Chapter Seven

Phenomenology and Logic

The Role of the Phenomenology

In the *Logic* Hegel tells us that nothing is needed to begin doing speculative philosophy except "the resolve (*Entschluß*), which can also be regarded as arbitrary, that we propose to consider thought as such" (*SL* 70/1: 68 [175]). Such a resolve requires that one "rid oneself of all other reflections and opinions whatever," and simply "take up *what is there before us*"—namely, the sheer being of thought, or thought *as* sheer being (*SL* 69/1: 68 [175]).[1] Hegel's Transcendental Deduction, as I described it in the previous chapter, involves nothing more than this act of ridding oneself of all assumptions; for that act leaves us with the thought that thought is minimally the thought of being and that being is initially nothing beyond what thought is immediately aware of. For Hegel, presuppositionless logic must be *ontological* logic because it can only begin with the utterly indeterminate thought of sheer immediacy or *being*. Indeed, he writes, "it lies in the *very nature of a beginning* that it must be being and nothing else" (*SL* 72/1: 72 [179]).

Anyone can embark on the study of ontological logic, therefore, provided he or she is willing to suspend all assumptions about thought and being, start from scratch, and let the indeterminate thought of being unfold. "To enter into philosophy . . . , calls for no other preparations, no further reflections or points of connection" (*SL* 72/1: 72 [179]). Moreover, anyone who is alert to the modern demand for radical self-criticism and self-determining freedom should be willing to suspend his or her assumptions in this way. In this sense, Hegel believes, the modern historical situation—after Kant, Fichte, and the French Revolution—*requires* of all philosophically educated people "the resolve . . . to consider thought as such." This resolve is "arbitrary," as I suggested in chapter 4, because it is a free decision that, although rational, one does not have to take. It is also arbitrary from another perspective, however: namely, from the perspective of ordinary, everyday, *non-philosophical* consciousness, which is not moved by the modern spirit of free self-criticism but firmly wedded to the certainties of everyday life. Ordinary consciousness is surrounded by objects and people of whose existence it is in no doubt, and it adheres to beliefs and engages

1. See also Hegel, *EL* 124/168 (§78).

in habitual practices whose validity and utility it sees no reason to challenge. It feels no imperative, therefore, to cast aside all its cherished assumptions and begin with sheer being but is more likely to regard the call to suspend one's presuppositions as dangerous or mad.

Hegel maintains that ordinary consciousness shares the conviction of the speculative philosopher and the pre-Kantian metaphysician (a belief repudiated by Kant) that we can know the true nature of things themselves.[2] He notes, however, that like the pre-Kantian metaphysician and Kant himself, and *unlik*e the speculative philosopher, ordinary consciousness takes it for granted that all thought relates to *things* and never just to pure being as such. Specifically, it holds that we are always conscious of *these* particular objects of experience—these particular trees, animals, houses, and people. Consciousness, he tells us, is caught up in "externality" (*SL* 28/1: 17); its standpoint is that it "knows objects in their antithesis (*Gegensatz*) to itself, and itself in antithesis to them" (*PhS* 15/30).[3] It thus does not accept Hegel's claim that philosophy can divine the nature of things by simply unfolding the indeterminate thought of being but insists that one only discovers what things are like by going over and looking at them or listening to them and by reflecting on what one sees and hears. From the perspective of ordinary or "natural" consciousness, therefore, being asked to embark on the presuppositionless study of pure being is like being invited "to walk on [one's] head." Consciousness regards the demand made of it by speculative philosophy as a "violence (*Gewalt*) it is expected to do to itself, all unprepared and seemingly without necessity." Ordinary consciousness, Hegel writes, is characterized not by the commitment to radical self-criticism but by "the certainty of itself"; from its point of view, speculative philosophy simply looks "wrong" (*verkehrt*) (*PhS* 15/30).[4]

If ordinary consciousness is to be persuaded to take speculative logic seriously, it needs to be shown that such a logic is in fact an intelligent, not a perverse, enterprise. It needs to be given what Hegel calls a "ladder" to the standpoint of speculative logic. Indeed, Hegel notes, the individual has the right to demand such a ladder—a right rooted in the "absolute independence" of ordinary consciousness, its certainty of itself, that is, its unshakable confidence that its own view of the world is the norm and that any alternative views need to be justified in its terms (*PhS* 14–16/29–31).

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is intended by Hegel to provide this justification by demonstrating that the standpoint of speculative logic or "absolute knowing" is actually made necessary by the certainties of ordinary consciousness itself:

2. See Hegel, *EL* 54, 65/79, 93 (§§22 Add., 26).
3. See also Hegel, *SL* 62–3/1: 60.
4. Miller translates *verkehrt* as "inverted."

> In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have exhibited consciousness in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object (*Gegenstand*) to absolute knowing. The path of this movement goes through every form of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and has the concept (*Begriff*) of science for its result. (*SL* 48/1: 42; see also *PhS* 15/31)

Hegel insists, indeed, that only a phenomenological analysis of consciousness itself can justify the standpoint of absolute knowing to ordinary consciousness: logic "cannot be justified in any other way than by this emergence in consciousness, all the forms of which are resolved into this concept as into their truth" (*SL* 48/1: 42).[5]

As we have seen, the *Phenomenology* does not provide the only possible route into speculative philosophy. Those who are prepared to suspend their ordinary certainties can bypass the *Phenomenology* and proceed directly to the *Logic*. Hegel believes that many people can be persuaded to give up their "presuppositions and prejudices" by studying the history of modern philosophy.[6] I suggested at the close of chapter 3 that true religion can also prepare the way for presuppositionless philosophy by teaching us to "let go of our antithetical existence." Those who take to heart St. Paul's call to be "not conformed to this world" but "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2) may therefore be open to Hegel's call to set aside the certainties of everyday life in favor of an openness to being as such.

