2 / Perception

General Characteristics of Perception

The point of view of perception is that of common consciousness and, more or less, of the various empirical sciences which raise the sensuous to the universal and mingle sensuous determinations with determinations of thought, while remaining unaware of the contradictions which thus arise.[1] For the essence of the sensuous is known only through these determinations of thought: "They alone constitute the sensuous as essence for consciousness; they alone determine the relation between consciousness and the sensuous, and only in them does the movement of perception and its perceived truth run its course" (*PE*, I, 107; *PG*, 101; *PM*, 177). We think that the piece of wax of which Descartes speaks in the second meditation, or the salt crystal of which Hegel speaks in this chapter of the *Phenomenology*, is perceived exclusively with our senses, or even with our imagination. But in fact our understanding intervenes. We perceive an extended thing, but the thing qua thing is never seen or touched. What do we know of it if not that it is not exhausted by this or that sensuous determination? "Perhaps," says Descartes, "it was as I now think, that the wax was neither that softness of honey, nor that pleasant scent of flowers, nor that whiteness, nor that shape, nor that sound." The introduction of negation is significant here, and if we quote this text of Descartes, whose purposes in this analysis are quite different

1. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia*, p. 573.

from those of Hegel in the latter's contemplation of a salt crystal, it is because, besides the parallel between the two examples, we can grasp in Descartes's text a movement of thought analogous to Hegel's. This thing before me is neither this nor that, though it can be this or that and can even take on shapes which the imagination cannot exhaust. Though the thing is *understood,* it expresses itself in its properties; it subsists in the properties we perceive in it.[2] To perceive is no longer to remain content with the ineffable of sensuous certainty but to move beyond this sensuousness and to reach what Hegel calls the universal—which he has defined in the preceding chapter of the *Phenomenology:* "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." This universal, which we have seen arise in the course of the dialectic of sensuous certainty and which is henceforth the new object of phenomenal consciousness, is the principle of perception. All is *one thing,* the extended thing and the thinking thing, the spirit, the God himself: precritical dogmatism merely formulates a metaphysics from the attitude of perceiving consciousness, as Hegel shows in his preface to the "Logic" of the *Encyclopaedia* under the title "First Position of Thought with Respect to Objectivity."[3]

Yet the universal, as we have seen it appear, "thingness" as such, is not without mediation, abstraction, or negation—three terms which here are synonymous for Hegel. It exists because something else does not exist, and hence by virtue of a reflection which at first is external to it but which the development of its dialectic will show can be conceived as internal. The thing of perception will then have dissolved itself qua thing. The determinations of thought which are successively attributed to the thing in order to rule out any contradiction and to preserve its identity with itself will come together in a universal that will include difference within it rather than being conditioned by it. The object will be force, law, or the necessity of law, and no longer

2. Cf. Berkeley's die: "[Philosophers] will have it that the word 'die' denotes a subject or substance distinct from the hardness, extension, and figure which are predicated of it, and in which they exist. This I cannot comprehend; to me a die seems to be nothing distinct from those things which are termed its modes or accidents" (Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge,* § 49).

3. *Encyclopaedia,* p. 59.

the naked thing; it will be the concept in-itself while consciousness, moving beyond the stage of perception, will genuinely have become understanding. The critique of the thing in this chapter of the *Phenomenology* is as much a critique of substance (which is not subject) as of the "thing-in-itself" [*Ding an sich*] a notion that haunts more or less every perceiving consciousness. In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel tells us that Kant's philosophy grasped spirit mainly at the level of perception; we might say that it analyzed perceiving consciousness without discovering the dialectic at the heart of that very analysis. The thing is a web of contradictions. As for the "thing-in-itself," it is but the absolute abstraction of pure thought made real as object, the final end point of every "thingism."

> The thing-in-itself—and by thing we also mean the spirit, God—expresses the object insofar as it is abstracted from all that it is for consciousness, from all its sensuous determinations as well as from all its determinations of thought. It is easy to see what remains: the absolute abstract, the total void, still determined only as a beyond, the negative of representation and of sensuousness, the negative of determinate thought.[4]

This "thing-in-itself" also presents itself as the pure matter of materialism, as Berkeley saw it, and as the supreme being of the Enlightenment, which is identical to it.

