

“Science of the phenomenology of spirit”: *Hegel’s  
program and its implementation*

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## I

Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, now turning 200, has ceased to be an odd stumbling block in the historical memory of present-day philosophy. In recent years, significant work has contributed to the exploration and appropriation of Hegel’s text. Someone who started studying this work more than half a century ago, as I did, can only envy those approaching the text today. Thanks to a discussion among experts that has increased in intensity and international scope over the past thirty-five years, beginners can now turn to excellent collections of essays.<sup>1</sup> Sustained unitary interpretations<sup>2</sup> have illuminated the whole extent of the enterprise. An encompassing and erudite essay<sup>3</sup> has clarified the full complexity of its underlying idea. Invigoratingly controversial and easily accessible studies have illuminated various parts of the work in more detail, and the context of these individual topics within the Hegelian oeuvre, life, and influence has been revealed in comprehensive accounts that in many respects mutually complement and correct each other.<sup>4</sup>

The tendency towards crudely one-sided interpretations, such as those that dominated the scene in the middle of the twentieth century, is hardly visible today. Someone who sets out now to discover a substantial truth or to find himself in the *Phenomenology* does not run the risk of falling prey to the misinterpretations that were at one time very pervasive. Well informed as we are about the prehistory that the *Phenomenology* had in Hegel’s thought, and familiar as we are with the contractual conditions under which the work had to be completed, we are even less prone to

Translated by David P. Schweikard.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Pöggeler and Köhler (1998); Stewart (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Scheier (1986); Pinkard (1994); Siep (2000). <sup>3</sup> Forster (1998).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Pippin (1989, 1997); Pinkard (2000); Fulda (2003); Jaeschke (2003); Hoffmann (2004).

believe in the tale that Theodor Haering invented about its genesis.<sup>5</sup> Even if one admits that there is evidence that the *Phenomenology* as it was published still carries traits of radical changes in its composition, no one who reads it alongside more recent secondary literature will find plausible that it is nothing but a congenial product of distress that fundamentally lacks coherence. The declared program and the idea of this magnum opus, the starting point and aim, method and makeup, train of thought, inner structure, and process of presentation, are too subtly interweaved to infer the inconsistency of the whole simply by applying a few external criteria.<sup>6</sup> Those who take Hegel seriously as a thinker and want to interpret his *Phenomenology* as a systematic work are no longer completely isolated.<sup>7</sup> The first imperative for further interpretation is to pay close attention to the text, for only then does thinking about the *Phenomenology* become productive.

The way in which Hegel has assimilated the basic concepts of the *Phenomenology* into his *Encyclopedia* doctrine of Subjective Spirit has by now been studied in detail. Even the possibility of connecting the later more complex content of the *Phenomenology* with the systematic philosophy of Objective and Absolute Spirit now appears much more plausible. Contemporary interest is not limited to the first four chapters, but also extends to the latter four of the eight chapters numbered in Roman numerals. There is now interest in the topics dealt with in those chapters: "The actualization of reason", "The ethical order," and "Religion," including their interconnections and the partial identity of religious representing and absolute knowing. There is even interest in studying the implications of the fact that the epistemological questions involved in these topics become more and more concrete from chapter to chapter.

The different dimensions advanced by distinct national cultures of reception in recent decades have also enriched the appropriation and study of the *Phenomenology*. In *Germany*, the interpretation that reduced the work to anthropological aspects has been left behind and the genesis of the *Phenomenology* reconstructed. Colleagues in *France* have integrated the important motifs of reduction into a careful exegesis of the entire work and

<sup>5</sup> See Haering (1934).

<sup>6</sup> In a letter to Schelling (of May 1, 1807), to which especially those refer who doubt the homogeneity of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel mentions the "wretched confusion" which – along with the "process of publishing and printing" – "partly dominates even the composition itself." That does not exclude a coherent and internally consistent *result* – in spite of the admitted "shapelessness of the final parts," the editing of which was, according to this testimony, finished "at midnight before the battle of Jena" (*Briefe*, vol. 1), 16. *Letters*, 79–80.

<sup>7</sup> But see Henrich (1971), 7.

(thanks to a new translation)<sup>8</sup> have developed a sensitive understanding of the literary qualities of the philosophical idiom that Hegel invented with the *Phenomenology*. From *English-speaking countries* there have been not only perspicacious analyses of the argumentative potential contained in Hegel's work, but also new directions of research that have grown out of the similarities between Hegel and specific priorities of Anglo-American philosophy, such as pragmatism, the critique of the myth of the given, contextualist epistemology, and the inferential semantics of making explicit. Above all, this climate of reception has opened the debate on the reassessment of Hegel's entire philosophy and sharpened the debate with respect to the crucial questions: Is Hegel's place one before the threshold to modern society and the modern intellectual world?<sup>9</sup> Or does he, after early modern philosophy and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and by bringing Kant's revolution of metaphysics to an end, take the last step towards a self-knowledge in which modernity can enlighten itself about its own presuppositions? If the latter, can he accomplish this task without forfeiting its deepest conceptual content, including its effectiveness for irrational "life" (with the self-destructive consequences, originating from Germany, that this has had for Europe)? In order to be able to take a stand on these questions, one has to give precise formulations of the program of the *Phenomenology* and its implementation. Such an interpretation should also be epistemological in nature. Great progress has been made in this field in recent decades. What can be said about my topic in a short chapter must, under these conditions, take only the shape of a corrective.

