

Hegel: Philosophy as a Kind of Skepticism

DIETMAR H. HEIDEMANN

1 INTRODUCTION

Hegel is not a skeptic, although he believes philosophy to be a kind of skepticism. This view looks paradoxical, but it isn't. Hegel, as many philosophers, holds that skepticism can take different forms. According to his account of philosophical doubt, there are untrue, misconceived forms of skepticism, that is, ordinary versions of skepticism according to which we cannot know whether our beliefs are true, and there is genuine skepticism that coincides with true philosophy itself. True philosophy realizes that skeptical doubt is to be conceived as an integral part of rationality and that, although skepticism as such cannot be overcome, it is not flying in the face of reason either, since genuine skepticism has the positive function of productively contributing to true philosophical cognition.

Already in his infamous essay *On the Relation between Skepticism and Philosophy* (1801), Hegel distinguishes “skepticism that is one with philosophy” from “skepticism that is sundered from it.” The latter “can be divided into two forms, according to whether it is or is not directed against Reason” (Hegel 2000: 330, translation modified). For Hegel, “genuine skepticism” is “skepticism that is one with philosophy” because this form of skepticism represents, in his terminology, the “negative side” that each true philosophy has in that it is “directed against everything limited” or “the whole soil of finitude” (2000: 322–323). Genuine skepticism is all-comprising and hence not limited to doubts about the existence of the external world, sense perception, or human reasoning in general. It also has speculative reason or metaphysics as its object but, unlike skepticism that is sundered from philosophy, not as its target. Unlike ordinary kinds of skepticism, genuine skepticism does not just call into doubt arbitrary epistemic claims but takes skeptical doubt to systematically demonstrate that certain types of cognition are misconceived in principle. Further, according to Hegel, the systematic skeptical proof that certain types of cognition are untrue necessarily belongs to the idea of what true philosophy consists in because in the end skeptical doubt contributes to the constitution of the true as a whole. In what follows, I present the arguments Hegel puts forward in

favor of this rather challenging account of skepticism. In Section 2, I discuss the celebrated conception of “self-fulfilling skepticism” of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) that is supposed to overcome untrue types of cognition in order to promote “absolute knowing.” In Section 3, I debate Hegel’s more advanced view according to which genuine skepticism must be construed as dialectic.¹

2 SKEPTICISM AND HISTORY OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

The *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Hegel conceives as a systematic introduction to metaphysics as true philosophical science, deals with the problem of justifying true knowledge. The project of justifying true knowledge is directly connected with skeptical doubts because epistemic justification presupposes a criterion by means of which it can be decided whether knowledge is justified; however, for the skeptic the criterion itself is questionable. Although theories of epistemic justification like coherentism or contextualism claim to be able to do without a criterion and thereby to dissolve skepticism, Hegel, in the *Phenomenology* at least, explicitly affirms that a criterion of justification is indispensable. The problem of the non-justifiability of the criterion originates in ancient (Pyrrhonian) skepticism, which for Hegel is substantially more sophisticated than modern skepticism (see Hegel 1969–1971: XIX 358–403; Forster 1989: 9–35; Heidemann 2007: 117–198). The Pyrrhonist Agrippa models it as a skeptical trilemma. The general argument runs as follows: the logical “criterion of truth” serves as “the standard regulating belief in reality or unreality”; however, it is unprovable. For to settle the philosophical dispute over the existence of a criterion of truth, a criterion is required to determine whether there is one or not. Now, this criterion can

- (i) be proven in a *circular* way because the proof of a criterion already requires an accepted criterion by means of which it can be proven; or
- (ii) be a *dogmatic* “assumption” that involves simply presupposing its existence; or
- (iii) be proven by another criterion, which in turn will be proven by another one, and so on *ad infinitum*. (cf. Sextus Empiricus 1933: I 21-24, II 18-21)

