

## Skeptical Despair, Transcendental Arguments, and Hegel's Method

‘[S]kepticism makes spirit for the first time competent to investigate what is the truth, since it manages to elicit a despair about those so-called natural conceptions, thoughts, and opinions’ (PhG 78, TP’s translation)

### §1 Introduction

Imagine you are in class, explaining Korsgaard’s argument that hurting animals is morally wrong: ‘We can all recognize, from our own case, that when we go after something and are prevented from getting it, we are frustrated.’ At this point, a student raises her hand: ‘But how do you know that? We are built so that we have to be frustrated when we do not get what we want, but maybe there are some creatures that are indifferent to whether they get what they are after.’ Or imagine you are explaining the difference between a material cause and a final cause in Aristotle: ‘The material cause of this chair is the wood that makes it up; the final cause of the chair is the purpose it serves, that we use it for sitting.’ A student objects: ‘But how do you know that it has a purpose? Maybe we have to think of it as having a purpose, but maybe there are beings who think it has no purpose.’ Or, finally, imagine you are explaining the difference between valid and invalid inference: ‘We can validly conclude that Socrates is mortal because there is no way for those premises to be true while that conclusion is false.’ And a student objects: ‘But how do you know that? Maybe we can’t think of a way for the premises to be true while the conclusion is false, but perhaps other beings, maybe beings from another planet, could.’

Let’s imagine these situations as ones in which the objections are at least in part sincere – that is, where the student in question really does think or worry that it might just be true for you

or for us. So, I am excluding situations where the student is purely playing the part of the sophisticated debater. It is also important to the scenarios that the student concedes that the point is indubitable. The teacher is claiming this reflects insight into the nature of things; the student is wondering whether it rather reflects a *limitation* on our insight into the nature of things.

The student is giving voice to what I will call the skeptical threat of parochialism, or the worry that one of my cognitive capacities is parochial: it does not disclose the world, but only how I take the world to be. I reflect on the fact that I claim to know some putative fact about the world only in light of standards that emerge from *my* understanding. So, they are parochial to me: they leave open how the world in fact is, and only disclose to me how the world seems (or must seem) to me (or to one like me). I conclude that I cannot have knowledge of the world through that capacity. In this essay, to make my topic more manageable, I will focus on parochialism in a very general guise: parochialism directed at my capacity to know the world. I take it, though I will not try to justify this claim, that this is the root of the worry about parochialism about such topics as the will, teleology, or logic. In at least many cases, and in the ones that are of interest to me here, the student's objection is not rooted in her understanding of the nature of frustration, purposes, or validity; her worries are about a general lack of connection between what she must think and what is the case.

To generate those worries, we might start with any claim about the world. For instance: I know that the sun will rise tomorrow. Why? An initial answer might be: because it always has in the past and the universe is regular. But now I reflect on the fact that it is not those bare truths that suffice to explain my knowledge – I must take them to be true, and also take them to be sufficient to establish my claim. And so I realize that the answer to the why question is equally: because *I take it* that the sun has always risen in the past, that the universe is regular, and that this

forms a sufficient basis for judgment.<sup>1</sup> What I take to be true is ultimately, the skeptical reflection continues, a fact about me. Perhaps I think it because I was raised a certain way, in which case it is a fact about my culture and not a fact about the sun. Or perhaps I think it because my brain has been hardwired by evolution, in which case it is a fact about my physiology and not about the sun. Or, the case of most interest to me in this essay, perhaps I think it because it is rational or the proper result of reasoning, in which case it is a fact about one of my cognitive capacities and not about the sun. The story always bottoms out in a claim about my nature, and not a claim about the nature of the sun. So, my justification for my claim leaves open whether the world is in fact as I claim it is. I conclude that I cannot know that the sun will rise tomorrow. This generalizes to all of my claims about the world. So, I conclude that I lack the capacity to know the world.

While teaching, and also in conversation with others and in silent communion with myself, the threat of parochialism has often arisen. And I have often felt tempted to answer the parochialism worry by noting how it defeats itself: if you think your capacities are limited in a way that prevents them from having insight into the nature of things, then your claim that those capacities are limited is itself nothing but a reflection of their limitations – not a justified (or even a justifiable) conclusion about the nature of your capacities. If your brain hardwired you to believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, then it equally hardwired you to believe that fact about your brain. If that (putatively) parochial basis undermines your confidence in the conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> That is, in the skeptic's reflections, it is vital that my *taking* my justifications to be sufficient play a necessary role in my claims to know. This might strike some readers as a generalized version of what Boghossian has called the 'Taking Condition': 'Inferring necessarily involves the thinker *taking* his premises to support his conclusion and drawing his conclusion *because* of that fact' (Boghossian 2014: 5). While the skeptic would certainly assent to that sentence, and Hegel would not challenge it, both would understand it very differently from Boghossian: Boghossian understands the Condition to be explanatorily prior to understanding inference, so that an account of it promises to explain an important part of what it is to infer in terms that do not already presuppose an account of inference (this comes out most plainly at Boghossian 2014: 8-9, 16-7). I am not suggesting and do not think that the 'taking' I refer to in rehearsing the skeptic's argument can be part of a non-circular analysis of knowing (or inferring).

about the sun, then it equally has to undermine your confidence in the conclusion about your own capacities. So, the skeptical doubt is self-defeating. I will call this, for reasons that will emerge in §3, ‘the bullying response.’

My goal in this essay is twofold: I want to show that the bullying response is inadequate and articulate a more adequate response by exploring Hegel’s early writings on skepticism; and I want to motivate Hegel’s position in those writings as a philosophically significant and so far unappreciated response to the skeptical threat of parochialism. One of my goals, that is, is to say something philosophically significant about the skeptical threat of parochialism. And one of my goals is to say something exegetically significant about Hegel.

On the first goal: I will argue that the skepticism that the students express can be a rationally compelling motivation towards philosophy (Hegel describes it as an ‘intimation of a higher truth’) by changing one’s understanding of the significance of both everyday and scientific knowledge of the world (2.240).<sup>2</sup> It can lead us to challenge the natural assumption that that form of knowledge – the one shared by everyday claims and natural science – is the paradigm for all knowledge, indeed the only kind of knowledge we are really capable of. And it can lead us to reflect creatively on other possible forms of knowledge and on their significance for our understanding of ourselves. This is in contrast to the bullying response: arguing that skepticism defeats itself does not provide a reason to do philosophy because it removes any reason to take the threat of skepticism seriously; we emerge from the threat unscathed, but also unchanged. I will articulate one of the ways in which grappling with parochialism can change us:

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<sup>2</sup> Citations of Hegel’s Jena Writings are to the Suhrkamp Edition, volume number followed by page number (e.g., 2.240). Citations of the *Encyclopedia Logic* use the abbreviation EL followed by the paragraph numbers (e.g. EL §33), with ‘A’ for the Remarks (published by Hegel) and ‘z’ for the additions (taken from student notes at his lecture). Citations of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* use the abbreviation *PhG* followed by the paragraph number (e.g. *PhG* ¶33). All translations of Hegel are my own.

it forces us out of our natural tendency to confine our understanding of knowledge, or of genuine knowledge, to the everyday and the scientific.

The exegetical goal is a bit harder to state up front, but I will try to foreshadow it a little. First a little terminology: Hegel calls the everyday and scientific capacity to know the world that is under threat from parochialism ‘the understanding’, and he argues that the understanding can only be a genuine capacity to know the world if we advance to another form of knowledge of the world, what Hegel calls ‘reason’.<sup>3</sup> So, one of the distinctive features of Hegel’s view is that he attempts to respond to skepticism by invoking another form of cognition that cannot properly be subjected to skepticism.

