



### The Absolute G.W.F. Hegel

According to my view, which can justify itself only through the presentation of the whole system, everything depends upon grasping and describing the True not merely as Substance, but also as Subject. It is to be noted at once that Substantiality includes the Universal or the Immediate of knowledge itself, as well as that which is Being or Immediacy for knowledge. If the conception of God as Substance shocked the age in which this characterization was expressed, the reason therefor lay partly in the instinctive feeling that self-consciousness was therein swallowed up, not preserved; but the contrary view which holds to thinking as mere thinking. Universality as such, in part involves the same simple or undifferentiated, unmoved Substantiality. And if in the third place Thought unites the being of Substance with itself and conceives immediacy or intuition as thought, it is a question whether this intellectual contemplation does not fall back into inert simplicity, and present Reality itself in an unreal manner.

Living Substance is furthermore that Being which is Subject in Truth, or — what amounts to the same thing, — is real in Truth, only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or the mediation of its own changes through itself. As subject it is pure, simple negativity, and thereby the sundering of the simple, or the duplication into opposites; and it is again the negation of this inert diversity and of this opposition. Only this self-reinstating identity or the reflection from another into itself — not an original unity as such, nor an immediate unity, as such, — is the Truth. It is the process of developing itself, the circle which presupposes its end as its goal, takes it as its starting point, and is real only through its development and in its final completion.

The life of God and the divine knowledge may be said to be a disporting of love with itself. This idea indeed sinks to edification and even to silliness if the seriousness, the pain, the patience and labor of the process of negation is overlooked. In itself that life is indeed undisturbed identity and unity with itself, in which there is no distress over difference and estrangement, nor over the overcoming of this estrangement. But this ‘in itself is abstract universality in which no account is taken of its disposition to be for itself, and thereby none whatever of the self-movement of Form. If form is described as identical with Essence then it is a misapprehension to hold that knowledge can be satisfied with the thing itself or its essence but do without the form, — that the absolute principle or the absolute vision makes the completion of the first or the development of the second superfluous. Just because the form is as essential to the essence as the essence is to it, it is not to be understood and expressed as mere essence, that is, as immediate substance, or as pure self-contemplation on the part of the Divine, but equally as form and with all the richness of developed form. Thereby only will it be apprehended and expressed in its actuality.

The True is the Whole. The whole, however, is only the Essence perfecting itself through its development. It must be said of the Absolute that it is essentially result, that only at the end is it what it is in truth. And herein consists its real nature — in being the Actual, Subject, or Self-developing Principle. However paradoxical it may seem that the Absolute is to be conceived as essentially result a little reflection corrects this appearance of contradiction. The origin,

principle, or absolute, as it is at first and immediately expressed is only the universal. Just as when I say, 'all animals', this expression cannot serve as a science of zoology, so it is evident that the words, 'God', 'Absolute', 'Eternal', etc., do not express all that is included under them. Such words really express only the intuition as immediate. What is more than such a word, even the mere transition to a sentence, contains a change to an Other which must be brought back, — is a process of mediation. This is abhorred, however, as if absolute knowledge is given up through the very fact that more is made of it than merely that it is absolutely nothing and does not exist in the Absolute.

This horror comes, however, in fact from the lack of acquaintance with the nature of mediation and of absolute knowledge itself. For mediation is nothing else than living Identity, or it is reflection into itself, the process of Self's becoming object for itself, pure negativity, or — lowered to its purely abstract level — simple Becoming. The Ego or Becoming in general, this mediation in its simplicity, is Immediacy coming into being, and is the Immediate itself. It is therefore a misconstruction of reason to exclude reflection from the truth and not to conceive it as a positive aspect of the Absolute. It is what brings the true to its full result, and at the same time overcomes the opposition between it and its own process of becoming; for this process is also simple and not different from the form of truth, in that in the result it appears as simple. Rather it is just this return into simplicity. Although the embryo is in essence a man yet it is not man perfected; in the perfected state he is the full formed reason which has brought itself to what it was potentially. This alone is its actuality. But this result is itself simple immediacy. For it is self-conscious freedom which rests in itself, has not placed its inner opposition to one side, and let it lie there, but has become reconciled to it.

What we have said can be expressed thus: reason is purposive activity. The exalting of so-called Nature over misunderstood thought, and above all the proscription of outer purposiveness has brought the conception of purpose into general discredit. But in line with Aristotle's definition of nature, as purposive, we assert that the goal is the immediate, reposing, unmoved, itself the source of motion; as such it is subject. Its power to move, abstractly taken, is its self-dependent being, or pure negativity. The end is the same as the beginning only for the reason that the beginning is also goal; — or the actual is the same as its concept only for the reason that the immediate as goal contains the self or pure actuality in it. The perfected end or the actual real is movement and process of becoming. But just this restlessness is the nature of the self; and it is identical with that immediacy and simplicity of the beginning because it is the result, that which has returned to itself, — but that which has returned to itself, however, is the self, and the self is identity and simplicity.