Those, however, who are not persuaded by philosophy or religion that the ordinary view of the world should be treated with skepticism but who nevertheless want to learn what speculative philosophy might reveal about the world must take the phenomenological path to absolute knowing: for only the *Phenomenology* can prove that the speculative standpoint is necessitated by ordinary consciousness itself.

Note that ordinary consciousness does not need to be persuaded that we can know the true nature of things or of being. For Hegel, as we have seen, consciousness already is, and knows itself to be, the awareness of what is. The *Phenomenology* does not, therefore, constitute an alternative, systematic Hegelian "Transcendental Deduction" since it does not set out to convince the skeptic that the categories of thought do after all apply to what there is. (Hegel's way of dealing with the skeptic, as we saw in the previous chapter, is to challenge the assumptions on which skepticism rests.) The aim of the *Phenomenology* is to

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5. Two of the best studies of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, in my view, are J. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), and Q. Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976).

6. This, I take it, is the main purpose behind Hegel's review of the history of philosophy in §§26–78 of the *Encyclopedia Logic*; see *EL* 65–124/93–168.

teach ordinary consciousness—and philosophers wedded to the convictions of ordinary consciousness—that being is not simply something *objective* to which we stand in relation but exhibits one and the same logical form as thought itself and thus can be understood a priori from *within* thought.

The precise role of the *Phenomenology* is explained at various places by Hegel, and the account he gives of the relation between that text and the *Logic* is remarkably consistent.[7] The role of the *Phenomenology* is simply to free us from the "opposition of consciousness" between what is known and the knowing subject itself. In the introduction to the *Logic*, for example, Hegel writes the following:

> The concept of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than the deduction of it. Absolute knowing is the *truth* of every mode of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* showed, it is only in absolute knowing that the separation of the *object* (*Gegenstand*) from the *certainty of oneself* (*Gewißheit seiner selbst*) is completely eliminated: truth is now equated with certainty and this certainty with truth.
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> Thus pure science presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness. It contains *thought in so far as this is just as much the matter* (*Sache*) *in itself, or the matter in itself in so far as it is equally pure thought.* (SL 49/1: 43)[8]

The same point is made in the *Phenomenology* itself:

> Whereas in the phenomenology of Spirit each moment is the difference of knowledge and Truth, and is the movement in which that difference is cancelled, Science on the other hand does not contain this difference and the cancelling of it. On the contrary, since the moment has the form of the concept (*Begriff*), it unites the objective form of Truth and of the knowing self *in an immediate unity* (*in unmittelbarer Einheit*). (*PhS* 491/589, my emphasis)[9]

For consciousness, the object—though knowable—is clearly distinct from the knowing mind. What is more important for speculative philosophy is that being has the same logical structure as our own thought or certainty of it and in that sense is immediately identical to, or in "immediate unity" with, thought. As we have seen, philosophy will not deny altogether that being takes the form of things "over there." It will start, however, from the idea that being is simply the *immediacy* of which thought is minimally aware and then proceed to demon-

7. See Houlgate, "Absolute Knowing Revisited," p. 61.
8. Translation revised.
9. See also Hegel, *PhS* 21–2/39, and *SL* 28, 60, 62, 68/1: 17, 57, 60, 67 (173).

strate that such being turns out to be (among other things) a realm of *things*. Philosophy thus no longer regards things as simply "over there," but understands them to be concrete modes of being as such, whose logical structure can be determined from within thought simply by examining the category of being. In this sense, philosophy is freed not from all difference but from the *presupposed* "opposition" between thought and being that characterizes consciousness.

Phenomenological Method

Hegel's procedure in the *Phenomenology* is to show that consciousness's own experience of things eventually leads it to the standpoint of speculative thought. This procedure involves examining various "shapes" of consciousness and asking whether they experience and understand their objects quite as they claim they do. Hegel maintains that consciousness in fact never does so and that, as each shape of consciousness becomes aware of the way it actually experiences things rather than the way it claims to understand them, it comes to be a new shape of consciousness. In this way, he argues, consciousness's own experience leads it to recognize that what it is aware of is not just "over there" after all, but is informed by a categorial structure comprehensible from *within* consciousness—or thought—itself (*SL* 69/1: 67–8 [173–5]).

Consciousness's initial experience will not be "disproved" in this process. Hegel will not argue that consciousness is simply wrong to think of the world as made up of perceivable things or self-conscious agents or forms of social and historical organization. He will argue that the experience of consciousness shows the world not *merely* to be determined in these ways. When consciousness realizes this, it ceases to be mere *consciousness* of a world over against it and becomes the *thought* of the universal, categorial structure immanent in that world and in thought (*SL* 62–3/1: 60).

The method of Hegel's phenomenological analysis is elaborated in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*. This method entails initially accepting the distinction consciousness draws between its own awareness of the object and the object of which it is aware. Consciousness takes itself to be directly aware of what there is, but for precisely this reason, it takes the object of which it is aware to be real and independent of consciousness (*PhS* 52–3/76). Hegel maintains that this distinction requires consciousness to consider whether its awareness always matches the nature of the object itself. This question might seem to be redundant. After all, the "object" is simply that of which consciousness is aware, so how could there fail to be a correspondence between the object and our knowledge of it? The question is not redundant, however: for even though consciousness equates the object with what it knows, it also distinguishes its *knowledge* of that object from the *object* known and thereby opens up the possibility that it may not actually know *properly* the very object it knows. "The object," Hegel writes, "seems only to be for consciousness in the way that con-

sciousness knows it." But "the distinction between the in-itself and knowledge is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all" (*PhS* 54/78). Since consciousness distinguishes in this way between its own knowledge of the object and the object itself, it cannot but ask itself whether these two elements always correspond to one another. Although there is no principle of radical self-criticism in ordinary consciousness, therefore, there is a need to assure ourselves that we do actually understand our object properly. The very structure of our ordinary certainty itself—the fact that we are certain of what is distinct from us—requires that we examine that certainty in order to *make certain* we are getting things right.

