaries. In mutual recognition we build up pictures of what's possible in a world of self-consciousnesses. Hegel's point is that our idea of autonomy is based on recognition – it is intersubjective – it only develops with other selves.

And sometimes we get the upper hand, and sometimes we don't, but for Hegel to truly test the limits of what I can do absolutely requires going the distance. We end up battling for recognition – who can go where, who can do what, who can win this argument, who can win this fight, and in the end, always, one comes out on top and one on the bottom. One commands and one follows. One is the master and one is the slave.

He writes, '[S]elf-consciousness at this standpoint . . . must resist recognizing an other as a free being, just as, on the other hand, each must concern itself with eliciting recognition within the other's self-consciousness, being posited as an independent being . . . [T]he single self [is not] able to bear the other's being independent of it, so that they necessarily drift into a struggle'.

Inevitably, one comes out on top, the other follows. One asks, the other answers. And, throughout history, one becomes master and one servant.

But, Hegel says, this shape of consciousness is unsatisfactory to both the master and the servant.

If I want to be recognised I want to be recognised by someone I respect – otherwise what's the point. But the master is only recognised by the servant. The servant does what the master commands but the servant is unessential, without their own autonomy, could be discarded or even killed – again, what's the value in being recognised by a thing that's not valuable, worthy, respectable.

We begin to see that autonomy here is complicated.

Because while the servant has lost some of its autonomy, its freedom, they see that they have their own value. They are doing the master's bidding but have command over the world of objects, they know work, they know the world – they know food, cooking, horses, procedures – in fact, they know more than the master.

Hegel says that the 'fear of lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom'.

This is characteristic of that Hegelian sublation. Out of fear – something negative – comes work, attending to the world – something positive – and out of that comes insight. Out of unfreedom, the servant realises that they are free in many ways – one of which is their inner life, their thoughts.

Spinoza says that, 'That thing is said to be free which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone'.

And so while consciousness may not be recognised as free, may be limited in where it can go, what it can say, how it acts, one thing is 'determined to action by itself alone' – thinking.

We can see that Hegel begins exploring historical examples as self-consciousness becomes intersubjective, that is the I becomes We. In other words, it's only then that consciousness becomes a historical being, but it also inevitably becomes a historical being.

History begins to happen to consciousness with the master-slave or lord-servant relationship. History becomes about domination but also inward reflection on the nature of freedom.

Hegel points to stoicism and scepticism in the ancient world as a response to this kind of shape of consciousness. Autonomy is contradicted everywhere. Self-consciousness is not free but is pushed and pulled around by forces exterior to it.

In response, the stoic and the sceptic turn inwards, into their own fortress of solitude. They say no to everything, deny that anything outside of them is essential to them. They cut themselves off from the world, saying to themselves that the only thing that can be relied on, the only thing that they have that is free, is their own thought. They searched for what the Greeks called ataraxia – unperturbedness.

For the Stoic, he says, 'the principle is that consciousness is a thinking being, and that something is essential for it, or is true and good, only insofar as consciousness conducts itself in it as a thinking being'.

The Stoic says it doesn't matter what happens to me from the outside. I am absolute, I can choose what to think about it.

Hegel says of the stoic: 'whether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence, its aim is to be free, and to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence'.

The sceptic, on the other hand, holds no content of their own. They also turn inward, away from the world. It's just 'yes but what about', or 'I don't believe that because of X'. It is 'a confused medley, the dizziness of perpetually self-engendered disorder'. Stoics and sceptics negate everything posited to them.

Hegel writes, 'Point out likeness or identity to it, and it will point out unlikeness or non-identity; and when it is now confronted with what it has just asserted, it turns round and points out likeness or identity. Its talk is in fact like the squabbling of self-willed children'.

The stoic looks around and in Rome, Hegel says, 'the world is sunk in melancholy: its heart is broken'. In another work, he calls ancient Rome 'the universal unhappiness of the world'.

This is the 'dark night of the soul'. Self-consciousness is 'Hopeless, disillusioned'.

And the sceptic sees all the world as contingent, changing, uncertain. Nothing is *universally, unchangeably* true. If I say this is hard, you say well, only to you. If I say this is tasty, you say it's disgusting, if I say a bottle is something that carries liquid, you say it's still a bottle without the liquid – nothing is universally unchangeable, except its own self-consciousness – that is a thread running through.

This stage sees the rise of a new shape – the unhappy consciousness. It yearns for certainty and wisdom but is in a miserable state – it is cut off from the world and uses its own *self* to question everything it experiences – outside there's a world of bondage and despair and uncertainty. But it also has a feeling of certainty, it knows itself.

Hegel says, 'This new form is, therefore, one which knows that it is the dual consciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable, and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-pervverting, and it is the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself . . . [T]he Unhappy Consciousness is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being'.

This is a difficult section. Hegel talks of working, acting, willing, and giving thanks. He talks about a changeable inessential, the contingent, and the unchangeable, the universal.

Here's a key, difficult passage: 'to both of these moments, the feeling of its wretchedness and the poverty of its actions, is linked the consciousness of its unity with the Unchangeable. For the attempted direct destruction of what it actually is is mediated by the thought of the Unchangeable, and takes place in this relation to it... and will bring consciousness itself to an awareness of its unity with the Unchangeable'.