What’s difficult about this view, and what interpreters have struggled with, is how that appeal can possibly help. For it seems that either skepticism is true, in which case it is unclear how appealing to another form of knowledge could save the understanding; or skepticism is false, in which case the understanding is perfectly legitimate on its own and it is unclear why we would need to appeal to another form of knowledge. In neither case does it seem like reason can be necessary to save the understanding. This bind has led commentators either to argue that Hegel thinks that skepticism about the understanding is true, such that reason does not save the understanding but rather replaces it.<sup>4</sup> Or to argue that he thinks that reason is somehow required to show that skepticism is false.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, I argue against both of these views: according to Hegel, skepticism is indeed true, but reason saves the understanding as a capacity for knowledge. That is, reason reveals that the fact that skepticism is true does not license despair at the

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<sup>3</sup> I offer my account of ‘the understanding’, which I call ‘discursive cognition’ [in §4](#); I offer a partial account of reason – ‘non-discursive cognition’ – [in §6](#). Using this terminology to express it, my first goal becomes: we naturally think we are confined to knowing the world discursively (through the understanding), and grappling with parochialism forces us to consider ways in which we know the world non-discursively (through reason).

<sup>4</sup> This route is taken in: McTaggart 1896; Horstmann 1984; Forster 1998: 143-145; Theunissen 2002, Brandom 2002: 178-209. For a very sophisticated recent version of this view, cf. Bowman 2013.

<sup>5</sup> This route is taken in: Pippin 1989; Fulda 1991; Sedgwick 2012. [Find more references.](#)

understanding being a genuine capacity for knowledge. (Everything will turn on what it means to claim that ‘skepticism is true’; I have much to say about this in §6.)

## §2 Parochialism is a Guise of Ancient Skepticism

Before discussing why the bullying response fails and the alternative that Hegel offers to it, I want to clarify the relation between the skeptical threat of parochialism and ancient skepticism. I need to do this because the kind of skepticism that Hegel praises is ancient skepticism: the quote offered previously about skepticism providing ‘an intimation of a higher truth’ is about ancient skepticism. So, I need to show that the threat of parochialism is a guise of ancient skepticism, and that Hegel saw that.

The most obvious places in Hegel’s texts where the threat of parochialism emerges are in response to worries generated by Kant and Kantian philosophy. Specifically, he thinks that Kantianism (not necessarily Kant) has given rise to the threat that my nature cuts me off from the world as it is in itself (cf., e.g., EL §22z, §80z). 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, calling it ‘impositionism’. Paradigmatically, the worry is about our forms of intuition, space and time: since those forms emerge from our nature, and we can at least think of alternative forms that would belong to other natures, it seems like we impose our forms of intuition onto the world, such that the best we can do is know how things must appear to rational beings with those forms of intuition.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> cf. Pippin 1989: 27ff and Pippin 2013. My account of parochialism is indebted to Pippin’s account of impositionism; it differs primarily in that it is not specified to the forms of our intuition or our uptake of the world (so it is more abstract), and in my attempt to explicitly connect the threat to ancient skepticism.

Hegel discusses this skeptical worry most explicitly and famously in the ‘Introduction’ to the *Phenomenology* when he discusses the view that cognition is a ‘tool’ or a ‘medium’ for arriving at knowledge of the absolute (*PhG* ¶73).<sup>7</sup> As a tool or a medium it would shape or alter that which is to be known: it would subject that which is to be known to the standards internal to it, where those standards are understood as arising not from what is to be known but from our nature as judging beings. This separateness gives rise to a bad or false understanding of the absolute precisely because our understanding of it, an understanding that is supposed to be, by its nature, separate from the absolute, is nevertheless understood as able to give us access to the absolute (cf. *PhG* ¶74; cf. also 2.240). If we understand cognition in this way, we are stuck with parochialism: since our grasp of the world is refracted through the medium of our cognitive capacity or shaped by the technical activity of our cognition, any judgment we make about it leaves open whether the world is really that way. Reflection on this fact prevents it from playing the role that it was meant to play of determining for us whether our judgments are true.

My thesis in this section is that this skeptical worry is a guise of ancient skepticism. That this worry is a guise of ancient skepticism is not often noted. It is more typically argued that it emerges in response to Kant (cf. for clear evidence in favor of this connection, cf. EL §10A). I fully grant the connection to Kant. My argument is that (as Hegel is thinking about these matters) the skeptical worry that emerges out of Kant is closely connected to ancient skepticism.<sup>8</sup>

It will help show this if I introduce a bit of terminology: let’s call a ‘standard internal to judging’ a standard that determines what counts as a (good) judgment and that has its source in the nature of judging as an activity that one can engage in. So, for instance, the claim that I

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<sup>7</sup> For an earlier appearance of the same argument, cf. 2.180-2.

<sup>8</sup> Forster, for instance, denies this connection (cf. Forster 1998: 126-128), and as a result has a significantly different interpretation of what Hegel takes from ancient skepticism than I do.

should not judge unless I have sufficient reasons to judge is plausibly a standard internal to judging. A sign that it is would be: if I am doing something, and I don't recognize that that standard applies to what I am doing, then I won't qualify as judging. Perhaps I am fantasizing, or dreaming, but not judging. Given this terminology, parochialism is the worry that the standards internal to judging are parochial to judges, such that they leave open how the world in fact is. It arises because the standards internal to judging, since they have their source in the nature of my activity, at least seem like they can get in the way of my knowing the world.<sup>9</sup>

This skeptical threat seems to be very different from ancient skepticism, which is most often understood in terms of a problem of sufficient grounds such that either there's a regress or a vicious circle or an arbitrary starting point for my claims about the world (the standard name for this skeptical worry is 'Agrippa's Trilemma').

The two forms of skepticism are really guises of the same skepticism, however. As Hegel understands it, ancient skepticism shows, through a variety of ways ('tropes', 'modes'), 'the uncertainty of finite things [*die Ungewißheit über die Endlichkeiten*]', such that everything finite 'is made to totter [*wankend gemacht wird*]' (2.238).<sup>10</sup> That is, ancient skepticism is directed

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<sup>9</sup> One of the distinctively modern aspects of the (post-Kantian) threat of parochialism not found in ancient skepticism is that the one gripped by it falls into despair, a despair which reveals a commitment to the necessity of their judging about the world. The ancient skeptics did not despair; they understood their skepticism to liberate them from the disquiet involved in attempting to know the world (or, perhaps, in claiming to know the world when one lacks sufficient grounds). It is noteworthy that Hegel praises this aspect of ancient skepticism, and takes the despair to be 'the sickness of our times' (EL §22z); it is also noteworthy that he describes the *Phenomenology* as both 'the path of despair' and 'the self-consummating [*sich vollbringende*] skepticism' (§78). For reasons of space, I cannot treat this distinctively modern aspect of parochialism (despair) or Hegel attitude towards it in this essay, though I hope to do so elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> Hegel draws a distinction between early ancient skepticism and later ancient skepticism (the lemmas of Agrippa's Trilemma come from later ancient skepticism; parochialism appears in both). Early ancient skepticism is directed only against the finite and the 'dogmatism of common consciousness'; later ancient skepticism is directed against that and also, according to Hegel unjustifiably, against the infinite and philosophy itself (2.238; cf. 2.44-5). This difference is immaterial for my purposes, as both forms of ancient skepticism are (for the same reasons) directed against the finite, and that is the aspect of them that I am considering now.

against the finite. What it shows about the finite is that it lacks certainty, or is not such that we can know it. (I say more about certainty and its relation to knowledge [in the next section](#).)

At the most general level, to be finite is to be dependent on something else. There are many different ways or modes of being dependent on other things. Agrippa's Trilemma and parochialism target different ways of being dependent. Agrippa's Trilemma targets that which depends for its existence (or for its being in some state) on something else. Where that something else is also finite, we will always need another ground, leading to an infinite regress, or a vicious circle, or an unjustified assertion that something is so. Parochialism targets that which depends for its nature on the possibility of something with a contrasting nature – or, to put the point in terms of our ability to know such a thing, it is directed against that the nature of which can only be determined in contrast with another nature. For example, my understanding of what a tangerine is depends upon my capacity to predicate of it that it is a fruit, and the significance of that predication in turn depends on the intelligibility of something's not being a fruit.<sup>11</sup> (I explore this idea as the first feature of discursive judgment in more detail [in §4](#).)

