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# The structure and method of Hegel's Phenomenology

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PHILIP J. KAIN

## The Structure and Method of Hegel's *Phenomenology*

H. S. Harris is one of the great Hegel scholars of our era. I want to present a view different from his of how Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is organized, what it is trying to do, and where it is trying to go. I hope my disagreements with Professor Harris will succeed in being dialectical, that is, that they will give rise to contradiction that allows for the generation of further insight.

The proclaimed task of the *Phenomenology* is to educate, train, or culture ordinary consciousness, to raise it to the level of what Hegel calls "science"—or true knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The *Phenomenology* is a movement from the simplest form of knowledge, sense knowledge, all the way to absolute knowing, that is, total, all-encompassing knowledge.

At this point it is impossible to define the Absolute. We can, however, say that absolute knowing is taken to be absolute in several senses: (1) It grasps absolutely all reality. Like the traditional God, it is total. There is no reality except what is present to absolute consciousness, no thing-in-itself left outside, nothing at all outside.<sup>2</sup> (2) It is absolutely true, not just in the sense that it involves no mistakes, errors, or illusions, but in the older sense of true

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1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 3, 15-16, 50 (hereafter *PhS* in the text).

2. I do not wish to suggest that the Absolute is a transcendent, onto-theological reality. I view it as a cultural construction—a view, however, that I will have to develop elsewhere.

as when one speaks of a "true friend," one who lives up to the concept, the ideal, the essence, of friendship.<sup>3</sup> The Absolute is truth fully realized—the highest truth. There is nothing higher. (3) It is also absolutely present, accessible, and open to consciousness, not merely implicit or in potential. It has been actualized and fully manifested in appearance. (4) It is also absolute freedom. It is not other to me, outside, an obstacle. It is not heteronomous. I am fully at home with it. It is absolutely mine—my very identity.

The *Phenomenology*, as it proceeds, sets out different forms of consciousness for our examination and moves ordinary consciousness along until it finally reaches and accepts the Absolute. We have full actuality only when we get to the Absolute. Short of that, something is missing. Hegel holds a doctrine of internal relations. "Everything that exists stands in a relationship, and this relationship is what is genuine in every existence" (*EL*, 204, also 193-94).<sup>4</sup> To adequately understand anything—its essence—we must understand its relationship to other things, the whole, the Absolute. The central argument of the *Phenomenology* is that we will not be able to adequately explain the simplest form of consciousness without being driven to bring in more and more complex forms of consciousness, and ultimately that we will be forced all the way to the Absolute.

Only the Absolute provides an adequate conceptual scheme. Each stage of the *Phenomenology*, we discover, lacks something. To handle what is missing will require a more complex and inclusive conceptual scheme that will include all that the earlier scheme did plus what it could not. In this way we uncover the presuppositions necessary to explain our experience. And to do so adequately, Hegel thinks, ultimately requires a paradigm that will include all reality.

Hegel starts with the most basic awareness, awareness of simple sensation. From there he moves step by step through ever more complex forms of experience. He watches each as it tries to give an adequate account of its self-sufficiency. Each and every one fails to do so, and we must move on to a

3. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 59-60, 287-88 (hereafter *EL*).

4. See also *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities P, 1989), 86 (hereafter *SL*).

more complex form of consciousness. If any earlier form of consciousness were actually able to justify itself as self-sufficient, then Hegel's project would fail. We would need go no further. We would have a philosophical account of experience that did not require the Absolute. But, for Hegel, each earlier stage does fail and we must move on until we reach the Absolute; only it will be able to justify itself.

In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel claims that the *Phenomenology* gives us a justification (*Rechtfertigung*), a deduction (*Deduction*), of the existence of the Absolute. What Hegel is saying here, I think, is that the mode of argument that the *Phenomenology* uses to establish the Absolute is the same sort of argument that Kant called a transcendental deduction (*Deduction*), and which Kant used to establish the legitimacy (*Rechtmässigkeit*) of the categories (*SL*, 48-49).<sup>5</sup> For Kant, we have ordered experience—that is something that it is simply impossible to deny. His transcendental deduction proceeded, then, by asking *how* we have this experience; we seek the transcendental conditions that make this ordered experience possible. The categories of the understanding, Kant thinks, are those conditions. If we can show, then, that the only possible way to have ordered experience is through the categories of the understanding, then we have given a deduction of the categories, justified them, proven them (*CPR*, B126-A94, A97, A125, B161). This is what Hegel is doing in the *Phenomenology*. We begin by setting out our experience, though we end up setting out far more complex forms of experience than Kant attended to. As we set out these forms of experience, we try to explain how it is possible to have them, we seek the conditions that make this experience possible, we seek to justify it, and ultimately we are led all the way to the Absolute. Anything short of that will fail to account for the total range of our experience.

