

Vojtěch Kolman

Master, Slave and Wittgenstein: The Dialectic of Rule-Following

Abstract *Pace* Wittgenstein's saying that he sees differences where Hegel sees identities, I start this chapter by claiming that Hegel's and Wittgenstein's philosophies are, in some important sense, identical or similar to each other. And I suggest that this identity consists in the way Hegel and Wittgenstein develop their concepts of knowledge from more primitive forms of consciousness and bring them to a cautiously optimistic closure based on the sociality of reason, particularly as mirrored in Hegel's *master–slave parable* and Wittgenstein's *private language argument*. The basic idea behind my line of thought is to read Hegel's master–slave parable not as a loose reference to the problem of *mastering* a rule but as a complex epistemological argument concerning the *struggle* between mere “private” opinions, resulting in the emergence of intersubjective knowledge. According to Wittgenstein's examples, the mastering of a rule arises from the mutual conditioning of the *pupil and his teacher* in the process of following a rule. What is risked here, I claim, is the certainty of one's private opinion, which, in its aiming at objective knowledge, necessarily becomes fallible.

Besides some minor remarks concerning Schopenhauer and Kant, one of the most explicit links connecting Wittgenstein to the tradition of German idealism is the seemingly inconsequential remark reported by Drury:

Hegel seems to me to be always wanting to say that things which look different are really the same. Whereas my interest is in showing that things which look the same are really different. (MDC: p.157)

This remark is of particular interest for many reasons, one of them being that it seems to anticipate Adorno's (1966) critique of Hegel's absolute idealism as being an *identity philosophy* which tries to sweep all the differences and dissonances of life under the carpet of some unified whole, thus making it sterile or even unhuman.

It would be interesting to investigate whether and to what extent Wittgenstein's philosophy (with its concepts of language-game, forms of life and family resemblances) qualifies as a *non-identity* or *difference philosophy* in Adorno's terms. But taking into account the dependency of Adorno's thinking on Hegel's philosophical system, before such a task might even be considered—and applied

to Wittgenstein as, for example, Bowie (2013) did with respect to Brandom and his unifying concept of sapience—I believe that another work has to be written; a work that presents Hegel and Wittgenstein, if not as working on the same project then as being at least roughly commensurable as far as their general principles, methods and goals are concerned.

I aim to do this by focusing on the rule-following episode of the *Philosophical Investigations* and the arguments that Wittgenstein gives there in favour of his new concept of knowledge based on game-related metaphors as opposed to the picturing metaphors of the *Tractatus*. I will read these arguments as carrying out what Hegel considered one of the main goals of his philosophy: to overcome *the subject–object distinction* that arises within so-called *natural* consciousness—and leads subsequently to various forms of epistemic scepticism—and, by way of continuous transformation, replace it with the *subject–subject distinction* known under the heading of self-consciousness or, in the end, *Absolute Spirit* (see, for example, JS: p.22). In my reading, Wittgenstein, with his concept of the language-game, not only associates himself with Hegel’s goal, but also adopts Hegel’s own remedy, namely a socially rooted concept of knowledge. This thesis of mine will be supported by a parallel reading—or rather reconceptualization—of the first paragraphs of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* and the first chapters of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, particularly in relation to their respective endpoints: the private language argument on the one hand and the master–slave parable on the other.

1 Idea and Concept

Before I turn to the rule-following enterprise, which will constitute the backbone of my argument, let me quickly sketch a broader idealist framework into which Wittgenstein’s philosophy can be embedded. The largest arc—known also as the transformation of the early Wittgenstein into the late Wittgenstein—stretches between two points: the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*. In a sense, this arc repeats the transformation of Kant’s transcendental idealism into its Hegelian version within the work of a single author. This time, the role of the *a priori* structures of the mind is played by the structure of *language*, according to a transcendental reading of language as a condition of the possibility of any experience.

