CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Social Ethics in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

ON OCTOBER 14, 1806, Napoleon faced off with Prussian troops outside the city of Jena. It was the middle of the Napoleonic Wars, and this battle was the latest in a series of confrontations between the French and the Prussians. The Holy Roman Empire was collapsing. The Battle of Jena only lasted one afternoon, but the Prussians suffered a devastating defeat.

At the time, G. W. F. Hegel was struggling to make ends meet as an unsalaried lecturer at the University of Jena. He was also working on a long-promised, book-length exposition of his philosophical system. That autumn, he had almost completed it. That book would be the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In a letter to Friedrich Schelling, Hegel claimed to have finished the book in the middle of the night before the Battle of Jena.[1] He entrusted the final pages of the book to a courier who traveled through French lines to deliver them to Hegel's publisher in Bamburg. Hegel's student Eduard Gans would later write that "under the thunder of the battle of Jena [Hegel] completed the *Phenomenology of Spirit*."[2]

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* was conceived and written amid great political and social upheaval. Hegel was hopeful about the latent possibilities of his changing society but concerned about the collapse of old communities and ways of life. He watched as political and military alliances shifted, and he wondered what would hold the emerging society together. He anticipated the tensions between individuals and the political entities that would demand their allegiance and sacrifice. At the same time, Hegel noticed and began to theorize the way that traditional roles and duties, including gender roles, were constructed and performed within these local and national communities. He tried to make sense of the apparent authority of these socially constructed norms as well as their capacity to change. What emerged from Hegel's efforts

to grapple with these issues was the brilliant and often maddening *Phenomenology of Spirit*—at once a highly abstract treatise on epistemology and an account of ethics rooted in communities.

This book holds these two aspects of Hegel's project together—epistemology and ethics, knowing and living well. In doing so, it gives an account of the relationships and practices that a community ought to cultivate, and of what happens when those relationships and practices are absent or deformed. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel shows what domination looks like and suggests that there is an alternative to it, a way of coping with conflict and forging solidarity. And, while Hegel was no democrat, he describes how conflicts can be confronted and hope for reconciliation sustained through just means in diverse communities. Read in this way, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has much to teach the denizens of contemporary societies about what democracy ought to be.

The Structure and Movement of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit

The abstraction of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, particularly in its early chapters, may not seem to bode well for social ethics. It is a notoriously difficult text. Hegel uses his own philosophical vocabulary throughout the text, and he warns his readers that the meaning of the terms he uses will only become clear as the book goes on. Their meaning will be specified by their use over the course of the text. Readers, therefore, ought not to import the familiar sense of words like "spirit," "God," "essence," and "absolute" into Hegel's use of them; readers are left in the dark for a long time about how to read and understand these words. This is also true of the argument of the text as a whole. In the preface, Hegel insists that he cannot provide a summary of his argument in advance. Light will dawn gradually. But it is nearly impossible to read or to consider the *Phenomenology of Spirit* without at least having a sense of what kind of text Hegel intends it to be, what his aims are, and what his method is.

In the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes that the book is an epistemological project. It is concerned with our knowledge about the world and, in particular, with what "standard" (*der Maßstab*) we might use to assess our claims to such knowledge. An adequate standard would be a yardstick against which our claims could be judged as true, right, or good. Hegel believes that there *is* such a standard, and he promises that we (his readers) will understand what it is by the end of the book. But Hegel also believes that the standard cannot be assumed or specified in advance. We must *arrive* at it through a dialectical process of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the various standards that one *could* posit.

Hegel refers to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a "voyage of discovery"—a voyage undertaken by his protagonist, whom he calls consciousness, in its

search for an adequate theory of knowledge. Hegel and his readers only arrive at the destination by undertaking this voyage along with consciousness. The point of departure is the most straightforward account of the standard that consciousness could claim to rely on in assessing the truth or falsity of its judgments. Hegel calls this account "sense-certainty." The voyage leads, through experiences that reveal that initial account's internal conflicts and contradictions, to increasingly complex accounts. Along the way, Hegel and his readers themselves learn from consciousness's experiences.

