

3 / Understanding

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT OF THIS CHAPTER

FOR PERCEIVING CONSCIOUSNESS, everything was “a thing.”¹ The category of substance, as the substratum of sensuous qualities—a category Berkeley had criticized in his *Three Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous*—gives way to a new category. Understanding rises from substance to cause, from thing to force. For understanding, everything is at first a *force*. But force is nothing but the concept, the thought of the sensuous world; it is the reflection of this world back on itself—or its reflection in consciousness, which, for us, comes to the same thing. This thought of the sensuous world, which at first manifests itself to consciousness as the empty beyond of this world, as the extra-sensuous as such, becomes, as a system of *laws*, the interior of this world. These laws, laws of experience, are beyond the phenomenon, yet they constitute its framework. Consciousness experiences the contingency of the laws of nature; in seeking their necessity, it returns from the world to itself. At first, its explanation of these laws is tautological, and consciousness reaches a merely analytic necessity. But that necessity becomes synthetic when it appears to consciousness in its object. Sensuous world and extrasensuous world, phenomenon and law, identify with each other in the genuine concept—the thought of infinity which, after expressing Leibniz’ dynamism, the legal-

1. Not *Sache* but *Ding*. See part IV, chapter 5, below, for a discussion of this difference.

ism of Newton and Kant, and Schelling's polarity, expresses Hegel's own point of view. Infinity, or absolute concept, is relation come alive, the universal life of the absolute which remains itself in its other and reconciles analytic and synthetic identity, the one and the many. At that moment, consciousness of the other has become a consciousness of itself in the other, the thought of a difference that is no longer a difference. In its object, consciousness reaches itself; in its truth, it is self-certainty, self-consciousness.

Such is the general development of this chapter, the implications of which we shall try to specify. We shall pay special attention to the important movement from consciousness to self-consciousness. At first, consciousness is universal consciousness, the medium of being, while its object, inaccessible in its concrete richness, is the sensuous this. Self-consciousness, on the contrary, is first a unique consciousness, a negation of all otherness in its pure relation to itself. But from this negative uniqueness it must rise to universality and return to the moment of consciousness qua universal self-consciousness. The unity of the universality of consciousness and the uniqueness of self-consciousness will then arise as reason (*Vernunft*).²

I. FORCE

UNDERSTANDING now has as its object the unconditioned (*unbedingt*) universal, which, according to its German etymology, is not a thing. For us,³ this universal is the concept which combines in it the contradictory moments that perceiving consciousness posited alternately in the subject and in the object: the moment of indifferent thingness *expressing* itself in a multitude of subsisting differences, i.e., the matters of physics or sensuous properties materialized, and the moment of the unique thing *excluding* all multiplicity from itself. These moments appeared as being-for-an-other and being-for-itself. The failure of perception lies in the impossibility of thinking these

2. "Understanding," on the contrary, the title of this chapter, corresponds to the German term *Verstand*.

3. In order to avoid any ambiguity let us recall once again that this "for us" denotes the point of view of the philosopher as opposed to the point of view of phenomenal consciousness.

two together. But the result of the previous dialectic, though negative for the consciousness engaged in experience, appears positive to us. "The result has within it the positive signification that in it the unity of being-for-itself and being-for-an-other, the absolute opposition, is immediately posited as one and the same essence" (PE, I, 110; PG, 104; PM, 181). This result applies to the content as well as the form. Expansion into the realm of differences and contraction into the unity of being-for-itself constitute all the contents which can henceforth appear to consciousness. But this expansion and contraction can no longer be isolated and posited separately; it is their unity which makes up the unconditionality of the universal. "First, it is clear that because they exist only in this universality these moments can no longer remain apart from each other but are in themselves essentially aspects which suppress [*aufheben*] themselves; only their transition into each other is posed" (PE, I, 111; PG, 104; PM, 182). This transition was the very movement of perceiving consciousness, which at times attributed exclusive unity to the thing in order to reserve for itself the diversity of its coexisting aspects and at times attributed this diversity to its object while reserving exclusive unity to itself. But whereas this movement was not an object for perceiving consciousness itself, now it is its object, and consciousness knows the *transition*, which only we knew when we retraced the experience of perceiving consciousness. It is crucial to note that what is now given to consciousness, which has become understanding, is the transition itself—the connection—which previously occurred in it without its knowledge and which was, therefore, external to its moments. Nonetheless, this transition first appears to understanding as having an objective form; for understanding, the transition will be *force*. In contradistinction to the thing, which has no link to its many properties, force makes sense only insofar as it manifests itself and poses what is inside itself outside itself. Thus, by itself, force expresses the *necessity of the transition* from one moment to the other, but for understanding it is still an object.