As is known, the first point of this large Wittgensteinian arc, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, is based on the *difference* between two holistic structures: the totality of all meaningful propositions, or *language*, and the corresponding *world* of elementary facts, in their projective relation based on the *identity* of the rep-

resentational form. Now, it is not difficult to interpret Hegel in his *Science of Logic* as drawing the same picture under the heading of *Idea*, or *Concept*, which is analogous to Wittgenstein's totality of language in its projective relation to the world. This is how I read the following passage from his *Encyclopaedia*:

The idea is the *truth*; for the truth is this, that objectivity corresponds to the concept [...]. (E 1817/E I: §213)

For Hegel, of course, the Idea of the *Tractatus* is an undeveloped one, suffering heavily from antinomies such as those of Kant or Russell. It is because this Idea has not yet reached the status of dialectical reason but only the level of mere Understanding which “makes easy work of pointing out that everything said of the idea is self-contradictory” (EL 1830/2010: §214). Not being able to solve the antinomies, but only to avoid them by preaching the “oath of silence” (see Section 3 for further details), the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* treats the whole subject–object (language–world) difference in a detached and static way. But: “the idea is essentially a process” (E 1817/E I: §215).

It is the insight that language is not a mere picture of something different from it but a living substance that develops itself from its own resources and by its own measures with which Wittgenstein enters the second phase of his philosophy, this time under the heading of *language-games*. As a self-subsistent whole which cannot have any external other, for the late Wittgenstein language represents an analogue of the *Absolute Idea* in which “every sentence [...] is in order as it is” and for which “there must be a perfect order even in the vaguest sentence” (PI: §8). Put another way, language is not a mere tool for achieving the goals given independently of it, e. g., to describe the external prelinguistic world, but a *form of life*, justified by its own means and having itself as its own goal.

2 Sense certainty

Let me now focus on the finer structure of the point at the other end of Wittgenstein's arc, the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents itself as a natural comparative standard, containing a corresponding arc that stretches from an initial critique of attempts to provide significance by pointing to the world, that is by *ostensive definition*, to knowledge primarily conceived as a *social institution*. The peculiar structural feature of this arc is its overall negative quality, in which no part of the argument is an outspokenly positive standpoint but instead a refutation of some previous, seemingly natural concept of knowledge.

Both Wittgenstein and Hegel believe that *scepticism* arising from this negative journey might be brought to a cautiously optimistic conclusion connected to the essential sociality of reason. This conclusion is, in fact, what Kripke (1982) in his famous reading of Wittgenstein calls a *sceptical solution* to the *sceptical paradox*. It corresponds to Hegel's transformation of knowledge from a *path of despair* to the *path of progress*. Hence, the general congruence of Hegel's and Wittgenstein's endeavours, as I intend to show, is guaranteed by:

- (1) the similar structure of the first parts of the *Philosophical Investigations* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and
- (2) the consequences that this isomorphism has for the resulting concept of knowledge.

Let me start with (1). This first and rather obvious similarity is reflected in the opening sections of the respective books, which deny the idea (on which “natural consciousness” is based) that there is a direct link between our knowledge and its object. In the analytic tradition of Russell and Wittgenstein, this link goes back to the idea of words functioning as names for objects external to them, with their relation being based on ostensive definition. Hegel's chapter on sense certainty deals with this very problem (to the extent that one can say, following Solomon (1983: p.326), that “whether or not Russell ever read his Hegel [...], Hegel knew his Russell”) by deconstructing the presupposition that ostensive definition works in this way. The seemingly rich and direct meaning assignments by proclamations and gestures such as “here” and “now”, which according to Russell are the only true names, are shown to be the most empty and indirect ones.

As Lamb (1980: pp.77–78)—*mutatis mutandis*—put it: if it is in the immediacy of the “here” and “now” that you find knowledge, then tell me what it is that you know. And if your reply is, “I know that there is a table in front of me”, you are bringing in other matters. You are making a classification, thus mediating the alleged immediacy. And finally:

If I say that this stapling machine is eight inches from my nose at 10 p.m. on the 18th March 1978, I have brought in a reference to the whole history of mankind. (ibid.)