Hegel characterizes his phenomenological investigation as "the path of *doubt*, or, more properly, as the path of despair" (§78/72). This doubt or despair must be distinguished from Cartesian doubt and Kantian skepticism; it is more like immanent critique. Hegel and his readers track consciousness as it gives an account of itself and its object, finds its account wanting, and reassesses it. Hegel calls this a "self-consummating skepticism" (ibid.), in which he shows what consciousness posits as its standard for assessing its knowledge claims, how it tries to apply this standard in practice, and what its experience of doing so reveals about the inadequacies of the standard that it has set for itself. Hegel shows his readers what the logical consequences of this failure are by way of a subsequent account of the standard that attempts to overcome the problems plaguing the previous one. The goal of the phenomenology, Hegel writes, "lies at that point where knowledge no longer has the need to go beyond itself, that is, where knowledge comes around to itself, and where the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept" (§80/74). Through this dialectic, consciousness eventually arrives at an adequate theory of knowledge. Hegel calls this "absolute knowing."

Initially, this story about consciousness's voyage from sense-certainty to absolute knowing may appear irrelevant to what I am calling Hegel's social ethics. By Hegel's own description, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is concerned with finding the standard against which knowledge claims are judged and conflicts are adjudicated. On this level, it is an epistemological project. But as the story of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* unfolds, it becomes clear that any adequate account of that standard would have to address the social and historical context in which people make knowledge claims. Hegel's account of *spirit*—the collection of norms and norm-generating practices of a form of life—highlights the ways that individuals' knowledge is mediated and judged in a community through its social practices. When Hegel begins to consider spirit, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* becomes a story about *authority*—the authority of norms (whether and why they count as good, right, or true) and the authority of the people who uphold and contest those norms. The ground of authority claimed by consciousness or by a community is, in Hegel's words, its *essence*.[3]

The epistemological project, therefore, is inseparable from the ethical project. Hegel considers what relationships and social practices ought to be cultivated in order to overcome domination and to build solidarity among the

members of a community. The relationships and practices that are capable of doing this are characterized by what Hegel calls reciprocal recognition. His discussion of reciprocal recognition comes toward the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel describes two individuals who have come into conflict but who manage to reconcile with one another through practices of confession and forgiveness. These practices are important because they express and embody each person's recognition of the authority of the other. Each person is a locus of authority—and of accountability—with respect to the other.

Without relationships and practices of the right kind, communities and societies can only be held together by violence, manipulation, or deceit. In what is perhaps the most famous section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the emergence of a relationship between two individuals who find themselves locked in a conflict that results in a life-and-death struggle. Their conflict is overcome, and their struggle comes to an end, only when one of the two gives up the fight, submits to the other, and becomes his bondsman. This is the episode known as the master-slave dialectic or the lordship and bondage section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (§178–89/145–50).[4] The lord forces the bondsman to acknowledge his power. Therefore, their relationship is drastically asymmetrical in its distribution of power and accountability. The lord claims power over the bondsman but no accountability for his treatment of him. The bondsman, meanwhile, is accountable to the lord but is not himself recognized as having power or authority. Because of this asymmetrical distribution of power and accountability, the coerced recognition that the bondsman offers the lord cannot possibly satisfy the lord's desire to be recognized as rightfully authoritative.

The lord dominates the bondsman, standing in a position to interfere arbitrarily with his desires, plans, and choices.[5] The master-slave relationship may be the paradigm case of domination, but Hegel shows how the specter of domination hovers over every shape of consciousness or shape of spirit that does not achieve relationships of reciprocal recognition. By the end of the book, Hegel has not only considered domination in its abstract form; he has also discussed practical matters such as slavery, tragedy, the sacrifices of young men in war, burial rites, gender roles, religion, the culture war standoff between religious faith and secular rationalism, and political revolution.