But in this movement the content of consciousness is only objective essence and not consciousness as such; therefore, the result must be posed for it in an objective signification, and consciousness must once again be posed as withdrawing from the having-become [*von dem Gewordenen; du devenu*] in such a way

that this having-become is, qua objective, its essence (PE, I, 110; PG, 103; PM, 180-81).⁴

A reality appears among the things that are tangible, visible, and in other ways perceptible, and all of a sudden disappears, hides, becomes imperceptible. We believe that its effects can be known but not its nature. We then invent a creature of reason [*un être de raison*] which is called force and which alternately manifests itself in spending itself and then, spent, becomes invisible in order to spend itself.⁵

Such is force, the unity of itself and its externalization. In positing force, we posit this very unity, already, that is, the *concept*. "In other words, the differences posed in their independence immediately pass over into their unity, their unity into their unfolding, and this unfolding, in turn, into reduction to unity. It is precisely this movement that we call force" (PE, I, 112; PG, 105; PM, 183). The universal being of sensuous certainty became the medium of properties or of distinct matters, and this medium, in turn, has become their reduction to unity inasmuch as it is the means of their expansion. Thus, for Leibniz, the essence of matter resides neither in extension, which is merely an indefinite multitude, nor in the atom, which is a sensuous image, but in force, the only true unity:

I realized that it is impossible to find the principles of a genuine unity in mere matter, or in that which is merely passive, since everything is but an infinite collection, or heap, of parts. Now since the multitude could have its reality only in the genuine unities which come from elsewhere . . . I had to have recourse to a formal atom. . . . Thus I discovered that their nature consists in force, that from this follows something analogous to sentiment and appetite, and hence that they had to be conceived in imitation of our notion of souls!"⁶

4. It is quite remarkable that what understanding takes to be given is the very reflection of the previous consciousness (perceiving consciousness). But since phenomenal consciousness always forgets its development, it is not aware that this object is itself. It does not yet know itself in the *transition* from one term to the next.

5. Andler, "Le fondement du savoir dans la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* de Hegel," in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, XXXVIII, no. 3 (July-Sept., 1931), 328.

6. Leibniz, "A New System of Nature and the Communication of Substances," *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. Leroy Loemker, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1956), I, 739.

II. THE CONCEPT OF FORCE AND THE REALITY OF FORCE

THE TWO MOMENTS OF FORCE—force as externalization or expansion of itself into the realm of differences, and force “driven back on itself,” or force proper—are not distinct to begin with. In the first *Logic*, that of Jena, Hegel deals with force while discussing the category of modality. Force driven back on itself, or concentrated on itself, is force as possibility; its externalization is its reality.⁷ When we envisage the fall of a body in space, we posit the same being twice: as reality, the motion is a juxtaposition that can be broken down into parts (or, at least, this decomposition is present in the spatial trajectory), but we can also consider the “whole of the motion,” the integral of which it is the realization. We then have force, the content of which is identical to its manifestation, but which *formally* differs from that manifestation. As the reflection back on itself of sensuous externality, force is identical to that externality. There is a *doubling* here, which Hegel emphasizes in the Jena *Logic*: we conceive the unity of reality as force; consequently, our explanations of this reality in terms of force are tautological.⁸ Nevertheless, force allows us to think causality and relation without positing reciprocally external substances. Two bodies attract each other in space, the magnet attracts iron; for perceiving consciousness, this signifies an external relation between two substantialized things. To conceive gravitation or magnetism is to conceive relation itself, to conceive the transition from one moment to another as transition. But force, as we have just defined it, is absolutely identical to its manifestations—so much so that the differences (force driven back on itself and force externalized) are differences only for consciousness. When we grasp the two moments in their immediate unity, the fact is that understanding, to which the concept of force belongs, is, properly speaking, the concept that maintains the distinct moments as distinct. For in force itself they are surely not distinct. The difference is only in thought. In other words, what we have posed above is only the concept of force, and not yet its reality (*PE*, I, 112; *PG*, 105; *PM*, 183).