And this is also exactly what Wittgenstein was aiming at. He does not deny the importance of ostensive definition, but stresses that the act of pointing out or naming something requires the *whole stage* on which it can be played (PI: §257). Thus, ostension is never a matter of a singular gesture totally isolated from its environment and thus determinate, but a complex holistic affair with

what might be called an *infinite* dimension. In a kind of Hegelian short cut, this point brings us to the concept of infinity.

3 Infinity

One of the main benefits of Kripke's famous reading of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* consists in its focus on mathematics, where meanings are quite typically of an *infinite nature*. To master, for example, what the expression $7 + 5 = 12$ means, one must quite obviously know what $2 + 2 = 4$ or $1345 + 2344 = 3689$, and so on, mean; that is, one must be able to follow the infinite rule associated with the operation of addition. In light of this, it seems rather obvious that such a mastering cannot be reduced only to pointing to some worldly object, as Augustine suggested, because the given addition is never completely realised. In other words, one is never able to perform all the individual additions at once.

And this observation is quite general: to learn something—for example, what the word “cat” means—is to master some rule allowing me to apply this word to instances of a cat that I have never seen before. As such, these instances, or their *re-presentations*, are obviously unlimited or *infinite* in their number as opposed to the *finite* number of instances of cats on which my mastering was based. Now, it seems that this *infinity of meaning* works in the same way as the *indeterminacy of ostension*, namely overthrowing the notion of “natural consciousness” with its simplistic picture of knowledge as based on the direct correspondence of subject and object. But there is more to it than this.

In the Kantian and early Wittgensteinian picture, every part of the world of which one can speak is, by definition, *finite*. Infinity, on the other hand, pertains exclusively to the whole, be it language, the world or the mysterious God who does not reveal himself in this world. This explains why talk about these totalities necessarily leads to the paradoxes of reason: by talking about the whole one makes—by the very form of the talk—the infinite finite. As for the indeterminacy of ostension, it does not change this overall picture, but only forces us to compare the whole of language with the whole of the world instead of only comparing their elements. Wittgenstein in his “middle” period phrased it like this:

I once wrote “A proposition is like a ruler laid against reality. Only the outermost graduating marks touch the object to be measured.” I would now rather say: a *system* of propositions is laid against reality like a ruler. What I mean is this: when I lay ruler against a spatial object, I lay all the graduating lines against it at the same time. It is not individual graduating lines that are laid beside it, but the whole scale. If I know that the object reaches up to the mark 10, I know also immediately that it does not reach to the mark 11, 12, and so on. (WVC: p.63)

With the infinity of meaning, however, the situation becomes untenable because the infinity permeates every single element of the picture. In Wittgenstein's parable, there are no fixed graduating lines on the ruler. This makes the antinomies of reason not only unavoidable—as Kant admitted in the transcendental dialectics—but also, as Hegel argued, constitutive of the development of knowledge, which becomes infinite simply by definition.

4 Life

With the rule-following phenomenon at hand, it is now easy to see how both Hegel and Wittgenstein use the concept of infinity in a complex dialectical way. If understanding what something (for example, a particular cat) is amounts to mastering the (potentially) infinite progression of instances and counter-instances of cats in a finite way, as a rule of some game, then this rule cannot exist only abstractly on some piece of paper or in the mind, as Kant still seemed to suggest, but must be lived and as such freely developed according to somebody's needs. In this sense, every object is at the same time both finite and infinite, something for which Hegel reserved the term *true infinity*, as opposed to the mere possibility of extending the given progression of cats and non-cats in an indefinite way, in the manner of *bad infinity* (SL 2010: p.109). (See also Kolman (2016) and Stekeler-Weithofer (2005: ch.7) for further details concerning the difference between “bad” and “true” infinity.)

