

The Social Dimension of Dialectical Truth: Hegel's Idea of Objective Spirit
Angelica Nuzzo, Graduate Center and Brooklyn College, CUNY

Abstract

In this essay I argue for the claim that Hegel's dialectical idea of truth, which is articulated in its pure forms in the *Logic* as the process of comprehension of partial positions of truth in an ultimate systematic unity, is socially and historically constituted within the structures of what Hegel calls "spirit." I start by bringing to the fore those controversial issues of the Goldman-Fuller debate on which Hegel has important suggestions to make. In placing Hegel within this debate, my claim is that his theory offers a 'third way' of shaping a social epistemology developed on the basis of a dialectic-speculative logic and such as having the notion of spirit at the center. What Hegel has to offer to us is a "dialectical" social epistemology where truth is indeed the fundamental aim of science and yet it is a historical and collective construction of spirit. I examine the access to and the elaboration of truth and knowledge proper, respectively, to subjective and objective spirit: the psychological, individual dimension of subjective spirit, and the social and institutional context of objective spirit. I argue that the dimension of objective spirit is the mediating center that organizes and gives "reality" to all the forms of spirit's knowledge. I conclude by briefly discussing the role that *Bildung* plays in shaping and articulating the institutions of knowledge and the activity of science within the social sphere.

In a recent debate,¹ Steve Fuller and Alvin Goldman have spelled out the central controversial issues surrounding the topic of the disciplinary field known, in Fuller's aftermath, as "social epistemology" in terms that allow for a voice apparently far removed from both to intervene. This is the voice of G.W.F. Hegel.² Unlike Kant, whose contribution to (traditional) epistemology cannot be questioned, the very presence of an epistemological theory in Hegel's philosophy has often been challenged or, alternatively, has been seen as in need of an extended justification.³ And although more recently in pragmatist circles attempts have been made to bend Hegel's position to pragmatist interests and goals, when the presence of an epistemological contribution in Hegel's philosophy is acknowledged, very rarely contemporary (analytic) philosophers confront themselves with it. In the present considerations, I shall argue by contrast that Hegel's philosophy of spirit and in particular his theory of dialectical truth offers an interesting contribution to the reflection on the "social" dimensions and implications of the theory of knowledge — a contribution that may be productively brought to bear on the current

¹ See Goldman 2009 and Fuller 2012.

² Yet, Fuller mentions Hegel (Fuller 2012, 269).

³ For the latter case and offering an extended discussion of the issue which is, however, restricted to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, see Westphal 2003, chapters 6-7.

discussion surrounding the field of social epistemology in its analytic and non-analytic variations.

I start by bringing to the fore those controversial issues of the Goldman-Fuller debate on which Hegel has important suggestions to make. In this framework I turn to Hegel's own theory by dwelling in particular on two general points, namely, first, on his conception of dialectical truth as the object and aim of the philosophical science, and second on his idea of spirit (*Geist*). In its articulation in the forms of "subjective," "objective," and "absolute" spirit, Hegel's *Geist* is both the subject and the object of his epistemology — it is the individual as well as the collective knowing subject, the producer of knowledge, and self-reflectively and to large extent the thematic object of scientific knowledge.

In placing Hegel within the debate between Fuller and Goldman, my claim is that his theory offers a 'third way' of shaping a social epistemology developed on the basis of a dialectic-speculative logic and such as having the notion of spirit at the center. What Hegel has to offer to us is a "dialectical" social epistemology where truth is indeed the fundamental aim of science and yet it is a historical and collective construction of spirit. While science for Hegel aims crucially at the truth, scientific rationality is inescapably embedded in the historical and collective tradition constituted by the activity of spirit, by its social, cultural, and linguistic practices and institutions, and cannot be adequately understood unless this 'objective' dimension is taken into account.

I should warn from the outset that in discussing Hegel's position my argument will appeal to the general systematic outline of his philosophy and to the way in which the different systematic spheres relate to one another rather than dwell on particular details of Hegel's texts. While doing the latter would be impossible in the present essay, I will refer to the work that I have done in this regard in other occasions. I conclude by briefly discussing an example in which Hegel's position displays its fruitfulness to the contemporary debate, namely, the role that "ethical life" plays in shaping and articulating the institutions of knowledge and the activity of *Bildung* — culture and education — within the social sphere, i.e., in the realm of what Hegel calls "objective spirit."

Truth: Epistemology and Social Epistemology

Crucial to the theory of knowledge *qua* theory of knowledge is the idea of truth. Epistemology views truth as the fundamental and inescapable aim of science. Since science's relation to truth qualifies the properly 'epistemological' status of a theory, on such relation hinges the specifically epistemological validity of the discipline of "social epistemology." This point is from the outset a contentious issue between Goldman and Fuller. Countering Thomas Kuhn's doubt regarding truth as the fundamental goal of science — a doubt that he sees undermining the very notion of truth and the established practices of science — Goldman puts the point simply by claiming, first, that knowledge has an exclusive relation to truth: "If your belief isn't true, it isn't a piece of knowledge" — from which it follows that there is apparently no place for non-true beliefs in epistemology; and claiming, second, that 'true' and 'false' are mind-independent and community-independent values of propositions. On this basis, Goldman dismisses the

constructivist position which sees truth as a function of the mind's activity, and labels social epistemology's attitude to truth as "veriphobe" thereby implicitly denying to it proper epistemological validity (Goldman 2009, 2-3).