## 2

*To what kind of epistemological question did Hegel dedicate his introductory Phenomenology?* It seems to me that a good answer to this question, one that clarifies the *program* of the work, requires a more complex approach than those that have been pursued so far. It is clear that a more adequate approach cannot be focused on the most universal alternatives of "epistemology," such as, for instance, the alternative between epistemological idealism and epistemological realism, though Hegel does also contribute to this.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, it is clear that in the Hegelian *Phenomenology*

<sup>8</sup> Trans. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, published in the Bibliothèque philosophique, Paris (1991–92).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Taylor (1975, 1979). <sup>10</sup> See Westphal (1989); Fulda (2004).



epistemic problems of the specific sciences can be treated only through the specific shapes of "observed" consciousness and not in terms of the justification of claims to knowledge made by the philosophizing phenomenologist. It should also be uncontroversial that the epistemic *horizon* of this phenomenologist includes not only those alleged or actual insights of specific sciences or of prescientific common sense (or the critique of common sense), and not only *theoretical* insights. This horizon equally includes the *practical* and such insights (alleged or actual) as those found in religious or normative-aesthetical knowledge, insights that cannot be subsumed under the theoretical or the practical, though they contain both kinds of knowledge. Likewise, the cognition and knowledge claimed by the phenomenologist should not be understood in the sense of the old textbook definition, i.e. as a pure taking-to-be-true that is true and justified by reasons which are sufficient although they are abstracted from all social and temporal context of appearance. Finally, the subject of such knowledge should not be seen throughout as an entirely indeterminate, isolated "taker" of such taking-to-be-true, but must be seen both in connection with increasingly concrete capacities, attitudes, and activities, and in increasingly complex interconnection with other subjects and with institutions or other collective, cultural forms. In short, in connection with a "Spirit" whose content is increasingly determinate.

More important in this regard (since it has not received as much attention) is to guard against presupposing that the cognition sought by the philosophizing phenomenologist must be theoretical. It should not be presupposed that this cognition has to ground theories about (and be verified in view of) objects and facts which are the case independent of the existence or non-existence of a theory about them. In contrast to this widespread assumption, which places the *Phenomenology* in a tradition in which epistemology is limited to *philosophical* cognizing, it could indeed turn out for the phenomenologist that the assumptions of this reduction must be abandoned. The same holds for the view that philosophical cognition refers to an "object" which is entirely independent of this thought and according to which thought must be adjusted and (if necessary) corrected. The corrective could instead be the most inner reality of thought itself.

Closely connected with the abandonment of these dogmatic presuppositions, there are three more considerations and corresponding Hegelian expressions that belong to the *basic elements of the program of the Phenomenology*:



1. Not only can that which is to be cognized be something other than a theoretical object, it need not even be an "object" in the sense of something finitely real or something possible *in the world*, and indeed it need not even be the *world itself*. Rather, the cognizing can be about something that is both real in the broadest sense and yet distinguishable from the world and its objects. This is why Hegel, right at the beginning of the "Introduction," writes only in a very indefinite way about an "actual cognition of what truly is" (53, ¶73). There could be something that belongs to all that truly is, that is effective in the one who cognizes, that is not external to him though it is distinguished from him, but that is nevertheless neither in the world nor the world itself.
2. If this is the case, what "truly is" need not be nature or belong to nature, even as *natura naturans*. It could be the content of a *metaphysical* insight, perhaps even one of world-transcendent and "supernatural" objects. It might also, though, turn out that such objects do not belong to that which truly is, or that the content of the knowledge developed in a phenomenology of spirit cannot be the content of metaphysics. Likewise, it is for the moment completely open whether metaphysics can be a philosophical discipline that provides knowledge, and whether, if metaphysics is possible, it need be (for example) a metaphysics of cognition-independent objects. Above all, it is open whether the objects of a possible metaphysics subdivide (as in Kant), into (a) the (appearing or supernatural) world, (b) the final subjects of knowledge acquired in the world but not locatable in the world, and (c) a world-transcendent God (or more than one) or an immanent cause of the world.

The most urgent task of the enterprise of a phenomenology of spirit is to understand how an epistemology of philosophical cognition gradually develops. The reconstruction of this insight is crucial to the understanding of Hegel's philosophy as a whole and of the role played in it by an introductory doctrine of appearing spirit. For only through the phenomenological self-cognition of spirit, only through realizing that the sociality and historicity of reason is constitutive of such a science, can the *fundamental alternatives* for the overall assessment of Hegel's philosophy be decided. (1) Does this self-cognition work towards a metaphysics of Spirit? Or does it reject all metaphysics of objective entities, even if they are conceived as *the Nature*, *the Spirit* or *the One Absolute*? (2) Does affirmation of the latter part of the alternative entail rejecting all metaphysics? Or does this rather make room for a new metaphysics that is not conceived as onto-theological? (3) Does the *Phenomenology* of 1807 successfully lead to this sort of metaphysics, namely to the Science of Logic as the only "actual"

metaphysics? Or does Hegel's work of 1807 in fact fail to satisfy these demands? (4) Does the absolute knowing that the *Phenomenology* is supposed to produce and justify discharge the representational finitude of religious knowing? Or does knowledge, without losing the content of true religious knowledge, acquire in absolute knowing a specific finitude that belongs to speculative cognition and that it lacks as pure religious knowledge? I want to plead emphatically for interpreting Hegel as affirming the latter parts of these alternatives.

For the moment, precisely this interpretation has to be postponed. It should not be anticipated by the usual reference to passages of the Preface to the *Phenomenology*. For this was actually a preface to the planned "system of science" in which the *Phenomenology* would be the first, introductory part. As a preliminary explanation of the system, the Preface had to mention and anticipate topics in a way that could not actually be part of a scientific introduction to such a system, and especially not part of an initial exposition of the program of this introduction. Such an introduction could take place only in the implementation of the introductory program itself. This means that the project of an introduction itself only becomes fully clear in the process of the implementation of the *Phenomenology*. This fact often remains unnoticed by interpreters of the *Phenomenology*, so it shall have my full attention in what follows.

