

Introduction

THE DIALECTIC THAT HEGEL PRESENTS in the first part of his book on consciousness is not very different from Fichte's or Schelling's. One must begin with naïve consciousness, which knows its object immediately or, rather, thinks that it knows it, and show that in the knowledge of its object it is in fact self-consciousness, knowledge of itself. The movement specific to this dialectic, a dialectic effected in three stages (sensuous consciousness, perception, understanding), is hence that movement which goes from consciousness to self-consciousness. Yet the object of this consciousness becomes for us the concept (*Begriff*).¹ Hegel differs from Fichte and Schelling in that he does not start with self-consciousness, with the equation $I = I$, but reaches it while claiming to follow the very steps of non-philosophical consciousness.

Self-consciousness will thus appear as a result and not as a presupposition. On the whole, the general movement of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy—a philosophy which founded a science of nature but culminated with Kant's critical reflection—corresponds to this development. Indeed, Kant himself began with a theory of the heavens, with a knowledge of

1. Hence the title of this part of our work: "The Phenomenological Genesis of the Concept" (*Begriff*). Just as the first part of the *Logic* (objective logic) presents an ontological genesis of the concept, the *Phenomenology* shows us how in the course of the experiences of consciousness the object of consciousness becomes the concept, that is, "life" or "self-consciousness." This genesis is only *for-us* who recall the experiences of consciousness.

nature, before he reflected on this knowledge and showed that it was fundamentally a kind of self-knowledge. Yet this development from a philosophy of nature, or of the world, to a philosophy of the I is at a higher level than the development which Hegel follows through in his chapter on consciousness. The part of the *Phenomenology* that corresponds more closely to this historical movement is the development of reason seeking itself in being. If, in a general way, the dialectic of consciousness—especially in the final chapter on understanding—already prefigures the movement from a philosophy of the world to a philosophy of the I, it must be said that for Hegel this dialectic requires a more rudimentary study. The object of consciousness is not yet the object that reason considers; it is not yet defined as a *world*. It is the object at its simplest stage, the object which is alien to all reason. At the start, it is only what is given and nothing but what is given. The first development, that of sensuous certainty, therefore, rather brings to mind the themes of Greek philosophy, of Platonic philosophy or of the ancient skepticism which Hegel had studied in his article on “Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie” [hereafter “Skeptizismus”—trans.], an article which had appeared in Schelling’s journal.² The second chapter, on perception, corresponds to the notion of “thing,” distinct from its properties and yet defined by them. We are still dealing with common perception, and Hegel’s study of perceiving consciousness often seems inspired by a philosophy like Locke’s, for example, which, though remaining at the level of common perception, begins to criticize it. Finally, in the chapter on understanding, which takes us from consciousness to self-consciousness, the object is no longer given immediately; it is no longer the thing of perception; it is force, or law. Leibniz’ dynamism or Newton’s philosophy of nature might come to mind here, but in our opinion Hegel was less concerned to rediscover a philosophy of nature than to find its presentiment in common consciousness—beneath science (of nature). We wish to emphasize this point. Hegel’s study is the study of common consciousness, not of philosophical consciousness, and yet, though Hegel names no philosopher, he uses the history of philosophy to develop his analysis and make it specific. The goal always is to lead consciousness to self-consciousness, or, better, to show that consciousness is led there by itself, by a kind of

2. “Skeptizismus,” p. 161.

internal logic of which it is not aware and which the philosopher discovers by following its experiences.³

3. Hegel does not doubt that there is a connection between these experiences of consciousness and philosophic systems. The history of philosophy is a part of philosophy itself, and, as Novalis said (*Werke*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn [Leipzig, n.d.], III, 183), "The genuine philosophic system must contain the pure history of philosophy."

1 / Sensuous Certainty

WE COULD ALSO SUMMARIZE the three chapters on consciousness—sensuous certainty, perception, understanding—by saying that for us, but only for us, the object of consciousness comes to be what Hegel calls the “concept” (*Begriff*), which is nothing other than the subject, that which is only by virtue of self-development, opposing itself to itself and rediscovering itself in that opposition. The three moments of the concept—universality, particularity, and specificity—should not be thought of as juxtaposed; the universal, which Hegel compares in the *Logic*¹ to omnipotence and to love, is itself only by being its other. As separated universal, it is the particular; it is determinateness. The indeterminate, in fact, is a kind of determinateness, the determination of indeterminateness—just as in aesthetics the spatial isolation of sculptures which are meant naïvely to symbolize the sublime whole is an abstraction, an opposition to determinate situation. The universal, then, is the particular, or rather it is itself and its other, the one that is in the many.² The particular, in turn (that is, the determinate), is *absolutely* determinate only insofar as it negates and overcomes its particularity; as absolute negativity, it is the negation of the negation. It is specificity, the return to immediateness, but this immediateness contains mediation because it is the negation of the

1. That is, the *Science of Logic*, 1812. This is usually referred to as the “Major *Logic*,” in opposition to the “*Logic*” of the *Encyclopaedia* which is called the “Minor *Logic*.” The comparison of the “concept” with “omnipotence” or “love” is in the second volume of the *Major Logic* (SW, IV, 242).