It is no coincidence that in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the topic of infinity is raised at the very verge of the transition from natural consciousness to self-consciousness, connected to the reflective ascent in which knowledge becomes its own object, and thus self-knowledge. This is where the subject–subject model of knowledge first appears. It comes, incidentally, quite naturally after the section devoted to the *inverted world*, where the subject–object difference is revealed to be reversible, and as such inadequate to its purported goal (see particularly PS 2018: §160). In the *Tractatus*, a similar proto-step towards the reflective turn is taken when Wittgenstein (TLP: 3.14) relativises the difference between the picture (such as a sentence) and the depicted fact by observing that the picture in its projective relation to the world is also a fact and might be, as such, inversely depicted by the given piece of reality.

In a surprising and radical explanatory twist, Hegel calls the resulting reflective turn “the simple essence of life” (PS 2018: §162), life now being the very object of knowledge as well as knowledge itself (PS 2018: §168). In the *Science of Logic* (SL 2010: p.676), life is determined as the first stage in the development of the Absolute Idea. The stress on this animate, “self-sufficient” and “restless”

quality of knowledge (PS 2018: §§168 ff.) corresponds, in my reading, quite naturally to Wittgenstein's general insight that all words have their meanings only if *used* in linguistic practices. Accordingly, language is self-sufficient because it does not have any external goal and always subsists off its own resources. And it is restless because *it is not simply there* but lives as a part of human practices that must be maintained.

5 Sceptical paradox

When dealing with knowledge that is based on the subject–object distinction, scepticism arises regarding the possibility that we can know anything at all. Its basic form looks like this: if knowledge's role is to enable a pre-given object to be described by a cognising subject distinct from it, the possibility will always be open that the meaning has not been correctly captured. Similarly, the history of knowledge as an unending story of one theory being succeeded by another, and then by another, etc., evokes in us the picture of what Hegel (PS 2018: §78) called a path of despair, where no stable point can be found or guaranteed. Both the indeterminacy and the infinity of meaning only seem to support these sceptical conclusions.

In Kripke's (1982) reading, Wittgenstein depicts this very situation in the form of a *sceptical paradox*. How can I know, the Wittgensteinian sceptic asks, that somebody to whom I am teaching some rule—for example, what a cat is—has acquired this rule as I meant it? The only testimony that I can have will be based on the finite number of examples she or he will give me if asked, and these do not suffice to justify the conclusion, which relates to the potential infinity of instances constituting the rule. According to Kripke, this “sceptical paradox” corresponds to what is known as Hume's *problem of induction* in its original application to the justification of the laws of nature. Historically, there are two basic approaches to this phenomenon, which can be interpreted respectively as a negative and a positive solution to the paradox:

1. The *negative* solution is that of Hume, who concludes that the inferential transfer from finitely many instances to some general law is unjustified and unjustifiable by rational, logical means. As such, it is quite “irrationally” based on our *habit* of expecting that which happens more frequently rather than that which happens less frequently.
2. Kant's solution is a rather specific example of the *positive* approach, which finds a way to justify the rationality of the general law without justifying the validity of the inductive inference. According to Kant, laws and rules are

valid because they stem from the apriority of our reason, which prescribes them to the world as it appears to us.

The overall positivity of the Kantian solution, of course, depends on the positive nature of the *a priori* structures of reason and the corresponding transcendental I that guarantees them. And this holds equally for the position adopted by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* (5.6331) and its idea of the unseeable Big Eye. But the question arises: are these positions not merely replacing the untenable subject–object model with the subject–subject model, which, because it leads to epistemic *solipsism*, is also untenable? In such a case, the path of despair turns itself into the conceited path of self-congratulation and is thus another reason for scepticism. The positivity of the given solution would only be a virtual one.

