

## Hegel and the Truth of Skepticism

**ABSTRACT:** It is by now well established that Hegel sought to incorporate what he took to be the insights of skepticism into his philosophical system. In particular, he sought to use skepticism about our everyday claims to know the world (the understanding) to motivate his appeal to “reason” as an activity that yields knowledge of “the absolute.” What is still not understood is exactly how he deployed skepticism to achieve this. According to the dominant, straightforward reading, Hegel argues that skepticism about the understanding is false or confused, a fact which can only be revealed through appealing to reason and the knowledge of the absolute that it gives us. But the straightforward reading faces an obvious problem: Hegel does not explicitly reject skepticism about the understanding as false or confused, and in many places seems simply to endorse it. This suggests instead that Hegel simply was a skeptic about the understanding, and that his appeal to reason is not meant to save the understanding’s claim to know. But this view faces its own exegetical problems, as there are many places in which Hegel insists that the understanding is a capacity for knowledge. In this essay I raise and address this interpretive puzzle. I argue that, for Hegel, skepticism is neither false nor confused, but rather reveals a genuine antinomy within the understanding. So, in a sense, Hegel is a skeptic about the understanding. But I also argue that reason reveals that this antinomy within the understanding is ultimately consistent with its status as a capacity for knowledge. So, in that sense, Hegel affirms that the understanding is a capacity for knowledge.

It is by now well established that Hegel’s philosophy is informed by a deep concern with skepticism.<sup>1</sup> This comes out, for instance, in Hegel’s famous claim in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that “[S]kepticism first makes spirit fit to examine what truth is, since it brings about a despair in the so-called natural representations, thoughts, and opinions” (PhG ¶78).<sup>2</sup> And in his

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<sup>1</sup> In English language scholarship, there was a concerted effort in the late 80’s to respond to the bogeyman view of Hegel as unconcerned with how we could know the grand metaphysical claims he advanced. The effort centered around showing that Hegel was deeply concerned to respond to skeptical questions about our ability to know. The most important early works establishing Hegel’s concern with skepticism in that vein are Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism*, Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, and Westphal, *Hegel’s Epistemological Realism* (for a very helpful more recent treatment, cf. Franks, *All or Nothing*). The German scholarship was not shaped by the same bogeyman, and so there was less of a focused treatment of skepticism until more recently. For some helpful work, cf. Fulda and Horstmann (eds.), *Skeptizismus und spekulatives Denken*, Heidemann, *Der Begriff des Skeptizismus*, Riedel (ed.) *Hegel und die antike Dialektik*, and Vieweg, *Philosophie des Remis*.

There is no consensus about the kind(s) of skepticism Hegel was interested in – for more on this, cf. §2.

<sup>2</sup> For the conventions I use when citing Hegel, see the bibliography. (Translations from Hegel are my own, though I have consulted di Giovanni’s translation of *The Science of Logic* and Pinkard’s translation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.) I cite from Hegel’s early and late works in this essay, since his views on the specific issues I discuss remained the same from 1801 onward. (For more on the evolution of Hegel’s views, cf. note 32.)

early essay on the relation of skepticism to philosophy he notes that “skepticism itself is, at its core, one with every true philosophy” (VdS 2.227) and that skepticism “is to be found in every genuine philosophical system” as its “free side” (VdS 2.229). These passages suggest that Hegel was not only concerned with skepticism, but thought that grappling with it was essential to philosophy as such. But what, exactly, does Hegel say about skepticism?

According to the most straightforward and quite common account, Hegel claims that skepticism is (at the end of the day) false or confused. On this view, skepticism is essential to philosophy because exposing its falsity or confusion is essential to vindicating our everyday claims to know the world.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, Hegel nowhere explicitly claims that skepticism about the understanding (his term for our capacity for empirical knowledge) is false or confused. One would think he might have, if that was his view. Nevertheless, the motivation for attributing that claim to him is, *prima facie*, quite compelling: Hegel clearly claimed that the understanding is a capacity for knowledge. As he notes in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, it is “the immediate prejudgment of everyone” that we can reach the truth by thinking about what is given to us, or that “we think in the fixed belief of the agreement of our thinking with the matter [*Sache*]” (EL §20z). Philosophy’s task is “not to present anything new,” certainly not to disprove what we all think, but rather “to bring” such immediate prejudgments “explicitly to consciousness” (EL §20z).<sup>4</sup> Hegel’s claim that the understanding can reach the truth appears to be incompatible with

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<sup>3</sup> For explicit commitments to this view, cf. Brandom, “Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel’s Idealism,” 211-215, Koch, *Die Evolution des Logischen Raumes*, 291-6, McDowell, “Hegel’s Idealism as a Radicalization of Kant,” 72-82, Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 94-99, and Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 4-14 and 43-5. This view is also implicitly presupposed by most of those who take Hegel’s response to skepticism to be less central to Hegel’s philosophy, as they assume Hegel’s commitment to our ability to have empirical knowledge. This comes out, for instance, in Kreines, *Reason in the World*, 6-7, 12-5, 256-7 and Stern, *Hegelian Metaphysics*, 18-29.

<sup>4</sup> Other passages in which Hegel claims that the understanding is a capacity for knowledge can be found at EPG §§465-7, EL §§5, 80z and 226, WdL 6.285-7, and WdL 6.697.

skepticism about the understanding. So it seems reasonable to infer that Hegel must have thought skepticism about the understanding was false or confused.

Matters become murky, however, when we consider that there are a great many passages in which Hegel simply endorses skepticism about the understanding's ability to know the world. For instance, in his *Logic* Hegel notes that the understanding (there described as "finite cognition") "is a contradiction that sublates itself" (WdL 6.499). In his explanation leading up to this claim, he notes that "the content" of finite cognition has "its foundation in what is given" such that "*in its truth* it has not arrived at *the truth*" (WdL 6.499). That is, the understanding is not able to attain the truth, though it claims to (I take it this is why it is contradictory). And in his early essay on the relation of skepticism to philosophy he notes that the "understanding itself recognizes quite well that all facts of its consciousness and this, its finite consciousness itself, ceases to be and that there is no certainty in it" (VdS 2.240-1).<sup>5</sup> According to this passage, even the understanding accepts the truth of skepticism!<sup>6</sup>

But now we are faced with an interpretive puzzle: Hegel claims that the understanding can know, and he claims that it has no certainty and is afflicted with a contradiction such that 'its truth' is not 'the truth'. What position can we attribute to him that makes good sense of both of these claims?

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<sup>5</sup> For other passages along this line, cf. VdS 2.227-8 and 2.237, PhG ¶78, EL §81z2.

<sup>6</sup> Passages like those cited in this paragraph have led some interpreters to claim that the understanding cannot know the world. For instance, Brady Bowman has recently argued that "Hegel is not concerned to provide a foundation (transcendental or otherwise) for our prototypical knowledge claims, be they scientific or of the everyday variety" (Bowman, *Metaphysics of Absolute Negativity*, 126) Rather, on Bowman's reading, Hegel claims that our "prototypical knowledge claims" fail to be knowledge.

For a similar account of Hegel's response to skepticism, cf. Heidemann, *Der Begriff des Skeptizismus*. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*. also takes this view, and suggestions of it can be found in the monistic account of Horstmann, *Ontologie und Relationen*. Bowman's presentation of the view stands out for its clarity in opposing the more straightforward reading.

Responding to this puzzle is crucial for comprehending Hegel's philosophy in general. For Hegel thinks that skepticism is what makes us fit to examine the truth, and thereby do philosophy. So, without an understanding of his response to skepticism, we will not be able to understand the nature of Hegel's philosophical project. We will fail, at a fundamental level, to grasp its point.

