**Hegel’s Preface to the Phenomenology of Mind**

Hegel begins by telling us (and he will echo this several times) that summary cannot do justice to the work itself—the end result is more properly the method than the conclusion. The preface satisfies “curiosity rather than knowledge” (107). He says, that contrary to common thinking of the day about philosophy, all philosophies are a progression of truth, none can be exactly compared with one another as exclusively contradictory things. All philosophies, even refutations, inform each other and the whole (68). The real subject-matter of anything is both the result and the process of “working [it] out” (69).

He goes on to say that if we understand the method fully enough, it will inform “everyday thought and conversation”—in short, this is “the systematic development of truth in scientific form” (70). Thus “truth finds the medium of its existence in notions or conceptions alone” (71).

There can be pitfalls. Hegel tells us that generalities are beguiling, but that’s not what he’s talking about. He explains that this simplistic method (the one he critiques) takes its beginning in leaving the material behind, but then we want solidity again and so revert to just materialism (positivism), but then we need a remedy for that, which can be dangerous since we are easily satisfied with so little in terms of conceptual philosophy (72). But, in keeping with what he’s already said, we can use this process for the ideal method too, since there is a “qualitative change” in philosophy when it breaks from the old way of reasoning from subjective feeling/reasoning about abstracts (ie God) (75). We can think more properly when we incorporate the exact material particularly also: “to reach rational knowledge by our intelligence is the just demand of the mind which comes to science” (77). THINGS, what is intelligible, is accessible to both the trained and untrained (scientifically-speaking) mind. This is something that science gets criticized for, but for Hegel, this is its potential, since thought cannot be purely speculative, ie. “monochrome formalism”. Purely Absolute thinking leaves the reality of material out (night in which all cows are black). To dispel this kind of thinking, we need to know what sort of shape reality is actually in, we have to know the form and content of truth; the form in which something arises is important (81).

This leads us to mediation, where truth is not just given via intuition or divine revelation. Man is reflective and takes processes of thinking and experiencing, in their diversity, to be simple. But we have self-conscious freedom, which allows us to think one thing and not another. We aren’t merely receptacles for sensation. We cannot give everything over to the absolute—we can start from that, thinking through the prospect of something like the whole as a beginning, rather than a foundation. This enaction allows us to get at Spirit, which is

“alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is per se; it assumes objective, determinate form, and enters into relations with itself—it is externality (otherness) and exists for self; yet, in this determination, and in its otherness, it is still one with itself—it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once. This self-containedness, however, is first something known by us, it is implicit in its nature [an sich]; it is Substance spiritual. It has to become self-contained for itself, on its own account; it must be knowledge of spirit, and must be consciousness of itself as spirit. This means, it must be presented to itself as an object, but at the same time straightaway annul and transcend this objective form; it must be its own object in which it finds itself reflected[…] mind, which, when thus developed, know itself to be mind, is science. Science is its realization, and the kingdom it sets up for itself in its own native element” (86).

Science thinks that it eschews the principle of the self reflecting on itself, of mediation in consciousness, but it also takes it first steps from “spirituality as the universal which assumes the shape of simple immediacy” (86). Science, the development of Spirit, undergoes a growth cycle not unlike that of the individual person—indeed, culture is a moment of the possibility of being self-conscious and reflective upon the culture. It constitutes us as “inorganic nature organic to the [self]” (90). Overall, “the goal to be reached is the mind’s insight into what knowing is” (90).

The process of history and mankind has already gotten beyond the idea that we’re merely receptacles for sensation—now, the project is “to transcend the forms as ideally presented and made familiar to our minds” (91). Part of the project is getting away from merely taking for granted that we can create unfamiliar forms out of the familiar (ie, adding complexity to our understanding of stuff, so that it may not be something that we so easily claim knowledge of on a conceptual level). In breaking apart elements of experience and cognition, we grasp a moment of the “concrete fact” being “self-divided” and then “self-moving”. The alliance of the concept and the contradiction in the concept provide the stuff of thought, which in this case is mediation via the process of dialectical thinking.

Hegel’s age needs the universal as opposed to the particular, they already have the particular. In a certain sense, Hegel says that we can approach this by means of thinking of concepts and notions as material separable from thought and the object of it AND realizing that the ego constitutes these concepts. The mind itself, as beginning/ground, is also subject to this, since the mind as it knows itself is an “immediate” thing but we have to venture out from there, to where we see truth: “the moments of mind are now set out in the form of thought pure and simple, which knows its object to be itself. They no longer involve the undivided simplicity of the knowing function; they are the truth in the form of truth, and their diversity is merely diversity of the content of truth” (97) This is speculative philosophy, or logic.