> Here it is essential to consider that pure matter is merely what remains when we abstract from sight, touch, taste, etc., that is, that pure matter is not what is seen, tasted, touched, etc. It is not matter that is seen, touched, and tasted, but color, a stone, a salt crystal. Matter, rather, is pure abstraction, and thus the pure essence of thought, or pure thought itself, is present as the absolute with no distinctions in itself, not determinate and without predicates (*PE*, II, 124; *PG*, 409; *PM*, 592).

We can plainly see the importance of a critique of the perceptive attitude, an attitude which thinks that it feels but which in fact makes abstractions real, an attitude which is the dupe of an unconscious metaphysics and yet accuses philosophy of dealing only with "beings conjured up by reason." But it is precisely the *not-I* as thing that is the creature of reason. Once again, the thought that calls itself "concrete" is fundamentally an abstract thought which does not master its determinations but grasps

4. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

them in their isolation; it is a nondialectical thought which, consequently, is prey to a dialectic that transcends it. Hegel dwells on this point at the end of the chapter on perception. Only philosophy can master the concrete because it succeeds in dominating and transcending the abstractions of the perceiving human understanding: "The latter is always poorest where it is richest. . . . Taking itself to be real and solid consciousness, it is in perception merely the interplay of these abstractions." Its opinion of philosophy is that the latter deals only with things of thought. Philosophy does indeed deal with them; it recognizes them as pure essences, as the absolute elements and powers. But it also knows them in their determinateness, and hence it masters them. "Perceiving understanding takes them to be the true and is sent on by them from one error to the next" (*PE*, I, 106; *PG*, 101; *PM*, 177). The dialectic, by contrast, as Hegel defined it some years later in the *Propaedeutic*, grasps the insufficiency of each determinateness isolated by understanding and shows that it is not in-itself what it is in its determinateness and that it changes into its contrary.[5] Philosophy grasps precisely this movement and thereby, like genuine empiricism, it rejoins the concrete whole. It does so better than does philosophical empiricism or common consciousness, since common consciousness stops at abstraction while unaware that it is an abstraction.[6] The two fundamental abstractions are the *universality of thingness* and the *exclusive unity of the thing*.

It is rather difficult to follow in detail the steps of the chapter which Hegel devotes to perceiving consciousness, a chapter which constitutes one of the moments of the genesis of the concept, which we have undertaken to reconstitute. Both the *Propaedeutic* and the *Encyclopaedia* briefly summarize the contradiction inherent in the object of perception in order to show how this contradiction makes the thing a mere phenomenon which reveals on the outside (for-an-other) what it is inside (for-itself): the object of perception is simultaneously the site of properties or rather of independent free matters and the unity in which these matters dissolve. (How can they coexist in one and the same place? How can the unique thing be an ensemble

5. *Propaedeutic*, p. 32.

6. In his article "Naturrecht" Hegel contraposed the genuine empiricism of the man of action, who dominates all determinations instead of congealing them in their particularity, to the empiricism of the understanding.

of independent properties?) The *Phenomenology*, on the other hand, develops the various aspects of this contradiction at greater length. First, the notion of substance expressing itself through its attributes, but expressing itself for some reflection external to it, is transcended. The notion of monad—the negative unity of the properties of the monad—which is next reached is judged to be equally inadequate because the intrinsic determinateness of any monad, which makes it distinguishable from every other monad, also places it in relation to other monads, and this relation to the other is the negation of its being-for-itself. Finally, this unity of being-for-itself and being-for-another, of negative entity and passive universality, appears as the end point of this development. At the same time, reflection, which at first is in consciousness as opposed to its object, appears as inherent in the object. The object itself becomes the whole of the movement, having first split itself into object and consciousness, so that at the end phenomenal consciousness contemplates its own reflection in the thing. In summary, the whole movement of perception is from substance (positive unity) to monad (negative unity), from thingness to force, from mechanism to dynamism, from thing to relation, from a reflection external to the object to an internal reflection. The object becomes concept, but only in-itself. For as yet, consciousness is not its own concept, "which is why it does not know itself in this reflected object" (*PE*, I, 110; *PG*, 103; *PM*, 180).

