

**HEGEL'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD**

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## HEGEL'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD\*

There is probably no aspect of “Hegelianism” which has attracted more attention and occasioned more confusion than the so-called “dialectical method.” Every university student has doubtless heard at least one lecture on this “secret” of Hegelianism, whether in terms of the notorious triad: thesis–antithesis–synthesis, or in some more sophisticated terminology. This is particularly noteworthy, not only because it misrepresents Hegel, but because Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*PbG*) was probably the *first* philosophical treatise whose method was radically and consistently non-dialectical.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, is the method of Hegel’s *PbG* if it is not dialectical? Insofar as it can be characterized in a word, it is descriptive. The study of a science, in Hegel’s sense, requires that the student, through a tremendous effort of restraint, give himself completely over to the structural development of that science itself. This, I take it, is what Hegel means by the famous phrase “die Anstrengung des Begriffs” (the effort of the Concept) (*PbG* 48). The true philosopher must strenuously avoid the temptation of interrupting the immanent development of the subject-matter by the introjection of interpretive models; he must rather give up this instinctively felt prerogative or “freedom” and “instead of being the arbitrarily moving principle of the content,” his task is “to submerge this freedom *in* the content and let the content be moved through its own nature, i.e., through the self as the self of the content, and to observe this movement” (*PbG* 48).

But if the phenomenological method must not interfere with the movement of the subject-matter, it must also abstain from a purely negative attitude vis-à-vis all content, e.g., the stance of the disengaged analyst who removes all life from the content, going straight after its truth value by a more or less elaborate and systematic employment of the formal criterion of tautologyhood. This methodological device, which is of unquestionable value in the mathematical sciences, is totally inadequate in the field of philosophy. The abstract affirmations and negations evinced by a two-valued logic of tautological truths versus non-tautological falsehoods *eo ipso* exclude from consideration the characteristics of negation inherent *in* the subject-matter itself. And it is precisely this internal negative movement which the Hegelian phenomenological method seeks to describe.

Since this method excludes the central criterion of formal or mathematical logic, it is natural to ask what sort of standard Hegel proposes to put in its place. His answer to this question, which constitutes the theme of the brief but all-important “Introduction”<sup>2</sup> to the *PbG*, is also the clearest

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\* All page references are to Johannes Hoffmeister’s edition of *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1948).

<sup>1</sup> Although scores of commentators, from Trendelenburg to Findlay, have denied that Hegel employed a consistently dialectical method (claiming on the contrary that his thought only attains its apparent dynamic through surreptitious appeals to experience), Ivan Iljin was, so far as I am aware, the first to develop the insight that “Hegel, in his philosophical method, was no dialectician” (Ivan Iljin, *Die Philosophie Hegels als kontemplative Gotteslehre* (Bern: A. Francke Verlag, 1946), p. 126). Iljin’s argument, persuasive though it is, does not focus on the *Phenomenology*, but deals rather with Hegel’s authorship as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> A new translation of the “Introduction” to Hegel’s *Phenomenology* has been published in Martin Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience*, with a section from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Kenley Royce Dove (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 7–26. This edition will be referred to as *HCE*.

indication of his radical departure from the previous history of western philosophy. He acknowledges (*PbG* 70 = *HCE* 18) that if the *PbG* were to be regarded as an exposition in which science is *related* to knowledge as it appears, or as an inquiry into the nature of human understanding or reason, then it would indeed, after the manner of a Locke or a Kant, require some sort of fundamental presupposition which could serve as a standard of measurement. But instead of adapting himself to this classical philosophical orientation, Hegel, to borrow a phrase from Kierkegaard, has found a way of “going beyond Socrates”—and Kant as well.<sup>3</sup> Unlike that of any previous philosophy, the method of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* takes the “paradox of learning” of Plato’s *Meno* (80d) in complete seriousness: “But here, where science makes its first appearance, neither science nor anything else has justified itself as the *essence* or as the *in-itself* ...” (*PbG* 70 = *HCE* 18).

The argument of the “Introduction” divides itself at this point into three exceedingly compact and organically inseparable moments. The *first* concerns the abstract distinction between knowledge and truth on which all previous epistemological theories have turned. This distinction is based upon the observation that consciousness itself “... *distinguishes* from itself something to which it at the same time *relates* itself” (*PbG* 70 = *HCE* 19). The *determinate* aspect of this interrelationship, the something which is said to be *for* consciousness, the “being-for-another,” is called knowledge. But, on further consideration, we also notice the side of that which is determined, namely the *determinable*. Or, to employ the expression of Brentano, consciousness is always consciousness *of*. This aspect of “being-in-itself,” whether regarded as a material thing, an abstract entity or a thing-in-itself, has tended to be associated in philosophical theory with *truth*, and philosophers have accordingly sought to establish criteria for determining the truth of knowledge.

It is particularly important to notice that Hegel does not join in this time-honored enterprise. From the viewpoint of the *PbG*, the question of the truth *of* knowledge is not a matter of direct concern; it is, in the modern idiom, “bracketed.” The only object with which the *PbG* is concerned is knowledge as it appears, already organized in the form of a “science” involving some systematic distinction between knowledge and truth.<sup>4</sup> If, on the contrary, we were to concern ourselves with the truth *of* knowledge, i.e., with what knowledge is in itself, then we should have to provide some standard whereby that truth could be determined. But it is clear that the truth thus attained, if indeed any such knowledge could be acquired, would not be the truth of knowledge, its being-in-itself; it could at most be *our* knowledge of it or its being-for-us. Moreover, as Hegel observes, the standard would be *our* standard and that for which our standard was to serve as a determinate “would not necessarily have to recognize it” (*PbG* 71 = *HCE* 20).

The first moment of Hegel’s methodological exposition therefore serves as a preliminary elucidation of what is implied by undertaking a phenomenological description of knowledge as it

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nicolai Hartmann, *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960), Part II: *Hegel* (1929).

<sup>4</sup> The term “science” is, of course, not to be taken merely in the restrictive sense of the natural sciences or any other formally organized discipline—although these too will come into view. What Hegel means by *Wissenschaft* here is a specific shape or *Gestalt* of consciousness or spirit which is *itself* constituted by a systematic mode of relating form and content, certainty and truth, subject and substance. Thus “*die Sittlichkeit*” is just as much a science as “psychology.”

appears (*PbG* 66 = *HCE* 13). Since the object of our inquiry is knowing, any distinction on our part between subject and object would be a playing with mere abstractions. *Our* object is at once and inseparably both the object-knowing subject and the object known-by-the-subject. Thus our object, consciousness or Spirit, contains this subject-object distinction within itself and requires no further distinction by us.