Fuller, on his part, sees the claim that truth is the fundamental goal of science as misdirected and too simplistically framed. On his view, the interesting epistemological disagreements arise rather over the question of "which truths are worth pursuing and the means by which they are pursued and the resulting claims are to be adjudicated" (Fuller 2012, 269). In other words, the alternative between true and non-true beliefs does not capture for him the epistemological question in its fullness: there are certain truths, for example, that in certain historical contexts are not considered worth pursuing — and this is an epistemologically relevant 'fact' for the social epistemologist (are such truths thereby considered falsities?). Thus, while truth as such is not excluded from Fuller's account (he may not be, after all, as "veriphobe" as Goldman presents him), truth's role within the scientific discourse and practices is considered far more complex than in Goldman's analytic view. In fact, two are the questions that arise from Fuller's account. On the one hand, at stake is the problem of what is the concept of truth that informs science, and in particular the relation between truth, falsity, and error, or 'alternative' truths; while on the other hand at stake is the meaning of the stated goal "aiming for the truth" when this is seen as the chief goal of the scientific enterprise (Fuller 2012, 269).

To the first point, concerning the idea of truth in its relation to its opposite: if non-true beliefs are programmatically excluded from the theory of knowledge, epistemology cannot be concerned with the *process of formation* of beliefs insofar as this implies errors and alternative pursuits of truth (such process implies the "experience" of what is at one time held as truth, then revealed as error; and implies the confrontation between truth and error as in Goldman's example of the Galileo-Bellarmino case — Goldman 2009, 5). By excluding truth's opposite, epistemology's sole concern is reduced to successful, i.e., true and proven outcomes. This is, in Hegel's view, the strategy followed by the *Verstandeslogik*, by which he designates all types of non-dialectical logic — traditional formal or general logic as well as Kant's transcendental logic — and the epistemologies based on such logic whose only task is to pursue truth with the exclusion of its opposite, i.e., truth formally respectful of the principle of contradiction as the positive utterly untouched by the negative. Hegel argues that since what everyone wants is, quite obviously, the truth, it is indeed reasonable to assume that "one might wish to be spared the negative (as the false) and demand instead to be taken without further ado straight to the truth." In fact, the seemingly obvious question is: "Why bother with the false at all?" (Phen. §38). This is the view common to the "logic of the understanding" and to Goldman's model of analytic epistemology. It seems indeed quite simple: "If your belief isn't true, it isn't a piece of knowledge" (Goldman 2009, 3).

Hegel's dialectical theory of truth, by contrasts, puts the subject in a quite different predicament. For, in order to arrive at the truth (a truth that is not only proven but reclaims, against relativism and skepticism, a strong value of "absoluteness") one needs in fact to traverse the false and dwell within the negative. Far from being the opposite of

science this path through the negative is a constitutive part of science and a constitutive condition of the absoluteness of science's truth.

Hegel criticizes the "logic of the understanding" on two interconnected counts.⁴ First, by rejecting what allegedly contradicts truth (but in fact dialectically constitutes it) such un-dialectical logic is blind to the context in which alone truth becomes meaningful to the knower, i.e., ultimately, is blind to the historical and social meaning and implications of truth. These, however, are not accidental by-products of truth, left to another discipline than epistemology to investigate; they are rather necessary to it (to its pursuit, to its validity, to its scientific relevance). Second, by focusing exclusively on the result, which alone is considered 'true', the logic of the understanding necessarily cuts off from epistemology the *process* whereby true knowledge is achieved — be this an individual or a collective process — hence it ultimately cuts off the historical dimension of truth itself. But it also excludes the possibility of seeing the achieved truth as the result of a confrontation of competing, alternative truths (and not simply as the exclusion of error or as the purely formal fulfillment of the principle of contradiction).

In contrast to the logic of the understanding, Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic reclaims to the truth of cognition and science both the dimension of error — whereby he accounts for things as different as the onesidedness of truth, the false conscience of truth, the pursuit of misguided objectives, and the endorsement of failed scientific methods — and the fundamentally process-oriented and dynamic dimension of the epistemological investigation. Dialectically, truth is a *process* in which the knowing subject and the known object are inescapably implicated; it is a movement in which truth is constituted as a process through the experience, the recognition, and the correction of error. This is the process that Hegel formally designates as dialectical *Aufhebung*. For, truth and error emerge as such only in the end, only once the process of truth's constitution has run its course.⁵ The important point, for Hegel, is that only as a result that incorporates error within it (instead of simply excluding it) is truth something "actual" (*Wirkliches*), i.e., something that is valid as a recognized manifestation of rationality in the world—in the world of science and scientific practices, in the world of culture, social institutions, and learning. Science is not just true knowledge. It is true knowledge that is also *actual* knowledge, i.e., the manifestation of a rationality that is validated and shared in the intersubjective world of spirit.

To the second point connected to Fuller's problematization of Goldman's position and concerning the significance of setting truth as science's highest aim: Fuller notices that "aiming for the truth" in its "original nineteenth-century context meant the ultimate systematic representation of reality" — a project that seems obsolete in the world of contemporary science (with the exception of physics' quest for a "grand unified theory of everything") but that Fuller explicitly supports in its contemporary updated version, i.e., as "a project in today's diversified yet globally undirected epistemic world" (Fuller 2012,

⁴ For this critique see Nuzzo 2010a.