2. *The Philosophy of Fine Art*.

negation, an internal movement of the immediate which opposes itself to itself, which becomes what it is. If we are to grasp the whole of Hegel's thought, we must understand this starting point of his philosophy: the intuition of life or of the I which develops by opposing itself and rediscovering itself. The logical form that this starting point took during Hegel's Jena period merely hides this initial seed and lends it progressively greater intellectual consistency.³ The true is subject, or concept, which is to say that it is itself this movement of coming to be what it is, of positing itself. The true, therefore, is not the immediate but the "immediateness that has come about" (PE, I, 19-20; PG, 21-22; PM, 84). In the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel strives to explain this basis of his entire philosophical system and to contrapose his conception of the true which includes mediation within it to any system that posits truth or the true as an immediate, a being, a substance beyond mediation. For Hegel, mediation is not alien to the true but within it. In other words, the true is subject and not substance. The true is not the immediate as such, that which is and remains equal to itself; "it is its own self-becoming, the circle which presupposes and has at the beginning its own end as its goal and which is actually real only by means of its developed actualization and of its end" (PE, I, 18; PG, 20; PM, 81).

It has not been superfluous to recall these texts before beginning our study of the starting point of the whole phenomenological development, sensuous consciousness or immediate knowledge, that is, knowledge of the immediate. In fact, in this part of the book Hegel shows how consciousness begins with an equality that will later be its end, the goal that it will strive to reach, to reconquer reflectively. This equality is that between (subjective) certainty and (objective) truth. The entire phenomenological development issues from this origin and tends to reconstruct it, for it has "at the beginning its own end as its goal." In this sense, we shall have to compare absolute knowledge—the last chapter of the *Phenomenology*—with sensuous certainty—the first chapter. Whereas in sensuous certainty the immediate is, in the last chapter it has come to be what it is:

3. See our article "Vie et prise de conscience de la vie dans la philosophie hégélienne d'Iéna," in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. XLIII (1936), reprinted in *Studies on Marx and Hegel* (New York, 1969), pp. 3-21, in which we showed how Hegel strove to give a logical form to his intuition of an infinity that is "as anxious as the finite."

it has actualized itself through an internal mediation. In the first chapter, truth and certainty are immediately equal; in the last chapter, certainty, i.e., subjectivity, has posed itself in being, posed itself as truth, and truth, i.e., objectivity, has shown itself to be certainty, self-consciousness. Identity is no longer immediate; it comes to be by means of the whole prior development. The true is then posed for consciousness as subject, and consciousness itself is this true, which is what Hegel expresses in a different way when he says that the absolute is spirit that knows itself as spirit.⁴

Thus we can consider the sensuous certainty with which consciousness starts as at once its highest truth and its greatest error. This consciousness thinks that it has the richest, the truest, the most determinate knowledge, but its knowledge is the poorest where it imagines itself the richest, the most false where it imagines itself the truest, and, above all, the least determinate where it imagines itself the most determinate. Yet that wealth, that truth, that complete determinateness, are not purely illusory: they are only intended, only a *δδξα*. The testing of this intending will reveal the dialectical reversal, but the moment of intending will subsist and, through the calvary of mediation, consciousness will rediscover that identity with which it had started as truth that is certain of itself. Writing at the end of the *Phenomenology* about the incarnation of God according to Christianity, Hegel says that "what is called sensuous consciousness is precisely the pure abstraction, the thought for which being, the immediate, is. The lowliest is hence at the same time the supreme; the revealed, completely emerging to the surface, is by that very fact the most profound" (*PE*, II, 267-68; *PG*, 529; *PM*, 760).

For us, philosophers who follow the experience of consciousness, what must result from its movement through sensuous certainty, perception, and understanding is first the concept in a still immediate form, then life, and then spirit. Hegel says this

4. Christianity revealed the subjectivity of the absolute, and all of philosophy since has tried to understand that "the absolute is subject." In the preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel wrote: "That substance is essentially subject is expressed in the portrayal of the absolute as spirit; this is the most elevated concept and it belongs to the modern age and its religion." Descartes wrote that God is "his own cause" (*cause de soi*), but Böhme, albeit still in a naïve and barbarous manner, glimpsed the subjectivity and the life of God that is "Mysterium magnum revelans seipsum."

explicitly in the chapter on revealed religion from which we have just quoted: "Thus spirit that knows itself arose for us through the movement of the knowledge of immediate consciousness, or of consciousness of the existing object" (*PE*, II, 264; *PG*, 526; *PM*, 757). Indeed, the object considered by sensuous certainty is the immediate, the true as immediate, i.e., being, or the universal opposed to determinateness or to specificity. But in perception the object becomes the thing, tied to its properties, the universal combined with the particular. And in understanding, finally, this thing is no longer an inert substratum separate from its determinations, but becomes force that expresses itself in its externalization, or law that unites separate terms. Finally, the object itself becomes self-consciousness in-itself, the concept which no longer juxtaposes the universal and the particular but is their movement, their development. At the level of self-consciousness, the second chapter of the *Phenomenology*, this immediate concept is life; it must then become spirit. We can say that for us the three chapters we have mentioned constitute a genesis, through the experiences of consciousness, of what Hegel calls the concept. At the same time, as we have noted, for itself this consciousness becomes self-consciousness.

