



G.W.F. Hegel

# Hegel's SCIENCE OF PHILOSOPHY PERSONALISM

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## Hegel and Personalism

### Personalism vs. Impersonalism: The Pivotal Point

As much as we may currently accept the Absolute as being Substance, to an equal degree we must now understand it as being Subject. Just as Spinoza shocked the age in which he taught that the Absolute was Substance, so too Hegel comes to shock our modern age with the Truth that Reality is Subject or Personality.

"...alles darauf an, das Wahre nicht als Substanz, sondern eben so sehr als Subjekt aufzufassen und auszudrücken."

"...everything turns on comprehending and expressing the Absolute Truth, not only as Substance but just as certainly as Subject." GWF Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Personality is an undeniable element of Reality, as each of us affirms by our own existence. That personality should be the fundamental and irreducible nature of Reality as a whole as much as in part is rationally justifiable since the part may not have any greater quality than that of the whole to which it belongs.

On the other hand, the concept that Reality is merely Substance is incomplete and therefore leaves us perplexed.

*A lump of earth, Got up from the earth  
To walk the earth, And eat the earth  
To return to the earth, And wonder why.  
Whatever got into inert dirt?*

### Hegel's Major Works

- History of Philosophy
- Philosophy of History
- Phenomenology of Spirit
- Science of Logic
- Encyclopedia Logic
- Encyclopedia Nature
- Encyclopedia Spirit
- Philosophy of Right
- Philosophy of Fine Art
- Philosophy of Religion
- Other Writings

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- Phenomenology Study
- Introduction to Hegel
- Philosophy of Religion
- Science of Logic

### Other Sections

- Philosophy of Nature

Therefore, the apparent success of empirical science in discerning the physical features of Reality without recourse to a personal frame of reference must be taken into proper perspective. Empirical science cannot explain the personal, social, political, moral or religious aspects of life that are also very real and essential features of Reality, especially for us as persons. Thus, for example, one cannot understand the meaning of a sentence simply by analyzing the type of ink it was written in.

Compelling as these common sense considerations are, the question remains: is it possible to comprehend, in a strictly scientific way, the Absolute or Reality as Personality? And what would that mean when would we then come to deal with Substance?

Albert Zyent Gyorgi, Nobel laureate in biology, once remarked that he had searched each molecule of the living cell for the secret of life but somehow it had slipped through his fingers and all he was left with were molecules. I once asked him at MIT why we think that life came from matter. Why not consider that matter came from life? Hearing this he exclaimed, "Oh no! That's too difficult!"

Here, I think we can clearly see a prejudice of modern science. It is not too difficult for empirical science to explain how life comes from matter - although it has never been done, and, as we will learn, is fundamentally impossible according to the way in which modern science conceives matter. Yet, a scientific explanation of the origin of matter from life is somehow "too difficult." Of course, it is not simple, and it is not a mere formal reduction of matter to life or thought that is to be implied here. It is certainly one of the major tasks of Philosophical Science is to solve this problem.

### ***"De nobis ipsis silemus"***

Francis Bacon, who may be considered the father of modern science, in his *Instauratio Magna* (ca. 1620), wrote, that in the scientific study of Nature, "*de nobis ipsis silemus*" - "of ourselves we are silent." With these words the impersonal foundation of modern science was established. In other words, Reality was to be explained without reference to Man. Essentially this came to mean that reality as Substance had no need or room for Man as subject or personality who consequently became a merely accidental epiphenomenon of such a reality, with certainly no room for comprehending the Whole as God (Personality). Impersonalism therefore became the chief perspective or characteristic of the reality that modern science dealt with. Likewise science came to mean that which dealt only with impersonal objectivity or substance. Religion was thereby relegated to the region of unscientific superstition and belief.

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Those who have been raised in the culture of scientific impersonalism or materialism find it hard or impossible to imagine that there could be any other way of comprehending things. Therefore when Reality is even considered as being Personal, which is what we mean when we speak of the Absolute as God, it may seem like a fairytale and something totally outside the realm of scientific thought. However, nothing could be further from the Truth and, in fact, Science, as we learn from reading Hegel, is rather that which necessarily leads to a Reality that must be Personal. Indeed, such a personalistic conclusion becomes the litmus test of the validity of any systematic thought as being scientific. This, of course, is what has to be shown and can only be concluded or proven in the systematic or rational exposition of Science itself.

### Hegel and Aristotle

Hegel has admitted that his philosophy is basically the same as Aristotle's except that he has made it more systematic and scientific. In general, the Greeks favored the organismic viewpoint of Nature. Following the basic tenet of Socrates that Nature was to be understood along the same lines as Man - purposeful and self-organizing, in short, acting like an organism - Aristotle conceived the universe as a supremely living being both in its entirety and in its parts. As Aristotle remarked

"As in human operations, so in natural processes; and as in processes, so in human operations (unless something interferes). Human operations are for an end, hence natural processes are so too."