The threat of parochialism, and the associated conception of finitude, emerges most clearly in Hegel's discussion of the skeptical trope of 'relation' (*Verhältnis*) according to which 'everything is only in relation to another' (cf. 2.239). This is the most general trope (cf. 2.239

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<sup>11</sup> Three brief points about this conception of finitude: first, I will put the point in terms of our grasp of a finite thing's nature. As noted, the point could also be put in terms of the nature of the thing itself: a finite thing is something the nature of which is dependent upon the possibility that something (else) might have a contrasting nature. The point is easier to handle, I believe, when put in terms of our grasp of natures, and so that is what I shall talk about in what follows. Second, this conception of finitude does not depend upon the very same thing being able to have a contrasting nature – perhaps being a tangerine, or being a fruit, is essential to this thing's being what it is, such that it could not cease to be a tangerine (or fruit) without ceasing to be full stop. That is consistent with claiming that what it is to be a tangerine (or fruit) is nevertheless dependent upon the intelligibility of some (other) thing's not being a tangerine (or fruit). And third, a full account of Hegel's understanding of this conception of finitude would have to work out how it relates to the conception of finitude within the Agrippan Trilemma (where to be finite is to be dependent for one's existence and state on something else), but that will have to await another occasion.

and Sextus 2000: I.38-9). In Sextus it certainly seems to include the threat of parochialism. The Greek term Hegel translates with ‘Verhältnis’ is *pros ti* – the standard translation of it in Sextus’s work is ‘relativity’. The term relativity is already suggestive of the skeptical threat of parochialism, according to which what we know is only relative to us and leaves open how the world in fact (non-relatively) is. And we find Sextus considering what appears to be parochialism as an instance of this trope (the eighth of the original ten) when he writes that ‘we have in fact already deduced that everything is relative, i.e. with respect to the subject judging (since each thing appears relative to a given animal and a given human and a given sense and a given circumstance)...’ (Sextus 2000: I.136; cp. I.38). One of the arguments in this list at least appears to be that what we claim to know must appear to us, and that makes it relative to us (the subject judging) so that we cannot know what we claim to know.<sup>12</sup> So, at least Sextus appears to have taken parochialism to be a guise of ancient skepticism.

That Hegel also has it in view comes out most clearly in his description of why dogmatism falls prey to the skeptical trope of relation: dogmatism falls prey to it because its essence ‘consists [*besteht*] in positing something finite, afflicted with an opposition ..., as the absolute’ (2.245). I want to focus on the description of the finite as ‘afflicted with an opposition’. That does not mean that it depends for its existence on something else, something that causes it to come about; it rather means that it is intelligible only in its relation to something that contrasts with it. This is plain from the examples Hegel gives (which fill in the ellipses in the quotation): ‘for example, pure subject or pure object or, in dualism, the duality over against the identity’

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<sup>12</sup> The same thought is present when Sextus claims (of the third mode of Agrippa’s five) that ‘the existing object appears to be such-and-such relative to the subject judging and to the things observed together with it, but we suspend judgment on what it is like in its nature’ (Sextus 2000: I.167; cp. I.177).

(2.245). The pure object need not depend for its existence on the pure subject.<sup>13</sup> Rather, the pure object depends for its intelligibility on the contrast with the pure subject. He has in mind a philosopher who says, for instance, that the absolute is the pure object. Whatever exactly that philosopher means, her claim has cognitive content only in contrast with the claim that (e.g.) the absolute is the pure subject. And that shows that the kind of finitude Hegel has in mind is that whose nature can only be determined in contrast to the nature of other things.

With that understanding of finitude in the background, we can bring out how the worry about parochialism emerges from the trope of relation. What we know, insofar as it can be known, has some nature. If this nature is understood to be finite, then it is intelligibly only in light of a contrasting nature. The contrast with what is knowable is with what can know, and so the contrasting nature is that of the knower.<sup>14</sup> This comes out most intuitively in the idea that I may think whatever I like, but whether what I think is so depends not on my thinking it to be so but on the way the world is – and that is independent of what I think it to be. I understand that my activity of judging is not the same thing as what is the case with the world, and so I understand that there is some kind of contrast between the nature of my activity and the nature of the world. (I say more about this idea in §3, when comparing Hegel with Stroud, and in §4, when discussing the second feature of discursive judgment.) So, the knower must have a nature that contrasts with that of the known. But then how can I know whether my nature reveals the way the world is to me? And how can I know that there are not other natures, natures that contrast with mine, to whom the world would appear different? I may not be able to think of those other

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Schulze – who is at least one of Hegel’s targets in this passage – emphatically insists that what we know does not depend for its existence on our knowledge of it: cf. Schulze 1801: 61.

<sup>14</sup> Note that this contrast is all that is required for Hegel’s argument; he is not committed to the intelligibility of unknowable objects. If knowable indeed is one side of a relation, then all that it requires for its intelligibility is that there be a contrast with the other side (one who is able to know, knower) which defines its role within the relation.

natures, but how could I legitimately exclude them? In other words, it is unclear how the nature of the world could be available to the knower on this conception without being in some way shaped by the knower, such that it becomes fit to be known by her. But if it is shaped by the knower, then what is known may not really be the world – it may just be the world as shaped by the knower. Even without spelling it out in more detail, it should already be apparent that this worry just is the worry that the nature of the knower is parochial to her.

Agrippa's Trilemma and parochialism might be brought closer together by noting how they both differ from Cartesian skepticism. By 'Cartesian skepticism' I mean a form of skepticism which accepts that we have representations of the world (e.g., it seems like there's a tangerine in front of me) and argues that those representations, even when we are in the epistemically best circumstances, do not yield knowledge of the world. Both ancient and Cartesian skepticism challenge whether we can in fact have knowledge of the world. But they do so in very different ways, and leave us in very different situations.

Cartesian skepticism, as just noted, takes for granted that we have representations of the world. Within ancient skepticism, those representations play no role – they are not that from which the skeptical reflections begin, and they are not that which remains upon the termination of the skeptical reflections.<sup>15</sup> Ancient skepticism, in all of its guises, begins with claims about what is finite, and ends having revealed that no such claim can yield knowledge. It does not suppose that that leaves us with representations which may or may not be true; those representations, precisely because they would be representations of what we have shown to be unsatisfying to our cognitive capacities, would be of no interest to an ancient skeptic (at least as

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<sup>15</sup> It is an interesting and important question whether the representations Cartesian skepticism starts from can be subjected to ancient skepticism, but it is not a question that Hegel raises (indeed, so far as I can see, Hegel never has anything like what I am here calling 'Cartesian skepticism' in view) and not one that needs to be tackled in this essay.

Hegel understands such a skeptic). The conclusion of ancient skepticism is not to concern yourself with such matters.

So, parochialism is one of the guises of ancient skepticism, expressed by Hegel in terms of a worry about the relation between our judging and the world we judge about, such that the world cannot be genuinely available to us in our judging. Having clarified that connection, I now turn to consider what goes wrong with the bullying response to parochialism.

### **§3 Parochialism is Incoherent**

In this section, I will argue that the bullying response to the parochialism worry is really a form of transcendental argument and that Stroud's criticism of transcendental arguments applies to it. I will also argue that Hegel makes the same criticism of Gottlob Schulze. This fact is not of mere historical interest; it sets us up to examine, in the next section, Hegel's diagnosis of what goes missing from Schulze's argument, and so from transcendental arguments as used to respond to the skeptic.

Before turning to discuss the adequacy of the bullying response to the parochialism worry, I first want to show that Schulze made exactly this response to skepticism insofar as it was directed at what he regarded as the non-philosophical claims of everyday cognition (and also at the extension of such claims in natural science). Schulze claims that doubts about the legitimacy of our claims to know whatever is 'at hand [*vorhanden*] in the sphere of our consciousness', defeat themselves: 'Because it is present [*gegenwärtig*] 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 1801: 51; quoted by Hegel at 2.220). So,

whatever is present in the sphere of our consciousness has ‘indisputable certainty [*unläugbare Gewißheit*]’ (Schulze 1801: 51). He later gives as examples of what can be present in our consciousness ‘a tree, a human, a book’ (Schulze 1801: 58), and more generally claims that it has to be ‘a singular and determinate [*bestimmter*] body’ (Schulze 1801: 57). Finally, he clarifies that he will call what is present to our consciousness ‘a fact [*Tatsache*] of consciousness’ and notes that these facts ‘are the indisputably real’ and that they are what philosophical explanations explain (Schulze 1801: 51).