In seeking this assurance, consciousness cannot step outside its own perspective and compare its understanding of the object with the object viewed, as it were, "from nowhere." Consciousness has to consider whether its understanding corresponds to the object as this latter is *for consciousness* itself. The standard, or "measure" (*Maßstab*), that consciousness must use to assess the adequacy of its knowledge is thus "what consciousness affirms from within itself as *being-in-itself* or the *True*" (*PhS* 53/77). Consciousness is required by the distinction it draws between its own knowledge and the object itself to consider whether it properly understands that which it itself regards as its object.

Hegel believes that this is a question consciousness is perfectly capable of answering:

> Consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and, on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not. (*PhS* 54/77–8)

Furthermore, Hegel believes that consciousness invariably discovers that it does *not* actually understand its own object adequately. Consciousness's object is nothing but that of which it is conscious, but the way consciousness actually understands that object does not always overlap with what it initially takes or declares its object to be.

To the extent that consciousness's actual understanding or knowledge of its object diverges from what it initially takes its object to be, "it would seem that consciousness must alter its knowledge to make it conform to the object"; that is, to make it consistent with its initial, stated conception of its object (*PhS* 54/78). However, the understanding consciousness has reached arises, in Hegel's account, not through any arbitrary fancy but through consciousness's attention to what its own object shows itself to be. That understanding cannot, therefore, simply be rejected or revised because it constitutes *new knowledge of the object itself:* it discloses what the object of consciousness is in truth. What has to be revised, therefore, is the initial conception of the object since consciousness

now recognizes, in light of what it has learned, that that conception was not completely adequate and only presented the object as it initially appears to consciousness: "it comes to pass for consciousness that what it previously took to be the *in-itself* is not an *in-itself*, or that it was only an in-itself *for consciousness*" (*PhS* 54/78). Accordingly, consciousness now declares itself certain that the object has a new character—disclosed by its experience—and it thereby comes to be a new shape of consciousness.

Each subsequent shape of consciousness undertakes a similar examination of its knowledge claims by measuring them against its own distinctive conception of its object and eventually comes to revise that conception. Throughout the *Phenomenology*, therefore, consciousness continues to try to make certain that it is understanding its object properly, but it does so by measuring its understanding against a standard that constantly changes (*PhS* 54/78).

Hegel's analysis continues until consciousness discovers that its understanding of its object does not actually correspond to the stated definition of an object of *consciousness* at all. An object of consciousness is stated to be something known by, but standing over against, consciousness. Consciousness eventually discovers, however, that it actually understands its object to have one and the same categorial structure as itself and so not simply to stand over against consciousness after all. At that point, consciousness realizes that it is no longer mere consciousness but has become speculative *thought*, or absolute knowing.

The dialectical movement through which a new understanding of its object—and so a new object—constantly arises for consciousness is understood by Hegel to constitute the *experience* (*Erfahrung*) of consciousness (*PhS* 55/78). This experience is not an historical experience that every individual necessarily makes in his or her own life but the experience that is *logically* entailed by the structure of ordinary consciousness itself. It is the experience through which ordinary consciousness is taken by its own internal logic from its most primitive shape of sense-certainty through perception, understanding, self-consciousness, reason, spirit, and religion to philosophy or absolute knowing, albeit an experience that concrete historical individuals all too often fail to comprehend.

From Sense-Certainty to Absolute Knowing

Hegel's specific analyses in the *Phenomenology* clearly exemplify the process of self-discovery described in the introduction. Each shape of consciousness initially takes its object in a certain way but comes through experience to a fuller understanding of that object. In this process, Hegel says, "we learn by experience that we [actually] mean something other than we meant to mean" (*PhS* 39/60).[10]

To begin with, sense-certainty takes itself to be conscious of the pure particularity of things without the mediation of concepts or language. It under-

10. Translation revised.

stands what it has before it simply as *this*, *here*, *now*. Its own experience shows, however, that its object is actually much more complex than it initially believes. Consciousness is not just aware of a pure and simple *this* after all but of a complex unity and continuity of different moments—"a Now which is an absolute plurality of Nows" and a *here* that is a "simple complex of many heres, . . . a Before and Behind, an Above and Below, a Right and Left" (*PhS* 64/89–90). When consciousness accepts this new conception of its object, it ceases being mere sense-certainty and becomes a new shape of consciousness: perception.

Perception discovers in turn that its object is not merely a unified thing with multiple moments or "properties" but the concrete expression of invisible inner force. At this point, perception becomes understanding (*Verstand*). Understanding discovers that the inner character of things is not just force but force governed by law—the same lawfulness that governs understanding itself. Understanding thus finds a dimension of itself in the things it encounters and so becomes *self*-consciousness. Self-consciousness then discovers that the objects to which it relates are not just law-governed objects in nature but other living, self-conscious beings—self-conscious beings who confirm our own consciousness of ourselves by recognizing us but whose recognition of us we in turn have to recognize (*PhS* 111/145).

In this way, self-consciousness acquires a sense that an individual's identity does not belong to that individual alone but is constituted by his or her social interaction with others. Self-consciousness comes to regard itself as part of a "unity of . . . different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence." That is to say, it begins to think of itself as an "*I* that is *We* and *We* that is *I*" (*PhS* 110/145).[11] This social (and historical) unity of different self-consciousnesses is named by Hegel *spirit* (*Geist*) and is understood to constitute the "absolute substance" of those individuals who belong to it.

