Stony Brook University
The Graduate School

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

Once Again From the Beginning: On the Relationship of Skepticism and Philosophy in
Hegel’s System

By

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This dissertation examines the relationship of skepticism and philosophy in the work of
G.W.F. Hegel. Whereas other commentators have come to recognize the epistemological
significance of Hegel's encounter with skepticism, emphasizing the strength of his system
against skeptical challenges to the possibility of knowledge, I argue that Hegel develops
his metaphysics in part through his ongoing engagement with the skeptical tradition. As
such, I argue that Hegel's interest is not in refuting skepticism, but in defining its
legitimate role within the project of philosophical science. Hegel finds that historical
forms of skepticism have misunderstood their own activity and thus have drawn the
wrong conclusions from the epistemological challenges that they raise. For Hegel, these
challenges lead not to the suspension of judgment, as many skeptics have assumed, but to
an insight into the fundamental nature of reality itself. For this reason, I argue that it is
important to distinguish between historical forms of skepticism (e.g., Pyrrhonism) and the
"self-completing skepticism" that Hegel describes in the Phenomenology of Spirit. It is
the latter sense of skepticism, I argue, that one finds at work in Hegel's own philosophical
project at nearly every stage of his career.

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