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PHL316

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 'Perceiving' is introduced as a model of consciousness that attempts to explain its conception of what knowledge is (i.e., the objects that are known to it) and how it knows these objects. This essay will explain this model of cognition, then examine some of the contradictions in *Perceiving* in effort to see whether this model of cognition can be remedied, so that knowledge as conceived under this model could still know the objects it claims to know. Then, an argument will be presented for why *Perceiving* is incoherent and unsalvageable by any attempt of modifying this model of consciousness.

*Perceiving* is a model of cognition in which its object is an external predetermined thing with various properties, and the subject is the passive perceiver of its properties. Perceiving initially considers the object as having the *essential* role in the epistemic relation between subject and object, which is to say that the object plays the determining role in what knowing the object would have to be like for perceiving (§111). The object is therefore said to be the in-itself (the cause of perception), while perception is how the object appears for consciousness (the being-for-consciousness). The object must have properties because in order to preserve its individuality, the object has got to be differentiated from the other objects that it is not. Without this differentiation, all you could ever say about '*this object*' are by means of *universal terms* (i.e., 'here', 'now', 'there', etc.) that could arbitrarily be applied to and said about any object whatsoever. Properties are thus important and necessary to the particularity of objects (e.g., in order to point out a particular blue-hued thing, you must use concepts to differentiate it from the

other non-blue-hued things that you're not pointing at). Concepts allow for this differentiation by standing in a negative relationship to the other concepts it is not. *Perceiving* uses this differentiation to determine the internal differences (i.e., properties) within objects and to consequently perceptually specify beings for knowledge (§113).

These properties, however, cannot be logically thought without the objects they inhere in. The property *sweetness* has no meaning apart from its presence in sugary things. Hegel writes, ***“this abstract universal medium, which can be called thinghood itself, or the pure essence, is none other than ... a simple togetherness of the many”*** (§113) to distinguish the object from the many properties it can instantiate. That is, sweetness is to be abstracted from the sugary object that expresses itself sensually. The object abstracted from its respective properties is what Hegel refers to as the ‘One’ (i.e., the unity of the object independent of the properties). The ‘Also’ is the collection of properties that a *One* has, which is to say that the *Also* is a feature of thinghood that allows for multiple non-excluding properties to coexist (e.g., sugar’s whiteness existing alongside its sweetness).

A contradiction occurs when *Perceiving* examines its experience of consciousness for consistency. Because perceiving based the essentiality of the epistemic relation in the object, various tensions arise when the ‘One’ and ‘Also’ are considered. First, the idea that the *One* is abstracted from its properties results in indeterminacy, because if the *One* is indifferent to its properties, then the *One* collapses into being no different from arbitrarily all other *One*’s. With respect to the *Also* and its relation amongst properties, the same issue arises wherein its notion of excluding or including other properties is called into question – what ties the properties together

if the *One* is abstracted from it? Hegel writes “*the object that I take up presents itself as purely One. I am also cognizant of the property in it, which is universal, but as a result, I go beyond that singularity*” (§117) to illustrate that even in describing properties in the *Also*, a reference is constantly made back to a universal (e.g., denoting a blue-hued property will always point to the universal *blue-ness* that instantiates the property). Considering this feature of universality of the property, *Perceiving* tries to “*take the objective essence as a community anyway*” (§117), because the object also has properties that it shares with others (e.g., a universal shape, taste, smell, etc.). When *Perceiving* tries to “*posit the objective essence as an excluding One*” (§117), it’s because excluding relations are necessary in avoiding contradictory properties inhering in the same object. These determination relations amongst universals must be themselves perceptible since *Perceiving*’s claim is that it can know everything about its object purely perceptually.

Basically, *Perceiving* notices properties and exclusion relations among things, and tries to divide them into non-contradictory standing relations but notices multiple properties that aren’t in contradiction with one another. For example, a triangle has the property of having vertices and a line has the property of being straight, yet in order to perceive the triangle, the subject will have to perceive the common properties between the two. But the mutuality between the triangle’s properties and line’s properties is not perceptible. *Perceiving* thinks that it can have universal or shareable properties that can be in multiple things with excluding relations, but it does not explain how this is perceptually available to it. *Perceiving* keeps oscillating between regarding the object as the medium for its properties, and as being intrinsic, because its conception of the subject’s role in cognition is underestimated.

If *Perceiving* were to try to address its most gripping obstacles, it would require a move that modifies its conception of cognition so that the relations between properties and universals can be consistently thought together. However, this is not possible without introducing some essentiality into the subject, which just undermines *Perceiving* by stripping away its passivity. I think that *Perceiving* is incoherent because the structural and logical concepts that *Perceiving* uses to articulate the object of cognition are not known according to its conception of knowledge. That is, the *One* and *Also* are not features of thing-hood that explain why cognitions' perception of them are possible. In order to know objects in the way that *Perceiving* takes itself to know objects, the subject must already have various logical concepts at hand (e.g., the concept of thing with properties, non-contradictory relations, contradictory relations, identity laws, etc.).

The argumentative flaw in *Perceiving* is in its presuppositional method of grouping properties together without explaining where these concepts used in grouping the properties come from. As well, the subject would have to know how to apply these concepts in order to make sense of what is being perceived. For example, to believe that there's not a contradiction in seeing the equality sign as pointing in two opposite directions, the subject must be able to use judgement faculties that will combine the perception of the arrow pointing left with the perception of the arrow pointing right in addition to the notion of equality. *Perceiving* needs conceptualisation in its theory of cognition so that standing relations can be perceptible. These determination relations amongst universals must be perceptible in order to know the object of experience. And this is only epistemically available to the subject (as it perceives itself in *Perceiving*) if the subject is not regarded as passive in cognition.

### Work Cited

Friedrich, Hegel Georg Wilhelm. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated and edited by Terry P. Pinkard, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2018.