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Taylor, Transcendental Arguments, and Hegel on Consciousness

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Abstract

In this paper, I consider Charles Taylor's classic article 'The Opening Arguments of the *Phenomenology*', in which Taylor presents an account of the Consciousness chapter of the *Phenomenology* as a transcendental argument. I set Taylor's discussion in context and present its main themes. I then consider a recent objection to Taylor's approach put forward by Stephen Houlgate: namely, that to see Hegel as using transcendental arguments would be to violate Hegel's requirement that his method in the *Phenomenology* needs to be *presuppositionless*. I concede that Houlgate's criticism of Taylor has some force, but argue that nonetheless Taylor can suggest instead that although Hegel is not offering transcendental *arguments* here, he can plausibly be read as making transcendental *claims*, so that perhaps Houlgate and Taylor are not so far apart after all, notwithstanding this disagreement.

Charles Taylor's paper 'The Opening Arguments of the *Phenomenology*' is in many respects one of the classics of Anglo-American Hegel interpretation; at the same time, it remains controversial. My aim here is to set it in the context of Taylor's philosophy more generally, and also to offer a limited defense of it against some important recent criticisms raised by Stephen Houlgate, while also mentioning some reservations of my own.

Taylor's article concerns the Consciousness chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 1977: 58-138), and is made distinctive by his understanding of this chapter as a *transcendental argument*. I will first say something about Taylor's view of such arguments and what he takes the point of them to be. I will then show how this general view is reflected in his reading of the opening of the *Phenomenology*, but in a way that creates difficulties for that reading. Nonetheless, I present and defend a modification of Taylor's position that still leaves some room for a transcendental approach. I will also suggest that Taylor is right to present Hegel as a philosophical ally in what Taylor sets out to achieve in using such transcendental arguments, even though Hegel may also be said to be fighting across a wider front than Taylor himself acknowledges or may be prepared to accept.

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I. Taylor on transcendental arguments

Taylor's paper 'The Opening Arguments of the *Phenomenology*' was published in Alasdair MacIntyre's ground-breaking collection on Hegel in 1972 (Taylor 1972), while parts of it were reproduced in Taylor's major book on Hegel in 1975 (Taylor 1975)[1]—a work that did much to revive interest in Hegel among English-speaking philosophers, and which remains a standard text in the field. The 1972 paper should also be read in conjunction with two other pieces by Taylor: his 1979 paper 'The Validity of Transcendental Arguments' (Taylor 1979), and 'Overcoming Epistemology' of 1987 (Taylor 1987), both of which were republished alongside one another in his collection *Philosophical Arguments* of 1995.

One major focus of that collection is an attack by Taylor on the epistemological outlook of modern philosophy since the scientific revolution, which he sees as being not only foundationalist, but also as working with a conception of the human subject as disembodied and disengaged from its place in the world, where this then ramifies into distinctive views of language, culture, ethics and much else. Along with this model, Taylor argues, there goes a certain impoverished view of our experience, as built up in a solipsistic and representational manner by a disembodied mind, in a world that appears to it as a plurality of atomistic sense-data, where Taylor associates this account of experience with empiricism.

Taylor (alongside other figures of the time, such as Rorty) believes and hopes that this epistemological model is being dismantled, where he credits five major figures as showing how it needs to be replaced with an alternative model of human experience: Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein. Taylor puts Kant in the vanguard here because of the way in which Kant adopted the approach of using transcendental arguments against Hume; Taylor then holds that the use of such arguments was taken further by the rest of the thinkers in this tradition. On this reading, Hegel is significant as a bridge from Kant to the other three, to whom he stands closer than does Kant himself, in whose thinking Taylor finds residual elements of the epistemological outlook.[2]

Now, set against this background, it is already clear that there is something untypical about Taylor's appeal to transcendental arguments. For, these have standardly been seen as targeted at scepticism, as trying to establish with certainty what the sceptic doubts—for example, in the manner of Kant's attempt in the Refutation of Idealism to prove the existence of the external world.[3] However, for Taylor, such sceptical doubts are not the primary target of such arguments; rather, their aim is to overturn the empiricist outlook, and the epistemological model on which it rests, where scepticism will be only an indirect casualty of this approach, in so far as it feeds off the epistemological model that the transcendental argument is designed to undermine. Thus, Taylor holds, Kant's transcendental argument as found in the transcendental deduction is primarily

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designed to refute the Humean view of experience, as basically 'a swirl of uninterpreted data' (Taylor 1987: 11), where Kant sets out to establish that unless there were more to experience than that, experience would not be possible at all. In this way, Taylor claims, 'the incoherence of the Humean picture, which made the basis of all knowledge the reception of raw, atomic, uninterpreted data, was brilliantly demonstrated' (Taylor 1987: 10). Taylor argues that Kant's way of doing this involved a kind of 'agent's knowledge' (Taylor 1987: 10), by which we can come to see directly the necessary conditions for experience that Hume had overlooked, which then forms the basis of Kant's transcendental argument against him: 'As subjects effectively engaged in the activities of getting to perceive and know the world, we are capable of identifying certain conditions without which our activity would fall apart into incoherence' (Taylor 1987: 10-11). For Taylor, therefore, Kant's transcendental approach is a vital tool in defeating the epistemological paradigm and its associated empiricist view of experience.