Okay, let's take an example. In acting to satiate hunger we hunt in the same place, we're hungry and we hope the same method works each time – we desire the unchangeable universal idea of finding deer here – but the sceptic unhappy consciousness doesn't know why the food is not there one day, its senses deceive them another day, we forget where to go another. In short, we're limited creatures. But we have an idea of the universally guaranteed act, the absolute truth – but it's beyond us.

And so this realm of Platonic forms arrives on the scene. Of the unchangeable, the perfect, the god like, the absolute. This is why Hegel says we give *thanks* to the unchangeable.

Kalkavage says, 'the unhappy consciousness, more than any other spiritual shape, reveals the problem that must be solved if man is to achieve absolute, divine knowing'.

It's here that religion comes in for the first time. If I can be sceptical about everything, but still know that there's an everything, an absolute, a universal, I must just have faith, a 'pure feeling' through the heart, he says. The unhappy consciousness feels their own feebleness as sinful and puts their faith in a God of the universal.



Renouncing our 'being-for-self', we renounce money, property, renounce gluttony, we are ashamed of ourselves and our limited selfhood and look to the universal idea. Everything comes from the beyond.

Now a mediator comes on the scene. A priest. They claim that they have a special connection to the universal. We sacrifice our will and put it in the hands of a priest – a mediator between the singular limited person and the universal infinite god – the absolute who giveth and the absolute who taketh away.

It's here that Hegel starts to analyse Christianity. Consciousness posits a god that is gone, not present, that I, as an unhappy consciousness, cannot have access to.

Beiser writes, 'The death of Christ means that God has withdrawn from the world, and that there are no longer direct mediators between individual and God. Hence the unhappy consciousness, in the depth of despair, concludes that 'God himself is dead''.

But this cannot stand. Remember, for Hegel, the absolute is not transcendent – separate, out there – but imminent, it runs through everything, we cannot be separate from God – secularised or theological – because God contains all relations within, is omnipresent, omnipotent.

In the priest, we see a unity between the particular and the universal.

Kalkavage says, 'This comes about because the priest, as representative of the universal Church, has absolute certainty that he speaks for God, the universal. He enjoys a privileged, universalized individuality'.

Hegel rejects traditional Christianity because it separates the self from the transcendent. The priest still interprets – interprets biblical texts, moral decisions, community matters, weddings, funerals – the priest cannot be a sceptic, the priest cannot be a stoic, the priest *acts*, the priest, in a strange way, is the most reasonable person in an unhappy world.

Reason

What is reason? It's a more difficult question than it appears. Was reason the *spirit of the age*, the *zeitgeist*, of the Enlightenment?

This is a difficult transition that we don't have the time to cover in detail. I'll instead raise two points that Hegel makes. The first is that the unhappy consciousness cannot successfully separate themselves from the universal – i.e. god – because, as Hegel writes, 'In this movement it has also become aware of its unity with this universal, a unity which, for us, no longer falls outside of it'.

In other words, I do, I will, I think not as a finite being but one that engages with universal ideas.

The second important point is that for Hegel the unhappy consciousness has some similarities with Kant's idea of reason, and that's because reason as a shape of consciousness arises out of a religious way of thinking – both posit a beyond that's separate, a privileged place that's split apart from the real world.

The unhappy consciousness says, 'I am nothing, God is everything'. The reasonable person says, 'the world is nothing, reason is everything'. Both posit a similar structural relationship between the particular and the universal, the finite and the infinite.

If we take medieval Christianity – which some have argued is what Hegel was thinking about with his unhappy consciousness – the regulating idea is that Jesus has died, God has abandoned us, we might reach heaven, we are sinful, though, stuck on earth – the spiritual is transcendental – it transcends everyday experience beyond, separate, and above the here-and-now.

And for Kant, *reason* is transcendental – which is slightly different to transcendent.

Kant agreed with the religious person that when we think in universals we're doing something pretty special that separates us from the rest of the earthly world. He believed that because we are creatures that possess rationality, we are able to take the particularity of the finite world and systemise it in a transcendental way that thinks in universal concepts. Yes, this grass is here and now, but it fits into my universal idea of what grass is.

But for Kant there was still a separation from that real thing called grass in front of me. Remember, for Kant I only know it through my own human facilities and through my transcendental reason, so I don't know what it's really like to be grass, or how a worm or a bird or an alien or a super-sensible being understands grass.

Both the unhappy consciousness and Kantian reason separate us from the world, and Hegel, to put it simply, says no. For him, reason cares, it's engaged, it's part of the world. It cries: 'THE WORLD IS MINE!'.

It, 'strides forward', Hegel says, and 'plants the ensign of its sovereignty on every height and in every depth'.

Now, Hegel agrees with Kant about a lot.

Kant thought we had that framework that we fit our experience of the world into, because without it the world would not make sense. It's a chaotic mass of data and information – half a billion photons hit the retina each second – how do we make sense of this without some kind of organising set of folders, an operating system, to fit everything into? The basis of this,

Kant says, is that we can count, recognise differences, think in terms of cause and effect – that these things are baked into us *a priori*, before experience.

But, in short, this operating system is ours but it bends, along with our senses, how we see the world. We are stuck viewing the world through our framework. To know the thing-in-itself is impossible.

But remember, Hegel says that Kant builds a 'boundary between cognition and the absolute' because he *fears* the absolute.

Kant is criticised as an abstract formalist. He says we need to experience the world to fit it into our framework but still, like a coward, says we cannot really connect to that world.