⁵ See Phen. §20.

269). Hegel's philosophy is perhaps the best example of a unified, systematic epistemology.

On the ground of the dialectic and process-oriented theory of truth, however, the systematic endeavors of Hegel's epistemology need not be construed as "totalizing," absolutistic or hegemonic but are, I submit, the promising antecedent of the pluralistic aspiration proper to Fuller's epistemology. Hegel's famous claims that "the truth is the whole" (Phen. §20) and that truth is "actual," i.e., realized and meaningful in the self-conscious world of spirit only to the extent that it achieves the form of the "system" (Phen. §25) mean that truth is construed as the result of a process that must dialectically take into account all one-sided (or allegedly false) positions of consciousness, all apparent alternatives to the ultimate truth. For, all such positions are eventually constitutive of the highest, all-encompassing truth. Significantly, Hegel's dialectical method converges on this point with what he holds as the only possible refutation of skepticism.

On Hegel's view, skepticism is refuted when the method, dialectically endorsing that which it is meant to refute, carries out to its ultimate consequences the claim of skepticism itself. In this way, skepticism becomes an internal and necessary "moment" of dialectic, i.e., far from being the negation of truth to be excluded from it, skepticism is made into a constitutive moment of truth itself.⁶ This is the objective that underlies Hegel's framing of the path of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the coherent and systematic consummation of skepticism: the phenomenological process is identical with the "thoroughgoing," "self-consummating skepticism" ("*sich vollbringende[r] Skeptizismus*" — Phen. §78), and this is the way in which truth in its systematic form is finally achieved. Truth, for Hegel, is not pursued against the claim of skepticism but by carrying such claim to its extreme consequences.⁷

While Fuller intends to diminish Goldman's aspirations for epistemology by framing his position in terms of an exclusive preoccupation with the claim of skepticism, Hegel does actually take that claim seriously into account but also shows that the refutation of skepticism does not distract from or is not incompatible with the program of a broader social epistemology. In fact, the dialectical refutation of skepticism taking place in the construction of the encompassing system of dialectical truth is, for Hegel, the very condition and presupposition of "science." Thereby the relation between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* as the first discipline of the system of philosophy or of the system of the philosophical sciences is indicated. Thus, appealing to Hegel's conception of science which upholds both the necessity to refute skepticism and a process-oriented view of truth as encompassing error, we can overcome Fuller's concern with Goldman's preoccupation with skepticism — the concern which he expresses, echoing Alston, by claiming that "an epistemology where all action occurs without the mediation of consciousness" is ultimately "an account of knowledge fit for androids not humans" (Fuller 2012, 269). Hegel shows that epistemology deals in a fundamental way with the

⁶ This is the case in the *Encyclopedia*, see Enz. §81 Remark.

⁷ See on this important topic Forster 1989 and Vieweg 2007.

"mediation of consciousness" and yet he takes the epistemological relevance of skepticism's claim seriously. However, the subject and the object of Hegel's epistemology is, more properly, "spirit."

Bringing to light a seemingly obvious fact, Goldman notices that one of the chief differences separating traditional epistemology from the social epistemology advocated by Fuller is that the former, in Descartes' aftermath, is a fundamentally individualistic endeavor while the latter concerns truths that are "socially" construed (or, in more radical versions of this view, "fabricated") and even "politically" negotiated (Goldman 2009, 1-2). Although clearly the notion of truth and the idea of its discovery/production vary substantially in this shift, what I want to stress herein is only the broadening of the scope from the individual to the collective and intersubjective implications of the processes of knowledge and the practices of science. The underlying more interesting questions, however, are the following: why is individual truth "socialized," and what are the implications of this process? It is interesting, I submit, that in the *Phenomenology* and later on in the philosophy of spirit of the *Encyclopedia* Hegel does not so much side with one or the other of these positions on epistemology — the individualist vs. the socially oriented one — as he rather indicates the immanent dialectic that necessarily brings the theory of knowledge to expand from an individual focus (the center on individual consciousness or on subjective spirit) to a collective endeavor (the center on the first intersubjective "we" of self-consciousness or on objective spirit). In other words, what Hegel addresses is precisely the reasons for the expansion of epistemology's focus.

On Hegel's view, the necessity of this crucial shift is both systematic and historical. The crucial point, however, is that such shift is inherent to the theory of knowledge itself, i.e., is unavoidable given what, for Hegel, knowledge (*Wissen* and *Erkennen*) and truth are, and what the relation between truth and consciousness is. Thus, the necessity for epistemology to move from an individual to a social dimension accounts for the transition from Consciousness to Self-Consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, while in the later *Encyclopedia* it accounts for the relation, with regard to the issue of knowledge, between subjective and absolute spirit on the one hand, and objective spirit on the other. I shall concentrate on the latter relation in the second part of this essay. Here, however, I want to point out that this issue is closely connected to the problem of the "method" of science — to the way in which knowledge and true beliefs are pursued and established, and to the question of whether there is a unique, privileged method for truth or a plurality of compatible and alternative possible methods that coexist as part of the same scientific program within the same historical epoch.