I will argue that Hegel believes both that skepticism about the understanding is true, and that the understanding provides us with genuine knowledge. These two things seem to be obviously incompatible. My argument requires that I show that they are not. The claim I will develop is that the understanding is afflicted with an antinomy, such that it cannot comprehend how it is a capacity to know the world. In that sense, skepticism is true: the understanding is unable to make sense of itself as a capacity for knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Reason saves the understanding by revealing how it is a capacity to know the world. In this sense, the understanding is a capacity for knowledge. But reason does not remove the antinomy from the understanding, and so does not enable the understanding to comprehend how it is a capacity for knowledge.

To develop this claim I turn to Hegel's early essay against Schulze, a defender of common sense realism and critic of the aspirations of philosophy. Scholars of Hegel who have paid attention to Schulze's work have tended to follow Hegel in treating it polemically. They have thus failed to see that Schulze makes an interesting argument against skepticism, an argument that is, in fact, quite popular today. Namely, Schulze makes a transcendental argument to defend common sense realism: the capacity to subject the understanding to skeptical doubt

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout this essay, I will follow Hegel and speak about the understanding as judging, comprehending itself, being committed to various claims, etc. These references to the activities of the understanding are equivalent to claims about our activity: we judge (in exercising our understanding), comprehend ourselves (by exercising our understanding and as ones who understand), are committed to various claims (through the exercise of the understanding). Talking about the understanding as active enables me (and enabled Hegel) to avoid the clumsy circumlocutions required by introducing talk of us (as ones who understand).

presupposes that the understanding is in good working order. Appreciating that Schulze makes this argument in turn allows us to see Hegel's response in a new light. Specifically, his response can be cast as a criticism of transcendental arguments, a criticism that closely resembles Barry Stroud's response to transcendental arguments. Unlike Stroud, however, Hegel thinks that skepticism is inevitable. (If Hegel is right about this, and I suggest that he is, this reveals that Stroud's own attempt to defend the understanding's claim to know the world cannot be right.) As a result, Hegel argues that we have to appeal to something other than the understanding (reason) to make sense of the understanding as a capacity for knowledge. This foray through Schulze and Stroud then allows me to return to the issues raised by the interpretive puzzle laid out above and describe how skepticism can be true of the understanding without that threatening its status as a capacity for knowledge.

## §1 The Target of Skepticism: the Understanding

Hegel thinks that there is a genuine antinomy within the understanding. In this section, I will describe what Hegel means by the understanding.

Hegel uses a number of different terms to pick out the understanding, including 'finite cognition' and 'the idea of the true'. In his early response to Schulze (from which I will frequently quote), he uses Schulze's own term for it, "common human understanding" (*gemein Menschenverstand*). These terms all pick out the cognitive power we use in forming judgments on empirical matters, both in non-scientific and scientific contexts.

The most fundamental feature of the understanding, for Hegel, is that the truth or falsity of judgments of the understanding is not determined by our judging but rather by what we judge

about. In Hegel's terminology, the understanding works within "the opposition of thinking and being" (VdS 2.251). That is, when exercising my understanding, my judgment is most fundamentally defined by the distinction between my judging, which aims to truly capture the way the world is, and the world judged about, which determines whether my judgment is true. What I judge, insofar as I judge it, does not determine whether what I judge is true – the world does. There is, on one side, "a thinking subject" and, on the other side, "an existing object", and no act of the understanding – none of its thoughts or concepts or judgments – as such contains the reality of what it is about (VdS 2.251).

Moreover, to so much as count as making a judgment about the world, on Hegel's view, is to be cognizant that the truth of one's judgment depends on how things stand with the object of one's judgment. I do not count as claiming that the rock is a hundred years old unless I am aware that the truth of my claim is dependent on the age of that rock, which is not in turn dependent on anything about my judgment.

So, on Hegel's view, in the most fundamental case, a judgment of the understanding is beholden to a reality that is other than it. Indeed, many philosophers have taken this to be such a basic fact that they build it into their definition of objectivity: "an objective world," as Stroud puts it, is a world that "exists and is the way it is quite independently of its being known or believed by us to be that way."<sup>8</sup> Hegel will, ultimately, argue that this is only the conception of objectivity of the understanding, not what objectivity as such is. But the presence of it in these definitions is, I think, a sign that this conception of objectivity is integral to our everyday understanding of the world and of judgment.

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<sup>8</sup> Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, 77

## §2 The Kind of Skepticism: Parochialism

In his essay, “Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy,” Hegel argues that ancient skepticism is superior to modern skepticism because it better prepares the way to philosophy. In this section, I will explore one strand of his account of ancient skepticism that has not yet received the attention it deserves: specifically, his account of the eighth skeptical trope, the trope of “Relation” (*Verhältnis*; in Greek: *pros ti*).

It is relatively standard in discussions of Hegel and ancient skepticism to focus either on the idea of equipollence (that one can show, for every claim, that its opposite has equal justification) or on Agrippa’s Trilemma (that the justification of a claim terminates in arbitrary assumption, endless regress, or vicious circularity).<sup>9</sup> But when he discusses ancient skepticism, Hegel follows Sextus and notes that the trope of relation is the “most extensive” trope (VdS 2.239), and he accords the notion of relation pride of place in his discussion of the ten tropes, claiming that this trope “expresses a principle of reason” (VdS 2.240). These passages give us good textual grounds to focus on Hegel’s account of the trope of relation when trying to understand what he finds valuable in ancient skepticism.

Hegel gives us only brief accounts of the individual tropes. He glosses the trope of relation in three ways: first, according to it, “everything is only in relation to an other” (VdS 2.239); second, “it concerns the conditionedness of everything finite through an other, or that everything is only in relation to an other” (VdS 2.239); third, he notes that “because the essence of dogmatism consists in positing something finite as the absolute,” the trope of relation points

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<sup>9</sup> For the focus on equipollence, cf. Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism* and Vieweg, *Philosophie des Remis*; for the focus on Agrippa’s Trilemma, cf. Westphal, “Hegel’s Solution to the Dilemma of the Criterion” and Franks, *All or Nothing*.

out its finitude, showing how it “is only through and in this connection to an other, thus is not absolute” (VdS 2.245).<sup>10</sup> I think we can put Hegel’s idea in each of these passages as follows:

**Generic Gloss on the Trope of Relation:** We start with some item, A, that is unconditioned. We arrive at skepticism about A by showing that in fact it would have to be conditioned by something else, B.

The idea that skepticism is generated when A is (taken to be) unconditioned is explicit in the second and third quote. It is also implicit in the first quote: that everything is conditioned by a relation to something else would only lead to skepticism if something must not be conditioned by a relation to something else. The three quotes neglect to fill in any details about whether A is supposed to be unconditioned by anything at all, or whether it is supposed to be unconditioned by something in particular. It is clear that skepticism would result in either case, however, and so I include both possibilities in the generic gloss.

As an example, Hegel considers what happens when one culture (let’s say it’s ours) becomes thoroughly acquainted with another culture for the first time. Previously, our culture had “an understanding of humanity,” such that we had “indisputable certainty about a number of concepts of right and truth” (VdS 2.242). These form the A, an account of humanity that is (we think, at least) unconditionally valid for all of humanity. (It is of course not valid for non-humans, and in that sense might be said to be conditionally valid; but it is taken to be unconditionally valid for humans.) The other culture presents our culture with another, contrasting understanding of humanity. In encountering the other culture, we realize that A is not unconditioned: in fact, that is not the way humans in general are to be understood, but only the

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<sup>10</sup> The first two quotes are glosses of the trope of relation as it appears in the list of ten tropes; the third quote characterizes the trope of relation as it appears in Agrippa’s five tropes. According to Hegel, Agrippa’s five tropes were more systematic, and they were directed not just against the understanding but also (wrongly) against philosophy. This explains why the term “absolute” appears in the third gloss, but not the first two: because the first two are directed against our everyday understanding, the idea of the absolute is not explicitly articulated in them. Nevertheless, this does not reflect a substantial difference in their content, as the idea of the absolute is implicit in the reference to “everything” (“*alles*”) in the first quote.

way we (subset of humans) are to be understood; in fact, there are other ways of thinking about right and truth, so that our ways must be conditioned by something about us (B). It does not much matter what specifically B turns out to be at this point (perhaps it is our history); the mere fact that there must be something about us that conditions the validity of our account of humanity has a “skeptical effect” on us, since we had taken it that our account was not conditioned by anything about us (VdS 2.242).