Hegel points out that we need the thing-in-itself. That the dialectical process takes the logic of the thing-in-itself and slowly unfolds its relationship to it. Kant might be right that our perspective bends the world, but Hegel thinks he neglects to explore how the perspective is, throughout history and through logic, *unbent*.

He looks at Enlightenment reason and says, 'I want to know about falling bodies, chemical reactions, animals, plants, planets, how the human body works, and much more!'. Knowledge, for Hegel, is directed towards 'the essence of things qua things'.

Through reason we are deeply implicated in the world. But we're already seeing a contradiction that we first saw with consciousness. I study the world carefully, empirically – I study geology, oceanography, meteorology, zoology, chemistry, physics – I look at all those particulars and through my reason I rise once again into universals. I see that the rabbit has sharp teeth because of its relationship to the environment, the concept of food, sustenance, of the idea of sharpness itself.

Reason is already beginning to get away from the empirical world. Reason develops concepts that stand 'above' life. Reason becomes something more than *simple empirical nature*.

In our study of nature we see that animality 'falls from its universal, from life, directly into the singleness of Dasein or being-there, and the moments of simple determinateness, and the single organic life united in this actuality, produce Becoming only as a contingent movement'.

His point is the rabbit has no idea why it has sharp teeth, the rock has no idea why trees can't grow on it, the bird has no idea about the physics of flight. *Reason does*.

Hegel says that nature 'has no history'. His point is that reason seems to organise what it empirically studies into a wider and wider system of thought that goes beyond – *aufheban* – simple nature.

But reason does something else, too: we try to use reason to study reason itself in the same way self-consciousness tried to study self-consciousness. So reason looks inwards, it comes home to itself.

But when we look for reasons within, Kalkavage writes, 'What do we see? Not logical ducks all in a row, but (in the words of William James) a "booming bustling confusion" of this half-thought, that memory, this regret, that image'.

Is reason *reasonable*? Or do we see 'given circumstances, situation, habits, customs, religion, and so on'?

Reason sees two worlds – the outward phenomenal one that seems to comply reasonably to the laws of cause and effect, physics, chemistry, biological processes – but when we look inwards at our own psychologies, we don't see much of this at all, we see passion, we see freedom, we see choice.

The term 'psychological necessity', Hegel says, thus 'becomes an empty phrase'.

For Hegel, reason is not cold and detached but interested, subjectified, has a persona. It becomes romantic, it has motivations. It's both reaching out into the world and embodied in us.

Kalkavage says, 'I go out into the world, not to observe but to act - to make rather than find myself'.

Reason wants to be happy. It finds that a perfectly reasonable thing to do. But it wants to see its own happiness manifested in the world around it. This is why Romanticism and the Enlightenment are so closely intertwined. Both revolt against unjust and irrational laws made by arbitrary aristocrats and monarchs.

Rousseau comes along and talks of the law of the heart. Reason feels itself to be right. I know I am right because I feel it – others are *cold hearted*.

But Hegel says, 'The consciousness that sets up the law of its heart... meets with resistance from others, because it contradicts the equally particular laws of their hearts'.

We all want our own things, we all feel we are right, and so morality cannot come from the inner heart. Instead, Kant inverts morality and describes it as what is universalisable. Morality isn't a warm feeling but a rational calculation.

The law of the heart becomes the law of duty. I give myself over to the idea that what is right can only be what can be made into a universal rule. My own desires are suppressed, I submit to the 'the discipline of the universal'.

We see the same finite/infinite logic again. I have what *I* want to do and what we should all do. I want to sit on the sofa and do nothing but we all have to help out with the clearing up.

The idealist posits a world where we all do the right thing.

The problem for the idealist, although virtue is on their side, is that they have to suppress their selfish desires, their individuality – what if I don't want to be nice today? What if they want to sit about? What if they don't want to work?

The world isn't animated by duty, by idealism, by universal rules, by abstract ideas; it is, Hegel says, 'animated by individuality'.

And so virtue is brought back down to earth in a similar way to unhappy consciousness realising that the universal moves through the individual. The idealist says do not be selfish. Selflessness is virtue, selflessness is the ideal, selflessness is the universal aspiration. The idealist says the world would be a better place if everyone was selfless.

But Hegel introduces its negation: the 'way of the world'.

The 'way of the world' whispers that sometimes you need to be selfish.

Selfishness can be good as we all act in self-interest. Sometimes – in working hard to earn a living to be comfortable, for example – selfishness is the same as selflessness; the particular, individual interest is the same as the universal ideal.

Selflessness is contradictory because we are, after all, *selves*. Because we are all connected, we are all being-for-another at the same time as being-for-ourselves.

Idealism becomes physical down here in *action*. Idealism must get its hands dirty.

Kalkavage says, 'action itself is the good as individualized universality. The cultivation of gifts, capacities, and strengths becomes the end itself'.

And so reason here becomes embodied in active action – reason, again, is interested in the world for its own good and for the good of the rest. Reason, even in positing a universal idea of, say, 'selflessness', must act that selflessness out through the self. The dialectic posits the universal then returns to the particular.

Active reason becomes self-confident – it uses its reason to act – it doesn't need kings or priests to tell it what to do. It's modern.

I have my interests, my activities, my *reasons for acting*. We make ourselves 'little gods' using the gifts and talents that we have. We use our own individual talents for the good of the wider world.