As his examples make plain, what Schulze calls a fact of consciousness – and what he claims we are certain of – is not our representations of the world, but rather the singular, worldly objects themselves.<sup>16</sup> Schulze does not obviously have in view any particular reason for doubting these facts of consciousness, and does not seem to be particularly concerned with parochialism. Nevertheless, his response to such doubts is exactly the response that the bully makes to parochialism: in response to a skepticism directed at our capacity to know things insofar as they are given or available to us in our conscious experience of the world, Schulze claims that such a skepticism is self-defeating because it relies on the very same capacity (Schulze’s ‘consciousness’) that it subjects to skeptical doubt. And this response, to be successful, must be

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<sup>16</sup> Sometimes Schulze is taken to be some kind of veil-of-ideas skeptic, and so read as asserting that only things like sense data are indubitable (cf. Beiser 1987: 282-3; Forster 1998: 132-152; for a helpful reading that targets Forster’s account, cf. Franks 2009). I believe Schulze’s examples of what we are certain of serve as an adequate refutation of that reading for my purposes. (Further evidence against this reading can be found in his discussion of intuition as connecting just consciousness and the world without the presence of an intermediate representation had by the subject that relates it to the world (cf. Schulze 1801: 58-9), and his claim that what we are certain of exists independently of our consciousness of it at Schulze 1801: 62 (quoted by Hegel at 2.222).) It is also plain that Hegel does not treat Schulze as a veil-of-ideas skeptic: consider, for instance, his claim that Schulze means to include physics and astronomy as indubitable at 2.225-6. Moreover, it is clear throughout Hegel’s essay that he reads Schulze as a skeptic about philosophy and not about the external world, and he reads Schulze’s defense of the facts of consciousness not as a defense of veil-of-ideas skepticism but rather as a defense of common sense dogmatism (cf., e.g., 2.237-8).

successful against parochialism (even if that is not the particular skeptical threat that Schulze is thinking of).

Before advancing to consider the merits of Schulze's argument, I need to make a point about the term 'certain': for both Schulze and Hegel, to be certain is to have no grounds for doubt.<sup>17</sup> On a proper and complete account of certainty, to be certain is to know. (One of the points at issue between Hegel and Schulze is whether Schulze's account of certainty is 'proper' in this sense; Hegel thinks it is not, and divorces being certain from knowing: cf. 2.221.) This is not meant as a substantive thesis about knowledge or about psychology. It does not articulate a test or criterion we can use to determine whether we have knowledge – you cannot ascertain whether something is certain independently of ascertaining whether our grounds for it suffice to establish that it is true. It is just the terminology that Schulze and Hegel employ for the subjective side of knowledge.

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<sup>17</sup> That this is how Schulze uses the term 'certainty' comes out in the fact that the argument for the certainty of facts of consciousness is just an argument against the existence of grounds for doubting them.

The clearest evidence for this interpretation of Hegel's use of the term 'certainty' ('Gewißheit') comes in his late *Philosophy of Spirit*, esp. §§413z, 416, 416z. There he claims, for instance, that certainty 'constitutes the nature of the I' as freedom constitutes the nature of the will – that is, that it defines the nature of the theoretical capacity for knowledge just as freedom defines the nature of the practical capacity to realize the good, and so characterizes that knowledge in terms of its being the product of a capacity of the subject's (or, as I put it, it characterizes knowledge on its subjective side) (§413z). (He also distinguishes between subjective or mere certainty and objective certainty, making it clear that it is only the latter that amounts to knowledge in the philosophically robust sense in which he is interested. As far as I can tell, he is not working with these distinctions in his response to Schulze, so I do not make use of them in my account of what he means by 'certainty'.)

In his early writings, probably the clearest formulation of what he means by certainty comes with his claim that 'to exist in a conditioned manner and to be for it [*für sich*] nothing certain mean the same' (2.221; cp. *PhG* ¶26). For something to exist conditionally, as Hegel understands it, is such that its grounds for existence reside at least partly in something else: it exists only because its condition obtains, and no account of it will explain why its condition obtains. For example, this tangerine exists only because that tree produced it, and no account of this tangerine will explain why the tree from which it came exists. So, for something to exist conditionally means that we can be fully acquainted with it and still have grounds for doubting it or being uncertain with respect to its existence: that is, still lack a complete account of why it exists. (On a straightforward reading of Hegel's claim, employing my interpretation of 'certainty', it also entails the much more difficult thought that we cannot know what exists conditionally. [I return to this thought in §6.](#))

I now turn to examine the argument, advanced by both Schulze and the bully, that parochialism is incoherent. The first point to note is that this is a transcendental argument. A transcendental argument is an argument that starts with some claim about our cognitive capacities, and concludes with some claim about the world. It purports to show that the world's being a certain way is a necessary condition on the truth of the claim about our cognitive capacities.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the starting claim about our cognitive capacities is supposed to be taken for granted by the skeptic while the concluding claim about the world is supposed to be denied by the skeptic. In our case, the one worried about parochialism takes for granted that she can make claims about the world, or be conscious of the world, while denying that the world is knowable, that she can be certain that her claims are true. Our bullying response insists that a condition on the possibility of being conscious of the world is that the capacity to be conscious of the world is able to issue forth in knowledge of the world – for the validity of the skeptical reflections themselves depend on this.

Stroud has famously argued against this sort of response to skepticism. A transcendental argument, he grants, can show that I am committed to some belief simply in virtue of being a thinking (or speaking, etc.) being – for instance, I am committed to the claim that the world is knowable. But that does not mean that the belief is true: the fact that I have to believe that the world is knowable is one conclusion; its being knowable is an entirely different claim. What moves me beyond my starting point in a transcendental argument is revealing that I am

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<sup>18</sup> What I am calling 'transcendental argument' is sometimes referred to in the literature as a specific kind of transcendental argument: a 'stronger' or 'more ambitious' (Stroud 2000: 213-5) or 'truth-directed' transcendental argument (cf. Cassam 1997: 33, Stern 2000: 10), because it concludes in a claim about how the world in fact is and not merely a claim about what we must believe. (The original use of the term 'truth-directed' transcendental argument appears to be Peacocke 1989; there Peacocke contrasts it with 'knowledge-directed' transcendental arguments because it establishes some claim as true but does not discuss how or whether we know it. This contrast is not relevant to my argument in this paper.) Claims about what we must believe do not suffice to prove that we can know the world, and so do not really touch the worry about parochialism; hence, I focus only on transcendental arguments that purport to establish that the world is knowable.

committed to something in virtue of being a thinking (or speaking, etc.) being; but one might ask whether what I am committed to is true, and no transcendental reflection can arrive at an answer to that question.<sup>19</sup> A transcendental argument, since it bottoms out in conclusions that rest on my being a thinking being, cannot establish the legitimacy of beliefs had on that basis. As that is what the skeptical reflections are really concerned with, it cannot dislodge them. Consequently, no transcendental argument can establish the conclusions it purports to establish. And, most saliently for us, no transcendental argument can establish that the world is knowable against the parochialism worry. All it can establish is that I must believe that the world is knowable.

Having briefly rehearsed Stroud's argument, I want to show that Hegel makes what is in essence the same response to Schulze's argument. Before doing so, however, I want to grant that one of the prominent ways in which Hegel puts his argument against Schulze is in terms of Agrippa's Trilemma, focusing on how Schulzean certainty is in fact compatible with doubt since it does not bring with it knowledge of all of the conditions of the existence of which one is certain (cf. 2.221-2). The demand that knowing such and such requires knowing all of the conditions of its existence, however, can seem overly demanding, and many philosophers reject it (rightly or wrongly). I will focus on a different version of Hegel's criticism of Schulze, one that brings out the proximity between his criticism and Stroud's criticism of transcendental arguments.

