CHAPTER TWO

Overview of themes

The themes dealt with in Hegel's *Phenomenology* are as many and varied as the shapes taken by consciousness in the course of the book. They include the relation between desire and recognition, the limits of observing reason, the necessary self-alienation of spirit, the intimate connection between abstract freedom and death and the importance of sacrifice to religion. A proper overview of the themes in the *Phenomenology* would thus have to summarize the whole work, and would overlap with much of the next chapter of this *Reader's Guide*. There is, however, one theme that runs throughout Hegel's text: that of the *education* (*Bildung*) of consciousness (§78/61). What the *Phenomenology* is ultimately *about* is the way in which natural consciousness is educated by its own experience and thereby transformed into 'absolute knowing'. Different shapes of consciousness are, of course, educated in different ways; but in his Introduction, Hegel provides an account of the general pattern of such education. This chapter, therefore, will not present my overview of all the themes in the *Phenomenology*, but will be devoted to Hegel's own 'overview' of its principal theme: how consciousness is educated by its experience.

Consciousness and its immanent criterion

Consciousness is educated, we are told, in the course of our phenomenological examination of its claim to be 'real knowledge' (§78/60). From the perspective of philosophy, natural consciousness

is at most 'apparent' or 'phenomenal' knowledge (§77/60). From its own perspective, by contrast, its knowledge is real and sound. The phenomenologist may not assume in advance that consciousness is mistaken in this claim. He must, therefore, take seriously the standpoint of consciousness and examine with an open mind the '*reality*' of its cognition (§81/63).

Hegel notes, however, that such an examination would appear to require a 'criterion' (*Maßstab*) of judgement: for how can one determine whether consciousness knows the truth without an independent standard against which to assess what consciousness knows (§81/63)? Yet in phenomenology no such independent standard is available, since we are not permitted to endorse any understanding of things other than that of natural consciousness. The difficulty is removed, Hegel points out, when we recognize that consciousness has within *itself* a standard or criterion against which to assess what it knows. This is because consciousness itself distinguishes between its knowing of something and the thing it knows, and so is able to compare the one with the other.

In the Introduction Hegel writes the following:

> In consciousness one thing exists *for* another, i.e. consciousness regularly contains the determinateness of the moment of knowing; at the same time, this other is to consciousness not merely *for it*, but is also outside of this relationship, or exists *in itself*: the moment of truth. (§84/64–5)

These lines do not present Hegel's philosophical theory of consciousness: they do not tell us what he thinks consciousness *is*. They tell us how, in his view, consciousness understands *itself*. It is true that Hegel's language here is somewhat abstract. Nonetheless, that language is meant to capture in abstract, formal terms the structure that consciousness takes itself to have.

There are three principal features to consciousness, as Hegel describes it. First, it understands itself to be conscious of something that is distinct from it. Second, it takes that something to be '*for*' it, that is, to be known by it. Third, it takes the thing it is conscious of to have a character of its own – *in itself* – and in that sense to fall 'outside' consciousness. This does not mean that the thing is in fact hidden from consciousness, like a Kantian 'thing in itself', but simply that it is taken to have an independent existence. Consciousness

thus understands the thing not just to exist *in being known*. Yet it also takes itself to *know* things in their independence; in that sense, things do not fall completely 'outside' consciousness. As Hegel puts it, 'consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself', but 'both are *for* the same consciousness' (§85/65).

Note that in distinguishing between its knowing of an object and the object or 'truth' that is known, consciousness supplies its own criterion of examination, for its knowledge of the object can be measured against whatever *it* takes the object in itself to be. 'Thus in what consciousness affirms from within itself as *being-in-itself* or the *True* we have the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows' (§84/65). Phenomenology may make reference only to this standard that is immanent in consciousness itself. The question it must consider, therefore, is not whether consciousness knows objects as *philosophy* knows them to be, but whether consciousness knows, quite as it thinks it does, the very object that it takes *itself* to be aware of.

Hegel maintains that we can call our knowledge of the object our 'concept' (*Begriff*) of it, and we can call the object, as we take it to be in itself, the 'object' (*Gegenstand*). Alternatively, we can call the object, as we *know* it to be, the 'object', and the object, as we take it to be in itself, the 'concept' (i.e. the object as it is in its very concept). Either way, the phenomenologist considers whether 'concept' and 'object' match one another and so undertakes a wholly *immanent* examination of consciousness (§84/65).