It is important to note one puzzle about what Hegel says that we will have to return to: it is not obvious from the quotes whether A could be, perhaps in some modified sense, if it were conditioned. That is, it is unclear how intimately connected A and being unconditioned are supposed to be. To focus on the example: as a result of encountering the other culture, it seems like we might need to rethink the foundation of our culture’s view of humanity, but it is not obvious that we should simply give it up. There might be a way of retaining it as valid for us given our history, for instance. But then we would not become skeptical about our view of humanity, we would just need to think about it a bit differently: in particular, we’d have to give up the idea that it is unconditionally valid of all humanity.

It is not clear what Hegel would say about that possibility. On the one hand, ancient skepticism in general is supposed to terminate in a suspension of belief about whatever topic is in question, which suggests that there is no way in which A can be without being unconditioned. However, the third quote in particular suggests that A could be, if only we did not dogmatically insist that it was absolute; that A could be, maybe even is, on an understanding of it according to which it was conditioned. We will return to this puzzle in the final section.

In this essay, I will focus on a specific variant of the trope of relation that is behind a lot of what Hegel says about skepticism. Given the account of the understanding from §1, we can

say that what I judge about is the unconditional ground of the truth of my judgment: the form of objectivity internal to the understanding is such that whatever I judge, whether what I judge is true depends, and depends alone, on how things stand with what I am judging about. This is the A: what I judge about is unconditioned, in particular unconditioned by my judging. As that makes apparent, the B is my judging. If it turned out that in fact the world I judge about is conditioned by my judging, then I would only be able to arrive at conclusions about how things seemed to me. As a result, we would lose our grip on the idea of the world that is what it is independently of us: our very notion of that world would turn out to depend on us, in a way that deprived it of its independence. Our judgments would be parochial. To put this more schematically:

**Parochialism:** The world as it is available for the understanding (A) is unconditioned by its judging. We arrive at skepticism about knowledge the world by showing that in fact the world as it is available to the understanding is conditioned by the understanding's judging.

Having clarified the form of skepticism I want to focus on, I will first discuss its presence within ancient skepticism, then provide exegetical evidence that Hegel was concerned with it, and finally motivate the skeptical worry.

Parochialism is certainly present in Sextus's presentation of the trope of relation, and that should give us some reason to think that Hegel was concerned with it (since he largely follows Sextus's presentation of the tropes in his own discussion of them). Sextus raises the parochialism worry in his discussion of the trope when he writes that "we have in fact already deduced that everything is relative, i.e. with respect to the subject judging."<sup>11</sup> He concludes from this that "it is clear that we shall not be able to say what each existing object is like in its own nature and purely, but only what it appears to be like relative to something. It follows that we must suspend

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<sup>11</sup> Sextus, *Outlines of Skepticism*, I.136; cp. I.38

judgment about the nature of objects.”<sup>12</sup> So, according to Sextus, showing something to be relative to (or in relation to) the subject judging shows that we cannot know it. This is an expression of parochialism.

A further piece of evidence that Hegel was concerned in particular with the parochialism variant of the trope of relation comes from his engagement with Kant. Hegel thinks that Kantianism has given rise to the threat that my nature as a cognitive being (B) cuts me off from the world as it is in itself (A).<sup>13</sup> This is often described as a post-Kantian form of skepticism because it emerges in response to some understanding of transcendental idealism (the doctrine that I cannot know things in themselves). Robert Pippin has provided the most helpful account of this skepticism, which he often calls ‘impositionism’. He characterizes impositionism paradigmatically in relation to our forms of intuition, space and time. According to (a common understanding of) Kant, we intuit the world as in space and time due to our particular nature. As a result, it seems like we impose our forms of intuition on the world. But if we impose space and time on the world, then our knowledge of spatial and temporal things is just knowledge of how things (have to) appear to us, and not knowledge of how things really are. Our “knowledge” is, in my terms, parochial to us.<sup>14</sup>

In response to Kant, the worry gets posed in terms of our forms of intuition. But in fact the worry is not principally about our forms of intuition – rather, it is principally about our

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<sup>12</sup> Sextus, *Outlines of Skepticism*, I.140; cf. also I.167 and 177

<sup>13</sup> This criticism comes out most famously in the discussion of the view of cognition as a medium/tool in the “Introduction” to the *Phenomenology* (for an earlier version of this criticism, cf. VdS 2.180-2). Hegel also helpfully discusses this topic at EL §§10A, 22z, 80z.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 27ff. and “Reason’s Form.” My account of parochialism differs from Pippin’s in part because I (unlike Pippin) connect it to Hegel’s understanding of a strand of ancient skepticism and in part because my account does not focus on what Kant thought of as synthetic *a priori* aspects of the form of the understanding, but rather on the form of the understanding in general.

judging.<sup>15</sup> So, the worries made pressing by Kant, in light of Hegel's serious engagement with them, provide exegetical evidence that Hegel was concerned with the threat of parochialism. Specifically, our nature as judges threatens to condition our access to the world. But the world (to be objective) needs to be independent of the conditioning nature of our judging. So, we face the skeptical threat of parochialism.<sup>16</sup>

Having shown that Hegel is concerned with parochialism, I now want to explore an argument for parochialism, or a reason why we should be worried that our nature as judges conditions the world we judge about it in a way that undercuts the objectivity internal the understanding. The starting point for this skeptical argument is simple: the understanding brings with it certain basic standards that it employs when judging, standards that it does not pick up from the world but rather brings to its judgments about the world. These standards are *a priori*, because they come from the nature of the understanding and not from experience. Examples might include the law of non-contradiction, or the law of excluded middle – standards we use no matter what we are judging about and without pausing to see whether they apply to what we are judging about. These make up what one might call the form of the understanding, in that they shape any act of the understanding. For the purposes of this essay, it does not matter what you

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Kant appealed to the forms of intuition precisely because he thought they could form a sort of mediating term between our activity of judging and the world, something that would save the validity of the categories we use in judging about the world. Hegel, for reasons we do not need to explore further here, does not think Kant's appeal to the forms of intuition works.

<sup>16</sup> The connection of this post-Kantian skeptical worry to ancient skepticism is much less often noted. Forster, for instance, denies the connection between what I call parochialism and ancient skepticism (cf. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, 126-128). Partly as a result, he has a significantly different interpretation of what Hegel takes from ancient skepticism than I do (for his account cf. Forster, *Hegel and Skepticism*, especially Part 1).

Franks has emphasized the connection between ancient skepticism and post-Kantian skepticism in Hegel (and German Idealism more generally) (cf. Franks, *All or Nothing*, esp. chapters 1 and 3, and "Ancient Skepticism, Modern Naturalism, and Nihilism in Hegel's Early Jena Writings"). His treatment of the connection between Agrippa's Trilemma and Kant is invaluable. I build on his account by connecting Hegel's worries to the trope of relation, a trope that Franks does not discuss (and that is not encompassed by Agrippa's Trilemma).

