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Consciousness and Objective Spirit in Hegel's *Phenomenology*

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I. System and *Phenomenology* In one sense it is a mistake to assert that the Hegelian System has an origin in time. If we take Hegel seriously, then the various objective moments the observation of which comprise the System (i.e., logic, nature, selves, historical events, art, religion, and philosophy) obviously exist prior to Hegel's explicit treatment of them. For Hegel, things exist before human thought. But, if the essence of Spirit is seen to be "freedom," Spirit's awareness of itself in its objects, then Spirit reaches completion only when the various objective elements with which the System deals are understood as moments of Spirit's own development by Spirit itself. This explicit awareness is, however, precisely the System. In this sense, therefore, the System does have its origin in time. At one specific temporal point, Spirit reaches full, conceptual understanding of itself. Similarly, at some moment in time, Spirit's object must become fully self-conscious, as this object is Spirit itself. It seems, then, that two specific conditions would be necessary for Spirit to evolve to a point where it can conceptually understand itself in a System of absolute knowledge. First, the Spiritual subject, that which is aware of itself in objectivity, whether this subject is personal or nonpersonal, must reach a level of development at which it can comprehend itself fully. A monkey, for example, does not suggest itself as such a subject. Second, that which this Spiritual subjectivity is aware of, Spiritual substance, must itself evolve to a position that explicitly indicates its spiritual nature. This, of course, means that that which Spirit is aware of must itself be self-conscious concerning its nature. This second condition cannot be met without the first being met, but perhaps the first can be fulfilled without the second.

These two conditions are obviously interrelated. Indeed, it almost appears that we have set up a distinction without any purpose. At the culminating point in the development of both Spiritual subject and Spiritual substance, the distinction between the two appears to break down. The very fact that Hegel has supplied us with both a System and a *Phenomenology* indicates, however, that there are two parallel but distinguishable lines of development toward absolute Spirit. Very roughly, these two parallel evolutions of Spirit correspond to the development in the *Phenomenology* and the development in the System; if you will, a subjective and an objective deduction of Absolute Spirit. The phenomenological evolution has as its moments the various attitudes of "consciousness

toward objectivity," a term Hegel uses to describe his informal history of modern philosophy in the introduction to the *Lesser Logic*. It would seem that Hegel is very clear in both Logics that the conceptual understanding of objectivity that comprises the System is possible only *after* this subjective evolution, or evolution of the Spiritual subject, is completed.

The Phenomenology of Spirit is the science of consciousness, the exposition of it, and that consciousness has for result the Notion of science, i.e., pure knowing. Logic, then, has for its presupposition the science of manifested spirit, which contains and demonstrates the necessity, and so the truth, of the standpoint occupied by pure knowing and its mediation.¹

This does *not* mean that knowing Spirit must have completed its rise to the concept of knowledge before the moments observed in the System make their objective appearance in time. It does mean, however, that the phenomenological development must be completed before these objective moments can be understood to comprise a System of Spirit's development. That is, to be self-conscious of itself in its object, Spirit must already have reached the stage of its conscious development, or development of consciousness or awareness, that is termed Absolute Knowledge in the *Phenomenology*.

The moments in the second development, the development I have called the "objective" evolution, are all characterized by their objectivity for conscious Spirit, though in themselves they are determinations of Spirit itself. There appear to be two damaging exceptions to this generalization. The various moments in the Logic are themselves categories of thought and thus seem to be shapes of consciousness rather than objectivity. Also, to some extent history, and much more definitely art, religion, and philosophy, all seem to be self-conscious activities of man. In regard to the first apparent exception to our generalization, the categories in the Logic, it should be noted that these are treated in a thoroughly "objective" manner in the System. That is, rather than viewing these categories as modes of cognition used by a concrete subject, Hegel is quite careful to view the various categories as they are in-themselves. This means, however, that the moments in the Logic are considered as differentiations within the Idea, and are viewed from a standpoint that is already established in the *Phenomenology*. They are thus objective to this absolute Spirit and finite manifestations of it, rather than concrete modes of cognition used by a finite subject. At some point in the development of Spiritual subjectivity, each of these pure concepts was used by a subjectivity. As they appear in the Logic, however, they are mere objects for this Absolute knowledge. Similarly, in regard to Objective and Absolute Spirit in the System, it is wise to remember that these are termed the Philosophy of History, the Philosophy of Art, and so on, and are *not* history, art, and so on. Instead of being treated as these activities appear to the performers of these actions, they are considered as they appear to a Spiritual Subjectivity that is already in possession of the Concept of Science. To be sure, the endpoints in the development of history, religion, and, most prominently, philosophy, are Spirit for themselves, or activities that themselves are aware of their Spiritual nature (that is why they are suitable *absolute* objects for Spiritual Subjectivity); but the devel-

¹ Hegel, *Werke*, 20 vols., ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969), 5:67; Hegel's *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), p. 68 (hereafter cited as *Logic*).

opment to these points is considered from the vantage of *already* developed Absolute knowledge.

It therefore seems that the question as to how Absolute Spirit can appear in time, or how a temporal origin of the System is possible, in fact covers two questions that are, in principle at least, distinct. First, how is it possible for consciousness or finite Spirit to raise itself, in time, to the perspective that allows for the possibility of understanding Spirit? Second, how is it possible for the objective fabric of historical being, community, and activity to attain to a historical position in time that allows a historical society to see its activities as embodiments of Spirit and allows the society to have a complete understanding of the events and activities that have led up to itself? The first question thus concerns the relationship of consciousness to time; the second concerns the relationship between history as a self-consciously purposive movement and time.