Or, rather, the phenomenologist observes while *consciousness* undertakes the examination. Consciousness is aware both of what it takes its object to be *in itself* and of what it *knows* its object to be, and 'since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not' (§85/65). Since consciousness examines its own knowledge, the phenomenologist in fact has no active role to play. 'All that is left for us to do' as phenomenologists, therefore, is 'simply to look on' (*das reine Zusehen*), as consciousness does all the work (§85/65). We are, indeed, active in our passivity, since we present the experience of consciousness in categories that consciousness itself would not employ (and, as we shall see below, are active in other ways). Nonetheless, the claim that our role is simply to 'look on' gives

vivid expression to the idea that in phenomenology consciousness examines *itself*.

As Hegel continues with his introductory overview of the education of consciousness, it becomes clear that consciousness does not *set out* to put its knowledge to the test. It starts by simply taking its object to be such and such. It is, however, *brought* to the point at which it can examine its knowledge by comparing the latter with its 'criterion', with what it takes the object *itself* to be. What brings it to that point is its own *experience*.

The experience of consciousness

Certain lines in the Introduction make it look as though consciousness is able to compare its knowledge with its object from the start. In fact, it must first undergo a process of experience. Consciousness thus compares what it *initially* takes its object to be with what it *comes to know* that object to be. The process in which it comes to examine its knowledge and comes to be educated is described in §85 of the Introduction. There is, however, a difficulty in this paragraph that needs to be addressed.

Hegel notes that when, in phenomenology, knowledge of an object does not match the object concerned, one might expect consciousness to change and correct its knowledge, so that it matches the object after all. 'If the comparison [of knowledge and the object] shows that these two moments do not correspond to one another, it would seem that consciousness must alter [*ändern*] its knowledge to make it conform to the object' (§85/66). This, at least, is what often happens in everyday experience: I see a small cat on my lawn; its behaviour makes me think that it is actually a squirrel; I look again more closely and realize that it is a cat after all; I thus change what I have come to know the object to be, to bring my knowledge *back in line* with the original object.

Hegel then makes the following claim:

> But, in fact, in the alteration of knowledge [*Veränderung des Wissens*], the object itself alters [*ändert sich*] for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object: as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge. (§85/66)

These lines are important to Hegel's argument. As they stand, however, they are more problematic than commentators have recognized. The problem is this: the word 'alteration' in these lines appears to refer back to the alteration that Hegel said 'it would seem' we should make, if our knowledge and object don't match.[1] If this is the case, however, Hegel's claim does not make complete sense. His argument would run as follows: (1) I take the object to be X; (2) I come to know the object to be Y; (3) my knowledge thus does not match the object; (4) it would seem, therefore, that I should alter my knowledge to make it conform to the object, that I should revert to knowing it to be X; (5) in altering my knowledge in this way, however, the *object alters* for me, too, and so becomes something different. This last point is the one that does not make sense: for why should the object alter for me when I bring my knowledge *back in line* with that object?

This problem can, however, be avoided if the word 'alteration' in the indented passage above is understood to have a different referent. That word, I suggest, refers *not* to the alteration that 'it would seem' consciousness should make to bring its knowledge *back* in line with its object, but to the alteration through which the knowledge *first* came to *diverge* from the initial conception of the object. This reading of the word 'alteration' makes more sense of Hegel's argument and, indeed, is supported by lines in §86 of the Introduction. There Hegel states: 'as was shown previously, the first object, *in being known*, is altered for consciousness'.[2] This suggests that the object alters, not when I *revert* to seeing it as I originally did, but *in the very process of being known in the first place*. Hegel's words also indicate that this is the point that was made 'previously' in §85.

Hegel's argument in §85 should therefore be understood as follows: (1) I take the object to be X; (2) I come to know it to be Y; (3) my knowledge thus does not match the object; (4) it would *seem*, therefore, that I should alter my knowledge to make it conform to the object, that I should revert to knowing it to be X; (5) I cannot revert to that initial conception of the object, however, because in the alteration of my knowledge that has *already taken place* the object itself has been altered in my eyes: the object has proven not just to be X, but to be Y; (6) this alteration of the object is *irreversible*, because the knowledge we have come to have of that object is not erroneous, but genuine knowledge of the object. As

Hegel puts it in lines quoted above, 'in the alteration of knowledge, the object itself alters for it too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge *of the object*' (§85/66).