I. SENSUOUS CERTAINTY: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

HENCE IT IS IMPORTANT to analyze the first chapter of Hegel's dialectic in detail. It is at once a critique of all immediate knowledge and a movement from sensuous certainty to perception. Moreover, Hegel's critique of sensuous certainty is largely inspired by Greek philosophy. Several years earlier, Hegel had taught a first course in the history of philosophy at Jena and had meditated on the meaning of the ancient *σχέψις* as opposed to modern empiricism, as we know from the article on "Skeptizismus." Without exaggerating, as Purpus does,⁵ the specificity of all the allusions to Greek philosophy in this chapter, we cannot but notice similarities between this first dialectic of the *Phenomenology* and that of such ancient Greek philosophers as Parmenides and Zeno—and, especially, Plato.

5. W. Purpus, *Die Dialektik der sinnlichen Gewissheit bei Hegel* (Nuremberg, 1905) and *Zur Dialektik des Bewusstseins nach Hegel* (Berlin, 1908).

Hegel's starting point is the situation of the most naïve consciousness. In the part of the *Encyclopaedia* called "Philosophy of Spirit," he will show how sensuous consciousness, the lowest form of consciousness, develops from the way in which the soul appears in anthropology. In the *Encyclopaedia*, in fact, anthropology precedes phenomenology.⁶ The sensuous soul does not yet distinguish itself from its object. It experiences within itself the whole universe of which it is the reflection, but it is not aware of the universe: it does not contrapose it to itself. But the moment of consciousness appears as the moment of separation, as the moment of the distinction between subject and object, between certainty and truth. The soul no longer senses but is consciousness: it has a sensuous *intuition*. This distinction is present in its simplest form at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*. Consciousness knows its object immediately—an immediate relation as close as possible to unity: "the immediate relation in fact means only unity" (*PE*, II, 188; *PG*, 461; *PM*, 664). Hegel could not avoid this first distinction since he started the *Phenomenology* with consciousness itself. But the two terms are posed in their equality. There is indeed knowledge, i.e., there is a distinction between certainty and truth, but this knowledge is immediate, which is to say that here certainty equals truth. Otherwise, knowledge would surpass its object or its object would surpass it, either of which alternatives would introduce a reflection, a difference that would be a mediation. That is why, Hegel says, this knowledge appears immediately as the richest, without limits in space or time since it unfolds itself in them indefinitely: it is as if space and time were the very symbol of that inexhaustible richness. It appears also as the truest and the most precise, as the most determinate, "for it has not yet separated anything from the object but has it before it in all its fullness" (*PE*, I, 81; *PG*, 79; *PM*, 179). Is this richness merely illusory? The answer will be revealed by the internal dialectic of sensuous certainty.

Let us begin by noting that by virtue of being immediate this immediate knowledge is a knowledge of the immediate: "The knowledge that is our object at the beginning, or immediately, can only be the knowledge that is itself immediate knowledge, that is, knowledge of the immediate, knowledge of the existing" (*PE*, I, 81; *PG*, 79; *PM*, 179). At the end of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel shows how absolute knowledge returns to consciousness by presenting itself in its immediateness:

6. *Encyclopaedia*, p. 369.

Indeed, precisely because it grasps its concept, spirit that knows itself is immediate equality with itself (which we call immediate knowledge), and in its difference this equality is certainty of the immediate, or sensuous consciousness, which is what we started with. This movement of detaching itself from the form of its self is the greatest freedom and the security of its self-knowledge (*PE*, II, 311; *PG*, 563; *PM*, 806).

Immediate knowledge, with the difference entailed by consciousness, is hence indeed knowledge of the immediate, or of the existing. Such is sensuous certainty. Since it rejects any mediation or any abstraction that might alter its object, it knows being and only being; it does not develop as consciousness which represents objects to itself diversely or compares them among themselves, for that would be to introduce reflection and thus substitute mediate knowledge for immediate knowledge. If I say that it is night or that this table is black, I am using words which designate *qualities* and which presuppose comparisons, words, that is, which introduce mediation into knowledge. The words "night" and "black" stand not only for what I experience immediately but also for other nights and other black objects. This is a working of abstraction (for Hegel, of negation), for night is what is not this or that particular night. Still less could we speak of a thing like the table, an object which would be known only by its qualities and inferred from these. If we are to describe the situation of this naïve consciousness which knows its object immediately, we must revert, according to a phrase in the *Logic*, to the state of mind of natives who, faced with the novelty of an object, can only cry out "here is."

This is why from the start Hegel contraposes the actual truth of this consciousness to its pretended richness: "In point of fact, nevertheless, this certainty explicitly acknowledges that it is the most abstract truth and the poorest. It only says 'it is' about what it knows, and its truth contains only the being of the thing" (*PE*, I, 81; *PG*, 79; *PM*, 149). This certainty is ineffable; it seizes the *ἄλογον*. And for Hegel this suffices to show its impotence. That which is ineffable, the *ἄλογον*, is only aimed at but never reached. What I experience but am unable to express in any way has no truth. Language is truer.

Assuredly we do not portray the universal this, or being in general, but we voice the universal. In other words, we do not at all speak in the same way that we intend [*meinen*] in sensuous certainty. But, as we see, language is truer. It allows us to go so far as im-

mediately to refute our *intention*, and since the universal is the true of sensuous certainty and language expresses only the true, it is certainly impossible for us to name [*sagen*] a sensuous being that we intend [*meinen*] (*PE*, I, 84; *PG*, 82; *PM*, 152).