Hegel argues that the most fundamental aspect of Schulze's view is the claim that our thinking is one thing, and what is the case with what we think about is another (he describes the

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<sup>19</sup> Or, as Stroud puts it, 'the sceptic can always very plausibly insist that it is enough to make language [or thought – 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 2000: 24). It will always be plausible to insist that the transcendental argument merely reveals that I have to believe that S is true because the basis of the reflection is in my nature as a thinking being.

claim in terms of ‘the opposition of thinking and being’, and of ‘holding fast’ to this opposition) (2.251). So, I may think of a tangerine, and think whatever I like about it, but whether there is a tangerine, and whether it is as I think of it, can never be known simply from my thought of the tangerine.<sup>20</sup> But he argues that this claim ‘agrees poorly with’ ‘the indisputable certainty of the facts of consciousness’ (2.254). For that certainty ‘presupposes’ ‘the *complete* [vollkommen] *agreement*’ of our thought with what is the case, but that presupposition cannot be defended (2.254): Schulze even says that ‘its possibility is one of the greatest *riddles* of human nature’ (2.255; from Schulze 1801: 70). Given Schulze’s starting point, we cannot know whether our nature as thinkers is in agreement with the nature of the world, such that we can know the world. We constantly, inevitably presuppose that we can, but such a presupposition can have no ground.

Hegel’s argument on these pages is identical with Stroud’s response to transcendental arguments: as with Stroud, it rests on the claims – accepted by the skeptic and the one who makes transcendental arguments – that the nature of my capacities is one thing while the nature of the world is another thing and that these two natures are to be contrasted with one another such that to make sense of knowledge one must articulate their relation. Once this set up is in place, the transcendental argument cannot dislodge skepticism because it cannot do anything more than articulate how things will seem to ones with these cognitive capacities.

Is the conclusion that we should be skeptics? Both Stroud and Hegel think we can know that such objects as tangerines exist and can know that they have the various properties they have. In what follows, my focus will be on Hegel. I will show how he maintains that we can know such objects as tangerines while nevertheless maintaining that there can be no certainty

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<sup>20</sup> As Hegel notes, Kant’s response to the ontological proof gave this idea ‘a universal and widespread fortune’ (2.252).

with respect to our claims about such things, which I will gloss as the claim that skepticism is true.

The key to his position is that he accepts a version of a distinction between our capacity to know finite objects, the understanding, and the capacity to know the unconditioned, reason. The relationship between the understanding and reason in Hegel is one of the most difficult aspects of his philosophy. In this essay, I will only make a limited claim about it, one meant to reveal its significance to the scenario of encountering skepticism articulated in the introduction. The bullying response to skepticism appears compelling because it identifies the capacity subjected to skepticism (what Hegel thinks of as the understanding) with the capacity to subject it to skepticism (what Hegel thinks of as the negative side of reason); thus, the skepticism undermines itself. Hegel's response is not to insist that there are really two different capacities, the understanding and reason. It is rather to insist that the truth of skepticism, as it applies to the lower activity, gives us a kind of push towards a higher activity of the same capacity, an activity that (1) is not subject to skepticism and that (2) enables us to reconcile the lower activity's claim to knowledge and skepticism.

In the next section (§4), I will explain why Hegel thinks transcendental arguments fail by examining the logical form of their conclusions. This will set us up for an account of how the skeptical worry actually points us towards reason as what can successfully respond to skepticism (§5).

#### **§4 The Logical Form of a Transcendental Argument**

A transcendental argument has as its conclusion some claim about the world: e.g., the world is knowable, or everything that happens has a cause, or the world is spatial. The grounds

for asserting this conclusion about the world is some claim, accepted by the skeptic, about our capacities. The conclusion has a very common form, in which some concept, the predicate, is predicated of some other concept, the subject. I want to argue that this form, which one might call the form of discursive judgment, is what makes the transcendental argument unfit to respond to the skeptic. It is not, in other words, the fact that the transcendental argument appeals to an in some sense psychological premise that vitiates it.<sup>21</sup> It is rather that it employs the form of discursive judgment.

By ‘discursive judgment’ I mean what Hegel frequently calls ‘finite cognition’ (in contrast to infinite cognition) and also ‘the understanding’ (in contrast to reason). For our purposes, and in the sense in which I will use the term, there are two essential characteristics of discursive judgment.<sup>22</sup> First, discursive judgments make sense only when the subject concept can be articulated or determined by predicating one concept as opposed to its opposite of that subject concept. For example, I articulate the subject-concept gold by predicating that it is a metal; I determine the concept tangerine by judging that this tangerine is ripe. These judgments have what cognitive content they have, make sense as judgments, only because the predicates are understood as having opposites and as excluding them: the content of the judgment that gold is a metal is parasitic upon the intelligibility of something’s not being a metal (and similarly, for the other judgment, of something’s not being ripe). Or, to use one of Hegel’s examples, consider the two propositions ‘God is a cause’ and ‘God is not a cause’ (2.230). A ‘proposition of the understanding’, a discursive judgment, cannot combine these two because the significance of the

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<sup>21</sup> This is, in a nutshell, Stroud’s diagnosis: cf., e.g., Stroud 2000: 23-4, 210-1

<sup>22</sup> These two characteristics are related to but different from the three characteristics of discursivity I outline in ‘Hegel on Kant’s Analytic-Synthetic Distinction’ – my formulations there were guided by an attempt to reveal connections between Hegel and Kant, and so borrowed more from Kant than I do here. Further, for Hegel’s account of discursive judgment to be philosophically significant, the two features I outline here must be connected to one another. Articulating their connection will have to wait another day; here all I try to do is show his commitment to both.

predicates of such judgements is dependent on ‘isolating’ that predicate from its opposite (2.229). Judged discursively, each of these two propositions has the significance it has only in light of being incompatible with and excluding the other.<sup>23</sup>

As my distinction between articulation of the subject-concept and determination of the subject-concept intimates, the judgment in question can be analytic – known simply through grasping the meaning of the subject term – or synthetic. In either case, the judgment makes sense only because the predicate is one among other, contrasting ways a thing can be, ways of being that are excluded by the judgment.<sup>24</sup>

The contrast of interest to us in what follows is the contrast between what is judged about (what Hegel will sometimes call ‘being’) and the judger of it (what Hegel will sometimes call ‘thought’). In the judgment that concludes the transcendental argument of interest to us, the world is knowable, it is sometimes said that the significance of that predication depends on the contrast between a knowable and an unknowable world. That is, it is sometimes said that the

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<sup>23</sup> In the context of the early essay on skepticism, Hegel’s description of discursive judgments has its significance most obviously in the context of the ancient skeptical strategy of equipollence, of showing that two opposing propositions have equally strong arguments in their favor (cf. Sextus Empiricus 2000: I.8-10). If the predicates of discursive judgments are understood as essentially having and excluding their opposites, then the strategy of equipollence will apply to and, where successful, undermine discursive judgments. If we have a form of judging that is not essentially understood in that fashion, then we will have a form of judging that is not undermined by equipollence. And this fits well with Hegel’s guiding thought that skepticism is only turned against philosophy in its degenerate forms, making Schulze’s skepticism, directed exclusively against philosophy, the most degenerate possible (cf. 2.237-8).

Less obviously, and more mysteriously, Hegel is also criticizing Schulze’s discussion of the law of non-contradiction as a law that has nothing to do with truth because it only articulates a necessary condition on something’s being a thought (and not any kind of condition on a thought’s being true): for Hegel, this is part of Schulze’s dogmatism, or insistence that the understanding is the only form of cognition of which we are capable (cf. Schulze 1801: 47-8, 80-1; Hegel 2.230).