Although Hegel identifies various accounts of the standard of knowledge with other philosophical positions, works of literature, and historical events, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not strictly a historical narrative. It does not describe the unfolding of actual historical events, let alone the progressive articulation and actualization of God in history. Instead, it is a conceptual narrative that uses a dialectical method to gradually specify what standard of knowledge a person in Hegel's social and historical context would be entitled to uphold. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the collapse of one position leads to the development of the next in a *conceptual*, rather than historical, sense.

This development unfolds at the level of thought. Hegel does not claim—in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, at least—that historical events track, in any straightforward way, the conceptual progression presented here. It is not the case, for example, that slavery or bondage was left behind, historically, with the lord and bondsman. Among other problems, that reading would make no sense of Hegel's later invocation of ancient Greek life. Rather, the account of the standard of knowledge that he describes with reference to lordship and bondage is left behind, conceptually, owing to its inadequacies. The account of the standard of knowledge that Hegel describes with reference to Greek *Sittlichkeit*, or ethical life, overcomes those inadequacies (while introducing new problems of its own). On my reading of Hegel, the necessity of the conceptual development does not imply the necessity of historical development. There is nothing inevitable about the practical achievement of nondomination, reconciliation, or solidarity under actual social and historical circumstances.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* tells its conceptual narrative in three sections, which are divided into eight chapters. Following the preface and introduction, Section A ("Consciousness") comprises three chapters: "Sense-Certainty," "Perception," and "Force and the Understanding"; Section B ("Self-Consciousness") includes only one chapter: "The Truth of Self-Certainty"; and Section C comprises four chapters: "Reason," "Spirit," "Religion," and "Absolute Knowing." The transition from Chapter V ("Reason") to Chapter VI ("Spirit") is particularly pivotal for understanding the book's social and ethical import because it begins with the moment in which consciousness's account of the standard of knowledge acquires its social and historical context. Unlike the first five chapters, which discuss what Hegel calls "shapes of consciousness," Chapter VI focuses on "shapes of spirit." This is a significant shift.[6] Whereas a shape of consciousness is an abstract conceptual scheme—the way a particular person or group characterizes itself, the ground of authority for its beliefs or norms, and its relationship to the world in which it finds itself—a shape of spirit is an embodied form of social life, including its norms and laws, social practices, and language. As Terry Pinkard notes, "A 'shape of spirit' is thus more fundamental than a 'shape of consciousness,'" for it provides the social and historical context in which particular conceptual schemes can even appear as live options.[7] In Hegel's words, "Spirit is thereby the self-supporting, absolute, real essence. All the previous shapes of consciousness are abstractions from it" (§439/325).

In Chapter VI, Hegel discusses a succession of shapes of spirit, considering not only the accounts that individuals and communities within these shapes of spirit give of themselves but also the norms and social practices that appear in them. Hegel presents a progression of people and communities who, for reasons that will become clear, cannot give an adequate account of why their norms, laws, institutions, and practices ought to be binding on them. He describes the ways that these people come into conflict with one another and the ways that their own understanding of the authority of their norms fails to

help them confront and overcome these conflicts. Some of these communities and conflicts are familiar to readers. The conflict between Antigone and Creon, which Hegel draws from Sophocles's *Antigone*, ends in tragedy. The standoff between Faith and Enlightenment—Hegel's labels for the kinds of positions held by early modern Pietists and their secular rationalist opponents—devolves into a seemingly intractable culture war. Both of these conflicts are confronted in ways that reveal the inadequacies of those shapes of spirit; the conflicts make it clear that something is wrong with that way of organizing a community and justifying its beliefs, practices, and institutions. Again and again, Hegel describes how shapes of spirit fall apart, only to be replaced by other shapes of spirit that try to compensate for the weaknesses of what came before.[8] It is only at the end of Chapter VI that he depicts a conflict that ends in reconciliation rather than self-destruction—in part because of the conflicting parties' participation in sacramental practices of confession and forgiveness. At that point, full-fledged reciprocal recognition and what Hegel calls "absolute spirit" emerge.