The knowledge to which consciousness comes through its experience is genuine knowledge *of* the object because it is generated *by* the object as it is initially taken to be. In this respect the process of learning described in the *Phenomenology* is different from the process of learning and self-correction we go through in everyday life. In life we might see what we think is a squirrel, but discover that it is in fact a small cat. In such a case, our understanding alters because we replace one object with *another*: our realization that the object is a cat is not generated *by* the initial thought that it is a squirrel. The process described in the *Phenomenology* is different: one object does not replace another, but the object, as we initially take it to be, leads *by itself* to its being known to be different from what it is initially taken to be. The object is initially taken to be X, and precisely in being known *to be X*, it proves *not* to be X (or not just X), but to be Y. This is the *dialectical* element in the process Hegel describes: the object turns out, in simply *being* what it is, *not* just to be what it is, but to be something different.

Recall that the object, as it is initially taken to be, constitutes the *criterion*, set up by consciousness itself, against which its knowledge is to be measured. Note, however, that when knowledge and its object fail to match, this occurs, not because the knowledge is deficient, but because the initial conception of the object fails to hold out in face of the knowledge of it. This means that the criterion against which knowledge is to be measured from this point on is *itself* altered. Phenomenology, as Hegel conceives it, is thus the process in which consciousness compares its knowledge with its immanent criterion, but comes to acquire a *new* criterion, as the first – the object as initially conceived – alters in the very knowing of it. In phenomenology the 'object' is what a particular shape of consciousness *takes* or *conceives* it to be. In acquiring new knowledge and a new *conception* of its object, therefore, consciousness acquires a new *object*. Thus, in the course of phenomenology, consciousness acquires new criteria, new conceptions of its object, and new objects at the same time, because these are in fact all the same thing.

The process in which a new object arises for consciousness, as it comes to know its initial object properly, is what Hegel calls *experience* (*Erfahrung*) (§86/66). Such experience is the process in

which the true character of the object of consciousness is progressively revealed. What emerges in the experience of consciousness counts as the *truth*, not because it matches what philosophy judges to be the truth, but because it is what the object *necessarily* proves to be in being known by consciousness. The experience described in the *Phenomenology* is thus not the empirical experience of historical individuals or communities. It is the experience that is made necessary *logically* by the object of consciousness – the experience that consciousness *must* make, or *should* make, given the way it conceives of its object. Since this experience involves the continuous disclosure of the true nature of the object of consciousness (and, as we have seen, is irreversible), it is of necessity *progressive*. The *Phenomenology* traces the progress of consciousness towards absolute knowing, therefore, not because Hegel is an incurable optimist, but because the experience he describes is one in which the object of consciousness necessarily transforms itself into a newer, richer form of itself.

This, then, is the overall theme of the *Phenomenology*: consciousness is brought by its experience to know its object to be such and such; on examining its new knowledge, it sees that the latter differs from its initial conception of the object; it also sees, however, that this new knowledge reveals the true character of the object and that there is thus no going back; in this way, consciousness is educated by its experience. This education is completed, in absolute knowing, when the object of consciousness proves to be not just the *object*, or *Gegen-stand*, of consciousness, but the *identity* of being and thought.

The object of experience

Note that what Hegel understands by the 'object' of consciousness is not a particular empirical object, but a particular *form* of object. The alteration he describes is the alteration of that form in the experience of it. Sense-certainty, for example, takes its object to be something simple and immediate: *this*, *now*. In the experience it makes, however, this simple object changes its form and becomes something complex: 'an absolute plurality of nows' (§107/75). This new form is then affirmed by perception as the true object of consciousness. More specifically, the complex object is understood

by perception to have the form of a *thing* with many *properties*. In the experience of perception, the thing then mutates into a dynamic play of moments that understanding conceives of as *force*. Sense-certainty, perception and understanding may encounter the same range of sensory material – colours, shapes and so on – but sense-certainty will think of each colour simply as *this*, whereas perception will regard it as the property of a thing and understanding will take it to be the expression of a certain force. Each shape of consciousness conceives of the sensory material in a different way, therefore, and takes itself to be confronted by a different *kind* of object. Later shapes confront even more radically different kinds of object, including other selves, the state, wealth and duty.

