

G.W.F. HEGEL: "Introduction," from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).

Translated by KENLEY R. DOVE

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G.W.F. HEGEL: “INTRODUCTION”
FROM THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT* (1807)
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[73]* It is a natural assumption that, in philosophy, one must first come to an understanding concerning the nature of knowledge before taking up the real subject matter, namely, the actual knowledge of what truly is. Knowledge, in turn, tends to be regarded as the instrument with which one takes hold of the absolute or as the medium through which one discovers it. The concern that there may be various kinds of knowledge, of which one might be better suited than another for attaining the end in view, seems moreover legitimate, for by making an erroneous choice among them one will thus grasp clouds of error instead of the heaven of truth; and when knowledge is taken to be a faculty of a determinate kind and scope, the concern once again seems legitimate that error will be grasped instead of truth unless the nature and limits of this faculty are still more precisely determined. Indeed, this concern will surely transform itself into the conviction that there is an absurdity in the Concept of even beginning a process of knowledge designed to gain for consciousness that which is in-itself, and that there is a strict line of demarcation separating knowledge and the absolute. For if knowledge is the instrument to take hold of the absolute essence, one is immediately reminded that the application of an instrument to a thing does not leave the thing as it is, but brings about a shaping and alteration of it. Or, if knowledge is not an instrument for our activity, but a more or less passive medium through which the light of truth reaches us, then again we do not receive this truth as it is in itself, but as it is in and through this medium. In both cases we employ a means which immediately brings about the opposite of its own end; or, rather, the absurdity lies in our making use of any means at all. To be sure, it does seem that an acquaintance with the way the instrument functions might help overcome this difficulty. For then it would seem possible to get the truth in its purity simply by subtracting from the result the instrument’s part in that representation of the absolute which we have gained through it. In fact, however, this correction would only lead us back to our point of departure. For [i], if we remove from a thing which has been shaped by an instrument the contribution of that instrument to it, then the thing (in this case the absolute) is for us exactly as it was before this now obviously superfluous effort. Or [ii], were the absolute only to be brought a bit *closer* to us by an instrument, perhaps as a bird is trapped by a lime twig, without being changed at all, it would surely laugh at this ruse if it were not, in and for itself, already close to us of its own accord. For in this case knowledge itself would be a ruse, pretending through its multifarious effort to do something other than merely bring forth a relation which is immediate and thus effortless. Or [iii], if the examination of knowledge, which we now represent as a *medium*, makes us acquainted with the law of light-refraction in the medium, it is likewise useless to subtract this factor from the result; for knowledge, through which the truth touches us, is the ray of light itself rather than its refraction; and if this be subtracted, we would be left with no more than an indication of pure direction or empty place.

[74] If concern about falling into error makes one in the meanwhile distrustful of science, which takes up its work and actually knows without any such hesitations, then one should not overlook the

* Bracketed numbers [73–89] refer to the corresponding paragraphs in the Miller and Pinkard translations and do not appear in Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes* or in Dove’s original translation.

possibility of reversing this procedure by placing distrust in this very distrust and becoming concerned about another question: Is not this fear of erring already the error itself? As a matter of fact, this fear presupposes something, indeed a great deal, as truth; its hesitations and inferences are based on an assumption whose claim to truth is yet to be examined. To be more specific, it presupposes *notions* about *knowledge* as an *instrument* and a *medium*, and also the notion that there is a *difference between ourselves and this knowledge*; but above all, it presupposes that the absolute *stands on one side* and that *knowledge*, though it is *on the other side*, for itself and separated from the absolute, is nevertheless something real. Hence it assumes that knowledge may be true despite its presupposition that knowledge is outside the absolute and therewith outside the truth as well. By taking this position, what calls itself the fear of error reveals itself as a fear of the truth.

[75] This conclusion follows from the presupposition that the absolute alone is true or that the true alone is absolute. To reject it, one might draw a distinction between knowledge of the absolute, which is the aim of science, and a knowledge which, though it indeed does not know the absolute, might be capable of yet another truth. But we are beginning to see that such talking back and forth will only lead to an obscure distinction between an absolute truth and a truth of some other sort, and that “absolute,” “knowledge,” etc., are words presupposing a significance which has yet to be discovered.