The relation between the "master" and the "slave" is a social-spiritual one in that each is tied inextricably to the other: the slave takes his direction from the master, and the master needs the slave to prepare natural objects for his consumption. But the master and slave do not yet acknowledge any common identity or purpose. Their relation is thus not yet a fully spiritual one but one in which each focuses primarily on himself and his superiority over or subordination to the other. Only when there emerges an explicit, shared recognition of a common identity between people embodied in the laws and institutions of the society they form does self-consciousness become spirit proper. The simplest and most basic shape of such spirit, Hegel maintains, is that found in the Greek world depicted in Sophocles' *Antigone*.

At this point the phenomenology of consciousness becomes the phenomenology of *spirit*. Consciousness does not suddenly disappear from Hegel's book,

11. Emphasis in German text but not in Miller's translation.

however, but remains an important moment of spirit itself. This is evident from the fact that the spirit Hegel examines remains *conscious* of itself as spirit. That is to say, it continues to regard its own social, historical, and spiritual character at least to some extent as something "over there"—for example, as constituting the *world* into which individuals are born.

Spiritual consciousness does not, however, just understand itself to be social and historical. It also comes to understand itself as ontologically grounded, as the self-consciousness that being itself—"substance" or the "Absolute"—comes to exhibit. The shape of consciousness or spirit that understands both being and itself in this way is religion. In religion—in particular in Christianity—consciousness is not just aware of natural objects or its own social-spiritual character; it understands being as such to become self-conscious—or "substance" to become "subject"—in and as *human* self-consciousness (*PhS* 459/552; see also *PhS* 10/23). Christianity gives expression to this idea by picturing being or substance as "God" and understanding God to become "incarnate" in Jesus Christ and, after Christ's death and resurrection, to become Holy Spirit within—indeed *as*—the community of Christian believers. This process of becoming incarnate and then becoming spirit is regarded by Christianity not as contingent but as unfolding the very nature of God. As Hegel puts it, "in this religion the divine Being (*das göttliche Wesen*) is *revealed*. Its being revealed obviously consists in this, that what it is, is known. But it is known precisely in its being known as Spirit (*Geist*), as a Being that is essentially *self-consciousness*" (*PhS* 459/552).[12]

In Christianity, consciousness thus finds itself included in absolute, "divine" being as the medium through which being itself becomes self-conscious. Religious consciousness also finds itself in being in another way, however. For it understands "divine" being or God to be (as well as love) infinite, eternal "essence" or *reason* (*Begriff*) (*PhS* 459, 464–5/552, 558–9). For religion, therefore, absolute, "divine" being not only becomes self-conscious in and through human beings; it has the same logical structure as human thought, albeit in an infinite rather than finite form. This is the structure of dialectical reason or *negativity*, of coming to be truly what one is through negating or "dying to" what one is initially. As Hegel puts it, "the object has the form of *Self* (*Selbst*) in its relation to consciousness." This means that "consciousness knows itself immediately in the object, or is manifest to itself in the object," insofar as "the divine nature is the *same* (*dasselbe*) as the human, and it is this unity that is beheld" (*PhS* 459–60/552–3).

Yet consciousness still conceives of "divine" being itself—infinite reason, *logos*, or God—as the "*object* (*Gegenstand*) of consciousness," as that which initially at least is quite distinct from human consciousness itself (*PhS* 459/552, my emphasis). Yes, God realizes himself (or, rather, itself) in humanity and has

12. Translation revised.

the same logical structure as human thought, but the process of divine self-realization is understood to be the work of God, not of man. It is conceived of as "the deed of an *alien* (*fremd*) satisfaction." In other words, the power through which divine being develops into human being is understood to reside in divine being alone; the conscious, human self "does not find it in its *own* action as such" (*PhS* 477–8/573).

Religious consciousness changes into absolute knowing, however, when it recognizes that this power is not actually alien to us at all but is the power of dialectical reason, or the "concept" (*Begriff*), that is operative in both being as such *and* human consciousness itself. At this point, consciousness ceases to be *consciousness* as such and becomes speculative thought: for its "object" is no longer simply being "over there" but *universal* reason immanent in being and in thought itself (*PhS* 490–1/588–9).

Religion and Speculative Philosophy

Hegel insists that speculative philosophy and revealed—that is, Christian—religion have the same content. They both disclose the same truth about being: namely, that it is the process of becoming self-conscious spirit in and as humanity. Philosophy understands this process to be the work of universal dialectical reason—of being *as* dialectical reason. It knows the truth to be "*Thought* (*Denken*) or pure Essence, and knows this Thought as simple Being (*Sein*) and Existence (*Dasein*), and Existence as the negativity of itself, hence as Self (*Selbst*)." Hegel adds that "it is precisely this that the revealed religion knows" (*PhS* 461/554).

Religion, however, conceives—or, rather, pictures (*vorstellt*)—being, absolute reason, or negativity as divine reason, or *God*, who is essentially *other* than we are but who becomes spirit in and through us. In Hegel's view, therefore, religion is still burdened by the "opposition of consciousness": "the Spirit of the revealed religion has not yet surmounted its consciousness as such." It is *conscious* of "absolute-reason-that-becomes-spirit" as its *object*. "Spirit itself as a whole, and the self-differentiated moments within it, fall," we are told, "within the sphere of picture-thinking (*Vorstellen*) and in the form of objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*)" (*PhS* 479/575). Religion gives expression before philosophy to the truth that being is the process of becoming self-conscious spirit, but Hegel argues "only [philosophical] Science is its true knowledge of itself" (*PhS* 488/586).