We shall try to recapitulate this detail of Hegel's dialectic, especially emphasizing its starting point, what perception is for us, that is, for the philosopher who witnesses the development of phenomenal consciousness, or what it is in-itself for this consciousness. This starting point contains all the contradictory elements of the thing, elements which will show themselves as such in the course of the experience and allow us to follow the original development of that experience.

I. The Perceptive Attitude, the Concept of the Thing

In what sense has the universal appeared to us as the general principle of perception? In the experience of sensuous certainty we saw the ineffable, or the immediate, transcended by that movement thanks to which, it was claimed, it could be seen or pointed out.

> The now and the act of indicating the now are so constituted that neither is an immediate simple but each is a movement which contains various moments [. . .]. Similarly, when we indicate the here as being, this indication reveals itself not as an immediate knowledge but as a movement which starts from the here that is aimed at and through many heres reaches the universal here which is a simple multiplicity of here as day is a simple multiplicity of now (*PE,* I, 88, 89; *PG,* 85, 86; *PM,* 156–57).

This act of indicating—this synthesis of apprehension in intuition, as Kant would say, which in turn presupposes reproduction and recognition—effects a mediation; it culminates in a *simple* term which, however, encloses a *multiplicity.* The intended here was the point, but it does not exist. What exists is a here that is affected by its being-other; it includes a high and a low, a right and a left, etc. It is this that Hegel calls a "universal," and that is the sensuous transcended (*aufgehoben*). This universal, in turn, is conditioned by the sensuous; it exists by means of the mediation of the sensuous through which it is posited. Moreover, each of these moments itself becomes a universal, but a determinate universal (the particular). That is why Hegel says that

> even in its simplest form, the principle of the object, the universal, is a mediate principle; the object must express this within itself as its nature. Thus the object shows itself as the thing with multiple properties. The richness of sensuous knowledge pertains to perception and not to immediate certainty, in which richness was only what was bypassed [*das Beiherspielende*]. For only perception includes negation, difference, and diverse multiplicity in its essence (*PE,* I, 94; *PG,* 90; *PM,* 163).

The universal is nothing but thingness (*Dingheit*), a milieu which is a simple ensemble of multiple terms, just as extension is composed of a right and a left, a high and a low, etc. This salt is a simple here, and at the same time it is a manifold: it is white; it is *also* cubical, *also* savory, *also* of a determinate weight. All these properties coexist in it with ease. They neither penetrate nor affect each other but they participate in universality because they express, in a term that Hegel deliberately borrows from Spinoza, thingness. The sensuous quality lodged in a being can be named; the whiteness or the savoriness of this salt is itself a determinate universal, a not-this, without losing its immediateness. The sensuous, which perception has transcended but not suppressed, is still present precisely in the form

of a determinateness. "Nothingness, as nothingness of the this, preserves immediateness and is itself sensuous, but it is a universal immediateness" (*PE*, I, 94; *PG*, 90; *PM*, 164). Every sensuous determination is universal when it is thus caught in thingness; physics tends to make of it a "free matter" diffused in the universe, only some part of which is localized in a specific body.[7] The whiteness and the savoriness of this salt resemble the whiteness and savoriness of another mineral; they extend beyond this salt crystal which I contemplate, just as spatial extension always exceeds the uniqueness of the point.

Yet thingness, the universal, which expresses itself in the various determinations that are its attributes, is a determination of thought that is never felt. It is, we may say, the substance, the "also" which gathers up all these determinations, the medium in which they coexist. "This 'also' is hence the pure universal itself, or the medium; it is thingness gathering all these properties" (*PE*, I, 96; *PG*, 91; *PM*, 165). But we do not perceive only thingness, the simple medium of the properties; we also claim to perceive a determinate thing in-and-for-itself, *this* crystal of salt. At this point, another characteristic of perception, another determination of thought, appears. This determination is that of pure uniqueness, of the exclusive entity, which is genuinely manifested neither by substance in general nor by attributes, but rather by its mode insofar as it is the negation of negation. According to Hegel, Spinoza correctly saw the three moments of the concept—the universal as substance, the particular as attribute, and the specific as mode—but he failed to see that if every determination is a negation, that negation is genuinely expressed (for-itself and no longer only in-itself) only in the mode, insofar as the latter is the negation of negation, negation bearing on itself and thus expressing the activity of the substance as an internal activity, as subject. Thingness is determinate in-and-for-itself only as thing—a unique thing—this salt crystal, which excludes from itself everything else, which ends indeed by excluding itself insofar as for-itself it is merely a being-other. We have not yet reached that movement which transforms substance to subject and thing to force, the movement that Leibniz was able to perceive in the monad. But we can note one characteristic of the perceived thing: it is a unique thing. Moreover, each property is determined absolutely, and as