The alteration of the form of the object – and thus of the *object* that consciousness takes itself to be aware of – occurs in the experience that consciousness makes of it, in the *knowing* of it. In being known, the object proves to be different from what it is initially taken to be. Furthermore, it proves to be different *because of* what it is initially taken to be. The new object that emerges in experience is thus not something separate from the first object, but is simply what consciousness has come to know that *first object* to be. The first object is what consciousness takes to be the object *in itself* (*an sich*). The new object that emerges is thus 'our knowledge of the first object, or the being-*for*-consciousness of the first in-itself' (§87/67).

In the process in which the new object emerges, the original object – what the object is initially taken to be – is shown not to be the true object of consciousness after all. The object as initially conceived turns out not to be the object as it is in truth or *in itself*, but only what *consciousness* first understood the object in itself to be. Thus, as Hegel puts it, 'it comes to pass for consciousness that what it previously took to be the *in-itself* is not an *in-itself*, or that it was only an in-itself *for consciousness*' (§85/66).

Hegel's wording in these lines and in those cited at the end of the preceding paragraph leave room for confusion on the part of the reader, for both the new object *and* the initial object of consciousness are described as being the object '*for* consciousness'. Confusion can, however, be avoided if we keep a clear focus on what Hegel is claiming: the new object is what the first *has come* to be *for* consciousness, and as the new object emerges the first turns out to be merely what the object *was for* consciousness. In this way,

the experience of consciousness exposes the limits of its own initial certainty. As we are about to see, however, there is a limit to the extent to which any shape of consciousness really recognizes the limits of its own certainty.

The role of the 'we'

Hegel now proceeds subtly to amend the picture he has been painting. It remains the case that the new object emerges in the knowing of the first object; but Hegel adds the following significant qualification: 'the new object shows itself to have come about through a *reversal* [*Umkehrung*] *of consciousness itself*' (§87/67). The new object emerges, therefore, as one shape of consciousness turns into a new and different shape. In this way, Hegel maintains, a necessary sequence of shapes is generated by the experience of consciousness.

Hegel further complicates this picture, however, with the following claim: the idea that the new object emerges in and through a 'reversal' of consciousness 'is something contributed by *us* [*unsere Zutat*]', but 'it is not known to the consciousness that we are observing'. 'The *origination* [*Entstehung*] of the new object,' in other words, 'proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness' (§87/67–8). So, too, does the emergence of a new *shape* of consciousness: a given shape is not itself conscious of becoming a new shape, as a new object emerges in its experience. Our role, as phenomenologists, is to think through the experience that consciousness is required to make by its own conception of the object. Yet it turns out that we are also actively involved in generating the necessary *sequence* of shapes of consciousness. This raises the following three questions: (1) Who are 'we'? (2) What do 'we' know and do? (3) What exactly does consciousness experience?

Hegel gives us little help in answering the first question. The answer, however, would seem to be that 'we' comprise the philosopher (acting as phenomenologist) and the readers of the *Phenomenology*. Since phenomenology is undertaken in order to justify the standpoint of philosophy to natural consciousness, one would expect the intended readers of Hegel's book to be attached to such consciousness in some way. The *Phenomenology*, however, is not just a *book* to be read, but it sets out a *science* with which

we must think along. Like the philosopher, therefore, the readers of Hegel's book must also be phenomenologists. Hegel's readers, however, come to the phenomenological study of consciousness from a different perspective to that of Hegel himself. He must first suspend his *philosophical* conviction that thought can think being before he can do phenomenology.[3] His readers, by contrast, come to phenomenology to discover whether the latter will dislodge their '*natural* ideas, thoughts and opinions' (§78/61).