There is an almost universal tendency of Hegel's commentators to collapse these two issues into one problem. From the radically egological perspective of Kierkegaard, for example, the one crucial question refers to the reflection of the individual subject. From the historical viewpoint of Karl Löwith, on the other hand, the crucial Hegelian problem of the beginning is how some person or society immersed in history can attain a transcendent, aperspectival view of historical development. In yet a third way, the religious consciousness of Emil Fackenheim prompts him to a consideration of how the actual historical development of the Christian community could possibly account for the rise of absolute Spiritual self-knowledge. It is valuable to consider the reasons why these and other commentators have collapsed in various ways the two questions I have distinguished and to see whether these reasons are cogent.

Fackenheim asserts that "only on condition of the existence of this Reason in life can there be a true peace between it and that Reason which is speculative thought."² Fackenheim comes to this statement by way of a consideration of the proposition in the *Philosophy of Right* that the Rational is actual and the Actual is rational. This seemingly asserts unambiguously the Hegelian thesis that Spirit must realize itself in the mode of actual, objective reality. Looked at from this standpoint it seems that the only necessary and sufficient condition for the actualization of Absolute Spirit is the actualization of Spirit in a real, self-conscious existence in a form of life, in a Christian state. Löwith has essentially the same perspective. Only if Absolute Spirit is actually present in a historical society prior to or contemporary with Hegelian philosophy can the attempted synthesis of thought and being in that philosophy be adequate. In the *Phenomenology* itself, Hegel gives weight to this interpretation by taking Spirit through obviously communal forms of historical society and religion in its Spiritual odyssey. It is clear that Hegel means to assert that the absolute perspective is not attainable by a consciousness that grasps itself as radically individual, but only by the awareness that is conscious of its own intersubjective basis. It would therefore seem to follow that only in a secular and religious society that had attained to the level of development of its self-awareness that corresponded to Absolute Spirit could a deduction of the Concept of Science take place. Thus the condition for the realization of the subjective evolution would appear to be identical with the condition for the completion of the objective evolution: both would depend upon the historical realization of Absolute Spirit in communal life. Our two

² *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 208.

questions, then, while perhaps distinguishable in principle, in fact would resolve themselves to the one question of how the absolute historical society could evolve in time. Since this argument rests on the undeniable fact that the ultimate subject of the *Phenomenology* does not view itself as personal or individual and sees itself as, at least, intersubjectively based, it would seem that it is very powerful. The conditions for the two evolutions would seem to be identical. But there is a hidden flaw in this presentation.

The fact that an individual consciousness recognizes the possibility of itself to rest upon an intersubjective or communal foundation does not mean that all individuals contemporaneous with such an individual recognize this, or that the society in which they live embodies this realization in its thoughts or institutions. As Findlay says, the *Phenomenology* is stated "in terms of biographical subjectivity";³ it is the self-transcendence of individual consciousness by individual consciousness. It may in fact turn out, upon close reading of the *Phenomenology*, that Hegel means to assert that such a self-transcendence is possible only within the framework of absolute society, but this cannot be assumed. Further, if such an absolute society is found to be historically nonactual, it might still be possible to interpret or to reconstruct the *Phenomenology* in such a way that the rise of absolute knowledge would not be impossible. It should also be remembered that from the pure perspective of absolute knowledge, history at every point demonstrates Spirit, not only at its endpoint, though its absolute object has not yet appeared. This indicates that if a subjective Spirit were to realize its foundation in Absolute Spirit, it could see itself realized, though not perfectly, in the actual social order of its own time. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the two questions of the rise of Spiritual Subjectivity in time to Absolute Knowledge and of the rise of Spiritual Objectivity to Absolute Spirit in time not be collapsed into the single historical question at the very beginning of our enterprise.

The Kierkegaardian reduction of the question of the beginning proceeds in the opposite manner. Rather than assuming that absolute consciousness must be based in a society, Kierkegaard assumes that all consciousness must be personal. His continual sarcastic comments concerning the thinker as "speculative thought" clearly shows this bias. Given this assumption, then, it plainly follows that regardless of the structure of society, absolute consciousness, being a state of the ego (as all awareness is assumed to be), must be the result of an action of the ego, or reflection. Thus, for Kierkegaard there is only one problem, how the ego can reflectively arrive at Absolute Knowledge and still remain an ego. It is clear that we must resist either assumption, that absolute subjectivity must be personally based or realizable only in a particular social structure, and hence keep the two questions of the beginning distinct. It is, in fact, only through a consideration of both of these questions concerning the origin in time of Absolute Spirit that either assumption can be justified.

II. Time: History in the System Karl Löwith asserts in his book *Meaning in History* that "history . . . is meaningful only by indicating some transcendent purpose beyond the actual facts. But, since history is a movement in time, the purpose is a goal."⁴ Since, however, we are still existing in time and in history, "the ultimate mean-

³ J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: Introduction and Reexamination* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 147.

⁴ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 5.

ing of a transcendent purpose is focused in an expected future."⁵ Given this philosophical interpretation of the historical discipline, the next question arises immediately. How, from within the historical movement itself, can we come to know the transcendent purpose, or goal, of history, which for us lies in the future, but without which we cannot properly interpret the past? Insofar as we assert that we know the meaning and goal of history, we must assert either that that goal has already been realized or that we, as interpreters, stand in a transcendent position with regard to our historical situation. As long as the Christian eschatology was considered to be a divine revelation, one could claim to be in possession of such a transcendent perspective. In the modern secular West, dependent on nothing but reason for interpretation of history, we can no longer make this claim. Hegel seems to assert that unaided reason can come to this transcendent position with regard to historical development, but insofar as he does so, he is compelled by his principle that "the rational is real; and whatever is real is rational" to assert, in Löwith's view, that the end of history is already present in the bourgeois-Christian society.⁶ On this view, then, the substantive basis of individual reason in the historical society must already have completed the movement of history if that reason is to assume a transcendent position with regard to that movement and thus know its purpose. But, the argument proceeds, to know the meaning of history is of course one of the conditions of Absolute Knowledge. Therefore, the System can arise in time as a self-conscious product only if history has already reached its supposed goal. But, as the nineteenth century surely shows, history can have reached its culmination in Hegel's time only if the bourgeois-Christian state as constituted in the early nineteenth century is accepted as final; but this is inconceivable. This society rested on the assertions that it was both politically free and a realization of the Christian eschaton. As Marx and Kierkegaard so persuasively have shown, neither assertion was true. Therefore, Hegel's system in general, and his interpretation of history in particular, cannot possibly be correct.