<sup>24</sup> It took me quite a while to understand how Hegel’s point applied to analytic judgments. For it had seemed to me that Hegel’s focus on the intelligibility of contrary predicates would not really, or at least not obviously, fit analytic judgments. Schulze, for instance, would deny that one can intelligibly predicate a contrary of the predicate in an analytic judgment, as the result would be a contradiction and a contradiction is no thought (cf. Schulze 1801: 47-8, 80-1), and Kant would (arguably) make a similar point: analytic judgments have no intelligible contrary since their contrary ‘annihilates itself’ (A151/B190-1). My breakthrough occurred when I realized that Hegel is not claiming that the analytic judgment has an intelligible contrary; rather, he is claiming that *the predicate* of the analytic judgment has a contrary, and that the analytic judgment has cognitive significance only in light of that.

transcendental argument depends on the intelligibility of an unknowable world. Whether that is true or not, that is not the contrast relevant for Hegel. The contrast relevant for Hegel is between the world as what is known and the judger as the one who knows. Regardless of the intelligibility of an unknowable world, the transcendental argument cannot succeed because it employs, and depends for its cognitive significance upon employing, this contrast.<sup>25</sup>

Highlighting this contrast leads us directly to the second feature of discursive judgments: they work within what Hegel calls ‘the opposition of thinking and being’ (2.251). That is, the space of discursive judgments is 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 think, insofar as I think it, does not determine whether what I think is true – the world does. There is, on one side, ‘a thinking subject’ and, on the other side, ‘an existing object’, and no (discursive) activity of the thinking subject – no (discursive) thought or concept or judgment – as such contains the reality of what it thinks (2.251), a point made most explicit (Hegel claims) in Kant’s treatment of the ontological argument for the existence of God (cf. 2.252).<sup>26</sup> Or, to put this point a little more precisely: the truth of a discursive judgment is determined by the way the world is, or by how things stand with its subject matter, in contrast to being determined just by how things are with my judging. Consider, for instance, the claim that the rock is a hundred years old. Whether it is true depends on the world, in particular on whether the rock is a hundred years old, and is not determined by my cognitive capacities.

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<sup>25</sup> That Hegel finds such a set-up dissatisfying came out in my explanation of finitude (in §2) as depending for its cognitive significance upon something other than it, with which it is incompatible, and on his example (cited there) of the philosopher who claims that the subject (as opposed to the object) is the absolute (cf. 2.245).

<sup>26</sup> A version of this point is noted in §§26-7 in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, though a full consideration of it in that text comes only with his discussion of Kant.

Importantly, the world determines *for me* whether my judgment is true. How things are with the world is a fact that obtains totally irrespective of whether I am conscious of that fact; but my judging as I do does depend on my at least taking it that I am conscious of that fact, as my consciousness of the way the world is serves as my grounds for judging as I do. As Hegel puts it, ‘the common human understanding... holds fast to the given, the fact, the finite’ (2.240). I only judge discursively what I do because I take it that I can hold fast to it – skepticism is a threat precisely because it seem to deprive us of our capacity to hold fast to the world, and so to deprive us of our grounds for judging as we do (cf. 2.241).

The availability of the world need not be confined to perception, though perception might well be paradigmatic. There need be no specifiable procedure for determining whether the world verifies our judgment, nor any possibility of the world determining the truth of my judgments one by one as opposed to in a holistic manner, and as a matter of historical or technological accident some truths may not (now or ever) be accessible to us. What matters is that the world is available to be thought about, perhaps as a result of testimony or inference or experiment or imaginative projection, such that it can serve as my grounds for my judgment’s being true. So, my judgment that the rock is one hundred years old is not only made true (if it is true) by the world; I must be able to be conscious of the way the world is, and to judge in light of that consciousness.

### **§5 Transcendental Arguments Fail Because of their Logical Form**

Having clarified what is involved in discursive judgment, I turn to show that the transcendental argument fails to answer the skeptic because it employs discursive judgment. Recall Hegel’s Stroudian criticism: given the set-up of a transcendental argument, we must

distinguish between claims about what we must believe, or claims about the standards internal to our judging, and claims about the world, what is the case with what we are judging about. The transcendental argument aspires to establish a claim about the world, but at most can establish something about the standards internal to our judging.

First, note that transcendental arguments essentially employ discursive judgments. For there could be no transcendental argument without a contrast between the nature of the world and the nature of the judger. It is the activity of doubting, for instance, that undermines itself when it seeks to doubt that it has the capacity for knowledge. This activity is not something the world can engage in, it is only something characteristic of the judger. A transcendental argument appeals to the nature of this activity, or one like it, in order to arrive at some conclusion about the world, where the world is understood as something other than the activity. Moreover, the success of a transcendental argument depends on whether it arrives at knowledge of the world, as opposed to knowledge of the judger, such that the world is the final arbiter for whether the conclusion of the transcendental argument is true.

Second, since the transcendental argument employs discursive judgments, it entails that conclusions arrived at on the basis of an appeal to the judger's capacities do not justify conclusions about the nature of the world. There is no way of accessing the world from outside of our cognitive capacities, outside of our capacities as a judger. And so, within a transcendental argument, there is no way the world can determine for us the truth of the claims we make about it on the basis of the nature of our capacities: we cannot know whether the limits of what we can doubt, think, etc. accurately reflect the nature of the world. But one who makes a transcendental argument judges discursively, and so thinks that the world must be the final arbiter for our

judgments about it. Hence, the transcendental argument can arrive at no knowledge of the world and cannot overcome the skeptical challenge.

That Hegel thinks that discursive judgment cannot be used to answer skepticism should need no argument – this thought is famous from his claim that philosophy must employ ‘speculative propositions’ (cf. *PhG* ¶¶60-66), and it is also obvious from his criticism of rationalist metaphysics for deploying the form of (discursive) judgment (cf. *EL* §§28-32). It might be worth noting that Hegel rehearses a version of these thoughts in the ‘Skepticism’ essay, when he explains why reason is not subjected to skepticism in the way that the understanding (discursive judgment) is. There he notes that reason is not parochial, or subjected to the skeptical trope of relation: reason is not ‘in a necessary connection [*Beziehung*] to another because it is itself nothing other than the relation’ (2.246). That reason is nothing other than the relation, given my account of the trope of relation in §2, means that reason is not understood as a capacity of the judger in contrast to the nature of what is judged about. That is, reason does not move from the subject to the object, or vice versa. And that suggests that discursive judgments cannot answer skepticism because they do proceed in that fashion: from the subject to the object, in that a claim is made about the world on the basis of the nature of the judger; from the object to the subject, in that the truth of the claim is understood to depend on the nature of the world. And since discursive judgment can only ever oscillate, as it were, from the subject to the object and from the object to the subject, it can never get in view the relation between them.

## **§6 An Aspect of the Logical Form of Hegel’s Method**

Following Hegel, I have so far argued that transcendental arguments fail in response to the threat of parochialism: that the best we can do, using them, is arrive at how the world must

seem to us. I have further offered a diagnosis of why they fail: they employ discursive judgments, judgments that are determined by the nature of judging and are answerable (for their truth) to the way the world is. But how do we know that the nature of judging is capable of disclosing the world as it truly is? Discursive judgment, because it is already shaped by the nature of judging, cannot answer this question. And so it cannot respond to parochialism. One reaction to this is to despair at the legitimacy of our cognitive capacities, and this is the skeptical plight (described in my introduction) we sometimes find ourselves or our students in. The reaction of despair is only justified, however, if there is no other form of cognition available to us.<sup>27</sup> For only then are we condemned to fail to answer the skeptical question.

Rather than despairing, and rather than bullying, Hegel argues that skepticism is essential to philosophy. So he claims that it is ‘the negative side of the cognition of the absolute’ (going on to claim that it ‘presupposes immediately reason as the positive side’) (2.228). He further claims that ‘a true philosophy necessarily has itself a negative side, which is turned against everything limited and therefore against the heap of facts of consciousness and their indisputable certainty...’ (2.227-8). And he speaks of ‘the skepticism that is one with philosophy’ (2.237; cf. also 2.227). It is not entirely clear what he means by this. But the suggestion appears to be that skepticism, at least when it is united with philosophy or with the positive side of philosophy, is true. He does not quite say that explicitly. But if it is the negative side of true philosophy, if it is one with the true philosophy, then it seems like it must be true. In particular, he does not appear to be suggesting the much more common and easily understood claim that the problem posed by the apparent truth of skepticism drives one to philosophy, such that skepticism (even if it is an

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<sup>27</sup> Even then it would not be justified, since justification would no longer make any sense; but it would reveal that cognition is incoherent, to be abandoned. This is a natural way of understanding the aspiration of ancient skepticism. Hegel thinks it is only the aspiration of the later, more degenerate forms of ancient skepticism that targets not just dogmatism but cognition in general (including philosophy).

abiding threat) is certainly not one with philosophy but refuted (or in some other way shown up) by philosophy. We might read him that way, we might have to in order to make sense of what he says, but it is not the natural way to take what he says in these passages. In this section I want to explain what Hegel might mean if we take the apparent implication of these passages – that skepticism, united with philosophy, is true – as what he really means.