With this in mind he developed his theory of *entelechy* (a Greek word that comes from *telos*, end or purpose) and thereby elaborated his now famous hierarchy of causes to logically express how such purpose or end was carried out.

Although Aristotle paid careful attention to Nature in all its detail, making such an excellent study of it that many of his observations and conclusions still remain valid today, philosophically he was not an empiricist. His conclusions were drawn on the basis of rational, conceptual considerations rather than experimental evidence. Thus it seemed natural to him that heavier objects would fall more rapidly than lighter ones, but he never thought of putting this conclusion to experimental test. It was not until Galileo that this idea was overthrown and ultimately led to the formulation of the Newtonian theory of gravity.

The overthrow of what eventually was called "anthropomorphism", that seemed to form the very heart of Aristotelian philosophy, became immanent with this challenge to the authority of the great philosopher. But if we look deeper into this anthropomorphism we find a very

fundamental, far-reaching and pervasive misunderstanding that affects our whole ability to comprehend the genuine philosophy of Aristotle and its consequent reformulation by Hegel.

### **Philosophy Begins with Unknowing or Indeterminateness**

To understand the situation properly we must go back to the roots of Aristotle's philosophy to Socrates and Plato. We may be familiar with the Socratic dictum, "I only know that I know nothing." Socrates also went about demonstrating through clever dialog with others that they also, although assuming to know something, were likewise ignorant. The purpose for this type of scepticism toward knowledge is explained by Hegel in his *History of Philosophy* in the section on Socrates. "Philosophy must, generally speaking, begin with a puzzle in order to bring about reflection; everything must be doubted, all presuppositions given up, to reach the truth as created through the Concept."

However, this is not the traditional Scepticism that establishes doubt as its aim and goal, and thus requires we remain in doubt. In Socrates and Descartes, as well, such doubt is only considered the *beginning* or *start* of philosophical thought. Indeed Descartes, whom Hegel considers the initiator of modern philosophy, expresses a similar kind of radical unknowing by saying that we must doubt everything, "*De omnibus dubitandum est*", and, in fact, begin from thought alone. This abolition of all determinations is the absolute beginning - the beginning of philosophy, and Hegel begins his *Science of Logic* with just this kind of indeterminateness - in pure Being. The beginning of anything necessarily starts from an immediate or unmediated, i.e. undeveloped stage. This is indeterminateness.

Man, when considered as a particular finite individual, is very much a determinate being - with a particular color, race, height, etc. Because philosophy begins with indeterminateness it is certainly not based on the particularities of any individual man or woman. It begins with thought and develops itself through thought. "Doubt" is not a physical thing - it is thought, it is the negation of the immediate and also the negation of the plane of sensuous perception.

Because we are dealing with that which is above the immediate or sensuous plane of particularity, philosophy does not operate within the anthropomorphic conception at all. Its domain is the pure plane of universality or thought, and, as we shall see, its center is the universal Self or universal aspect of God, which is not rooted in the particularity of human individuality.

### **Is Knowing Transparent?**

The sensuous is what is "given" to us. Whatever is "given" is immediate or undeveloped and it is therefore indeterminate as to whether it is truth or untruth. We 'know' or are aware of the sensuous since it is given to us or to consciousness, and this kind of undeveloped or initial knowing is called certainty or apprehension. Because it is undeveloped or immediate knowing we may also say it is transparent. In other words, there are three aspects to 'knowing' - knower, knowing (knowledge) and the known. When 'knowing' is transparent it means that the knower immediately apprehends the known as if 'knowing' were merely an invisible medium between knower and known, i.e. as if there were no contribution from knowing in the apprehension of what is known.

Generally, in ordinary consciousness, 'knowing' is not considered an object of concern at all. This is the conception that the knower apprehends the known directly. However, we may now see that this conception merely hides that fact that knowing is tacitly being assumed to be transparent. When we doubt what we know, we are doubting our knowledge of things. This doubt also affects what is known because the known belongs to that knowledge. Thus the 'known' is never independent of knowledge. If knowledge changes then what is known also changes, for the known is only what it is for knowledge. Yet at the same time we also consider the 'known' to be an object confronting knowledge or something that has being-in-itself independent of knowledge.

We can see why ordinary thinking ignores 'knowing' or knowledge in considering the relation between the knower and known - it complicates things considerably. What was considered a simple object is now actually seen as a contradiction. It is both in-itself as an object confronting knowing, and it is also bound up with knowing or for-consciousness, i.e. it is within consciousness as what is known. Thus it is both in-itself and for-another simultaneously - it is both independent and dependent. This is the object's contradictory nature - it is simultaneously both being-in-itself and being-for-another.

(To be continued.)

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