As I have mentioned before, the premise of this argument is that an individual is bound in a completely determinate way by the society in which he lives. This is expressed in its most universal sense by F. H. Bradley:

The individual's consciousness of himself is inseparable from the knowing himself as an organ of the whole; and the residuum falls more and more into the background, so that he thinks of it, if at all, not as himself, but as an idle appendage. . . . He is related to the living moral system not as a foreign body . . . in a word, the self-consciousness of himself is the self-consciousness of the whole in him. . . .⁷

By his repeated definition of freedom Hegel himself gives important weight to the view that society must reach a stage of absolute self-consciousness and fulfillment before Absolute Knowledge can emerge: "Universal history . . . shows the development of the consciousness of Freedom on the part of Spirit, and of the consequent realization of that Freedom."⁸ And Freedom itself is "self-contained existence . . . this self-contained exis-

⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶ *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 135.

⁷ *Ethical Studies* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1951), p. 119.

⁸ *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, 4 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955), 1:167; *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Press, 1956), p. 63 (hereafter cited as *Phil. of Hist.*).

tence of Spirit is none other than self-consciousness'-consciousness of one's own being."⁹ But if the essence of history is freedom, and freedom itself is full self-consciousness in one's object, then *that* freedom is the essence of history can be realized only when Spirit is explicitly free, when it finds itself in objective, historical existence. It appears, however, that objective history did *not* reach full freedom in 1830, so it therefore follows that Hegel could not have known the essence of history and that there could be no System of the philosophical sciences. Were we to take these statements of Hegel as definitive, not only could no objective evolution of Spirit be completed by Hegel, but also no subjective evolution could have been possible. The *Phenomenology* thus would be also radically flawed.

As strong as these conclusions are, they can be made even stronger by an examination of the Hegelian doctrine of time. Time, for Hegel, is the "negative unity of self-externality." Never is the Hegelian terminology more obtuse than in the *Philosophy of Nature*, and this abstract definition is hardly enlightening. Luckily, however, he goes on to expand upon this assertion and to show us its import.

The real is certainly distinct from time, but is also essentially identical with it. What is real is limited, and the Other to this negative is outside it; therefore the determination in it is self-external and is consequently the contradiction of its being; the abstraction of this externality and unrest of its contradiction is time itself.¹⁰

Time, therefore, is the abstraction of the limitation of all finite things. They are finite because they do not include the whole, and because they are finite, they are temporal. Time is the pure necessity for finite entities passing away. But what is the relationship between time, as the negation of finitude, and those things that are in principle infinite, like Spirit?

The universal, as law, also has a process within it, and lives only as a process; but it is not part of the process, but contains its two sides, and is itself processless. On its phenomenal side, law enters into the time process, in that the moments of the Notion have a show of self-subsistence; but in this Notion, the excluded differences are reconciled and co-exist in peace again. The idea, Spirit transcends time because it is itself the Notion of time; it is eternal, in and for itself, and it is not dragged into the time process because it does not lose itself in one side of the process.¹¹

Spirit, then, insofar as it embodies itself in distinct moments, is contained in time, as these moments by themselves each have the characteristic of being finite and limited. But Spirit in its universal aspect as the reconciliation of the various moments is itself atemporal, as it has no external limitation. Now since *all* finite, particular beings are moments in the process of Spirit's self-development, these moments remain in time only insofar as they do not self-consciously realize their own infinity in Spirit. Rocks, for example, must always be in time, as, in themselves, they do not have the potentiality of realizing Absolute Spirit. Man and human societies, on the other hand, must recognize

⁹ *Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, 1:55; *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 17.

¹⁰ *Werke*, Vol. 9, sec. 258; *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), sec. 258 (hereafter cited as *Phil. of Nat.*).

¹¹ *Werke*, vol. 9, sec. 258, *Zusätze*; *Phil. of Nat.*, sec. 258, *Zusätze*.

themselves as temporal only insofar as they have not attained the completion of history, that is, only until Spirit is fully self-conscious of itself as freedom. "Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not grasped its pure Notion, i.e., has not annulled Time."¹²

This does not assert that time is an illusion, à la McTaggart. Rather, it claims that beings remain temporally finite as long as they do not self-consciously realize their explicit infinitude; only finite Spirit and Nature are temporal. Absolute Spirit *appears* in time, but it finally recognizes its own eternity. Let us now apply this doctrine to the problem of Absolute Spirit arising in a self-conscious human community. It would seem that a necessary indication of the achievement of pure self-conscious freedom in a community would have to be that that community, at that temporal point, would cease to see itself as a temporal entity. It could continue to recognize the temporality of Nature and of particular human beings, but it itself must necessarily cease to evolve. But, under what condition is this possible? The notion of a fully completed human community that no longer recognizes change, is itself no other than the old Christian doctrine of the reign of the Kingdom of God on earth. This establishment, then, of the Kingdom of God and the lapse of temporality is itself the condition for a society—whether secular, religious, or both—attaining to Absolute Spirit. Therefore, the objective evolution of Spirit toward full self-consciousness, the evolution of the Spiritual Object, can be known to be complete only when time is annulled. So any society that continues to recognize itself as temporal is *in principle* not the culmination of history. If we further continue to assert that such a society is the sole necessary and sufficient condition for the realization of Absolute Knowledge by anyone, then the System can arise only in a fully atemporal society. In principle, then, if a totally atemporal society is the condition for Absolute Knowledge, as long as history continues, no one, let alone Hegel, can rise to a transcendent viewpoint on all being.