The *second* moment of Hegel's argument is equally far-reaching and revolutionary though its philosophical significance can be no more than adumbrated here. It directly concerns the Concept (*Begriff*)<sup>5</sup> but it also involves a radically new insight into the perennial problem of time and eternity. Just as the object of knowledge is seen to fall *within* the object of *our* inquiry, Hegel also makes the unprecedented move of regarding the Concept as something completely within the temporal process of the consciousness or Spirit under investigation.<sup>6</sup> Thus the Concept is not regarded as identical with timeless eternity, as in the Parmenidean tradition, or, after the manner of Plato or Whitehead, as an eternal object which "participates" or "ingresses" in the temporal realm of human experience or of "actual occasions." It is also to be distinguished from the Aristotelian and Nietzschean interpretation of the Concept as something which, although falling within time, e.g., as a "natural kind," nevertheless undergoes a cyclical process of eternal recurrence within time itself. For Hegel the Concept *is* time, and time is "the existentially embodied Concept itself" (*PbG* 558).<sup>7</sup>

Since the Concept is seen to fall within the knowledge we are investigating, it follows that "consciousness provides itself with its own standard, and the investigation will accordingly be a comparison of consciousness with its own self ..." (*PbG* 71 = *HCE* 20). To understand how this comparison takes place we must observe that, just as consciousness or Spirit was seen to be at once both "subjective" and "objective," this same duality holds true for the Concept: consciousness itself distinguishes between (a) the Concept *qua* knowledge and (b) the Concept *qua* object. Hence there is within consciousness not only something which is taken to be *for it*; consciousness also assumes that that which is for it, is in-itself or has an independent status as well. Accordingly, we see that the Concept has two moments. If we take the Concept to be knowledge, then the standard for this Concept *qua* knowledge will be its object or what is said to exist in-itself. In this case the comparison will consist in seeing whether the Concept corresponds to the object, i.e., what consciousness now regards as the standard of truth. But, on the other hand, if we take the Concept to be the object as it is essentially or in-itself, then the Concept itself will be the standard for the Concept *qua* known, i.e., the Concept *qua* object of knowledge. Here the comparison consists in seeing whether the Concept *qua* known or *qua* object corresponds to the Concept itself.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In view of the radical novelty of Hegel's use of the term *Begriff*, it is tempting to avoid translating it as "Concept," the most obvious choice. Wallace and Baillie have presented cogent arguments for the term "notion." It has the advantage of suggesting a kinship with the Greek term νοῦς—and it has a systematic precedent in Berkeley's *Siris*. Unfortunately, the term carries with it irrepressible connotations of vagueness and imprecision.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the Concept *qua* known by the philosophical "we," see below.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also *PbG* 38: "Was die *Zeit* betrifft, ... so ist sie der *daseiende Begriff selbst*." Both these passages are given an extensive and illuminating interpretation in A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel: Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études*, ed. by Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

<sup>8</sup> Hegel has in this analysis developed an important insight into the problematical relationship between the positive and negative senses of the Kantian Thing-in-itself, i.e., of the Thing-in-itself *qua* object (that which, according to the

Although both aspects of the Concept must no doubt be taken into account in any adequate description of the knowing process—and an emphasis on one or the other has traditionally served as the touchstone for a realist or idealist epistemology<sup>9</sup>—Hegel’s descriptive method seems, in this second moment of its explication, to be in danger of losing its purely descriptive character in virtue of the necessity of our determining which aspect of the Concept is to serve as the standard.

His answer to this problem is as simple as it is convincing, especially when the reader has followed the presentation through the section called “Consciousness.” He observes, namely, that both of these processes are the same. The standard is selected by consciousness itself and, since both moments of the process fall within our object, i.e., knowledge as it appears, any selection of standards on *our* part would be superfluous.<sup>10</sup> Needless to say, the adoption of such a purely descriptive stance does require a great deal of restraint; it is not the traditional way of “doing” philosophy.

The *third* moment in the development of Hegel’s phenomenological method is guided by the observation that consciousness not only selects its own standard but is also the *comparison* of its knowledge with its own standard. This is based on the fact that consciousness is “on the one hand, consciousness of the object, 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” (*PbG* 72 = *HCE* 21). Consciousness is therefore both consciousness *of* something, and consciousness of its self.<sup>11</sup> In view of this characteristic feature of consciousness, it is at the same time conscious of its standard of truth and conscious of its knowledge of the truth in question. And since both the standard and the knowledge are for the same consciousness, their comparison is a fundamental feature in the movement of consciousness itself.

It is indeed true that consciousness’ standard of truth is only a standard insofar as it is known by consciousness, i.e., as it is *for* consciousness and not as it is in itself. And this observation has driven many less descriptive philosophers to some form of skepticism, for the presumptive standard does not really seem to be what it “ought” to be (namely, something independent of knowledge). Hence it seems incapable of serving as a criterion of knowledge. But for Hegel, whose attention is steadfastly focussed on the experience of knowledge as it appears, all such talk about “capacities” and “intentions” is beside the point.<sup>12</sup> The crucial point is that consciousness, in all the shapes of its

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“Transcendental Aesthetic” of the first *Critique*, is said to be known) and the Thing-in-itself *qua* noumenon. From the perspective of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there is no unambiguous answer to Jacobi’s well-known charge that Kant tried, against his own strictures, to have it both ways.

<sup>9</sup> For Hegel’s most explicit discussion of this question, see his Jena lectures of 1803–1804, first published in 1932 by Felix Meiner as *Jenenser Realphilosophie I*. See pp. 214ff.

<sup>10</sup> In view of the endless polemics among Marxists and critics of Marx on the question of the “Hegelian method” it is interesting to note that this “method” is quite indifferent to the rival claims of idealism on the one hand and realism on the other.

<sup>11</sup> But this aspect of human experience is not grasped by the reader of the *PbG* before he has followed the argument *through* the chapter on *Verstand*. N.B., *PbG* 128. As we shall see, an understanding of this characteristic feature of the *PbG* is essential for a demystification of the philosophical “we”; or, which is another way of expressing the same problem, it is essential to the intelligibility of the *PbG* as a philosophical work. This second aspect of consciousness must not be simply identified with that section of the *PbG* explicitly called “Self-consciousness.” As a moment of human knowing, self-consciousness is a factor, however much explicitly emphasized, throughout the entire course of experience from “Sense-certainty” to “Absolute Knowledge.”