7. A usual term in the natural science of Hegel's time. Heat, savoriness, etc., would be called "free matters."

such it excludes another property—white excludes black, sweetness excludes bitterness, etc. Things then are not only universal but also specific, and these two characteristics, the "also" of the free matters and the negative entity, constitute the thing that is the object of perceiving consciousness. These two determinations of thought, the also and the entity—abstract universality and abstract specificity—are already present in the sensuous but universal property which seems to present itself immediately to consciousness. "In the property, negation as determinateness is immediately one with the immediateness of being, and this immediateness, in turn, is universality through its unity with negation. But negation is like an entity when negation is freed from this unity with the contrary and exists in and for itself." "Sensuous universality, or the immediate unity of being and the negative," Hegel continues, "is thus a property only when the entity and universality are developed from it and distinguished from each other, and when this sensuous universality combines them; only this relation of sensuous universality to the pure essential moments completes the thing" (*PE*, I, 96, 97; *PG*, 92; *PM*, 166).

What we have said about the perceived thing can also be said about the perceiving thing; at this level, the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans* are parallel. Hence the soul is sometimes perceived as an ensemble of faculties—memory, imagination, and so on—just as the thing is made up of its whiteness, its savor, and so on. When perceiving consciousness wishes to explain this coexistence of various qualities in one place, it has recourse to a fiction of the understanding which it offers as a physical reality: it speaks of the pores of one kind of matter through which another kind of matter enters. But since the reverse is also true, a vicious circle results. With regard to the thinking thing, we are led in a parallel way to speak of "the influence of memory on imagination and of imagination on memory, of their interpenetration." This parallelism between consciousness and its object is characteristic of the *Phenomenology*. When the object changes, consciousness changes, and conversely. But here it is especially important to note the common birth of perceiving consciousness and of the thing perceived. We (philosophers) have seen them take shape together in the earlier experience of sensuous certainty. They diverge only in their manifestation; their common principle is the universal. They are both inessential in relation to this principle, which is their essence. We think of Spinoza's substance which expresses itself

through the order and connection of things as well as through the order and connection of ideas. But let us consider these two moments as they appear in their common genesis.

> One is the movement of indicating; the other, this same movement but as something simple. The first is the act of perceiving; the second is the object. In its essence, the object is the same thing as the movement. The movement is the unfolding and the differentiation of the moments; the object is their assembling and their unification (*PE*, I, 93; *PG*, 89; *PM*, 162).

This synthesis of a diversity, effected by consciousness, is the act of perceiving; the same synthesis, but as though congealed, is the thing perceived. The importance of this distinction becomes apparent when we consider that from the point of view of perceiving consciousness essence is attributed to the object and nonessence to consciousness itself. Later, Hegel will make the same apportionment with regard to the opposition between unhappy consciousness and unchanging consciousness. "Because it is itself the consciousness of this contradiction, consciousness places itself on the side of changing consciousness and appears to itself as the inessential" (*PE*, I, 177; *PG*, 159; *PM*, 252). Consciousness begins by attributing the inessential reflection to itself while making the object in its self-identity the essence. For this consciousness, truth—and truth is conformity with the object—is independent of the reflection that reaches the object. "The object, determined as the simple, is the essence, indifferent to whether it is perceived or not. But perceiving as movement is something inconstant, which may or may not be, and it is the inessential" (*PE*, I, 94; *PG*, 90; *PM*, 163). This is why perceiving consciousness knows that it can err in its apprehension of the true. In its principle, which is the universal (the self-identity of the true), the being-other is contained, but as a moment that has been transcended, as a nothingness which can have a place only within itself but not in truth. For perceiving consciousness, the criterion of truth will then be the search for the equality of the object with itself and the exclusion from it of any otherness. If there is a contradiction it can only be in consciousness; the object, the true, is noncontradictory. Thus proceed common consciousness and the dogmatic thought which is its extension; they see in contradiction the sign of our reflection within ourselves, external to the true.