In any of the three cases, the justification of the criterion necessarily fails. Hegel, who was familiar with the Pyrrhonists’ writings, claims in the *Phenomenology* to have found a solution to it. In particular, he thinks that he has developed a procedure that justifies the criterion without making unjustified external presuppositions. According to Hegel, the *aporia* of the criterion, or “standard” (*Maßstab*) as he most frequently calls it, arises because the “investigation and *examination of the reality of cognition*” cannot manage “without some presupposition that can serve as its underlying criterion” (1977: sec. 81). From this there results a “contradiction” (1977: sec. 82) or an *aporia*. Hegel argues as follows:

An examination consists in applying an accepted standard, and in determining whether something is right or wrong on the basis of the resulting agreement

or disagreement of the thing examined; thus the standard as such (and Science likewise if it were the criterion) is accepted as the *essence* or as the *in-itself* (*an sich*). But here, where Science has just begun to come on the scene, neither Science nor anything else has yet justified itself as the essence or the in-itself; and without something of that sort it seems that no examination can take place. (1977: sec. 81)

This version of the *aporia* essentially resembles Sextus Empiricus's approach, even though Hegel does not explicitly mention the Pyrrhonian background here (cf. Claesges 1981: 68–74 and 77–96). Hegel's solution to the problem is based on the analysis of epistemic consciousness. It can be outlined as follows: in order to prevent the unjustified presupposition of the criterion, in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel introduces the concept of Science as it “comes on the scene” (1977: sec. 76). Science is characterized at this stage first as an “appearance,” that is, a form of cognition emerging alongside other epistemic claims. Secondly, as an “emerging” science, it is “not yet Science in its developed and unfolded truth.” As this nascent Science competes with other concepts of cognition, due to skeptical equipollence it cannot simply declare its superiority since this would be nothing but a dogmatic “assurance” (1977: sec. 76). Therefore, Hegel's strategy is to show that the emerging Science develops into true Science by turning against the mere appearance of knowledge and thereby abandoning its provisional status in order to overcome untrue modes of cognition. However, to the extent that the “exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance” (1977: sec. 76) is nothing but the “*examination of the reality of cognition*” (1977: sec. 81), the *Phenomenology* obviously cannot avoid relapsing into the *aporia*, since that examination presupposes a “standard” of its own. In other words, Science must provide the standard of truth although it is just about to emerge and is not yet true and real, that is, justified. Hegel now argues that a standard of justification is indispensable but cannot be dogmatically presupposed as an external criterion. It therefore must fall into the sphere of consciousness itself. The standard is an internal factor of consciousness, for “truth” and “knowledge” prove to be “abstract determinations” that “occur in consciousness” itself (1977: sec. 82). Examination of the relation between these determinations yields the insight that “[c]onsciousness provides its own criterion from within itself” by performing nothing more than a “comparison” with itself (1977: sec. 84). Hegel conceives of this as the self-creation of the standard for the distinction between knowledge and truth, between that which is *for* consciousness and that which is *in itself* outside the relation, for that very distinction is one that is made within the epistemic structures of consciousness itself. Whenever consciousness “knows” an object, this object is both *for it* and at the same time *in itself* or true, since consciousness regards the object as given outside of the cognitive relation. The in itself, however, is a determination that consciousness “affirms” within its knowledge. For Hegel these epistemic structures generate the standard: “Thus in what consciousness affirms from within itself as *being-in-itself* or the *True* we have the standard that consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows” (1977: sec. 84).

Thus, according to Hegel's solution to the skeptical trilemma, the examination of knowledge consists in a comparison of consciousness with what it takes to be true.

If consciousness corresponds to what it takes to be true, that is, if it is in accordance with itself, then its knowledge meets the standard of true knowledge, produced by itself. This stage is achieved by consciousness at the level of true self-consciousness or subjectivity, that is, “absolute knowing.” In the course of its development toward fully-fledged subjectivity, consciousness is already following the path of science and hence does not have to presuppose an external standard. It is the “history of self-consciousness” in terms of self-fulfilling skepticism by means of which Hegel explains how consciousness proceeds through that development.