Somewhat later, Hegel writes of speech as having the divine nature of immediately reversing my opinion and immediately transforming it into something else, without letting it really express itself in words (*PE*, I, 92; *PG*, 89; *PM*, 160). This philosophy of language, which already appears in Hegel's first chapter, reminds us of Plato's dialectics. For Plato, too, there was a question of the possible expression of knowledge, of the *λόγος* and the resistance it put up to us.⁷

Whatever the case, sensuous certainty, the certainty of the immediate, cannot name its object lest it introduce a mediation. Hence, it experiences the object in its ineffable uniqueness. This object and the I that grasps it are, in effect, purely specific: "In this certainty, consciousness is only qua pure I, where I am qua pure this one and the object is qua pure this. . . . The specific knows a pure this; it knows the specific" (*PE*, I, 82; *PG*, 79–80; *PM*, 149–50). This ineffable specificity is not the specificity that includes negation, or mediation, and hence encloses determinateness so as to negate it; a long development will be necessary before we reach authentic specificity, which is the concept and which is expressed in living beings or in spirit. The specificity we are discussing is immediate, or positive, specificity, which opposes the universal but is in fact identical to it:

By saying about something only that it is an actually real thing, an external object, we say only what is most universal and we thereby state the object's equality with everything much more than its difference. If I say "a specific thing," I express it rather as completely universal, for every thing is a specific thing (*PE*, I, 91; *PG*, 88; *PM*, 160).

Clearly, to say "here" or "now," which seems most determinate, is in fact to say any moment in time, any point in space. The

7. One of the profound defects in Hegel's thought is revealed perhaps in his philosophy of language and his conception of specificity, which banished "specific souls" because they are ineffable. For Hegel, specificity is a *negation* rather than an irreducible *originality*; it either manifests itself through a determination which is a negation or, qua genuine specificity, it is the *negation of negation*, an internal negation—which may indeed lead us to a *universal subject* but which tends to eliminate *specific existents*.

most precise is also the most vague. But generally, the being that is the immediate—the essential truth of sensuous certainty—is itself every being and none. It is therefore negation and not merely positing, as was affirmed at the beginning. Thus sensuous certainty illustrates the first theorem of Hegel's logic, the theorem which, positing the immediate, positing being, discovers it to be identical to nothingness; the positing of being refutes itself.

Let us remember this essential point: the specific aimed at by sensuous certainty, which is itself specific, is in fact its own contrary: it is the most abstract universal. To be sure, consciousness aims at something else, but it cannot say what it aims at, and it therefore fails to reach it. Language withholds itself. According to Aristotle, it is impossible to define the sensuous individual: "If, for example, you were being defined and you were told that you are a lean animal or a white one, or an animal with some other attribute, that would be a characteristic that could belong to another being as well."⁸

In criticizing the claims of sensuous certainty here, Hegel criticizes all immediate knowledge, any philosophical intuition of the *ἄλογον*, any philosophy that foregoes thinking so as to bring us back to the ineffable, that is, to pure being. The feeling of the ineffable can appear infinitely profound and infinitely rich to itself, but it can give no proofs and it cannot even test itself lest it give up its immediateness. This intuition in which "all cows are black," this depth, is always what is most superficial.⁹

But in describing the situation of sensuous consciousness, we have substituted ourselves for it; it is essential that this consciousness itself discover the poverty beneath its apparent richness. The dialectic of sensuous consciousness must be its own, not ours. But how can sensuous consciousness experience its immediate knowledge and discover its negative character, that is, introduce within it mediation, the universal? If we were content

8. *Metaphysics* Z.15.

9. The complete unity of being and the knowledge of being will lead us either not to reach or to go beyond consciousness, which is characterized by the *distinction* between certainty and truth, between knowledge and essence. Beyond it lies *absolute knowledge*, in which *being* is simultaneously a *knowledge of being*. But that speculative thought (ontological logic) is of such a nature that its starting point (being that is identical to nothingness) contains the cleavage *in another form*. For if *being* is not only *being*, if it contains the possibility of the *knowledge* of being and of the *question* of being, then it must be its own negation. The beginning of the *Logic* corresponds to that of the *Phenomenology*. Cf. part VII, below.

with the pure and simple identity of certainty and truth, sensuous consciousness would be unable to progress, but it would by the same token no longer be consciousness or knowledge. There is, in fact, a distinction within it, between its knowledge and its object, and a requirement: to determine the *essence* of its knowledge. In fact, a multitude of actual specific certainties is at play in the pure being which constitutes the essence of this certainty: "An actual sensuous certainty not only is this pure immediateness but also is an example of it."¹⁰ Hegel uses the terms *Beispiel* and *Beiherspielen* ("example" and "bypass"). The specific sensuous certainty is in juxtaposition with the absolute immediateness; at the first stage of the development there is no interpenetration of universal and specific, of essence and accident. Now the distinction between the essential and the nonessential is the very work of consciousness. It is consciousness that distinguishes what is in-itself from what is for-it. If the immediate is its truth, it therefore differentiates itself within itself as sensuous certainty of its essence. If we reflect on this distinction, we see that the difference between subject and object already implies a certain mediation. "I have certainty but I have it through the mediation of an other, the thing, and this thing also is in certainty through the mediation of an other, the I."