6 We are the world

Placing the sceptical paradox along with its two solutions—the negative one of Hume’s empiricism and the positive one of Kant’s idealism—into the historical context of modern philosophy enables us to foresee where Wittgenstein’s own solution is going. In the given context, it quite straightforwardly corresponds to a Hegelian synthesis of both. Here, the unexplained status of the transcendental I as something that unifies the subject–object difference and as such—being neither subject nor object—cannot be talked about, is dissolved into the structure of the transcendental We. This We (or Hegel’s *Spirit*) is society as a dialectical middle point between the radical objectivity of the external and thus unreachable world and the radical subjectivity of the private and thus utterly solipsistic mind.

In Kripke’s reading of Wittgenstein, this synthesis corresponds to what Kripke calls the sceptical solution to the sceptical paradox. The question “How do I know that somebody has already mastered some rule?” cannot have a positive answer in the sense of pointing to some directly accessible evidence such as an external object. Its apparent unsolvability disappears, though, if one asks inversely “How can the given subject *himself* know that he has mastered what he was supposed to?” From this, the promised sceptical solution easily follows because the sought-after answer obviously can be found *neither* in the external world of objects *nor* in the privacy of the given subject’s mind, but, so to speak, between them, in the very “fact” that both the teacher and the student understand each other sufficiently. This is the point Wittgenstein (PI: §199) arrives at when he says that rule-following is an institution.

The resulting solution is not positive, simply because one can never eliminate the prospective discord of society's members. But it is not negative either, because knowledge is not only possible, but real, stemming from the existing consensus already presupposed, for example, in formulating the sceptical paradox as something others can understand. As such, it might be compared either to the naturalisation of Kant or the idealisation of Hume. Both are anticipated by Hegel who, on the one hand, places the apriority of reason into the structures of society, and, on the other, stresses the active and prescriptive property of habit which does not arise passively, but always in a mutual interaction with the environment.

7 Desire

The point of the preceding exposition is not only to depict the transition from the subject-object model of knowledge to the subject-subject model, as is in my reading entertained by both Hegel and Wittgenstein, but also to point out their joint emphasis on the non-trivial, non-solipsistic nature of the latter concept of knowledge. This emphasis corresponds to the moment where the initial fragments of the respective books coincide and, moreover, at which the sketched exegetical arc is closed. In the rest of my paper, I want to identify this closure with the private language argument in Wittgenstein's part of the arc and the master-slave parable in Hegel's part.

As for the private language argument, Kripke (1982) suggested its core can be found in the paragraphs preceding §243, namely in the very formulation of the sceptical paradox. The key passage is the following:

And hence also "obeying a rule" is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule "privately": otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it. (PI: §202)

One can read this passage quite straightforwardly as follows: if one leaves matters of rule-following so that they only depend on the decision of the cognising subject, then obeying some rule—and thus deciding what things *are*—will become identical with thinking that one is obeying some rule or what things only *seem* to be. And this will qualify the whole enterprise of rule-following as useless, because to master this or that rule will be as good as mastering any other rule and as such is good for nothing.

Hegel's master-slave parable is the segment of the *Phenomenology* that begins the part concerning self-consciousness. Though the parable does not seem,

at first, to have a lot in common with Wittgenstein's private language argument, I claim that it actually offers us a finer and richer version of it. To see this, let us first keep in mind the already-described explanatory arc that starts by casting doubt upon the subject–object difference and the direct representational relation that obtains between its poles. In the transitional paragraphs of the *Phenomenology*, where the inadequacy of natural consciousness is made transparent, Hegel replaces this relation with what he calls “desire”, thus stressing its basically subjective, human-oriented drift, which is connected essentially to the previously established concept of “life”. In the second step, the continuous transition from primitive desires such as hunger or sex to complex ones—including the desire to know—comes into focus. This transition, of course, needs some time and space, as Brandom demonstrated in his paper (2007) and in the manuscript of his forthcoming *The Spirit of Trust* (2014).