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel conceives of the “history of self-consciousness” as the “history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science” (1977: sec. 78).² The purpose of the history of self-consciousness is not to describe the empirical coming into being of self-consciousness on the basis of the natural, cultural, or social development of mankind. Rather, the conception of the history of self-consciousness, as Fichte and Schelling have developed it, is about the ideal or systematic genesis of cognitive capacities in the human mind. The idea is to show how the human mind develops such capacities starting with primitive forms of epistemic consciousness or knowledge, which in the sequel is enriched by more complex forms until they finally culminate in the fully developed self-conscious cognitive subject.

The *Phenomenology* is arranged as an interconnected “series of forms” of consciousness (1977: sec. 79). Hegel presents it as a development of epistemic claims. A form of consciousness is an idealized epistemic shape or structure of consciousness within a specific field like sense certainty, perception, reason, or spirit. The exposition of forms of consciousness is not, however, about the way consciousness has sense-impressions, perceptual representations, etc. Rather it deals with the specific epistemic claims involved in sense certainty, perception, etc., and the question whether consciousness meets these claims so as to acquire *true* cognition. According to this method, each form of consciousness must have its own standard that makes it possible to decide whether an epistemic claim is satisfied. For example, the standard of sense certainty as a form of consciousness is “immediacy” (1977: sec. 90–93), that is, non-inferentiality is the standard that natural consciousness sets up as the criterion for the examination of the truth of its knowledge claims. So at the level of sense certainty, consciousness examines whether its epistemic claim, that is, beliefs based on sense-impressions, meet the standard of immediacy. The examination of this form of consciousness then proves that sense certainty does not meet its standard since it turns out to be inferential knowledge after all and hence, according to its own standard, one of “the forms of the unreal consciousness” (1977: sec. 79). Thus sense certainty as the form or claim of immediate knowledge has to be given up, because all knowledge based on sense-impressions is conceptually mediated. The standard as such is not just an external presupposition since it is intrinsic to each form of consciousness and set up by consciousness itself.³

This seems to be a legitimate conception to the extent that it is possible to typify different classes of epistemic claims according to different criteria of epistemic justification. However, the systematic interconnection of these claims in the *Phenomenology* does generate a problem. According to Hegel, with the exception of

absolute knowing, no shape of consciousness meets its standard as the fully developed form of self-consciousness or self-knowledge. However, the series of the “formative stages” (1977: sec. 28) of consciousness is not arbitrary but is said to be *complete* as well as *necessary* (1977: sec. 29, 77–80). Hegel tries to guarantee this on the basis of the following argument: the skeptically motivated non-satisfaction of a specific standard not only leads to a modification of the epistemic claim of consciousness but also “the criterion for testing is altered,” so that the examination of consciousness is also an examination of “the criterion of what knowledge is” (1977: sec. 85). From this alteration, Hegel claims, “*the new true object issues*” by a “*dialectical movement that consciousness exercises*” (1977: sec. 86). This new object is the new epistemic claim of consciousness, including its new standard. That is to say, with the exception of sense certainty as the first form of consciousness, each of the ensuing forms of consciousness necessarily (logically) follows from the preceding one and hence always contains what consciousness has learned from its previous shape. By this “historical” or, to be more precise, developmental and skeptical process, natural consciousness continuously develops into true “absolute knowing” or the completed subject, encompassing the entire experience consciousness has made before.