In contrast to religion, speculative philosophy does not regard absolute reason as simply the *object* of consciousness but understands such reason to be the inherent nature of being *and* of human thought itself. Being develops rationally and dialectically, and human thought (when it thinks properly) follows the same dialectic. Furthermore, it is only through its own rational activity that thought can determine the precise structure of the rational activity of being itself. That is to say, thought can only establish what it is to be by working out—in specula-

tive logic—what it is to think properly. As soon becomes clear in the *Logic*, thought does not control the path of its rational, dialectical development; nor does it receive dialectical insight as a gift from another "on high." It discovers its own dialectical structure—and thereby also the dialectical structure of being—by rendering explicit what is immanent in, and so necessitated by, its *own* activity of thinking. Being is thus known through our own rational activity to be essentially the same rational activity as we are.[13]

This is the point behind Hegel's assertion toward the end of the *Phenomenology* that "what in religion was *content* or a form for presenting (*Vorstellen*) an *other*, is here the *Self's* own *act*" (*PhS* 485/582). It is easy to misread Hegel here as simply replacing the religious idea of God with the idea of our own activity—as if we, not God, were the real creators of the world. Hegel is not, however, a subjective idealist of that kind, and he does not deny that human thought is itself the product of being or "substance." Rational knowledge is certainly "the self's own act," but Hegel immediately notes that rational knowledge is also knowledge of "*substance*," indeed of substance as itself the "knowledge of its act." Hegel is not, therefore, obliterating all difference between substance or being, on the one hand, and the knowing self, on the other, or reducing the former to something created by the latter. His point is that rational thought through its *own* activity knows itself to be identical in form to substance or being—and so, as he puts it, knows "subject as substance"—and also understands substance or being itself to issue in the very knowing that we ourselves are. Once again, Hegel brilliantly combines quasi-Kantian and quasi-Spinozan insights into one: we know the structure of being through our *own* conceptual activity, and through that activity we know *being itself* to become conscious of itself in us.

The fact that being is known through our own reason to be universal, dialectical reason that achieves self-consciousness in us—and so is known to be *one and the same* reason as we are—distinguishes speculative philosophy from religion for Hegel. In religion, the object—"God"—is only implicitly (*an sich*) identical with human being. That is to say, "God" exhibits the same dialectical structure as we do and becomes incarnate in a human being, but he is originally *other* than us. In religion, therefore, we take ourselves to relate to and to be graced by something distinct from ourselves: "Truth . . . in religion is still not identical with its certainty" (*PhS* 485/583). In philosophy, by contrast, we see in being itself nothing but the very same rationality that immanently structures our own thinking, and the idea that being is essentially something *other* than us falls away (though, of course, being remains irreducible to us in the sense that it pre-

13. To say that being is rational activity is not, of course, to deny the place of contingency in being (in both nature and history). For Hegel, it is rational that there be contingency, and the rational development of being to self-consciousness is mediated by such contingency; see chapter 6, above, p. 118.

cedes us and will continue when human beings are no more). By thus dissolving the residual otherness of being that is still retained in religion, philosophy understands fully the truth that religion merely pictures and feels.

The transition from religion to speculative philosophy involves nothing more than overcoming the idea that absolute reason is the "divine" *object* of consciousness and releasing the thought that such reason is actually *universal* and immanent in both being and thought itself (see *PhS* 416/502–3). This overcoming is made necessary by the whole development of the *Phenomenology* insofar as the whole analysis—from sense-certainty onwards—serves to undermine the conviction of consciousness that it fully understands its object. The transition to philosophy is, however, also motivated by revealed religion in particular. This is because Christianity itself undermines the very difference between God and humanity from which it proceeds. This occurs above all in the doctrine that God becomes Holy Spirit as the community of religious believers. For in knowing God as spirit, such believers actually know themselves to be spirit, too. True, they are conscious of themselves as what *God* has become, but they are conscious that *they* are the concrete self-consciousness, or spirit, of God. In Hegel's view, this is not just a philosophical reinterpretation of Christian belief but essential Christian doctrine itself. For Hegel, the Christian religion itself overcomes the idea that God is simply other than humanity and leads us to recognize that our consciousness of God as spirit is at the same time our own consciousness of *ourselves*. Spirit is not merely the "content" or "object" of our consciousness, therefore, but what we know ourselves to be. "The concept of spirit," Hegel writes, "is *intuited* by the religious consciousness to which the absolute Being is revealed, and this consciousness dissolves (*aufhebt*) the *difference* between *itself* and *that which it intuits*" (*PhS* 477/572).[14]

But if Christianity already overcomes the standpoint of consciousness, why move on to philosophy? Because Christianity as a form of religious consciousness still thinks of the absolute power as "God," who *comes to* unite himself with humanity but is nevertheless originally other than humanity itself. It does not recognize explicitly that what it pictures as "God" is in fact *universal* reason, which exists both as being (or the "world") *and* as self-conscious humanity. Religion thus retains a lingering sense that God is separate from us even in reconciling himself with us. Consequently, the satisfaction felt by religious consciousness in knowing itself to be one with God "remains burdened with the antithesis of a beyond," and humanity's final reconciliation with God is projected into an indefinitely deferred future (*PhS* 478/574). Philosophy, by contrast, is the understanding that we are completely "reconciled with God" *now*, since God is not in truth something other than us after all but universal reason that immanently structures both being *and* our own thought. Philosophy understands, there-

14. Translation revised.

fore, that "reason . . . is the absolute power," or to cite one of Hegel's most famous lines, that "what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational."[15]

Hegel's claim is not, of course, that human beings abide by the dictates of reason in everything they do. We have to learn what reason is, what it does, and what it requires of us, and we can always fail to learn this or to pay heed to what we have learned; crime, poverty, and war are thus always possibilities even in modern, rational societies. The point, however, is that in committing crimes or acting irrationally, we are failing to abide by the demands of reason that is as much our *own* as it is immanent in being itself. Furthermore, our failure to act in accordance with (our own) reason has *rational* consequences that we cannot disavow. In this sense, reason is always "actual," whatever we do. Or, as religious consciousness would put it, God is at work in everything we undertake.