Thus, consciousness directs itself sometimes toward the object, which it then considers essential, and sometimes toward its subjective certainty, which it then posits as essential while the object is nonessential. Driven away from these two positions in which it fails to find the immediateness which is its essence, it returns to the immediate relation from which it started, posing the whole of that relation as essential. The progression of sensuous certainty from object to subject and from subject to whole is a concrete progression. The mediation that is external at the beginning completely penetrates sensuous certainty at the end, after which that certainty is no longer immediate knowledge but the knowledge of perception. We shall distinguish and examine these three moments: (1) that at which the object is posed as essential; this dialectic leads to Parmenides' being, as opposed to opinion, $\delta\delta\zeta\alpha$, but this being reveals itself as the con-

10. In order to understand this distinction we must recall what accompanies consciousness: the distinction between a truth (the essence, the in-itself) and a certainty. At this stage, truth for consciousness is the *immediate*, but its certainty is distinct from that truth: "This other is not only for-it; it is simultaneously truth outside that relation, in-itself" (PE, I, 73; PG, 71; PM, 141).

trary of an immediate being, as abstraction, or as negation (the terms are equivalent for Hegel); (2) that at which opinion, subjective knowledge, is posed as essential in opposition to the empty being of the preceding stage; this dialectic leads to Protagoras' "man," the measure of all things, but the I that is thus reached is itself only an abstraction—as much this unique I as the I in general, all I's. Nonetheless, the relation between the universal and the specific is more profound in this second stage than in the first; (3) that at which sensuous certainty is posed in its concrete unity, with the whole of the relation defined as "unity of that which feels and that which is felt." But this unity reveals itself as including an ineluctable multiplicity and as being a mediation of various "heres" and "nows." The *thing*, the unity of various properties and the negation of their separation, is born *for-us*. The object and the I are no longer immediate but have become the former an *extended thing* and the latter a *thinking thing*.

II. WITH RESPECT TO THE OBJECT: PARMENIDES' THINKING AND OPINION

KNOWLEDGE MUST JUDGE ITSELF by its norm, by what for it is its essence. But in the case of sensuous certainty, its norm is its immediateness. The first experience is that in which being is posed as the essence; it is immediate, while knowledge, on the contrary, is inessential and mediated, a knowledge which can be but which needs not be: "But the object *is*; it is the true and the essence; it is indifferent to being known or not known; it subsists even if it is not known; but without the object there is no knowledge" (PE, I, 83; PG, 81; PM, 151). The privilege that being has over knowledge is due to its permanence. But in what does this permanence consist? And what experience does consciousness have of its object here, an object that subsists despite the vicissitudes of subjective certainty, which is only an example, only an aside in comparison to the immediateness of its object? We need not consider what this object truly is but only how sensuous certainty contains it.¹¹

11. Whereas for us the two terms exist through each other, for sensuous certainty *being* at the start is *the immediate*: it is valid in-itself, independently of our knowledge of it. Indeed this realism of

What thus is *independent* of all knowledge is being, in Parmenides' sense. Although sensuous consciousness does not reach such a philosophic thought, this moment of logic expresses its truth. Indeed, sensuous consciousness can say only "this is," thus posing the absolute nature of an existent independently of all mediation. This being is the necessary being, and the necessity is but the immediate reflection of this being back on itself: "It is because it is" (PE, I, 82; PG, 80; PM, 150). Yet just as Parmenides had to distinguish opinion (*δόξα*) from being (*τὸ ὄν*), so sensuous consciousness must distinguish its aim (*Meinung*) from being. Sensuous knowledge experiences its own inconstancy with respect to being, which is its truth and its essence. In considering this experience of inconstancy, we shall see sensuous certainty discover that being, which is its essential truth, is so only by the artifice of negation. The object of sensuous certainty, far from being immediate existence, is an abstraction, the universal as the negation of every particular this; it is the first negative manifestation of the universal in consciousness.

The crucial question is this: what in sensuous certainty subsists? "If we consider the this in the double aspect of its being, as the now and as the here, its internal dialectic will take a form as intelligible as the this itself" (PE, I, 83; PG, 81; PM, 151). Sensuous certainty, indeed, does not have the right to rise above the notions of the this, the here, the now. In saying "the now is daytime" or "the this is a tree," it introduces qualitative determinations into its knowledge which are opposed to the immediateness that it requires for its object. "These notions of night and of day, of tree and of house, are generic terms which we cannot yet use and which belong to a more highly evolved consciousness. Nouns presuppose a classification by genus and species which cannot be present in immediate sensuous consciousness, the most formless of all knowledge."¹² Classification, indeed, requires a comparison, a movement by consciousness above what is given to it immediately; with specific particularity,

being is characteristic of naïve consciousness. "In this certainty a moment is posed as what simply and immediately *is*, or as the essence; this is the object. The other moment, on the contrary, is posed as the inessential and as the mediated; that which is not in-itself but only exists through the mediation of an other is the I, a knowledge that knows only the object because the *object* exists whereas the knowledge can either be or not be" (PE, I, 83; PG, 80; PM, 151).

12. Andler, "Le fondement du savoir dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* de Hegel," p. 322.

consciousness introduces mediation into the object. But sensuous certainty must reject this mediation lest what constitutes its own essence vanish before its eyes.