Although subjectivity constitutes the unity of the entire development and is thus the thread of this process, from beginning to end, the question of how the developing consciousness itself can have knowledge of the logical interconnection and epistemic features of the different stages remains an open one. Indeed, the developing consciousness does not have such knowledge. This is due to the fact that the conception of a history of self-consciousness presupposes the methodological differentiation between the developing consciousness at the first level and the phenomenological philosopher who establishes the theoretical links between the forms of consciousness at the second level. The developing consciousness ignores the logical relations between its different epistemic claims since the theoretical assessment takes place from the already fully developed philosophical standpoint. This is the reason why Hegel maintains that the *Phenomenology* as “the way to science is itself already *Science*” (1977: sec. 88) and therefore does not lay claim to unjustified external standards of epistemic examination.⁴

Consequently, the history of self-consciousness shows, first, how the standard is generated by the skeptically self-examining consciousness, secondly, what the standard is in each particular case, and thirdly, that Hegel’s solution does not come down to mere subjectivism since the philosophical evaluation of the “pathway” is “something contributed by us” (1977: sec. 87), the knowing philosopher, and therefore made from an objective standpoint. Nevertheless, this argument as a whole can be reproached with circularity because the conclusion, the standpoint of philosophical truth, is a constitutive element needed to make sense of the premises, that is, the history of self-consciousness. For, on the one hand, the history of self-consciousness constitutes the skeptical justification of true philosophical knowledge, but, on the other hand, the theory already makes use of it prior to the completion of the whole developmental process before it is itself justified. The history of self-consciousness is forced to make the external presupposition of philosophical knowledge that explains what is going on within the skeptical process of justifying

the sequence of epistemic claims that consciousness raises. This difficulty might be the reason why Hegel in his later work further developed his account of skepticism by accommodating it with skepticism.

3 SKEPTICISM AND DIALECTIC

The place of true philosophy in Hegel's system is logic conceived as metaphysics. Unlike the *Phenomenology*, logic, as depicted in the *Science of Logic* (1812–1816) and the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817–1830), does not operate on the basis of self-fulfilling skepticism. In the logic, skepticism rather appears in connection with dialectic. Hegel makes two crucial claims with respect to the relation between skepticism and dialectic: (a) “philosophy . . . contains the skeptical moment as a moment within itself—specifically as the dialectical moment” (1991: §81), and (b) “skepticism” as “the dialectical moment itself is an essential one in the affirmative Science” (1991: §78). Both of these claims have to be understood in light of the problem of “total presuppositionlessness” (1991: §78). This problem is subsequent to the problem of a systematic introduction to metaphysics or logic. For Hegel acknowledges the skeptic's claim that the demonstration of “Science” (1991: §78), that is, philosophical science, must not make any unjustified presuppositions. However, employing skeptical doubt as the method of a systematic introduction to science would be question-begging since “Science” itself is supposed to be self-reliant, that is, it cannot depend on a preceding justification through skepticism. Hence, it cannot be legitimate to construe the demonstration of “Science” as a procedure of skeptical justification. This, of course, means that Hegel can no longer hold onto the conception of the *Phenomenology* as a systematic introduction to metaphysics or “Science.”⁵

The fact that skepticism, particularly *Phenomenology*'s “self-fulfilling skepticism,” cannot perform the function of a systematic introduction to “Science” raises two questions: First, is there an alternative way of obtaining access to “Science,” a systematic way that does not violate the claim of “presuppositionlessness”? Second, if skepticism cannot accomplish the task of a systematic introduction, wouldn't skeptical doubt be independent of, and therefore a fundamental threat to, “Science”? Hegel's answer to the first question is that we can obtain access to “Science” without making presuppositions “by the freedom that abstracts from everything, and grasps its own pure abstraction, the simplicity of thinking—in the resolve to think purely” (1991: §78, translation modified). It is by no means clear what the “resolve to think purely” consists in, not least because Hegel does not further explain this concept. But he seems to believe that this concept represents the appropriate methodological procedure that enables an individual to get immediate access to the proper content of “Science” by pure thought. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that “Science” can indeed be grasped by this procedure. How then does Hegel respond to the second question? He clearly denies that independent skepticism is threatening to “Science” since according to his theory skepticism is contained within philosophy as “the dialectical moment” (1991: §81). In order to see Hegel's point, one has to recall his conception of “Science” or logic as metaphysics. In Hegel's speculative idealism,

logic represents “the pure truth itself” (1991: §19). As such, it contains “objective thoughts” that “express the essentialities of things,” though not as a collection of abstract terms but as dialectically evolving “thought-determinations.” Since Hegel’s logic is therefore to be construed in the traditional terms of ontology, it “coincides with metaphysics” (1991: §24).