Taylor then sees Hegel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein as following Kant's lead in their own way: 'Now the four authors I mention push this argument form further, and explain the conditions of intentionality that require a more fundamental break with the epistemological tradition. In particular, they push it far enough to undermine the anthropological beliefs I described earlier: beliefs in the disengaged subject, the punctual self, and atomism' (Taylor 1987: 11). Thus, where Kant remains wedded to some aspects of the epistemological model while fatally undermining others, the remaining four thinkers are portrayed by Taylor as more radical and thoroughgoing, with Hegel leading the way.

II. Taylor on transcendental arguments in Hegel

With this background, therefore, we can see how it is that Taylor comes to have a transcendental reading of the opening of the *Phenomenology*, and what this means for him. Unlike some subsequent readers of Hegel that have also taken a transcendental approach (such as Robert Pippin and Jon Stewart),[4] Taylor does not come to this out of a desire to show how Hegel is to closer to Kant than has been realized, or to show that Hegel's method is less outlandish than has been feared, or that he adopts this method out of a fundamental concern with scepticism. Rather, Taylor sees Hegel as part of a transcendental tradition stretching from Kant to Wittgenstein because his target is the epistemological model as Taylor understands it, against which transcendental arguments can be an effective weapon, as (he thinks) Kant's refutation of Hume had showed, in a way that inspired those who came after him to adopt it, where crucially for Taylor that means Hegel.

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In 'The Opening Arguments of the *Phenomenology*', Taylor therefore reads Hegel as attempting to overturn the epistemological tradition and its associated empiricist view of experience, and as doing so using a transcendental argument: that is, by establishing 'something quite strong about the subject of experience and the subject's place in the world' (Taylor 1979: 33), something the epistemological approach has overlooked. Moreover, given that Taylor places Hegel in this post-Kantian tradition, it is not surprising that he finds important affinities between Hegel's position and approach and that of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein.

Given this context, we can now briefly review Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's account of Consciousness in 'The Opening Arguments' paper. He begins by associating sense-certainty with an empiricist outlook,[5] and then suggests that Hegel's central argument against it is a transcendental claim that Hegel shares with Wittgenstein: 'that if this is really knowledge, then one must be able to say what it is' (Taylor 1972: 162), where it turns out that in being asked to articulate what it takes itself to know through pure apprehension, sense-certainty finds it cannot do so, and so cannot claim it as knowledge or sense-*certainty* at all. The empiricist's view of experience and knowledge represented by sense-certainty is thus dealt a significant blow, akin to Wittgenstein's blow against 'a private realm of knowledge' that is also part of the epistemological paradigm according to Taylor: because the content of our experience must be something we can speak about, neither the pure given of sense-certainty nor the purely inner mental states of the private language theorist can be said to form part of that experience, and so cannot serve as the foundational bedrock on which the epistemologist thinks he can build.[6]

Taylor then turns to Hegel's discussion of perception, where now consciousness views the object of its experience not as a bare 'This', but as things with properties, or substances with attributes. However, perception is unable to find a satisfactory way of viewing the relation between these two aspects of things, until (Taylor suggests) consciousness comes to recognize some causal interaction between these properties, which Taylor takes to be the central lesson of the 'Force and the Understanding' section of the *Phenomenology*. While few have paid much attention to Hegel's discussion in 'Force and the Understanding', Taylor places considerable weight on it, where he views it as dealing a further blow to the epistemological model, by forcing consciousness to accept a view of the world as made up of causal powers with which we are in bodily interaction, rather than being cut off from it as disengaged minds. As Taylor summarizes the result of this discussion as he sees it: '[T]here cannot be a perception of things without there being a perception of causality. Perception of objects is available only to a subject who is an embodied agent interacting with the world he experiences' (Taylor 1972: 182). Thus, while Taylor associates sense-certainty with Wittgenstein, he associates Hegel's discussion of perception and force with

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Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, who see 'conscious human experience [as] an awareness that arises in a being who is already engaged with the world' (Taylor 1972: 185); all three therefore set out to overturn the epistemological view in a transcendental manner, a view which takes that engagement to be secondary and subsequent to some more primitive experience that does not yet involve any causal interaction with things around us.

We have seen, therefore, that by taking Hegel to have adopted a transcendental approach in the Consciousness chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Taylor is able to place him in a tradition that runs from Kant to Wittgenstein, and to give his text a particular kind of method and target. In so doing, Taylor was able to give Hegel's work a contemporary relevance and significance that until then it had seemed to lack.