I suggested earlier in this chapter that the task of the *Phenomenology* is to show those who are not persuaded by the history of philosophy or by religion to suspend the certainties of ordinary life and to take up speculative philosophy that such philosophy is actually the logical outcome of the very certainties they hold dear. What becomes clear in the process of Hegel's phenomenological analysis is that the religious—specifically, Christian—understanding of the world is itself made necessary by our ordinary certainties and that consciousness is required to become philosophical (in Hegel's sense) by the implications of Christian belief. From Hegel's point of view, therefore, ordinary consciousness errs as much in resisting religion as it does in resisting speculative philosophy (and, indeed, as it does in resisting the idea that consciousness is fundamentally social, historical, moral, and aesthetic). As we know, religion is not the only route into speculative philosophy—all one needs is the *resolve* to consider thought as such without presuppositions—but it does provide one way into philosophy: for it teaches us that truth comes to those who are prepared to give up, or "die to," their dearest convictions, or in the words of Luke's Gospel, that "whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17: 33). The *Phenomenology* shows that consciousness is pointed in the direction of speculative philosophy by religious belief that is itself made necessary by the instability of our own secular certainties.

I should point out, by the way, that Hegel's phenomenological account of religion should not be confused with his later philosophy of religion. Hegel's phenomenology of religion considers religion insofar as it is a relation of *consciousness* to an *object* (God), albeit one that undermines the perspective of consciousness itself through the idea that God and humanity come to form one self-knowing spirit. Hegel's philosophy of religion, on the other hand, considers religion insofar as it is a way of knowing the *truth*, albeit through consciousness, "picture-thinking," and feeling. It will show that religion complements philosophy by picturing as "love," and believing in, the very power of universal

15. Hegel, *VGP* 3: 372, my translation, and *PR* 20/24. See also *EL* 29/47 (§6).

reason and negativity that we fully understand only in philosophy. The philosophy of religion thus emphasizes more than the phenomenology of religion the enduring positive significance of religion for our spiritual lives.[16] The phenomenology of religion, by contrast, stresses that we need to let go of the religious viewpoint if we are to become speculative philosophers. It shows that religion points beyond itself to philosophy by conceiving of God and humanity as "reconciled." It also shows that religion itself helps us to let go of the very form of religious consciousness—though only for the purposes of doing philosophy, not in our everyday lives (in which religion remains central, for Hegel)—by conceiving of the willingness to *let go* as the spirit of true forgiveness.

As I remarked in chapter 3, religious consciousness emerges in the *Phenomenology* at the point where the "self-certain Spirit which forgives evil . . . lets go of (*abläßt von*) its own simple unitary nature and rigid unchangeableness" (*PhS* 477/572).[17] In Hegel's view, this readiness to let go—for example, of the opposition between God and humanity—suffuses fully developed religious consciousness as a whole and eventually leads logically to the move to philosophy or absolute knowing.

Letting Go

Absolute knowing is not religious consciousness, but it, too, requires the readiness to let go because consciousness can become philosophical, onto-logical thought only if the "I" refrains from "cling[ing] (*festhalten*) to itself in the *form* of *self-consciousness* as against the form of substantiality and objectivity" (*PhS* 490/588). Absolute knowing, one should recall, does not bridge the gap between consciousness and things by showing how we can gain access to them; it suspends or gives up the idea that consciousness and being are fundamentally separate in the first place. Absolute knowing does not, however, "suspend" the opposition of subject and object by simply "cast[ing] the differences back into the abyss of the Absolute" in the manner of Schelling. Hegel's mature approach to all oppositions—in the *Phenomenology* and beyond—is not to assert that they presuppose a unified Absolute in which they are dissolved but to let such oppositions dissolve themselves. Absolute knowing, he says, consists in "this seeming inactivity which merely contemplates how what is differentiated spontaneously moves in its own self (*sich an ihm selbst bewegt*) and returns into its unity" (*PhS* 490/588).

This readiness to let go of oppositions by letting them undermine themselves is required if we are to follow the detailed arguments of both the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology*, which are both the work of absolute knowing.[18] The *Logic* proceeds not by overcoming or "sublating" oppositions in a presupposed "higher

16. See Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel*, pp. 242–75.
17. Translation revised. See also Hegel, *PhS* 409, 484/494, 581.
18. See Houlgate, "Absolute Knowing Revisited," p. 64.

unity" but by allowing concepts to demonstrate their own "finitude and the untruth of their supposed independent self-subsistence (*die Unwahrheit ihres Für-sich-sein-Sollens*)" (*SL* 39/1: 30).[19] Concepts become fluid, therefore,

> when the pure certainty of self . . . giv[es] up the *fixity* (*das Fixe*) of its self-positing, by giving up not only the fixity of the pure concrete, which the "I" itself is, in contrast with its differentiated content, but also the fixity of the differentiated moments . . . posited in the element of pure thinking [i.e., of the categories]. (*PhS* 20/37)

We will see in part 3 precisely what it means for concepts to become "fluid." It is important to recognize, however, that progress is made in the *Logic* by watching the assumed independence of concepts, such as "being" and "nothing," undermine itself and *not* by assuming in advance that such concepts are mere moments of some overarching, synthetic whole.