In order to demonstrate that truth can be cognized through pure thought, it first has to be shown that the one-sided, finite “forms of cognition,” as represented, for example, through Kant’s transcendental account of cognition, are deficient, for otherwise logic or metaphysics wouldn’t represent the only possible “Science” of “the pure truth itself” (1991: §19). This is compatible with Hegel’s idea of the nullification of the finite “forms of cognition” by means of skeptical doubt. However, this does not conflict with the view that skepticism cannot function as an introduction to metaphysics. For here Hegel explicitly refers to the destructive role of skepticism with regard to the finite “forms of cognition” beyond any kind of introductory function as in the *Phenomenology*: “The high skepticism of antiquity accomplishes this by showing that every one of those forms contained a contradiction within itself” (1991: §24, Addition 3). As we shall shortly see, “showing that every one of those forms contained a contradiction within itself” indicates the point of intersection between dialectic and skepticism.

In *On the Relation between Skepticism and Philosophy*, Hegel has already argued that skepticism is innocuous “[s]ince every genuine philosophy has this negative side” (Hegel 2000: 325). The “negative side” of “every genuine philosophy” is a positive, systematic component “implicit in every genuine philosophical system.” In Hegel’s eyes, Plato’s *Parmenides* along with Spinoza’s *Ethics* are ideal representatives of this skeptical, “free side of philosophy,” since these works exhibit antinomies according to “the principle of skepticism: *panti logôî logos isos antikeitai*” [to every argument an equal argument is opposed] (Hegel 2000: 324f).⁶ The presentation of skepticism as the “negative side” of true philosophy indicates Hegel’s mature view of positively integrating skepticism into philosophy by assimilating it with dialectic. By means of this integrative strategy Hegel intends to immunize metaphysics or, more broadly, philosophy against skeptical attacks. This connection between skepticism and dialectic is not at all arbitrary, but rather systematically motivated. For according to Hegel,

the dialectical, taken separately on its own by the understanding, constitutes skepticism, especially when it is exhibited in scientific concepts. Skepticism contains the mere negation that results from the dialectic. (1991: §81)

The connection of skepticism and dialectic is justified by means of “negation,” that is, in Hegelian terms, through contradiction. However, skepticism is not identical with dialectic. Dialectic shows the “one-sidedness and restrictedness of the determinations of the understanding” (1991: §81), and this means their “negation.” This is also accomplished by skepticism in that the skeptic raises doubts and therefore negates epistemic claims by opposing them according to the aforementioned principle, “*panti logôî logos isos antikeitai*.” Unlike dialectic, skepticism does not go any further than demonstrating the “negation” of the “determinations of the understanding.”

However, skepticism is capable of recognizing the positive content of its “negation.” For this reason skepticism and dialectic coincide only inasmuch as both reveal finite understanding’s intrinsic negativity. Nonetheless, finite understanding cannot be aware of dialectic itself but exclusively of the skeptical negation of epistemic claims. Since finite understanding is incapable of reaching dialectical insights, it must accept skepticism as a fundamental threat to its epistemic claims, for without the help of dialectical means finite understanding cannot escape from its natural skeptical doubts and contradictions. By contrast, “genuine philosophy” itself is not affected by skeptical doubts:

Skepticism should not be regarded merely as a doctrine of doubt; rather, it is completely certain about its central point, i.e., the nullity of everything finite. . . . Philosophy, on the other hand, contains the skeptical as a moment within itself—specifically as the dialectical moment. But then philosophy does not stop at the merely negative result of the dialectic, as is the case with skepticism. (1991: §81, Addition 2)