I see the good in being a carpenter – in building houses for everyone – in helping in a universal idea, then I return to my self and *do it*. I posit the universal ideal of carpentry and the particular instance of doing it myself.

But something new nags at me. Carpentry is a universal idea. There are lots of carpenters. What am I? Can I not just be replaced? Does the universal idea really speak through the particular *me*?

Kalkavage says, 'I become a ripple in the talent pool'.

The ripple is nothing – it's gone and the pool remains. What is this pool? How do I relate to it? I build and chop wood and construct musical instruments but then they're gone – off into the pool for other people to use, to do with what they will.

We are just cogs in a machine, a single subject being moved around by the invisible hand of the market. From this, Kalkavage says reason 'learns that my action cannot be mine alone, and that what is for me must also be for others'.

Spirit

In Hegel's time, there wasn't much of an intellectual idea of what *social* consciousness was. There was no concept of the unconscious, or preconscious experience, no *sociology*. It's difficult to pin down precisely what Hegel means by Geist because, really, it's the *entire process*.

But R.C. Solomon writes that, 'What clearly emerges from Hegel's writings is that "Geist" refers to some, sort of general consciousness, a single "mind" common to all men'.

We can start by thinking about self-consciousness needing two self-consciousnesses, and then how traditions and customs arise from there.

We can see what Hegel calls 'the unity of different, independent self-consciousnesses', or 'I that is We, and We that is I'.

Geist – or Spirit – is that I that is we. It is consciousness going outside of itself but still finding itself in the universal work of all, and the universal returning back to consciousness. It describes not just the social idea, but the movement of the social idea.

Besier says that, 'Spirit is when finite selves become conscious of themselves as infinite; and when the infinite becomes self-conscious through finite selves'.

The *infinite* is the concept of the I – not this I, or that I, but these Is – the concept of the I that goes beyond myself but returns to me as I think, use, understand, and act.

Hippolyte writes that, 'The Phenomenology sets itself a double task: to lead naive consciousness to philosophical knowledge and to lead individual consciousness to emerge from its would-be isolation - its exclusive being-for-itself - so as to raise it to spirit'.

Hegel's point is that by thinking through the infinite I we become something more than this particular I.

In other works, Hegel looks to the Persians, Egyptians, Chinese, and other 'civilizations', but for Hegel, Ancient Greece is the beginning of the world history. He says that in Greece the *We* – ethical life – was experienced, like sense-certainty, as a simply thisness – what he describes as 'the unwritten and infallible law of the gods'.

Here, he says, is ethicality – or the *We* – in its simplest purest form. It is child like, naïve but beautiful. The Greeks just take their communal ethical life as it is. It's not something to be analysed or questioned. It is something that they do, that they live in, bathe in, that they are.

For Hegel, Greek ethical life was harmonious and balanced. There was a simple freedom – each individual was a ‘law unto himself’, what Hegel calls a ‘beautiful individuality’. And there was the simple polis – democratic and, for free men at least, equal.

For a brief moment democratic Ancient Greece was idyllic. It was like a work of art in which all of the elements come together harmoniously. Each has a democratic right to participate in the affairs of government, and other than that were left to their own devices. But Greeks lived *for* the state – the state came first when it had to.

Hegel said, 'The Greeks in their immediate actuality lived in the happy middle between both self-conscious subjective freedom and the ethical substance'.

But while all *seems* whole, he says reason here 'must withdraw from its happiness'. Like sense-certainty, things cannot be this simple.

There are several contradictions that led to its decline.

Ancient Greece was a slave society – slaves and women could not participate in public life.

Freedom was defined as self-sufficiency, which mostly meant *not being a slave*. As Aristotle says, 'it is the mark of a free man not to live at another's beck and call'.

There was also no way for Greek city states to grow – for a universal idea of citizenship. They couldn't incorporate conquered territories like the Romans did, and face to face democracies needed to be small to function.

Hegel says, 'democratic constitutions are possible only in small states, in states that do not exceed the extent of a city by very much. Living together in a city, the circumstance of seeing one another daily, make possible a common education and a vital democracy'.

The philosopher Terry Pinkard writes, 'Because of the necessity of the ideal of self-sufficiency, the polis had to be small enough to enable face to face interaction. This made the Greek polis too small to defend itself, and when another, well-organized powerful empire showed up at its door, it no longer had the power, motivational or otherwise, to resist'.

Third, there were no mediating institutions between the individual and the collective. The ethical, the polis, the collective, was considered absolute.

For the Greeks the polis dealt with the collective, and the family were left to deal with their own problems. But what's decided politically is unquestioned.

The tensions that arose from this can be seen in the Greek playwright Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Creon, the ruler of Thebes, decrees that Polynices is to be held to blame for betraying the city and fighting his brother in the Thebeian Civil War.

He demands that Antigone, Polynices' sister, leave Polynices' dead body to rot on the battlefield rather than be buried.

Burial, though, was divinely important to the Greeks. It 'weds the blood-relation to the bosom of the earth', so Creon's decree was the severest punishment imaginable.

So Antigone ignores it. She cannot leave her brother to rot. It goes against everything she believes.

Hegel sees in this a contradiction between two laws, public human law – the law of the ruler or polis, the collective – and the divine right that families and individuals also felt compelled to live by. Each sees the other as wrong, and their own law as absolute.

Kalkavage says, 'Each knows (in the sense of recognizing as absolute) only one side of the law, and consequently neither knows the whole of divine right'.