Religion, Ethics, and Post-Kantian Interpretations of Hegel

But what is absolute spirit? The answer to that question is highly disputed among contemporary interpreters of Hegel. It is clear that what Hegel calls "absolute" is the shared object of religion and philosophy. It is also clear that religion and philosophy grasp the "absolute" in different forms, with religion representing it as "God" and philosophy knowing it as "spirit." But interpreters disagree about how to understand these related concepts and the significance of the differences between religious and philosophical reflections on them.

Much scholarship on Hegel contends that his philosophy is thoroughly metaphysical, an attempt to gain knowledge of the absolute through reason, and thus a rejection of Immanuel Kant's critical turn.[9] His concept of spirit, some interpreters hold, is best understood as a divine mind or supernatural entity that manifests and progressively reveals itself in history. A growing number of scholars, however, have challenged this interpretation of Hegel. Such scholars have argued that Hegel's concept of spirit is nonmetaphysical, metaphysically minimalist, and/or naturalist. On this view, *spirit* refers to the collection of norms and norm-generating practices that characterize a community. *Absolute* spirit is that range of norms and practices in which spirit has itself for an object—in and through which members of the community create, sustain, and transform its collection of norms and norm-generating practices. When members of the community are fully self-conscious of this process and their participation in it, they have achieved what Hegel calls absolute knowing. My reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is indebted to this second group of scholars. As I show in the following chapters, this line of interpretation not only is equipped

to make sense of some of the most challenging passages in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* but also has the advantage of connecting Hegel's epistemological and ethical thought in ways that continue to resonate for us today.

This body of scholarship is sometimes referred to as the nonmetaphysical interpretation of Hegel. That label can be confusing. Just what is being ruled out when Hegel, or an interpretation of Hegel, is called "nonmetaphysical"? Moreover, the label has had the effect of repelling readers with religious commitments, who worry that a nonmetaphysical Hegel is a Hegel stripped of religious or theological relevance. This is unfortunate. Many of the so-called nonmetaphysical interpretations of Hegel do neglect his relevance for these areas of thought, but that neglect has more to do with the particular interests of the analytic philosophers who have spearheaded this interpretation than with the interpretive moves themselves. In fact, these interpretive moves reveal aspects of Hegel's thought that ought to intrigue and engage theologians and scholars of religion. Religion is everywhere in Hegel's philosophy. To take this fact seriously, and to treat his philosophy of religion with due care, however, is not incompatible with the view that Hegel has rejected precritical metaphysics. The chapters ahead highlight the role that religious communities and practices play in Hegel's account of spirit, and chapter 5 addresses the various senses in which that account may and may not be said to involve metaphysics. In the meantime, to sidestep (some of) the confusion, I will avoid the label "nonmetaphysical" and refer, instead, to "post-Kantian" interpretations of Hegel.

Post-Kantian interpretations of Hegel emphasize Hegel's continuity with Kant and object to interpretations that cast Hegel's philosophy as engaged in the dogmatic metaphysics that Kant tried to rule out.[10] According to Robert Pippin, for instance, Hegel should not be interpreted as rejecting Kantian philosophy and reverting to Spinozistic metaphysics. Instead, he should be interpreted as endorsing and extending central aspects of Kant's project, even as he leaves others behind.[11] For the purposes of this book, the most important of these is Kant's account of the transcendental unity of apperception.

In the Transcendental Deduction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that the human mind does not passively record data from the sensible world but rather engages in an active process of "unifying the manifold," that is, making judgments about how sensory material ought to be organized.[12] The experience of seeing a table, for instance, is not a matter of the object "table" impressing itself on the mind but rather an activity of organizing relevant sensory material and judging that what one is looking at is a table rather than a jungle gym or a bed. In this sense, representations of objects are normative judgments, true or false claims about the world, undertaken by "apperceiving" (that is, reflective or self-conscious) subjects or, in Kantian terminology, unities of apperception.