I have reiterated that the extension of the above argument to include the subjective rise of consciousness to Absolute Spirit and the concept of Science depends upon the assumption that an individual consciousness can in no crucial way transcend his specific natural and social determinations. What if this condition is granted? Since the possibility of our knowing the truth of the doctrine of the evolution of history toward a meaningful goal—specifically the goal of Absolute Spirit—depends upon Hegel's or our ability to transcend temporality, and since clearly our societies do not do this, it then follows that we have no way of knowing if history is in fact progressing in this way. Not only do we not now have Absolute Knowledge, but the very possibility of our knowing that anyone ever will have it rests upon our now having Absolute Knowledge. Therefore, since we do not and cannot know that Absolute Knowledge is possible, we are necessarily thrown into the most pervasive form of skepticism: we cannot even know whether we can know. The entire Hegelian project is thus disrupted. What if, on the other hand, we continue to hold in suspension our conclusion concerning the relationship between the subjective and objective evolutions of Spirit? The above considerations at least indicate that objectivity or spiritual substance and society is not now and never has been at a position where it was fully conscious of itself as free Spirit. No objective deduction of

¹² *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1952), p. 558; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 487 (hereafter cited as *Phen.*).

Absolute Spirit is now or ever has been possible. It would still be possible, however, while staying within the general Hegelian framework, to suppose that Absolute Knowledge, in the sense outlined at the end of the *Phenomenology*, could have been and can now be attained. That is, individuals could, through a process of reflection, reach the end of reflection and gain an absolute perspective on objectivity. From such a perspective, or the Concept of Science, it would then be possible to deduce a System of Science, or objectivity as it appears to the absolute subject, insofar as that System had itself completed itself. It should be noted that only under the condition that an individual self can perform this process of transcendent reflection to discover his necessary basis can the Hegelian project have any validity. Only if the rise of Spirit to its absolute relation with objectivity is distinct from the rise of that objectivity in the form of society to full self-consciousness can the System have had or have now an origin in time. The question of the historical basis of the rise of the System in time thus forces us into a consideration of the possibility of the *Phenomenology* as the subjective evolution, or the evolution of the Spiritual Subject, in time.

III. Time: Necessity in the *Phenomenology* In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard isolates the fundamental problem of what I have called the "subjective evolution of Spirit." The System begins with "Being," which "must be purely and simply an Immediacy, or rather merely immediacy itself."¹³ But, as Kierkegaard points out, the attitude with which we approach this pure immediacy, and through which alone we can develop the System, is itself an attitude that must be developed. That is, as Hegel says in one of his rare systematic comments on the importance of the *Phenomenology*, "it [the beginning] is mediated because pure knowing is the ultimate, absolute truth of consciousness."¹⁴ Both Hegel and Kierkegaard recognize that the beginning of the System is mediated by a development of consciousness. The argument between them rests upon the different notion they have of this mediation. For Kierkegaard, reflection is infinite, and the demand for a progression from the ego to a state of pure knowing Spirit can be nothing other than a demand for a resolve of will on the part of the ego: "I ask him [the ego] for a resolve. And in so doing, I will, for in no other way can the process of reflection be halted. . . . But if a resolution of the will is required to end the preliminary process of reflection, the presuppositionless character of the System is renounced."¹⁵ Hegel himself recognizes that if we call upon the ego in its natural, immediate state to adopt the standpoint of pure ego, or pure knowledge (as Fichte in fact does), then the act whereby the ego does this would be an arbitrary, merely subjective act. "But as thus immediately demanded, this elevation is a subjective postulate; to prove itself a genuine demand, the progression of the concrete ego from immediate consciousness to pure knowing must have been indicated and exhibited through the necessity of the ego itself."¹⁶ Thus Hegel agrees with Kierkegaard that the individual ego cannot be called upon immediately to end its process of reflection. Rather, the movement from concrete ego to pure knowing must be shown to be a neces-

¹³ Trans. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 70.

¹⁴ *Werke*, 5:67; *Logic*, p. 68.

¹⁵ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 103.

¹⁶ *Werke*, 5:76; *Logic*, p. 76.

sary movement of the ego itself. This necessary movement is, for Hegel, demonstrated in the *Phenomenology*.

But in what sense is this progression from natural consciousness to pure knowledge a necessary development? It is clear that Hegel cannot mean that every individual ego must necessarily follow this progression in the course of its life. If this were his meaning, it would be impossible to explain why no one conceived the solution of the epistemological problem—which is this progression—before Hegel. It is equally clear, in the light of the result of the last section, that if Hegel meant that the progression was necessary given the state of the historical development of Spirit to this point, then this necessity is illusory. To be sure, when treated in the *Logic*, necessity shows itself to develop dialectically into freedom. But this result is not helpful here. The Hegelian notion of freedom is such that it essentially refers to the necessary progression of Spirit out of its immediacy into explicit being-for-itself. Whether and how this happens, however, is precisely the point at issue.

In the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel makes his clearest statement of the necessity involved in the progression of consciousness to Absolute Knowledge. Each particular "shape," or type, of natural consciousness is characterized by a duality of its object. Insofar as consciousness asserts that it knows its object, it has its object as it is both for-consciousness and as it takes it to be in-itself. In approximating its knowledge of the object, or the for-consciousness of the object, to its concept of the object, or what it takes to be the object in-itself, consciousness recognizes that this supposed in-itself is merely the in-itself of the object for-consciousness. This realization itself refocuses consciousness' attention onto this being-for-consciousness of the old-in-itself as consciousness' new object. It is claimed that the necessity of the progression of experience, and with it the necessity of the development of consciousness, is demonstrated in this transition.

