

ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, New York: Basic Books, 1969.

Appendix: “The Structure of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” pp. 261–287.

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT** ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE

The *Phenomenology* can only be understood by the reader who is aware of its dialectical articulations. These articulations are, however, only rarely explicated by Hegel himself. The purpose of the following analysis will be to indicate them to the reader.

The *Phenomenology* is a *phenomenological* description of human existence. That is to say, it describes human existence as it “appears” (*erscheint*) or “manifests” itself to the very one who experiences it. In other words, Hegel describes the content of the self-consciousness of man, whose existence is dominated either by one of the typical existential attitudes that are found everywhere and at all times (First Part), or by an attitude characterizing an outstanding historical epoch (Second Part). Since “Consciousness” (*Bewusstsein*) is the general term for man in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel indicates that he is giving a *phenomenological* description when he says he is describing the attitude in question as it exists “for Consciousness itself” (*für das Bewusstsein selbst*).

But Hegel himself writes the *Phenomenology* after having thought it—that is, after having integrated in his mind *all* of the possible existential attitudes. He therefore knows the *totality* of human existence, and consequently sees it as it is in reality or in truth (*in der Tat*). Thus possessing “absolute knowledge,” he sees a given attitude, which is partial or historically conditioned, in a different light than the man who realizes it. The latter is concerned with an attitude which he believes to be total and the only possible one or, at the very least, the only admissible one. Hegel, on the contrary, knows that he is dealing with a mere fragment or a stage in the formation of integral existence. He is the only one who sees the links which unite the fragments with each other, as well as the order of the stages.

Bringing these links and this order to light is precisely what gives a “scientific” or philosophical character to the phenomenological description (which otherwise would be purely literary). This is why Hegel frames the descriptions made from the point of view of the one who is being described (*für es*) with analyses written from the point of view of “absolute knowledge,” which is the viewpoint of Hegel himself. In these remarks that serve as frameworks, Hegel therefore describes the existential attitudes such as they “appear” to him, or, as he says: “to us” (*für uns*), this “we” being Hegel himself and the reader who understands him. Now Hegel sees the things as they are in truth or in reality, or as he says: “in themselves” (*an sich*). Therefore he says indifferently “in itself or for us” (*an sich oder für uns*), or simply “in itself” or else “for us,” when he wants to make clear that at this particular point he is not giving a *phenomenological* description but a philosophical or *scientific* analysis of the situation.

Unfortunately, Hegel often omits the sacramental formula, and the boundaries between the descriptions *für es* and the analyses *für uns* are therefore not always easy to establish. And it becomes even more complicated, because sometimes, without telling the reader, he inserts into the descriptions Notes written from the point of view of Absolute Knowledge (*für uns = an sich*). But, in principle, these

* Edited, translated, and correlated with the Hoffmeister (1952) and Baillie (1931) editions of the *Phenomenology* by Kenley and Christa Dove.

Notes should not be there, and each description *für es* should be preceded by an introduction where Hegel indicates the place which the constituent-element or the historical stage in question occupies in the simultaneous and consecutive integrity of human existence; and each description should be followed by a sort of conclusion where he makes evident the “true” why and how of the transformation of the element or stage under consideration into those that result from it (through their “dialectical overcoming”). The “dialectical” transformations which are *experienced* by those who undergo them (or, more exactly, who provoke them) are described in the phenomenological parts (*für es*).

The principal aim of the following Analysis is to indicate the boundaries between the phenomenological parts and the *Introductions* and *Transitions* which surround them and which are written from the point of view of Absolute Knowledge (*für uns*). The Analysis also brings to light the dialectical (triadic) articulations of the phenomenological parts themselves, while pointing out the Notes inserted *für uns*.

In Chapter VIII, the distinction between *für es* and *für uns* comes to disappear, because this chapter describes the self-consciousness of the Wise Man possessing Absolute Knowledge—that is to say, Hegel himself—which “appears” to that self (*für es*) as it is in reality (*an sich*) and also as it appears to those who truly understand it (*für uns*). At this stage the phenomenological description therefore coincides with the philosophical or “scientific” analysis. However, this coinciding of the *für es* and the *für uns* only comes about at the end of the chapter. Therefore the chapter has a general *Introduction*, and its first Section has an *Introduction* and a *Transition*.

Of course, the *Preface* (*Vorrede*) and the *Introduction* (*Einleitung*) of the *Phenomenology* are written entirely from the point of view of Absolute Knowledge (*für uns*).

[The first two numbers indicate the page and line of the Hoffmeister edition (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952); the last two numbers indicate the page and line of the English translation of Baillie (second edition, London: Allen & Unwin, 1931). “PhG” is used as an abbreviation for the *Phenomenology*.]

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