If Hegel's phenomenology is successful, his readers will be educated by it and shown the necessity of the philosophical way of knowing. These readers will be educated, however, by being shown how the shapes of natural consciousness that are the subject of phenomenology are *themselves* educated by their experiences and transformed into new shapes (and eventually into absolute knowing). Hegel's readers are concrete individuals with identities formed within families, societies, states and history. The shapes that are examined by phenomenology constitute either aspects of individual consciousness (such as perception) or abbreviated versions of historical (and literary) shapes that form the context in which Hegel's readers have grown up. Hegel's intended readers will thus be wedded to a certain degree to the certainties embodied in those shapes (though they must also be open to what phenomenology might disclose, otherwise there is no point in their studying it). By thinking through the experience of the shapes of consciousness under examination, Hegel's readers will thus see their *own* natural certainties progressively undermined.

What, then, do 'we' know and do, and what exactly does the consciousness under examination experience? We can answer these questions by distinguishing between the 'micro-transitions' within a given shape of consciousness and the 'macro-transitions' that take us from one shape to another (such as from sense-certainty to perception). It is clear from the Introduction that all macro-transitions require *our* contribution, which will be further explained below. Many micro-transitions, by contrast, do not appear to require our contribution, but are experienced by the shape of consciousness concerned. The changes in their objects experienced, for example, by sense-certainty and absolute freedom, fall into this category (see §§103, 592/73, 391).[4] There are some micro-transitions, however, that are not experienced by consciousness itself. For example, the transition

from the first to the second shape of the unhappy consciousness is described by Hegel as occurring only 'for us' (§218/150).[5] What makes the difference between these micro-transitions is the fact that in some cases a change *within* a shape of consciousness effectively amounts to a change *to* a new shape.[6] One of the things that readers of the *Phenomenology* should look out for, therefore, is whether a given shape of consciousness experiences its micro-transitions or not. It is clear that no shape experiences such changes in the explicitly *logical* terms employed by the phenomenologist.[7] In some cases, however, consciousness experiences for itself the changes that such logic articulates, whereas in others it does not.

To get a clearer idea of the difference between micro- and macro-transitions, let us look briefly at the transition from sense-certainty to perception. Sense-certainty passes through three subtly different conceptions of the object, and Hegel makes it clear that it is taken by its own *experience* from one conception of the object to another: 'sense-certainty thus comes to know *by experience* [*erfährt also*] that its essence is neither in the object nor in the "I"' alone (§103/73). Indeed, Hegel states that the whole 'dialectic of sense-certainty is nothing else but the simple history of its movement or of its experience' (§109/76). The micro-transitions that occur within the chapter on sense-certainty are thus ones of which sense-certainty itself is aware: it knows that its own experience takes it beyond its initial conception of the object.

Prior to the conclusion of its experience, however, these changes do not take sense-certainty forward to a completely new object; they take it on to a modified version *of* its original object (which is simply *this*, *here*, *now*). At the conclusion of that experience, a more dramatic change in the object then occurs: the object proves to be not just a *simple* '*this*' at all, but a unified *complex* or *plurality* of different moments, or concrete 'universal'. The experience of sense-certainty concludes, therefore, when a *new* object arises that goes radically beyond what it initially takes its object to be. Hegel notes, however, that sense-certainty does not affirm or take up this new object, but seeks to cling to its own object (even if in a modified form): 'immediate certainty does not take over the truth, for its truth is the universal, whereas certainty wants to apprehend the this' (§111/79). Sense-certainty thus loses its initial object, and so loses its own certainty, as a new truth emerges *for it* in its *own* experience;

but such certainty refuses to accept this loss and disavows the new truth in favour of its familiar object.

This refusal to take up the new object that has emerged in its experience means that sense-certainty does not actually become anything other than the certainty it is: it remains what it is and does not mutate into a new shape of consciousness. Rather, *we*, the phenomenologists, move on to the new shape that takes up the truth that has emerged for sense-certainty. This new shape is *perception*, which in German is called *Wahrnehmung* or 'true-taking'. Unlike sense-certainty, Hegel notes, perception 'takes what is present to it as a universal' (§111/79). This macro-transition from sense-certainty to perception prefigures – *more or less* – all such moves in the *Phenomenology*. A new object emerges, with greater or lesser explicitness, in the experience of a given shape of consciousness and so is something of which that shape is more or less conscious. However, that shape does not *itself* take up and affirm this new object and new truth. Rather, we, the phenomenologists, move on to the shape that does take it up and affirm it. The macro-transition from one shape to another – the '*reversal of consciousness*' (§87/67) – is thus a move that *we* undertake and is one of which the shape from which we move remains unaware.