[76] One could, of course, simply condemn all such useless notions as accidental and arbitrary and cast them out together with all talk about knowledge as an instrument to take hold of the absolute or as a medium through which we discover the truth, and so on—since all these notions of a knowledge separated from the absolute and an absolute separated from knowledge will no doubt lead to some such talk about the conditions of knowledge. It would also be possible to spurn in like fashion the excuses which those who are incapable of science derive from such presumed conditions, excuses designed to avoid the toil of science and to give at the same time the impression of earnest and zealous effort. And, rejecting these notions straightway, one could, instead of bothering to find answers to all this, even regard as deceptive the use of words bound up with these notions, words like “absolute,” “knowledge,” as well as “objective” and “subjective” and innumerable others whose meaning is assumed to be familiar to everyone. For to give the impression, partly that their meaning is universally familiar and partly too that one himself possesses their Concept, does seem rather like an attempt to avoid the fundamental task, namely, to give this Concept. With still better right, however, one could spare himself the effort of even taking notice of such notions and expressions, by which science itself is to be avoided, for these constitute no more than an empty appearance of knowledge, an appearance which immediately vanishes as soon as science makes *its* appearance.

But science, in making its appearance, *is* an appearance itself; it is not yet science in its fully realized and propagated truth simply by virtue of making its appearance. Whether one thinks that *science* is *the* appearance because it makes its appearance *next to another kind of knowledge* or whether one calls that other untrue knowledge its mode of appearance is therefore a matter of indifference. But science must free itself from this semblance, and it can only do so by confronting the semblance itself. For science cannot simply reject an untrue form of knowledge as a merely common view of things and give assurance that it is a completely different way of knowing, to which the other knowledge is

of no significance whatever. Nor can it refer to the intimation of a better knowledge within that other. By giving this *assurance* it would declare that its force resides in its *being*; but the untrue knowledge also appeals to the fact that *it is*, and gives assurance that to it science is nothing—one barren assurance carries as much weight as another. Still less can science refer to the intimation of something better which is said to be present in untrue knowledge, pointing the way toward science; for, in the first place, this would involve once again reference to a mere being and, secondly, this reference would be to itself, but as it exists in untrue knowledge, i.e., to a bad mode of its own being, and to its appearance rather than to what it is in and for itself. These, then, are the reasons for proposing to undertake a description of knowledge as it appears, a presentation of knowledge as a phenomenon.

[77] In view of the fact that this presentation has for its object only phenomenal knowledge, the presentation itself seems to be unscientific, for, unlike free science, it does not seem to move in a Shape peculiar to itself. But it can be regarded, from this point of view, as the pathway of the natural consciousness which is striving toward true knowledge, or as the path of the soul which is making its way through the sequence of its own transformations as through waystations prescribed to it by its very nature, that it may, by purifying itself, lift itself to the level of Spirit and attain cognizance of what it is in itself through the completed experience of its own self.

[78] Natural consciousness will show itself to be merely the Concept of knowledge, or unreal knowledge. But since it immediately takes itself to be real knowledge, this pathway has a negative significance for it, and what is actually the realization of the Concept is for it rather the loss and destruction of its self: for on this road it loses its truth. The road may thus be viewed as the way of doubt, or, more properly, as the way of despair. For what happens here is not what is usually understood by “doubt,” i.e., entertaining a disbelief in this or that presumed truth only to return to that same “truth” once the “doubt” has been appropriately dissipated, so that in the end matters stand pretty much as in the beginning. On the contrary, this road is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, a knowledge for which that is most real which is, in truth, only the unrealized Concept. And therefore this thoroughgoing skepticism is not that device with which an earnest zealot may imagine himself made ready for truth and armed for science: The *resolve* not to found science on authority, surrendering oneself to the thoughts of others, but rather to examine everything for oneself and follow only one’s own conviction, or, better yet, to produce everything by oneself and hold one’s own act alone as true. Instead, the sequence of Shapes through which consciousness passes on this road is the detailed history of consciousness’ own education to the level of science. And whereas that resolve assumes that education may be treated like a resolution, as something immediately dispensed with and done, this road, contrary to such an untruth, actually carries it through.