Hence, skepticism and dialectic accord with respect to “negation” while being vitally distinct at the same time. Although both likewise rely on “negation,” skepticism performs “abstract negation” by simply doubting, that is, nullifying epistemic claims, whereas from the point of view of dialectic the “result” of the “negation” preserves the positive content which it “resulted from.” Here Hegel draws on the *Phenomenology*’s distinction between two kinds of negation. Skepticism’s, that is, finite understanding’s (“abstract”) negation merely “wait[s] to see whether something new comes along and what it is, in order to throw it too into the same empty abyss” (1977: sec. 79). By contrast, true, “determinate negation” realizes that,

nothingness is, in a determinate fashion, specifically the nothingness of that from which it results. For it is only when it is taken as the result from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a determinate nothingness, one which has a content. (1977: sec. 79, translation modified)

Consequently, it is the method of counter-position or negation that makes skepticism dialectical and thereby a positive element of rationality. From the immanent point of view of human understanding, skeptical counter-position or negation of epistemic claims has devastating consequences for rationality since finite understanding’s cognitive performances lead naturally and inescapably to skeptical doubt. For finite understanding it therefore looks as if the skeptic, by means of counter-position or negation, is able to prevent the human mind from successfully achieving positive metaphysical knowledge. Hegel does not deny the negative consequences that skepticism has for finite understanding. However, he criticizes this destructive view of skepticism as one-sided. For him the true positive meaning of skepticism is the “dialectical moment,” that is, skepticism’s ability to nullify finite reflection by means of skeptical doubt in order to promote all-comprising metaphysical cognition of the true.

It is important to see that Hegel is not operating with two distinct types of skepticism, negative skepticism on the one hand and positive philosophical

skepticism on the other. On the contrary, negative and positive philosophical skepticism are identical. It is one and the same skeptical doubt that—on the level of finite understanding—nullifies reflection while—on the level of dialectic—it promotes metaphysical knowledge. This distinction itself is, of course, made from a philosophical point of view, that is, it is an insight that cannot be achieved from within finite reflection. However, from a dialectical angle, skeptical doubt has to be taken as the documentation of true philosophical knowledge.

3 PHILOSOPHY, SKEPTICISM, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Hegel's account of skepticism is a philosophical challenge in many ways. First of all, self-fulfilling skepticism claims to be a methodological construction of a series of skeptical doubts that promotes true philosophical knowledge. Although one can grant Hegel that he is aware of one of the most fundamental problems of epistemology, that is, the problem of the criterion, it is hard to see how the construction of a series of skeptical doubts is able to face this problem. For the skeptic might still question the objectivity of the systematic connections between the forms of skeptical doubts that supposedly lead consciousness necessarily to the standpoint of true cognition. On the other hand, within the systematically evolved forms of skeptical doubts, Hegel discusses many of the skeptical arguments that are still debated in the present, like skeptical doubts concerning external world beliefs, cognition *a priori*, identity, first-person beliefs, morality, or realism, and offers astute critical analyses of these arguments.⁷

Secondly, with respect to the account of skepticism in Hegel's later work, one might question whether "dialectical" skepticism is at all a kind of skepticism. For Hegel's assimilation of skeptical doubt and dialectic seems to violate our ordinary understanding of skeptical doubt. Whereas skeptical arguments are supposed to support the claim that we cannot know whether our beliefs are true, dialectic is designed to bring about metaphysical knowledge. Hence, the skeptic would insist that doubt and dialectic are intrinsically incompatible. Hegel would respond that the skeptic's insistence is symptomatic of finite understanding's incapacity to judge metaphysical truth, that is, that true philosophy and skepticism coincide. Accordingly, "Science" shows that this kind of criticism is limited to a one-sided finite perspective that is to be overcome in the direction of all-comprising true philosophy. From the Hegelian angle, to repudiate skeptical doubts would even be inefficacious since skepticism is a natural, inescapable problem for human cognition, a problem that can never be eliminated from our philosophical examination of the question of knowledge. This is a point of intersection between Hegel's and the more recent discussion of skepticism. According to Michael Williams's interpretation, contemporary "New Sceptics" like Stroud and Nagel follow Hume in that they "are rightly impressed by the simplicity, brevity and seeming transparency of typical skeptical arguments" (Williams 1996: xv), that is, they take skepticism to be a natural problem. However, the crucial question to be asked is: "Is skepticism really a natural or intuitive problem?" For Williams it isn't since, if it is, "then Hume is right, and we will never reconcile everyday attitudes with the results of philosophical reflection"