> Since, at the same time, diversity is for the perceiving consciousness, the latter's behavior is the act of relating the various

> moments of its apprehension to each other. But if in this comparison an inequality is produced, that is an untruth not of the object, for the object is that which is equal to itself, but only of the perceiving activity (*PE*, I, 97; *PG*, 93; *PM*, 167).

We can now understand the title of Hegel's chapter: "Perception, or Thing and Illusion." The object side, the thing, is truth; the subject side, reflection, is illusion. But we also understand the inevitable reversal. Consciousness will discover that its naïve position is untenable. For according to that position, it would suffice to take the object as it is without changing it in any way. Truth, then, would be given to us; we would merely have to reproduce it. In fact, however, the discovery of contradictions in the pure determinateness of the thing leads us to a critical position (closer, by the way, to Locke's than to Kant's), and we then try to distinguish what comes from the thing itself, i.e., from the true, and what comes from our reflection and changes the true. But this reflection, which is external to truth, manifests itself in various forms, so that the true is sometimes this when reflection is that, sometimes that when reflection is this. Thus in the end, the true itself appears as reflecting itself outside itself at the same time as in-itself, as having its being-other within itself. From that moment on, the movement of the object and of perceiving consciousness relative to each other becomes the integral movement of the object. And consciousness, as we have already noted, sees itself, without knowing it, in its object which in-itself is concept. "For us, the development of this object by means of the movement of consciousness has become such that consciousness itself is implicated in the development and that reflection is the same on both sides—or is one single reflection" (*PE*, I, 110; *PG*, 103; *PM*, 180). "*From one and the same point of view,*" Hegel says at the end of the chapter on perception, "*the object is the opposite of itself, for-itself insofar as it is for-an-other, and for-an-other insofar as it is for-itself*" (*PE*, I, 104; *PG*, 99; *PM*, 175).

We can now see the relevance of this whole chapter to the study of the development of phenomenal consciousness. It is a matter of moving definitively beyond thingism, a thingism which at first characterizes common consciousness and then promotes itself to the metaphysics of a substance which is not absolute negativity, to a metaphysics of the doorless and windowless monad. This dogmatic metaphysics is not, incidentally, corrected by a critical philosophy which tries to define the part played by our reflection in the apprehension of the true. The

true is not a thing, a substance, or even a monad; it is subject, that is, identity of identity and nonidentity; it is its own becoming. It manifests itself outside—it is external to itself—in order to posit itself and to reflect back on itself in its being-other. Starting with a universal which keeps mediation and reflection external to it, we reach a universal which posits itself, that is, which, contains its mediation within it. This universal is precisely what at the end of this chapter Hegel calls the "unconditioned universal," which in-itself is concept. It still needs to know itself, to be self-consciousness, in order to be concept for-itself.

II. The Experience of Consciousness

Let us consider now what perceiving consciousness experiences. The seeds of these experiences are contained in what has already occurred. Consciousness wishes to apprehend the thing, but it experiences the contradictions of the thing. It becomes aware, then, of its reflection as being outside the true and distinguishes it from its pure apprehension of the true. But this reflection also reveals itself to be constitutive of the thing itself, which includes "a truth opposed to itself" (*PE*, I, 102; *PG*, 97; *PM*, 172). The multiplicity of things cannot prevent the dissolution of the thing, either by excluding the being-other both from consciousness and from the specific thing or by discovering in each particular thing both a determinate essence which makes it distinguishable from every other particular thing (the principle of individuation of the monad) and an inessential variety of properties which is nonetheless necessary to it. All these means, which a recalcitrant consciousness uses in order to preserve its dogmatism, prove futile, and the thing, or things in their mutual intercourse, become merely *phenomena* through which the unconditioned universal which understanding is striving to conceive manifests itself. "In the continuous change, this something transcends itself and changes into an other, but the other changes too. Now the other of the other, or the changing of the changeable, is the development of the permanent, of the subsisting in-and-for-itself, and of the internal." [8] One must no longer say *esse est percipi*, but *esse est intelligi*.

8. *Logic*, *SW*, III, 104 ff.