III. The critique of Taylor

Notwithstanding its undoubted interest and importance, Taylor's reading of Hegel on Consciousness, has been strongly criticized as an interpretation of Hegel's text on a variety of grounds.[7] The criticism I want to focus on here is the one pressed recently by Stephen Houlgate in 'Is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* an Essay in Transcendental Argument?', where Houlgate contends that any transcendental reading of Hegel such as Taylor's is fundamentally at odds with the method of immanent critique to which Hegel is committed in the *Phenomenology*, so that this reading must therefore be set aside.

The worry can be seen most clearly in Taylor's treatment of sense-certainty. Here, as we have discussed, Taylor views Hegel as adopting a transcendental argument to undermine the latter's claim to be the '*richest*' and the '*truest*' knowledge,[8] on the basis that the kind of experience it claims to have of the world cannot be articulated in language, where to be knowledge at all, such articulation is required as a necessary condition. As Taylor makes clear elsewhere, he sees this appeal to language as an important element in the move away from the epistemological paradigm, as it brings with it a different view of the subject and her relation to the world, where he sets Hegel's discussion in this context, alongside Wittgenstein:

> The new theory of language that arises at the end of the eighteenth century, most notably in the work of Herder and Humboldt, not only gives a new account of how language is essential to human thought, but also places the capacity to speak not simply in the individual but primarily in the speech community. This totally upsets the outlook of the mainstream epistemological tradition. Now arguments to this effect have

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> formed part of the refutation of atomism that has proceeded through an overturning of standard modern epistemology.
>
> Important examples of arguments of this kind are Hegel's in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, against the position he defines as "sensible certainty," where he shows both the indispensability of language and its holistic character; and Wittgenstein's famous demonstrations of the uselessness of "ostensive definitions," where he makes plain the crucial role played by language in identifying the object and the impossibility of a purely private language. Both are, I believe, excellent examples of arguments that explore the conditions of intentionality and show their conclusions to be inescapable. (Taylor 1987: 13)[9]

Taylor thus understands Hegel's attack on sense-certainty to be an attack on the epistemological model as he understands it. Central to Hegel's attack is an appeal to the new conception of language and to its significance for thought and knowledge: sense-certainty is shown to be inadequate because what it thinks of as experience cannot be articulated, and so can be rejected as a form of knowing.

The worry, however, is that this violates the methodological approach Hegel has set out in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*, which is that a position held by consciousness should not be rejected on grounds that are *external* to it and which it does not itself accept; rather, all legitimate criticism, if it is to avoid dogmatism, must be *internal* or *immanent*, by showing consciousness to be incoherent in its *own* terms.[10] Houlgate puts this worry as follows:

> The central assumption of Taylor's Hegel is that 'to know is to be able to say'… Sense-certainty, however, proves unable to say what it knows without going beyond the sheer immediacies of which it takes itself to be aware and subsuming them under concepts. In this way, as Taylor's Hegel shows, 'the attempt to say will contradict the basic requirements of sensible certainty, will take us beyond its defining limits, and hence it will stand self-refuted'. The word 'self-refuted', however, is really out of place here, since sense-certainty is not refuted purely by its own model of experience. It is 'refuted' by the failure of that model to survive the challenge, addressed to consciousness by Taylor's Hegel, to say what it means. This challenge is made because Taylor's Hegel, though *not* sense-certainty itself, takes it for granted as 'the basic starting point that to know is to be able to say'. (Houlgate forthcoming: 11-12)

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In effect, therefore, Houlgate is accusing Taylor of playing into the hands of a critic like Feuerbach, who castigated Hegel for begging the question against sense-certainty, by making various assumptions about language that sense-certainty would not and does not need to accept.[11] For Houlgate, therefore, if we are to remain true to Hegel's own methodology, we must reject Taylor's reading of sense-certainty and of the Consciousness chapter as a whole, seen as an exercise in transcendental argument.

Now, of course, Taylor is fully aware of the methodological commitments that Hegel undertakes in the *Phenomenology* and his reasons behind them. Thus, Taylor himself raises the question concerning the thesis that 'reflective consciousness is necessarily linguistic consciousness': 'But if we bring to bear theories of this kind, are we not violating our method, and importing ideas, information, theories from outside ordinary consciousness?' (Taylor 1975: 141).[12] Taylor's response to this worry on Hegel's behalf seems to be that we can assume that sense-certainty *itself* adopts this theory, and that it therefore *is* internal to this form of consciousness, precisely because it is 'criterial' for knowledge and thus must be accepted by it, as a transcendental claim it must endorse and which (Taylor holds) is certainly very plausible.[13] Thus, Taylor appears to take the transcendental nature of Hegel's argument to *answer* Houlgate's worry, rather than *generate* it: sense-certainty must endorse the results of the test of language in a way that we are entitled to assume, because the link between language and knowledge is clear and evident to all, including (we can equally assume) sense-certainty itself.