The issue of method is connected in turn, for Hegel as for the current debate on social epistemology, with the idea of rationality that informs the activity of science, and with the issue of the role of social and political institutions as well as of institutions of learning such as the university in shaping, supporting, and orienting the practices of knowledge. Goldman strongly reacts against the subjectivism and relativism of the constructivist views which, in their radical formulations, seem to deny to rationality all objectivity — and mind- and society-independence — and consequently seem to reduce rationality to a practice of negotiation and, at the most, of "explanation" of "various knowledge-related

episodes in social life, especially in science" (Goldman 2009, 2-3). Such explanations are barely 'epistemological' as they concern an amorphous content only vaguely related to knowledge (and certainly not related *exclusively* to *true* knowledge). Their main flaw, however, consists in the utter elimination of scientific "facts," which are entirely reduced to social and collective constructions.⁸

In contrast with these positions, Goldman advocates to the "style of objectivist social epistemology" he pursues an idea of "objective rationality" that "emphasizes truth over justification and rationality" as well as explanation (Goldman 2009, 6). The objectivity of rationality is, for him, identical with the objectivity (and mind- and society-independence) of truth and can, accordingly, be dispensed with throughout. Now I contend that in this case as well Hegel offers a complex position on truth, method, and rationality that shows how Goldman's reaction to the constructivism of social epistemology needs not be so dramatic in presenting the idea of objectivity (of objective truth and objective rationality) as the radical opposite of what constructivism pursues (in its alleged relativism and idealistic subjectivism). I shall argue below that in placing his epistemological theory within the broader theory of "objective" spirit developed, importantly, on the basis of his dialectic-speculative logic, Hegel can hold *both* that knowledge claims and scientific truths are "constructions" of spirit's activity (whereby they have a fundamentally historical validity) *and* that such truths have an "objective" actuality which is, in an important regard, independent of the peculiar historical situatedness of subjective consciousness because (i) it is grounded on the fundamental structures of the logic and (ii) displays the objective rationality proper of spirit as "objective" spirit. There is, in other words, an objective "truth" that underlies social justification and makes such justification itself possible. Such truth underlies the different (historically successive, contradictory or alternative) figures that knowledge takes in socially different contexts.

I turn now directly to Hegel's philosophy in order to flesh out in some more details the point made above, namely, the claim that his epistemological theory based on the dialectical logic and centered on the idea of objective spirit offers a fruitful third way or third perspective — beyond and between Fuller and Goldman — from which to frame the contemporary discussion on social epistemology.

Hegel's Social Epistemology: Dialectical Truth and Objective Spirit

Let me briefly review the famous claims that Hegel offers in the preface of the *Phenomenology* regarding the dialectical nature of truth and the task of an epistemology that has such truth as its topic and goal. My present aim is to set such claims in relation to the development of the truth that, in turn, is the topic respectively of the Logic and the Philosophy of Spirit. I have already discussed the crucial idea that for Hegel truth encompasses and does not exclude its opposite, that truth is a process in which different positions of un-truth — partial or one-sided truths as well as outright errors — are refuted

⁸ In Goldman's example, "a bacillus comes to existence when the scientific community comes to believe in its existence" (Goldman 2009, 4).

and at the same time taken up (*aufgehoben*, as it were) in a systematic unity which is the totality of the process of truth's immanent formation and actualization. Let me now add the following points.

In presenting the unfolding of the phenomenological process as, subjectively and individually, the propedeutic to the position of science (see *Phen.* §26), and systematically the condition of science itself, i.e., of the logic, Hegel appropriates Kant's Copernican and transcendental turn to the subject thereby making the truth of knowledge dependent on the position of consciousness by which and for which determinate beliefs are construed as true. This paradigm (itself an appropriation of Reinhold's "proposition of consciousness")⁹ whereby consciousness is necessarily always implicated in the construction of the relation between the knowing subject and the known object (knowledge being this very relation) and their correspondence (which is the "truth" of knowledge) is the paradigm on which consciousness' "experience" develops. What is relevant to our present discussion is the identity of the subject at stake in this relation. Who is the "subject" into which the metaphysical "substance" of the tradition is now transformed (*Phen.* §17, 54)? As Hegel famously claims that the substance that as "living substance" is "essentially subject" is *Geist* (*Phen.* §§18, 25, 26) the question regards the identity of Hegel's "spirit"—the spiritual substance-subject. What kind of subject is spirit—and more precisely, what kind of subject is spirit, respectively, before and after the Logic, i.e., the spirit that emerges in the *Phenomenology* and the spirit thematized in the encyclopedic *Philosophy of Spirit*?

In the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, following the methodological program put forth in the introduction, Hegel begins the "science of the experience of consciousness" by presenting an epistemology that has "consciousness" as its center. *Bewusstsein* is the subject (and the object) of the epistemological paradigms put forth successively by "sense-certainty," "perception," the "understanding." Such consciousness-based epistemology appears, in all respects, to be the individualistically oriented epistemology that Goldman identifies with the modern, Cartesian way (Goldman 2009, 1). In the second chapter of the book, addressing this time the structure of "self-consciousness," Hegel moves on to lay the foundation of his social epistemology. The chapter is one of the most studied texts in Hegel's entire philosophy. However, while the turn to an intersubjective dimension of the subject's *practical* activity that occurs at this juncture is impossible to miss, it has never been noticed that such a turn has a fundamental impact on the further development of the *epistemology* proposed in this work. Hegel famously notices that with the resolution of the movement of self-consciousness — passing through the duplication of self-consciousness and the struggle for recognition — the "concept of spirit" is gained: at least "for us," Hegel specifies (*Phen.* §177). In fact, what consciousness additionally has to experience in and of the reality that spirit is (i.e., in addition to the "concept" that we entertain) is the unity of opposites that constitutes spirit

⁹ This is the very structure of consciousness: "Consciousness *distinguishes* something from itself and at the same time it *relates* itself to it" (*Phen.* §82). In the Logic, Hegel refers to consciousness' involvement in the act of knowledge as the "opposition of consciousness" (TW 5, 45, 59).

itself: "the *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*" (Phen. §177). Herein I want to briefly underscore only two points that are relevant to our discussion.