It's the best example of Greek tragedy because while both are right, both are also wrong. They are stuck. Antigone commits suicide and Creon goes into exile because they're both guilty.

Hegel sees this story as archetypal to the problems of Ancient Greece.

Pinkard writes, 'even the most ordinary citizen would have to be able to think for himself about which law — the "divine" or the "human" law, or even which among many "divine" laws — he was required to follow. That left citizens at odds with themselves and potentially at odds with each other'.

But the idea of freedom was a breakthrough and the beginning of the idea that whereas previously only one was free – the ruler – and everyone else followed, now *many*, slaves and women excluded, could be free *together*. For Hegel, following on from the master-servant relationship, freedom consists in recognition – recognition that as a free man or an Athenian one had certain rights.

As Ancient Greece declines, Hegel writes, 'Greek ethical life is the historical Eden from which modern man has fallen'.

Rome learns something from all of this. Individuality is important. Rome developed a complex legal system. The individual had certain rights to property and the right to a trial in Rome. Citizenship was granted to some conquered territories.

Through this system, Rome could grow in a way Greece could not. For the first time, the idea of being a citizen was, potentially, *universal*. Theoretically, certain aspects of citizenship were open to all – even women could legally own property and even someone from a distant city could become a citizen with rights that were protected. Rome could create a universal mission in the way that Greek city states could not.

But Rome was a conquest state. Hegel thinks that without conquest, there were few ethical, public, communal, *we*, principles holding the spirit of Roman life together.

Hegel said that Roman life 'lacked content'.

The Greeks found meaning and purpose in public life in a way Romans could not.

Pinkard writes that, 'What it denied was something like the necessity of having a bounded social space that provided its members with a fundamental orientation in life—that is, a social space in which determinate goods are available to people which are made up of the elements of a common way of doing things and institutions transmitting that into practical knowledge of the world'.

Greece was poetic, Rome pragmatic. Greece warm, Rome cold.

Power and meaning – choices, decisions, the zeitgeist – were centralised in the will of the Roman Emperor – the 'Lord of the World', as Hegel called him.

Pinkard writes, 'For the Roman shape of life, being a subject was simply being a member of the Roman legal order with all of its complicated divisions among local laws, imperial laws, and the like. There was no further essence, as it were, to subjectivity'.

This is why for Hegel Stoicism rises from Rome. It was natural for Romans to want to distance themselves psychologically from the arbitrariness, the brutality, the slavishness of the Roman world, and instead focus on inner life, inner thought, inner virtue. This was both an insight and a contradiction of Rome. But, ultimately, it contributed to its collapse.

The Ancient World's problem was that that it struggled with the question of how individuals came together into a collective whole. But they did, at least, pose the question, they made it one of importance that *we* should think through.

Kalkavage writes that, 'the absence of an ethical whole is the soil out of which culture grows'.

What does culture have to do with spirit? The idea of what it means to be *cultured* is important to Hegel. It's a question of meaning. What does it mean to be Greek, to be Roman, to be Christian?

To be cultured means to leave my individuality and become something else. To become cultured is to become something that comes from the *we* - something *spirited*. To become civil, to become polite, to speak Spanish, to read prayers, to think about custom and laws, to become a universal being.

Culture speaks quite clearly of that divide between individuality and universality.

Remember, though, for Hegel we're talking about the *idea* of culture – a construct that we posit ourselves. He says it is that which 'consists precisely in being conscious of two different worlds, and which embraces both'.

And so he calls it 'self-alienated spirit'.

It's both external and internal – but because it's an idea, the external is internal too – it's the self's alienation from itself, positing its own negation, as outside of itself but as part of its ethical constitution.

Hegel writes, 'Nothing has a spirit that is grounded within itself and indwelling; but each is outside itself in something alien'.

When we think about the out there of communal *Spirit* we go outside of ourselves in ourselves. But we crave, we desire what fuels dialectical movement in the idea of subject and object – individual and culture – being one, so that we feel no painful divide between our own desires and what's imposed culturally.

What consciousness wants, Kalkavage says, is that, 'Through the general will, the individual obeys laws that he himself has authorized. Law in this sense is not external to the individual but emanates from him'.

This is evident in the Enlightenment, when it was argued that it wasn't kings or Gods or even tradition that was the source of right, but people themselves. That *We as I's together* are the source of culture, rights, ideas – liberty, equality, fraternity. In this they are universal and individual at the same time.

For Hegel, culture leads to thinking morally, and morality is where we find the self and the universal united. He writes, 'Like culture and faith, morality is "absolute mediation." As a moral, self-reflective being, I make myself other than myself'.

The central example is Kant's categorical imperative. Kant said I should make my actions conform to a universalisable rule so as to ask what would happen if everyone – i.e. the universal – did this. What if everyone stole? What if everyone lied? What if no-one was generous?

The I that is we is one motivated by duty, forgetting the immediate sensuous here and now, the pull of pleasures, and individual desires, and thinks about the larger universal idea. Hegel says self-consciousness 'knows duty to be the absolute essence'.

But here's where we get that Hegelian inversion. For Kant, acting dutifully – doing the right thing – is a product of our reason. I become a carpenter because the town needs houses and chairs and tables – it's a universal need that I dutifully fulfil.

But Hegel says this leads to a problem – what about me? What about my desires? My impulses? My inclinations? My needs? Didn't we learn from previous shapes that there is no universal object out there without looking at the subject in here?