Moreover, Taylor seems to suggest in a difficult passage from 'The Opening Arguments' paper that *unless* Hegel was happy with something like this sort of procedure, it is hard to make sense of what he meant by 'testing' consciousness against some sort of internal measure or yardstick at all—for what else could this involve, if not the sort of procedure Taylor thinks is going on with respect to sense-certainty?:

> But this procedure presupposes that we can characterize effective experience in terms independent of the model of experience we are working with. Moreover, if we are to show that the model is not just unrealized in a given case, but cannot be realized, we have to be able to identify some basic and pervasive facets of experience independently of our model (they must be independent, i.e. not derivable from the model itself, if they are to contradict it and show it to be impossible). Hence the method that Hegel outlines in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* can only be applied if such basic facets can be picked out, and his arguments will stand only to the extent that they can be shown to be beyond question.

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> Hegel's argument will thus have to start from undeniable characteristics of experience; and since it will go on from there to show that the various inadequate models of consciousness are incompatible with these characteristics, which on the contrary require other conceptions if they are to hold, his argument, to the extent that it follows the plan of the Introduction, has many affinities to transcendental arguments. (Taylor 1972: 160-1)

While recognizing something like Houlgate's worries in the abstract, therefore, Taylor's attitude to them appears to be that they are misplaced, because measuring consciousness against the necessary conditions for its possibility, in a transcendental manner, surely counts as 'internal' enough to meet the methodological strictures of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*.

In response, however, Houlgate can still argue that Taylor has not properly appreciated the commitments of Hegel's *phenomenological* method, because Taylor's account still involves *the philosopher* bringing out certain implicit conditions that sense-certainty is claimed to have, but which are not necessarily evident to consciousness itself:

> We can now see why the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* would also reject a properly transcendental approach to ordinary consciousness. He would object to the fact that in adopting such an approach philosophy would identify conditions of ordinary consciousness which only *philosophy* can discern. In so doing philosophy would demonstrate its superiority over ordinary consciousness by simply appealing to its *own* philosophical insight. It would beg the question against such consciousness through the very method of its procedure. (Houlgate forthcoming: 10)

Thus, Houlgate suggests, while we as philosophers may make any number of transcendental claims about knowledge or experience, and use such claims to convict a position of incoherence, unless and until consciousness *itself* adopts those claims and holds itself to them, Hegel would not be satisfied with our procedure.

But, it might be said, two kinds of reply are open to Taylor here. One is to argue that the conditions he mentions *can* be expected to be evident to and accepted by sense-certainty itself, as they are not as philosophically sophisticated or contentious as Houlgate seems to suggest: rather, they are part of the 'agent's knowledge' that Taylor thinks we all (including sense-certainty) possess simply by reflecting on what it is like to be us. However, the difficulty for this sort of response, is that while good philosophical grounds can perhaps be given to

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defend the transcendental claim that 'to know is to be able to say', it seems wrong to expect it to be something that sense-certainty must endorse from the outset, or find to be unproblematic from the beginning. Another kind of reply is the converse of the first: this is to accept that the transcendental claim is indeed a philosophically loaded one, but to deny that sense-certainty is merely the kind of 'natural' or unphilosophical consciousness it pretends to be—rather, it is as philosophically committed as the transcendental critic, and so can be expected to be as good as that critic at seeing what its philosophical errors are, as demonstrated by the transcendental argument. Perhaps, therefore, the dichotomy Houlgate is working with between 'ordinary consciousness' and 'the philosopher' is too extreme, as even the former has philosophical views that can then legitimately be criticized by the latter?

The difficulty for Taylor, however, is that while it may be legitimate to take 'ordinary consciousness' to have some philosophical commitments underlying it, it still remains the case that for the method to fit Hegel's immanent approach, those commitments must include the transcendental claim that 'to know is to be able to say', and at no point in the text does Hegel seem to attribute this principle to sense-certainty, or explain why it has to be committed to it—and it is surely not so obvious, that he can be entitled to expect that sense-certainty would simply take it for granted;[14] while if he *were* simply doing that, it would again seem to fuel Feuerbach's worry that he is just begging the question about sense-certainty, and what it must accept from the outset. Hegel does of course turn to language in his discussion: but this is just sense-certainty telling us what its experience is like, rather than doing so because otherwise it fears it will fall foul of the conditions of effability and thus knowledge. So, while we philosophers may endorse and find plausible the idea that 'the ability to say [is] one of the criterial properties of knowing' (Taylor 1975: 141), there is nothing to suggest that Hegel took this to be a commitment of sense-certainty itself, in a way that would render his critique of it on this basis properly immanent.

IV. Taylor on 'Perception'

We have seen, therefore, that when it comes to Taylor's transcendental treatment of sense-certainty, Houlgate's critique of that treatment is a powerful one, in so far as Taylor's account seemed to rely on an 'external' transcendental principle that 'to know is to be able to say'.