The contradiction of the thing is simple. It first appears to us as one and then as infinitely divisible—*partes extra partes.* Such is the antinomy presented by Kant in his transcendental dialectic. On the one hand, we must stop dividing, and reach the simple; on the other hand, this simple, in turn, shows itself to be a composite, and the division is endless. As Hegel says, objective essence appears sometimes as the entity, the atom, and sometimes as a community or a continuity, the "Cartesian extension." So far, we have reached only objective essence in general and not the thing endowed with multiple properties. In the 1812 *Logic,* in which he wishes to show that existence, that is, the thing or things, is merely phenomenon, Hegel again takes up this dialectic with regard to the category "existence," and notes more directly, "The 'also' is what appears in external representation as spatial extension while the 'this,' the negative unity, is the thing taken as a point."[9] But it would be wrong to think that this antinomy holds only for extension. The object of perception is the mingling of abstraction and the sensuous which we call a "property." Now this property is abstract and general; it is the result of a negation, and it extends beyond the unique thing that we are contemplating. This crystal of salt is white, but its whiteness is a universal sensuous determination; we go beyond this crystal when we perceive it as white.

But the property is determinate as well as universal. When we look at it as determinate and not merely as universal, we say that it excludes other properties from itself. This salt crystal is white and therefore not black; it has one particular shape and therefore not another. We are again led to the thing as being an entity, but this time it is a question no longer of an abstract unity but of a concrete unity. This crystal excludes other things but it encloses a multiplicity of properties which we perceive to be coexistent. In the isolated entity we rediscover a medium for properties each of which is for-itself and which, only insofar as they are determinate, exclude the others. Do they exclude them from the salt crystal, or do they mutually exclude each other? In order to save the thing from contradiction, common understanding tries to expel the opposition from the particular medium that this salt crystal is. But it cannot succeed. How can those properties, which have become whiteness, alkalinity, weight, etc., coexist in a specific unit? Either the thing is one

9. *Ibid., SW,* IV, 116–17. Thus, Kant's pure variety would be the support and, as it were, the pure symbol of empirical variety.

and properties merge in it, or it is multiple: white, and also savory, and also cubical. In the first case, the properties are no longer each for-itself in their indifferent universality but are interpenetrable, and they reciprocally negate each other; in the second case, we would be dealing with a composite. A number of "matters"—caloric, chemical, electrical—are grouped in this particular enclosure and are there juxtaposed. Yet how can they be next to each other? They must occupy each other's interstices. This whole web is a fiction created by understanding, which does not forego imagining and which hides contradiction from itself in the fog of the infinitely small. If these matters interpenetrate, their independence disappears, and there remains only one unique thing without determinations; if they are juxtaposed, their independence is saved, but the unique thing is lost and we return to objective essence, a dust cloud made up of parts that are not the parts of anything and that are themselves infinitely divisible into parts. It is impossible to avoid this contradiction because the sensuous property with which we start, e.g., the alkalinity of salt, is simultaneously universal and determinate. Insofar as it is universal, it is firmly anchored in thingness, it is independent, and it is substance; insofar as it is determinate, it is specific, and excludes otherness. For this reason the two contradictory moments of the thing, on the one hand its universality, its substantiveness—which makes it indifferent to all its parts (the universal is that which can be this or that and is indifferent to being this or that)—and on the other hand its specificity, which makes it exclusive, the negative entity: both of these develop from some sensuous property. In point of fact, taken in their purity, these two moments, universality and specificity—between which the particular, the determinate universal, oscillates—meet absolutely. Pure specificity, or exclusive unity, has no determinations; it is the very universal. Every thing is a unique thing, and in that respect all things are equal. But this dialectic is a logical one, and perception is unaware of it. Hence it returns to sensuous properties and considers them in the medium of the entity without bringing itself either to merge them or to distinguish them absolutely. It is left, then, with properties taken each for itself—the whiteness, the alkalinity, the cubical shape of the salt. But considered without their medium of thingness and without the unity of the thing, these properties are no longer properties since they are no longer inherent in a medium, and they are not determinate since they do not exclude each other. Perceiving consciousness