How can one set about proving the existence of the Absolute? How can one prove a first principle? One certainly cannot deduce it by logically deriving it from other

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5. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B116-A85 (hereafter *CPR*); I have used the Norman Kemp Smith translation (New York: St. Martin's P, 1965) but cite the standard A and B edition pagination.

principles (*SL*, 530).<sup>6</sup> If one thinks the existence of the Absolute is buried in the premises one starts with, and one tries to draw the Absolute out of them, logically deduce it, one can succeed in proving the Absolute only if the starting premises have been proven. But if they are *starting* premises they obviously have *not* been proven. To prove them, the starting premises would have to be derived from other premises, and those in their turn from others, and so on *ad infinitum*. One would have an unproven and unprovable starting point—as Fichte thinks we must.<sup>7</sup> If there were some other way to establish the necessity of a starting point, find some sort of Cartesian, indubitable, Archimedian point, then we would have to consider such an approach. But, as we shall see in “Sense-Certainty,” Hegel does not seem to start in this way. He does not start off with something undeniable and indubitable. In fact, he almost instantly finds sense-certainty quite deniable and doubtable, as he does every other stage until the Absolute. Moreover, the *Phenomenology* just does not proceed by laying down and establishing true propositions from which we go on to logically deduce further true propositions. Nor does Hegel even proceed as Fichte did, by laying down a fundamental principle and then showing it to be impossible unless we presuppose further conditions (*SKW*, 25). It is not even a “progressive discovery of *truth*,” as Harris has it.<sup>8</sup> Instead, for Hegel, at every stage we find that our account will not hold, that it is somehow inadequate, incomplete, false at least in certain respects, and that we must go on to more

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6. Some scholars do seem to think that the Absolute is logically deduced; see Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 82. Also, Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1974), 157. Richard Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1976), 117-18.

7. Johann Fichte, *Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), 12, 24 (hereafter *SKW*). Also Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1977), 103, 105. See also W. T. Stace, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (New York: Dover, 1955), 89-115.

8. H. S. Harris, *Hegel: Phenomenology and System* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 19 (hereafter *HP&S*).

complex presuppositions, until we finally reach the Absolute. The *Phenomenology* is a "pathway of doubt," a "way of despair," a "thoroughgoing scepticism" (*PhS*, 49-50).

Like Kant, Hegel starts out from experience. We cannot deny that we experience a tree, a white cube of salt, a force, and so forth. Hegel certainly does not think that there is nothing to question and no room for deception in such experience—in fact, he very obviously thinks there is a great deal of deception and a lot to question. We may even have it completely wrong. In any experience, then, there is something that demands explanation, something we must try to understand. So Hegel sets these experiences out from the simplest to the most complex and examines traditional attempts to understand and explain them. Each explanation fails. In this way, Hegel's approach is a negative one. Thus, unlike Fichte, he does not have the burden of justifying any principle, position, or theory; he does not have to give us, or defend, his own explanation—until the very end when he arrives at the Absolute. His method for proving the reality of the Absolute, then, is to keep setting out more and more complex forms of experience that demand explanation, and to demolish any explanations of this experience that are simpler than the Absolute—thus to show us that this Absolute is the only explanation of our experience.

As long as we can point to something that counts as experience, we can ask what makes that experience possible and seek the conditions necessary for its possibility. We must account for every experience that can be brought up and we must give the conceptual presuppositions sufficient to explain the possibility of that experience. Each stage fails, but not in every sense. Along the way, we accumulate a good deal of explanation—or potential explanation. It is just that experience has not been explained completely. We finally need a paradigm with enough scope to include everything, take it all up, make it a part of a whole, and leave nothing out. Hegel's approach is a bit like Plato's. One cannot logically deduce the Forms; instead we use dialectic. We seek the necessary presuppositions for any type of knowledge. We move backward through these presuppositions until we reach the Forms.<sup>9</sup> This is crucially

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9. *Republic*, 509d-516c.

important because many readers assume that the *Phenomenology* proceeds by necessary logical deduction, that each successive stage is logically derived from what precedes. Kojève (82) and Hyppolite (157) hold such views. So do Stace (54, 308-9) and Norman (16), but then they find that such logical necessity fails, or seems arbitrary or obscure. Readers notoriously are unable to see the necessity in moving from one form of consciousness to the next. This perplexity arises from mistakenly assuming that each stage is supposed to be logically derived from the preceding.

Other commentators give up on logical deduction and try to find different forms of necessity in the movement from one stage to the next. Harris suggests that each stage "generates a new 'shape,'" yet that the "transition is necessary." It is "actually a logical *result*" in the sense that it is "the answer to the problem that emerged as critically important in our lives when we were living within the earlier categorical framework" (*HP&S*, 18-19, 34-35).<sup>10</sup> For Georg Lukács, the necessity is dialectical—each stage resolves contradictions found on a lower level. For Judith Butler, it is desire which drives the Hegelian subject on toward the Absolute. We might argue that the necessity is presuppositional; the *Phenomenology* sets out the presuppositions necessary to explain our experience. Donald Phillip Verene admits that one stage is not logically deduced from another, but thinks there is still necessity to be found in the *Phenomenology*; he argues that we move from one stage to the next by ingenuity and wit, by Hegel acting behind the scenes as a stage hand.<sup>11</sup> Verene is quite correct about how the *Phenomenology* moves from one stage to the next, but how this involves necessity, and what sort of necessity it is, he does not make clear. I also have no trouble with dialectic or desire. For Hegel, all we need do is present reason with something that it does not know and reason will be driven to grasp it, encompass it, and will never be satisfied short of totality. In fact, a claim for totality can be found at every

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10. Also, see Harris, *Hegel's Ladder*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), *The Pilgrimage of Reason* I: 67, 263 (hereafter *HL*).

11. Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1975), 188. Judith P. Butler, *Subjects of Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987). Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection* (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1985), 20-22, 64, 67.

stage of the *Phenomenology*. Each form of consciousness implies that it will give us all knowledge that is possible, significant, or meaningful. All else is impossible or unimportant. Ordinary consciousness comes on the stage quite sure of itself, unaware of any problems, feels that it knows all there is to know, and naively thinks it can explain it all perfectly well without anything so elaborate as the Absolute being necessary. When it fails, another form of consciousness will rush in to show that it can do better. We do have some sort of necessity here—something that will keep us moving on toward the Absolute, something that generates a new shape or gives us an answer to an earlier problem. Moreover, I myself have already argued that the *Phenomenology* tries to get at the presuppositions necessary to explain our experience. But the fact that we are driven to go on to another stage after each stage fails, or the fact that later stages resolve contradictions or problems in earlier stages, even the fact that later stages give us the presuppositions necessary for the possibility of experience described at earlier stages, none of this logically deduces the next stage, none of this tells us ahead of time *what* we must move on to, none of this gives us ahead of time the *specific details* of what the next stage must look like. Hegel himself admits that the movement from stage to stage is presented to consciousness without it understanding how it happened—it proceeds behind the back of consciousness (*PhS*, 56).

Moreover, whatever sort of necessity might be involved in desire, dialectic, or the generation of new shapes which keep us moving on toward the Absolute, it certainly could not be taken to *prove* the existence of this Absolute. Desire, dialectic, consciousness in general lead on to a lot of things in the course of the *Phenomenology*. None hold up for very long. Even if we admit that desire, dialectic, or whatever, leads us to the Absolute, is that going to make us accept the existence of this monster? If logical deduction is ruled out, to have a proof we need a transcendental deduction; we must show that without the Absolute we cannot have the sort of experience we do have. We must show that the Absolute is a necessary presupposition of our experience. Presuppositional necessity, then, *is* fundamental in the *Phenomenology*—without it we would have no proof of the Absolute.

What else do we need, then, to understand the sort of necessity that moves us from stage to stage in the *Phenom-*



*enology*? Frithjof H. Bergmann draws our attention to an important form of necessity that we find in Hegel, namely, necessity for a purpose—necessity in order to reach a goal.<sup>12</sup> We might call this strategic necessity. If we want to get to x, then it is necessary to discover the steps that can get us there. If we want to reach the Absolute, it is necessary to find our way through such and such stages. If we are to give a transcendental deduction of the Absolute, it is necessary to uncover the conceptual presuppositions needed to explain experience. If we are to explain the sort of necessity found between stages in the *Phenomenology*, we cannot ignore strategic necessity. Once we get to the Absolute, we can look back and see that the steps that got us there were necessary. We would not have gotten there if we had taken a wrong turn, left out this or that crucial step, or ignored religion, or culture, and so forth. This necessity, completely unlike logical deduction, tells us nothing ahead of time about the details of what the next stage must be.

What is needed is to show that each stage fails. But nothing specific necessarily follows from that failure—certainly the next stage is not logically deduced. As each stage fails, we simply take up another form of consciousness. We look for more complex presuppositions that can include the accomplishments of the earlier stages and overcome their failures. It is we who make the leap to the next stage in order to overcome the inadequacies of the preceding stages. We are constructing a deduction in the Kantian sense. We try to dig out the presuppositions necessary to explain experience. There is no problem with transitions from stage to stage. Hegel strategically thinks up the next stage himself. Hegel selects the example he thinks will work best to make his point. Hegel selects the sort of experience that will lead us to realize that more complex conceptual presuppositions are necessary. Hegel selects what examples he wants so long as things are arranged to lead us to see that the Absolute is ultimately necessary to coherently account for all our experience.