However, while Taylor does indeed adopt such a principle in his treatment of sense-certainty, his account of perception appears to proceed somewhat differently, where here he does not evaluate this position by appeal to any such principle, or attempt to undermine it in this way. Rather, he argues, perception

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faces a difficulty in grasping the relation between things and their properties, where neither can be abandoned in favour of the other, and where the resolution of this tension involves an appeal to causal notions only available to the embodied subject. Thus, here the transcendental claim is not used to provide a test for consciousness's knowledge claim, as it is in Taylor's reading of sense-certainty; instead, it is used to show that it cannot evade the *aporia* it faces in its conception of objects by abandoning one side or other of the substance/attribute relation by treating the object as a property-less substratum qua 'One' or a mere collection of properties qua 'Also'. The transcendental claim Taylor identifies here is therefore 'that we couldn't logically have our property concepts if we didn't operate with particulars, and reciprocally that we couldn't identify particulars without property concepts' (Taylor 1972: 169), where the fact that it must then operate with *both* moves consciousness (Taylor argues) to the notion of cause, to render this position stable. Thus, it would appear, there is here no transcendental argument directed at the 'refutation' of perception as such, but rather a transcendental claim made to show why perception cannot escape the *aporia* it is faced with by opting for one option or the other, where the force of this claim is revealed to perception itself, as it is faced with the inadequacy of trying to grasp things without properties or vice versa.

It would seem, then, that while Taylor can hold that Hegel's treatment of perception involves a transcendental approach, he could also hold that it does so without falling foul of Houlgate's concerns, namely that his critique of perception is based on an 'external' transcendental principle of some sort. Rather, the critique is derived from the two positions perception is committed to, where the transcendental claim is merely that both such commitments are required and are not intelligible without their opposite, so that the tension between them which perception is faced with cannot be prematurely resolved by opting for one over the other, and thus without moving on to the conception of cause that takes us to 'Force and the Understanding'.

It therefore seems that the dialectic of 'Perception', whereby consciousness oscillates between viewing the object as 'One' and as 'Also' has a transcendental result, whereby consciousness comes to realize that what underlies this oscillation is the fact that (as Taylor puts it) '[w]e cannot operate with property concepts without attributing them to particulars, and we cannot operate with particulars without applying some property concepts to them. Perception requires that we use both in tandem' (Taylor 1972: 172-3). Moreover, Taylor claims, without the notions of cause and effect, force and its manifestation, we cannot conceive of these properties as belonging to one thing: '[T]o speak of this unity as going over into (*übergehen*) external multiplicity, to think of the latter as emanating from unity and returning to it, is to characterize the object of perception in terms of force (*Kraft*) or causal properties' (Taylor 1972: 179). Here, then, it could be argued,

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Taylor can present Hegel as using a phenomenological argument to produce a transcendental outcome: through its experience of the oscillation from One to Also and back again, consciousness comes to see how the concept of objects and their properties are necessarily interrelated, in a way that drives it on to the notion of force.[15] The transcendental claim is thus not used to push the dialectic from the outside, in a way that Houlgate criticized in relation to sense-certainty, but rather emerges from it, as consciousness recognizes that any attempt to separate an object qua substance from its properties qua attributes will lead into incoherence—for example, what could distinguish these propertyless subtrata from one another, or relate these properties together in abstraction from the substances to which they belong?

Admittedly, however, in his own presentation of 'Perception', Taylor does not set things out in this way, but rather exactly as Houlgate fears: that is, he seems to think Hegel uses a transcendental argument as the basis for the dialectic, as the ground on which Hegel criticizes consciousness for trying to think in terms of the One or the Also. So, rather than this transition happening in a properly phenomenological manner, it again seems in Taylor's account as if it is driven by an external presupposition, where the transcendental argument concerns the relation between objects and their properties:

> Hegel's strategy is simple, and it is evident from the foregoing. He takes the thesis that we described above as the condition of the first transcendental argument of the chapter, that we cannot separate property concepts from particulars, and uses it to destroy all the dodges of the traditional epistemology and hence this epistemology itself. Thus any attempt to separate the unity of the thing from its multiple properties, taking it as either a substrate or a creation of the mind, must make unintelligible our perception of these properties. And any attempt to distinguish the thing "for itself" from the thing in relation to others encounters the crucial objection that things can be distinguished from each other only by (in the broad sense above, which includes spatiotemporal position) their properties, and that these can be identified only by contrast. (Taylor 1972: 178)

Thus, I think that Houlgate will again complain that on this view of Taylor's, Hegel is seen as taking a philosophical thesis ('that we cannot separate property concepts from particulars') and using this to demonstrate the unintelligibility of certain positions taken by consciousness (e.g. that the object is a propertyless substratum) which are then 'destroyed', where the worry is once more that Taylor's Hegel will not have shown why consciousness must accept this thesis, and so has begged the question against it.

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However, while it is true that Taylor presents his transcendental approach in this manner, my suggestion is that it is not obvious that he has to do so; rather, by demonstrating the unintelligibility of certain positions taken by consciousness in *phenomenological* terms, as leading into incoherence, a transcendental claim could be said to *emerge*, in a manner that is more properly internal and immanent. Thus, it would appear, transcendental claims can be identified within the *Phenomenology*, in a way that does not put Hegel's phenomenological approach under threat, as long as they are not used as premises in transcendental arguments (at least until they have so emerged).