Röttges is the only scholar I know of who stresses the importance of the trope of relation/relativity to Hegel's account of skepticism (cf. Röttges, *Dialektik und Skeptizismus*, 46-7, 127-9). His account of the trope of relation/relativity is valuable.

think these standards are. So long as you accept that there are some such standards, or that the understanding has some (*a priori*) form, then the skeptical argument has a foothold.

The validity of the standards in question are presupposed by any judgment of the understanding. That is, they are employed whenever I judge, about whatever I judge, such that my judgments are always governed by those standards. (This is just what it means to say they are characteristic of the form of the understanding.) I say that they are presupposed because there is no way to assess them from within the understanding: any judgment we might make to assess whether they are good standards would always already be determined by the standards, and so there is no way the understanding can check and see whether the standards are good ones. Hence, they are presupposed in every judgment.

Moreover, because I presuppose these standards in all of my judgments, I understand them to have their source in my nature as a judge as opposed to the nature of the world. I do not learn that the standards are valid by inquiring into the nature of the world; rather, I bring them with me in any inquiry into the nature of the world. The world may well conform to them, but my judgments conform to them regardless of whether the world does, simply because they define the nature of my understanding. This can be put by saying that my commitment to the validity of these standards is insensitive to how the world actually is.

That all of my judgments are determined by these standards, coupled with the fact that I am committed to the standards regardless of how the world actually is, entails skepticism. For the truth of my judgments depends only on how things stand with the world, or what I am judging about. And yet I can have no way of knowing how things stand with the world with respect to the world's conformity to these standards. The world will seem to me like it conforms to these standards, given my nature, but we can see that this only reflects how the world must

seem to me – it does not reach all the way to showing that it is how the world must be.

Consequently, I can have no way of knowing whether the world does conform to these standards.

As all of my judgments presuppose their validity, and I can have no way of knowing their validity, I can have no knowledge of the world.<sup>17</sup>

More prosaically, the skeptical worry is this: knowledge of the world involves what is genuinely other than me. But how can we ever escape the self? Whatever I judge about, I always bring my standards of justification and validity to it. And I do that sight unseen, in a way that is totally uninformed by what I am judging about. For the other to appear, it seems like we must disappear from our judgment. But how can we, given that the activity of judging is ours?<sup>18</sup>

Before proceeding, I want to note two objections to this argument that will be answered in later sections, and two objections that I will not be able to answer in this essay. First, one might object that the argument for skepticism refutes itself, since it consists of judgments of the understanding and so presupposes the validity of the standards it indicts. This argument is in fact advanced by Schulze, in defense of common sense realism, and I discuss Hegel's answer to it in the next section. Second, one might object that in fact I do know that the world conforms to the form of the understanding, because on reflection I recognize that it does. That my recognition that it does presupposes its validity entails at most that I have not disproven skepticism; but I do not need to do that to avoid skepticism. All I need to do is be able consistently to maintain that I

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<sup>17</sup> Hegel makes this skeptical argument in his response to Schulze: on Schulze's view "we constantly presuppose in *daily* life such an *agreement*" between our representations and what we represent (VdS 2.254-5). And yet we cannot make sense of its possibility, precisely because of this presupposition. Indeed, on Schulze's view, the possibility of this agreement, grounded as it is in a psychological fact about our inability to doubt the form of the understanding, becomes "one of the greatest *riddles* of human nature" (VdS 2.255; claimed by Schulze at KtP 70). Schulze himself notes that this is a riddle on his view. In citing it, however, Hegel clearly means to mock Schulze: in granting that it is a riddle (the greatness of which presumably lies in its having no solution), Schulze implicitly concedes that he has made knowledge impossible.

<sup>18</sup> I mean for this paragraph to echo the themes of Stanley Cavell's work on skepticism and also Jonathan Lear's influential arguments in Lear, "The Disappearing We." Space prevents me from doing justice to the connection between these topics and Hegel's discussion of skepticism, though I hope to do so elsewhere.

know, in light of the epistemic standards that characterize the form of the understanding. This is Stroud's way of responding to skepticism, and I show that this response is unsatisfying in §4, when I discuss how Hegel's response to skepticism differs from Stroud's.

A third objection, one that I will not be able to consider in this essay, is that the standards for knowing that the argument presupposes are too high. In particular, according to this objection, what counts as knowledge is context dependent. In (almost) every context there is no question of whether (e.g.) the law of non-contradiction is valid – that is not a question we would (or should) recognize as legitimate in those contexts. So, the argument appears to work only because it concedes to the skeptic a context-independent conception of the justification requisite for knowledge. As far as I can tell, Hegel nowhere considers contextualism of this sort; in this paper I will simply take for granted that, however unusual, it is legitimate to ask after the validity of the form of the understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, a fourth objection to the argument for parochialism that I will not be able to fully address in this essay is that the apparent thought that the world does not conform to the form of the understanding is sheer nonsense, and so does not give rise to a skeptical worry. The skeptical argument seems to turn on the possibility that the world does not conform to (e.g.) the law of non-contradiction. But to think that possibility requires thinking of a world that does not conform to the law of non-contradiction. If the law of non-contradiction genuinely is part of the form of the understanding, that means that I cannot think anything which “violates” that law, that the idea of a “violation” of the law of non-contradiction is confused. So I cannot think even the

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<sup>19</sup> For a response with which I believe Hegel would be sympathetic, see Kern, *The Sources of Knowledge*, 76-95.

possibility of such a world. So there is no intelligible worry that can be raised about the conformity of the world to the law of non-contradiction.<sup>20</sup>

The kernel of this response can be put like this: parochialism rests on the apparent worry that the world does not conform to the form of the understanding. That worry is equivalent to this one: that *waefalkj fewal ewafelj*. That is, it is nonsense. It may seem more worrying only because we have not thought it through; in fact that which is supposed to be worrying is meaningless.

Though I cannot hope to refute this response to parochialism in this essay, I think it can be very helpful to place Hegel's position in relation to it. In particular, I want to make two points in response to it, one philosophical and one exegetical. First, to show that the apparent idea of the world not conforming to the form of the understanding is nonsense would have to involve showing that the standards that the understanding employs do not come from it. For if they come from it, and if they are used in judging about what is other than it, then it is impossible to consistently foreclose the question of their validity. The only way to show that question to be nonsense is to find a way of thinking on which those standards and the world judged about using those standards have the same ground or (if talk of ground is inept) are not separable from one another.<sup>21</sup> And so dissolving the parochialism worry will require a different way of thinking about the form of the understanding than the way suggested in the skeptical argument – and this is just what Hegel's appeal to reason is meant to provide. At the very least, we have to address the parochialism worry, and cannot simply set it aside as meaningless from the start.

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<sup>20</sup> This response, as I am putting it, is closely tied to issues discussed with great insight and sophistication in the literature on the "resolute reading" of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. I am particularly influenced by work by Cora Diamond and James Conant: cf. Conant, "Logically Alien Thought," Conant and Diamond, "On Reading the *Tractatus* Resolutely," and the essays gathered in Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit*.

<sup>21</sup> I take it that this is what Irad Kimhi tries to do in his *Tractatus*-inspired attempt to reveal the validity of the "syllogisms of thinking and being" in Kimhi, *Thinking and Being*. Specifically, the worries generated by what he calls "psycho-logical dualism" are cognate with the worries generated by parochialism.

That, though, may make it seem like perhaps Hegel would simply agree with the claim that the skeptical worry is nonsense. My second, exegetical point is that that is false: Hegel would deny that the worry is nonsense. This comes out, for instance, in his claim that “the common human understanding itself recognizes very well that all facts of its consciousness and this its finite consciousness itself vanishes and that there is no certainty therein” (VdS 2.240-1). That is, the understanding recognizes that it comes to grief in skepticism; this recognition is not only natural – Hegel endorses it, though not as the last word. I will discuss how he can mean this in more detail in the final section of this paper sections. Now I just want to note that this claim is incompatible with the claim that the skeptical worry is sheer nonsense. One might provisionally put this by saying that Hegel sees a truth in skepticism that the “it is nonsense” response does not.