Stephen Houlgate claims that the method of the *Phenomenology* does not depend at all upon strategic assumptions made by Hegel. Hegel need assume nothing. All he need do

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12. Frithjof H. Bergmann, "The Purpose of Hegel's System," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 2 (1964): 189-204, esp. 191.

is attend to the ways in which the various forms of consciousness criticize and transform themselves—Hegel simply looks on as they call themselves into question.<sup>13</sup> These metaphors do capture something about the experience of reading Hegel—one category or form of consciousness just seems to transform itself into another on its own. Harris speaks of their evolution or generation (*HP&S*, 18, *HL*, I:184-85). But to take these metaphors literally, or even to take them very far, will reify thought. They already make Hegel a passive onlooker and his thought something that merely happens to him. They cloak Hegel's very real strategic activity. Hegel definitely decides a great many things himself. He decides in what order to take things up. He decides what examples of consciousness will best lead toward the presuppositions he thinks we must make: fighting and lordship and bondage rather than love to get us to self-consciousness. Most of the examples he takes up could have been different. To get where he wanted to go, he could have chosen other examples than Stoicism, Unhappy Consciousness, Physiognomy, Antigone, and so forth. Moreover, Hegel interprets each stage in terms of concrete literary or historical examples and picks out the specific problems he wants to focus on. The abstract stages themselves do not show us every problem they can or do have. Hegel strategically selects examples to lead us toward the Absolute.

Yet each stage fails on its own—in the sense that we do not need to import an external criterion of truth (*PhS*, 53-54). We do not judge each stage against a norm of absolute truth that Hegel brings onto the scene to show us what has gone wrong. That would be to presuppose this norm—ultimately it would be to merely presuppose the Absolute. We must prove the existence of the Absolute—we must show it to be a *necessary* presupposition. In each stage, Hegel takes up a more complex and encompassing conceptual scheme or set of presuppositions in order to explain experience, and each time the explanation will fail on its own terms. Something will not fit, something will be left out, something will be unexplained. Only the Absolute will finally succeed.

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13. Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991), 71.

In a single article, I cannot trace the details of Hegel's deduction throughout the entire *Phenomenology*. So I will just attend to the first three chapters and give a reading of them that is different from Harris's (*HL*, I: 208-315). In my view, in each and every one of these chapters—"Sense-Certainty," "Perception," and "Force and the Understanding"—Kant is at the conceptual center of the issues treated. These three chapters, I argue, begin Hegel's deduction and closely follow Kant's transcendental deduction, especially as Kant laid it out in the A edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*CPR*, A95-A130).

Kant says, "If each representation were completely foreign to every other, standing apart in isolation, no such thing as knowledge would ever arise. For knowledge is [essentially] a whole in which representations stand compared and connected." (*CPR*, A97).<sup>14</sup> Coherent experience, Kant argues in the A edition, requires a threefold synthesis: a synthesis of apprehension in intuition, a synthesis of reproduction in imagination, and a synthesis of recognition in a concept. These are not three separate steps; they are inseparable moments of one synthesis (*CPR*, A102, A120-A121). For knowledge to be possible, the manifold of sensation must be run through and held together. In the synthesis of apprehension, for Kant, the imagination takes up impressions, apprehends them, forms them into an image, and makes them modifications of the mind belonging to inner sense and thus subject to time. For Kant, inner intuition or inner sense is thoroughly temporal. Our representations appear to us successively in time. They are ordered, connected, and related in time (*CPR*, A98-A100, A120).

This synthesis of apprehension, however, cannot by itself give us ordered experience. A second synthesis is necessary. The mind must reinstate preceding perceptions alongside subsequent perceptions and hold them together in a temporal series. We need to retain, remember, and reproduce perceptions. We need a synthesis of reproduction in imagination (*CPR*, A100-A101, A121). If I try to "think of the time from one noon to another," Kant tells us, and "if I were always to drop out of thought the preceding representations . . . [if I] did not reproduce them while advancing to those

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14. Brackets in the original.

that follow," then, he says, "not even the . . . most elementary representations . . . could arise" (*CPR*, A102). We must be aware that what we think is the same as what we thought a moment before (*CPR*, A103). Otherwise we would have disjointed chaos. We would not be able to connect earlier and later perceptions of an event or object—they would not belong together for us. We would have no "experience" of the event or object.

Still, even this is not enough. Representations, if they are to give rise to knowledge, cannot be reproduced in any old order just as they happen to come together accidentally. The reproduction, Kant thinks, must conform to a rule according to which a perception is connected with some one representation rather than another (*CPR*, A121). The concepts or categories of the understanding provide these rules—rules for the necessary reproduction of the manifold (*CPR*, A103, A106; also B233-A201). A third synthesis, then, is necessary. A synthesis of recognition in a concept is necessary to determine the specific order, relation, and reproduction of representations. The only way to grasp these succeeding and remembered moments in one cognition and to unify these sensations into one object is through a concept which embraces, organizes, and unifies them. Without this concept we would not have an object, but merely a disjointed series of isolated, remembered sensations. And without this conceptualization we would not have a unified consciousness to grasp this unified object.