To follow one’s own conviction is certainly more than to give oneself over to authority; but by the conversion of opinion held on authority into opinion held out of personal conviction, the content of what is held is not necessarily altered, and truth does not necessarily take the place of error. In persisting within a system of opinion and prejudice, it matters little whether one bases himself on the authority of others or on personal conviction; the only difference is the vanity which is peculiar to the latter. But through that skepticism which directs itself to the whole compass of phenomenal

consciousness, Spirit becomes able, for the first time, to examine what truth is. For this skepticism brings about a despair over notions, thoughts and opinions which are called natural, and it is of no consequence whether these notions are said to be one's own or others'. But when consciousness engages in the examination *straightway*, it is still filled and burdened with these "natural" notions and that is why it is, in fact, incapable of what it wants to undertake.

[79] The *complete system* of the forms of unreal consciousness will present itself through the necessity of the progression and interrelatedness of the forms. To make this comprehensible, it may be noted, in a general and preliminary way, that the presentation of untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely *negative* movement, as natural consciousness one-sidedly views it. And a mode of knowledge which makes this one-sidedness its basic principle is one of the Shapes of incomplete consciousness which, as such, belongs to the system of these Shapes and will become manifest in the course of the road itself. It is, namely, the skepticism which sees in every result only *pure nothingness* and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is determinate, that it is the nothingness *of that from which it results*. In fact, it is only when nothingness is taken as the nothingness of what it comes from that it is the true result; for then nothingness itself is a *determinate* nothingness and has a *content*. The skepticism which ends up with the abstraction of nothingness, or with emptiness, cannot proceed any further but must wait and see whether anything new presents itself to it, and what this is, in order to cast it into the same abysmal void. But if, on the contrary, the result is comprehended as it truly is, as *determinate* negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made by which the progression through the complete sequence of Shapes takes place of its own accord.

[80] For knowledge, however, the *goal* is fixed just as necessarily as the sequence of the progression. It is that point where knowledge no longer has need to go out beyond itself, where it finds itself and where the Concept corresponds to the object and the object to the Concept. The progression toward this goal is consequently without halt and at no earlier stage is satisfaction to be found. Although what is limited to a natural life is by itself powerless to transcend its immediate existence, it *is* driven out by another power—and thus to be uprooted is its *death*. But since consciousness is for itself its own *Concept*, it immediately transcends what is limited, and, because this limitedness is its own, it transcends its self. With the positing of something individual, the beyond is also established for consciousness, even when it is only *next to* what is limited, as in spatial intuition. Consciousness therefore suffers violence at its own hands, a violence through which it destroys for itself any limited satisfaction.

Under the influence of this violence, anxiety may well retreat from the truth and try to conserve what is in danger of being lost. But it can find no rest. Should it wish to remain in thoughtless indolence, thought will trouble the thoughtlessness and its restlessness will disturb that indolence. Or, should it take refuge as a sentimentality which claims to find everything *good in its kind*, this claim will suffer equal violence at the hands of reason, which finds a thing wanting precisely in so far as it is a kind. Or, finally, fear of the truth may hide, from itself as well as from others, behind the illusion that, despite everything, one is somehow more subtle than any mere thoughts, be they one's own or from others—as if passionate zeal for truth itself made it so difficult, if not impossible, to find any truth other than the subtleties peculiar to vanity. This is the vanity which understands how every truth may be rendered vain that it may return to itself and feast upon this its own understanding. And this

understanding, which knows how all thoughts may be incessantly dissolved and bereft of all content, finding instead no more than the barren “I,” is a satisfaction which must be left to itself, for it flees the universal and seeks only being-for-itself.

[81] In addition to the foregoing preliminary and general remarks concerning the manner and necessity of the progression, it may also be helpful to mention something about the *method* of carrying out the inquiry. For if this presentation is viewed as a description of the way *science* is *related* to *phenomenal* knowledge, and as an *investigation* and *critical examination* into *the reality of knowledge*, it does not seem possible for it even to take place without some presupposition which will serve as the fundamental standard of measurement. For an examination consists in applying an accepted standard and in deciding, on the basis of final agreement or disagreement with the standard, whether what is being tested is correct or incorrect. Thus the standard as such, and science too, were it the standard, is accepted as the essence or the *in-itself*. But here, where science will make its first appearance, neither science nor anything else has justified itself as the *essence* or as the *in-itself*; and without some such basic principle it seems that an examination cannot take place.