<sup>12</sup> For a complementary formulation of this important methodological issue, see Hegel’s Jena lectures of 1803–1804, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

appearance, *does* draw a distinction between its standard, or what the object is in-itself, and its knowledge, or the being of the object *for* consciousness (*PbG* 72 = *HCE* 22). And if, in the course of the comparison, consciousness should find that its standard and its knowledge do not correspond, it will, on the basis of its own assumptions, have to change its knowledge in order to make it correspond to its standard.

But it also follows from these same assumptions that a change in consciousness' knowledge *eo ipso* involves a change in its standard, for the standard was based upon the object and, indeed, upon the object *qua* known. Hence with a change in the knowledge for the sake of truth, the standard of truth is itself changed. Consciousness thus discovers that the process in which it placed its knowledge in *doubt*, all the while certain that it held a firm criterion for what the object of its knowledge was in-itself, turns out to be a movement in which it loses its own truth; the "path of doubt" (*Weg des Zweifels*) is transformed into the "way of despair" (*Weg der Verzweiflung*) (*PbG* 67 = *HCE* 13–14). Moreover, this despair is not something arbitrarily imposed on consciousness from without; it is *immanent* in the very movement of consciousness itself. Thus, in Baillie's poignant translation, consciousness "suffers this violence at its own hands."<sup>13</sup>

The positive aspect of this third moment of Hegel's method is that the process of examining knowledge, which of necessity involves a standard, is actually (and equally necessarily) an examination of the standard as well. And with the emergence of a new standard, consciousness is confronted by an object which is for it new and now true. At this point in the exposition, one is nevertheless compelled to ask: "Whence this new object?" Or, more skeptically: "Isn't Hegel here attempting to justify that sleight-of-hand trick for which his dialectical method is so notorious?"

If this "new object" is in fact the product of Hegel's "dialectical method," the traditional charge against him is completely justified. But Hegel's method is radically *undialectical*. It is the experience of consciousness itself which is dialectical and Hegel's *Phenomenology* is a viable philosophical enterprise precisely to the extent that it merely *describes* this dialectical process. The "new object" therefore must not be introduced by the philosopher; it must arise out of the course of the experience described—and not merely *qua* described, but through itself.

Experience itself is therefore described as dialectical to the extent that it generates new objects for itself. But the "new object" seems to be no more than a reflection on the part of consciousness, and a reflection which is not based on anything objective, but merely on its knowledge of its first object. The term "reflection," however, is misleading; it tends to suggest something which takes place immediately. But experience is a *process*, it is something which takes time; and the process of experience is precisely constituted by the alteration of its first object, and therewith its first standard. The alteration, in turn, must be seen as a negation of the *appearance* of the first object within consciousness' experience. Thus the negating process of alteration is not an immediate, empty, or abstract negation; the appearance which is negated has content and the alteration is a *determinate* negation (*PbG* 68 = *HCE* 16) which, as the result of the negated appearance, also has a *content*.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. by J.B. Baillie (London: Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1931), p. 138.

Thus the “new object” is not simply the product of an immediate reflection; it is constituted by the process of negating the first object, “it is the experience constituted through that first object” (*PbG* 73 = *HCE* 24). But Hegel’s concept of determinate negation can only be grasped through a careful analysis of (I) the role of appearance in experience and (II) why “we” must describe the experience of consciousness as a phenomenon.

## I

Hegel’s concept of experience is both more restrictive and at the same time far more inclusive than what is usually understood by the word. And the intelligibility of the entire *PbG* hinges upon a firm grasp of what phenomenal experience, knowing as it appears, consists in. In the first place, phenomenal experience is more restrictive than other philosophical interpretations of experience because experience, to be described as a phenomenon, must *appear*. Thus mere intentions, capacities, dispositions, meanings, etc., do not, as such, constitute experience. Insofar as such “mental entities” are recognized as the real content of experience, the attempt at phenomenological description is condemned to acknowledge the validity of Prufrock’s claim: “That is not it at all, that is not what I meant, at all”; or the equally enigmatic “meaning” which is presumably expressed in the assertion: “The present king of France is bald.”

For Hegel, on the contrary, genuine experience is a self-revealing process and philosophy is conceived as a description of this process, not as a systematic analysis of a presumed relationship between meanings and assertions. Experience is constituted by an *act*: something which is actually said or done. Experience is therefore revealed in language and work and what is so revealed can be *described*: it is an *act*, “and it can be *said* of it, what *it is*” (*PbG* 236). In the act, the “inexpressible meaning” is simply abolished, i.e., it is expressed.

But if this restriction of experience to that which can be described appears to be a narrowing of what philosophers have usually understood by the term, the wealth of human experience<sup>14</sup> actually described in the *PbG* is a most eloquent demonstration that Hegel’s method is far more “empirical” than that of philosophers who call themselves “empiricists.”<sup>15</sup>

The kinds of phenomenal experience described in the *PbG* are basically two: (1) the acts of individual men considered in abstraction from their social and historical “world,” and (2) the interaction of individuals within a community or a “world” in the course of its development (*PbG* 315). This emphasis on the forms of experience in terms of the nature of the acting subject suggests<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. Kroner suggests that *Erleben* would be a more adequate term for what Hegel describes as experience. Cf. Richard Kroner, *Von Kant bis Hegel*, Vol. II: *Von der Naturphilosophie zur Philosophie des Geistes* (Tübingen: Verlag J.C.B. Mohr, 1924), p. 374.

<sup>15</sup> This argument is forcefully developed by George Schrader in “Hegel’s Contribution to Phenomenology,” *The Monist*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Jan., 1964), pp. 18ff.

<sup>16</sup> The structure of the *PbG* is so complex that nothing short of a detailed commentary could possibly do it justice. It is interesting to note that the only existing complete commentary on the *PbG* divides the work into the two parts indicated above. Cf. Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l’Esprit de Hegel*, Vols. I and II (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1946), p. 40 *et passim*. But Hyppolite’s contention (p. 55) that “the *Phenomenology* was for Hegel, consciously or unconsciously, the means to deliver to the public, not a complete system, but the history of his own philosophical development,” seems to commit that *intentional* fallacy which Hegel (*PbG* 227–301) subjected to such a

a systematic division of the *PbG* into two parts. The first, covering the sections on “Consciousness,” “Self-consciousness,” and “Reason,” is a phenomenological description of man *qua* individual, or “natural consciousness,” in the various shapes (*Gestalten*) of his theoretical (i.e., in language) and practical (i.e., through labor and work) struggle for truth. The second, spanning the sections from “Spirit” through “Religion” to “Absolute Knowledge,” concerns the sequence of shapes assumed by man in his life with other men, i.e., man *qua* Spirit. Although Hegel himself is not entirely consistent in his account of the temporal relations between ‘Spirit’ and ‘Religion’ (compare *PbG* 476 with *PbG* 557), it is clear that the entire second half of the *PbG* deals with the development of associated humanity. “All of the previous shapes of consciousness are abstractions from Spirit. . . . This abstractive isolating of such moments presupposes Spirit and requires Spirit for its subsistence” (*PbG* 314).