That force manifests itself to consciousness as reality and

7. Jena *Logic*, pp. 41 ff.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 44 ff.

no longer as concept signifies that its moments take on a certain independence. But since, on the other hand, this independence is contrary to the essence of force, it also signifies that these moments suppress (*aufheben*) themselves as independent and return into the unity of the concept, or of the unconditioned universal which is the permanent object of understanding throughout the whole of this dialectic. But the concept thus reached is no longer the immediate concept with which we began; it is

determined as the negative of that force which has a sensuous objectivity. The concept is force as the latter is in its true essence, that is, only as object of understanding. The first universal, then, is force driven back on itself, or force as substance, but the second universal is the inside of things qua inside, which is identical to the concept qua concept (*PE*, I, 118; *PG*, 110; *PM*, 189).

The experience of consciousness here is quite remarkable. In making force real, it discovers that "the realization of force is at the same time the loss of reality" (*PE*, I, 118; *PG*, 110; *PM*, 189). In the sensuous world, force first opposes an other without which it seems unable to exist. Then that other appears as another force, and what is then posed is the duality of forces—as Boscovitch and Kant had already noticed. But these two forces, in turn, are only apparently independent. They presuppose each other. "To every attraction corresponds a repulsion; otherwise, the matter of the whole universe would coagulate at one point." Each force, then, presupposes another force and is presupposed by it. The play of forces (*Spiel der Kräfte*), which we will later come upon as the relation between self-consciousnesses, is hence a reciprocal relation such that only the thought of this play, only the concept of phenomenal reality, or the inside of things, subsists in the perpetual interplay of determinations. Force has become what it already was for us, the thought of the phenomenal world which, as an interplay of forces, is now no more than an incessant exchange of determinations, a perpetual instability whose unity and consistency lie only in thought.

The realization of force expresses itself in three dialectics which Hegel subtly distinguishes: (1) force and the other, (2) the two independent forces, and (3) the reciprocal action of forces, the interplay of forces. To begin with, force is posed as the infinite expansion of itself in the medium of differences. But in order to exist as force driven back on itself, reflected

back on itself, an other must approach and call for it to turn in upon itself. Fichte's "I," for instance, reflects itself only through a shock (*Anstoss*) which seems alien to it. Similarly, if force is already posited as driven back on itself, as pure possibility, then in order for it to exist as externality it must be called forth by an other. When we compare these two roles of the other, we are led to define this other itself as force. What is then posed is no longer force and an other-than-force but two real forces which act on each other: "Thus force has not in general exceeded the bounds of its concept by the fact that an other exists for it and that it exists for an other. Two forces are present simultaneously. To be sure, the concept of the two is the same but the concept has left its unity to pass over into duality" (*PE*, I, 115; *PG*, 107; *PM*, 186). This whole dialectic concerning the being of things for consciousness prefigures a dialectic of spirit, a dialectic which seems to be more profound in the world of spirit than in nature. Here, Hegel's subtlety strikes us as somewhat empty and forced. What is essential is to understand the direction of his whole argument: to lead us to see the dialectic of intelligence in the dialectic of the real. "The spirit of nature is a hidden spirit; it does not appear in the form of spirit; it is spirit only for cognizant spirit. Or, in other words, it is spirit in-itself and not for-itself." It is a matter of finding in the dynamism and the interplay of forces, in the polarity of opposing forces, a dialectic whose meaning is for-itself only in the cognizant spirit. When the two forces are posed in their independence, their interplay reveals their interdependence. "They are not like extremes, each keeping something solid for itself and each transmitting merely an external property to the other through their common term and their contact. What these forces are, they are only in this common term and in this contact" (*PE*, I, 117; *PG*, 109; *PM*, 188). Each vanishes in the other, and this movement of vanishing is the only reality of forces that has sensuous objectivity. There then remains only manifestation, the phenomenon (*Erscheinung*), which no longer has consistency and stability within itself but refers back to an internal truth that at first appears beyond it. Here we may recall the following passage of the preface to the *Phenomenology* on the nature of phenomena: "Manifestation (the phenomenon) is the movement of being born and of perishing, a movement which itself neither is born nor perishes but which is in-itself, and which constitutes the actuality and the movement of the life of truth" (*PE*, I, 40; *PG*, 39; *PM*, 105).

III. THE INTERIOR, OR THE BOTTOM OF THINGS

UNDERSTANDING HAS DISCOVERED the element of truth: it is the interior, or the bottom of things, which stands contraposed to phenomenal manifestation. This opposition, which reproduces at a new level the opposition between force and its externalization, is at first empty of meaning. As the negation of the phenomenon, the interior is beyond it. But Hegel's whole dialectic here will tend to bring these two terms closer until they are identified, an identification already set forth in the passage from the preface that we have just quoted. The phenomenon, qua phenomenon, is the extrasensuous, that is, the phenomenon seen as something in the process of vanishing. The great joke, Hegel wrote in a personal note, is that things are what they are. There is no reason to go beyond them; they are simply to be taken in their phenomenality instead of being posed as things-in-themselves. The essence of essence is to manifest itself; manifestation is the manifestation of essence. The end point of our dialectic, therefore, will be to gather anew the sensuous and the extrasensuous into the infinity of absolute concept.