again aims at the this; it returns to a subjectivism of the second degree. This crystal is alkaline only on my tongue and is white only to my eyes. Am I then to begin again the movement from aiming at the this to perception without ever being able to get out of it? No. Because this subjectivism will allow me to become aware in myself of my reflection in coming to know the thing; it will lead me to a critical position—which Locke had already formulated and which Kant sometimes developed under the name "transcendental idealism" when he distinguished the thing-in-itself from the thing-for-us. The thing will always be the real thing, equal to itself, but the knowledge I gain of it will be disturbed by my reflection within myself. My perception will be considered no longer as a pure and simple apprehension but as an apprehension mixed with a reflection which alters the thing and makes it different *for me* from what it is *in-itself*. In this manner, the thing will remain unchanged and illusion will arise only in consciousness. But consciousness is mistaken if it imagines that truth thus simply falls outside it. Since consciousness itself discerns the respective proportions of its reflection and of objectivity, it unknowingly becomes the very *measure* of truth. Our starting point, according to which the perceived object was the essence and perceiving consciousness the inessential, is already transcended, if not for consciousness which effects this critical discernment, then at least for us who philosophize. Do we not already know that the universal, the principle of all perceiving consciousness, is as much the I as it is being, and that the rigidity of the thing that sets itself up over against consciousness is merely the projection of the I outside of itself?

Consciousness now undergoes a double experience: at times it appears to itself as the indifferent milieu, the passive universal in which the properties are but do not mingle; at other times it appears as an entity. In the first case, the "thing-in-itself" is an entity, and pure variety is only for consciousness. This variety, of which Kant speaks, pertains not to the thing but to the multifaceted sensuousness which refracts within itself the unity of the thing. This crystal is white to my eyes, cubical to my touch, savory to my tongue. Here we have a kind of psychological idealism which is not alien to common consciousness if it is cornered: the green of this tree leaf and the moisture in it are only mine; taken alone, the thing is one. It brings about this diversity in me because I have a variety of senses by which to apprehend it. As Hegel notes somewhere, this psychological idealism has no depth because it attributes to

me a passivity that seems most alien to my activity as consciousness. But the coherence of the thing is saved in this way, and its truth of being an entity is preserved. Yet it is impossible to stop here, for there seems no way to distinguish one thing from another. If the thing is an entity it is because it is distinguishable from every other thing, and it is distinguishable not because it is an entity as such, but because it has particular properties which completely determine it. This complete determinateness of the thing is what Leibniz had in mind in his principle of indistinguishables; in Kant's philosophy, moreover, sometimes matter appears as that which determines form and sometimes form as that which determines matter, the ideal being the complete determinateness of the object which, according to Maimon, is only an idea called up by reason.

In the second case, to which the first refers us, we must take responsibility for the unity of the thing and necessarily attribute diversity to it. If the thing is indeed determinate it is because it is determinate *within itself* and this complete determinateness is not possible without an intrinsic variety. The thing could not have one single property because in that case it would not be different. In his polemic against Locke, Leibniz saw better than his adversary that relation is intrinsic and not extrinsic, that the unique thing has diversity at its heart in order in-itself to be distinguishable from every other. "But the truth is that every body is changeable and in fact is always altered so that it differs within itself from every other." [10] But if variety is thus in the thing, it is there in terms of an indifferent multiplicity, and it is we who introduce the unity, which hypothesis, as we see, is the reverse of the preceding one. The "thing-in-itself" is white, cubical, savory, etc.; its unity is created by us; what unites the properties is an act of the spirit, uniform in all its perceptions. "The act of positing this multiplicity of terms in an entity is performed only by consciousness, which must therefore avoid letting these terms coincide in the thing itself" (*PE*, I, 101; *PG*, 96; *PM*, 171). For this reason we say that the thing is white insofar as it is not cubical and is not savory insofar as it is white. By saying "insofar as" we avoid contradiction in the object, and we reserve the act of positing these properties, or rather these free matters, in an entity. "In this manner, the thing is raised to a genuine 'also,' and instead of being an entity is a

10. Leibniz, *New Essays concerning Human Understanding*, book II, chapter xxvii.

collection of matters; it becomes merely the surface that envelops them."