This threefold synthesis, it is clear, also requires a unity of consciousness—Kant calls it the transcendental unity of apperception (*CPR*, A106-A107). For Hume, there was no fixed, stable, unified self that could be experienced. When we turn to inner sense, we experience nothing but a flux of shifting and changing ideas, images, impressions, and feelings.<sup>15</sup> Kant agrees with Hume that we never *experience* a unified self (*CPR*; A106-A107). But for Kant there must be a unified self, without which the diverse multitude of sensations and the temporal flux that constitutes inner sense would not belong to a single consciousness and thus could not belong to me. The flux must be unified within a single self for experience to be possible—or else this flux of

15. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 251-63.

images would not be *my* flux of images. It would not be *my* experience. There would then be no experience—but “merely a blind play of representations, less even than a dream” (CPR, A112, A122, B132-B133).

I want to argue that the first three chapters of Hegel's *Phenomenology* follow and comment upon Kant's treatment of the threefold synthesis of the imagination. At the same time, they criticize Kant and try to get beyond his unknown thing-in-itself. Chapter I, “Sense-Certainty,” takes up immediate sensation and treats it simply as apprehended, that is, as if we had a synthesis of apprehension, the first moment of the threefold synthesis, but without going any further, without having a synthesis of reproduction or a synthesis of recognition. We quickly see that this fails. We cannot even hold impressions together through time. So in Chapter II, “Perception,” we go on to include a synthesis of reproduction, the second moment of the threefold synthesis, memory holding together a series of representations through time. Here we get a thing and its properties—which recalls the empiricism of John Locke. This runs into various troubles because we have not as yet included a synthesis of recognition in a concept. In Chapter III, “Force and the Understanding,” where we finally arrive at Kant's categories or concepts of the understanding, we include the third part of the threefold synthesis, and we come to see that we must understand objects as conceptual relations.<sup>16</sup>

In “Sense-Certainty,” we start with simple, immediate, and seemingly indubitable sensation, an as yet unorganized manifold of isolated sensations. We certainly do not have conceptually organized objects, but, as Hegel puts it, merely a “This.” We have a “Here” and a “Now”—a spatial “Here” and a temporal “Now”—making up a “This.” We point to it, indicate it, mean it. We can say no more about it (*PhS*, 59-60).

But even as we do so, we discover that we really have no pure immediacy before us; we really have no “Here,” or

16. For evidence that Hegel sees the importance of the Kantian threefold synthesis, see *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 208-10. Also *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1977), 69-70. Also *First Philosophy of Spirit*, in *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit*, ed. and trans. H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox (Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1979), 219-21.

"Now," or "This," but only *instances* of them. The "Here" and the "Now" change. Night changes into day. As I turn my head, the tree disappears and I see a house. The indicated referent does not remain; it will not hold stable; it is not preserved. If "Now" is night, Hegel says, let us write it down, "a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our preserving it." But the next time we look, it is noon and our truth "has become stale" (*PhS*, 59-60). The "Now" changes, is different, has a different referent. We have ignored the role of time. "This" will not indicate the same referent through time. The "This" will not indicate the unity of an object through time. We have ignored the synthesis of reproduction in imagination. We have ignored memory—we forget (*PhS*, 64).

Hegel wants us to see that "Here," "Now," "This" really refer to universals. No "This" will indicate a sensuous particular. Any "This" can indicate any and all "Heres," "Nows," "Thises." Language can never say, can never express in words, the sensuous particular that we mean (*PhS*, 60). Hegel is headed in the same direction as Kant here. We cannot have knowledge simply of isolated, given sensations. Knowledge involves universals—it requires concepts.

What we are driven to, for Hegel, is a "Now" of many "Nows," a "Here" of many "Heres"—a plurality holding together as a universal. We have a "Now" which is a process, a passing of "Nows" in time (*PhS*, 64, 66). Time, then, is an inescapable element of any sensation. And thus a synthesis of reproduction is a necessary element of any organized experience. The series of isolated sensations must be held together, remembered, reproduced, through time.

In Chapter II, "Perception," we begin with what Sense-Certainty drove us to—a "This" of many "Thises," a "Now" of many "Nows." We have an entity that holds together—a universal that holds together particular moments. To use the language of empiricists, we have a thing of many properties (*PhS*, 66-67). Empiricism, Hegel claims in the *Logic*, elevates the brute facts of sensation to general ideas (*EL*, 77). What Hegel means here, I think, is that we have the idea of many sensations or qualities held together as a thing; in other words, basically a Lockean substance—an idea (signifying we know not what) holding together many

properties.<sup>17</sup> To use Kant's language, we have now included the second moment of the threefold synthesis—a synthesis of reproduction in imagination. We have a holding together, a remembering, a reproducing, of sensations through time. However, we do not yet have the third moment—a synthesis of recognition in a concept. The Lockean idea of a substance signifying we know not what falls short, we shall see, of Kantian categories. Hegel, in *Faith and Knowledge* (78), even claims that Kant's views are an extension of Locke's.

So Hegel takes up a suitable example, a bit of salt, a thing that has several properties—it is white, tart, cubical. These properties are taken to be separate, distinguishable, and indifferent to each other as well as to the salt as a whole. As Hegel puts it, they are connected by an indifferent "Also"—the salt is white, *also* tart, *also* cubical. But at the same time, these properties are all held together in a unity. And so, besides these "Alsos," we have a "One" (*PhS*, 68-69).