Summarizing the prior moments with regard to religion, Hegel writes: "Insofar as it is understanding, consciousness already becomes consciousness of the extrasensuous, or of the interior of objective Dasein. Yet the extrasensuous, the external, or whatever we may wish to call it, has no self; it is at first merely the universal which is still far from being spirit that knows itself as spirit" (*PE*, II, 203; *PG*, 473; *PM*, 685). This universal is at first posed outside consciousness and outside the phenomenon as a possibly intelligible world of which we can well have some notion but no knowledge. In the last chapter of his "Transcendental Analytic," which deals with the distinction between phenomena and noumena, Kant insists that we cannot take this world, the world of the here-below, as a thing-in-itself, but that, on the other hand, as soon as we move beyond it, using our categories transcendently and no longer empirically, we reach an empty place, a noumenon in the negative sense. But for Hegel, this beyond of the phenomenon is a kind of optical illusion. Understanding hypostatizes its own reflection, it does not reflect it back on itself, and it fails to see in nature the self-knowledge that is implicit in it. Knowledge of the phenomenon is a self-knowledge and, as such, it has a truth that

is no longer located in the beyond. But in order to reach such an idealism, reflection, which Kant uses in his critical philosophy, must reflect itself. In objectifying this "interior as the universal without the self," understanding does not know that "there is nothing to be seen" behind the curtain which is thought to cover the inside of things "unless *we* step behind it—as much that there be someone to see as that there be something to be seen" (*PE*, I, 140–41; *PG*, 129; *PM*, 212–13). The noumenon (in the negative sense) is criticized here, just as the "thing-in-itself" of "transcendental aesthetics" was criticized in the dialectic of perception. Starting from this movement, consciousness reflects itself back on itself as it does in the true; but, as consciousness, it again makes an objectified interior of this true and distinguishes this reflection of things from its reflection back on itself. Similarly, for this consciousness the movement that carries out the mediation remains an objective movement (*PE*, I, 119; *PG*, 110; *PM*, 190). Thus, the three terms of this fundamental syllogism—*understanding*, the *movement of the phenomenal world*, and the *interior or the bottom of things*—are posed in their mutual externality. But there can be no knowledge of this interior, as it is immediately—not, as Kant claimed, because reason is limited, but because of the simple nature of the thing, for in the void nothing is known, or, more precisely, because this interior is posed as the beyond of consciousness.

Yet, in fact, this interior has been born for us. It has been posed only through the mediation of the phenomenon, which is why Hegel expresses the nature of the interior in the following remarkable way: "It derives from the phenomenon, and the phenomenon is its mediation, or, the phenomenon is its essence and, indeed, its fulfillment. The extrasensuous is the sensuous and the perceived posed as they truly are. But the truth of the sensuous and the perceived is to be phenomenon. Hence the extrasensuous is the phenomenon qua phenomenon" (*PE*, I, 121; *PG*, 113; *PM*, 193). We do not thereby return to the prior sensuous world, to perception, for example, or to objective force, but we see this world as it genuinely is—as the movement by which it continuously disappears and negates itself. What subsists throughout this instability of the phenomenon, throughout the continuous exchange of its moments, is indeed difference, but difference taken up into thought and become universal, that is, the *law* of the phenomenon. In this way, the universal is no

longer the nothingness beyond the phenomenon; it carries difference, or mediation, within itself, and this difference at the heart of this universal is difference become equal to itself, the simple image of the phenomenon. This difference is expressed in law as the "invariable image of the ever-unstable phenomenon." The extrasensuous world is thus a calm realm of laws. "These laws are, no doubt, beyond the perceived world—for this world presents law only through continuous change—but they are also present in it and are its immediate and immobile copy" (PE, I, 123–24; PG, 115; PM, 195).

At the end of the "Transcendental Analytic," Kant wrote that nature is the collection of phenomena ruled by laws. In their universality, at least, these laws are the forms of phenomena; in their stability they reflect the uninterrupted development of that which appears. Just as force was the reflection back on itself of its externalization, so law is the unity of the sensuous world. But it is a unity which includes difference and which through this constant difference translates phenomenal movement. In the free fall of a body, space and time vary continuously, but their relation remains the same and the well-known mathematical formula, $d = \frac{1}{2} gt^2$, is the invariable expression of the perpetual variance of these two terms. The law that is the interior of phenomenal nature finds its content in this nature and, in exchange, imparts its form to it.