There are several points in this exposition that must be emphasized and further developed. It is not at first sight clear why, for example, it is a necessary condition of all consciousness that it has the twofold character outlined above. On this point, I believe, Hegel is depending upon Kantian results. The transcendental deduction asserts that the categories of the understanding are necessary conditions for the possibility of all experience whatsoever. Now, for natural consciousness these transcendental rules of synthesis are taken to be predicates that are true of objects as they are in-themselves, and they are used in this way when reason employs them in a transcendent (as opposed to transcendental) fashion. It is only when reason reflectively focuses upon the categories themselves as objects that it is realized that these categories, though treated as true determinations of the initial object-in-itself, are in fact merely determinations of the object-in-itself-for-consciousness. A similar progression may be noted with regard to the ideas of reason. At each point consciousness has before itself both an object of knowledge and a determination it takes to be true of the object-in-itself. The Hegelian assertion that all consciousness has essentially this twofold character thus seems to be merely a reassertion of one of the key Kantian conditions for experience.

Hegel's great contribution to the study of consciousness would thus seem to be not the assertion of the diadicity of consciousness, but rather the statement of the necessity of this development. Here, for the first time, the nature of this necessity becomes clear. Each dialectical shift in the object of consciousness, and concurrent change in the

“shape” of consciousness itself, makes explicit to consciousness the condition under which alone the previous shape of consciousness was possible. The entire progression of shapes in the *Phenomenology* therefore represents the successive statement of the complete set of transcendental conditions for the possibility of the existence of *any* type of consciousness. A shape is “higher” or “lower” depending upon how many and how few of the transcendental conditions are explicitly shown to consciousness in that shape. Absolute Knowledge, or the last stage in the *Phenomenology*, is thus an explicit recognition of the totality of conditions that make any and all types of conscious awareness possible. We now see that the *Phenomenology* taken as a whole is a massive transcendental deduction of Absolute Knowledge, performed, however, in an integral connection with consciousness itself. This accounts for the necessity of the *content* of the *Phenomenology*. Each stage follows from the last, if the *Phenomenology* is successful, in accordance with a strictly logical necessity, the necessity involved in the relationship between a type of consciousness and the conditions for the possibility of that type.

It should be emphasized that the development in the *Phenomenology* represents an ideal development of consciousness. It does not necessarily correspond exactly to any actual historical sequence. The necessity of the phenomenological movement is a function of the relationship between actual, natural consciousness and the conditions under which such a consciousness exists. There is no necessity that natural consciousness become aware of these conditions at any time. Let me give an example. A person considers himself to be a radically independent, free subject. He sees the content and form of his consciousness to be in principle beyond the influence of external forces. It is possible, however, that such a self-consciousness could exist only within a society in which such a view was made possible by certain cultural forces, which, at the very least, influence this person’s self-consciousness. Now, it would be true, in-itself, that this person was influenced by his culture, could see himself as free only because of the culture; and if he became aware of this, it would be a true insight into the actual condition of his self-consciousness. On the other hand, it is also possible that such a person never becomes aware of this fact. It is also possible that he could misinterpret its import. At this point it is unclear what it is that determines whether or not an individual goes through this ideal, true progression of consciousness. We can see, however, that the progression in the *Phenomenology* can have a necessary content without necessitating that any particular individual or group mirror this development exactly. (See Section IV below.)

But Absolute Knowledge represents not only a statement of the conditions for possible experience, but also the assertion that there is a shape of awareness that is explicitly aware of these conditions, and that this shape has now, after the *Phenomenology*, become the type of awareness the readers of the *Phenomenology* possess. The content of the *Phenomenology* is necessary in the logical sense that the object of each stage is the condition for the possibility of the previous stage. But this does not mean that natural consciousness becomes explicitly aware of these conditions *as conditions* of the previous shape as well as object. Insofar as any person is merely finite consciousness, his consciousness is restricted to the particular shapes he happens to possess. He is not explicitly aware of either the preceding shapes or the future ones. But, then, what accounts for the possibility, and indeed the necessity, of the phenomenological reexamination of the shapes of natural consciousness which alone seems to account for the possi-

bility of a finite Spirit in fact reaching the level of Absolute Knowledge? Let me try to make the import of this question and the distinction that lies behind it clear. Hegel says that for natural consciousness there is no necessity in the process of experience. Natural consciousness is not explicitly aware that its new object is merely the truth or the transcendental condition for its old object. "It usually seems that we somehow discover *an other* object in a manner quite accidental and extraneous, and that we experience *in it* the untruth of our first concept. What would fall to us, on this ordinary view of experience, is therefore simply the pure *apprehension* of what exists in and for itself."¹⁷ The necessity of the progression of shapes and their objects, in virtue of which alone the progression becomes "scientific" and hence a deduction of Absolute Knowledge appears only *for-us*, the readers of the *Phenomenology*.

From the viewpoint of the present investigation, however, the new object shows itself as having come into being through *an inversion of consciousness* itself. This way of observing the subject matter is *our* contribution; it does not exist for the consciousness which we observe. But when viewed in this way the sequence of experience constituted by consciousness is raised to the level of a scientific progression.¹⁸

Thus the formal observation through which the *Phenomenology* is a deduction of the Concept of Science is not performed by the consciousness we observe itself, but by us. But that there be Absolute Knowledge, as opposed to a statement of the fact that there are a variety of transcendental conditions for consciousness, depends upon some consciousness in fact observing the necessity of the evolution of experience, and of having the principle of this development as *its* in-itself. Further, since the progression from one stage to the next is purely formal there is no necessity that *anyone* has ever had the type of awareness described at the higher stages. The recognition of the necessity of the movement of consciousness, and with it the possibility of the actualization of Absolute Knowledge, thus depends upon the possibility of an observer attaining a perspective from which the movement emerges in its necessity. "A moment which is both *in-itself* and *for-us* is thereby introduced into the movement of consciousness, a moment which does not present itself to the consciousness engaged in the experience itself. But the *content* of what we see emerging exists *for it*, and we comprehend only the formal aspect of what emerges or its pure emerging."¹⁹ But, to return to our previous question, what accounts for the possibility or necessity of *our* attaining this perspective from which the movement of pure emerging appears for us?