If Hegel uses these notions (night, day, tree, house), he does so because it is impossible not to use them in a judgment that must be able to express itself one way or another. Yet sensuous certainty does not take these notions for what they are, specific determinations which presuppose an entire system of mediations in knowledge; it takes them rather as the pure essence of the ineffable quality of the this. Thus, if we ask, "What is the now?" and answer, "the now is nighttime," this in no way signifies an understanding of what the generic term "night" designates; it is simply a qualification of this now, the specificity of which can by right not be said but only aimed at. The continuation of this dialectic bears this out. The now must indeed maintain its being lest it lose its characteristic of truth and immediateness; it is, but what is it if, reviewing this written truth (*PE*, I, 83; *PG*, 81; *PM*, 151) at noon, for example, I must state the new judgment that the now is noon? The now is different from itself. What is preserved when certainty experiences the inconstancy of the now? Being subsists when knowledge changes. Xenophon and, later, the Greek skeptics called this perpetual alteration of the now "appearance," that which is not. Thus, the now does not appear as an existent; it changes continually, or, even better, it is always other. Yet we still say "now," this now. But the now, which maintains itself and whose permanence is the truth of sensuous consciousness, is not an immediate term as it claimed to be: it is something *mediated*. It is, because night and day pass through it without changing it at all; it is their negation (which, for Hegel, characterizes abstraction itself; every abstraction is a negation). It is neither night nor day, and yet it can be night as well as day. "It is in no way affected by its being-other." This, precisely, is the first definition of the universal. "We call a simple entity of this kind, which *is* through the mediation of negation, which is neither this nor that but can be equally this or that, a universal" (*PE*, I, 84; *PG*, 82; *PM*, 152).¹³ In point of fact then, the universal is the true of sensuous certainty.

The dialectic we have just developed for the now is repro-

13. What we have reached through this dialectic is a first definition of the universal, but as the being of "pure abstraction" and as the precondition of every other abstraction; what has been shown to be essential in this universal is negation.

duced with regard to the here. "The here is a tree," but if I turn around it is a house. These differences are rejected as being merely opinions which do not yet have the consistency that mediation will confer on them. The here is hence neither tree nor house; it can be the one or the other. It is not affected by its being-other. It is the universal here, which is indifferent to what goes on within it. Similarly, the this is indifferent to everything it can be; it is the universal this as the now is the universal now and the here the universal here. The result of this experience is indeed what we have indicated: the truth of sensuous certainty is being, universal space, and universal time, but this being, this space, and this time are not, as they claim to be, immediate givens. They are because something else is not. "Thus what subsists is no longer that which we intended as being, but is a determinate being—abstraction or the purely universal—and our intention, according to which the true of sensuous certainty is not the universal, is what alone remains vis-à-vis this empty and indifferent now and here" (*PE*, I, 85; *PG*, 82; *PM*, 153).

Our starting point was the ineffable, but positive, here and now; we have discovered the negation that lies within them. They are only by virtue of negating their being-other. Specificity transforms itself into its opposite, universality. But this universality is not a positive one; it appears as pure abstraction and yet as the simple element, which is such by the mediation of the other. What subsists, indifferent to all that is not it, is a universal "this" which is the basis of all "thises," a universal now which is the time in which the now repeats itself indefinitely, remaining equal to itself despite its becoming-other, and a space in which all particular points are located. What has been gained by this experience is the first notion of the universal contraposed to, but mediated by, the specific. But the particularity of determinateness, the particularity which expresses mediation and which will appear in perception, has not yet been fixed upon. Rather, quality, which was no doubt in the ineffableness of the sensuous this, has been negated, and what remains in view is not day or night, and the universal, but abstract here as specificity and universality and the now as specificity and universality. The dialectic corresponding to this stage is that of pure quantity in the field of space and time as it is expressed in the arguments of Zeno the Eleatic. In the movement from the specific this to being in general, to the universal this, the dialectic has abandoned quality, but there remains a dialectic of the one and the many. Like the heres, all the nows are indeed

identical, and the identity that constitutes their community is the continuity of space and of time. But on the other hand, they are all different, and this difference is what constitutes the discontinuity of numbers. But this difference is an intended difference; it is a random difference: each point in space is identical to any other, as any moment in time is identical to any other. If we begin with their identity, or with their continuity, we necessarily reach their difference and come upon discontinuity; if we begin with discontinuity, that is, with their difference, we necessarily come back to their equality and their continuity. All "ones" are simultaneously different and identical. Such, in the field of quantity, is the opposition between specificity, *the one that is different from the others* (though this difference is only aimed at and there is no question here of being-for-itself or of genuine specificity which contains negation within itself), and the *one that is absolutely identical to all the others* (the universal, though this universal is not contraposed to itself and is not the genuine universal).

III. WITH REGARD TO THE SUBJECT

AT FIRST, sensuous certainty posited its truth in the object. The object was, it was essence; knowledge, on the contrary, was the inessential. Now, sensuous certainty must reverse its first hypothesis. The object does not reveal itself to sensuous consciousness as the immediate; rather, its being appears as posed by negation. The object is because another thing, to wit, knowledge, is not. Hence, it is necessary to return to knowledge and to make being the inessential. This last is the position of the Greek Sophists. Sensuous consciousness expects to preserve its immediateness by abandoning the dogmatism of being for a subjective phenomenalism: "Hence, the strength of [sensuous certainty's] truth is now found in the I, in the immediateness of my sight, my hearing, etc." (PE, I, 85; PG, 83; PM, 153-54). The "now is night" no longer means the immediate being-in-itself of night but its being-for-me. Truth is what I experience immediately, insofar as I experience it. This is Protagoras' thesis, which is taken up again in Plato's *Theaetetus*: "Man is the measure of all things: of those that are, the measure of their being; of those that are not, the measure of their nonbeing." *Theaetetus* concluded from this that science was nothing but

sensation.¹⁴ On this point, Hegel says that "truth lies in the object insofar as it is my object or is in my view; it is because I have knowledge of it" (PE, I, 85; PG, 83; PM, 153). The now is night or day because I see it as such and not because it is such in-itself. Truth is *my* truth, which then is immediate. (Hegel puns here on the analogy of *mein* ["my"] and *meinen* ["intend"].) This subjective idealism now knows only what the I experiences. It always poses the I, or Protagoras' "man," as truth.