Looked at broadly, we can say that consciousness in the *Phenomenology* transforms *itself*, or mutates, into new shapes of itself. Strictly speaking, however, no shape of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* turns directly into the following shape: sense-certainty does not become perception, the slave does not become a stoic, and the sceptic does not become the unhappy consciousness. In each case, we are the ones who effect the transition from one shape to another. No shape is conscious, therefore, of becoming something other than itself. Nor is any shape aware of having emerged from a previous shape. Perception does not regard itself as the result of sense-certainty's experience, but just takes itself to be what it is, and the same is true of all other shapes. None is aware that its object has *emerged* through the experience of its predecessor, but each knows the object simply to be *its* object:

> Thus in the movement of consciousness there occurs a moment of *being-in-itself* or *being-for-us* which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself. The *content*, however, of what presents itself to us does exist *for it*;

> we comprehend only the formal aspect of that content, or its pure origination. *For it*, what has thus arisen exists only as an object; *for us*, it appears at the same time as movement and a process of becoming. (§87/68)

The experiences of the different shapes of consciousness thus form a single, continuous development of consciousness *for phenomenological thought* only. Thought allows this continuous development to emerge by moving from one shape to a subsequent one in which what is implicit in the experience of the first is rendered explicit.

We phenomenologists not only effect the transition from one shape to another, but in many cases, though not necessarily all, we also play a role in working out what the new object must be for the new shape of consciousness. The chapter on perception, for example, begins with §111, but the account of the *experience* of perception does not begin until §117. Before that account can begin, Hegel states, the 'object must now be defined more precisely, and the definition must be developed briefly from the result that has been reached' (§112/79). The new object that emerges in the experience of sense-certainty is a complex plurality of moments, rather than a simple *this*. In §§113–15, however, Hegel shows that such a complex plurality must be conceived by perception as a *thing* with many *properties*. It is the experience of this thing that Hegel then begins to trace in §117. Prior to tracing this experience, Hegel does not present his own philosophical understanding of perceptual objects but sets out what the object must be *for perception itself*. Nonetheless, he is the one, in his capacity as phenomenologist, who works out more precisely what the object must be taken by perception to be.[8]

Yet does not this activity of the phenomenologist undermine the claim that phenomenology is a strictly *immanent* account of the experience of consciousness? No, because the macro-transition from one shape to another is not engineered by the phenomenologist, but is made necessary by what emerges in the *experience* of that shape. The new object is fully present for the succeeding shape, but it first emerges as a new object – more or less explicitly – in the preceding one. Furthermore, in working out 'more precisely' what that new object must be for the next shape of consciousness, all the phenomenologist is doing is rendering explicit what is implicit

in that object; he is not giving his own philosophical account of that object.[9] The immanence of the phenomenological account of consciousness is thus preserved, even though the phenomenologist plays a more active role in presenting that account than is suggested by Hegel's claim that all we do is 'look on'.

It is clear, therefore, that the development of consciousness presented in the *Phenomenology* is not historical, but logical. Phenomenology sets out the experience that consciousness *must* make, given the way it conceives of its object. The logic of such experience has not always been, and will not always be, followed by historical individuals and communities, but it is the logic that should be followed by them if they are true to themselves. The life and death struggle, for example, leads logically to the master–slave relation, but such struggles in history often continue unresolved for generations or end with the death of the protagonists.

Many of the shapes of consciousness considered by Hegel have obvious historical parallels, such as 'enlightenment' and 'absolute freedom'; others, such as sense-certainty and perception, are aspects of the consciousness of individuals who themselves live in history. The story told in the *Phenomenology* can thus be understood as a reconstruction in thought of the 'enormous labour of world history' in which shapes of consciousness were born and then surpassed to a greater or lesser degree (§29/23; see also §§295, 808/199, 530). The sequence of shapes presented in the *Phenomenology* does not, however, directly match that of history, since Hegel discusses the unhappy consciousness that finds expression in medieval Catholicism *after* the understanding embodied in Newtonian physics, and examines ancient Egyptian and Greek religion *after* the French Revolution. More importantly, Hegel is interested in the logically necessary transition from one shape to another, not in whatever historical connection there may be between them. Indeed, it is solely such logically necessary transitions that justify the standpoint of philosophy and so fulfil the aim of phenomenology.