It is perfectly possible that Hegel meant to assert that this perspective was possible in virtue of the fact that natural consciousness had already developed, in a natural historical evolution, to communal consciousness that already had achieved Absolute Knowledge. On this view, the nineteenth-century bourgeois-Christian world would represent the final embodiment of Absolute Spirit, and thus account for the possibility of one of its members, Hegel, turning back from this point and resurrecting the road of conscious-

¹⁷ *Phänomenologie*, p. 74; "Introduction" to the *Phenomenology*, trans. K. R. Dove, in Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 24 (hereafter cited as *Intro.*)

¹⁸ *Phänomenologie*, p. 74; *Intro.*, p. 24.

¹⁹ *Phänomenologie*, p. 74; *Intro.*, p. 25.

ness to that point in its necessity. Thus *our* ability to add the moment that is for-us and in-itself in virtue of which the movement of the *Phenomenology* is seen in its necessity would be accounted for by the assertion that we had already attained Absolute Knowledge and were now merely demonstrating how we had attained it. In light of the result of the preceding section, however, this can no longer be maintained. The attainment of the standpoint of the *we* in the *Phenomenology*, and with it the possibility of the deduction of Absolute Knowledge being performed and the System having an origin in time, must therefore be explained in a different manner. But how is this possible? To answer this we must next turn to an examination of the *we* in the body of the *Phenomenology* itself.

IV. We and the Beginning of Science The final stage in the *Phenomenology*, or Absolute knowledge, is an explicit awareness by Spirit of the grounds for the possibility of any consciousness whatsoever. Consciousness itself, as the awareness by an individual of a world, can be possible only if in fact or in-itself both consciousness and the world have a certain specific character. Ordinarily consciousness is not aware of these conditions for its very possibility. Absolute Knowledge, on the other hand, is that mode of awareness that is self-conscious of the conditions that must be met not only if it is to exist, but also if any type of consciousness is to exist. The present question can now be phrased, What is the relationship between these grounds for consciousness as such and the *we*, or the standpoint from which these conditions can be reviewed and made explicit? To answer this question we must turn our examination to the formal structure of consciousness itself. This examination must, of course, be phenomenological in character. That is, we cannot assume the standpoint of Absolute Knowledge in our attempt to understand how such knowledge might be possible. Thus our description of consciousness will be our assertion not of what consciousness is in itself or in truth, but merely of what natural consciousness takes itself to be. Insofar as natural consciousness is conscious of itself in a Cartesian or Husserlian manner, our description will be Cartesian. This does not commit us to accept the ultimate validity of such a viewpoint. A Cartesian view of consciousness is perhaps inaccurate insofar as it is not aware of the conditions under which such a view of consciousness could be present for-consciousness and thus is not fully self-conscious of itself. In particular, natural consciousness conceives itself to be radically isolated and individual, which perhaps is not the case. It seems self-evident, however, to assert from a Husserlian or Cartesian perspective that consciousness, whatever else it may be, presents itself to the subject as a relationship between that subject and an object. In one sense, the object of this relationship is presented to the subject as distinct from the conscious self, or the "I." Even in the type of consciousness that has been termed self-consciousness, the self as object of awareness is distinguished from that same self as subject. We will, therefore, take it as a self-evident fact of phenomenology that there can be no consciousness unless there is an object, or *thing*, distinguished from the self. A completely objectless consciousness is a contradiction in terms. However, at the same time that the object is distinguished from the self, the very fact that consciousness is a relationship means that this other, or object, is in some manner *related* to the self. Indeed, without the object having some type of relation to the subject, there can be no consciousness at all, for then the object would not be an object of consciousness. As Hegel expresses it, "Consciousness *distinguishes* from itself something to which it at the same time *relates*

itself."²⁰ Consciousness, in order to be consciousness, must have an object to which it is related, but which remains distinct from the subject of consciousness. Thus this condition of consciousness, which we have stated above as the distinction between an in-itself and for-consciousness, both contained in consciousness, is universal. Now, insofar as consciousness takes the object to be *its* object, the object is taken to be identical with the self of consciousness. Let us emphasize this. Insofar as the object is related to the self, the self is characterized by the determination that it is *that* which has this object. The content of the self is identical with the content of its object, insofar as that object is for it. What is the self? It is the consciousness of this object. What is the object-for-consciousness? It is the *consciousness* of this object. At the same time that consciousness identifies itself with the object, however, the object is distinguished from that consciousness—the object is an in-itself for consciousness. It is consciousness' claim, just because it is consciousness, that that with which it is related, the for-consciousness of the object, can be made to correspond with the object as it is in-itself. Insofar as this content of consciousness is merely the object-for-consciousness, it is difficult to see how consciousness can make the assertion that its content is identical with the object as distinct from consciousness, or being-in-itself. In order even to assert this correspondence, consciousness would necessarily have to be able to compare the for-consciousness of the object with the object in itself. The object in itself, however, is precisely taken to be the object as it is independent of any relation to consciousness. In order to carry out the comparison the object in itself would have to be for-consciousness, but if it is for consciousness, the object is not the object as it is in itself. But as the content of consciousness is merely the object-for-consciousness, any attempt to arrive at the object in itself—which is necessary if consciousness is to perform this comparison—will result merely in a new content of consciousness. Here is the crucial point. Consciousness *must* compare its content with what is taken to be the object in itself; only under this condition can consciousness claim to be aware of *something*, to be related to something that is distinct. On the other hand, insofar as the content of consciousness, what consciousness *is*, is taken to be merely the object *for* consciousness, this cannot be done. Any object that personal consciousness is aware of, any presumptive in itself, must, insofar as it is an object of consciousness, be merely the object as it is for-consciousness, and there is no guarantee that it is indeed the object-in-itself. Therefore, as this comparison is necessary if there is to be consciousness, it is a necessary condition for consciousness to exist that there be the possibility of a "third," or a standpoint independent of both the subject and object of consciousness, that performs the comparison. This "third," or independent, condition of consciousness is the standpoint of the *we* in the *Phenomenology*. Further, the necessity for such a standpoint that is distinct from individual, Cartesian consciousness and is a condition for such a consciousness is discoverable through an examination of Cartesian consciousness itself. Indeed, Descartes's attempt to ground consciousness in the being of God may be seen as an attempt to allow for such a standpoint while yet asserting the truth of his notion of consciousness. The result of the Hegelian analysis of natural consciousness, on the other hand, is the assertion that this notion of consciousness for it-self, or this self-consciousness of consciousness as radically individual, is an inadequate expression of the truth of consciousness.