[82] This contradiction and its removal will present themselves more distinctly if, as a first step, the abstract determinations of knowledge and truth are called to mind as they exist in consciousness. Consciousness *distinguishes* from itself something to which it at the same time *relates* itself; or, as this is expressed: this something is something *for consciousness*. The determinate side of this process of relating, or the *being* of something *for a consciousness*, is *knowledge*. From this being for an other, however, we distinguish the *being-in-itself*; that which is related to knowledge is at the same time distinguished from it and is posited as *existing* outside this relationship too. The side of this in-itself [existing outside the relationship] is *truth*. Exactly what might be involved in these determinations need not further concern us here. Inasmuch as phenomenal knowledge is our object, so at the outset the determinations of this object are taken as they immediately present themselves; and they present themselves very much as they have been taken.

[83] When we investigate the truth of knowledge, it seems that we are investigating what knowledge is *in itself*. But since knowledge is *our* object in this investigation, it is *for us*. Therefore the *in-itself* of the object resulting from our investigation would not be the *in-itself* of knowledge but rather its being *for us*. What we would affirm as its essence would not really be its truth but only our knowledge of it. The essence or the standard would lie in us, and that which was to be compared with this standard and decided upon as a result of this comparison would not necessarily have to recognize that standard.

[84] But this distinction, or this semblance of a distinction [between what is *in-itself* and what is *for us*], is overcome, together with the attendant presupposition, by the nature of the object which we are investigating. Since consciousness provides itself with its own standard, the investigation will be a comparison of consciousness with its own self; for the distinction just made falls in it. In consciousness, one moment is *for an other*; in other words, consciousness in general has the determination of the moment of knowledge in it. At the same time, this other is to consciousness not only something *for it*; it is also something outside this relationship or *in itself*: the moment of truth.

Therefore, in what consciousness within its own self designates as the *in-itself* or the *true*, we have the standard by which consciousness itself proposes to measure its knowledge.

If we call *knowledge* the *Concept*, and call the essence or the *true* that-which-is or the object, then the examination will consist in looking to see whether the Concept corresponds to the object. But if we call the *essence* or the *in-itself of the object* the *Concept*, and if, on the other hand, we understand by the *object* the object *as object*, i.e., as it is *for an other*, then the examination will consist in our looking to see whether the object corresponds to its Concept. It is not difficult to see that these two presentations coincide; it is, however, essential to hold fast to the following fact throughout the entire course of the investigation: These two moments, *Concept and object, being-for-another* and *being-in-itself*, fall within that same knowledge which we are investigating, and we consequently do not need to bring along standards or to apply *our* preconceived ideas and thoughts during this investigation; and, through leaving them out, we will reach the point of observing the subject matter as it is *in* and *for itself*.

[85] But a contribution by us becomes superfluous not only in connection with the side of the investigation just outlined—that Concept and object, the measure and what is to be examined, are present in consciousness itself. We are also spared the effort of comparing these two moments. Indeed, it is not even necessary for us to undertake the actual *examination*. And therefore, since consciousness examines itself, what remains for us, on this side of the investigation too, is simply the pure act of *observation*. For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object and, on the other, consciousness of its self; it is consciousness of what to it is the true, and consciousness of its knowledge of this truth. Since both are *for consciousness*, consciousness itself is their comparison; whether its knowledge of the object corresponds or fails to correspond with this object will be a matter *for consciousness* itself.

To be sure, the object seems to be for consciousness only as consciousness knows it; consciousness seems, as it were, unable to get behind the object in order to see it, *not* as it is *for consciousness*, but as it is *in itself*. Therefore consciousness also seems unable to examine its own knowledge by comparing it with the object. But the difference between the *in-itself* and the *for-itself* is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all. Something is *to it* the *in-itself*, but the knowledge or the being of the object *for* consciousness is *to it* still another moment. It is upon this differentiation, which exists and is present at hand, that the examination is grounded. And if, in this comparison, the two moments do not correspond, then it seems that consciousness will have to alter its knowledge in order to bring it into accord with the object. In the alteration of the knowledge, however, the object itself becomes to consciousness something which has in fact been altered as well. For the knowledge which existed was essentially a knowledge of the object: with change in the knowledge, the object also becomes an other, since it was an essential part of this knowledge. Hence it comes to pass for consciousness that what had been to it the *in-itself* is not in itself, or, what was *in itself* was so only *for consciousness*. When therefore consciousness finds its knowledge not corresponding with its object, the object itself will also give way. In other words, the standard of the examination is changed if that whose standard it was supposed to be fails to endure the course of the examination. Thus the examination is not only an examination of knowledge, but also of the standard used in the examination itself.