Consider first what Hegel definitely does not mean to say about skepticism. First, that skepticism (when united with philosophy) is true does not entail that we should despair about our capacity to know the world – it does not even entail that we should despair about our capacity to know the world through discursive judgment. (Henceforth in this section I will speak about skepticism as shorthand for ‘skepticism united with philosophy’ unless otherwise noted.) Despair is a reaction to skepticism that rests on understanding its conclusion to mean the denial of validity to (discursive) judgment. Skepticism as Hegel understands it, does not deny that discursive judgment is perfectly valid within its own domain, however.<sup>28</sup>

Second, Hegel does not mean that skepticism is the last word about cognition and the world. Skepticism presupposes a form of non-skeptical cognition (it is the negative side of philosophy while reason is the positive side). This does not mean what that kind of sentence would typically mean in contemporary philosophy: it does not mean that skepticism undermines itself because it secretly presupposes something it denies. A major part of Hegel’s essay is devoted precisely to showing that skepticism in its deepest guise is not directed against philosophy at all, but only against discursive judgment. That skepticism presupposes reason

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<sup>28</sup> Consider, for instance, this claim from student transcripts of his later lectures on *Logic*: ‘With finite things it is now certainly the case that they must be determined through finite predicates, and here the understanding with its activity is in the right place. It, itself finite [*der selbst Endliche*], cognizes also only the nature of the finite’ (EL §28z). **I will provide further evidence for this exegetical claim towards the end of this section.**

means, rather, that reason supplies something over and above what is supplied by skepticism, but both are necessary to explain our capacity to know the world.

That skepticism is the force that moves us from discursive judgment (the understanding) to reason might suggest that it poses a problem for discursive judgment that only reason can solve, but that nevertheless reason *solves* the problem and so reveals that skepticism is false. This, for instance, might seem like a plausible way of taking Hegel's claim that ancient skepticism (one of the guises of which, I have argued, is the skeptical threat of parochialism) 'can be seen as the first step [*Stufe*] towards philosophy, because the beginning of philosophy must be the elevation [*erhebung*] over the truth that is there for common consciousness [*welche das gemeine Bewußtein gibt*], and the intimation of a higher truth' (2.240). Skepticism points us towards philosophy by intimating that there is a truth not available within everyday consciousness (i.e., within discursive judgment). It might intimate that by enabling us to arrive at a better understanding of discursive judgment, one that resolves the problem posed by skepticism. I judge that the stone is a hundred years old. Skepticism notes that my judgment appears to be determined not by the way the world is but just by the standards internal to judging. And philosophy provides the solution by explaining how in fact my judgment is (or, at least, can be) determined by the way the world is. With that, skepticism disappears, and we have (or are on the way to having) a satisfying account of discursive judgment.

This interpretation has the merits of being fairly easy to understand and philosophically plausible. It is no wonder that it has been, in one form or another, a popular interpretation of Hegel's attitude towards skepticism.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, I contend that it is not what Hegel is saying, and that what Hegel is saying is philosophically important.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. the works referred to in footnote ###.

One sign that it is not what Hegel means is in the passage I quoted in support of it: Hegel there claims that skepticism leads us to a ‘higher’ truth – not just to the truth, and not to the true account of discursive judgment, but to a different truth that is in some sense ‘higher’, more intellectually satisfying or about a more worthy object, than is the truth available to discursive judgment. This thought is, moreover, reinforced by Hegel’s claim (in the immediately proceeding sentence) that what skepticism claims about discursive judgment is actually recognized by us in judging discursively: the ‘common human understanding itself recognizes quite well that all facts of its consciousness and this, its finite consciousness itself, ceases to be [*vergeht*] and that there is no certainty in it’ (2.240-1; the German is a bit awkward, and I have preserved the awkwardness in my translation). It is only dogmatism that fails to recognize the lack of certainty of discursive judgment. That is, skepticism articulates the true nature of discursive judgment, and this is recognized by discursive judges in judging discursively (by us in our ‘common understanding’): there really is no certainty within discursive judgment. So, skepticism (at least as Hegel understands it) is not a problem philosophy solves, or a confusion philosophy dissolves – it really gets at the nature of discursive judgment.

But before advancing any further, it is worth noting that the parts of the passage that I have highlighted suggest quite strongly that Hegel endorses not only skepticism but also its apparent upshot that discursive judgment cannot attain knowledge. For to talk of certainty, as I said in §3, is really just a way of talking about knowledge (by focusing on its subjective side). To deny all certainty to discursive judgment is to deny that it can attain knowledge. So it is understandable, and quite tempting, to read the passage I have just quoted as providing evidence

for the popular view that skepticism leads us to a better, more satisfying conception of discursive judgment.<sup>30</sup>

So, we are in a bind: either we do not take Hegel's words fully seriously, or we attribute to him the view that discursive judgment can yield no knowledge. It is clear that to get out of this bind we need a precise account of what Hegel means to endorse in skepticism. So I will turn to that now.

Hegel describes what he endorses in skepticism as an 'antinomy' within discursive judgment (cf., e.g., 2.240). The antinomy, I suggest, is this: on the one hand, per the second feature of discursive judgment, I take it that the world is the final arbiter of the truth of discursive judgments. But because the world is a final arbiter only insofar as I take it to be, and so only insofar as it is available to me to judge about, the world is not actually the final arbiter: the standards internal to my judging are the final arbiter, since those standards determine what the world is for me. So, the world is not the final arbiter; the standards internal to my judging are. On the other hand, I understand those standards to be valid only if they are answerable to or get at the nature of the world, which nature is what it is whatever my standards of judging happen to be. And so the standards internal to my judging are not the final arbiter; the nature of the world is.

I judge that the tangerine is ripe. I take my judgment to be answerable to the world. But the world is, as what my judgments answer to, for me, and so my judgments are really answerable to me. Does my judgment agree with my ultimate conception of the world? But, according to me, my judgments, and my conception of the world (even my ultimate conception

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<sup>30</sup> As this is not a very plausible way of reading this kind of passage, it is not surprising that the temptation to read passages like this has been resisted, and that there is a long-standing strand in Hegel interpretation that claims that he is a skeptic about discursive judgments, that they cannot yield knowledge: cf. [the authors mentioned in note ###](#).

of the world), are valid only if they are answerable to the world as it in fact is, irrespective of my conception of it. Does my judgment, and the conception of the world with which it operates, really get at the way the world is? But the world is for me...

This is the antinomy that skepticism truly recognizes in discursive judgment. By the claim that skepticism is true I mean that this antinomy accurately describes discursive judgment.

If this is the sense in which skepticism is true, then it seems like Hegel must despair at the validity of discursive judgment. For, it seems, in judging discursively, I cannot know that my judgments are answerable to the way the world is. And yet in judging I take it that they are answerable to the way the world is, for the world is the final arbiter of my judging. So discursive judgment cannot yield knowledge.

But in fact despair need not follow. For skepticism does not show that I cannot know that my judgments are answerable to the way the world is in judging discursively. What it shows, rather, is that that knowledge cannot be had discursively, that that knowledge is not discursive knowledge. And so it is true that the nature of discursive judging, as defined by the two features articulated in §4, will not reveal that my judgments are answerable to the way the world is. But I might nevertheless have a non-discursive cognition within (so to speak) discursive judgment, a cognition that holds together the nature of the world and the internal standards of my discursive judging so that they are understood to be the same (in some sense of 'same' that would need to be worked out in a fuller account of this proposal).

The bind appears irresolvable only because we take it that skepticism entails that discursive judgment cannot know the world. Given this thought, if discursive judgment can know the world, then skepticism is false and there is neither need nor use for a non-discursive

form of cognition. And, again given this thought, if discursive judgment cannot know the world, then skepticism is true and no non-discursive form of cognition can save discursive judgment.

But the thought that underlies this is not quite right. Skepticism does entail that an account of the nature of discursive judgment cannot explain or sustain its status as a capacity for knowledge. But that is perfectly compatible with thinking that discursive judgment is a capacity for knowledge if we can make out a non-discursive form of cognition that grounds or sustains discursive judgment's claim to knowledge.