²⁰ *Phänomenologie*, p. 70; *Intro.*, p. 19.

The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. The standpoint of the *we* that is independent of individual consciousness, which we have found to be a necessary condition for the development of *Phenomenology*, is also a necessary condition for consciousness itself. By the very fact that consciousness is related to an object that is yet distinct from consciousness, consciousness implicitly asserts the possibility of a standpoint beyond individual consciousness that may perform the comparison between the object-in-itself and the object as it is for-consciousness. The possibility of this standpoint we adopt in the *Phenomenology* is itself a condition for all consciousness, regardless of its shape. At this point, on the basis of merely a first level phenomenological description of natural consciousness, we cannot assert the actual character of the *we*. This becomes clear only through a process of growth by consciousness toward complete self-consciousness. We can assert, however, that this standpoint is in no sense just another individual consciousness.

Even given this result, however, we are still faced with a problem with regard to the possibility of the *Phenomenology*. The condition for consciousness is that the standpoint of the *we* be possible, not that any particular *consciousness* should in fact achieve this standpoint. The condition for the *Phenomenology* is that some group of consciousnesses—Hegel and the readers of the *Phenomenology*—in fact have reached the standpoint of the *we*. Indeed, the *Phenomenology* itself is the road by which consciousness grasps the structure and standpoint of the *we*. Kenley Dove has remarked that “the development of the argument in the book may therefore be read as a progressive thematization by consciousness of that ultimate, but at first abstractly posited ground of its absoluteness: the ‘*Wir*’.”²¹ Read in this way, the final standpoint of the *we* is nothing more nor less than the explicit awareness of the totality of the conditions for consciousness that we have previously called Absolute Knowledge. That is, Absolute Knowledge has been characterized as the self-conscious awareness of all of the conditions necessary if there is to be any consciousness whatever. The *we*, on the other hand, has been described as that standpoint that is external to individual consciousness and that supplies the possibility of that consciousness. As this standpoint performs the function of potentially comparing the object for consciousness with the object in-itself it must be some form of awareness but cannot be merely an individual consciousness. What this *we* would do, however—compare the object of consciousness with the object itself—is possible only if certain conditions are met. First, the *we* must self-consciously grasp what consciousness is. But to do this the *we* would have to know the actual nature both of consciousness and of the world, which supply the conditions for the existence of any type of consciousness, regardless of its shape. That is, it must have Absolute Knowledge. The necessity of the progression in the *Phenomenology*, and hence its certainty, depends upon *our* already having achieved this standpoint at the beginning of the enterprise. This is not the same, however, as the mere assertion that there is such a possible standpoint. But, as we are certain that Absolute Spirit has not yet realized itself in history, what can account for the possibility of our *achievement* of this perspective?

²¹ “Hegel’s Deduction of the Concept of Science,” a lecture delivered at the meeting of the Hegel Society of America, 1970. This paper has been announced for publication in *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 34.

The answer to this question once again involves an analysis of the structure of consciousness itself. Consciousness implicitly assumes that there is the possibility of the *we*, insofar as it claims to be related to an object that is distinct from it. Consciousness does not yet know, however, what this standpoint concretely involves. It merely has the formal assurance that the *we* cannot be individual in the same way consciousness is. But it is only from the perspective of the *we* that this claim of consciousness, the claim which amounts to the assertion that it is consciousness, can be judged. As it is conscious, however, the self of consciousness endeavors to verify its assertion. The possibility of the standpoint of the *we* is not only an implicit condition of consciousness, but also an *element* in consciousness itself. In consciousness the *we* acts as an *ideal* standpoint which the individual consciousness attempts to reach. The very activity Hegel isolates as the key feature of consciousness, the progressive attempt to make the in-itself correspond with the for-consciousness and the rise of a new object in accord with the recognition that what was taken to be in-itself was actually the in-itself-for-consciousness—this activity represents the successive attempts of consciousness to realize its ground in the objectivity of the *we*. That is, the movement that is observed in the *Phenomenology*, the movement of natural consciousness, is motivated by consciousness itself insofar as consciousness has for-itself the ideal of Truth, or the possibility of the *we*, which individual consciousness attempts to realize for-itself. Natural consciousness thus has implicit within it the tendency toward attempting to transcend itself.

To recapitulate, we have uncovered three aspects of the *we* in the *Phenomenology*. First, the *we* is the standpoint from which the structure of the movement of experience among shapes of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* can be seen as a necessary progression. That is, the necessity of the emergence of the new object for natural consciousness can be grasped only from the perspective of the *we*—"our" perspective—and not by the natural consciousness being examined. Thus, the actualized achievement of the standpoint of the *we* is the necessary condition for the possibility of the science of phenomenology. Second, there is a sense in which the *possibility* of the standpoint of the *we* is a necessary condition for the possibility of *natural* consciousness. The distinction between the object for-consciousness and in-itself which is both *for* natural consciousness and a necessary feature *of* natural consciousness, and the comparison of these two moments which is the *movement* of natural consciousness, are both possible only if there is a distinction between individual consciousness and the standpoint from which being itself could be cognized. That is, the awareness of objectivity, which is essential to consciousness, is possible only under the condition that natural consciousness distinguishes for-itself its own experience from a possible objective experience of the *we*. This leads to the third aspect of the *we*. The being-for-natural consciousness of the *we* is the prethematic norm or ideal of consciousness, which is an element within consciousness.