First, the concept of self-consciousness that leads in its development to the intersubjective, collective reality that is already the reality of spirit is the *result* of — not the alternative to — the preceding movement of consciousness (see Phen. §166). Second, the concept of self-consciousness discloses an *epistemological* paradigm: its validity is not restricted to a crucial statement on the nature of action (moral, ethical, political action) but concerns the nature of *knowledge* as reflective self-knowledge, as knowledge of objects which is necessarily mediated by the consciousness of the self as producer of knowledge. It follows that the epistemology connected to this figure is the *result* of — not the alternative to — the individualistic epistemology of consciousness (of sense-certainty, perception, understanding). This conclusion allows in turn for two considerations.

With regard to the subject side of the cognitive relation, it leads me to suggest that in the production of knowledge the subject is not implicated as an isolated individual but rather that, in following through as an isolated individual who holds on to a certain epistemic paradigm, the subject is forced to a confrontation with other subjects producers of knowledge, and that eventually precisely in force of this confrontation the individual has to recognize that truth is constituted as a collective — although deeply oppositional and far from collaborative — enterprise. If we connect this claim to Goldman's example of the Galileo-Bellarmino controversy (Goldman 2009, 5), the suggestion is not the relativistic contention that one truth is as justified as the other given the differing epistemic systems of reference of the two individuals but that to the full-fledged *actuality* of the one objective scientific truth at stake herein the opposition manifested in such controversy belongs essentially and constitutively.

Now this is as much a clash between individuals (in their respective truth claims) as it is an opposition of social values, belief systems, etc. The point is that the controversy *does not precede* the scientific truth (which is allegedly individually discovered) but *first institutes* the historical actuality of the scientific truth in its social and collective validity. The controversy (or the contradiction), in other words, is not accidental to scientific truth and is not a matter of sociology or of other disciplines, foreign in any case to epistemology. It is instead a matter of deep concern for an epistemology that dealing with a truth that is fundamentally dialectic is for this very reason forced to extend its problematic focus from the individual to the intersubjective confrontation of different epistemic claims. On this Hegelian suggestion, however, the two positions (individualist vs. social epistemology), are not mutually exclusive. For, they relate and integrate each other in the same way in which the chapter Consciousness leads to the more advanced (and more complete and 'true') position proper to the chapter Self-Consciousness.

With regard to the object side of the epistemic relation at stake in the shift pursued in the Self-consciousness chapter, the claim that the phenomenological figure of self-consciousness entails an epistemological paradigm that is a paradigm of *social* epistemology, implies that the "object" to which knowledge claims are directed always

and necessarily reveals intersubjective interests and choices, that the object to which knowledge refers is an object that is always and necessarily already mediated by self-consciousness, i.e., by (individual and social) desire, by language, and by the cognitive and practical activities that modify and appropriate the objective reality of nature ("labor" is famously the last figure of such practices discussed by Hegel — a practice that significantly displays a cognitive dimension of its own).

While the *Phenomenology*, from the chapter Self-Consciousness on and through the crucial turning point represented by the chapter Spirit discloses the social dimension and reality of subjectivity thereby revealing the "ethical" structures and institutions supporting both knowledge and action, its conclusion in "Absolute Knowing" leads to the radical overcoming of the structure of knowledge itself insofar as knowledge is based on the subject-object relation (and opposition) imposed by consciousness. And yet, in an apparent paradox, precisely by overcoming the structure of knowledge "absolute knowing" leads also to the beginning of science proper.¹⁰ This is the "science of logic." The phenomenological itinerary developing all possible oppositions of consciousness to its object, hence the complete series of figures of (finite) knowledge prepares to science but is not itself science.¹¹ Hegel's phenomenological (social) epistemology yields, at this point, to an epistemology of a very different kind—an epistemology in which the "concept" (*Begriff*), in its purely logical dimension, is free of all subjectivity, i.e., of all "opposition of consciousness."¹² But what kind of theory is a theory that concerns cognition and truth but dispenses with the knowing subject entirely? Can such theory count as an *epistemological* theory at all?

Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic develops in the aftermath of Kant's transcendental logic to the extent that it shares with the latter a crucial epistemological validity: unlike purely formal (or general) logic which is concerned only with the formal laws of thinking independently of objects, Hegel's logic is a theory of knowledge of objects.¹³ However, unlike Kant's transcendental logic, which is anchored in the "I think" of the transcendental unity of apperception, Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic presents the immanent development of "objective thinking" (Enz. §25)¹⁴ in its pure forms or determinations (the categories).

Hegel's notion of "objective thinking" expresses an idea of rationality that is objective or actual (*wirklich*) in the sense of being independent of the subject (individual or collective) but not in the sense of being merely "given" (i.e., displaying the givenness of mere "existence"— *Dasein*, *Existenz*, *Erscheinung* — which is not necessarily "rational").¹⁵ To the extent in which the objectivity of rationality is the objectivity of

¹⁰ For a discussion of this chapter see Nuzzo 2003.