Brandom's basic idea is that human desire, as described by Hegel, has a *tri-partite* structure. He means by this that, unlike the *dyadic* relation of some stimulus to the reaction it directly causes (for example, of the wet environment to the rusting iron bar), phenomena such as being hungry include:

- (1) the object of the given desire, as well as
- (2) the subjective pole of desire in which one treats an object as food by trying to eat it (which makes the object food *for* consciousness), and
- (3) the desire's objective pole in which the thing taken for food satisfies the given need (it is food *in* itself).

These poles are, of course, only relative to each other, both depending in some sense on the desiring subject. As such, they are in principle affected by Wittgenstein's private language argument, and the question arises of whether this is not, in fact, the last word in the whole story. Is there some *a priori* reason why one could not treat desire as having the private structure in which to desire something and to think that I desire something is the same thing? And the straightforward answer—supposing that one takes Wittgenstein's argument to be valid—is “No”. But the point of Wittgenstein's, as well as Hegel's, exposition is that one needs to keep the desire's subjective and objective poles (their “in itself” and “for itself”) apart if one wants to achieve the more complex desires which are not defined just by their direct satisfaction, as in the dyadic case of the rusting iron, but also by a concurrent intention. In the case of knowledge—as opposed, for example, to the desire for an itch to stop—this differentiation creates the possibility of error. The resulting fallibility of knowledge is an epiphenomenon connected to the general sociality of human experience, which both Hegel and Wittgenstein promote and justify in their subject–subject model of knowledge.

8 Master and pupil

This is where the master–slave parable comes in, within the context of what Hegel calls the desire for *recognition*. The basic situation looks like this: the subject wants to see his desire as having objective validity and, to achieve that, he makes his desire explicit, as being something that he is prepared to die for. The death, in the end, does not have to be the physical death of the desiring subject, but the metaphorical death or falsification of his public claim by another subject (see Brandom (2014) and Stekeler-Weithofer (2008; 2014) for further elaboration on this reading). It is in this very act of abandoning the privacy and safety of one’s own mind that the difference between what is and what only seems to be is established, by making the objective pole of the original desire guaranteed by recognition by another subject. In this way, the social version of the subject–subject difference gradually arises from the subject–object difference not as its rejection, but as its sublation or *Aufhebung* in Hegel’s sense of the word.

In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel devotes substantial space to the continuous advance of the sociality of reason from its “deficient modes”, as Heidegger would say, starting with the asymmetric relations of master and slave. In the master–slave parable, this relation arises from the struggle for recognition in which one of the struggling subjects is—as a result of his unconditional surrender—*objectified*, and the other assumes the role of the primeval all-dominating *subject*. In the turn known as the dialectic of master and slave, this again leads to the instability of the subject–object model, though in a different, more refined sense.

Though he does not do it explicitly, nor in Hegel’s systematic fashion, in his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein also allows for this stage of spirit’s development by introducing the topic of rule-following in a fictive dialogue between a teacher (of mathematics) and his pupil. This recapitulates Hegel’s parable in the following sense: first, it is the teacher who, by definition, stipulates what there *is*, or what there is to *know*, making the pupil totally dependent on what the teacher means to be followed: that is, what is right and wrong. At the same time, it is obvious that this situation is not by its own measure stable, because somebody is a teacher only if he is able to teach somebody something, the success of which is not completely dependent on the teacher. (Notice that we have here Brandom’s tripartite structure of desire, this time with respect to the desire to teach somebody something.) Confronted with a teacher who thinks of himself as the absolute authority, to the extent of being able to jeopardise the student’s every attempt at giving the correct answer, the student—like the slave in Hegel’s parable—becomes at least derivatively autonomous by willingly recognising the teacher as an authority from which he might learn something

and/or by being forced to find the answer on his own. Hence, it is in the very act of learning, not only in its results, that the student overcomes the subjectivity of knowledge to which the dogmatic teacher falls prey.