My suggestion, then, is this. As presented by Taylor, Hegel's strategy is to argue in something like the following manner:

1. We cannot operate with property concepts without attributing them to particulars and vice versa (transcendental claim);
2. To conceive of a thing as a substratum separates it from its properties;
3. Therefore, this conception is incoherent.

Houlgate's worry, then, is that (1) is just an assumption which consciousness itself does not accept, thereby making this procedure insufficiently immanent. However, I suggest, we could also see Hegel as arguing in this way:

1'. To conceive of a thing as a substratum is to separate it from its properties.
2'. The concept of a substratum is incoherent: e.g. what distinguishes one property-less substratum from another?
3'. Therefore, we cannot operate with property concepts without attributing them to particulars and vice versa (transcendental claim).

Of course, as it stands, (3') doesn't follow from (1') and (2'); many more such arguments would be required to establish (3') as such a general claim—but Hegel can be said to provide such arguments in his full discussion of the 'One' and the 'Also'. The fundamental point, however, is that we can see something like (1') to (3') as *establishing* a transcendental claim without violating Hegel's phenomenological and immanent approach, and thus as preserving a role for such claims within his philosophy, even though Hegel's arguments do not *rest* on such claims, and so do not beg the question against the position he is criticizing.

But, it might be asked, why do we need to see Hegel as making such claims, if his argument against consciousness does not rely on them? I think the answer to this question relates to the way in which the phenomenology speaks to two audiences and operates at two levels: consciousness itself, as it moves from one position to the next in finding that the first is incoherent, and the philosophical observer, who can see *why* that incoherence has arisen, and what fundamental principle consciousness has violated in a way that has led it into incoherence,

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where ultimately these levels are taken to converge. It is then at this philosophical level that transcendental lessons can be learned, even if such claims (contra Taylor) are not what drives the dialectic itself at this stage in the *Phenomenology*.

If this is right, it would therefore seem that some degree of reconciliation between Taylor and Houlgate is possible. That is, Taylor could concede to Houlgate that he was wrong to present the transcendental element in Hegel as a matter of transcendental *arguments*, based on transcendental claims that consciousness is just expected to accept; rather, Houlgate is right to insist that the critique of consciousness must precede in a more immanent and phenomenological manner, and so cannot rest on such claims. On the other hand, it is consistent with Houlgate's position to allow (as he seems to do himself at one point),[16] that this phenomenological approach can *yield* transcendental *conclusions* concerning the necessary conditions for experience, so that Hegel can be seen to be making a contribution to transcendental philosophizing, even if he does not employ transcendental arguments to do so. To this degree, therefore, Taylor can continue to claim some affinity between Hegel's position and that of transcendental philosophy, even if this is not quite in the way he intended originally.

It may still be, however, that even this less ambitious transcendental reading of Hegel might be viewed as problematic, on different grounds: namely, as Taylor and others present such transcendental propositions, they have primarily to do not with being as such, but with the structure of our concepts and our conceptual scheme, and its necessary interrelations—as reflected in Taylor's claim, for example, that 'we cannot separate property concepts from particulars', so that if we are to think in terms of the former, we must think in terms of the latter also. Indeed, transcendental readers of Hegel often present this as a virtue of his approach, showing that he has properly absorbed the lessons of Kant's critical philosophy, and its turn away from metaphysics.[17] For Houlgate, however, ultimately it is wrong to take Hegel's relation to Kant in this way, where instead he urges that we should Hegel's project more ontologically than this transcendental approach seems to allow, where it may then seem that a transcendental reading of the *Phenomenology* will make this difficult.[18]

It is not my intention to enter into this complex debate here. But while such concerns about the implications of the transcendental reading of the *Phenomenology* are understandable, I do not think such a reading needs to be confined to making its claims at the purely conceptual level, concerning merely how our conceptual scheme must be structured in order to make experience possible; rather, such claims can also *themselves* be ontological, where it can be argued not just that (for example) we must operate with the concept of properties as well as that of particulars, but rather that there must *be* properties as well as particulars, where it is this kind of ontological conclusion that Hegel arguably takes to be warranted by his discussion of perception, not merely a claim about

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the necessary interrelation between certain concepts. Of course, to defend this sort of account and to show that it is plausible would require more work than is possible here; but perhaps this is enough to indicate that again the gap between an ontological reading of Hegel and the transcendental approach does not have to be as great might be feared.

V. Taylor, transcendental arguments, and epistemology

Finally, I want to step back from the intricacies of Taylor's methodological claims regarding the opening arguments of the *Phenomenology*, and consider his broader agenda, which is the attack on 'epistemology' and the conception of ourselves and the world that he takes this to involve. Is Taylor right to think that (alongside Kant, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein) Hegel was aiming to defeat such an enemy, and that this is the best way to view Hegel's project in this chapter of the *Phenomenology*?