How do we explain how these properties are unified in the salt, are a "One," yet at the same time are "Alsos," are separate, distinguishable (we can distinguish the color from the taste, the taste from the shape, and so forth)? Where Hegel is headed here is to show us that if the thing-property model, the substance model, will not explain things, we will have to move toward a doctrine of internal relations.

Let us try, as empiricism did, to attribute the separateness to the subject. It is the subject's perception that distinguishes the whiteness from the tartness and from the cubicalness; and the subject will also accept responsibility for any distortion of the object brought about in this process. We have Locke's notion of secondary qualities. The thing is white only to our eyes, tart only to our tongue. Secondary qualities (colors, sounds, tastes) exist only in the mind and are not thought to resemble anything in the object (*PhS*, 70, 72, Locke, 134-35, 137). On the other hand, the unity we will attribute to the thing or substance itself—to primary qualities (solidity, extension, mobility, figure) that are supposed to exist independently on their own in the thing just as they appear to us.

The problem is that while we can attribute unity to the thing or substance, we cannot, as George Berkeley pointed

17. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 95, 175, 295-97.

out, *perceive* that unity. All we perceive are secondary qualities, the "Alsos," the whiteness, the tartness. Primary qualities cannot be perceived except through secondary qualities—we cannot, for example, identify shape without color. And even the primary qualities are separable. So, we never perceive the substance, the unity, the "salt itself," as something beneath the whiteness, tartness, or cubicalness. Hegel concludes, as did Berkeley, that we can simply dispense with the substance. The thing itself is nothing but the qualities—the whiteness, tartness, cubicalness (*PhS*, 73).<sup>18</sup>

At this point, we have completely reversed ourselves. We can no longer say that the diversity, the separateness, is due to the subject and the unity to the object. We find no unity in the object—it is nothing but a diversity, a separateness, the "Alsos." We find that the subject has merely projected a unity into the object (*PhS*, 73-74). The substance is merely an idea we add to the distinguishable qualities. The unity then is due to the subject and the diversity to the object—precisely the opposite of what we started with.

Let us, then, try a different tack. Let us try making the subject responsible for both sides—for the unity, the unifying, of the object, and also for distinguishing the various qualities or properties (*PhS*, 74). This is no longer a Lockean substance but merely a Berkeleyan object of perception. Hegel also has Kant in mind here (*EL*, 85-86). The thing is merely what appears, what can be perceived, and that is all. The thing is whiteness, tartness, cubicalness; the oneness is produced by our perception, the unity of our consciousness, that holds it all together.

What we have then is a thing that presents itself as a unity for-consciousness, but in-itself it is seen as diverse. This raises big problems. The thing is taken both as something in-itself and as something for-consciousness. And the thing is something *different* for-consciousness from what it is in-itself. It is a one for-consciousness and diverse in-itself. We have a split object. Moreover, the thing is one (a unity) only for-*another*. The thing only gets its oneness for-itself through *another*. So, to be one (unified) the thing must

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18. George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: Nelson and Sons, 1949), 2: 44-45.



be *other* than itself, that is, to get its oneness it must *not be one*—it must be something besides itself. It must also be something for-consciousness, for-another (*PhS*, 74-76).

This is an insurmountable problem for empiricism. The thing-property model or the substance model will not work. It will not explain the thing's unity (oneness) that exists only for-another (for-consciousness). The only way to understand this is as a *relation*—a relation grasped by *concepts*.

In "Force and the Understanding," we reach the third moment of the threefold synthesis—the synthesis of recognition in a concept. However, the consciousness there on the stage has not yet become aware of the transcendental unity of apperception. Consciousness does not yet see that the unity of the object is due to the unity of consciousness; that is, consciousness does not yet see that, or does not yet see the degree to which, consciousness constitutes the object. We still have an understanding that sits back and observes its object as if the object were just given to it from outside, or as if the object were anchored in an unknown thing-in-itself—a view that Hegel also wants to undermine as he proceeds in this chapter. He wants to begin to move beyond Kant.

The first question that arises, I suppose, is why Hegel discusses *force*? Hegel moves from simple experience to more complex experience and, at each stage, he chooses an example appropriate to the point he wants to make. Here he chooses force because it is a perfect example of a phenomenon that is unexplainable on the substance model or the thing-property model. It can only be understood as a relation grasped by concepts.