We have seen that the most critical precondition for a phenomenological description of experience is the actual *appearance* of experience itself. The term “appearance” has, however, two distinct usages in the *PbG*, and Hegel’s phenomenological method is bound to seem either exotic or capricious if these two usages are not distinguished. The first of these concerns the appearance *of* experience; the second concerns appearance *in* experience. A great deal of what is unique, and consequently “unfamiliar” about Hegel’s method is based on his insight into and his consistent awareness of this twofold character of appearance throughout the *PbG*. The appearance *of* experience is the condition necessary for the possibility of a phenomenological description; it is the basic (or direct) presupposition of the *PbG* as a philosophical work. This presupposition must also be shared by the reader. We shall discuss this problem of the appearance *of* experience in section II. Here attention will be directed to the problem of appearance as it is revealed *within* experience.

The experiencing subject, either as an individual or a community, tacitly or explicitly presupposes a distinction between appearance and reality (*Wesen*), between knowledge and its standard. Appearance as such is taken to be something involving time; reality is felt to be something which is at least in principle timeless or somehow eternal (cf. *PbG* 558). But as long as this sense of the unchangeable remains a mere feeling, there is no experience in the proper sense of the word. Human experience must involve action, it must involve an expression of the inwardly felt reality—which as such is no reality. This is what Hegel means by an *act*: it is the revelation of “reality” through the process of letting it appear. Action, in turn, has two basic phenomenal forms: language and work.

Both forms of action entail an objectification of what is otherwise merely “meant,” “intended” or “presumed” to be. Consequently the subject who actively expresses himself in the world of appearance puts himself at the same time under the risk that his sense of reality will be altered or perverted (*PbG* 237). The risk, however, is inevitable for the experiencing subject; the only seeming alternative is a solipsism of the present moment. But this is only theoretically conceivable as a “philosophical” stance which one tacitly “intends” or “means” to assume. As Hegel demonstrates in his opening chapter on “Sense-certainty,” it is impossible for this solipsism to say what it “means”

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devastating criticism. The most elaborate structural interpretation of the *PbG* is given in the third appendix to Kojève’s lectures, *op. cit.*, pp. 574–595.

because any saying involves *language* and language is a form of expression or objectification. But as objectified, such a “meaning” is patently contradicted: the solipsist’s “here and now,” once it has been written down, becomes a “there and then.” In its actual appearance, in language, “meaning” must mix with time; and by this process its semblance of atemporal reality is simply negated.

But a negation of meaning-solipsism in no way entails a negation of that sense of eternal reality for which the language of sense-certainty is merely the most immediate expression. The entire course of human experience, both individual and collective, can be viewed as a series of progressively less immediate or more mediated expressions of this quest for certainty and truth in the form of something which will not, like Chronos, be devoured by Zeus.

Thus, with the negation of meaning-solipsism, the process of letting-appear begins once again; but this beginning of appearance within experience is not the same as its antecedent. The experiencing subject has changed; it has become a new subject through its objective activity. Perhaps it itself does not explicitly know this, but “we” do—and not because we have some special access to the inner recesses of its consciousness akin to that of the “omniscient narrator,” which was once such a popular novelistic device.

The *PbG* is not a work of that sort; in method of presentation as well as subject-matter it is far more comparable to a dramatic work.<sup>17</sup> Like all literature, it is an expression in language; but unlike “ordinary language” and the language of pre-Hegelian philosophers, it is purely descriptive. The course of the dramatic development is only describable because it has appeared: because there have been actual appearances within experiences and because these appearances are susceptible of being discussed and have been discussed. Under these circumstances the development of human activity and the continual dialogue about human activity can be *comprehended* by those who have a descriptive guide and who are able to master the art of reading scientific descriptions. The guide in question is the *PbG*; we shall now turn to the problem of its readers.

## II

The reader’s most obvious source of difficulty stems, of course, from the external literary form of the *PbG*; it is at best a very peculiar kind of *Lesedrama*. But the dramatic development itself is systematically interrupted by what may be described—in the felicitous phrase of Brecht—as a *Verfremdungseffekt* (estrangement-effect).<sup>18</sup> Every reader of the *PbG* has doubtless puzzled over the significance of the *wir* and the *für uns* which periodically come into view and break up the flow of experience described. In the preface, before the actual drama gets underway, it is of course clear that the “we” is to be taken in the sense familiar to readers of almost any philosophical work, namely, we philosophers who are following the argument in question.

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<sup>17</sup> Among existing works of drama, the one which immediately suggests itself for comparison is Goethe’s *Faust*. An elaboration of this comparison between the *PbG* and *Faust* may be found in Georg Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit* (Bern: A. Francke Verlag, 1947) and Ernst Bloch, “Das Faustmotiv der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,” *Hegel-Studien*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1961), pp. 155–171.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1957).

The “Introduction” may be viewed as a transition from the ordinary philosophical usage of an editorial “we” to the problematical usage of the work itself. Here Hegel comes closest to giving an explicit account of how the term “we” is to be understood in the sequel. Yet even at this juncture the reader is forced to ask himself: “Who are ‘we’?”

The problem seems to become critical at two points in particular. The first (at *PbG* 71 = *HCE* 20) concerns the determination of what shall serve as a standard within experience: object or Concept. Hegel at first seems to suggest that “we” make the selection. But as the previous discussion has shown, he provides an answer which, in principle, preserves the purely descriptive character of his method. The second difficulty (at *PbG* 74 = *HCE* 24) is, unfortunately, not so easily answered.

We have already seen the general relationship of consciousness to its object, the twofold character of the Concept, and how in the course of experience consciousness brings about both an examination of its standard and emergence of a new object. All of this is intelligible as a process which takes place within experience. We have also seen that experience itself involves, by its very nature, action and appearance. Hence the process of experience is not constituted by any hidden or “inner” meanings or intentions, i.e., it is in principle describable. The problem which now emerges is that what is *for* consciousness a new object is *for us* a new attitude toward objectivity, a new shape or *Gestalt* of consciousness or Spirit. In other words, whereas consciousness itself merely seems to be related to a new object appearing *within* experience, from *our* point of view, i.e., the description of the appearance *of* experience, consciousness, the active protagonist, has itself changed.