I think Taylor's approach is undoubtedly a useful corrective to other readings of these sections, particularly of 'Sense-Certainty', that see Hegel's ambitions here in a much more 'idealist' or 'speculative' light—for example, as trying to show that there really are no particular objects, only universals. And I would agree that at a general level Hegel shares much of Taylor's antipathy to what he characterizes as the outlook of epistemology, with its foundationalism, its limited conception of experience, its disengaged view of the human subject, and the like. I see nothing to object to, therefore, in putting Hegel into the 'anti-epistemology' tradition, as Taylor understands this, with its mixture of anti-Cartesian and anti-Humean concerns.

Nonetheless, I would want to argue that for Hegel, the locus of such objectionable views is not primarily in epistemology, but in metaphysics and ontology, where this goes further back merely than to Descartes and Hume and other figures in early modern philosophy. For, I would suggest that for Hegel what leads us to adopt such epistemological views are a set of metaphysical assumptions we make about the nature of universals and particulars, and a nominalistic rejection of the former in favour of the latter, where for Hegel the epistemological position Taylor highlights is no more than a symptom of this deeper ontological commitment that concerns him most of all. Thus, while Taylor and Hegel share many of the same targets, I would argue that they have a different diagnosis of what it is that makes those targets attractive to us, in a way that makes them dominant in philosophy, science, religion, ethics and elsewhere.

This difference can be seen, I think, in the interpretation of sense-certainty.[19] For, on the one hand, Taylor is undoubtedly right to claim that this form of consciousness is presented by Hegel as having empiricist commitments,

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in its 'idea of consciousness as primordially receptivity, prior to any intellectual (i.e. conceptual) activity, and the view that a greater degree of certainty attaches to the deliverances of this receptivity that to any judgments we might make on the basis of it' (Taylor 1972: 161-2). On the other hand, Taylor can nonetheless be criticized for not fully getting to the heart of the matter here, to what Hegel fundamentally takes sense-certainty's commitment to be. For, what really drives sense-certainty epistemological outlook, I would argue, is the nominalist thought that what is fundamentally real are individuals in their unique specificity, where the worry about conceptualization playing a role in our experience is then that this will distance us from that specificity by bringing in general concepts. If this is correct, therefore, the outlook Hegel analyzes here is driven not just by the sort of epistemological standpoint Taylor identifies, but more deeply by a set of *metaphysical* assumptions that form Hegel's real target, but which are not picked up as such by Taylor. To this extent, therefore, Taylor's attempt to locate Hegel within the anti-epistemological tradition to which he himself belongs rather neglects an important additional aspect of Hegel's own agenda, which is broader than Taylor allows or seems to recognize.

VI. Concluding remarks

My intention here has been to present not only a critique of Taylor's classic paper, but also to offer some appreciation of it by setting it in the wider context of Taylor's work at the time, and his background philosophical agenda—an agenda that remains very much current. But of course, in philosophy, appreciation is rarely separable from critique, so that I also hope my consideration of objections that can be raised to Taylor's article may also lead to a better understanding of it, and of what makes it so valuable today.[20]

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Notes

[1] For the material that overlaps with Taylor 1972, see pp. 140-47, where it is mainly the discussion of sense-certainty which is reproduced.

[2] Cf. Taylor 1972: 184: '[I]t is clear that [Hegel] is closer to the picture of experience that has emerged in the middle of the present century in opposition to the empiricist tradition… In this

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area Hegel's doctrines have a contemporary ring that Kant's do not'; and pp. 186-7: 'Thus, it is not surprising that Hegel's attempt to establish our experience of causality should be so much closer to contemporary doctrines of experience than Kant's. For Hegel is the originator of some themes that are central to much contemporary philosophy'.

[3] Cf. Strawson 1985: 10: 'the point of transcendental argument in general is an anti-skeptical point'.

[4] See Pippin 1989 and Stewart 2000.

[5] '[Sense-certainty] has evidently a certain resemblance to empiricism. It is not identical with empiricism, since it is not by any means as fully specified: it lacks, for instance, the definition of what is received in terms of "sense data" (or "ideas," "impressions," as they were variously called in the classical version). But the idea of consciousness as primordially receptivity, prior to any intellectual (i.e. conceptual) activity, and the view that a greater degree of certainty attaches to the deliverances of this receptivity than to any judgments we might make on the basis of it, there are recognizably empiricist themes' (Taylor 1972: 161-2). Taylor translates 'sinnliche Gewißheit' as 'sensible certainty'; but I will use the now more standard translation of 'sense-certainty'.