With Kant as his starting point, Hegel likewise argues that human beings' experiences of the world—even experiences as commonplace as seeing a

table—involve making normative judgments and, furthermore, that this practical activity is what being a subject entails. Where Hegel extends this claim, according to Pippin, is in his insistence that these judgments are open to contestation from other self-conscious subjects. Hegel believes that people cannot make normative judgments of the kind that characterize human beings as self-conscious subjects unless *other* self-conscious subjects recognize or contest these judgments. As Hegel writes, "Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (§175/144). In *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, Pippin reads the lordship and bondage section of the *Phenomenology* in light of this interpretation, concluding that Hegel views self-consciousness "as always in a way provisional, as opening up a kind of gap between a subject's initial resolving and any satisfaction of its desire to confirm that what it takes to be true or right or good is."[13] There is, in other words, a kind of provisionality to our judgments about the world. We make judgments, and we seek confirmation or recognition that they are correct. For Hegel, self-consciousness is not a static faculty of the individual mind but an ongoing movement or process that involves making judgments and having those judgments affirmed, denied, or otherwise contested by someone other than oneself.

The neo-pragmatist philosopher Robert Brandom connects this post-Kantian aspect of Hegel's thought to Brandom's own philosophy of language, in order to develop what he calls a semantic interpretation of Hegel.[14] Like Pippin, Brandom argues that Hegel both draws on Kant's account of the unity of apperception and insists that such a unity of apperception must be socially and historically situated. As noted above, Kant thinks that human beings' experiences of the world require judgments. Brandom characterizes these judgments as normative *commitments* for which human beings (as subjects) take responsibility. As a human being interacts with the world, she acquires new commitments, some of which may contradict other commitments that she holds. To become a self-conscious subject—a *unity* of apperception—she must synthesize a unified set of commitments out of such conflicts.[15]

According to Brandom, Hegel sees (as Kant did not) that this synthetic unity has an intersubjective dimension. While Hegel agrees with Kant that the subject is the entity who is responsible *for* his or her commitments, he goes beyond Kant to suggest that the subject must also be responsible *to* someone or something. Without this responsibility *to*, there is no normativity. In response to this problem, Hegel develops what Brandom calls a "recognitive model" of normative bindingness, in which subjects are responsible *to other subjects* for their normative judgments, concept use, and so forth.[16] The practices of reciprocal recognition, which include taking responsibility, granting authority, and holding oneself and others accountable, are all *social* practices. The conflicts and reconciliations that happen as subjects try to sort out their various conflicting commitments involve members of a community contesting one another's beliefs, norms, and actions and reweaving the fabric of the community in

the face of such conflicts. In Brandom's reading of Hegel, the "inexhaustibility of concrete, sensuous immediacy guarantees that we will never achieve a set of conceptual contents articulated by relations of material inferential consequence and incompatibility that will not . . . at some point lead to commitments that are incompatible, according to those same standards. *No integration or recollection is final at the ground level*."[17] In other words, according to Brandom, people should expect that conflicts will continue to arise. The reciprocal recognition and reconciliation from which absolute spirit emerges are never more than temporary, contestable achievements. Social life must therefore involve *ongoing* practices of contestation and reconciliation.

From Epistemology to Ethics

This emphasis on the social-practical dimension of human knowing places Hegel at the forefront of an intellectual tradition that prioritizes social practice in epistemology and ethics alike. In the United States, Hegel's influence on John Dewey connects him to the tradition of inquiry that animates American pragmatism. Hegel's insistence on the social construction of norms and his recognition of what Pinkard has called "the sociality of reason" are all echoed in Dewey's democratic pragmatism. Like Dewey and other classical pragmatists, Hegel contends that knowledge emerges from the practices of people who share a community.