Arguably, it is the aim of every sound educational practice to avoid this as a final stage and to develop a curriculum that purposefully ends up with teacher and student being more or less equal partners in their dialogue. In proclaiming the rule and the activity of rule-following to be a social institution, Wittgenstein, contrary to Hegel, omits the intermittent stages and jumps almost directly to the fully developed, symmetric concept of knowledge so as to primarily deal with the refutation of its purely solipsistic reading. This is the content of the paragraphs devoted explicitly to the private language argument from §243 on, which deal with problems such as the criteria for my referring to sensations, claiming that I have pain, that I intend to do something, etc.

This anti-solipsistic emphasis is more than justified in the light of the prevailing tendency to hold social concepts of knowledge as being purely conventional, in the sense that it is society, as opposed to the “objective world”, that decides on what there is by simple fiat. What one forgets here is that the social consensus is not something that is easy to comprehend; it certainly cannot be revealed by a simple proclamation or by voting. The fully developed society in Hegel’s or Wittgenstein’s sense is not a new master with the society’s members as its subordinates, but the totality of free agents maintaining symmetric relations with each other. As a result, the difference between the acting subject and the “hard to get” object is still preserved, but this time mediated by another subject.

9 Fallibility of knowledge

In the previous sections, the similarity of the structures of the first parts of the *Philosophical Investigations* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* was discussed. Describing this similarity was the first part of the task formulated above in Section 2, namely to show that there is a congruence between Hegel’s and Wittgenstein’s philosophies. Now I will move on to the second part of my task: evaluating the consequences that this similarity has for the resulting concept of knowledge.

The main benefit of comparing the master–slave parable with the private language argument consists in making the *fallibility* of knowledge explicit as one of its defining and positive features. At first, of course, it looks instead to be the other way around, because knowledge is traditionally held to be endowed with certainty, particularly in its delimitation from mere opinion. But after the subject–object model and its solipsistic subject–subject counterpart (as corre-

sponding, e.g., to the dogmatic teacher–student relation) are shown to be unsustainable, it is the fallibility that makes the social concept of knowledge a cautiously optimistic way out of the resulting scepticism. To get this “optimistic” quality right, I recommend considering the following points of interest.

- (1) In the course of its refutation or, rather, sublation, the subject–object difference is made symmetrical by treating the object as subject and object at once. It is an *object* in the sense that it serves as an independent standard for measuring the objectivity of truth. It is a *subject* because such a measure is always relative to society’s needs and the development of these needs. Knowledge is thus, as Brandom (1994) said, the *hybrid deontic status* pertaining to the whole of society and not only to some of its individual members. These members, of course, can be wrong in their individual opinions, but they cannot be wrong *in toto*, in the same sense in which not *all* money can be counterfeited, because—given the interdependency of the concepts of right and wrong—in such a case there would be no money or knowledge at all.
- (2) This fallibility or mediacy of knowledge, as Hegel would say, has some related properties which we have already encountered on our way here. One of them is the overall *negativity* of cognition in the sense that it cannot be positively identified with any of the epistemic contents or stages achieved so far, if only because these might soon, like every other content or stage before them, be refuted and/or “sublated” into some of its later stages. The general insight behind this point is, of course, the idea of knowledge as a process rather than as a simple state of mind. But the master–slave parable deepens this insight, showing that the cognitive significance of some claim or body of knowledge consists in the long path and the strenuous work that led to it rather than in the short-lived feelings of victory that accompany scientific discoveries and “breakthroughs”. Such self-proclaimed triumphs only foreshadow the fate of the master who forgets that it is not this or that battle which made him who he is but the preparedness to fight again and again for his cause; in other words, it is not some contingent state of mind but the mind sufficiently aware of its social nature.
- (3) Again, this negative quality of knowledge can be remoulded in a cautiously optimistic way into a positive quality of a higher order, if identified with the *self-reflective* and *self-correcting* nature of the whole enterprise. This is what the main modern proponents of fallibilism, Peirce (1868) and Sellars (1997), did in following Hegel’s example:

[K]nowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational not because it has foundation but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy though not *all* at once (Sellars 1997: §38).