“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” (*PbG* 74 = *HCE* 24). On the one hand, therefore, “we” seem to be merely describing what the active experience of consciousness presents for phenomenological description; on the other hand, however, “our” observation is also seen to be an act (“*unsere Zutat*”) which plays a constitutive role in the drama as a whole. Moreover, as Hegel adds, without “our contribution,” the drama of human experience could only have a skeptical conclusion, or rather, no conclusion at all.

In view of these considerations the descriptive character of the whole *PbG* seems to become paradoxical, if not impossible. For if our observation is regarded as totally determined by the subject-matter, the development of appearance within experience, then “we” may indeed observe the coming to be and passing away of various objects of experience, but the upshot would be no more than a chronicle tracing a formless flow of phenomenal content. Insofar as the description concerned historical phenomena, our viewpoint would be that of a skeptical relativism or historicism. This indeed has been a popular characterization of what Hegel’s later philosophy of history—minus the Absolute Idea—implies. And when we consider the radical temporalizing of the Concept in the *PbG*, together with the conspicuous absence of talk about the Absolute Idea, the method of this work seems to entail a distinctly relativistic orientation for the “we.”

If, on the other hand, our description of the sequence of objects experienced is raised to the level of a scientific series simply in virtue of the fact that it is “we” who do the describing, that the

description is “unsere Zutat,” then “we” seem to be nothing short of the Absolute itself. Either our description would be carried out *sub specie aeternitatis*, or “our” addition would have the significance of an arbitrary positing, or both.

Hegel’s phenomenological method, for all its cogency in the treatment of appearance *in* experience, thus seems to entail an impossible dilemma with respect to the no less important and complementary question of the appearance *of* experience. Between the Scylla of relativism and the Charybdis of constructive metaphysics there seems to be no safe passage. In view of the absolutely critical nature of this problem, it will be well to consider at this point what Hegel scholars have had to say about the “we” in the *PbG*.

As one might expect, Hegel’s use of the term “we” in the *PbG* has been recognized by most of his commentators as, in one way or another, in need of an explanation.<sup>19</sup> The explanations usually provided are, however, remarkably laconic. It will therefore be feasible to expedite our brief survey of these explanations by presenting and commenting on a selection of relevant quotations from the literature. In many cases, the passages cited will be coextensive with the total direct discussion of the problem in the work cited.

Herbert MARCUSE: The reader who is to understand the various parts of the work must already dwell in the “element of philosophy.” The “we” that appears so often denotes not everyday men but philosophers.<sup>20</sup>

Georg LUKÁCS: The characteristic mode of exposition consists in always clarifying for the reader that connection of the objective and subjective categories which remains hidden to the individual “shape of consciousness” then under consideration. . . . The dualism exists only for the “shapes of consciousness,” not for the philosopher and consequently not for the reader. When Hegel . . . says that the decisive connections between objectivity and subjectivity are opaque for the “shapes of consciousness” but transparent *for us*, he means for the philosophical reader, who observes this process of evolution of the human genus from a higher plane.<sup>21</sup>

Nicolai HARTMANN: With the term “we” Hegel means the accompanying philosophical comprehension. And therein lies the possibility for philosophy, in tracing the origination [of a new shape of consciousness], to grasp its necessity as well. For it is in virtue of this possibility that “this road to science is itself already a science,” a science of the experience of consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

Jean HYPPOLITE: That is why the necessity of the experience which consciousness undergoes presents itself under a double light, or rather that there are two necessities, that of the negation of the object, brought about by consciousness itself in its experience, in the examination of its knowledge, and that of the appearance of the new object which is formed

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<sup>19</sup> The problem of the “we” has, however, received scant attention in Marxist oriented studies dealing with the *PbG*. It is, for example, not even mentioned by Bloch, *Subjekt-Objekt: Erläuterungen zu Hegel* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1962), 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1951).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 94.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Lukács, *Der junge Hegel: Über die Beziehungen von Dialektik und Ökonomie* (Zürich and Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1948), pp. 602–603.

<sup>22</sup> N. Hartmann, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

through the earlier experience. (This necessity could be called *retrospective*.) This second necessity only belongs to the philosopher who re-thinks the phenomenological development; there is in it a moment of the in-itself or “for us” which is not to be found in consciousness. . . . (The *PbG* is *theory of knowledge* and at the same time *speculative philosophy*; but it is speculative philosophy only for us. . . . Which means that Hegel’s *PbG* is at the same time a *description* of phenomenal consciousness and a *comprehension* of this description by the philosopher.) . . . (The succession of the “experiences” of consciousness is thus contingent only for phenomenal consciousness. As for us who are gathering these experiences, we discover at the same time the necessity of the progression, which goes from the one to the other. The *PbG* demonstrates the immanence of all experience in consciousness. Moreover, it must be recognized that this (synthetic) necessity is not always easy to grasp and the transition sometimes appears arbitrary to the modern reader. This transition also poses the problem of the connection between history and the *PbG*.)<sup>23</sup>

Richard KRONER: In the *PbG* there are thus two moving series running parallel to each other: that of the observed object, the wandering “soul” which passes from experience to experience, and that of the observer who surveys this progress from the end of the road and comprehends it as the self-actualization of the Absolute. Each step which “natural” consciousness advances thus becomes a doubly necessary one; or *the necessity of each step appears under a double light*. On the one hand consciousness is urged forward on the basis of its own experience, . . . on the other hand, however, the necessity of the first self-movement is placed into the light of Absolute Knowledge and is comprehended as a necessity by the observer who has already reached that goal towards which consciousness directs itself and which in truth attracts the wandering ego to itself.<sup>24</sup>

Martin HEIDEGGER: Who are the “we”?

They are those who in the inversion of natural consciousness let it persist in its own meaning and opinion but at the same time and expressly look at the appearance of the appearing. This looking-at, which expressly watches the appearance, is the watching in which the *skepsis* fulfills itself, the *skepsis* which has looked ahead to the absoluteness of the absolute and has in advance provided itself with it. That which comes to light in thoroughgoing skepticism shows itself “for us,” i.e., for those who, thinking upon the beingness of being, are already provided with Being. . . .

The contribution accordingly wills the will of the absolute. The contribution itself is what is willed by the absoluteness of the absolute. . . . The contribution gives prominence to the fact that and the manner in which we, in watching, are akin to the absoluteness of the absolute.<sup>25</sup>

The passages here assembled provide an instructive spectrum of possibilities for envisaging the “philosophical we” but they also show how an interpretation of the “we” tends to govern—or be governed by—one’s view of the *PbG* as a whole. The following discussion will thus enable us not only to survey the field of Hegel scholarship through the prism of this vital issue; it will also afford an occasion for systematically developing the argument of this essay.

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<sup>23</sup> Jean Hyppolite, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–30. Cf. also pp. 81 and 104.