But form and content remain inadequate. According to Maimon's early interpretation of Kantianism, a form that completely determined content or a content that was completely taken up into form would be the idea.⁹ But this perfect adequation is never realized. Content, the matter of understanding, is infinitely diverse and varying; form, taken to its highest power, is the abstract unity of abstract difference. We can say, in more picturesque language, that the "Transcendental Analytic" gives us the law of laws, the skeleton of a nature in general. But between this skeleton and concrete nature lies an abyss. To be sure, this abyss is partly filled by empirical induction which rises from particular laws to progressively more general ones. But this induction can never reach the idea, for the idea requires the complete determination of all conditions. The critique of judg-

9. Salomen Maimon, *Gesammelte Werke* (Hildesheim, 1965–71): "In my view, the knowledge of things in-itself is nothing but complete knowledge of phenomena."

ment—that Leibnizianism of immanence—elaborates a philosophy of the as-if, a logic of hypotheses, precisely so as to remedy this shortcoming in subsumption and specification. We must finally agree that there remains a side to the phenomenon-for-itself that is not taken up into the interior, “where the phenomenon is not yet genuinely posed as phenomenon, that is, as suppressed [*aufgehoben*] being-for-itself” (PE, I, 124; PG, 115; PM, 196). The laws of nature are characterized by a contingency that appears in two complementary aspects: either law does not express the entirety of phenomenal presence, in which case the phenomenon still keeps as a possible in-itself an uncoordinated variety, or there is a multiplicity of empirical laws which cannot be gathered into the unity of a simple law of which they would be the specifications. The problem posed by moving from the phenomenon to its law reappears in the problem of the plurality of laws.

We could try to subsume all laws under the unity of a single law. Newton, for example, presents phenomena as diverse as the free fall of a body on earth and the general planetary movement around the sun (as expressed in the more specific laws of Kepler) as universal gravitation. But ever since his Jena dissertation on planetary movement, Hegel had tried to show the error of such a reduction: it can only reach an abstract formula which, though it has, no doubt, the merit of setting forth lawfulness as lawfulness, completely obscures the qualitative diversity of the content. Are we then to give up difference as genuine qualitative difference in order to attain unity, or are we to give up unity in order not to lose this difference? With this, we are at the heart of the problem of phenomenal identity and reality. Hegel’s solution is not to continue to contrapose the two terms but rather to seek their union in a dialectical relation which for him is “absolute concept,” or infinity.

The concept of law—the unity of differences—clashes not only with the empirical plurality of laws but also with law itself. For it expresses the *necessity* of the connection among terms which appear as distinct in the statement of the law—space and time, for example, what attracts and what is attracted, etc.—in such a manner that in the thought of this connection, in the thought of this unity, “understanding [difference] returns once more into the interior, understood as simple (indivisible) unity. This unity is the internal *necessity* of law” (PE, I, 125; PG, 116; PM, 197).

IV. EXPLANATION: THE ANALYTIC NECESSITY OF LAW

LET US CONSIDER a particular law, for example, that of falling bodies, or of gravitation, or of positive and negative electricity. Each law contains a concrete difference—space and time or positive and negative electricity—and it expresses the relation between these two factors. This relation, or concept of the law, which we can also call force, indicates the necessity of law in analytic form. But this necessity is not a necessity, for we cannot see how either factor joins with, or becomes, the other. By the very fact that one term of the law is posed, the other is not posed. And if, finally, we pose the necessity of their relation by starting with a force—weight, for example, or electricity in general—then this necessity is merely a verbal one, for we must then explain why this force expresses itself in this or that specific difference, why, for example, the nature of weight is such that weighty bodies fall according to an unchanging and precise law which contains a difference, such as that of space and time, and even states it in a mathematical formula, $d = \frac{1}{2} gt^2$.

The problem Hegel poses here is that of the necessity of relation, a question which Hume had posed as that of “the necessary connection” and which Kant claimed to answer in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. We know that for Hume everything that is different (in representation) is separable and nothing that cannot be separated is discernible. For what can discernment grasp where there is no difference?¹⁰ Hume’s conception forbids us abstraction while it renders the necessary connection impossible. As Hegel notes in the *Jena Logic*, what is posed by Hume and Kant is a diversity of substantive terms which are indifferent to each other, terms such as sensuous representation offers, or seems to offer.¹¹ In this case, Hume is entirely justified in denying necessity and in seeing it as merely an illusion. “In fact, necessity is only substance envisaged as relation or as the being-one of opposite determinations which are not, like material terms that are absolutely for-themselves, absolute substantive terms or qualities, but are in-themselves such as to bear on

10. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, book I, part I, section 7.

