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Introductory Remarks

One of Hegel's main concerns in the revolutionary book he wrote in the German city of Jena while only in his thirties, his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is a familiar modern philosophical concern: the attempt to understand the various competencies involved in distinctly human sentience, sapience, and agency, and, especially and above all in Hegel's project, the complex inter-relations among all such competencies. So there are in his unprecedented book accounts of sensory receptivity, perception, judgment, generalization, inference, self-consciousness, nomic necessity, justification, as well as of intention, purpose, practical reason, linguistic community, and sociality in general. Hegel's account is unusual in that it is conducted via a procedure he invented, a "phenomenology," or what he at first called a "science of the experience of consciousness." This new procedure, at the very minimum and somewhat crudely summarized, involved imagining possible models of experience (models of its basic structure), primarily experience of objects and of other subjects, restricted to one or some set of competencies, or in some specific relation, and then demonstrating by a series of essentially *reductio ad absurdum* arguments that such an imagined experience, when imagined from the point of view of the experiencer, really could *not* be a possible or

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coherent experience, thus requiring some determinate addition or alteration to repair the imagined picture, and so a new possibility to be entertained. Eventually such an internal testing of models of experience becomes in the course of Hegel's developmental account so detailed and rich that it amounts to an examination of the possibility and viability of an actual historical form of life, a historical experience conducted under the assumption of such competencies and their inter-relationship. So once he has assembled all the materials necessary for a full, adequate picture of such a subject of experience (after the first five chapters), he then begins an even more unusual account of the development of such a subject, now a form of *collective* like-mindedness he calls *Geist*. From this point on, the account is even more unusual because Hegel treats the project of human self-knowledge as essentially a matter of what he calls *Geist*'s "actuality," its historical and social development, and he seems to effect a shift in the proper subject matter of philosophy itself, insisting that philosophy must not study mere concepts, but concepts *in* their "actuality," and that means in the *Phenomenology* in their historical actuality, when that actuality is considered in terms of this experiential "test."

So far, much of this should sound unusual but, aside from Hegel's highly idiosyncratic innovations in philosophical German, comprehensible and relatively trackable in the text. But there are two points in the progression of topics where puzzlement can easily become complete bafflement. They occur in the fourth chapter on "self-consciousness," a passage Hegel himself points to as the most important in the book, its "turning point." The first occurs when he suddenly claims: "Self-consciousness is desire itself (*Begierde überhaupt*)." The second is just as, if not more important, for Hegel's theory of self-consciousness and for post-Hegelian thought, and it is just as difficult to understand: the claim

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that "self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness."

I want to try to understand the meaning and philosophical motivation for these two claims in Hegel's adventurous book. Several qualifications are necessary, though, before embarking on such an enterprise. I will mention only the most serious, namely, that strictly speaking Hegel cannot be said to have a "theory" of self-consciousness in the usual sense, or at least that isolating such a theory does some violence to his famous holism. The entire *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a meditation on self-consciousness and the coming to self-consciousness of human subjects, especially as a kind of collective subject coming to collective self-consciousness, and Hegel treats as integral to this account everything from medieval Catholicism to the French Revolution. But as I hope to show in the following, the most distinctive, original aspect of that long account begins to come into focus in Chapter Four and that is sufficient reason for concentrating on that section alone.

There is another, broader reason for doing so, one more specific to the British and American tradition of philosophy. For several reasons philosophers like Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant continue to have a living presence in contemporary Anglophone philosophy (at least to some degree), and, by contrast, what is rather clumsily characterized as "European philosophy" has very little presence at the elite research universities.[1] One can make a good case that this supposedly divergent tradition began with Hegel and his influence on later European philosophy. There are two aspects to this influence. One has to do with the reluctance of those who philosophize under the shadow of Hegel to accept any firm separation between strictly epistemological or metaphysical

[1] "Clumsily" because much of what is characterized as analytic philosophy originated in Austrian and German philosophy.

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issues or even broadly formal issues from various issues in what is traditionally considered practical philosophy, accounts of action, agency, purposiveness, interpretation, and the like. Such a holistic approach leads quickly to the second point of divergence, one that builds upon the integration of practical and theoretical philosophy: the post-Hegelian insistence on the relevance of human sociality and the historicity of that sociality in accounting for claims of cognitive success or even in understanding properly the nature of the basic mind-world and subject-subject relation inevitably presupposed in any account of the very possibility of epistemic or practical success. There are many forms of such claims for the philosophical relevance of such sociohistorical actuality to what had traditionally been considered strictly philosophical issues in epistemology, metaphysics, moral theory, aesthetics and so forth: socioeconomic matters in Marxism, genealogy and psychology in Nietzsche, mood and resoluteness in Heidegger and existentialism, archeology and genealogy in Foucault, the dependence of subject on structure (or the disappearance of subject into structure) in structuralism, and so forth. (The countercharge by more traditional philosophy has always been, of course, that such enterprises transform philosophy into something else, and so massively transform philosophy as to lose touch with it altogether.)

What I am calling the divergence between the traditions could plausibly be said to have originated in the turning point of this individual chapter in the *Phenomenology*—another reason for attending to it closely, even if in some violation of Hegel's holism. The book's turning point in other words involved a much broader turning point in the modern Western philosophical tradition, and so is especially valuable in the way it can highlight the issue: transformation of philosophy, or a farewell to philosophy altogether?

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And a strategy naturally suggests itself at this point. Since the topic of the chapter, self-consciousness, together with another to which it is deeply linked, freedom, are far and away the most important topics in what we call German Idealism, I propose to begin with the introduction of the idea of the centrality of self-consciousness in human sapience by Immanuel Kant. For that is the position, I want to show, that Hegel is building on and transforming in the direction just suggested.[2]

[2] The following represents a reconsideration and substantial alteration of the interpretation of Chapter Four I originally presented in *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) (hereafter HI). If anything, I am more committed here to what Scott Jenkins, in "Hegel's Concept of Desire," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, no. 1 (2009), pp. 109–30, calls a "contextualist" approach; that is, working within the limitations of what has been developed in the first three chapters in order to explain why there seem to be so many new topics, rather than just helping oneself to "an appeal to the capacities of rational, sentient beings" in general (109) as Jenkins does. I think the present account answers some of the concerns raised by Jenkins (110–12). In general, Jenkins wants to press the point that Hegel should not be seen here as primarily concerned with a further elaboration of the conditions of knowing (which he sees me doing in HI), but rather as advancing a broad, powerful claim about the nature of human subjectivity as such, that that is his *new* theme. He goes on to deny that this subjectivity should be understood as a mere "point of view," insisting instead that it is a corporeal, historical, laboring subject. It seems to me truer to the radicality of Hegel's attempt to admit that he is indeed on about such themes, but in the service of a further elaboration of the possibility of intentional consciousness. Put another way, Jenkins does not seem to me to do justice (as McDowell does in an interpretation we shall look at shortly) to Hegel's formulation in ¶167 that *in* self-consciousness, "the whole breadth of the sensuous world is preserved for it." It is true that there is a great deal to say about the content of a self-relation in relation to an object before the properly epistemological focus returns, but Hegel never loses sight of it. See also my concluding remarks about "wholeness."

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