<sup>24</sup> R. Kroner, *op. cit.*, pp. 369–370.

<sup>25</sup> M. Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt/Main: V. Klostermann, 1957) (1st impr. 1950), pp. 173 and 175.

The first point of critical importance which, consciously or unconsciously, divides these scholars is the degree of significance they attach to the inverted commas which they place around the “we” or “for us.” Only Marcuse and Lukács draw explicit attention to the fact that the “we” refers to the *readers* of the *PbG*. Thus the problem of the intelligibility of the dramatic activity to the “audience” is elevated to a position of prominence. When the “we” is understood to denote the readers such as “you or I,” then the *Verfremdungseffekt* serves to remind us (a) that we are the public, the audience, and (b) that *what* we as audience are seeing or have seen is an appearance in public space;<sup>26</sup> it prevents us from losing our descriptive orientation by, for example, becoming absorbed in the public action of the play as if it were the private experience of a protagonist.<sup>27</sup> It does not, on the other hand, estrange us from the standpoint of description, tacitly or explicitly suggesting that the “we” stands for some extraordinary intelligence which we readers see through a glass but darkly.

Marcuse’s observation that the intelligibility of the *PbG* is only open to those readers who “already dwell in the ‘element of philosophy’” is clearly incontestable, but it is not clear from his remarks just what this “element” is. In a subsequent passage (*op. cit.*, p. 94) he suggests that this “element” is the philosophy of transcendental idealism; but this is also problematical since, as Hartmann points out (*op. cit.*, p. 338), transcendental idealism is not accepted in the *PbG* as a thesis but is rather treated as a historical phenomenon, one of the stages of consciousness described. Although Hyppolite mentions the peculiar difficulties faced by “the modern reader” in following the transitions in the *PbG*, as well as the problematical relationship of the *PbG* and history, his extensive study has little to say about the specific preconditions for intelligible reading, whether in 1946 or 1807.<sup>28</sup>

The only writer who directly deals with this problem is Lukács. He suggests that the appearance of the various “shapes of consciousness” is intelligible for the philosophical reader because he (i.e., the “we”) observes the developmental process of the human genus from a “higher plane.” The higher plane is said to be that of “Objective Spirit” or the perspective of history.<sup>29</sup> This historical

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<sup>26</sup> The most frequent contexts for the appearance of “we” in the main body of the *PbG* are: “jetzt sehen wir” or “wir sehen.”

<sup>27</sup> Jacob Loewenberg’s imaginative proposal that the “we” engages in an alternating process of “histrionically impersonating” consciousness and experiencing its comic denouement systematically encourages this misunderstanding. The argument is formulated in Loewenberg’s introduction to the Scribner edition of *Hegel Selections* (1929), in his two *Mind* articles (Oct. 1934 and Jan. 1935) and in *Hegel’s Phenomenology: Dialogues on the Life of Mind* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1965). Emil Fackenheim suggests that the reader of the *PbG* is not the “we” but “must, as it were, hover *between* the viewing and the viewed standpoints . . .” (*The Religious Dimension in Hegel’s Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967), p. 36). Unfortunately, the notion of “hovering” is never clearly formulated in Fackenheim’s interesting book.

<sup>28</sup> Hyppolite does, however, offer a clue to answering this problem in a subsequent remark which does not directly deal with the problem of the philosophical “we”: “. . . but it is only the *universal individuality*, that which has been able to lift itself to absolute knowledge, which must find again in it and develop in itself the moments implied in its becoming. It is the same consciousness which, having reached philosophical knowledge, turns back upon itself and which, as empirical consciousness, goes upon the phenomenological itinerary. In order to indicate to others the road of absolute knowledge, it must find it back in itself. . . . That which for it is reminiscence and interiorisation, must be for the others the road of their ascension. But this individuality itself, as far as it is individuality, carries necessarily elements of particularity; it is bound to time and for it the French Revolution or the period of enlightenment have more importance than other historical events. Isn’t there an irreducible contingency in this?” Jean Hyppolite, *op. cit.*, p. 50. Cf. p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> Lukács divides the *PbG* according to the triad of Spirit in the *Encyclopedia*.

approach to the problem of the “we” is very suggestive, but in Lukács’ discussion it has two distinct shortcomings as a general hypothesis: (a) the specific nature of the historical preconditions for the “we” is not developed (e.g., in connection with Hegel’s references in the preface (*PbG* 15ff.) to “our age,” c. 1806, as a “new world”) and (b) Lukács expressly limits this interpretation of the “we” to what he calls the “first part” (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 602) of the *PbG*, i.e., “Subjective Spirit.” For the second and third parts of his triadically divided *PbG* he offers no explanation for the “philosophical we”—which nevertheless continues to appear.

The citation from Hartmann adds to this discussion a recognition of the problem of “our” grasping the “necessity” in the sequence of consciousness’ experiences, thus enabling “us” to raise this sequence to a scientific series, “a science of the experience of consciousness.” But it is only Kroner and Hyppolite who develop the problem of the structure of “necessity” in the *PbG*. In the terminology of this study, both scholars recognize that there is (a) a process of necessity *within* experience, the process in which consciousness judges its knowledge by its own standard and consequently tests its standard and alters its object, as well as (b) the necessity *of* experience as a noncontingent series observed by us. As the foregoing discussion has shown, it is this second kind of necessity which is most problematical and crucial for an understanding of the “philosophical we.”

It is noteworthy that, of the two, only Hyppolite speaks of this second necessity in terms of *appearance*. But it is an appearance of a peculiarly “retrospective” nature. The “we” or the philosopher is said to be already (and not merely implicitly) at the level of “speculative philosophy” and, on Hyppolite’s reading, the appearance *of* experience seems to provide the philosopher something like an *occasion* to rethink the phenomenological development, which he has presumably already, in some sense, experienced. In view of the historical preconditions for “our” phenomenological comprehension suggested by Hegel in the preface, this is at least a partially plausible assumption. One is, however, led to ask Hyppolite whether the standpoint of “speculative philosophy” is itself attainable without having *first* rethought the phenomenological development presented in the *PbG*. This surely would seem to follow from Hegel’s description of the *PbG* as an *introduction*, and a necessary introduction, to speculative philosophy or, since for Hegel they are equivalent, logic (*PbG* 33).<sup>30</sup> Hegel observes that the “System der Erfahrung des Geistes” (system of the experience of Spirit) only embraces the *appearance of* this experience (*PbG* 33) and he clearly does not set down systematic philosophy as a precondition for grasping the systematic character of this experience. It is manifest that the reverse of this is proposed (cf. also, *PbG* 25ff. and *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Vol. I, Lasson ed., p. 30).