Before moving on, I want to make one final point about Hegel’s attitude towards the skeptical argument: that argument concludes with the claim that the understanding is not a capacity for knowledge. This claim is a result of a reflection that the understanding itself engages in, such that the understanding cannot see its way around the conclusion that it’s nature prevents it from knowing the world. On Hegel’s view, this will turn out to be only a limited insight into the nature of the understanding, such that it is a conclusion the understanding is driven to, but not the last word. Hence, the conclusion (as Hegel sees it) can be put like this: I must believe that the understanding is not a capacity for knowledge. This will turn out to be merely one side of an antinomy that Hegel affirms, the other side being that I must believe that the understanding *is* a capacity for knowledge. As we will see in the sections that follow, Hegel thinks we are committed to both of these claims insofar as we judge about the world through the understanding. It is this antinomy that Hegel thinks is true of the understanding; skepticism

properly understood consists in affirming this antinomy of the understanding. I only want to flag this complication now; we will return to it in §5.

### §3 Hegel's Criticism of Schulze's Response to Skepticism

In his early essay on the relation between skepticism and philosophy, Hegel considers an attempt to refute skepticism by G.E. Schulze. Schulze is now known mostly for his so-called Aenesidemus review, in which he responded to Reinhold and Kant.<sup>22</sup> After publishing that review, he published a two volume work (*Critique of Theoretical Philosophy*) in which he defends a version of common-sense realism and argues that philosophy can never achieve the 'unconditioned' knowledge it aspires to. Hegel's essay on the relation of skepticism to philosophy is a polemical review of this work. In this section, I will first offer an interpretation of the relevant parts of Schulze's work. I will then explain Hegel's criticism of it.

Before diving into what Schulze himself says, I want to briefly discuss the literature on Schulze. It is often rightly noted that Schulze is a kind of common sense realist in the tradition of Reid, who is primarily concerned to show that philosophy's aspirations of grounding our everyday knowledge cannot work. It is also standard to claim that Schulze does not have an argument in favor of this common sense realism, apart perhaps from his insistence that nothing else will work.<sup>23</sup> This substantially underestimates Schulze's position, however: as I will show, he has an interesting argument in favor of common sense realism that is even quite popular

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<sup>22</sup> Schulze, *Aenesidemus*. A translation of part of this text can be found in Giovanni and Harris (eds.), *Between Kant and Hegel*.

<sup>23</sup> For the claim that he is a common sense realist, cf. Vieweg, *Philosophie des Remis*, 55, 104 and Heidemann, *Der Begriff des Skeptizismus*, 150. For the claim that he has no argument for his common sense realism, cf. Vieweg, *Philosophie des Remis*, 211 and Heidemann, *Der Begriff des Skeptizismus*, 147ff.

today. Appreciating this will allow us to understand Hegel's response to Schulze in a new and helpful light.

I will start with a few uncontroversial and obvious points about Schulze's view: he develops a version of skepticism that is directed at philosophy, understood as the attempt to arrive at unconditioned explanations of what we know. In pursuit of this aim, he distinguishes philosophy from the common human understanding, and claims that the latter is immune to skepticism.

As examples of the sorts of objects we know through common human understanding, Schulze offers "a tree, a human, a book" (Schulze, KtP 58). More generally, he claims that it has to be "a singular and determinate body" (Schulze, KtP 57). He further claims that these objects can be "at hand [*vorhanden*] in the sphere of our consciousness" and "present [*gegenwärtig*] in consciousness" (Schulze, KtP 51). Though it is present in consciousness, Schulze emphasizes that it is existentially independent of our consciousness of it, noting that what we perceive "persists for itself independently of the effects of our power of representation" (Schulze, KtP 62; cf. VdS 2.222). Philosophy pursues explanations of the existence of such objects and of the nature of "their being." Philosophy, that is, starts from what is indisputably at hand, and asks why it is and why it is the way that it is. Specifically, it seeks grounds for those things that are unconditional, or provide a "because for every why?" (Schulze, KtP 72). Schulze argues that the 'because' that philosophy seeks cannot itself be present in consciousness in the same way that trees and books can be.

Schulze's conception of being present in consciousness brings with it an immunity to skeptical doubt. As he puts it, if something "is present in consciousness, we could just as little doubt of its existence as consciousness itself; to want to doubt consciousness, however, is

absolutely impossible, because such a doubt, since it cannot occur without consciousness, would annihilate itself.” (Schulze, KtP 51; quoted by Hegel at VdS 2.220). So, whatever is present in the sphere of our consciousness has “indisputable certainty [*unläugbare Gewißheit*]” (Schulze, KtP 51).<sup>24</sup>

It is not immediately obvious why Schulze takes the facts of consciousness to have indisputable certainty, especially since we seem to be mistaken about such objects all the time. Schulze explains cases of illusion as being cases in which we “cannot in the least doubt” what is present to our senses – “rather we can only think that, with an other and more correct condition [*Beschaffenheit*] of our senses or under other relations of the intuited object to our senses, this object with other properties [*Beschaffenheiten*] would be cognized by us” (Schulze, KtP 77-8). I take Schulze’s point to be that doubting whether things are as they appear to be presupposes that we have access to how they actually are. He seems to think this because he thinks that doubt always involves an undoubted belief – specifically, whatever belief warrants the doubt (cf. Schulze, KtP 76-7).<sup>25</sup> And perhaps he thinks we cannot have reasons to think a particular episode

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<sup>24</sup> William Bristow cites this passage as evidence that Schulze was concerned with veil of ideas skepticism, assuming that Schulze’s facts of consciousness are somehow less than worldly objects and facts (cf. Bristow, *Hegel and the Philosophical Transformation of Critique*, 151). This is a fairly common misreading of Schulze (for another example, cf. Heidemann, *Der Begriff des Skeptizismus*, 149). But the above-cited examples from Schulze (and his general defense of common sense realism) reveal that this reading must be wrong.

<sup>25</sup> Engstler draws attention to these passages in Schulze (cf. Engstler, “Hegels Kritik,” 108), claiming on their basis that Hegel misinterprets Schulze’s argument (cf. Engstler, “Hegels Kritik,” 109-12). As we will see, Hegel’s claim is that, for Schulze, there can be no act of the mind that guarantees the existence of the objects we judge about, because of the sharp separation Schulze draws between judgments and what they are about. Schulze wants to avoid this conclusion by introducing an act of the mind (intuitions) that guarantees the existence of the object we judge about. Hegel sees the basis for this claim in Schulze’s invocation of the indisputable certainty of consciousness (cf. VdS 2.220). Engstler disagrees with this interpretive claim about Schulze, since he thinks that Schulze’s appeal to the indisputable certainty of consciousness is separate from his appeal to intuitions.

But Hegel must be right about Schulze’s argument. For without the appeal to the indisputable certainty acquired from the impossibility of doubting consciousness, there would be absolutely no justification for introducing an existence-guaranteeing act of the mind. Moreover, Hegel’s interpretation is also obvious from Schulze’s text: Schulze introduces the idea of a “fact of consciousness” as that which has “indisputable certainty” (Schulze, KtP 51) in order to talk about intuition as that act which makes worldly objects constituents of facts of consciousness (cf.

is a case of illusion without having a capacity for non-illusory, perceptual access to the world.

That last thought is just conjecture. What matters for our purposes is that Schulze has a conception of consciousness according to which we can be certain of the world insofar as it is or can be present to consciousness. This funds his argument that the common human understanding is immune to skepticism.