Progress is made in the *Phenomenology* in the same way. One shape of consciousness develops logically into another by depriving *itself* of the very certainty of which it is initially so assured and so doing "violence" to itself (*PhS* 51/74). Consciousness progresses, therefore, by *losing* its certainty of itself—letting go of its initial conception of itself and its object—and coming to understand itself in a new way. Progress is certainly made; it would be absurd to deny that Hegel's thought is progressive. But consciousness moves forward purely because it loses the apparently firm ground on which it believes it stands, not because it is pulled forward teleologically by the lure of absolute knowing or driven forward by some presupposed power of dialectic. For natural consciousness, Hegel writes, the path of the *Phenomenology* "has negative significance . . . , and what is in fact the realization of the concept [the emergence of absolute knowing], counts for it rather as the loss of its own self; for it does lose its truth on this path" (*PhS* 49/72).

The *Phenomenology* is thus above all a skeptical, deconstructive work that brings about a "despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions" (*PhS* 50/73). In this sense, it resembles Descartes's First Meditation, which also serves to lead the reader to a philosophical understanding of truth through first loosening the hold that ordinary preconceptions have on us. Unlike the skepticism of the First Meditation, however, which is driven by the strategic energy of the philosopher, the skepticism at work in the *Phenomenology* is deployed by the very shapes of consciousness that are the subject of phenomenological study. Moreover, such skepticism is deployed by consciousness against itself *unintentionally* as each shape endeavors to assure itself that it does actually understand its object as it thinks it does. Each shape of consciousness is thus forced to let go of its certainty by its own act of trying to confirm it.

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19. See also Hegel, *EL* 82/114 (§41 Add. 1): "they must determine their own limits and point out their own defects."

Consciousness is not trying to become anything other than it is or to reach some predetermined goal, such as absolute knowing. It is trying to stand still and to *be* what it takes itself to be: to be immediately certain of *this* or to be in control of the slave, and so on. In so doing, however, consciousness undermines itself and forces itself to become something new. This is the "cunning" whereby the reason immanent in consciousness itself—consciousness's own inherent logic—turns consciousness into something other than it takes itself to be. For Hegel, indeed, phenomenological knowing is itself a form of cunning because it simply *lets* each shape of consciousness undermine itself through its own efforts, just as the speculative logician will let each category turn itself into a new one through its own intrinsic logic. In Hegel's own words, phenomenological and philosophical knowing are

> the cunning (*List*) which, while seeming to abstain from activity, looks on and watches how determinateness, with its concrete life, just where it fancies it is pursuing its own self-preservation and particular interest, is in fact doing the very opposite, is an activity that results in its own dissolution, and makes itself a moment of the whole. (*PhS* 33/53–4)

The *Phenomenology* sets out a systematic, immanent skepticism that is clearly different from the "external" skepticism of the radically self-critical philosopher who urges ordinary consciousness, from a position not shared by consciousness itself, to suspend its assumptions. Such external skepticism may, of course, succeed in moving ordinary consciousness on toward speculative philosophy. Through the *Phenomenology*, however, it becomes clear that the certainties of ordinary consciousness necessarily undermine themselves and that absolute knowing is in fact the logical outcome of all that such consciousness holds dear.

For Whom Is the Phenomenology *Written?*

The *Phenomenology* shows how shapes of consciousness logically entail, or "develop into," one another. It is possible, however, for ordinary consciousness to refuse to accept the lessons of the *Phenomenology*, just as it is able to resist the imperative of radical self-criticism. From Hegel's perspective, individuals and societies who do so will still be subject to the tensions he discerns within their own certainties, but they are nonetheless free to hold on to those certainties and to resist new ones. No one can be forced to become a religious believer or a pure philosopher, not even by the logic of his or her own position.

It is perfectly possible, therefore, for people to insist that the ordinary distinction between subject and object is irreducible, however convincing the phenomenologist's arguments may seem; if they do so, they effectively "bar the entrance to philosophy" as a presuppositionless discipline (*SL* 45/1: 38). This is unfortunate, but if people insist on their ordinary certainties, there is ultimately

nothing to be done except to leave them to their own devices. In Hegel's view, people who refuse to consider the arguments of others and declare themselves "finished and done with anyone who does not agree" ultimately "trample underfoot the roots of humanity" (*PhS* 43/64–5). Like the "barren ego" that "gloats over its own understanding," they exhibit a "satisfaction which we must leave to itself, for it flees from the universal, and seeks only to be for itself" (*PhS* 52/75). The *Phenomenology* is clearly not written for them.

For whom is it written then? Do the potential readers of Hegel's text already have to be predisposed to agree with him? No, but they must at least be open to the suggestion that the certainties of everyday life might prove to be problematic and lead consciousness in a direction in which it does not expect to go. As I understand it, the readers of the *Phenomenology* are intended to be ordinary people (and philosophers tied to ordinary beliefs) who are unmoved by the modern spirit of philosophical self-criticism and so need to be persuaded that Hegel's presuppositionless, ontological logic is a justified and relevant science. Such people will be firmly immersed in the world of everyday experience. But they cannot be completely bull-headed; they must have some interest in what Hegelian speculative philosophy might disclose about the world and be open to what it may show them about their own everyday beliefs. The *Phenomenology* is thus directed at readers who although steeped in the certainties of everyday life share in the openness of mind that characterizes true philosophy itself. Such openness of mind may come from a basic ethical decency and intelligence, or indeed, it may stem from religion. In the case of such readers, one must assume, religion does not cause them actually to suspend their ordinary certainties and begin philosophizing without presuppositions, but it does encourage them at least to consider the idea that their ordinary certainties might undermine themselves.