What is force? Force appears, is expressed, when another object approaches and attracts, repulses, or excites it. Think of two magnets. There is no actual contact between the two as there is with Hume's billiard balls. There is no connecting or transmitting medium. The influence (the attraction or repulsion) is not a mechanical operating on the other. It makes no sense to speak of a thing or substance transmitting motion as a property to another thing (*PhS*, 85). You can only speak of interaction—relations—within a field. In

the *Jena System of 1804-5* (49-51, 55), Hegel explicitly claims that force is not a substance but a relation.<sup>19</sup>

Force is nothing but an interaction occurring in a field. Force exists only if it is expressed. When the magnets come close enough together, force appears. When they are far enough apart, it disappears. Perception was unable to reconcile being one for-another and being diverse in-itself. Force has not the slightest difficulty with this. What force is in-itself, it is through its expression, through its relation to another. It expresses itself only when the other magnet approaches. Thus, only insofar as force is for-another is it what it is in-itself. Moreover, when force is expressed, it is diverse; when it is driven back into itself, it is one (*PhS*, 80-82, 86, *JS*, 54). Thus, it is one in-itself and diverse for-another. Yet it is what it is in-itself (one) only through its relation to another (diversity).

Force is a complex relation between the two magnets, not a perceivable thing or substance or secret power. It is a relation. Moreover, force is not an *external* relation. We do not have two things or substances that can be related externally as with Humean billiard balls. Force is quintessentially an *internal* relation—and, I suggest, that is what Hegel is after. The very essence of force is that it exists solely through the other. Force cannot be what it is except in its relation to another (*PhS*, 86, also 82, 100, Hyppolite, 130, also 122). The other is part of its essence.

All we experience, then, is a play of forces. We see forces appear and vanish—a flux of forces. That is all. To project a substance behind this appearance explains nothing. What understanding grasps, then, is only the relation, the appearance, the flux. Nor does understanding grasp any inner workings or mechanism. Nevertheless, Hegel suggests, we yearn to project something behind the appearance. The inner remains, in Humean or Kantian fashion, a mere beyond (*PhS*, 86-88). What is this beyond? Consciousness wants to call it (and Kant did call it) the thing-in-itself, which does not appear—an *unknown* thing-in-itself.

Consciousness just assumes it must be there. Consciousness wants it to be there, needs it there. Consciousness

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19. Hegel, *The Jena System, 1804-5*, trans. John W. Burbidge and George di Giovanni, with intro. and notes H. S. Harris (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1986), 49-51, 55 (hereafter *JS*).

posits the inner as an explanation of the manifestation of force. The inner explains the unity—the connection—of forces. The appearance is pure flux—interactions appearing and disappearing. The inner is the unity that continues through this flux—a lawlike inner unity. Consciousness takes this inner to be the in-itself, a supersensible world, the true world, a beyond. Hegel says that this is the first dim appearance of reason in the *Phenomenology* (*PhS*, 87-88). He is obviously referring to Kant's ideas of reason—regulative ideas that allow us to treat nature as if it were unified and consistent. As we shall see, for Hegel as for Kant, there is something like a transcendental illusion involved here, though, for Hegel, in very much the opposite sense of Kant (*CPR*, A297-B354, A314-B371, A644-B673, A653-B682, A698=B726).

In both the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, Hegel suggests that we are driven to go behind, within, to find a unity, a set of laws, a lawlike explanation (*EL*, 53). Hegel calls it a "*Reich der Gesetze*," a realm or kingdom of laws (*PhS*, 91). For Kant the thing-in-itself was found not only behind any given experience of particular things but, in the Transcendental Dialectic, nature as a whole was also taken to be a thing-in-itself. The unity of nature as a whole could never be experienced but was assumed as a regulative idea. Hegel wants to focus on the thing-in-itself not just behind particular things—a specific appearance-disappearance of force—but much more importantly behind the unity of the whole of physical nature. Understanding and natural science need a concept of a unified nature. For science to be possible, for the understanding to carry out its work, Kant thought, we must assume that nature is unified and consistent (*CPR*, A653-B682, A670-B701, A678=B706, A686=B715, A698=B726). The same laws that explain terrestrial motion must be consistent with the laws that explain planetary motion. One set of laws must be subsumable under higher sets of laws (*PhS*, 91).

Understanding demands this regulative idea, this kingdom of laws. But, if we admit that consciousness needs, assumes, projects this kingdom of laws, how can we say that it is unknown? It is a need, a creation, a positing of the understanding. The distinction between the flux of appearance and an inner world is a distinction made by consciousness. To organize the flux of appearance, understanding

posits an inner world, a beyond, a unity, a kingdom of laws. In doing this, consciousness takes itself to be talking about a real, independent, inner world, actually there behind the scenes. But we see that consciousness simply made a distinction between appearances and an inner, supersensible thing-in-itself. We see that the supersensible beyond simply arises from the world of appearance and, as Hegel puts it, that appearance is its essence and only filling (*PhS*, 89).

Hegel will resist this drive of consciousness to project a world beyond, a true world, an unknown thing-in-itself. In the *Logic*, Hegel says that the Absolute is not far away in a world beyond. It is always directly before us. We always carry it with us (*EL*, 59). We must just learn to see how. In the *Phenomenology*, he says: "behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen" (*PhS*, 103).<sup>20</sup>

Hegel denies that the thing-in-itself is *unknown*. It is not unknown because we construct it. There is nothing there unless we ourselves go behind the curtain to construct it. And what is it we construct? An inner, a beyond, an empty abstraction. It looks like an unknown thing-in-itself because it has no content to be known. But nothing is more easily known—it is merely the empty concept of an other world, a beyond, an unknown. It is merely an empty concept, whose only filling or content comes from appearance (*EL*, 87, *PhS*, 89).