¹¹ For the relation between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* see the classic Fulda 1965 and Nuzzo 2010b.

¹² See TW 5, 45, 59.

¹³ I have developed the relation between Hegel's dialectic-speculative logic and Kant's transcendental logic in Nuzzo forthcoming.

¹⁴ See for this idea Jaeschke 1979.

¹⁵ See for this important clarification Enz. §6 and Remark which refers to the claim of the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* concerning the actuality of rationality.

thinking's own self-constituting activity the idea of "objective thinking" is connected to the notion of *Geist*. Since objective thinking is the topic (or properly the "standpoint" — Enz. §25) assumed by the logic, what we have, in this case, is a theory of knowledge that has "truth" (and "all truth") as its highest goal,¹⁶ that develops a "method" for the scientific cognition of all possible objects (objects of nature and spirit)¹⁷ but is not anchored in a presupposed subject (be it a metaphysical substrate or subject as for Descartes, a phenomenological consciousness as in Hegel's 1807 work or a transcendental subject as for Kant) as it rather yields, immanently and from its own movement, the subject of cognition itself.¹⁸ This is, I suggest, an epistemology that is neither individualistic in the Cartesian, modern sense pointed out by Goldman, nor social in the sense of the *Phenomenology* and in Fuller's own sense. It is, however, the necessary basis (or the condition) for both. As the first part of the system of philosophy — and of the philosophical sciences — Hegel's logic is the methodological and epistemological foundation of his theory of spirit. This is articulated, in turn, in the forms of subjective, objective, and absolute spirit. Now Hegel's theory of spirit is the systematic realm in which the logic explicitly reveals its function or application, as it were, as a properly *epistemological* theory¹⁹ — an epistemological theory that similarly to the one of the *Phenomenology* starts out with the individualistic orientation of subjective spirit and develops as a full-fledged social epistemology at the level of objective and absolute spirit.

After the development of the Logic, which proceeds in the element of pure objective thinking without reference to a finite thinking subject or consciousness, the logical forms and their relevance to the cognitive process come again to the fore in the Psychology of the philosophy of subjective spirit, at the end of the movement of "theoretical spirit" (Enz. §467 Remark). This time such forms are used and enacted by the knowing subject (or by "theoretical intelligence") in her attempts to know objects. What Hegel presents, at this point, is "thinking" (*Denken*) as the activity of the subject engaged in the pursuit of knowledge (*Erkennen*), as one — and the highest — of all the subjective mental activities characterizing the spiritual individual involved in a cognitive, theoretical relation to the world (*denkendes Erkennen*: Enz. §466).

What we have here, yet again, is a transformation of the Cartesian subject and of the epistemological standpoint this represents. And yet, the individualistic epistemology that Hegel outlines in dealing with the spiritual subject's cognitive relation to its objects is only the *beginning* of the epistemology of the philosophy of spirit. As a mere beginning, such epistemology is necessarily one-sided and limited in its scope but is also limited with regard to the notion of truth it pursues. It is a merely individualistic, subjectivist, and idealistic epistemology in which the subject's truth is indeed *her* truth; it is what *she*

¹⁶ See TW 6, 549 "truth," and "all truth" is the sole object of the logic, and of philosophy.

¹⁷ See the last chapter on the "absolute idea" as "absolute method" (for an extensive analysis see Nuzzo 2005); but also the chapter on the "Idea of Truth" dealing with finite cognition; see TW 6, 257 for the extension of the epistemic validity of logical forms to both nature and spirit.

¹⁸ Subjectivity as "personality" emerges at the very end of the logic (TW 6, 549; see also 6, 253-255 for Hegel's confrontation with Kant's unity of apperception at the beginning of the Subjective Logic).

¹⁹ I have developed an argument for this in Nuzzo 2012 chapters 2-3.

construes as true (Enz. §444). But since theoretical spirit's pursuit of truth in thinking and knowing reveals, already at this level, the freedom proper to spirit, and since freedom is essentially a process of actualization and the realm of freedom's *actualization* is, most properly, the sphere of *objective* spirit (Enz. §469 and Remark), the epistemology of spirit that begins with theoretical intelligence's idealistic and subjectivist stance must be overcome, expanded, and fulfilled in the movement toward truth's and freedom's realization in the collective and social institutions of objective spirit. In other words, the subjectivity of truth — its belonging to the individual, its idealistic and constructivist paradigm (in the Kantian sense but also in the more radical Foucaultian sense opposed by Goldman) — is a sign of its ultimate un-truth, which must be overcome (*aufgehoben*) in the objective and collective dimension of a *realized* truth or of a truth always in the process of its realization. In this crucial point I see Hegel's position on both truth and freedom (as manifestations and embodiments of dialectical rationality) which are achieved in and through a necessary process of realization and actualization (*Verwirklichung* and *Entwicklung*) mediated by the objective—intersubjective, social, and institutional—structures of spirit as an important precursor of Fuller's self-described "realizationist" epistemology (Fuller 2012, 272).

Moreover, on the basis of the general meaning of the systematic transitions proper to Hegel's philosophy, the fact that subjective spirit finds its *actual* truth (its realized meaning and fulfillment) in the transition to objectivity — in which subjective conceptions and beliefs are not only "turned into reality" (Fuller 2012, 272) but also tested and changed by the confrontation with reality — means that the sphere of spirit's social and collective institutions is the *foundation* of spirit's individual life. Just as, in good Aristotelian fashion, the social and political whole is (metaphysically) prior to its individual parts, for Hegel the individual epistemology of subjective spirit presupposes and is truly based on the social epistemology of objective spirit.