11. *Jena Logic*, p. 48.

another, are essentially the opposite of themselves.”¹² As for the identity that understanding claims to reach in the process of its explanation, it is a formal identity, a tautology which in no way alters the diversity of the terms. For Hume there exist only substantive elements (Hegel says “substances”) which are not interrelated, which remain for-themselves and are connected together *from outside*. Thus, for understanding, identity remains analytic and is a tautology, while sensuous diversity remains diversity. This identity does lead to a synthesis, but only to an empirical synthesis that lacks necessity. “This identity remains simply a tautology and this diversity is only a specific being-for-itself of substances; identity and diversity remain external to each other; the relation of diverse substances is in no way necessary, because this relation is not internal to them.”¹³ What is needed for this relation to become internal? As Hegel will show, it would be necessary that each determination be conceived as infinite, that is, as other than itself. In this case, space by itself becomes time, and time becomes space. Relation is no longer imposed on substantialized determinations from the outside; it is the very life of these determinations. We can then understand what relation implies: dialectical life. For relation is neither an abstract unity nor an equally abstract diversity; it is their concrete synthesis, or, as Hegel said of life in his early works, “the bond of the bond and the nonbond,” “the identity of identity and nonidentity.”¹⁴

Instead of thinking through this dialectic which alone confers necessity on relation, Kant failed really to answer Hume: “Kant did the same thing as Hume.” Hume’s substantive elements, which follow each other or come into juxtaposition and are reciprocally indifferent, remain indifferent for Kant as well. That these elements are called “phenomena” and not “things” changes nothing. Kant began with Hume’s diversity and added to it the infinity of relation, but this addition remains external. Necessity, the infinity of relation, is something separate from diversity. Diversity is phenomenal and pertains to sensuousness; necessity is a concept of the understanding. Each of the two moments remains for-itself. “For Kant, experience is indeed the bond between concept and phenomenon, that is, it renders the

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. The first phrase is from Hegel’s *Early Theological Writings*, p. 312; the second, from Hegel’s study “Differenz,” p. 77.

indifferent terms mobile (*mobilmachen*). Outside their relation, each of these terms remains for-itself, and the relation itself, qua unity, is external to that which is related."¹⁵ Thus Kant did not truly grasp *relation as infinite*.

We have referred to this illuminating passage from the Jena *Logic* because it seems to us to shed light on the dialectic concerning the laws of nature—the first immediate elevation of the sensuous world to the intelligible. Since this elevation is immediate, it does not yet express the totality of the phenomenal world. In it, the phenomenon is not yet posed as phenomenon, as suppressed being-for-itself, and this shortcoming appears in the law itself as the indifferent difference between its terms. The law does not express the whole phenomenon, which keeps for itself its instability and its development, or (and this comes to the same thing) it expresses it immediately in the form of a difference that is stable and lacks necessity. We can grasp here one of the most profound characteristics of Hegel's thought: to introduce life and becoming into thought itself instead of giving up thought and returning to the phenomenon—a phenomenon no longer cut up into substantive elements, as for Hume, but grasped in its ineffable becoming, in an immediate intuition. For Hegel, the immediate givens of consciousness furnish not a discontinuous sequence of terms but, as Bergson later showed, an inexpressible transition. It is by reintroducing life into the law (immediate relation) that thought will completely rejoin the phenomenal world, or (in Hegel's terminology) that the phenomenon will be posed in its integrity as a phenomenon, that is, as complete manifestation of its essence. That this is indeed Hegel's goal is expressed in an important passage of the preface: "Hence, the task now is . . . to make the universal actually present and to infuse spirit into it as a result of the suppression of determinate and solidified thoughts. But it is far more difficult to render solidified thoughts fluid than it is to render sensuous Dasein fluid" (*PE*, I, 30; *PG*, 30; *PM*, 94). Similarly, in an article written in Jena, Hegel justified a profound empiricism—that of the man of action, who intuitively grasps the becoming of reality without cutting it up in an arbitrary way—and contrasted it to the empiricism of understanding, which freezes and solidifies experiential determinations. But the philosophic method cannot be simply to return to this profound empiricism—to the ineffable of sensuous certainty—at the cost of giving up