If, then, our critique of Hyppolite has hit its mark, Kroner’s interpretation of the philosophical observer, or “we,” is even less viable. Not mentioning the problem of the *appearance of* experience, he proceeds to assert that the “we” grasps the necessity in the sequence of natural consciousness’ experiences from the standpoint of the goal toward which it is striving, from the *end* of its pathway,

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<sup>30</sup> Hyppolite takes up the question of the relationship of the *PbG* to the *Logik* in the last chapter of his commentary. His discussion includes a, for this reader, novel argument showing how the *Logik* may be regarded as the standpoint “für uns” in the *PbG* and the *PbG*, reciprocally, as the standpoint “für uns” in the *Logik*. Cf. Hyppolite, *op. cit.*, pp. 560ff. But this discussion also leaves unanswered the problem of the philosophical “we” *qua reader* in the *PbG*.

which the “we” recognizes as the “self-realization of the Absolute.” Kroner’s version of the “we” has already arrived at the level of Absolute Knowledge. But if this interpretation were accepted, one could give no plausible answer to Hegel’s “rhetorical” question: “... one might simply dispense with the negative as something *false* and thus demand to be led to the truth without further ado; why bother oneself about that which is false?” (*PbG* 33).

The most detailed and provocative interpretation of the “we” problem in Hegel’s *PbG* is found in Heidegger’s essay on “Hegel’s Concept of Experience.” He alone explicitly poses the question; “Who are the ‘we’?” and his answer to the question constitutes the heart of his proposal for a reading of the entire book (*Holzwege*, p. 188 = *HCE* 149). Like the other commentators, Heidegger assumes that the “we” has some kind of privileged access to the Absolute. But the superiority of the “we” over natural consciousness is not attributed to its “higher” historical standpoint (Lukács) or to its ultimately mystical and irrational intuition (Kroner). Heidegger’s account is distinguished by the claim that the “we” is akin to the Absolute through the fact that it lets consciousness be, that it keeps its own standards out of the self-investigation of consciousness. No one has seen more clearly than Heidegger that “our contribution” consists in the act of restraint in the face of the appearance *of* experience, that “our contribution” is the omission of all contributions (*Holzwege*, p. 174 = *HCE* 128).

The peculiarity of Heidegger’s interpretation is found in his tendency to identify the “we” of the *PbG* with the fundamental ontologist of his own writings. Thus he refers to the consciousness described in the *PbG*, natural consciousness, as “ontic consciousness” (*Holzwege*, p. 161 = *HCE* 105) whereas the “we” is said to think “the beingness of being” and to be therefore “already provided with Being [*Sein*].” Heidegger accordingly reads the *PbG* as “a dialogue between ontic and ontological consciousness” (*Holzwege*, p. 185 = *HCE* 144) or between natural consciousness and Absolute Knowledge (*Holzwege*, p. 186 = *HCE* 146). This dialogue is precisely what he regards as Hegel’s Concept of experience. The “we” is said to be receptive to that ontological dimension of consciousness’ experience which remains invisible for natural or ontic consciousness because what appears *within* this experience excludes the appearance *of* experience for consciousness. But the “we,” in its “thoroughgoing skepticism,” does not interfere with the appearance *within* consciousness’ experience and thus lets the “new object,” and therewith the Being of experience itself, appear.

Heidegger’s interpretation rests upon his contention that the term “Being” may be used to refer to what Hegel calls Spirit (*Holzwege*, p. 142 = *HCE* 69). But Hegel’s sense of Being (i.e., Spirit) is said to suffer from the forgetfulness characteristic of post-Socratic metaphysics in that Being is implicitly regarded as *will* (*Holzwege*, pp. 187–188 = *HCE* 148–149 and *Holzwege*, p. 120 = *HCE* 30). The ontological knowledge of the “we” is therefore defective because (a) it has not yet made explicit and radicalized the traditional metaphysics of Being as will (an achievement Heidegger attributes to Nietzsche’s writings on the will-to-power) and (b) it has not yet grasped the necessity of systematically destroying traditional metaphysics (the task which Heidegger himself claims to have undertaken). But Heidegger’s interpretation of Spirit in the *PbG* as Being and Being as will rests upon his interpretation of the “we” as a mode of consciousness. For him: “Everything depends upon thinking the experience mentioned here [in the *PbG*] as the Being of consciousness” (*Holzwege*, p. 171 = *HCE* 121).

The safest generalization about Heidegger's essay is that it uses the *PbG* "Introduction" as a touchstone for elucidating some important elements of his own fundamental ontology. As such it is a valuable document for the student who seeks to grasp the relationship between *Sein und Zeit* and the "late" Heidegger. And while it is in many respects a stimulating exercise for the Hegel student, it can be singularly misleading if taken literally as a commentary on the *PbG*. For the *PbG* is *not* an ontology (Hegel's *Logik* may be properly spoken of as his ontology);<sup>31</sup> it is a *phenomenology* and can only be understood if it is read as such.<sup>32</sup>

The most remarkable feature of Heidegger's interpretation of the philosophical "we" is that it focusses upon the dark passage in the next last page of the "Introduction" (*PbG* 74 = *HCE* 24–25) dealing with "unsere Zutat." But perhaps this is not so remarkable after all, for when we look closely at the studies of Kroner, Hartmann, and Hyppolite, we find that their definitive utterances on the "we" also take the form of analyses of *PbG* 74. It seems to this writer a matter of no mean consequence that four of the six scholars cited tend so to limit their attention in defining a term on whose comprehension intelligibility in *reading* the *PbG* hinges. And if, in addition, one recalls Hegel's frequent critical comments on prefaces and introductions to philosophical works, it is reasonable to assume that he too would be highly skeptical of a general definition which is based on a passage where, in the terminology of contemporary semantical theory, the term is, from the viewpoint of the work as a whole, metalinguistically "mentioned" rather than dramatically "used."

In point of fact, the term "we" and its variants are *used* repeatedly throughout the *PbG*. Rather than adding any further speculations on the "real" meaning of "unsere Zutat," perhaps it might be more fruitful to arrive at a comprehension of who "we" are through the process of "working the matter out." In the following paragraphs certain working hypotheses will be stated, but these can only be provisional; their only verification can be an enhanced comprehension on the part of a reader who works his way through the *PbG* itself.

First, let us gather together the helpful suggestions which have emerged from our review of Hegel scholarship.