Meanwhile, contemporary scholars including Brandom, Pinkard, Richard J. Bernstein, Robert Stern, and Jeffrey Stout have asked whether and to what extent Hegel himself might be said to be a (proto-) pragmatist and whether pragmatism has anything to learn from Hegel.[18] Neo-pragmatist reconstructions of Hegel's thought highlight the role that practices of reasoning, deliberation, and justification play in Hegel's theory of knowledge. Despite their attention to these social practices, however, the neo-pragmatists and other Anglophone scholars sympathetic to post-Kantian interpretations of Hegel remain primarily concerned with these social practices' role in Hegel's epistemology rather than his ethics.

The intellectual tradition inaugurated by Hegel's insights into the social construction of norms and the practical basis of normative authority has a second strand, which includes many of the most influential twentieth-century continental philosophers, including Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler. Philosophers working in this strand of the Hegelian tradition have been more interested than those in the former strand in Hegel's reflections on power and his relevance for social and political thought.

At times, there has appeared to be an impasse between these two strands of this intellectual tradition. Many Anglo-American philosophers (neo-pragmatists and others) who have championed post-Kantian interpretations of Hegel have emphasized the first half of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* over the

second and the epistemologically abstract over the socially, ethically, and politically concrete. Consider Pippin's influential *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, which is often seen as a founding text of the post-Kantian line of interpretation. Pippin argues that Hegel has made his philosophical case by the end of Chapter V of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, after Hegel's discussion of consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason but before his treatment of spirit and religion.[19] The Marxist philosopher Fredric Jameson notes that "Pippin has taught us to reread Hegel's arguments with the respect due a rigorous philosophizing, even though he achieves this by a modest lowering of the volume of Hegel's dialectical claims, which are surely what have always excited the latter's followers, not many of whom will be altogether content with the unpretentious Rortyan pragmatism of this new avatar."[20] Jameson worries that post-Kantian interpretations highlight the "philosophical chapters" in the first half of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the expense of the "non-philosophical (or 'sociological') chapters" in the second half.[21] Continental philosophers, by contrast, tend to focus on Hegel's master-slave dialectic, as well as his discussions of slavery, domination, tragedy, revolution and terror, and sacrifice—that is, Hegel's more obvious claims about power.

These two aspects of Hegel's thought—his epistemology and his account of power, and thus social ethics—need not be held apart. In fact, they are inextricably linked. This book contends that an epistemology that attends to social practices opens up to a social ethics that attends to norms, power, and conflict. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel shows the connection between communities' accounts of why the things that they believe and do ought to be believed and done—that is, why they have authority—and the practices through which the members of those communities instantiate norms and adjudicate conflicts over them. That connection is at the heart of this book. As I have suggested, the transition from "shapes of consciousness" to "shapes of spirit" in the middle of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is significant, and the second half of the text requires the careful analysis that the first half has already received from the post-Kantian interpreters. This is particularly pressing because, as Jameson notes, the social, political, and religious themes that have made the *Phenomenology of Spirit* so compelling in continental philosophical circles for the past two centuries have been neglected in this new reading of Hegel.[22] By highlighting the relationships and practices through which ethics and norms are instituted—and the dynamics of power, exclusion, and domination in them—this book bridges the gap between Hegel's post-Kantian interpreters and those animated by continental philosophy.

On my reading, Hegel anticipates many nineteenth- and twentieth-century objections to (and misreadings of) his philosophy. Those who read Hegel as a philosopher of totality, of mediation that ends in absolute spirit, have objected to his supposed claim that mediation could come to an end under present historical circumstances (Marx, Kierkegaard, Kojève), while others have objected

to his apparent presumption that mediation could come to an end under *any* circumstances (Adorno, Foucault, Derrida). If Hegel's metaphysics are of the sort that traditional interpretations suggest—that is, if Hegel thinks that absolute spirit involves the subject's a priori knowledge of the absolute—then absolute spirit *would* entail closure.[23] But I read Hegel as a philosopher of "mediation without closure."[24] Hegel is committed to the notion that social practices stand at the center of human life. Through social practices, human beings become subjects—and through social practices, these subjects create, maintain, and transform the norms of their shape of spirit. When people reflect on these processes, Hegel claims, the search for a self-sufficient standard of knowledge comes to an end, because they become self-conscious of their participation in the practices by which they institute norms and generate authority. Nothing about this, however, necessitates the end of difference, conflict, or contestation.