Yet we find the same dialectic in this position as in the preceding one. Truth lies in the I. But in which I? "I, a this one, see the tree and affirm it as the here, but another I sees the house and affirms that the here is a house and not a tree" (PE, I, 86; PG, 83; PM, 154). These affirmations have the same authenticity and the same immediateness. What I know immediately is the antithesis of what another I knows no less immediately. Each one of these truths is swallowed up in turn by the other; what remains is no longer this I, unique and ineffable, but the universal I which with regard to the subject matches the universal this, now, and here. The same refutation [of subjective phenomenalism] appears in Socrates' argument in the *Theaetetus*: "Doesn't he say something like this: things are for me as they appear to me, one by one; things are for you as they appear to you; but you are a man and so am I?"¹⁵ The dialectic which Hegel follows is a naïve refutation—as naïve as the idealism it refutes—of solipsism. Nonetheless, the interaction of specific I's at this stage of consciousness (an interaction of attraction and repulsion because they are characterized by identity and difference, as spatial entities are) prefigures a higher dialectic, that of the unity of specific I's in the universal I.

What in fact is not swallowed up in this experience is the I insofar as it is universal, whose sight is neither the seeing of the tree nor the seeing of the house but simple sight, mediated by the negation of this house and yet remaining simple and indifferent with regard to what is still at stake [*beihier spielt*]: the house, the tree etc. (PE, I, 86; PG, 83; PM, 154).

There is another possible refutation of this immediate knowledge, one that has no recourse to the plurality of I's: I need but compare my knowledge at two different points in time. The now is day because I see it, but later it is night for the same reason. The I persists through this difference and remains equal to

14. *Theaetetus* 152.a.

15. *Ibid.*

itself. Thus the truth of my aim, as my aim, is the I as universal I. But it is symptomatic that Hegel chose the refutation which presupposes the plurality of I's. It leads in fact to the common I, which is one of the essential presuppositions of his philosophy: "The I that is a we, the we that is an I" (PE, I, 154; PG, 140; PM, 227). Andler appropriately quotes the following passage from the *Logic* concerning this dialectic:

One of the most profound and correct insights in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that unity, which constitutes the essence of the concept, must be recognized as the primitive synthetic unity of apperception, as the unity of the "I think" or of self-consciousness. We must thus recognize in us two I's which cannot be separated. The sensuous I that I am in a specific sensuous certainty is thus situated in a universal I which posits it, but without the specific I's there would be no universal I.¹⁶

The argument with regard to the object, which led us to being in general, to space, and to time, here, with regard to the subject, leads us to the universal I. "I indeed intend a specific I, but I can no more say what I intend about this I than I can say what I mean about the now and the here. . . . Similarly, when I say I, this specific I, I say all those I's in general; each of them is precisely what I say, this particular I" (PE, I, 86; PG, 83-84; PM, 154). We do not reach a positive specificity on this last point either. We fancy that we are unique and that we have an unmediated I with no comparison to others, with no mediation, the only one. But each I says the same. Its specificity falls into universality. The movement from the specific to the universal is the same as the one that was effected in space and in time. Each I is alone and unique, but every I says this. The dialectic with regard to the I does not seem to take us further than that with regard to the object. Yet there is an advance. Between the individual I and the universal I there is a deeper tie than in the case of the spatiotemporal object. There is not so much a juxtaposition between the universal and the specific as a more intimate interpenetration, and this interpenetration is the concrete truth toward which we are aiming.

Purpus has noted that the dialectic of I's is important from the very first chapter of the *Phenomenology*. "The essence and experience of subjective idealism," he wrote, "are here noted in

16. Andler, "Le fondement du savoir dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* de Hegel," p. 324.

an incomparable way.”¹⁷ This idealism, the consequences of which should be to determine as pure appearance the I that opposes it, fails before the solidity of the other I, which claims the same right for itself and attributes the same value to its determinations. The two I's are indeed transcended, each in the ideality of the other, and stand thus in the relation of identity and of attraction. But they are also in this relation as different from each other (repulsion). Now the I sees and limits itself in the other, and this self-limitation of the I implies in itself an essential step forward. There is a dynamic relation here, a mediation between the universal and the specific that is already vital and is therefore of another order than the mediation that presented itself in the object, in the this. The fact is that there is a cleavage between a dogmatic philosophy of being and an idealistic philosophy of the I. This cleavage will disappear only when the I discovers itself in being, when consciousness becomes self-consciousness.

Before moving on to the third experience, which will lead us to particularity, we can note that seductive though it is, Hegel's argument here can be understood only if we already know where it is leading. As we have emphasized, Hegel undoubtedly does not presuppose self-consciousness, the equation “I = I” as Fichte did; rather, he uncovers it in the development of consciousness. But in order to follow him, we must admit the movement from the specific to the universal, which at the level of the I is the original identity of this I and the universal I, of an “I think” that transcends any specific “I think” and of the “specific I think” itself. The self-transcendence of consciousness discovering this is significant only at the level of a transcendental philosophy. In other words, to determine the meaning of this experience of sensuous certainty we must already know that the universal and the specific must interpenetrate, or better, that there is a universal that exists through negation.