3. The phenomenological procedure of initially bracketing metaphysical assumptions, followed by a critical examination of the partial validity of these assumptions or by their conclusive dismissal, makes it seem especially natural that prior to all true cognition of that which truly is, one has to come to an understanding "about cognition" (53, ¶73). It seems that with regard to potential metaphysical claims of knowledge one has to pursue a "prolegomenon" to a future systematic redemption of such claims like the one Kant offered in his first Critique. The connection to Kant's "*Revolution der Denkungsart*" that Hegel draws in his *Logic*<sup>11</sup> and the later characterization of this Logic as "metaphysics proper"<sup>12</sup> suggests that the *Phenomenology* should not only be taken in analogy to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a vestibule to this metaphysics, but also as a "treatise of the method" of metaphysics. On closer inspection this interpretation proves to be mistaken, for a work written on this basis does not contain anything decisive to set it apart from its diametrical opposite (which is to dart headfirst into the cognition of absolute truth), apart from some prejudices that decrease rather than

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Wissenschaft der Logik* (WL). Nürnberg 1812. Preface, first sentence.

<sup>12</sup> WL, 7th para.



increase the chances of cognition. In any case, in such a work there are presuppositions that must first be examined (54, ¶74 ff.). Thus, both beginnings of systematic philosophy are to be rejected for easily appreciated epistemological reasons. One can avoid having to choose between them only by undertaking the task of "expounding" (55, ¶71) knowledge as it appears in the broadest possible way. This means not only to judge it as true or false, insight or error, but to "comprehend" what in it has "substance and solid worth" (II, ¶3), even if this turns out to be very little.

Note how sparingly Hegel expresses the program of a phenomenology of spirit, even in comparison with the modest linguistic effort that is needed to justify it! The formula "exposition of how knowledge makes its appearance" (55, ¶76) does not even distinguish between the appearing philosophical knowledge aimed at systematic science and other appearing knowledge, although this distinction already belongs to the context of justification and although the *Phenomenology* aims to be an account of both kinds of appearing knowledge. The programmatic formula remains even more sparse with regard to the relationship between its concepts and the heavy metaphysical concepts in the Preface, such as the concept of truth conceived not only as substance, but at the same time as subject (18, ¶18). By conceptualizing its program through an "Introduction" to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel does not, in contrast to Kant, want to "design" the "Idea" and with it the whole contour or plan of a metaphysical discipline that follows the prolegomenon "architectonically, i.e. from principles."<sup>13</sup> He does not even outline a full idea of the philosophical science that the *Phenomenology* is supposed to become, nor a concept of its relationship to philosophy similar to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Could it really be that this simply represents the crudity of Hegel's plan for the work, or is it not a rather precise concept of the task of an introduction to the program of an exposition of appearing knowledge? The plausibility of both the program and its composition would only be corrupted if conceptual presuppositions were invoked at the outset, for these would require a further vestibule or create the suspicion that the projected enterprise is persuasive only together with dogmatic presuppositions. It is completely appropriate for Hegel to formulate the program of his *Phenomenology* on the minimal basis of the "exposition of appearing knowledge" (18, ¶18) and to develop the program through a number of steps to that of a "Science of the Experience of Consciousness" (61, ¶88), and then further down a much longer path,

<sup>13</sup> Kant (*CPR*), B XXII, B 27.



that comprises the whole *Phenomenology*, to the “science of appearing knowledge” (434, ¶808), and ultimately to a “Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> The program of this work and its implementation thus seem to be deeply intertwined. For the sake of its explication even the program itself needs an implementation in the course of its introduction. But its actual implementation, *for* which it is the program, also further develops the concept of the program. Only viewed from its end is the title of the work fully comprehensible.

## 3

Much more could be said about this than space here will allow. But we are concerned with the *introductory explication* of the program, which is not intended to give the idea of the whole of a *Phenomenology* that opens the philosophical “system of science.” It suffices to sketch the succession and the interconnection of its steps. Even when looked at cursorily, these steps confirm the proposed work-in-progress strategy in three respects.

First, the cognitive *horizon* of the exposition of appearing knowledge encompasses the *whole range* of consciousness, and “completeness of the forms of the unreal consciousness” of the truth will result only from a cognitive process, “through the necessity of the progression,” from particular forms to other forms (56, ¶79). The *goal* set for this progression can be stated only very formally because the procedure itself needs to be defined. From the perspective of the self-conception of the “natural” consciousness that is to be examined, the goal will lie at a stage where this consciousness does not have to “go beyond itself” anymore, and where “Concept corresponds to object and object to concept.” For it is “for itself the *Concept* of itself” and therefore it is immediately “something that goes beyond limits” (57, ¶80). Anyone can make this evident to himself with respect to his *moral* consciousness and its incessant unease under a self-conception that is higher than, but intrinsic to, himself. Only from a discussion of the *procedure of the exposition* of appearing knowledge can one expect to learn more about the forms of unreal consciousness, their completeness, their succession from one to another, and about the goal to which the succession is directed.