In the following chapters, I develop these arguments with two broad goals in mind. The first is to explicate Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a work not only of epistemology but also of social ethics, concerned with the evaluation of relationships, practices, and institutions. The book tracks Hegel's account of how ethical conflicts emerge and how they might be confronted and overcome. The second goal is to show the continuing relevance of Hegel's social ethics for a religiously diverse democratic society. Accordingly, this book proceeds in two parts.

Chapters 2–5 present an interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that connects consciousness's search for the standard of knowledge to an account of the relationships and practices that communities ought to cultivate. These chapters involve close readings of a series of linked parts of Hegel's *Phenomenology* alongside analysis of the major concepts at play in them. Chapter 2 begins to make the case that, for Hegel, the authority of a community's norms is rooted in its social practices. It considers the lessons of Hegel's discussion of Sophocles's *Antigone*, in which he shows that a community that treats its norms as natural, fixed, and immediately given will be afflicted by tragedy. Chapter 3 turns from immediacy and tragedy to self-legislation and alienation through a discussion of the conflict between Faith and Enlightenment. Faith and Enlightenment believe that individuals must be able to affirm their commitments for themselves, based on objective standards that are available to all. Because they disagree about what those standards are, however, they are locked in a culture war–style impasse. The apparent intractability of their conflict stems from the two sides' inability to recognize the social practices through which members of each group authorize and contest their norms. Chapter 4 describes Hegel's alternative to domination. It compares the relationship between the lord and bondsman in the famous struggle for recognition to the relationship between the wicked and judging consciousnesses near the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the latter section, the two individuals' conflict is transformed into a relationship of reciprocal recognition through their practices of confession and

forgiveness. I describe the structure of the relationship of reciprocal recognition as one of reciprocal authority and accountability, and I show how this relationship emerges from the sacramental practices of confession and forgiveness. Chapter 5 draws out the implications of these three conflicts for Hegel's account of absolute spirit. Absolute spirit, I argue, is characterized by ongoing diversity, conflict, and disagreement, mediated by rituals of reconciliation that create and repair relationships of reciprocal recognition.

The final chapters of the book move from interpretation to application. There is no straightforward way to apply Hegel's thought to contemporary public life. Hegel's system of philosophy is marked by its own social and historical context. Hegel himself knew this. "Philosophy," as he famously wrote in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, "is its own time comprehended in thought" (26).[25] Nevertheless, many of the social, political, and philosophical challenges that confronted Hegel still demand attention. It seems to me that his work continues to provide philosophical resources for thinking about these challenges. Hegel's view of conflict and reconciliation—his social ethics—can help us think about the relationships and practices that sustain diverse communities.

Chapter 6 addresses the relationship between religion and philosophy. It responds to the worry that Hegel's claims about authority collapse into a naturalist view of norms and normativity that is incompatible with respect for religious difference. I engage with the work of contemporary Christian theologians concerned with the nature of authority and argue for the relevance of the Hegelian account to these concerns. While the Hegelian standpoint is at odds with some religious views, it embraces a set of practices for engaging with one another across such differences and disagreements. Finally, chapter 7 offers an account of democratic authority based in the relationships and practices of citizens. In a democratically organized community, citizens' relationships are relationships of reciprocal recognition. Insofar as we call ourselves democrats, we ought to be committed to cultivating practices in which we recognize one another's authority and hold one another accountable. These practices include some, but not all, forms of contestation and conflict, as well as practices of reconciliation. I offer examples of what such relationships and practices have looked like in democratic organizing and restorative justice.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* offers an account of the relationships, rituals, and other social practices through which norms are created and transformed, and through which they gain or lose their authority over people and communities. The task of this book is to understand Hegel's claims about what those relationships and practices are and how they work, and to suggest how his social ethics can contribute to how we think about, and do, democracy in our own diverse communities.

INDEX