Having said all this, there turns out in practice to be more *variety* in the transitions, and in the ways in which each shape develops, than is apparent from the Introduction. It is important to bear in mind, therefore, that what Hegel sets out in the Introduction is only a general account or overview of the way in which, in phenomenology, consciousness is educated by its experience. It does not lay down a hard and fast method to be followed rigidly by each shape of

consciousness. The differences in the ways in which shapes develop are due to the character of the shapes concerned. In some shapes, such as observing reason and self-alienated spirit, the experiences they undergo are long and complicated. In the first form of natural religion, by contrast, the changes that occur in its object are slight: all that happens is that the 'light-being' sends forth 'torrents of light', and then, as the lord or power over them, dissolves them back into itself (§§686–8/452–3). Some shapes have an acute sense that they have *lost* their original object or self-understanding: pleasure-seeking reason, for example, feels that it has seized hold of death, where it sought life, and faith explicitly 'mourns over the loss of its spiritual world' (§§364, 573/243, 378). In other cases, the sense of loss is more muted: stoicism, we are told, is simply 'perplexed' by its inability to point to any intrinsic content in its thoughts of the true and the good (§200/139). The slave, indeed, experiences the loss of its initial self-understanding as a *gain*: for in his work, in which he seemed to have only 'an alienated existence', he in fact 'acquires a mind of his own' (§196/136). And in scepticism, the constant change and contradiction it experiences is deliberately engendered by it and so is not felt to be a *loss* of its freedom at all. What remains constant throughout the *Phenomenology*, however, is the fact that each shape of consciousness experiences some change in its object or in itself (or both), and that the phenomenologist then moves from this shape to another that renders explicit what is implicit in the experience of the first. This ensures that what we are doing is phenomenology, rather than speculative philosophy, throughout (though readers will note that the chapters on reason and spirit contain more Hegelian *obiter dicta* than they probably should).

The end and the beginning of phenomenology

The goal of phenomenology, for Hegel, is the point at which the experience of consciousness no longer leads beyond the conception that consciousness first has of its object but coincides with it (see §80/62). At this point, knowledge and the object known match one another, because they are both understood to have *the same form*. Note that Hegel's claim is not that consciousness now catches up

with particular insights that philosophy presupposes as true all along. His claim is that it now enters into the distinctive *way of knowing* that characterizes philosophy. This way of knowing is the one in which the clear *distinction* between the knower and the known – between certainty and truth – is dissolved or 'overcome' (§37/29). Precisely what that way of knowing will disclose the world to be remains to be discovered by philosophy. Phenomenology, however, has justified the philosophical way of knowing to natural consciousness by showing how the element of philosophy – the *identity* of thought and being – is made necessary by the experience of consciousness itself.

At the end of phenomenology, therefore, the consciousness that is thematized in it *becomes* philosophical consciousness or thought (albeit via the transition from religion to absolute knowing effected by the phenomenologist). At the same time, both the philosopher-qua-phenomenologist and the reader see that the standpoint of philosophy is justified by the certainties of natural consciousness itself. The perspectives of all three – phenomenologist, reader and thematized consciousness – thus converge and philosophy can begin.

Thus ends phenomenology; but how does it begin? It must begin, Hegel contends, with the simplest and most immediate form of natural consciousness. Such consciousness will not be the oldest historically, but the simplest structurally or logically. It will thus be the immediate awareness of what is immediately given to us, what is immediately *there* before our eyes and for our other senses. Such *sensuous certainty* forms the starting point for phenomenology because it is the least that *natural* consciousness can be. More advanced shapes of consciousness cannot form the starting point of phenomenology, precisely because they are *advanced*. On the other hand, anything less than sense-certainty – any form of mindedness that does not at least entail an *I* knowing *this*, *here*, *now* – would not count as a form of natural *consciousness* at all, either in its own eyes or the eyes of the philosopher.

Unlike twentieth-century phenomenologists, such as Husserl and Heidegger, therefore, Hegel does not begin with developed, concrete human experience, but with the simplest shape of consciousness conceivable. His task is then to think through, with a genuine openness of mind, the experience of such certainty and to discover where, *if anywhere*, that experience leads to.