Second, we should be led by the “*method of carrying out the inquiry*” (58, ¶81). This characterizes, within the horizon of appearing knowledge,

<sup>14</sup> This heading on the subsequently inserted title page of the *Phenomenology* is not rendered in the English edition.

not the “idea of the whole” but the *way* to this idea. It is the way through which the natural consciousness has to pass to true knowledge, not on its own, but together with philosophizing knowledge. The basic epistemologically relevant characteristics of this path can be delineated in five moments:

1. In the justification of claims to knowledge and in the examination of whether the concept corresponds to the object and vice versa, the presentation can be successful only if the appearing philosophical cognition, the “we” perspective, restrains itself in its observation of the natural consciousness and its claims to knowledge. The natural consciousness can and must give itself its own standard for the examination, for it is “for itself the *Concept* of itself” (57, ¶80), and it must examine itself according to this standard. As one can make plausible to oneself with the case of moral knowledge, the natural consciousness can achieve this if it is not deluded from the outside or distracted from its path by sophistications. This is why – at least initially – the accompanying philosophical knowledge should observe carefully how, on the assumption of its particular standard, consciousness searches skeptically for the truth in its (at least alleged) knowledge and how it gains experience through the examination of specific claims to knowledge. This can happen in that the readers of the presentation concentrate on the role which the natural consciousness plays and as they practice skepticism regarding its object and its alleged knowledge, while those same readers, in the role of incipient scientific–philosophical cognition and knowledge, restrict themselves to “looking on” (59, ¶84) or calling the natural consciousness’s attention to the obvious.
2. On the part of the philosophical knowledge that initially only looks on, there may be a strong suspicion, stemming from moral knowledge and conscience, that the observed consciousness will undergo a negative experience at every single stage of its examination. But this suspicion should not serve as an anticipation of the result of the examination. Even if the experience of the examination is necessarily negative, the natural consciousness must still discover for itself that this is so. Though distinct from it, the accompanying philosophical knowledge is itself only an appearing knowledge.
3. The more continuous the progress of natural consciousness is along its path, the more convincing will the account of appearing knowledge be. This account will be most convincing as a “detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself” – namely, if all goes well – “to the standpoint of Science” (56, ¶78). If the philosophical knowledge (as



accompanying the natural consciousness and, if necessary, correcting itself through its own skepticism) is also included in this continuous progress, then it will be a kind of skepticism that is directed at the entire range of the knowledge appearing in consciousness and that will “render the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is” (56, ¶78). This by no means results in a merely narrative history, but “brings about a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions” (56, ¶78). If, in addition, all non-philosophical kinds of appearing knowledge (and even the non-scientific philosophical kinds of appearing knowledge) do not ultimately stand up to the examination, but the philosophical knowledge stands up to its self-examination in one of its guises, then the goal is attained at least for one part of the presentation, namely that of philosophical knowledge. But the goal has been fully attained, and the presentation of appearing knowledge has become a “self-completing skepticism,” only when the natural consciousness itself has been brought to a decisive insight. It must realize that it cannot end in skeptical knowledge of its ignorance, but that there is at least one point in its appearing knowledge through which it can pass over without alternative to that philosophical knowledge (to knowledge that is no longer merely appearing, but rather actual knowledge). Whether the implementation of this program will get to that point admittedly remains unstated right to the end. But in any case, the program is aimed at the possibility of such an ending. Two further moments that are closely connected with this must not be left open, but must be integrated into the procedure right from the beginning.

4. The skepticism of the procedure of examination cannot be the *ancient* one that was directed exclusively at objects that putatively exist. It must rather integrate into the procedure specific ways of knowing and standpoints of consciousness from which something can count as the true that corresponds to the standard. That means not only examining its object, but examining just as thoroughly its specific (putative or actual) knowledge, so that it will have to give up its standard and itself. Skepticism is specifically modern if it is also directed at consciousness’s capacity for truth and knowledge and not exclusively at objects of putative knowledge. The experience that leads to examination is an experience of consciousness. If its exposition were to obtain a scientific character through the procedure, and if a systematicity of experience were established thereby, then it would be the *science* of the experience of consciousness.
5. But such systematicity could not arise solely from the natural consciousness, which works on its self-examination and is observed only in this



regard. Insofar as systematicity is constitutive of the scientific character of philosophy (as Kant had believed), philosophical knowledge and its presentation (i.e. the presentation of non-philosophical knowledge and of itself as appearing knowledge) would not take on a scientific character on the basis of merely observing non-philosophical knowledge. It would not even achieve the character of an incipient science (one that would still stand in need of improvement in many respects). But the profile of the procedure that is taking shape up to this point contains a further element to which we now must attend. Regarding this element, one could even refer to the conception of an exposition [*Darstellung*], provided that "exposition" stands not only for the claim to judge (and to be judged), but at the same time for the claim that what has "substance and solid worth" is "grasped" in what is judged, and therefore at least approximately included in the scientific "Concept." Therefore one must reflect on what this means for the (up until now) silent interplay of the observed, self-examining natural consciousness with the philosophical knowledge that has only watched the examination. In a shape of consciousness there is a specific form of objectivity and there are objects that appear in this form, as well as a corresponding way of knowing (putatively or actually). It is possible through the communication between philosophical knowledge and natural consciousness for a philosophical skepticism about consciousness to consider the descriptively accessible phenomenal inventory of each shape with the purpose of understanding both what lesson can be drawn from its negation and what can be formulated as a *positive* content of the conscious experience that corresponds to the negation. This content serves to extract the motifs and constitutive features for a new standpoint of consciousness with a new form of objectivity and knowledge. The step from negative to positive experiential content, the "*reversal of consciousness*" (61, ¶87) from the knowledge of a certain failure of knowing towards a new object, is indeed "contributed by us" (61 ¶87). But if we take it accurately, it contains nothing more than the experience that was undergone by the previous form, so it must also be accepted by the natural consciousness that is pursuing its path. This is how "we," in the role of philosophical knowledge, conceive (more or less well) the emergence of a new shape of consciousness and the "*origination*" (61, ¶87) of its object and its concept of knowledge. The "grasp" of this progression from one form to the next may take place for an appearing philosophical knowledge, only with a certain (hopefully increasing) degree of stringency and clarity<sup>15</sup> in