(1) Following Marcuse, our attention must be fixed on the problem of *intelligibility* in the *PbG* and (2) with Lukács this intelligibility is to be sought, insofar as possible, in connection with the specific prerequisites for comprehension by "us" as intelligent (but also human) *readers*. (3) As Hyppolite has pointed out, certain of these prerequisites are *historical*. (4) All the while, we must not forget that, as Hartmann observes, "we" must grasp the *necessity* in the development of the described consciousness' experiences. It will be of singular importance to comprehend just what this necessity consists in. (5) But our comprehension of this necessity will be clouded if we neglect to distinguish between the *two* parallel processes of necessity at work in the *PbG*, as Kroner indicates.

The first and absolutely essential stage in the actualization of the reader's already implicitly philosophical (in Hegel's sense) comprehension (i.e., the first of the two processes of necessity) is

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Heidegger's discussion of the *Logik* in his *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Neske Verlag, 1957).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. T.W. Adorno's critique of Heidegger's Hegel interpretation in *Drei Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963), p. 69.

found in working through the section called “Consciousness” (*PbG* I–III). It is here that Hegel shows that the “we,” *contra* Heidegger, cannot be understood as a mode of consciousness, for in his explication of the result of “Consciousness” (*PbG* 133–140) the “we” comes to see that the “I” of consciousness is first *constituted* through the intersubjectivity of the “we” and that the unity in question in the *PbG* is not (as in Heidegger’s interpretation) the unity of consciousness and Being but the “spiritual unity” in reciprocal recognition. It is this “spiritual unity” which constitutes the Concept of Spirit (*PbG* 140–141). But the way out of consciousness’ meaning-solipsism cannot be simply “pointed out”; it must be worked through. And in doing so the reader must note Hegel’s peculiar use of the word “we” in this section. For it is only in “Consciousness” (and in subsequent references back to *PbG* I–III) that the “we” is seen to play the role (*zum Bei-spiel*) of the consciousness presented, to *speak* for it and *write* for it (*PbG* 81), immediately and passively *observe* for it (*PbG* 85), as well as *perceive* for it (*PbG* 95) and actively participate in its Concept (*PbG* 103).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, “we” are able so to relate ourselves, not because it is some primordial experience and the “we” is “the absoluteness of the absolute” (with Heidegger), or because the “we” is a speculative Hegelian philosopher (with Hyppolite), or because the “we” enjoys the privileged access of Absolute Knowledge (with Kroner); both the consciousness in question and “we” ourselves are already in the element of *pre*-Hegelian philosophy.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the section called “Consciousness” is the most clearly philosophical (when philosophy is understood as the theory of knowledge) of the entire work. And it is so because it must enable its readers to get beyond “philosophy,” beyond the “love of knowledge,” and thus to begin to know (*PbG* 12).

Hegel, contrary to many a legend, demonstrates in the *PbG* a great respect for his readers. This, rather than his reputedly esoteric and didactic style, is a more probable source of “unintelligibility” to readers of the *PbG*. He recognized that the individual reader has “the right to demand that science at least provide him with the ladder to this standpoint [the element of philosophy], and show him this standpoint within himself” (*PbG* 25). The ladder which Hegel extends in the opening three chapters of the *PbG* is a “ladder language” quite unlike that of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*: it *does* enable “our” theoretical orientation to rise above the level of solipsism, mystical or otherwise, because it destroys the “myth of meaning” underlying the “paradox of learning” which has plagued philosophical thought since Socrates.

In these chapters Hegel shows that meaning remains a myth and learning remains paradoxical as long as the ultimate subject is taken to have the egological structure of consciousness. Consciousness *is* dialectical because it presumes to give an account of its experience in terms of the ego and its other. But by playing the role of consciousness, *we* come to see at the end of *PbG* III that consciousness’ attempt at self-explication results, when pushed to the limit, in an inversion of

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<sup>33</sup> This is the only section of the *PbG* which presents any *prima facie* grounds for Loewenberg’s interpretive notion of “histrionic impersonation.” It is perhaps worth noting that Loewenberg’s *Mind* articles mentioned above, written thirty years before his commentary on the *PbG* as a whole, developed the “histrionic” thesis in connection with an analysis focussing on *PbG* I–III.

<sup>34</sup> The term “pre-Hegelian” is to be understood in a systematic and not merely chronological sense.

consciousness and its world (*PbG* 121ff.). To see this inversion is “our contribution,” an act of restraint through which we are finally able to relinquish the standpoint of consciousness.

We may agree with Heidegger that the *PbG* presents us with a dialogue. But the protagonists are not the ontic and ontological modes of consciousness’ experience. They are rather consciousness and Spirit. The dialogue itself is consciousness’ (not Hegel’s) voyage to the discovery that it *is* Spirit. For *us*, this dramatic dialogue begins when the Concept of Spirit reveals itself to us (*PbG* 140), when we no longer take ourselves to be substitution instances of the protagonist, consciousness. Heidegger’s brilliant exposition of the “Introduction” founders on just this issue. He fails to see that the Concept of Spirit is inexplicable in terms of consciousness or its ontic and ontological modalities of experience. The “I” of consciousness must rather be grasped as constituted through the “we” of Spirit. And when “we,” the readers of the *PbG*, grasp this, the “we” becomes, for the first time, ‘we’ in Hegel’s distinctive sense of the word. As such, ‘we’ are able to witness the dialogue between consciousness and Spirit through which consciousness works out in concrete detail (*PbG* IV–VIII) what ‘we’ have come to grasp merely *ex negativo* and in principle (*PbG* I–III).

In the concluding paragraph to the “Introduction,” Hegel says “consciousness will reach a point [*Punkt*] 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” (*PbG* 75 = *HCE* 26). The suggestion which follows from the argument of this essay is that the “point” referred to is the transition to *PbG* IV. “In self-consciousness, as the Concept of Spirit, consciousness has for the first time reached its turning point [*Wendungspunkt*]” (*PbG* 140).

These texts suggest that the *method* of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is developed in two stages. The first (*PbG* I–III) is a dialogue between consciousness and the “we” in which the “we” participates. The result of this dialogue is that consciousness, through its inversion, comes to present itself to us as the appearance *of* experience, whose essence (Spirit) ‘*we*’ no longer distinguish from its appearance. Since ‘we’ no longer interfere with consciousness (as at *PbG* 81, 85, 95, 103), “our contribution” *becomes* “the pure act of *observation*” (*PbG* 72 = *HCE* 21). The second stage (*PbG* IV–VIII) is accordingly “the authentic science of Spirit,” the *phenomenology* of *Spirit* rather than consciousness. At this point ‘*we*’ have grasped the essence of consciousness.

The “Introduction” ends with these words: “And, finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its essence, it will indicate the nature of absolute knowledge itself” (*PbG* 75 = *HCE* 26).

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