On Hegel's view, this means that the individual is subject or producer of knowledge only because her cognitive activity is grounded on the presupposed social institutions of the society that supports her individual cognitive endeavors; only because her activity is seen in connection with and as mediated by the cognitive efforts of other (individual or collective) producers of knowledge in exchanges that may be alternatively collaborative or conflicting; she is a producer of knowledge only because the results of her individual cognitive pursuits are recognized and shared by the scientific community to which the individual, in turn, owes her scientific formation and culture (*Bildung*). Thus, what Hegel has to add to Fuller's "realizationist" claim that "we increasingly come to turn into reality whatever we conceive" (Fuller 2012, 272) is the stronger claim that we, as individuals, cannot even start conceiving of anything (true) unless we start from a position in which (some form or stage of) truth is already incorporated in real—objective and collective—institutions of learning, in linguistic transactions, in scientific practices that allow us first to even conceive of our cognitive and scientific pursuits and programs, and then to put them into reality (or realize them).

***Bildung* and the Realization of Freedom**

I want to conclude these considerations with a brief mention of the role of *Bildung* — culture and education — in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. In this paradigmatic case — which is significantly related to the Humboldtian idea of the university to which Fuller often refers — we can appreciate the systematic turn that I discussed above, namely, the relation between the individual and the social, whereby the social is the basis and the condition that allows for the "formation" of the individual as a producer of knowledge and an agent of and in intersubjective practices and transactions.

I should first mention the general result of the movement of subjective spirit on which the entire development of objective spirit depends. The highest level reached by spirit in its subjectivity is the freedom of a subject that is both "theoretical" and "practical" spirit, i.e., on the one hand is a subject who is engaged in the pursuit of truth and knowledge but also entertains different beliefs and is guided by imagination, memories, representations, and on the other hand is an agent involved in practical activities of different kind—in moral, ethical, juridical, economic relations. These two moments are always present and interconnected in the subject's life within the social institutions of the objective world. It follows that at stake in Hegel's development of the movement of objective spirit through Abstract Right, Morality, and Ethical Life (the three spheres successively explored in the *Philosophy of Right*) is not only a theory of action (or a practical philosophy) but also a theory of knowledge constituted not in abstraction from but rather on the basis of the social reality of spirit. In other words, in the *Philosophy of Right* we find the center of Hegel's social epistemology.

The second sphere of Ethical Life (*Sittlichkeit*) is "civil society." In its most general traits, this is the realm of the economic relations and transactions in which individuals engage in their social life. Significantly, however, this is also the systematic place that Hegel assigns to "culture" and to the intellectual activities that form and educate the individual to the collective universality and freedom proper to ethical life as the highest form of objective spirit. This is, importantly, an intellectual and cognitive as well as a practical formation: it is the education of the individual as a self-conscious and active member of the intellectual and ethical community.

Hegel introduces civil society by way of its two "principles" (R§182). The first principle is the "concrete person" that is a "particular end" to itself, a "totality of needs and a mixture of natural necessity and arbitrariness." The second principle is the "particular person" who as such "stands essentially in relation to other similar particulars, and their relation is such that each asserts itself and gains satisfaction through the other," and more precisely "through the exclusive mediation of the form of universality." It is in the sphere outlined by these principles that Hegel discerns a necessary moment in the realization of freedom proper to the modern world. The particular attains the form of universality not by negating its particularity and self-interest (in the name of the self-identical yet fundamentally empty prescription of Kant's categorical imperative for example) or by being entirely absorbed in the universal (as Hegel deems Plato's political project to be doing: R§185 Remark) but by asserting and satisfying the claims of particularity in an

essential engagement and interaction with other particulars. Importantly, these are theoretical as well as practical claims; they are cognitive as well as practical interests and beliefs. At stake in this sphere is the task of "forming (*bilden*) subjectivity in its particularity," educating and raising the individual to the "formal universality of knowing and willing" (R§187). *Bildung* is both "theoretical culture" and "practical culture." (R§197). The concrete formation-*Bildung* of particularity is, at this point, the exact opposite of (Kantian) morality's abstraction in the name of an empty universal but is also far removed both from the idealistic and subjectivist pursuits of "theoretical intelligence" at the level of subjective spirit and from the (modern, Cartesian) individualistic epistemic position represented by the phenomenological consciousness. While the dynamic of civil society gives "free rein" to contingency, natural needs, personal beliefs, and egoistic pursuits, it also establishes the fundamental mediation that connects the concrete, particular person to the higher universal by forming, as it were, *a culture of the universal or a universal culture*. This is the first "liberation" (*Befreiung*) of the individual (R§187 Remark, TW 7, 344f.), the process of her *Bildung* to the ethical universal. The point is for the individual to recognize what her personal beliefs owe to the universal culture of which she is part, and accordingly not to renounce her particularity but to connect it to the (similar) particularity of others.