[6] Cf. Taylor 1972: 155: 'Thus we could look at a goodly part of Wittgenstein's argument in the *Investigations* as a transcendental one with the following starting point: to know, we must be able to say (in the sense in which admitting indescribability is also a form of "saying"). This gives the wherewithal to destroy the picture of preverbal consciousness which lends the notion of experience as private knowledge its plausibility… So that irreducibly private experience (experience not shaped through common language) could only be it if were not the case that to know is to be able to say; or in other words, a necessary condition of this seemingly undeniable facet of our conscious experience, that we be capable of speaking about it, is that there be no irreducibly private experience'. Subsequently to Taylor, David Lamb also argued in a number of works for an affinity between Wittgenstein and Hegel based on this part of the *Phenomenology*: see Lamb 1978; Lamb 1980a; Lamb 1980b; and Lamb 1987. Prior to Taylor, some mention of Wittgenstein can be found in Findlay 1958. Since the 1980s, it has been a recurring but somewhat minor theme in Hegel commentaries: see, for example, McCumber 1993, esp. pp. 273-77 and pp. 338-43, and Forster 1998, esp. pp. 207-222.

[7] For criticisms of Taylor's approach aside from Houlgate's see: Soll 1976; Solomon 1983: 347-57; Forster 1998: 161-3.

[8] Cf. Hegel 1977: 58.

[9] Cf. also Taylor 1975: 141: 'Now Hegel's way of entering the dialectical movement [of sense-certainty] here is to ask the subject of sensible certainty to *say* what it experiences. We can see here at work the same basic idea that Herder espoused, that human, reflective consciousness is necessarily linguistic consciousness, that it has to be expressed in signs'.

[10] Cf. Hegel 1977: 48-9, 52-57.

[11] Cf. Feuerbach 1983: 114: 'To sensuous consciousness it is precisely language that is unreal, nothing. How can it regard itself, therefore, as refuted it if is pointed out that a particular entity cannot be expressed in language? Sensuous consciousness sees precisely in this a refutation of language but not a refutation of sensuous certainty'.

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[12] Cf. also ibid p. 147, where Taylor accuses Hegel elsewhere of having 'fallen prey to one of the dangers which beset dialectical arguments, that of imputing a yardstick or standard to the object under study which in fact is open to question, and which leads us unerringly to our conclusion at the cost of straining credibility at the starting point'.

[13] Cf. Taylor 1975: 141: 'Hegel clearly does not think [he is violating his method] here. Rather, he treats the ability to say as one of the criterial properties of knowing. And it is hard not to agree with him'.

[14] Cf. Pippin 1989: 119: 'First, to some commentators, it has seemed as if Hegel is assuming that all experience somehow depends on language for its possibility…But if that were true, and some general (potentially quite controversial) thesis about the relation between language and experience were here introduced, we would, I think, certainly expect Hegel to make more of it than he does, and we would especially expect that in succeeding chapters this kind of language test would reappear as criterial in the [*Phenomenology*'s] account of reflection'.

[15] Speaking for myself, I don't think this account of how force emerges really fits Hegel's text terribly well, but I will go along with it in what follows, as a full discussion of 'Force and the Understanding' would take us too far afield. For a brief alternative account, see Stern 2002: 59-66. However, though I would see the outcome of Hegel's account of perception differently from Taylor, I still see value in his account of perception itself.

[16] Houlgate forthcoming: 17, where Houlgate quotes a passage from the *Phenomenology* which speaks of Spirit as the 'presupposition' of the previous forms of consciousness (see Hegel 1977: 264). Houlgate says of this passage: 'Spirit does, indeed, prove to be the "condition" of consciousness in the sense that consciousness, self-consciousness and reason prove to be mere moments or aspects of spirit. Yet what shows them to be such moments is ultimately *their own experience*—experience that is initially generated by what sense-certainty takes its object to be, not by any assumptions about consciousness made by the philosopher… My claim that Hegel's *Phenomenology* is not an essay in transcendental argument is thus not meant to suggest that nothing at all is said in that text about presuppositions or conditions of consciousness or its objects. It suggests only that whatever understanding of the presuppositions of consciousness emerges does so in and through the experience of consciousness itself, not through the privileged insight (and due to the assumptions) of the philosopher'. My suggestion above therefore, is that Taylor should accept the implied distinction Houlgate is drawing here between a transcendental philosophy of transcendental *arguments* against various positions and a transcendental philosophy that merely makes transcendental *claims*, and restrict his account of Hegel as a transcendental philosopher to the latter. Taylor can thereby take away the central point of disagreement between himself and Houlgate, while continuing to give sense to the idea that Hegel, alongside Kant, Merleau-Ponty and the others, is a transcendental philosopher and belongs in that tradition in some important way.

[17] Cf. Pippin 1989: 95 and 98; Stewart 2000: 2-3.

[18] Cf. Houlgate forthcoming: 21-22. Houlgate is prepared to allow, however, that the *Phenomenology* is not *itself* an ontological work but rather paves the way for the *Logic*, which is—so to this extent he is not at odds with a transcendental reading of the text. See e.g. Houlgate 2005: 104-5.

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[19] For further discussion, see Stern 2002: 43-50.

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