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. ¶¶III, 168.

each case. It can lead to scientific systematicity, for it already belongs to the “*method of carrying out*” the program. Perhaps one could even say the following. In the experience of the consciousness that is observed by philosophical knowing there thus looms “for us” (i.e. for the author and his readers in the role of knowing that is becoming scientific) a necessary progression from one particular form of consciousness to another. Further, in traversing the complete range of the forms of the unreal consciousness, there is the justified prospect of a methodically developed systematic whole of conscious experience. Insofar as the implementation must function in this way, and insofar as the systematicity of philosophical knowledge that is achieved through this methodical path just *is* its scientificity, the program can now be characterized, with richer content than before, as that of a “Science of the *experience of consciousness*” (61, ¶88). It would, however, be illusory to believe that, on the basis of this information about its method and its scientificity, the program could be operationalized and implemented without further introductory reflections.

Thirdly, the concluding remarks of the “Introduction” do not specify the course to be taken by the “Science of the *experience of consciousness*” (61, ¶88) more precisely than anything Hegel has said up to that point. Thus they do not reveal much new information about the content of this experience and its arrangement. As Hegel notes in passing at the beginning, the path which the natural consciousness has to pursue can be taken as one of the soul, which journeys (*qua* such consciousness) “through the series of its own configurations . . . , so that it may purify itself for the life of Spirit” (55, ¶77). So one could expect that the figures of consciousness will pass over or merge into figures of Spirit. This is now affirmed. The experience that consciousness will undergo on the indicated path can, according to its concept, comprise nothing less than “the entire realm of the truth of Spirit” (61, ¶89). At first it was not clear whether the talk about the purification of the soul already marked the end of the trajectory or was just an important stage. But now it becomes clear that only the latter could be meant. Consciousness will reach a point where “appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit” (62, ¶89). But only later on its path will consciousness grasp its essence and (presumably even later) will it “signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself” (62, ¶89). These suggestions are obviously insufficient to make further findings about the structure unnecessary. Thus, as proposed, the program of the *Phenomenology* has been further determined in the course of its implementation, without this



being attributable to rhetorical clumsiness, indecision, or even confused thinking. It can be taken as well-considered dramaturgy.

## 4

The *implementation* of the program confirms the vague anticipations that are made at the end of its Introduction and further specifies some of the Introduction's formulations.<sup>16</sup> It makes sense for the implementation to begin before the program has been fully explicated, and before all stages of its realization have been neatly sketched, as long as the program is explicit enough to orient and initiate the upcoming steps of the implementation in each case, and later addenda to the explication of the program do not contradict the steps that have been taken up to that point. But the interweaving of the implementation and presentation of the program does entail that during the course of the implementation many more structural distinctions must be considered than were indicated in the prior presentation of the program. The successive *parts* of the implementation distinguish themselves by formulating, tracing, and assessing the experience of consciousness. They also contain a preceding section that introduces the distinctive aspect of implementation by applying the general characterization of the program to a specific form of consciousness, and in turn assessing the concrete result of the directly preceding part of the implementation. But also, in the introductory discussion of these particular parts, more general reflections are made from case to case in order to gradually fill in the initially incomplete overview of the aim of the whole. Thus, the general "Introduction" continues in the special introductions to the particular parts of the implementation.<sup>17</sup> In this continuation Hegel provides recapitulations that often lead much further back than just to the immediately preceding part, as well as anticipations (which are for the most part possible only from "our" perspective) that reach further forward than to the immediately following stage. Both directions take into account aspects that were not addressed by the general "introductory" information about the goal of the exposition and the method of its implementation. These aspects and the remarks made in their contexts belong just as much to our "contribution"<sup>18</sup> as the comprehension of a particular form of consciousness on the basis of a conceptual elaboration of a previous

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 61–62, ¶¶87–89 and 238–240, ¶¶438–443; 62, ¶89 and 367–368, ¶¶681–668 *et passim*.

<sup>17</sup> Reasonably, those introductions as well as these passages were written and printed with specific titles.

<sup>18</sup> For the differentiation of different kinds of "contributions" see Siep (2000), 78.



conscious experience. But these additions do more than repeat the structural features of the method that were given in the Introduction and that lay out the basics of an exposition of appearing knowledge and of a Science of the experience of consciousness. More is now unveiled of the conceptual depth of these features and of the contents of appearing knowledge that has become manifest. It is much less easy to say how much of this depth is present to the natural consciousness in contrast to what has been added merely from "our" perspective.

It is in fact possible to distinguish four kinds of progression in the text. (1) The most obvious, which is the passing over from the object of consciousness to its knowledge. (2) The repeated passing over to the object as well as a passing to and fro from that which is for the observing consciousness and that which is present only to us. (3) Something similar to this last movement, which one already finds in the introductory phase of the respective part of implementation. Even within this phase, which first and foremost prepares the exposition as well as the inspection (and the later elaboration) of the forthcoming actual "*dialectical* movement" (60, ¶86), some claims are clearly only "for us," but others have disclosed themselves to the observed consciousness on the basis of its phenomenal reservoir. (4) The third back and forth is intertwined with a fourth, which Hegel has left most unclear of all. There is a passing over from philosophical knowledge that at first appears (and hence contains something untrue) to the already scientific and real knowledge of the form of consciousness which is at issue, and from this a return to further (for the moment) merely appearing philosophical knowledge. Precisely because it is often difficult here to mark off what is (scientifically or prescientifically) merely "for us" and what is also "for it," the difference and the back and forth from one to the other has to be taken into account.