(Williams 1996: xv). In this case, from the point of view of everyday life, philosophy would be irrelevant since what we commonsensically believe to be true in everyday life does not carry the heavy burden of fundamental skeptical doubt. The best way to deal with this situation is, Williams argues, to offer a “theoretical diagnosis” of skepticism that identifies “theoretical ideas” the skeptic holds “that we are by no means bound to accept” (Williams 1996: xvii). If we do so, we have a good chance to overcome skepticism by an alternative account of cognition. Hegel’s strategy is similar to Williams’s since, according to his view, skeptical doubts arise from a misconceived conception of cognition, that is, one-sided finite cognition that is to be overcome by true philosophical “Science.” Philosophical “Science” then prevents us from accepting those “theoretical ideas” that naturally force us into skepticism. That is, according to Hegel, skeptical doubts are natural as long as we reflect within the theoretical framework of, for example, Kantian subjectivism. For Kant’s restriction of cognition to appearances as ordinary objects of everyday life leads naturally into skepticism about things in themselves, that is, about things as they really are. In order to escape this kind of skepticism and to therefore eliminate unnatural doubts, Hegel asks us to give the theoretical framework that like Kantian subjectivism makes skepticism unavoidable. With respect to the claim that skeptical doubts are unnatural as long as we subscribe to certain kinds of theoretical frameworks, Hegel therefore concurs with Williams’s theoretical diagnosis. However, unlike Williams, Hegel argues that skepticism itself makes indeed a positive contribution to this insight in that skeptical doubts should be understood as the flipside of true philosophical “Science.” Skeptical arguments like Agrippa’s trilemma or Kant’s antinomies of pure reason point to the finiteness of ordinary human cognition that Hegel aims to overcome by absolute idealism, according to which true philosophical cognition is possible. For absolute idealism skeptical doubts are unnatural, on the one hand, but they remain everlasting historical facts on the other. Although as historical appearances they are unnatural as such, they are at the same time manifestations of the shortcomings of the human mind and hence move rationality towards true philosophy. In this sense true philosophy is a kind of skepticism.

NOTES

1. This article will not be concerned with Hegel’s early views of the relation between logic and metaphysics that pave the way for his later account of skepticism. For more details, see Heidemann (2011: 81–84), from which I draw in my current interpretation of Hegelian skepticism. For the broader context, see Düsing (1995: chs. 2 and 3).
2. On the “history of self-consciousness,” see also Breazeale (2001), Düsing (1993), and Heidemann (2009: 16–19).
3. For a more detailed analysis of the skeptical argument in “Sense certainty” and “Perception,” see Heidemann (2011: 88–92).
4. On the methodological differentiation between the standpoint of consciousness in process and the standpoint of the philosopher, see Heidemann (2007: 245–271).

5. Hegel, after 1807, in fact gives up the view that the *Phenomenology* serves as such an introduction, although he does not give up the *Phenomenology* itself. On Hegel's later reappraisal of the relation between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*, see Heidemann (2007: 327–339).
6. By “principle of skepticism” Hegel alludes to Sextus Empiricus (1933: I 12). The use of “antinomy” not only refers to the antinomies of the *Parmenides* but also to the antinomies of pure reason in Kant's first *Critique* and possibly to the antithetical structure of the principles in Fichte's *Doctrine of Science*.
7. I cannot elaborate here on Hegel's worthwhile discussion of these arguments, but I have done so in Heidemann (2007).

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