Thus consciousness itself is the purposive movement toward the objectivity of the *we*. Although natural consciousness is not focally aware of itself *as* this purposive movement, *we*, from the standpoint of the *we*, can see that this purposive movement is the being of consciousness.

What has just been said can also be expressed by saying that Reason is purposive activity. . . . Its power to move, taken abstractly, is being-for-self or pure negativity. The result is the same as the beginning, only because the beginning is the purpose; in other words, the actual is the same as its

Notion only because the immediate, as purpose, contains the self or pure actuality within itself.²²

Consciousness is the movement toward the fulfillment of the standpoint of the *we*. It can be purposive movement only in that the *we* is the prethematic norm for consciousness.

This tendency as element in consciousness—the ideal of the *we* as a norm for consciousness—is the fundamental tendency in consciousness. As Hegel himself implicitly recognizes, consciousness has the ideal or norm of grounding itself in the transcendent standpoint of the *we*. Hegel identifies the ideal endeavor to reach the *we* as

the pathway of the natural consciousness which is striving toward true knowledge, or as the path of the soul which is making its way through the sequence of its own transformation . . . that it may, by purifying itself, lift itself to the level of Spirit and attain cognizance of what it is in itself through the completed experience of its own self.²³

For Hegel, in that consciousness has its own concept for itself, that is, has the norm of the *we* for itself, consciousness is necessarily dynamic: "But since consciousness is for itself its own *Concept*, it immediately transcends what is limited, and because this limitedness is its own, it transcends its self. . . . Consciousness therefore suffers violence at its own hands, a violence through which it destroys for itself any limited satisfaction."²⁴ This necessary unrest of consciousness, it must be emphasized, is a necessary feature of consciousness qua consciousness. That is, simply insofar as there is consciousness, that consciousness "is for itself its own concept," and thus *is* the movement of transcendence beyond its own initial limited determinacy.

Now, it is, for Hegel, a necessary condition for the possibility of individual self-consciousness that the self-consciousness be "recognized" by another self-consciousness: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."²⁵ That a conscious being is, and *what* a conscious being is, is determinately allowed for by the fact of the form of his social relations. As Hegel says in Chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*, all purely "individual" shapes of consciousness are "abstract forms" of social Spirit.²⁶ It does not follow from this assertion, however, that individual self-consciousness cannot transcend the particular historical social form in which it finds itself and which is a condition for its possibility. In that consciousness is for itself its own Concept in the form of being implicitly aware of the norm of the *we*, consciousness *is* rather the movement of transcendence beyond the already established historical horizon of objectivity. Indeed, all development of *historical* institutions is mediated for Hegel in the *Philosophy of History* by just such individual transcendence. That such transcendence can become embodied in Objective Spirit in the form of institutions, of course, depends upon the objective development of Spiritual substance. But that there is historical change is possible only in that reason is purposive activity toward the goal of fulfilled Spirit. Thus, far from precluding

²² *Phänomenologie*, p. 22; *Phen.*, p. 12.

²³ *Phänomenologie*, p. 67. *Intro.*, p. 13.

²⁴ *Phänomenologie*, p. 68. *Intro.*, p. 17.

²⁵ *Phänomenologie*, p. 141. *Phen.*, p. 111.

²⁶ *Phänomenologie*, p. 314. *Phen.*, p. 264.

the possibility of individual transcendence of objective Spirit, the Hegelian System implicitly insists upon such a possibility.

Given the objectivity of the *we* as a norm for consciousness, we can see that, for Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, natural consciousness implicitly has a dual normative structure. First, in that there is consciousness, that consciousness has a "diadic" structure. The distinction between "in-itself" and "for-consciousness" exists within consciousness and for-consciousness. Natural consciousness is thus the movement that examines its knowledge in light of a standard of objectivity. In the sphere of history this movement corresponds to the movement in which a historical people or person evaluate and alter an existent historical institutional form in terms of its own inherent principle or concept. But second, in that natural consciousness is for-itself its own Concept in the form of the norm of the *we*, it is *also* the movement through which the particular finite forms of this Concept, "the-in-itself-for-consciousness," get evaluated and altered. Natural consciousness thus involves the second order examination of the standard used in its examination of its own knowledge.²⁷ It would thus be possible for a particular natural consciousness to progress through the entire series of transformations of its object through the successive application of the initially abstract norm of the *we*, or final and complete objectivity. Even though it did not recognize at the time the necessity of these transformations, there is no reason in principle why it could not eventually arrive at Absolute Knowledge, in the sense Hegel gives to this term at the end of the *Phenomenology*—the Concept of Science. From this final standpoint it would then be possible to recall the stages in the development, assuming at the beginning of this recollection the position of the *we*. This consciousness could thus construct the *Phenomenology* in its necessity.

It is thus possible to see that the "subjective" evolution of Spirit, while related to the "objective" evolution, is in principle distinct from it. The *Phenomenology* is Hegel's deduction of the Concept of Science from the notion of consciousness. The necessary condition for the possibility of this deduction in its necessity is, implicitly for Hegel, the progression of a natural consciousness through the successive transformations of its shapes to the endpoint of this progression in the realized objectivity of the *we*. Given the assertion that consciousness is for itself its own Concept, this subjective evolution could in principle be carried out, regardless of the stage at which this consciousness began this progression or the state of his society. It is of course an entirely separate question whether or not either the subjective or the objective evolutions and deductions are possible *in fact* in the form that Hegel understood them. All that is maintained here is that given the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the System, the two evolutions are in principle distinct in Hegel.

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²⁷ *Phänomenologie*, p. 73. *Int.*, p. 23.