On the basis of *Bildung* a different epistemology than the individualistic epistemology of subjective spirit and a different morality than the empty formalism of Kant's ethics of duty is proposed — an epistemology that is now "social," a morality that is based on the universalization of the particular standpoint reached through culture and education. Both knowledge claims and moral goals are now based on the capacity of regarding individual beliefs, interests, and desires — i.e., the totality of my "concrete person" — as others regard them, that is, ultimately, as set in necessary connection with others. It is at this level that *Bildung* is brought to bear on the movement of recognition discussed by Hegel, for the first time, in the Self-Consciousness chapter of the *Phenomenology*.

The individual is recognized as a "universal person," a universality in which everyone is "identical" as *Mensch* (R§209). *Bildung* forms the capacity of transposing oneself into other standpoints whereby universality is attained even though the particular is not left behind or sacrificed but affirmed. The "objective" truth pursued at this level by the producer of knowledge (the scientist or the university professor, for example) is not an impersonal, "inhuman" truth: it is not the "knowledge fit for androids" to which Fuller (following Alston's challenge to Goldman) objects (Fuller 2012, 269). It is rather a truth that integrates the subject's personal interests and beliefs into the pursuit of scientific knowledge but not by (naively or violently) turning subjective beliefs into objective truth. It rather connects the subjective beliefs with the universal element of "humanity" in them, discarding what in particularity is a merely idiosyncratic, biased, and one-sided (hence non-universalizable and not true) component. Ultimately, culture and education lead the individual to reflect on and appraise her subjective contribution to the common pursuit of knowledge and to the common advancement of science.

Indeed, in civil society particularity with all its interests and ends cannot be negated. Particularity sets itself higher than the universal and uses the universal as "means" to

further its particular ends. And yet, this movement shows that the individual can reach and satisfy her ends only at the condition of acting "in connection" with all other particular individuals — each of whom does exactly what she herself does. *Bildung*, in its first emergence, is the movement whereby the individual by recognizing that other particulars do exactly what she herself does, becomes a "member (*Glied*) of the chain of this connection," is "formed" or raised to "formal freedom," i.e., to "the formal universality of knowing and willing" (R§187). Formation-*Bildung*, in this general sense, indicates the very nature of the dialectical movement proper to civil society, i.e., the integration of concrete particularity and universality taking place precisely by exploiting the potentiality of individual, self-interested action. The formal universal first achieved by *Bildung* negates particularity by affirming it, i.e., by negating its distinctive negativity or by contextualizing it in a broader framework.

To conclude, I have argued that Hegel presents a "social epistemology" that is centered on the idea of dialectical truth and objective rationality the fundamental aim of science (of the sciences and of philosophy as science) and assumes the concept of spirit — subjective and objective — as the producer of knowledge. I have presented Hegel's systematic position in broad outlines and with the Goldman-Fuller debate on social epistemology as my reference point. In this framework, I have proposed viewing Hegel's dialectical social epistemology as a "third way" between Goldman's analytic position and Fuller's "realizationist" epistemology.

Contact details: anuzzo@gc.cuny.edu

References

- Goldman, Alvin I., 2009. "Social epistemology: Theory and applications" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 64: 1-18.
- Forster, Michael N. 1989. *Hegel and skepticism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Fulda, H.F. 1965. *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*. Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann.
- Fuller, Steve 2012. "Social Epistemology: A Quarter Century Itinerary." *Social Epistemology* 26 (3-4): 267-283.
- Hegel, G.W.F. 1986. *Werke in zwanzig Bände*. Edited by E. Moldenhauer and H.M. Michel. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp (= TW).
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Philosophy of Right*. TW 7 (= R followed by section number).
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*. TW 8-10 (= Enz. followed by section number).
- Hegel, G.W.F., 2000. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Terry Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (= Phen. followed by section number).
- Jaeschke, W. 1979. "Objektiver Gedanke. Philosophiehistorische Erwägungen zur Konzeption und zur Aktualität der spekulativen Logik." *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3: 23-37.
- Nuzzo, Angelica. forthcoming. "Dialektisch-spekulative Logik und Transzendentalphilosophie," In *200 Jahren Wissenschaft der Logik*, edited by Klaus Vieweg and Claudia Wirsig.

Nuzzo, Angelica. 2013. "The Social Dimension of Dialectical Truth: Hegel's Idea of Objective Spirit." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 2 (8): 10-25. <http://wp.me/p1Bfg0-RG>

- Nuzzo, Angelica. 2012. *Memory, history, justice in Hegel*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nuzzo, Angelica. 2010a. "... As if truth were a coin!' Lessing and Hegel's developmental theory of truth." In *Hegel Studies*, 44: 131-155.
- Nuzzo, Angelica. 2010b. "Das Problem eines "Vorbegriffs" in Hegels spekulativer Logik." In *Der "Vorbegriff" zur Wissenschaft der Logik in der Enzyklopädie von 1830*, edited by Alfred Denker, Annette Sell and Holger Zaborowski, 84-113. Freiburg: Alber.
- Nuzzo, Angelica. 2005. "The end of Hegel's logic: Absolute idea as absolute method." In *Hegel's theory of the subject*, edited by David G. Carlson, 187-205. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nuzzo, Angelica. 2003. "The truth of 'absolutes Wissen', in Hegel's *Phenomenology*." In *Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*, edited by Alfred Denker, 265-294. Amherst, NY: Humanities Press.
- Westphal, Kenneth R., 2003. *Hegel's epistemology. A philosophical introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Vieweg, Klaus. 2007. *Skepsis und Freiheit. Hegel über den Skeptizismus zwischen Philosophie und Literatur*. Paderborn: Fink.