[86] This *dialectical* movement, which consciousness exercises on its self—on its knowledge as well as its object—is, *in so far as the new, true object emerges to consciousness* as the result of it, precisely that which is called *experience*. In this connection, there is a moment in the just mentioned process which must be further articulated that a new light may be cast on the scientific aspect of the following presentation. Consciousness knows *something*, and this object is the essence or the *in-itself*. But this object is also the *in-itself* for consciousness; and hence the ambiguity of this truth comes into play. We see that consciousness now has two objects; one is the first *in-itself* and the second is the *being-for-consciousness of this in-itself*. The latter seems at first to be merely the reflection of consciousness into its self, a representation, not of an object, but only of its knowledge of the first object. But, as already indicated, the first object comes to be altered for consciousness in this very process; it ceases to be the *in-itself* and becomes to consciousness an object which is the *in-itself* only *for it*. And therefore it follows that this, the *being-for-consciousness of this in-itself*, is the true, which is to say that this true is the *essence* or consciousness' new *object*. This new object contains the annihilation of the first; it is the experience constituted through that first object.

[87] In this presentation of the course of experience, there is a moment in virtue of which it does not seem to be in agreement with the ordinary use of the term “experience.” This moment is the transition from the first object and the knowledge of that object to the other object. Although it is said that the experience is made in *this other object*, here the transition has been presented in such a way that the knowledge of the first object, or the *being-for-consciousness* of the first *in-itself*, is seen to become the second object itself. By contrast, it usually seems that we somehow discover *an other* object in a manner quite accidental and extraneous, and that we experience *in it* the untruth of our first Concept. What would fall to us, on this ordinary view of experience, is therefore simply the pure *apprehension* of what exists in and for itself. From the viewpoint of the present investigation, however, the new object shows itself as having come into being through an *inversion of consciousness* itself. This way of observing the subject matter is *our* contribution; it does not exist for the consciousness which we observe. But when viewed in this way the sequence of experiences constituted by consciousness is raised to the level of a scientific progression.

As a matter of fact, the circumstance which guides this way of observing is the same as the one previously discussed with regard to the relationship between the present inquiry and skepticism: In every case the result which emerges from an untrue mode of knowledge must not be allowed to dissolve into an empty nothingness but must of necessity be grasped as the nothingness *of that whose result it is*, a result which contains what is true in the previous knowledge. Within the present context, this circumstance manifests itself as follows: When that which at first appeared as the object sinks to the level of being to consciousness a knowledge of the object, and when the *in-itself* becomes a *being-for-consciousness of the in-itself*, then this *is* the new object. And with this new object a new Shape of consciousness also makes its appearance, a Shape to which the essence is something different from that which was the essence to the preceding Shape. It is this circumstance which guides the entire succession of the Shapes of consciousness in its necessity. But it is this necessity alone—or the *emergence* of the new object, presenting itself to consciousness without the latter's knowing how this happens to it—which occurs for us, as it were, behind its back. A moment which is both *in-itself* and *for-us* is thereby

introduced into the movement of consciousness, a moment which does not present itself for the consciousness engaged in the experience itself. But the *content* of what we see emerging exists *for it*, and we comprehend only the formal aspect of what emerges or its pure emerging. *For consciousness*, what has emerged exists only as an object; *for us*, it exists at once as movement and becoming.

[88] This, then, is the necessity in virtue of which the present road toward science is itself already a *science*. And, in accordance with its content, it may be called the science of the *experience of consciousness*.

[89] The experience which consciousness makes of itself can, according to the Concept of experience, comprehend in itself nothing less than the whole system of consciousness or the whole realm of the truth of Spirit. The Concept of experience thus entails that the moments of truth present themselves, not as abstract, pure moments, but in the peculiar determinateness of being as they are for consciousness, or as this consciousness itself appears in its relationship to them. Presenting themselves in this way, the moments of the whole are *Shapes of Consciousness*. And in driving itself toward its true existence, consciousness will reach a point at which it casts off the semblance of being burdened by something alien to it, something which is only *for it* and which exists as an other. In other words, at that point where its appearance becomes equal to its essence, consciousness' presentation of itself will therefore converge with this very same point in the authentic science of Spirit. And, finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its essence, it will indicate the nature of absolute knowledge itself.