Stepping back from the details of Schulze's own justification, I do want to note that there is a plausible argument in the vicinity of Schulze's. The argument goes like this: you, the skeptic, are worried about the credentials of your capacity to judge about the world. Specifically, you are worried that the nature of that capacity might prevent you from being able to know the world. After all, you reason, it is only your capacity, with a nature that might be peculiar to you (or to you and all other judges). But your own skeptical reflection is just an exercise of that very capacity, the one under skeptical duress. And your worry is not specific to worries about knowing the world as opposed to worries about knowing your own capacity – really, you are worried about any exercise of (your) judgment. So, your worry defeats itself: if we suppose it is a legitimate worry, then the rational force of the reflections that lead to it are undermined, which undermines the worry's legitimacy.

If my reading of Schulze's argument is on the mark, then his basic thought is that doubting presupposes that our capacity for judgment is in good working order – or able to yield knowledge – because it presupposes that the doubt can be justified. He couples this argument with a similar claim about illusion. This part of his argument may strike us as implausible because it may not be clear why the capacity to perceive is an essential component of doubting. And so it may not be clear why the capacity to perceive must be in good working order for us to

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Schulze, KtP 56-7). There is absolutely no indication in Schulze of a separate basis for introducing this conception of an intuition, and so no grounds for accusing Hegel of conflating two topics Schulze separates.

doubt that it is. Nevertheless, Schulze's claim that we cannot doubt what is present to consciousness belongs to a strategy for responding to skepticism that has struck many as compelling. In general, the strategy consists in showing that some domain must be available to consciousness in Schulze's sense – that is, indubitable – because skepticism about that domain would rely on doubts that presuppose that the skepticism is false.

Schulze's claim has the appearance of being a point about the logic of (certain forms of) skepticism: skepticism undermines itself because it rests on a claim and also denies that claim. In particular, his point does not appear to rest on any claim about the nature of our capacity to judge, or to make a claim about what is the case on the basis of a claim about what we must believe. By thinking through one of Hegel's responses to Schulze, however, we can see that this appearance is misleading.

Skepticism is supposed to arrive at the conclusion that our capacity to judge is parochial to us. To arrive at this conclusion requires exercising our capacity to judge, and taking it that it is not (and that we know it is not) parochial. The skepticism defeats itself because in judging anything at all, we presuppose that the capacity to judge is not parochial. To appreciate why skepticism defeats itself, then, we have to turn to examine the nature of this presupposition: why must we presuppose, in judging, that the capacity to judge is not parochial?

The only way to answer this question, from within the understanding, is to point to the nature of our capacity to judge. It belongs to the nature of that capacity that, in exercising it, we inevitably presuppose it is not parochial. But this is just a fact about us, insofar as we are judges. So, Schulze argument shows that I must believe that the understanding can know the world. But that does not mean that it is in fact a capacity to know the world. Far from being a point about

the logic of skepticism, the certainty that Schulze's argument leads to has a merely "psychological meaning," as Hegel puts it (VdS 2.256).

At this point, we should take stock of what we have learned from Schulze and Hegel's response to him. Schulze shows that I must believe that the understanding is a capacity for knowledge. Hegel would agree with this: as he notes elsewhere, this is "an immediate prejudgment of everyone" (EL §22z; cp. EL §5). But he argues that Schulze's conclusion is not a refutation of skepticism, because it merely reflects what we must believe. So, the skeptical argument has not yet been dislodged.

As I suggested at the end of the prior section, Hegel thinks that the conclusion of the skeptical argument is also a claim about what I must believe. This, too, is shown by the interaction of Schulze's argument and Hegel's response. As Schulze notes, my commitment to the claim that the understanding cannot know presupposes the validity of the form of the understanding. That form is revealed, by the skeptical argument, to be a "psychological" fact about me: that is, it just characterizes my nature as a judge. So, the proper conclusion of the skeptical argument (like the proper conclusion of Schulze's anti-skeptical argument) is about what I must believe: namely, I must believe that the understanding is not a capacity for knowledge.

So it follows that we are caught in an antinomy: I must believe that the understanding is a capacity for knowledge, and I must believe that the understanding is not a capacity for knowledge. Before we turn to examine what to do in light of this antinomy, I want to take a detour to compare and contrast Hegel's response to Schulze with Stroud's response to transcendental arguments.

#### §4 Hegel's Criticism in Light of Stroud's

Readers of Stroud's work on skepticism will, I hope, be struck by the similarity between Hegel's response to Schulze and Stroud's response to arguments that seek to disprove skepticism. Just like Hegel, Stroud argues that the fact that we cannot coherently embrace the skeptical conclusion is not a justification that our capacity to judge (about the relevant domain) is indeed a capacity for knowledge. And just like Hegel, Stroud's argument to this effect turns on distinguishing between what I must be committed to, by the nature of my capacity to judge (about the relevant domain), and the truth of that commitment.<sup>26</sup> And finally, just like Hegel, Stroud grounds this distinction in the form of objectivity that, I noted in §1, is expressed in Hegel's account of the understanding.<sup>27</sup>

Stroud differs from Hegel, however, in two key respects. First, Stroud claims that we cannot consistently maintain the skeptic's position. And, second, he claims that the understanding can consistently maintain that it can know the world.

On the first point: he claims that we cannot consistently maintain the skeptic's position – that it is incoherent for us to do so.<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that skepticism is false, because the

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<sup>26</sup> As Stroud puts it in his 1977 paper, “the sceptic can always very plausibly insist that it is enough to make language [or judgment – AW] possible if we believe that S [the conclusion of the transcendental argument – AW] is true, or it looks for all the world as if it is, but that S needn't actually be true” (Stroud, “Transcendental Arguments,” 24). For a helpful recapitulation of his argument in that paper, cf. Stroud, “Kantian Argument, Conceptual Capacities, and Invulnerability.”

<sup>27</sup> The anti-skeptical arguments require “making sense of a distinction between a thinking subject with his or her thoughts and experiences on the one hand and something or other that is independent of a thinking subject on the other – the truth or falsity of what the thinker thinks or experiences to be so” (Stroud, *Metaphysical Dissatisfaction*, 132). It is this requirement which deprives the anti-skeptical conclusions of their status as justifying the falsity of skepticism. This comes out on the next page, where Stroud notes that there is “a step from how all thinkers do or must think of the world to a conclusion about how the world is” (Stroud, *Metaphysical Dissatisfaction*, 133). This step is the step the anti-skeptical arguments have no way of taking, and it is predicated precisely upon the independence of what I judge about from my judgment of it.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Stroud, *Metaphysical Dissatisfaction*, 137

incoherence stems from our nature, or is psychological, and not from the logic of the skeptic's position.

Second, Stroud maintains that we can continue to find that the world is how we must take it to be, or that parochialism is false. In making this second claim, he treats the fundamental beliefs we cannot deny without self-contradiction as on a par with ordinary, empirical beliefs of the understanding. Just as I can say that my belief that it is raining is true, and that the belief that it is not raining would be false, so too I can say that my belief that the world is judgeable is true, and the belief that it is not judgeable would be false. As Stroud puts it, "For every one of our beliefs we can say that things really are as that belief says they are. If there are some kinds of belief that we and all thinkers must have, we can say that things really are as we must believe them to be."<sup>29</sup> For Stroud, this is no refutation of the skeptic, no proof that the world is judgeable, because it is nothing more than "a mundane observation we are always in a position to make, without any metaphysical reflection."<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it does show that we can, from within the understanding, continue to affirm our belief that the world is judgeable without contradiction.