The consciousness of the *Phenomenology*'s intended readers anticipates the perspective of absolute knowing, but it is not absolute knowing in the fullest sense. It shares the readiness of absolute knowing to let the matter at hand develop but does not yet have the confidence that thought can know the true nature of being purely from within itself. The philosophical thought that undertakes the *phenomenological* study of consciousness is not absolute knowing in the fullest sense either. However, it is absolute knowing that has *suspended* its claim to know the form of being from within thought rather than open-minded ordinary consciousness that is *yet* to be convinced that it can make that claim. Philosophy must set aside its own ontological convictions in this way because it cannot simply take its own standpoint for granted in its education of consciousness. The *Phenomenology* does not, therefore, set out a *philosophy* of consciousness: it is not the study by pure thought of what consciousness ultimately *is*. It is simply a study of the way consciousness experiences itself and the world, a study of consciousness's own multiple certainties—a logical account of what is *apparent* to consciousness about itself and its world, rather than a presentation of the full truth of being or consciousness itself. This, indeed, is why

Hegel names his study *phenomenology*—the logic of appearance—rather than philosophy. The *Phenomenology* demonstrates, however, that the certainties of consciousness themselves lead to absolute knowing—the mode of thought that is responsible for both philosophical ontology *and* phenomenology itself.[20]

From the Phenomenology *to the* Logic

The *Phenomenology* leads to the standpoint of the *Logic*. Yet absolute knowing at the end of the *Phenomenology* does not collapse directly into the thought of pure being with which the *Logic* begins. The *Phenomenology* ends with the recognition that being is essentially universal, dialectical reason, or *Begriff*—the *same* reason as that which informs our own thinking (*PhS* 491/589). This changes our relation to being because being is no longer regarded as the *object* of consciousness, as something fundamentally distinct from our knowledge or thought of it. On the contrary, we now understand that we can determine the true nature of being merely by determining the true character of thought itself—that is, by becoming properly *self*-conscious. Absolute knowing is thus

> the certainty which, on the one hand, no longer has the object over against it but has internalized it, knows it as its own self—and, on the other hand, has given up the knowledge of itself as of something confronting the object of which it is only the annihilation, has divested itself of this subjectivity and is at one with its self-alienation. (*SL* 69/1: 68 [175])[21]

The opposition between consciousness and its object dissolves because both are discovered to have the same *determinate* character: both are negativity, dialectical reason, *Begriff*. With the collapse of that opposition, however, comes a new task: that of determining in detail the true nature of being now that being is no longer to be regarded merely as the object of consciousness but as structurally identical to thought and as comprehensible from within thought itself. As Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology*, "Spirit, . . . having won the concept (*Begriff*), unfolds existence and movement (*entfaltet . . . das Dasein und Bewegung*) in this ether of its life and is *Science*" (*PhS* 491/589).[22]

Now if this new understanding of being is not to be governed by the various

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20. Unlike Kantian appearance, Hegelian "appearance" is not experience that is conditioned by irreducibly *subjective* forms of intuition and so cut off from being as it might be in itself. Hegelian "appearance" is experience that is directly conscious of *being as such* but that does not fully comprehend the being of which it is aware. Ordinary consciousness, for Hegel, can be brought to a true, untrammeled understanding of being itself, but this is not possible for Kant.

21. See D. S. Stern, "The Immanence of Thought: Hegel's Critique of Foundationalism," *The Owl of Minerva* 22, 1 (Fall 1990): 33.

22. Translation revised.

conceptions of it previously formed by consciousness, these must obviously be set to one side. We must retain an ethical, religious, or simply intelligent willingness to let thought unfold immanently, but we must actively *forget* that being comprises perceivable natural objects and social and historical life.[23] We must also leave behind the conception of being entertained by religion and taken over by absolute knowing at the close of the *Phenomenology*: namely, that being is the dialectical process of becoming self-conscious in us. This means that we must hold to the simple idea that being is determinable by thought while suspending any determinate conceptions consciousness has of either (see *SL* 69/1: 68 [175]).

The *Phenomenology* thus does not end directly where the *Logic* begins—with the pure thought of being as such. It ends with a determinate conception of being as universal reason (*Begriff*) that marks the disappearance of the opposition between consciousness and its object. This collapse of the standpoint of consciousness then confronts thought with the task of determining a priori the nature of being *without* bringing into consideration any of the conceptions that consciousness forms of being or thought. The immanent skepticism of the *Phenomenology* leaves us, therefore, with the same task as the skepticism of radically self-critical thought. If we come to this task from the *Phenomenology*, however, we can carry it out only by first suspending the determinate conception of being with which the *Phenomenology* itself ends and which initially generated the task.

The project of the *Logic* is not to analyze what is involved in the determinate idea of being as "reason" (or "spirit"), even though absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology* culminates in this idea. Whichever route we take to it, the project of the *Logic* is simply to unfold what is implicit in pure or absolute knowing as such; that is, in the simple *unity* of thought and being—a unity that is initially no more than the indeterminate thought of sheer, immediate being.[24]

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23. See M. Theunissen, *Sein und Schein. Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), p. 113.

24. See Hegel, *SL* 69/1: 68 (175). In denying that, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, absolute knowing collapses directly into the thought of pure being with which the *Logic* begins, I take issue with William Maker's reading of Hegel. I fully endorse Maker's view that "the *Phenomenology* does not serve to deduce the concept of science by in any way predetermining or grounding the method, manner or nature of scientific cognition" and that the *Logic* itself "begins neither in nor with . . . any *structure* of knowing at all." In contrast to Maker, however, I believe that between the end of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic* there must occur an act of abstraction in which we specifically set aside the determinate conception of being and spirit reached at the close of the *Phenomenology*. See Maker, *Philosophy without Foundations*, pp. 72–3.