There is yet a further aspect to Hegel's presentation. In contrast to the various "movements," the introductory passages of the sections offer "resting-points of reflection"<sup>19</sup> that contribute to the "so-called intelligibility,"<sup>20</sup> so that the recapitulation and the anticipation can proceed based on "what has been vigorously deduced."<sup>21</sup> Much is thereby illuminated which pertains to the development of the conceptual content of consciousness, not only for us, but also, though mostly with a different content, for the observed consciousness (and not infrequently for us and for consciousness

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hegel's letter to H.F.W. Hinrichs, whose treatise on religion is deeply inspired by the *Phenomenology*. Hegel criticizes Hinrichs for not providing these resting-points and offers detailed comments on what they should consist in (*Briefe*), vol. 21, 254–255. *Letters*, 480–481.

<sup>20</sup> *Briefe*, vol. 2, 254. *Letters*, 480. <sup>21</sup> *Briefe*, vol. 2, 254–255. *Letters*, 480.

at once). Such resting-points are therefore not only required so that the reader can keep track and make sense of the exposition. Without them and the possibility they open up for inferring according to reasonable consequence and for keeping the consequential relations stable, the “dialectical movement” would overly complicate the conceptual determinations. It would “water down” their contents so much that everything that is supposed to be “expounded,” i.e. clarified, would end up in a single meaningless joke, or become pointless, especially for the natural consciousness pursuing its path. The possible transition to true knowledge – without which there can be no justification of the claims to knowledge in the *Phenomenology* – can only be granted to this natural consciousness through the fact that it develops potentials of inferring according to reasonable consequences, and finds in itself arrangements and definitional correlations that constitute the content of its own conceptual determinations.<sup>22</sup> Of exemplary interest for this movement is the gradually developed *structure* of the work, which is indicated by bracketed capital letters in the table of contents of the *Phenomenology*. I would now like to go into the details and merits of this *structure*.

This topic concerns the “architectonic” of the *Phenomenology*, so to speak. After the previous analysis, one should not expect that under this title one could offer a preconceived construction plan followed by the author that adequately informed readers could also follow. Even “we,” the author and the readers Hegel intends to address, have to discover during the course of its development the structure of a science of the experience of consciousness, and we have to explore how natural consciousness becomes conscious of this science.

This task is not so difficult with respect to the *first three stages of the structure*, with whose capital letters (A), (B), and (C) the first four stages of consciousness (I–IV) are contrasted with the next stage and all stages that may follow it afterwards (V, . . .). From a resting-point of reflection at the beginning of the fourth stage of consciousness, one can easily see in retrospect that in the previous three stages the object was for consciousness that which is in itself, while consciousness was that which is added, or accidental, whereas now by contrast self-consciousness has posited its object in immediate identity with itself. There is, as far as I can see, no

<sup>22</sup> The fundamentals regarding the dynamics of the Concept that are in effect behind the back of consciousness, and regarding the connection between “reasonable” [*Verständigem*] and “speculative” [*Spekulativem*] in the determinations of the concept are explained, as will be obvious, only in the later *Science of Logic*; cf. *Science of Logic*, Second volume, first section, first chapter.



reason to believe that the difference from the previous standpoints of consciousness is concealed from the natural consciousness that has reached this standpoint as self-consciousness for itself, once its concept as that of appearing knowledge is "completed" (108, ¶176). The point "for us" is, of course, that this result of reflection is not located only in the concept that self-consciousness is for itself, but in the fact that self-consciousness has resulted from the dialectics of preceding experiences of consciousness. Something similar should apply to the phase of construction (C) that is reached by the subsequent stage of consciousness (V.). At this stage consciousness knows its object as something that is in-and-for-itself and thus at the same time the certainty of itself. The basic determinations of consciousness of the first two stages (A) and (B) are no longer opposed to one another, but united, and a third phase of construction is reached. Now, given the preceding path and the dialectics contained therein, we should not take it as settled that this stage needs to be identified once and for all with a consciousness that "has" reason (= V).

That this is not the case, but that the initially obvious identification must be revised, is shown by the further experience of this rational consciousness. It is at first a cognition based on observation, and it then progresses to the rational self-consciousness and its self-actualization. For us, this demand for revision should arise right after the first link in the chain of experiences and with the assessment of its result, i.e. at the beginning of section V.B. From this point onwards it becomes necessary to differentiate within the third phase of construction between the conceptual content of the consciousness that belongs to it in general, i.e. (C), and a specification of it, namely (C) (AA) and the others. The "actualization of reason" exists only for a consciousness or for a self-consciousness that has not yet reached the substance of its rationality or has lost it in the course of earlier history and is now striving to regain it (cf. 194, ¶¶349 ff.); thus, it exists for a consciousness that is distinct from the consciousness of this substance and its objective reason, i.e. distinct from (C)(BB). On the other hand, at the beginning of stage V.B. all this may not be all that clear to the natural consciousness, but may be seen as the result only in retrospect. There are no decisive obstacles, however, to thinking that the following misidentifications are also corrected by the natural consciousness, so that the fifth and sixth stages of consciousness can be identified with two successive steps of the third phase of construction. The same holds for the identification of a further, third step (C) (CC) with a seventh stage of consciousness. Though things are complicated in each particular case, through further resting-points of reflection one can develop a concept



of the third phase of construction that is more determinate in content and internally more structured. This content, which is differentiated into moments of consciousness and self-consciousness, can be ascribed not only to "us," but also, from recognizable aspects of its path, to the natural consciousness. But an exposition of appearing knowledge cannot claim completeness for this subdivision of (C) into (C) (AA), (BB), and (CC).