At this point, Hegel says we have moved from consciousness on to self-consciousness (*PhS*, 103) because we see that the thing-in-itself, the inner, the kingdom of laws is constructed by consciousness. Self-consciousness grasps appearances-for-consciousness as well as the thing-in-itself, which we now see is just another kind of appearance-for-consciousness. The content of self-consciousness is completely contained within consciousness. We have—though the consciousness does not see all of this yet—a transcendental unity of apperception. All objects lie within this unified consciousness, and in opposition to Kant there is no

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20. Italics in the text.

unknown thing-in-itself. The transcendental illusion involved here is not what Kant thought it was. It is not that we mistakenly claim to know the unknowable thing-in-itself as we try to go beyond experience to know the whole of nature, as we assume that nature is unified and consistent, a kingdom of laws. The transcendental illusion is rather that, in going behind the curtain, in constructing the thing-in-itself, the beyond, the kingdom of laws, we do not notice that in fact we ourselves do this constructing and that nothing is more easily known than the thing constructed.

Let us take stock and see where we are. If we construct the unity of nature, as Hegel argues in his discussion of the kingdom of laws and as even Kant would admit in his discussion of regulative ideas, and if, for Hegel, we also thereby construct the thing-in-itself which is thus known, then we cannot say that what we construct is mere appearance cut off from an unknown thing-in-itself. We must concede that we construct the unity of nature as reality. This, then, immediately poses a problem regarding the subject. The individual Kantian subject cannot construct the unity of nature as reality. Reality constructed by individual subjects would lead to a subjectivist chaos. We must begin, then, to understand the subject differently, to get beyond a Kantian individual subject, and on toward an absolute subject.

Hegel takes the rest of the *Phenomenology* to complete his proof of the Absolute, and it is impossible to follow him here. But perhaps the following can help. For Kant, we have ordered experience. If we can state the necessary conditions or presuppositions for our having this ordered experience, we can give a deduction of those presuppositions. For Kant what is presupposed is the operation of the categories of the understanding. For Hegel, categories or concepts of a much more complex sort are necessary for ordered experience to be possible. But we also note that for Hegel consciousness must be responsible for the constitution of a great deal more order in experience than was the case for Kant. We cannot account for this order merely as order in Kantian phenomenal appearance. To construct reality, we must account for the order found in reality. Consciousness is responsible for all order in nature, culture, history, and the religious sphere. There is no other possible source for that order. What sorts of presuppositions must we make to explain this

enormous range of order? This should begin to make it clearer why we cannot get along with less than the Absolute. The whole of experienced reality is ordered. How did it become so? Individual consciousness might be able to order its own subjective experience understood as Kantian appearance, but not all of *reality*. Nothing short of the Absolute is going to be able to explain the totality of this order.

For Kant, the categories of the understanding constitute experience, but only local experience. Everything that can appear to us must appear to us as ordered by the categories. But what appears to us are only bits of nature. Nature as a whole never appears to us. And so while any bit of nature that appears to us will be unified by the categories of the understanding, the categories cannot unify nature as a whole. To think they can would be to think that the categories can be applied beyond experience to the thing-in-itself. Nevertheless, for Kant, it is necessary to assume that nature as a whole is unified. The very possibility of natural science, to say nothing of ordinary experience, depends upon it. We must assume that the laws of nature which hold in one part of nature are not arbitrarily suspended but also hold in the rest of nature that we have not experienced. We assume nature to be consistent. Laws of nature cannot contradict each other. Science as well as ordinary experience would flounder. For Kant, therefore, we must think of nature as if it were designed by a divine intelligence. We cannot know this. It is not given by the categories. We cannot apply the categories to the whole of nature, to the thing-in-itself. But we must take the unity and consistency of nature as a regulative idea (*CPR*, A644=B672, A653-B682, A670-B699, A672-B701, A677-B707, A686-B715).

One can almost hear Hegel chuckling in the background. Kant's move is perfectly transparent. Individual consciousness constructs the unity in nature. It just insists that the thing-in-itself remains unknown so it can get away with holding this unity to be a mere regulative idea, mere appearance, not reality. But if the thing-in-itself is our construction just as much as the regulative idea, then, for Hegel, we must face up to the fact that there is only one possible source of all the order we find in nature, and that is us. And if we cannot get away with claiming that what we order is mere appearance because we cannot pretend that

the thing-in-itself remains unknown, if we must admit that we order reality, then we must also go on to admit that we cannot order it as individual consciousnesses, but only as participating in absolute consciousness. If that is the only way to explain the order of nature, if all other attempts fail, then we must accept the Absolute.

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