Hegel differs from Stroud on both of these points. On both points, the key difference is in how they understand the implications of the form of objectivity they both find in the understanding. For Hegel, but not for Stroud, that form of objectivity entails an "antinomy" (VdS 2.240). In particular, it entails that we must believe that the world is knowable, and it entails that we must believe that the world is not knowable. (The second entailment expresses parochialism.) Stroud does not think it entails the latter claim.

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<sup>29</sup> Stroud, *Metaphysical Dissatisfaction*, 144

<sup>30</sup> Stroud, *Metaphysical Dissatisfaction*, 144

It is easy to see why Hegel thinks the conception of objectivity entails an antinomy. It follows from the form of objectivity internal to the understanding. For whether the world is knowable (that is, conforms to the form of the understanding) is independent of whether I judge it to be so. So, to believe that the world is knowable, that character of it must be available to me. But it cannot be, since I must presuppose that the world is knowable regardless of what is the case. So whether I believe that the world is knowable cannot be informed by whether the world is knowable – it can only be informed by the nature of my judging. Hence, I cannot, in the ordinary way, consistently maintain that my belief that the world is knowable is true.

So, we cannot take solace in the fact that the skeptic is confused or self-deceived. For the skeptic is simply pointing out that we are confused or self-deceived. We think we can continue, without contradiction, to believe that the world is knowable. And, indeed, we must continue to believe that. But we are confused or self-deceived insofar as we think that we can do so without contradiction.

To appreciate this point, it is important to recognize a shift away from Stroud in our account of what skepticism consists in. When Stroud claims that the skeptic is confused or self-deceived, he means that a person who takes herself to consistently believe that the world is not knowable is confused or self-deceived. Or, Stroud's skeptic is one who believes that the understanding cannot know the world. Stroud's skeptic is incoherent.

Hegel agrees that Stroud's skeptic is incoherent. The skepticism that Hegel affirms does not consist in the one-sided claim that the world is not knowable. It rather consists in pointing out an antinomy, namely that we must believe that the world is knowable *and* we must believe that the world is not knowable. Skepticism so understood is not incoherent. Rather, it points to an incoherence. Specifically, the incoherence of one-sidedly insisting that the world is knowable, *or*

of one-sidedly insisting that the world is not knowable. According to skepticism in the sense in which Hegel affirms it, neither judgment can stand alone.

There are four points to draw from the relation between Hegel, Schulze and Stroud. The first, most obvious point concerns Hegel's relation to transcendental arguments: contrary to a common view, Hegel does not advance transcendental arguments. Part of what my reconstruction of his response to Schulze shows is that he was derisive of such arguments.<sup>31</sup>

Second, against Schulze, but with Stroud, Hegel shows that the understanding cannot prove that skepticism is false or confused. This is the key point on which Hegel and Stroud agree: the most we can do from within the understanding is arrive at a conclusion about what we must believe, a conclusion that will never be enough to establish an anti-skeptical point about how the world in fact is.

Third, Hegel shows that Stroud's own response to skepticism cannot work. Stroud believes we can coherently affirm that we can know the world from within the understanding. He believes this because he does not think skepticism emerges from the conception of objectivity internal to the understanding. Hegel shows that it does. It follows that if we are to overcome skepticism, we must go beyond the understanding with its conception of the understanding.

And that is the fourth and final point to draw from this section: if skepticism emerges just from the form of objectivity internal to the understanding, then to respond to it we must move

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<sup>31</sup> Views that read Hegel as making transcendental arguments date from Charles Taylor's essay on the opening arguments of the *Phenomenology*: cf. Taylor "The Opening Arguments of the *Phenomenology*." For some variants on it – which are all close enough to Schulze's position to be subject to Hegel's criticism of it – cf. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, Horstmann, "Transcendentalistic Argument," Höle, *Hegels System*, Wandschneider, *Grundzüge einer Theorie der Dialektik*, and Stern, "Hegel, Scepticism, and Transcendental Arguments."

I am hardly the first to argue that Hegel does not advance transcendental arguments (cf. Heidemann, *Der Begriff des Skeptizismus*, 130-1, Houlgate, "Is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* an Essay in Transcendental Argument?", and Pippin, *The Realm of Shadows*, 186-190, 318-9). However, I do not know of any others to have made the argument on the basis of considering Hegel's response to Schulze.

beyond that form of objectivity. In this section, I have tried to show why it might be reasonable for Hegel to think that any strategy for responding to skepticism that relies on the understanding will fail, by considering what goes wrong with Stroud's attempt to remain within the understanding.

#### §5 Overcoming and Preserving the Antinomy within the Understanding

In this final section, I return to the interpretive puzzle raised in the introduction. We saw there that Hegel claims both that the understanding can know, and he endorses skepticism about the understanding. Our foray through Schulze and Stroud was meant to help us see how these claims can be made consistent with one another. Let's see.

In passages I quoted in the introduction, Hegel claims that the understanding "recognizes quite well that all facts of its consciousness and this, its finite consciousness itself, ceases to be and that there is no certainty in it" (VdS 2.240-1). He also claims that the understanding "is a contradiction that sublates itself" (WdL 6.499) and that "*in its truth* it has not arrived at *the truth*" (WdL 6.499). These passages seemed to entail that, according to Hegel, the understanding cannot know. But now we can see that they do not.

The claim that the understanding recognizes that it has no certainty is one side of the antinomy, the parochialism side according to which the understanding must believe that the world is not knowable. But it is only *one* side of the antinomy. As Hegel puts it, the common human understanding's "skepticism and its dogmatism about the finite things stand *next to one another*" (VdS 2.241). That is, the understanding recognizes both that it cannot attain certainty (its skepticism) and that it can attain certainty (its dogmatism). Neither claim is wrong; each is rather one side of the understanding's nature. But the understanding is unable to combine the two

sides, or to think through the fact that it is committed to an antinomy. Skepticism – “true” or “proper” skepticism as opposed to the understanding’s one-sided skepticism – brings together the two sides in its recognition of the antinomy within the understanding.

How can the understanding be a capacity for knowledge in light of this? Consider that what seems to prevent the understanding from being a capacity for knowledge is its inability to exclude parochialism, which inability itself derives from the form of objectivity internal to the understanding. To exclude parochialism, then, we need a form of knowledge with a different form of objectivity. This other form of knowledge would have to be identical with what it knows, where identity is understood in such a fashion as to entail that there is no longer any logical space for the worry that what we know is due to some nature parochial to us. Specifically, within this other form of objectivity, thought’s object is dependent on its thought of the object, and its thought of its object is dependent on its object. And, finally, this form of knowledge would have to know the form of the understanding – but it would have to know it in its own distinctive way, with its own form of objectivity. This would be a way which grasped that the form of the understanding is the same as the form of the world. If there were such a form of knowledge – Hegel’s “reason” or “speculation” – then it would exclude parochialism as a threat to the understanding’s status as a capacity for knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This conception of reason comes out in his early essay when Hegel writes that reason is immune to the skeptical trope of relation because “it is itself nothing other than the relation,” such that it is neither of the relata but that which relates them to one another (VdS 2.246). Similarly, he claims that reason “encloses the finite, of which one is the opposite of the other, in itself” (VdS 2.247). I take both the relata and the two opposing finite things to be the understanding and the world, so that reason is at one and the same time responsible for both. He does not say work out exactly how this works in this early essay, but these passages suggest that already he thinks of reason as being the source of the form of the understanding and the form of the world. (He says a great deal more about the structure of reason in the introductory remarks to his two *Logics* and in the “Absolute Idea” chapter of *The Science of Logic*. I have discussed these passages in [name of article redacted]. What I say here is intended to complement what I say there.)

Meist has argued that when Hegel wrote this early essay, he didn’t have this aspect of the relation between the understanding and reason in view (Cf. Meist, “*Sich vollbringender Skeptizismus*,” 200-1; for a similar claim, cf.