Reflecting on this double experience, that is, on our first reflection in apprehending the thing, we discover that we alternatively make both of ourselves and of the thing at times the pure entity, without multiplicity, and at other times the "also," divided up into matters that are independent of each other. As a consequence, this first reflection of ours becomes the object of our second reflection and appears to us as inherent in the thing itself. It is the thing that reflects itself back on itself and is different for-itself from what it is for-an-other (specifically, for our consciousness). It is at times single when it appears multiple, at times multiple when it appears single. It includes within itself a truth opposed to itself; it is a contradiction, that of being simultaneously for-itself and for-an-other. This new opposition of form (being-for-itself, being-for-an-other) replaces the opposition of content (single being, multiple being). But can we not still avoid it and keep truth pure of any contradiction by saving the *coherence* of the thing? The thing, as we have said, is at once for-itself and for-an-other—two diverse beings—and it is different for-itself from what it is for-an-other. That is, the thing becomes thinkable as a multitude of things or of monads which exclude contradiction from themselves by assigning it to the intercourse among them. In this manner, monism becomes pluralism. We can foresee in this Hegelian dialectic, presented in so condensed and obscure a manner in the chapter on perception, a step that will appear at every stage of the *Phenomenology*. Force will split itself into two forces, self-consciousness into two self-consciousnesses, etc. But this pluralism, in turn, is merely an appearance, and the contradiction which has been expelled from the thing that is different not from itself but from other things in fact returns to dwell within the thing as a difference of itself to itself, an internal reflection within external reflection.

Let us consider the thing, or the monad, different from all others. It is for-itself as unity within itself in its own determinations, a determinateness which is suitable only to it and which constitutes its essence. No doubt, there is also a diversity in it, for how could it be determinate without that diversity which is its being-for-an-other? But this diversity is inessential to it and is its exteriority. Contradiction is indeed avoided by this distinction between *essential* and *inessential,* an inessential that is always necessary (which is a new, concealed contradic-

tion). But contradiction reappears in its definitive form, for this thing which is equal to itself and is for-itself is such only in its absolute difference from every other. And this difference implies a relation with other things, a relation which is the cessation of its being-for-itself: "It is precisely by means of its absolute character and its opposition that the thing relates to others and is essentially only this process of relating. But this relation is the negation of its independence, and the thing indeed collapses due to its own essential property" (*PE*, I, 104; *PG*, 99; *PM*, 174).

Thanks to this dialectic we proceed from *thing* to *relation*, from the thingism of perception to the relativity of understanding. This movement is a familiar one in the history of science and of philosophy. What disappear in this movement are the artifices that common consciousness uses to preserve the single and independent thing: the distinction between essential and inessential, the separation of being-for-itself and being-for-another. "From one and the same point of view," Hegel writes, "the object is the opposite of itself, for-itself insofar as it is for-an-other, for-an-other insofar as it is for-itself." (*PE*, I, 104; *PG*, 99; *PM*, 175). What appears, and this is specific to Hegel, is a notion of relation which manifests the life of relation. Relation is both the separateness and the unity of these terms; correctly understood, it is that unity of unity and multiplicity, that identity of identity and nonidentity, which Hegel had planned since his early writing to think through as the life of the absolute. Undoubtedly, it often seems that his dialectic is better suited to living or conscious beings than to material beings. When we wish to understand Hegel's dialectic of being-for-itself which is for-itself only in its being-for-an-other, examples taken from human life or human relations seem more appropriate than the example of the salt crystal. For a dynamism must be introduced into being—which is relation—which we can attribute to living beings, or to consciousness, but which it seems difficult to introduce into what we generally call "inert matter." But Hegel's thought seeks to grasp universal being as concept, that is, as subject, and it sees in nature merely one specific moment of this dialectic.

But these considerations have taken us away from our subject. Perceiving consciousness has been transcended. Since the thing is contradiction, it dissolves as thing equal to itself and becomes phenomenon. The mingling of the sensuous and thought, which the sensuous property constitutes, has decomposed into its extremes, the "also" and the "entity," being-for-an-

other and being-for-itself. And these extremes have become identified with each other in a universal that is unconditioned (by the sensuous). This universal is the new object of consciousness, which has become understanding. We must now follow this *esse* which *est intelligi*, for though it is the concept in-itself, it is not yet the concept for-itself. At first, for consciousness, it is force and its manifestation, then law and its necessity, and, finally, infinite life in which the self discovers itself in its other. At that moment, consciousness of the other becomes self-consciousness, and the concept in-itself becomes the concept for-itself.