Kant's morality has much in common with the unhappy consciousness. It posits the good in some transcendental region that is almost separate from me.

Instead, Hegel says, we must look for the source of culture, morality, the good, and duty *within*. It must align with our own impulses, our own individual ideas, our own talents, wants, personal preferences. Duty must become an individual drive rather than an abstract thought.

Personal will and community duty must become the same: Hegel says, 'it is now the law that is for the sake of the self, not the self for the sake of the law'.

We see this expressed in the great interest in emotion, passion, and moral sentiment during the Enlightenment. We forget that this was a period of individual expression and interest in emotion as much as it was about reason.

We need to place morality within so that aligns with the individual's desire – the driving force of spirit. We need, in Kalkavage's phrase, a 'moral will to power'.

We see this idea most notably in Hegel's admiration of Napoleon. Napoleon, for Hegel at least, is the embodiment of both Enlightenment values *and* individual glory. He calls him 'the world-soul on horseback'.



Augereau. Napoleon. Lannes. Hegel.

TWO PHILOSOPHERS MEET AT JENA.

Napoleon is 'concrete moral spirit'. He acts from intuition and conviction but he's not a king or a priest, he is self-made. He creates his own world. We return to Fichte's phrase: 'My will alone . . . shall float audaciously and boldly over the wreckage of the universe'.

But we've returned, *again*, to the subject with no concrete object. Ethics, morality, the we, all arises from the I.

Kalkavage summarises Hegel's dance with spirit: 'Greek ethicality falls because it cannot incorporate the serpent of knowledge into the garden of custom, piety, and trust. Modernity falls because man eats from the Tree of Knowledge and becomes, as we shall see, perverse, self-alienated, and ultimately life-denying as a so-called beautiful soul [658]. Hegel's chapter on spirit thus lays bare the fundamental problem of the modern world: how to reconcile substance and subject, to infuse life with knowledge, and knowledge with life'.

Religion

Hegel's interpretation of religion is where he is both most profound and, probably, the most controversial today. For some, this is where Hegel's metaphysics becomes outdated. To others, it's integral to the entire system.

What this means is that, for non-metaphysical Hegelians, we can focus on his ideas about dialectics, change, etc, as something going on *in the mind*. But for metaphysical Hegelians, that part of it makes no sense without acknowledging that it rests on wider, more fundamental, metaphysical beliefs about the nature of God, the universe, time, and so on.

What he's tried to show so far is that starting from the simplest of ideas about an experience, a process emerges or unfolds. However, it's only as we grasp the process towards the end that we see that the unfolding makes sense from a wider point of view that you cannot see at the beginning.

It's like starting looking at the ground and then zooming out and seeing the earth from space.

In many ways it's about reversing the idea of the concept in your head. What if, rather than the finite leading to the infinite, it's the infinite that's drawing out the finite all along, beckoning it, attracting it like a force, whispering this is what's reasonable, rational, logical – this is what makes sense, this is the way we should go.

For Hegel, substance empties itself through time – it becomes more complex, fuller, more concrete, more realised.

What does this have to do with religion? Hegel makes the case that it's a perfectly rational result of reason as it unfolds. What's significant about the religious shape of consciousness is that it's almost proto-rational, it's a shape of reason since reason proper unfolds from it.

He says it's the shape of abstract spirit made concrete in the form of myths, stories, community morality, festivals, procedures, routines – it brings people together as spirit to ask the most fundamental metaphysical, universal, and ethical questions about God and the universe. As such, we tend to forget its importance today.

The philosopher Robert Wicks, commenting on all of the previous shapes of consciousness, says: 'Hegel realized that none of these forms, either intrinsically or explicitly, are oriented towards foundational realities of a metaphysical kind. None are inherently geared towards the deepest human questions that concern our presence in the universe and the meaning of existence. Religious communities embody this kind of awareness in Hegel's view, and in this

respect, are more advanced in social awareness than moral and political communities. We thus pass from “spirit” to “religion.”

Hegel moves through many world religions commenting on art, statues, myths, and beliefs, but for him Christianity – albeit a modified Christianity – is the most important.

Writing as he is towards the end of the Enlightenment, he sees attacks on religion all around him – don’t follow blindly! It says – use your own reason! The Church is corrupt! The bible is full of error! But the Enlightenment fails to see something integral: it too has a foundation based on faith.

The Enlightenment says God is but an image in your mind, the creation of humans, religion is an idea, an image – but it fails to see that, for reason too, the world is a product of the human mind, perceiving through subjectivity, through its own reasons; all of our perspectives are based on concepts and ideas. Reason and empiricism cannot tell us anything about first causes or the nature of God because it focuses on a here and now.

Hegel says, 'what enlightenment declares to be an error and a fiction is the very same thing as enlightenment itself is'.

On the other hand, the Enlightenment can bring religion back down to earth, because the Enlightenment 'illuminates that heavenly world [of faith] with ideas belonging to the world of sense, and points out this finitude that faith cannot deny'.

Here he makes his characteristic inversion. He asks what’s theological about science and what’s scientific about theology. What’s finite about the infinite, what’s universal about the particular.

This is where his critique of traditional Christianity comes in. What he means is that faith is not transcendent, separate – up there in heaven or in the afterlife – not just about universality and infinity – but is invested in and through the finite – through people, objects, habits, images, art – the sensuous, the immediate here and now. But on the other hand, the finite – the finite *I* – is always going beyond the immediate here and now – thinking about the universal, the eternal, the infinite, positing, theorising, hypothesising. Both turn on the same wheel.