*NB: Democritus thought the void moved atoms; we found later that the atoms moved themselves (Epicurus, Lucretius, Marx’s dissertation) pg 97*

“Substance is itself the negative element” (98) when confronted with thought. We know, for instance, something perhaps better when we have amended our thinking about it (due to more information, etc). As in the case of the mathematical proof, we have the outcome as a result not only of the theorem but also the proof—however, the important difference is that we no longer need the proof to see that the outcome is “proof” of the theorem. The difference seems to lie in the fact that, in philosophy, the end result is not necessarily demonstrably true in a condensed form. Multiplicity relies on, and in, elaboration. Philosophical knowledge shows how something comes to be which is particular to the object—we learn how the tree is prefigured in the seed. Mathematics can tell us things of quantity, but quality is not reducible in the same way to an external method. The method of quality is immanent.

Example: Euclid’s 4 Proposition <https://mathcs.clarku.edu/~djoyce/java/elements/bookI/propI4.html>

Time comes in, and we get things as situational = ”the notion itself in the form of existence” (104). But this thing is dead, lifeless, not in motion (“quantity is alien to the notion”). Only what comes into being and go away, what admits of movement, is alive.

*\*\*\*What about a depiction of art in which there is life? How does art work here, since it can have the appearance of its own obsolescence.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

Philosophy has to look at the whole picture. Those things which don’t work, or are negated, are as necessary as those that do. We could think here of the importance of space to Euclidean mathematics. “The truth is thus the bacchanalian revel” (105). All participating must be drunk or the unity is broken. It is thus calm, conceptually, as long as the unity is unbroken.

“The method is the structure of the whole in its pure and essential form” (106). Thus formalism, where we apply a mode, or category to a variety of disparate things, doesn’t do them justice. Philosophical knowledge must be immanent, interested in training itself to “the inherent life of the notion” (111). This is, in basest form, because each thing is only what it is, according to the fact that it is not not. This is “self-identity.” Interestingly, scientific knowledge proceeds in a similar fashion—where we think we are understanding the utility only of something for ourselves, we are also dissolving this element of our activity and making knowing activity “a moment in the whole” (114). *\*\*\*How does this pertain to the Dialectic of Enlightenment?*

So knowing activity maps onto “reality” because understanding is a process like literally any other—a mushroom growing, etc: “This alone is what is rational, the rhythm of the organic whole” (115). Thus, knowledge is progressive, and not fixed—new ideas are perfectly welcome, but they must be grappled with like any other. Revelation is not a thing, we have to learn—not only in the sense of becoming educated, but in the very literal sense that learning is existence, especially conceptual learning (thereby, to use an old and basic example, we learn that “hot” as a quality can yield dangerous or pleasant results, so we need to think in a variety of categories to understand why, when, where, and how to interact most desirably with heat and things that are hot).

The mind, when thinking of the elements of its subject, takes the subject into mind, and even when trying to address the predicate, begins to take on the quality of the subject in order to get to the consideration of the predicate. So, perhaps, I can wonder if (to take another simplistic example specifically for its echoes) art reflects society. In that case, to get at the question, I have to take on the concept of art, and then think of the interaction of my mind and art, in order to begin to see how the three collapse in intricate ways, since then I can wonder if my mind is society and how that mediation arises (how? when? where?). I experience in this movement too a necessary restraint—I have to preserve the contradictions in each step, especially since the subject-predicate, if preserved, is just an empty form without the process of recognizing the mediation that was already there anyway.

“For the nature of humanity is to impel men to agree with one another, and its very existence lies simply in the explicit realization of a community of conscious life” (127). So, in order to have the world we want, we must do “the labor of the notion” (128) and recognize the movement of reason in, and through, history.

Questions:

Is something more poetic, the invention of new words, forms, sometimes that presume a return to a prior treasured state, anti-Hegel? Thinking of Donna Haraway, Heidegger

Is beauty only a promise of happiness? (Nehamas’s formulation) What is the function of happiness (withheld or not) here, of like and dislike, of volition in the field of non-mechanistic inquiry?

Is Hegel, in a general sense perhaps, more like David Hume than he is like Kant (who he is obviously unlike, but the question is one of degrees)?

Politically-speaking, is the state the only possible outcome for Hegelian dialectics?

1. See Japanese Zen poet Dōgen: “**My late master said, ‘A tall bamboo and a plantain appear in a painting.’ This phrase means that things beyond measure are actualized together in a painting.  A tall bamboo is long.  Although it is moved by yin and yang, the months and years of the tall bamboo move yin and yang.  The months and years of yin and yang are beyond measure.  Although the great sages understand yin and yang, they cannot measure it.  Yin and yang are all-inclusive phenomena, all-inclusive scale, and the all-inclusive way.”** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)