The need of representing the Absolute as subject availed itself of the assertion: God is the Eternal, or the Moral World-order, or Love, etc. In such assertions the truth is only baldly posited as subject, not presented as the movement of self-reflection. In a sentence of this kind one begins with the word 'God'. This by itself is a meaningless sound, a mere name; an added predicate is what tells what he is and constitutes its consummation and meaning; the empty beginning becomes actualized knowledge only in this ending. So far we see no reason why one does not speak merely of the eternal, the moral world-order, etc., or as the ancients did, of pure concepts: 'being', 'the one', etc., of that which gives the meaning, without prefixing this meaningless sound. But by this word there is indicated just this: that not a being or essence or universal in general, but a being reflected into itself, a subject, is posited. But at the same time this is merely intuited. The subject is presumed as a fixed point, to which, as to their support, the predicates are attached, through a movement which belongs to him who is aware of it, but which is not viewed as belonging to the point itself. Yet through this movement alone could the content be presented as subject. Considering the manner in which this movement

is constituted it cannot belong to it ; but after the presupposition of that point it cannot be constituted otherwise, it can be only external. That presentiment that the Absolute is Subject is therefore not only not the actualization of this concept, but makes it even impossible ; for it posits Him as a stationary point, while the reality is self-movement.

Among many sorts of consequences which follow from what has been said this may be emphasized, that knowledge exists and is to be presented only as science or as system; that further a so-called axiom or principle of philosophy, even if it is true, is also false in so far as it exists only as axiom or principle. It is therefore easy to refute it. The refutation consists in showing its deficiency; but it is deficient because it is only the universal or principle, the beginning. If the refutation is well founded it is taken and developed out of the principle itself, not effected through opposed affirmations and sallies from without. It would therefore really be the agent of development and the means of supplying defects if it did not err in giving attention only to negative effects and in not being aware of progress and result on the positive side also. On the other hand the true positive development of the starting point is at once just as much a negative procedure against it, that is against its one-sided form, when it is merely immediate or mere goal. It can therefore be taken equally well as refutation of that which constitutes the basis of the system, but more correctly is it to be viewed as a revelation that the basis or principle of the system is in fact only its beginning.

That the true is actual only as system, or that Substance is essentially subject, is expressed in the view that represents the Absolute as Spirit, — in the loftiest of conceptions, and the one which belongs to recent time and to its religion. The spiritual alone is actual ; it is essence or self-existence, — the self-determining and definite, Otherness and Self-existence — and in this determinateness or its otherness yet remaining within itself; or it is in and for itself. It is this being *i7i* and for itself, however, only /or us or in itself ; it is spiritual substance. It must be this also /or itself, must be knowledge of the spiritual and knowledge of itself as the spiritual, that is, it must be object to itself, but also immediately as object taken up and reflected into itself. It is explicitly revealed only for us and in so far as its spiritual content is begotten through itself; but in so far as it is explicitly revealed to itself this self-production, the pure concept, is at the same time the objective element in it, wherein it has its existence. And in this way in its existence for itself it is its object reflected into itself. The spirit which knows itself thus developed as spirit, is science. Science is its actuality and the realm which it builds for itself in its own element.

Pure self-knowledge by way of what is absolutely ‘other’ — this ether as such — is the very foundation of science or of knowledge in general. Philosophy at the very beginning presupposes or demands that consciousness thrive in this atmosphere. But this element achieves its perfection and illumination only through its process of development. It is pure spirituality, the universal, which has the aspect of simple immediacy; — this Simple, in its existence as such, is the Ground, the Thought, which exists only in spirit. Because this element, this immediacy of spirit, is the Substance of spirit in general, it is the transfigured essence, i. e., reflection which is aware of its own simplicity and immediacy, and it is immediate Being which consists in reflection upon self. Science on its part demands of self-consciousness that it have raised itself into this ether, that it may be able to live and actually should live with it and in it. On the contrary the individual has the right to demand that science offer him at least a ladder reaching to this point, and reveal to him this same standpoint in himself. His right is based upon his absolute independence, which knows how to possess this right in every form of his knowledge, for in every one, be it recognized by science or not, and be the content what it will, he, the individual, is the absolute form, that is, he is the immediate certainty of himself, and — if this expression be preferred — thereby unconditioned Being. If the standpoint of ‘‘consciousness’’, which knows objective things in opposition to itself, and itself in opposition to them, amounts in the

eyes of science to an alien one (a standpoint in which science, in its own heart, sees itself losing the very nature of spirit) , on the other hand the atmosphere of science is to “consciousness” a remote region, in which it no longer finds itself. Each of these two parties appears to the other the reverse of truth. Natural consciousness in committing itself immediately to science is making an attempt, knowing not from what impulse, to walk on its head ; the constraint to assume this unaccustomed position and to move about therein is a violence that it is expected to do to itself for which it is unprepared and which seems unnecessary. Let science be in itself what it will, to immediate self-consciousness it presents itself as a perversion, or, since self-consciousness has certainty of itself as the principle of its actuality, it regards itself as external to science, which therefore appears to it as unreal. Science has therefore to unite this element with itself or rather to show that this element belongs to it and how. As lacking such actuality science is only content, undeveloped, the goal which is still latent, not spirit, but the potential stuff of spirit. This implicit element has to render itself explicit, and become its own object; which means nothing else than that it must establish self-consciousness as one with itself.