It’s also the case that Enlightenment is new and abstract and religion is old and full of the concrete.

Kalkavage says, ‘Whereas enlightenment is nascent and empty, faith is long-standing and full of content. Insight must be invented, whereas Christian faith has been around for centuries and is’.

What Hegel is arguing is that reason reaches out for full knowledge of substance, but substance *is* god, God and substance are just the totality of all things, of all meaning – and so the shape of reason, of truth, of knowledge, can be found everywhere, in history, in culture, in religion.

But this is where Hegel makes a deeper analysis of Christianity. Substance unfolds through everything, but as subjects we are part of that substance but have in part been separated from

it so that we are subjects perceiving substance, the universe perceiving itself. The ultimate question is to make sense of this gap – why has the universe separated itself from itself? Why is it reflecting on itself?

What we are is a process of the objective world moving beyond being merely objects, in-themselves, and becoming self-aware. We are how, in Kalkavage's words, 'life becomes knowledge'.

What is knowledge if not the universe *waking up*?

What does this have to do with Christianity being rational? Hegel argues that this gap of the subject partially separated from substance but moving back towards it is the framework of Christianity. We are both part of God, made from God, but separate from God and become responsible for our own salvation. We learn this from God himself, who separates himself in the form of Jesus, who teaches us about our finite sinfulness but, in dying for them too, shows us that this is also God's suffering.

Kalkavage says, 'Christ is a religious symbol for spirit at work in time and history'.

If substance is to reflect on itself as subject, if the universe is going to have knowledge of itself, then God as substance must separate itself from itself, and this can be seen – metaphorically or not – in the story of Christianity.

The *Phenomenology* is the logical story of a God who 'empties himself' into time for our own benefit, but in doing this, God must suffer.

Hegel says that, 'Without the world God is not God'.

And Kalkavage writes, 'The Phenomenology is thus the logical reconstruction of God's suffering in time. It is the process by which God comes to know himself-and fully be himself. In an early work, Hegel posed as the ultimate goal of philosophy what he called "the speculative Good Friday'.

This also contains the logic of why forgiveness is essential to Christianity; because God – or substance – is infinite and all-knowing and we are finite and limited, it follows that we have limited knowledge, limited ideas, limited senses – and so we are inevitably going to get things wrong, make mistakes; we're all going to sin.

So forgiveness is essential to finite human life. Jesus dies to show us this, to show that God is implicated in this, to teach us that forgiveness is necessary, and to teach us that God – in separating itself from itself – suffers with us.

Christianity, in short, is the 'humanization of the divine essence'.

Absolute Knowing

What do you have when you understand the dialectical process as just laid out? How do you *think* when you understand the logical shapes of consciousness, self-consciousness, reason,

Geist, and religion? What happens when you comprehend where you stand and what your place is in this great unfolding? You have philosophy.

Absolute knowing is that philosophy – but it's now systematic, a science, what the Germans called *Wissenschaft*.

During Hegel's time science didn't just mean how we think of science today – empirical science, experiments, inventions, physics, and so on. Science and philosophy were still used interchangeably.

Wissenschaft was about the *systemisation* of knowledge, and that included ethics, metaphysics, and so on – it was the idea that all could be understood, if placed on adequate foundations, as a full scientific system.

Absolute knowing knows that all is in a process of becoming under a certain systematicity. Wicks writes, 'as time goes on, everything becomes more integrated, unified, rational, balanced, free, reconciled, and self-aware'.

Absolute knowing understands the rationality of all previous shapes of consciousness as the work of *the* Concept. It is the perspective of 'the Concept that knows itself as Concept', as Hegel says.

What is a concept? It's not just the *universal* ideas I have – chairs are objects for sitting, cats are mammals that have fur and four legs, democracy is governance by the people – but the question of the development of the concept *as* a dialectical process between the finite object and the absolute idea in which all knowledge is incorporated and makes sense and understands itself as *the* concept as all concepts.

In his *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel writes: 'Philosophy is a knowledge through concepts because it sees that what on other grades of consciousness is taken to have Being, and to be naturally or immediately independent, is but a constituent stage in the Idea The concept, in short, is what contains all the earlier categories of thought merged in it'.

It's important to say this doesn't mean *knowing everything* – an impossibility – but the awareness of a shape of consciousness that is itself aware of the process of knowing, the shape of knowing, desire as the shape of knowledge itself.

Once you understand how concepts relate to one another, sense can be made of them – this applies to thinking through what democracy means, why a journey from the moorland happened in the way it did, how a weather system works, history itself, and how each fits with the other.

Kalkavage writes, 'The phenomenologist must first identify the shapes of knowing that are spread out in time, and then reorganize them to bring out their logically necessary connections'.

Think about your own life – a series of things you did sometimes only makes sense in retrospect. But, with some insight and analysis and self-understanding, you can work out why you did the things you did – what was formative, what was important, and what wasn't.

Kalkavage says absolute knowing is when the 'self is finally transparent to itself'.

Through all the previous shapes it knows that it is the truth of substance and substance is the truth of it.

Absolute knowing rises out of religion, retains the truth of the religion, while reconfiguring it as philosophy. Christianity, for all its truth in shape, for all the good it has done, still thinks of God as separate. It misunderstands itself.