The resulting cautious optimism might be formulated like this: knowledge is fallible, but one can, if discord occurs, arrive at some socially accepted equilibrium as a new basis for further progress.

- (4) The last collateral quality of fallible knowledge to be mentioned is its *infinity*, by which I refer not only to knowledge's always-unfinished nature (responsible for the above-mentioned scepticism and the delimitation of knowledge as a path of despair), but also to the moments of its relative stability and the self-correcting means which stabilise the existing discord. As Hegel noticed, the general self-reflexivity of knowledge, that is, the necessity of measuring what is there by knowledge's own standards, leads to the fact that even the most stable and fixed parts of our universe, such as tables and cats, are the result of the opposing tendencies of our reason to, on the one hand, make the difference between what things are for us and what they are in itself more determinate by developing it *ad infinitum* and, on the other, make this prospective infinity determinate or finite.

This is explicitly known from mathematical phenomena such as the development of real numbers, which are, by no coincidence, dealt with by both Hegel and Wittgenstein as examples of logical significance *sui generis*. In the end, one gets an overall picture of knowledge which is socially mediated; that is, the structure of the Concept is somehow identical with the structure of the Self, but also with the structure of Concept's proper parts.

10 Conclusion

Pace Wittgenstein's saying that he sees differences where Hegel sees identities—which seems to anticipate Adorno's critique of Hegel as an identity philosopher—I started this chapter by claiming that Hegel's and Wittgenstein's philosophies are, in some important sense, identical or similar to each other. And I suggested that this identity consists in the way Hegel and Wittgenstein develop their concepts of knowledge from more primitive forms of consciousness and bring them to a cautiously optimistic closure based on the sociality of reason, particularly as mirrored in Hegel's master–slave parable and Wittgenstein's private language argument.

The basic idea behind my line of thought (which can also be found in Stekler-Weithofer (2008; 2014) and Brandom (2014)) is to read Hegel's master-slave parable not as a loose reference to the problem of *mastering* the rule but as a complex epistemological argument concerning the *struggle* between mere "private" opinions, resulting in the emergence of intersubjective knowledge. According to Wittgenstein's examples, the mastering of a rule arises from the mutual conditioning of the *pupil and his teacher* in the process of following a rule. What is risked here, I claimed, is the certainty of one's private opinion which, in its aiming at objective knowledge, necessarily becomes recognised as *fallible*.

But there is a complementary side to this story, closer to Wittgenstein's self-proclaimed difference between him and Hegel and their final conceptions of human knowledge: *Geist*—known for its ultimate unity—and *Sprachspiel*—known for its plurality. The origin of this side lies in the fact that the transformation of the transcendental I into the transcendental We, connected to the intersubjective stabilisation of the subject-subject difference, has the consequence of specifying who to count as "one of us", who to count as another subject and who not to. Now, it is exactly this necessity of drawing lines between Us and the Others that makes the corresponding social concepts of knowledge suspicious to those who, like Adorno, claim that every attempt at totality in the end only pretends to have achieved such a totality while, in virtue of its restrictive nature, suppressing or even causing discord and suffering to those who are excluded. Bowie recently applied this Adornian complaint to Brandom's neo-Hegelianism with its delimitative concept of sapience, which separates brutes from men, claiming that:

The neo-Hegelian account of the sociality of reason is often presented in a way which takes too little account of how social relations specific to modernity produce disaster. (Bowie 2013: p.59)

I am mentioning this critique not because I think it is somehow self-explanatory or obvious, but because I believe that at this particular point—now that the analysis of the similarities between Hegel and Wittgenstein have been completed—it can shed more light on their differences, particularly with respect to the anti-systematic features of Wittgenstein's philosophy. This includes his restless life in which, like in Adorno's work, epistemic questions were inseparable from the matters of ethics and art.

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