In preparation for such a claim, right at the beginning of stage VI. Hegel reports that for us all forms of consciousness and elements of the structure treated up to that point are collected in the form of the last of these moments (i.e. Spirit) and are abstractions from it (cf. 239–240, ¶¶439–440). At the next main resting-point (at the beginning of VII) we can see that what is now to be considered, namely religion, has also occurred in earlier forms of consciousness, even if it was not as conscious of itself as from the current standpoint (of religious self-consciousness). The more detailed configurations of all previous moments of the structure now differentiate themselves into such that belong to the self-consciousness of Spirit in a particular form of religion. In light of the experience of religious self-consciousness in (C) (CC) and of the parallel history of the secular Spirit in (C) (BB), a relatively concise historical place can be assigned to all the configurations of consciousness that are treated in those chapters, or were considered earlier. And this can be done in accord with reflection, hence as something that can be taken into the natural consciousness, although the reflection is possible only thanks to the previous dialectical movement and the speculative pursuit thereof. The implementation of this program thus explains at least the main parts of its division, and explains it also for the natural consciousness following its path in all stages of consciousness up to the very last.

## 5

But how much is prepared in the development of religious Spirit for the cognition of a necessary progression to such an *absolute knowledge*? How much insight is gained that this knowledge will constitute an appropriate final part in the third phase of construction of a Science of the experience of consciousness? The table of contents affirms the assumption that the last part belongs as (C) (DD) to the third phase of construction. The last resting-point of reflection says more than what has been mentioned so far about the program of the *Phenomenology* and the task of its further determination. Although this is connected to problems that would need to be treated in detail, I can only outline them in what follows. I must postpone further treatment of these issues to another essay.

- i. Before we approach the questions that are more difficult to answer, a few observations can be made from the perspective of the last two resting-points of reflection (in VII and VIII). Apart from the form of philosophical knowledge, the forms of consciousness and of Spirit that precede the last stage comprise the entire horizon of cognition. The last stage reconsiders the whole inventory of differentiated forms of unreal consciousness of what is true via the systematics created in those forms. By way of the self-examination of the natural consciousness, it shows what part of the content of these forms has gained the potential to become actual cognition. The objection possible up to that point, that there is an impending *progressus ad indefinitum* into as yet unknown forms of consciousness, is thus swept away, and with it a main obstacle against the idea that the natural consciousness can complete its skepticism. In anticipation of the possible completion Hegel provides an inventory of forms at the beginning of the seventh stage of consciousness (cf. 364–368, ¶¶675–679). To reach this goal, not only the knowledge appearing in religion, but also the knowledge of morality will have to be surpassed. In view of this, the whole of Spirit, which has become present to itself in appearing knowledge (including that of religion) up to this point, will have to reorganize itself under a new concept. According to the last resting-point of reflection (at the beginning of VIII), this reorganization can take place only in a philosophical self-knowledge of Spirit in which all the appearing knowledge that has been presented is systematized. Given that the preconditions of such self-knowledge have been fulfilled, all external barriers against its possible passage to the true knowledge of what is true are eliminated for the natural consciousness (cf. 422–427, ¶¶788–796). If the Spirit had developed further in appearing knowledge than was the case before the appearance of the *Phenomenology* in 1807, then this passage would “have yielded itself . . . in the form of a *shape of consciousness*” (427, ¶797).<sup>23</sup>

The arrangement of VIII does not pose fundamental problems. In a charitable reading, this chapter can be divided (as with the previous ones) into (a) an introductory part which ends with the concept of the new form as well as with its knowledge and the content of this knowledge (422–428, ¶¶788–798), (b) the part that portrays the appearance and (implicitly) the self-examination of the new consciousness (428–31, ¶¶799–803), and (c) the concluding part which registers the result of the

<sup>23</sup> The use of this temporal *conjunctivus irrealis* in the contexts of Hegel’s systematic–philosophical sentences is as sensational as it is singular.



self-examination for us (430–34, ¶¶803–808). If one registers attentively what constitutes the concept of the whole form and what is meant to constitute the experiential content of this movement of consciousness, then there can no longer be a question which side of the alternative interpretations presented above<sup>24</sup> one should opt for. The decision can only be in favour of the second alternative in each case, as it can only be in favour of the interpretation that emphasizes Hegel's modernity.<sup>25</sup>

2. Nevertheless, the *problems* Hegel's *Phenomenology* creates with the implementation of its program for contemplative readers do not begin just in (VIII). Instead of trying to examine them in a few words or claiming that they are irresolvable, I can here only set out the questions in an orderly fashion:
  - (a) Even *before the beginning of VIII* one would like to know the following: Do Hegel's remarks in the seventh (and at the end of the sixth) chapter suffice as a preparation of the concept which consciousness becomes for itself in VIII? There is reason to doubt this, for already at the end of VI, but especially in VII, the elaboration of specific experiences of consciousness and self-consciousness is badly neglected. This makes it unclear why, for the natural consciousness of revealed religion, its appearing knowledge is not thoroughly real and true. It remains undecided whether this self-consciousness must proceed to a skeptically determinate knowledge of its ignorance (with regard to issues that cannot be left open for its aspiration to knowledge) or not. It is therefore also unclear how our treatment of the result of VII is to be connected with a renewed and deeper treatment of the result of VI. It is hard to make out how to integrate both results in the kind of coherent position Hegel describes at the beginning of VIII. It is even less clear what the chances are for a philosophizing consciousness in VIII to transfer this result to the new concept. Finally, there is the question of whether any factual reasons render the absence of conscious experience in the chapter on religion uncontroversial for what follows. These questions would probably become superfluous on the basis of a merely clarifying greater elaboration of the pertinent parts of the work. But in VIII the problematic traits are exacerbated.
  - (b) Is the above-mentioned back and forth of reflection fully considered *in VIII*, including especially the fourth dimension? Is its claim and are the claims regarding the other dimensions at least implicitly

<sup>24</sup> Cf. section 3.2.    <sup>25</sup> This concerns especially the question mentioned at the end of section 2.



accounted for?<sup>26</sup> This formal point is not the only one that gives rise to doubts. Is not the elaboration or re-elaboration of the results of the seventh and sixth chapters too narrow a basis for our reflection if we want to attain a concept to reorganize all previous forms of consciousness, a concept which is for itself the consciousness of a last form of Spirit? Would not all previous results of the experiences of consciousness (together with experience to be presented in VII) have to be explicitly re-elaborated? In this respect, is the opening thesis of VIII – that only the suspension of the mere form of representing consciousness is at issue – perhaps even a severe abridgement of the task confronting Hegel in this chapter? What ray of truth is nevertheless contained in the opening thesis? Where does its questionableness begin, or is it overcome?