I will not be able to illuminate the claim that reason knows the form of the understanding in this essay, but I do want to say something to clarify the form of objectivity internal to reason. We can think about this form of objectivity as bearing the same structure as first-person thought about one's beliefs (at least on one understanding of that structure). Here I will be drawing on work about first-person thought about one's beliefs by Patricia Kitcher (Kitcher, *Kant's Thinker*) and Sebastian Rödl (Rödl, *Self-Consciousness and Self-Consciousness and Objectivity*).

Consider the relation between two of my claims: first, that I believe that it is raining and, second, that it is raining. The first claim is a claim about me, specifically about what I believe. Plausibly, I would not count as making this claim without knowing that it is a claim about me. That is, to have a first-person thought about one of my beliefs, I must know that the object I am thinking about is my belief. So, my first-person thought depends upon my object. Sometimes this is put by saying that first person thought is object dependent thought, like demonstrative thought but unlike descriptive thought, where my description might not net an object while nevertheless remaining a thought. In this sense, the existence of the first-person thought is dependent on the object it is about.

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Bristow, *The Transformation of Philosophical Critique*, 110). According to Meist, Hegel's views changed in response to Schulze's reply to Hegel's early essay. Specifically, Schulze claims, in his reply to Hegel, that if reason makes sense, then what it knows (the absolute) would be "the purest unity, in which nothing can be distinguished" (Schulze, *Aphorismen*, 344; quoted at Meist, "*Sich vollbringender Skeptizismus*," 200).

Though space prevents me from showing this at the length it deserves, I think it is relatively clear that Schulze gets Hegel badly wrong, and so Hegel would not have changed his position about the nature of the absolute upon reading Schulze's reply. This comes out in the quotes about reason that begin this footnote; he would hardly have agreed with Schulze that there can be no distinctions within the absolute if reason is the relation connecting two distinct things (VdS 2.246).

This does not mean that Hegel had fully worked out the relation between the understanding and reason already in 1802 – it just means that he had already formed the position that we are driven to reason by an antinomy within the understanding, and that reason was to save the understanding as a capacity for knowledge. I am inclined to agree with Franks that Hegel did not yet see, in 1802, that "the skeptical destruction of dogmatism, taken to its ultimate, can also constitute the positive content of dogmatism" and so did not yet have the idea of determinate negation in view (Franks, *All or Nothing*, 193).

A further feature of the structure of first-person thought is that I cannot be in the state picked out by a first-person thought without being able to have the first-person thought that I am in that state. To use my example, I cannot claim that it is raining without being able to claim that I believe that it is raining. This claim is more controversial. The basic idea is that self-consciousness belongs to the form of beliefs that are had by self-conscious beings. We are essentially rational animals, and the rationality of our beliefs (on this view) is tied to their being combined with one another in a self-conscious manner. Let us assume that this more controversial view is true. (For my present purposes, it does not matter if it is; what matters is just that it makes sense and so can be used as an example of the form of objectivity internal to reason.)

It follows from this that I must be able to form the first-person thought about my beliefs to have my beliefs. That is, given that I am a self-conscious being, simply having the belief that it is raining suffices to put me in a position to judge that I believe that it is raining. I need no other premise to arrive at this conclusion. So, having the belief that it is raining is dependent upon being able to have the first person thought that I believe that it is raining. And in this sense my being in the state of having the belief is dependent upon my having the first person thought ready at hand. This contrasts radically with non-first person thoughts, including demonstrative thoughts, where what I am thinking about is what it is regardless of anyone's being in a position to think about it. We might call first-person beliefs, on this view, thought-dependent objects – meaning not that my beliefs are thoughts, but that my beliefs are dependent on thoughts about them.

If we combine these two claims about the structure of first-person thought about beliefs, we get: it is a thought that depends on its object and its object depends upon it. This is just how I

characterized the form of objectivity internal to reason. That is, reason, as Hegel understands it, knows in the “first-person way”: what it judges is dependent on its ability to judge it, and its ability to judge it is dependent on what it judges. So, if reason knew the form of the understanding (a big “if” that will not be discharged in this paper), then the world’s conforming to that form would be dependent on our ability to judge that it does and our ability to judge that it does would be dependent on the world’s being that way. There would no longer be any logical space to worry that the understanding has a form that leads it astray.

What happens to the antinomy, if reason is able to save the understanding? At this point, we have to return to a puzzle that initially arose in §2 about the trope of relation. Skepticism by this trope arises when something that is supposed to be unconditioned is revealed to be conditioned. Our culture’s view of humanity is supposed to be unconditionally valid for humanity, but it is revealed to be conditioned by something about us when we encounter another culture, with a different view of humanity. It is unclear, though, whether the trope of relation gives us reason to be skeptical about the thing that is unconditioned, or just about our claim that it is unconditioned – whether we have reason to be skeptical of our culture’s view of humanity, or just of our assumption that that view is unconditionally valid for humans. The latter seems like it would suffice.

In parallel fashion, it seems like we can avoid the antinomy that is supposedly internal to the understanding simply by giving up our assumption that the understanding’s status as a capacity for knowledge is independent of an appeal to reason. I can make sense of the understanding as a capacity to know, without any antinomy, simply by registering its dependence on reason.

This strategy for avoiding the antinomy cannot work, however. For the understanding is unable to grasp reason, the “higher” form of knowledge (cf. VdS 2.230, 2.241). The claims of reason must remain incomprehensible because the understanding can only ever grasp the world through its form of objectivity, as independent of what it must believe it to be. And so, rather than saving that world, it will always seem to the understanding like reason is depriving its world of objectivity – as damning rather than saving it. Consequently, the understanding cannot grasp its dependence on reason. And so I cannot register the dependence of the understanding on reason from within the understanding. Hence, the understanding will remain committed to the antinomy: it must believe that it can know and that it cannot know.<sup>33</sup>

It follows that skepticism is neither false nor confused. Proper Skepticism, the claim that the understanding is plagued by an antinomy, is true and shows up in the understanding’s own account of itself, in the way in which it insists that it can know the world and also insists that it cannot know the world. But reason makes this bearable by knowing the relation between the understanding and the world in the first-person way. This, then, solves the interpretive puzzle raised in the introduction: Hegel thinks both that the understanding can know, and that skepticism about the understanding is true.

In this essay, I have explained why Hegel takes skepticism to be essential to philosophy: it reveals a genuine antinomy within the understanding that propels us to a higher form of knowledge that would be free of that antinomy and, simultaneously, would show that the

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<sup>33</sup> Koch also develops the notion of an unavoidable antinomy as key to Hegel’s philosophy, specifically in relation to the idea of a logical progression (cf. Koch, *Die Evolution des logischen Raumes*, 109-114). He models his understanding of the unavoidable antinomy on the liar’s paradox (viz., this sentence is not true), and develops an account of that using a non-standard version of set theory. While I find his notion of an unavoidable antinomy helpful, I think the appeal to the liar’s paradox and set theory are too foreign to Hegel’s own way of thinking to be helpful in explaining it. My appeal to first-person thoughts about one’s beliefs is less foreign, I believe, as it is implicit in Kant’s claim that “the I think must be able to accompany all of my representations” (B 131) a notion that Hegel himself develops (cf. WdL 6.254ff. and WdL 6.488-9).

antinomy within the understanding limits but is compatible with the understanding's claim to know the world.

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I cite Hegel's texts by section number or (if there are no section numbers) volume and page number of the Suhrkamp edition (cited below), and use the following abbreviations:

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PhG	<i>Phänomenologie des Geistes</i>
WdL	<i>Wissenschaft der Logik</i>
EL	<i>Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften I</i>

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