CHAPTER NINE

SOME FURTHER METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter, certain methodological points Hegel makes in paragraphs 14-16 of the Introduction were set aside in order to focus on the self-critical revision of standards of knowledge. These points are taken up in this chapter and elaborated in view of some of Hegel's other methodological considerations, both those mentioned elsewhere in the Introduction and those presupposed by his method as outlined therein. Section II discusses Hegel's conception of experience. Section III considers certain views about principles and practices implied by Hegel's method. Section IV explores how Hegel’s method is sensitive to the *Meno* paradox. Section V examines Hegel's views about the motivations for consciousness' self-critical examination. Section VI discusses Hegel's claim that his phenomenological method is a methodological skepticism. Section VII treats Hegel's claim that his method is a science. Section VIII considers briefly again Hegel's solution to the problem of our begging the question against the forms of consciousness displayed in the *Phenomenology*. Section IX discusses whether Hegel is open to the charge of begging the question against opponents by giving an analysis of consciousness in the Introduction. I close in section X by considering the problem of the completeness of the series of forms of consciousness Hegel presents.

II. Hegel's Conception of Experience

The distinction between there being a need to develop a more adequate form of consciousness, a need Hegel always clues us into, and observed consciousness' awareness of this need (or lack thereof) is central to Hegel's concept of experience. After sketching the process of the critical revision of consciousness' criterion of knowledge generally, Hegel focuses on some details of this process by claiming that

This *dialectical* movement, which consciousness exercises on itself—on its knowledge as well as its object—, *insofar as the new, true object emerges to consciousness* as the result of it, is precisely that which is called *experience*. (S1)

Two questions need to be asked here: Which "object" is this "new, true object" that emerges to consciousness, and why is this process called "experience"? Insofar as the critical revision of a criterion of knowledge should issue in a new criterion, this "new object" should be a new pair of conceptions of the world and of knowledge. This interpretation is confirmed in sentence 9, where Hegel notes that the important point at hand is "the transition from the first object and the knowledge of it to the other object." The sense of "the first object" is, here again, "the world according to consciousness," and thus the clause I have emphasized here refers to the comprehension of the inadequacies of
the prior conception of the world. The comprehension of these inadequacies results in the postulation of new conceptions of the world and of knowledge of such a world, and these conceptions serve as a new criterion for knowledge. This new conception of knowledge and its objects, therefore, is "the new true object" that "emerges to [sic] consciousness" out of this process. So much, then, for the interpretation of this "new object," but why call this process "experience"?

Hegel notes that there is a divergence between what he calls experience and what is commonly understood by the term. This divergence concerns the transition from one "object" of consciousness to the next (S8, S9). Whereas the common view of experience claims that falsehoods are discovered when a counterexample to a view is found (S9) and that this counterexample is found in an accidental, extraneous way (S10), Hegel insists that the transition from one false conception of knowledge and of the world to its successor comes about by explicitly comprehending the previous conception (S9), and that this explicit comprehension of the previous conception involves an "inversion [Umkehrung] of consciousness itself" (S11).

What is Hegel doing to our understanding of experience?

Hegel is not using the term "experience" to contrast it with "theory." Rather, he is attending to the experience involved in a sustained effort to comprehend the world in accordance with a certain set of principles. The philosophical interest in this sort of experience is, as Quentin Lauer has put it, that in the consistently sustained experience of the object the object reveals itself more and more as what it truly is. Only in plumbing the depths of what it is for us shall we ever attain to what it is in itself.²

An important point about Hegel's concept of experience is the level of generality of this experience. Hegel is not concerned with the experience of discovering a new instance of an already familiar kind of thing (say, a newly discovered kind of fish inhabiting a deep ocean trench). He is concerned instead with discovering discrepancies between sets of fundamental conceptions of knowledge and of the world and the objects to which these conceptions are applied, namely, to knowledge itself and to the world itself. The phenomenological dialectic works only on a broad categorial level, for only at such a level do conceptions of knowledge imply anything about the kind of objects that can be known, and only at such a level do conceptions of objects imply anything about the kind of knowledge we have of them; only at such a level does the experience of a kind of object imply anything concerning what knowledge in general is. There is thus a sustained categorial, transcendental, reflexive level to the issues that Hegel treats in the Phenomenology. Because the development and adoption of more adequate conceptions transpires only through the critical revision of less adequate conceptions, and because this process of revision involves consciousness' recognition that its conceptions have been only its own conceptions, the reconceiving of what knowledge is, and with that, the reconception of oneself as a cognizer, is a sustained self-critical process. Thus there seems to be a good sense to Hegel's claim that this critical revision of transcendental conceptions involves an "inversion" of consciousness (S11). The "inversion" concerns consciousness' coming to recognize that what it had taken the world and its knowledge of it to be was only its own way of taking the world and knowledge.

Another point concerning experience Hegel insists upon is that humans have been successfully "plumbing the depths" of what the world is "for us" on this applied transcendental level for millennia, but without having been sufficiently self-conscious about the fact that this is what we've been doing. This is part of the point Hegel makes in both the