- (c) The *opening reflections*, which are meant to serve not only to attain the new concept, but also to show that the thesis implied by the claim is at least basically and for us redeemable, raise a series of more specific questions in addition to the questions already mentioned. I shall confine myself here to the most salient of these questions: Would the programmed overcoming of the religious standpoint not have to be explicitly linked to the overcoming of mere morality in a modern ethical life? Would the appearing knowledge that is now made the subject of investigation (and that performs this double overcoming in its self-examination) not at the same time become cognizable as the knowledge of a specifically *philosophical* consciousness? This consciousness would let absolute knowledge *appear* from the beginning, though it would not be *actual* in the way it at first appears, but in the course of numerous experiences would become an actually absolute knowledge. It would follow the passage of modern philosophy up to that point and end in a form that corresponds to the concept developed, namely the form of the *Phenomenology* available at that stage. It appears to me that this would be the orientation of an adequate final resting-point of reflection.
- (d) Since this orientation is missing, the *experiential part* of chapter VIII awakens the suspicion that it fails to fulfill the task set by the

<sup>26</sup> Hegel himself formed a very self-critical judgment about this. See his letter to Schelling of May 1, 1807 and the letter to Niethammer of January 16, 1807, in which he aspires to a second edition of the *Phenomenology* (*Briefe*, vol. 1), 136, 161. *Letters*, 119–120, 79–80. As late as August 1829, when the second edition was eventually due, Hegel does not seem to have given up the plan to revise the work (see *Briefe*, vol. 4), 30. *Letters*, 121. It was only shortly before his death that he decided against such a revision, as an autographic note probably from Fall 1831 indicates (see, for instance, *PLG*, 552).

program, and even that it makes the problems of this fulfillment unsolvable. Does Hegel here not confound the aspects decisive for this task with a point that is only peripherally relevant, namely with the question of philosophy's history, of when the philosophical science appears "in Time and in the actual world" (428, ¶800)? This is the question of the determinate being of absolute knowledge in its appearing, of whether it appears only at that moment in which the conditions specifying the "when" are fulfilled. Given the dominance of this question, where does the topic of the self-examination of appearing absolute knowledge and of the experiences made therewith come in? How would its self-examination progress to the point at which the norm that belongs to its concept is established in experience? Is the exposition of the dialectical movement that leads to this experience of consciousness not suppressed here by something negligible and insufficient? It is suppressed first by an answer to the question of why Spirit appears earlier in time in the content of religion, but nevertheless only science can bring Spirit to true knowledge of itself. It is then further suppressed (cf. 430–431, ¶803) by an extremely dense, concentrated, and external sketch of the history of modern intellectuality and philosophy up to Fichte and Schelling that ends with Hegel's critique of them. Does this sketch not provide far too vague a justification of the fact that Hegel opposes both Fichte's account of the philosophy of subjectivity and Schelling's philosophy of the Absolute? Does the cognitive perspective become increasingly focused on the most abstract questions of principles internal to philosophy, without considering the previously defined goal and everything that has substance and solid worth in the whole knowledge that has appeared? Even if it were possible in this way to find a conclusion of the procedure that is for us adequate to the program, how could it be one that is also adequate for the natural consciousness that is pursuing its path and is distinguished from us? How could we vindicate ourselves in the exposition of appearing knowledge through that which has removed us from it?

- (e) It is no longer surprising that considering all these open questions, the *concluding part* (431–434, ¶¶803–808) takes on a problematic appearance. Does the exposition of the result, as postulated by the program, remain within the horizon of the science of the experience of consciousness, or does it leave this horizon in favor of a first statement about the "system of philosophy" and its structure? If the

latter is the case, can the *Phenomenology* in the end be convincingly designated as the “Science of appearing knowledge” (434, ¶808), and can the final intertitle “Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit” be introduced? Does not the claim marked by this title (through the addition of “I”), that it figures as the first science, work against the implementation of its program, since it could be justified only on the basis of a “system of science,” and as the first part of this system, while the knowledge of this system and everything pertaining to it needs to be substantiated by the introductory science?

3. I am in no way willing to assume that the *Phenomenology* in its published version allows us to arrive at satisfactory answers to all these questions. In those parts to which the questions are addressed, an improved edition would be required. But judging from the essentials of the program and the concept of its implementation, this reworking could, it seems to me, be successful, and the title of a “Science of the Phenomenology of Spirit” could be justified. As a work that, according to its own aspiration, has to account for the Spiritual situation at the time of its appearance, the improved version would, if it were to be written nowadays, have to take into account the historical changes that have occurred since 1807 in the consciousness that has reason, in the history of ethical life that is reason, in the field of religious self-consciousness, and through the experience with posthegelian and postmodern philosophy. Such a continuation of the *Phenomenology* would be the worthiest gift for the 200th anniversary of this work. This is what I hereby request of the thinking experts of a younger generation.