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First Passage Analysis

In the introduction of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel contemplates the best way to grasp the nature of the Absolute or of beings in themselves, with effort to ascertain our human capacity for cognition and likewise for knowledge in general. The endeavour for Absolute knowing leads the investigation towards the examination of the different faculties that may serve fruitful in this exposition. However, within the array of faculties that humans are bestowed with (e.g., imagination, sense-perception), each capacity has objects that it claims it cannot know. Hegel dismisses these capacities and contends that the nature of knowledge is only cognized by a capacity that has no limit to what objects it can cognize. That is, the Absolute (i.e., truth) is wholly cognizable through a single essence. This single essence cannot be passive or instrumental in nature, because that would entail some alteration of its object. Instead, the essence (Hegel argues is cognition) must show that its knowledge is completely identical to its object. This is Absolute knowledge. Therefore, it is the unfolding job of cognition to give an elaborative account of: why it is cognition rather than something else that attains to Absolute knowledge, which one of its models of consciousness grasps the object of its knowledge perfectly (i.e., its concept of the object is identical to the object in itself), and how we know this models' concept matches its object. The examination consists in seeing whether the in-itself (i.e., any object we are uncertain of) corresponds to the for-itself (i.e., cognitions' concept of that object). The for-itself is a relating relation that consciousness also applies to itself – it is aware of

itself as a determinate object, and consequently it cognizes itself as both what it is and what it is not. Whatever is for-consciousness can then be thought of consciousness' knowing. Similarly, what is in-itself is outside of this relating relation yet still within consciousness because the for-itself has a conception of it as well.

Determining the truth of knowledge is therefore an investigation that occurs within us, since truth is actually what the for-itself knows of the in-itself. Hegel writes ***“however, from this aspect not only will it be superfluous for us to add anything and not only because concept and object, the standard and what is to be examined, are present in consciousness itself”*** to emphasize that the concept (i.e., the for-itself) and the object (i.e., the in-itself) are within the very nature of knowledge itself, and that what consciousness claims is outside the relating relation (i.e., the in-itself) is just the standard that consciousness has chosen as the metric by which knowledge measures itself against.

However, Hegel then confusingly writes ***“rather, we are lifted above comparing the two and conducting a genuine examination such that, while consciousness examines its own self, the only thing that remains to us is purely to look on”*** as if to suggest that consciousness is taken by surprise when the concept and object do not match up, and that consciousness is also unable to get behind the scenes to examine the object in-itself. One reading might argue that since Hegel asserts that the object in itself is not known to us, ‘object’ could be understood as the concept consciousness has of that object. As well, the ‘surprise’ Hegel suggests that consciousness has might be interpreted as rather a momentary observation whereby consciousness examines a turn of events just as a seed examines its first sprout; having never existed as a full-fledged plant, yet still having the intuition of what is to come. Hegel continues by writing ***“this is so because consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other hand, it is***

consciousness of its own self. It is consciousness of what, to it, is the true, as well as consciousness of its knowing of the true. While both are for the same consciousness, consciousness itself is their comparison” to reinforce the claim that both the for-itself and the in-itself are within consciousness, and the standard that inheres in consciousness is what compares the two against each other. Hegel writes “*it is an issue for that consciousness whether or not its knowing of the object corresponds to the object*” to express consciousness’ constant strive for its concept of the object to perfectly match the object-in-itself; even if consciousness were to rest in thoughtless indolence, a constant anxiety would swell and pressure consciousness to relentlessly advance beyond the limits it imposed on itself. Therefore, this ‘issue’ Hegel mentions is simply the reassurance that consciousness would not let the exposition come to a halt.

Hegel writes “*to be sure, for consciousness, the object seems to be such only in the manner that consciousness knows it; consciousness seems, as it were, to be incapable of getting behind the object to the object as it is in itself and not as the object is for consciousness*” to say that consciousness is not equipped to access the object-in-itself, but only ever conceptions that consciousness has of the object. Hegel writes “*however, consciousness therefore also seems to be incapable in its own self of testing its knowing of the object*” to further assert that since consciousness only ever has conceptions of the object as conceived by other conceptions, and not consciousness of the object as it is in itself, consciousness is either forced to endlessly compare its conceptions against other conceptions, or look elsewhere to measure its knowledge properly. Thus, Hegel writes “*yet precisely because consciousness knows of an object at all, there is already present the difference that something is, to consciousness, the in-itself, but another moment is knowing, or the being of the object for consciousness*” to explicate that the very

appearance of the in-itself means that there is a distinction between it and the for-itself, and that subsequently the in-itself does not match with the object in itself. When consciousness has a conception of what objects are like in themselves that does not match with its own conception of knowledge, it must compare and test the concept with the object. Hegel writes “*it is upon this difference which is present that the testing depends. If, in this comparison, the two do not correspond to one another, then it seems as if consciousness must alter its knowing in order to make it adequate to the object*” to express that when consciousness has a conception of how objects in themselves are like that do not correspond to its own conception of that knowledge, it will alter its conception of knowing by changing its own conception of the object. The relationship between the knowing and the object as known makes it so that when there is a mismatch, consciousness signifies that this standard or model of knowledge is not one that is at equilibrium with the object in itself. When consciousness alters its conception of the object, what in turn happens is not a ‘removal’ of the previous mode of knowing, but rather in this negation of the previous mode of knowing, a more determinate mode of knowing ensues in its absence.