So, the first step to getting out of the bind is to note that there is a difference between claiming that discursive judgment cannot yield knowledge on its own and claiming that discursive judgment cannot yield knowledge full stop. Skepticism asserts the former. Per this first step, we have arrived at a conception of skepticism which is true. In judging discursively (considered by itself), we take the world to be the final arbiter of our judgments and we, in judging discursively (considered by itself), cannot take the world to be the final arbiter. And, moreover, this is consistent with preserving discursive judgment as a capacity for knowledge: we can make sense of how the world is the final arbiter for discursive judgment by employing another, non-discursive form of cognition.

This first step is consistent with claiming that the antinomy that skepticism recognizes in discursive judgment is not, at the end of the day, a genuine antinomy: taking just the first step, the antinomy would cease to be antinomial once we recognize the saving grace of the non-discursive form of cognition. Hegel does not say, however, that the antinomy disappears; he simply asserts, flat-out as it were, that there is an antinomy within discursive judgment, and he also asserts, flat-out, that discursive judgment has no certainty (and so provides no knowledge).

To make sense of these claims we have to take a second, less easily comprehensible step: some step to register the sense in which discursive judgment is genuinely antinomial. According to the first step, skepticism recognizes that discursive judgment cannot yield knowledge on its own. It is through distinguishing that claim from the claim that discursive judgment cannot yield knowledge (full-stop) that we avoid despair. For there to be a genuine antinomy, in judging discursively, I must take my capacity to judge discursively to be a capacity for knowledge that does not depend on any other form of cognition.<sup>31</sup>

We can distinguish between two versions of the claim that discursive judgment does not depend on any other form of cognition might take. It might be that, in judging discursively, I can recognize that there are non-discursive forms of cognition, and I claim that the validity of discursive judgment does not depend on them. Or it might be that, in judging discursively, I simply cannot recognize that there are non-discursive forms of cognition, so that I cannot form the thought that the validity of discursive judgment is dependent on them. It will turn out that the second claim is what Hegel means – in judging discursively, I do not erroneously claim that discursive judgment stands free of non-discursive cognition. Rather, I cannot form the thought of non-discursive cognition, and so the only sense I can make of the claim that discursive judgment is a capacity for knowledge brings with it the implicit claim that it stands alone.

This point comes out in Hegel's description of the presence of the antinomy within discursive judgment, as opposed to its presence in the skeptical reflection on discursive

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, discursive judgment might depend on sensibility, or a capacity to be conscious of objects in virtue of being given them, and we might describe sensibility as another form of cognition. That issue, the relation between discursive judgment and sensibility, is not one that I am currently talking about. In particular, I do not mean to say that, in judging discursively, I take my judgment to be independent of sensibility. I mean to say that, in judging discursively, I take my judging to be independent of non-discursive knowledge. Sensibility is not a capacity for knowledge – it is a capacity for being given objects. (It may be part of a capacity for knowledge insofar as it is necessary for discursive judgment, but that just means it provides 'no higher truth' than the truths arrived at through discursive judgment.)

judgment. He claims that within discursive judgment, the two sides of the antinomy merely ‘stand *next to* one another’, such that they are not properly integrated (2.241). Within discursive judgment, the recognition that discursive judgment is incapable of knowledge operates alongside the recognition that discursive judgment is fully capable of knowledge. The former recognition is only ‘formal [*Formelles*]’ in the sense that it is not actually applied to the certainty of our discursive claims to knowledge. It is only through skepticism that these two claims are brought together: ‘the common belief in the uncertainty of the facts of consciousness ceases to be something formal in that skepticism elevates [*erhebt*] the whole sphere of reality and certainty into the potency of uncertainty and annihilates [*vernichtet*] the common dogmatism...’ (2.241). Hegel’s point in this passage is that I am committed, in judging discursively, both to my capacity to know discursively (my capacity to be certain of what I am discursively conscious of) and my inability to know discursively (the lack of certainty of everything I am discursively conscious of). Discursive judgment is, we might say, riven or split into two by these two commitments. But it persists as an activity because it has not brought these two commitments together.

Indeed, these two commitments cannot be brought together discursively, for to bring them together would require recognizing that two opposing predicates (the pair here is certainty and uncertainty) do not mutually exclude one another. But that is inconsistent with the first defining feature of discursive judgment. Skepticism does bring them together by recognizing uncertainty as the higher (more elevated) ‘potency’ of certainty. Whatever exactly that Schellingian term means in Hegel’s hands, it is clear that this elevation cannot be performed discursively, by common consciousness.

The antinomy within discursive judgment is precisely what impels us towards the non-discursive form of cognition. It is only through recognizing the availability of a non-discursive

form of cognition that we can formulate the thought that discursive judgment cannot yield knowledge *on its own*. For it is only in recognizing the possibility of non-discursive cognition that the expression ‘on its own’ takes on meaning. So, judging discursively, I cannot take the first step to resolve the bind: I cannot distinguish the claim that discursive judgment cannot yield knowledge full-stop from the claim that it cannot yield knowledge on its own. The proper expression of the antinomy within discursive judgment is thus: I can know; I cannot know. (The qualifier ‘discursively’ isn’t available, properly speaking, since I have no grasp from within discursive judgment of any other form of knowing.) Confining myself to discursive judgment, I am committed to both of these claims; confining myself to discursive judgment, I cannot bring them together; confining myself to discursive judgment, I am unintelligible to myself.

Skepticism brings the two judgments together, and it does so in a way which sustains discursive judgment’s claim to knowledge by enabling us to affirm both of the commitments as true of discursive judgment. That is, my claim that I can know is right. *As is* my claim that I cannot know. Once we have raised ourselves above discursive judgment through skepticism, we realize that these two claims are true in qualified senses. Because we have differentiated between knowing as such and discursive knowing, the two claims become: I can know discursively and I cannot know discursively. This is not a qualification available from within discursive judging; making it requires advancing beyond discursive judging, and even then the distinction does not become available within discursive judging. From non-discursive judging, we recognize the truth of both of these claims in qualified senses. I can know discursively, but the discursivity of the knowing marks a limit to, or a condition on, its status as knowledge: specifically, it is knowing only in virtue of another form of knowing. And I cannot know discursively, in that discursive judging cannot yield knowledge when taken on its own. These two thoughts, once we have taken

on board the antinomial character of discursive judgment, come to this: in judging discursively, I commit myself to the claim that I can know discursively without being able to ground or sustain that claim, concluding that I cannot know. That commitment, coupled with that conclusion, is the limit to discursive judgment, what makes it the case that it must be conditioned upon a form of non-discursive judging.

Within my everyday consciousness, I rightly judge that I am unable to attain any certainty. Skepticism takes me beyond my everyday consciousness. Through it, my judgment develops into the insight that I am unable to attain certainty without the higher truth that skepticism ‘intimates’ to me (cf., again, 2.240). That development is not incompatible with my judgment in everyday consciousness; rather, it tells me what that judgment really means, by developing the resources to understand it, and its relation to the equally right judgment that I make within everyday consciousness that I can attain certainty.

## **§7 Conclusion**

To conclude my case, I want to return to the skeptical scenario with which I began. Consider again the student that raises her hand to ask after our right to claim, on the basis that we necessarily do believe something, that that is how things in fact are. For instance: what makes it the case that Socrates must be mortal if the premises of the famous syllogism are true? Our minds are such that we have to think that. But we want to make a claim about what must be the case with Socrates, and not a claim about what we must think about Socrates. So, there is something that we are making a claim about and that is what it is regardless of what we think about it. And our claim emerges from how we must, cannot help but, think about this thing.

This situation is unsatisfying, and that dissatisfaction manifests as skepticism. ‘There must be some other way of grounding our claims’, says the voice of skepticism. But there can be no other way of grounding our claims from within discursive judgment. ‘So there can be no cognition of this thing!’ cries the voice of despair. But we have adopted the discursive form of judging without reflection; certainly we have not shown that it is the only manner in which we could know this thing. Skepticism only becomes despair when we dogmatically take it that discursive judging is the only way to know this topic. And that is not something the skepticism itself is committed to.