Absolute knowing knows that the thinking subject *is* divine.

Wicks writes that, 'Art, in his view, characteristically expresses the deepest interests of humanity in an external sensory form; religion characteristically expresses them through sensuous mental imagery and feeling; philosophy does so in pure concepts'.

For Hegel, previous forms of consciousness were engaged in what he called picture thinking. There was truthfulness, but because the ideas were complex, they were expressed in things like religious images and ceremonies, art, sculpture, and so on. The philosopher of absolute knowing interprets the previous shapes of consciousness philosophically, conceptually.

And so in doing this, that division between subject and object, between reason and Kant's thing-in-itself, between the finite and the infinite, dissolves into a unity.

Kalkavage writes: 'It is replaced by the unity of pure thinking, which communes only with itself and at the same time expresses all that is. It is subject that knows itself as the enduring substance of all things'.

Self becomes object and object becomes self. It is a reminder: we *are* the universe.

And if the unfolding of the universe – the unfolding of the relationship between subject and object – leads to the development of knowledge about the universe, then there is meaning and purpose to history.

But it is meaning and purpose that can only be seen after the myriad of different shapes and events, battles and processes, ideas and actions, have happened – only then can we look as an observer over and above what's happened and say, 'this happened because of this', and, 'this idea relates to this event'.

Hegel said, 'the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk' – only after things have happened can we look retroactively, only then can some kind of sense be made out of what's occurred. There's a pattern, but it's a messy one – reason, Hegel says, is cunning.

Conclusions

Hegel meant the journey of the *Phenomenology* to be but an introduction – a preface – to his system of mature works – his *Science of Logic* and *Philosophy of Right* – his work on ethics and political philosophy.

Because what the *Phenomenology* is really is a great biography of philosophy, a painting of thought itself. Kalkavage says, ‘Spirit is like an artist engaged in self-portraiture’.

And what emerges from the portrait is something so big, so all-encompassing, that it becomes open to an unfathomably wide range of interpretations. Hegel is claimed as an ally, a defender, a thinker of Christianity, of post-Christianity, of modernity itself, of the conservative 19th century Prussian state, of Marxism, of liberalism, of modern conservatism, of, well, almost anything you can think of – except simplicity, atomisation, and of the idea that we can think locally without any reference to the whole.

Which is why Wicks says, ‘what is slowly emerging from this consideration of Hegel’s influence is that he is among the most powerful advocates of social integration and equality on a global scale’.

Of course, critics would and do say that he’s Eurocentric, or that integration on a global scale is precisely what we need less of, that what arises out of it is a dialectic of domination, or a justification of horrific events in history as *reasonable*.

And over the past century or so, it’s become unfashionable to agree with the metaphysical side of Hegel’s work – on god, spirit, the wider ideas about the meaning of the time and space of the universe. But others have argued that without those parts, there’s no Hegel.

And there’s also been a resurgence of Hegelianism. Partly because of Marx and Marxism and a desire to understand the 20th century – but partly, I think as well, because there’s a cunning return of a taste for the bigger questions – for broader meaning, for synthesis, for interdisciplinary ideas – that something might have been missed by partitioning the world into self-contained experiments, subjects, pursuits, and our singular focus on data, on the empirical, on individualising and secularising.

Because, I think, when you go back to beginnings in science – when you look at first knowledge, first books and writings, first art, first consciousness, first life, first planets, first suns, first atoms, first big bang, first *space*, first time, and really try and grapple with what that means, you get to a scientific moment that’s not too different to the lines from the poet Schiller which Hegel chooses to end his great philosophical epic with:

Friendless was the great Master of the World, He felt a lack, and so he fashioned spirits,
Blessed mirrors of His blessedness! The highest Being found no equal; From the chalice of
the whole realm of souls There foamed forth for Him infinitude.

Introductory Reading List

I don’t think there’s a one-size-fits-all approach to introducing Hegel. Furthermore, it’s something you have to come back to and it will likely take several years. I think most people, myself included, will read introductions and get a general overview and then explore and try to understand a specific section, this will often give you a better grasp of what Hegel is doing. For example, I remember writing an essay on the differences between Hegel and Heidegger’s idea of infinity. Later, I really got a grasp on German Idealism before Hegel. Another time I became interested in the famous master-slave moment. More than anything, I think it’s really useful to have a grasp on Kant to understand what Hegel is responding to.

And remember, let it wash over you. Even Hegel scholars are frustrated, dismayed, and bicker about what Hegel meant in specific passages. There are many different interpretations.

All that said, I'd recommend this order:

Robert Wicks, *Simply Hegel* – A great, concise and quite unique introduction.

Fredrich Beiser, *Hegel* – A thorough introduction that is great at going over the context.

Robert Stern, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* – good to read as you're reading the PoS

Peter Kalkavage, *The Logic of Desire: An Introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* – A great book to read before or while reading the PoS. Is dense and difficult in places but is faithful to the text.

Sebastian Gardner's *Hegel Glossary*:

<http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/ewatkins/Phil107S13/Hegel-Glossary.pdf>

- This is a godsend! Print it off and stick it to the wall.

Finally, of course – Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

Gregory Sadler's *Half Hour Hegel* – a great resource on Youtube if you're looking for help on particular passages.

Terry Pinkard, *Does History Make Sense?* – A good introduction to Hegel's historical work and ideas.

Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* – good to have to look up specific concepts and ideas. Lucidly written.