This development of science in general, or of knowledge, is what the Phenomenology of Spirit presents. Knowledge as it is at first, or immediate spirit, is spirit-less, sensuous consciousness. In order to develop into real knowledge, or to realize the essence of science which is its pure concept itself, it has to work its way through a long course. This development, as it will assume expression in its content and the forms which appear in it, will not be what one understands in the first instance by the bringing of unscientific consciousness to scientific. It will also be something other than laying the foundation of science; — as also something else than confident dogmatism which begins point-blank with absolute knowledge, and is thereby done with other standpoints, merely explaining that it proposes to take no notice of them.

The task of leading the individual from his undeveloped state to the state of knowledge, was to be taken in its general sense, and the general individual, self-conscious spirit, to be observed in its development. As concerns the relation of the two every factor shows itself in the general individual as it gains concrete form and peculiar figure. The particular individual is unperfected spirit, a concrete form, in whose whole existence one type of determinateness is sovereign, and in which others are present only in blurred outlines. In the mind which stands on the higher level the lower concrete existence has sunk to a subordinate factor; what was previously an independent thing is now only a trace; its form has been absorbed and has become a mere bit of shading. The individual whose substance is the higher mind traverses this outgrown stage in the manner in which one who is taking up a higher science, reviews the elementary knowledge which he acquired long ago, in order to recall its content to his mind. He recalls this content without having any interest in and without lingering over it. With regard to content each finite mind has also to pass through the stages of development of the universal mind, but it traverses them as forms already laid aside by the spirit, as steps in a path that is already finished and leveled. So we see with respect to intellectual attainments that that which in earlier ages occupied the mature spirit of man has sunk down to common information, drill practice, and even games of boyhood; and we shall recognize in the stages of educational progress the history of the civilization of the world as it were sketched in hasty outline. This past existence is the already appropriated possession of the general mind, which constitutes the substance of the individual and, as it appears externally to him, his inorganic nature. Education in this respect viewed from the position of the individual consists in mastering what is ready to hand, assimilating its inorganic nature and taking it up into full possession. This, however, from the standpoint of the general mind as substance, is nothing but its gaining of self-consciousness, effecting its own process, and reflection into itself.

Science presents this movement of culture both in its fullness and its necessity as that which

has already sunken down to the level of mere part and property of the Spirit in the course of its formation. The final goal is the insight of the Spirit into what knowledge is. Impatience demands the impossible, that is the attainment of the end without the means. On the one hand this long journey must be endured, for every factor is necessary; — on the other hand one should linger with each stage, for each is itself an individual, total form, and is seen in its absoluteness only in so far as its determinateness as whole or concrete, or the whole in this peculiar determinate form, is taken into consideration. Because the substance of the individual, because even the World Spirit, has had the patience to go through these forms in the long stretch of time, and to undertake the vast labor of World History, in which it gave to each form the fullest amount of itself which it was capable of receiving, and because through nothing less could it attain the consciousness of itself, neither can the individual really comprehend its own substance with less effort. Still, it has at once less trouble because potentially this is accomplished; the content is an actuality now reduced to potentiality, its immediacy having been overcome; the formative process has been abbreviated to a simple conceptual description. As already an object of thought the content has become a possession of Substance; existence is not to be turned back into its undeveloped form; that which is no more primitive, nor on the low level of mere existence, but rather now potential in memory only, is to be transformed into object of full consciousness. The manner in which this is done is to be given in more detail.

What the Whole can dispense with at the point at which we here take up this movement is the transcending of mere existence; what is still left, however, and needs higher transformation, is our common ideas and familiar conceptions. Existence which has been taken up into substance is through that first negation transferred into the sphere of the Self only on the level of immediacy. This possession gained by it has therefore still the same character of uncomprehended immediacy, of calm indifference, as mere existence itself, and has thus passed over only into sense imagery. Thereupon it has become a familiar thing, such a thing as the living mind is done with, wherein its activity and consequently its interest no longer lies. If the activity which does away with mere existence itself is only the movement of the particular spirit which does not comprehend itself, on the contrary knowledge is directed against the sensory image which has hereby come into existence, against this mere familiarity; it is activity of the Universal Self, and the interest of Thought.

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