IV. THE THIRD EXPERIENCE: THE CONCRETE UNITY OF SENSUOUS CERTAINTY

THE THIRD EXPERIENCE gets us out of this oscillation between specific and universal. In posing the whole of sensuous

17. Purpus, *Zur Dialectik des Bewusstseins nach Hegel*, p. 45.

certainty (as the act common to the sensing and the sensed) as the essence of sensuous certainty, we reach a more concrete sphere. And mediation is no longer outside the specific sensuous certainty which is taken as an example (*Beispiel*), but is discovered within it.

In the first experience, the object was posited as the essential and knowledge as the inessential. But the object showed itself to be different from what it had been seen as: it was being, that is, a universal abstract. In the second experience, the ineffable I was aimed at and was the essential in relation to an inessential being. But this idealism experienced within itself the same dialectic: aiming at immediateness, it reached only an abstract universal, the I in general, which is neither this I nor that one.

What remains is to return to the starting point, that is, to pose the immediate relation of knowledge and its object without trying to distinguish which of them is the essential and which the inessential term. The essence is only the unity of this simple relation: "The now is day (and I know it as day)" (*PE*, I, 87; *PG*, 85; *PM*, 155). I refuse to leave this specific certainty and to consider another now or another self. Like the Heracliteans, according to Plato, I refuse to argue for the object or for the subject:

Let us not posit anything [Socrates says] as being in-and-for-itself. We shall then see that black or white or any other color is the meeting of the eyes with the specific transmission which, manifestly, engenders the color and that any color whose specific being we affirm is neither what meets nor what is met but something intermediate, a product that is original for each individual.¹⁸

Since this certainty does not emerge from itself, we shall go to it and we shall have indicated the unique now that is aimed at. This movement, which is not yet the act of naming a quality, is nonetheless an act of mediation. It constitutes the claimed immediate: "We are shown the now, this specific now. But now, when it is shown, it has already ceased to be; the now which is, is immediately other than the now that was shown, and we see that the now is precisely what no longer is when it is" (*PE*, I, 88; *PG*, 85; *PM*, 156). It has been, but what has been is not. And it is being that we sought. Thus, in the midst of a sensuous certainty, and without privileging either object or

18. *Theaetetus* 153.d.

knowledge as essence, there is already a mediation. What is posed no longer is as soon as it is posed, yet in its very disappearance it still is—which Hegel expresses in the first elementary dialectic that constitutes the present (richer and more concrete than the now):

1. I pose the now as truth, and I negate it; it no longer is;
2. I pose as truth that it is not, that it has been;
3. In a negation of the negation, I negate this second truth, which apparently brings me back to the first truth.¹⁹

Yet this is not the case. For the term I reach is the first to have passed through negation, to have negated its negation, and to be only through the negation of its being-other. "The first term reflected back on itself is no longer quite the same as it was, viz., an immediate. It is something reflected back on itself, something simple which remains what it is in being-other, a now which is many nows" (PE, I, 89; PG, 86; PM, 157), the day that is many hours, these hours which are many minutes. What remains is a certain unity in the multiple, a quantum; and a particular sensuous certainty is the experience of this mediation that constitutes what it claims to be immediate. From this point on, we are dealing not with a unique and ineffable now or here but with a now or here that includes mediation within itself, that is a thing including both the unity of universality and the multiplicity of specific terms. A thing will be for us an ensemble of coexisting properties and a unity of these properties—as a determinate place in space is a high or a low, a right or a left. We reach a simple complex of many heres. "The intended here would be the point, but the point does not exist." On the contrary, when we indicate it as existing, the act of indicating is shown to be not an immediate knowledge but a movement which from the aimed-at here reaches, through many heres, the universal here, which is a simple multiplicity of here, just as day

19. We note a first dialectic of temporality here: in this movement negation arises from the surge toward the *future*, which negates the now. This negation culminates in the *past* which has been (*gewesen*) and which, therefore, becomes essence. But in this manner a concrete unity which includes mediation within itself is constituted by the negation of this negation. In the preface, Hegel states that temporality is mediation itself (PE, I, 19; PG, 21; PM, 82).

is a simple multiplicity of now (PE, I, 89; PG, 86; PM, 157-58).²⁰

We thus experience a certain interpenetration of the universal and the specific, a certain unity of the diverse and unity. This is what perception, our new object of experience, will reveal to us in "the thing endowed with multiple properties." But in the movement of indicating, sensuous consciousness emerges from itself, and the object as well as knowledge become other for it: it genuinely *perceives*, and its object is a *thing* with *multiple* properties. In sensuous consciousness, negation and mediation are indeed external to being and to knowledge. "The richness of sensuous knowledge pertains to perception and not to immediate certainty, in which that richness was only what was bypassed; for only perception includes negation, difference, or diverse multiplicity in its essence" (PE, I, 94; PG, 90; PM, 163). We can also say that the essence of sensuous certainty was being or the-I, separated from this unique being or from this unique I. But what is henceforth posed is multiplicity in the unity of being, or being that has negation within it; it is multiplicity in the I, or the I that includes negation. Such is particularity, the second moment of the concept.

20. These passages can be compared with Kant's distinction between the form of intuition (pure variety) and formal intuition (the unity of the synopsis).