15. Jena *Logic*, pp. 48–49.

thought. For this reason, philosophy must raise understanding to reason and render the determinations of thought mobile—that is, it must think dialectically.¹⁶

It is rather difficult to follow the transition from the world of laws—that immediate and inadequate replica of the phenomenal world—to absolute concept, that is, to infinity. Hegel begins by criticizing the explanations offered by understanding which, in search of necessity, discovers that necessity only within itself, in its own tautologies, while leaving its object unchanged. He then proceeds from this movement, which takes place only in understanding, to the movement in the “thing-in-itself”—to the dialectic that infuses life into the “quiescent rule of laws” and thus allows it completely to rejoin phenomena. This last transition seems to us the most difficult to follow, especially since Hegel makes it rather abruptly.

Seeking the necessity of law, understanding creates a difference that is not a difference and, recognizing the identity of what it has just separated, ends up with simple tautologies which it calls necessity. This, one might say, is the soporific virtue of opium. Why do bodies fall according to the law? Because they undergo the action of a force, weight, that is so constituted as to manifest itself in precisely this way. In other words, a body falls in this way because it falls in this way.

The unique event of lightning, for example, is apprehended as a universal, and this universal is expressed as the law of electricity. Then, explanation sets down and summarizes the law that is in force as the essence of the law. This force is then constituted in a manner such that when it externalizes itself two opposite electric charges are generated and then cancel each other. In other words, *force is constituted exactly like law*; the two are said not to differ at all (PE, I, 129; PG, 119; PM, 201).

But force is posed here as the necessity of law. It is in-itself, and it remains what it is external to understanding while the differences—specifically, the very difference between force in-itself and the law by means of which force externalizes itself—devolve on understanding. “The differences are pure universal externalization (law) and pure force. But law and force have the same content, the same constitution. Difference, as difference in content, i.e., as difference in the thing, is therefore abandoned once more” (PE, I, 129; PG, 119; PM, 201).

16. The article in question is “*Naturrecht*,” p. 343.

But the difference between understanding and its object in-itself, force, is also a difference of understanding. This difference, therefore, disappears in turn, and the thing itself, force in-itself, reveals itself as the movement which had at first been considered only a movement of consciousness. "But since the interior of things is the concept qua concept of understanding, this change came about for understanding as the law of the interior." This is the difficult transition we noted above; we move "from one shore to the other" (PE, I, 130; PG, 120; PM, 202), from the movement of an explanation that is different from its object to the very movement of the object, for this difference, too, is a difference in understanding. Change of form becomes change in content because the difference between form and content is itself part of the process. But in that case, analytic necessity, i.e., tautology, becomes a necessity of the content, i.e., synthetic necessity; tautology reappears in heterology [*hétérologie*] as identity in contradiction. At that point, we reach dialectical thought, that "unity of unity and diversity" which, according to Hegel, both Hume and Kant had missed. But let us dwell here on the procedure of understanding which Hegel calls "explanation" (*Erklären*). We might think that explanation is merely a matter of a verbal formula—opium makes one sleep because it has a soporific quality—and be surprised at the length of the description Hegel devotes to it. In fact, the procedure of explanation is a very general one: it goes *from the same to the same*. It establishes differences which are not genuine in order then rigorously to demonstrate their identity. This is the formal movement of understanding, a movement that is expressed in the abstract equation $A = A$, in which A is distinguished from A in order then to be identified with it. Every explanation, then, is tautological, or formal. But this procedure extends far beyond the soporific quality of opium. Many explanations which appear fruitful are in fact reducible to this formalism, to this lifeless equal sign. In his *Jena Logic*, Hegel gives examples: "Explanation is merely the production of a tautology. Cold comes from the loss of heat, etc. . . . For understanding, there can be no genuine qualitative change; there is only a *change in the location of the parts*. . . . The fruit of the tree comes from humidity, from oxygen, hydrogen, etc., in short, from everything that the fruit itself is."¹⁷ Hegel thus reproaches the formalism of understanding for using an abstract formula of conservation

17. *Jena Logic*, p. 47.

to negate qualitative difference. Specifically, we may note that he does not believe in the fruitfulness of mathematical equations. Just as he criticized Newton's general law, without taking its mathematical implications into account, so, in this critique of explanation he attacks—at least implicitly—a mathematical science of the universe which, if not verbal in the usual sense of the word, is nonetheless merely a formal language, unable to preserve qualitative difference in the network of its equations. We need but look in the preface to the *Phenomenology* to find an explicit statement of this critique:

The actually real is not something spatial as mathematics considers it to be. Neither concrete sensuous intuition, nor philosophy, burdens itself with such actual nonrealities as mathematical things. . . . Besides, by virtue of this principle and this element—and this is what the formalism of mathematical evidence consists of—knowledge traverses the equal sign. For what is dead, unable to move itself, can attain neither the differentiation of essence nor opposition, or essential inequality; it thus also fails to attain the change of opposed terms into each other, a change that is qualitative and is immanent movement, self-movement (PE, I, 38; PG, 37-38; PM, 103).¹⁸

Hegel is seeking a science that will remain a science without, however, giving up qualitative difference. The answer he found—the dialectic—is the result of a manipulation of qualitative difference such that difference is forced to its resolution by means of opposition and contradiction. "In general," Hegel wrote at Jena, "opposition is the qualitative, and since nothing exists outside the absolute, opposition itself is absolute; only because it is absolute does it suppress itself within itself."¹⁹ By introducing contraction into thought, we avoid both the formalism of explanation and the empiricism of random differences. We introduce infinity into determinateness and in this

18. The preface contains a general critique of mathematical knowledge, a critique which reappears in the *Major Logic* with reference to the category of quantity. To the *formal* knowledge of mathematics, in which reflection (or mediation) is external to the thing itself (PE, I, 37; PG, 36; PM, 101), Hegel contraposes a *dialectical* knowledge which does not contain an alien mediation but is simultaneously the movement of the thing itself and the movement of our thought of the thing. Mathematics, in particular, is unable to think time—"the pure disquiet of life, the process of absolute distinction" (PE, I, 40; PG, 39; PM, 104).

19. *Jena Logic*, p. 13.

way rise above Schelling's philosophy of identity, a philosophy that fails to reconcile the identity of the absolute with the qualitative differences of manifestation. For such a reconciliation to be possible, "polarity" had to be pushed to the point of contradiction.

In contrast to content, which remains unchanged, the movement of explanation, then, is a pure movement, a formalism. But this formalism already contains what its object (the world of laws) lacks: it is movement within itself. "In it, however, we recognize precisely absolute change itself, the lack of which was felt in law. Indeed, considered more closely, this movement is immediately its own contrary" (*PE*, I, 129-30; *PG*, 120; *PM*, 201).²⁰ It poses a difference where there is none; it quickly identifies what it has just distinguished. It is the contentless instability of pure form which is straightway its own contrary. When we say "A is A," we both distinguish and identify. The equal to itself repels itself but also unites itself.

What is the result for content, for the interior, when this movement is noticed in it—the difference between content and form having been suppressed? The experience of understanding reveals that the law of the phenomenon itself is that differences which are not differences come into being. "In a parallel way, [understanding] experiences that the differences are of such a nature that they are not genuine differences and that they suppress themselves." Content, which is noticed through the at first formal movement of understanding, becomes the opposite of itself, and form, in turn, becomes rich with content. We have here "absolute concept," or infinity. But let us dwell on what Hegel curiously terms the experience of the "upside-down world." It is because the first, suprasensuous world (the immediate elevation of the sensuous to the intelligible) reverses, or upends, itself in itself that movement is introduced into it and that it is no longer merely a replica of the phenomenon but completely joins the phenomenon which in this way mediates itself in-itself

20. In other words, insofar as it is envisaged *only* in our understanding, the movement of our thought which establishes laws and *explains* them is formal. It is tautological: we distinguish in order then to show that what we have distinguished is identical. But insofar as it is viewed as a movement of the thing itself it becomes synthetic, for it is the thing itself that opposes itself and unites with itself. Explanation, then, is no longer *our* explanation; it is the very *explanation* of being that is identical to the self. Thus, thought and being are one.

and becomes manifestation of essence. We understand what Hegel meant when he claimed that there were not two worlds but that the intelligible world was "the phenomenon as phenomenon," i.e., "manifestation," which in its authentic development is only the self-manifestation of self.

V. THE TWO WORLDS AND THEIR DIALECTICAL UNITY

THIS EXPERIENCE of the inversion of the world is more common than we might think at first. Perhaps if we are to understand it, we should refer less to science or to Schelling's polarity than to the dialectic of the Gospels, which constantly opposes the apparent world to the true one. Whereas in the first transformation of the sensuous world we raise this world to essence only in an immediate way—by raising the difference it includes to universality without modifying it profoundly—we now reach a world that is the *inverse* of the first one. The difference between essence and appearance has become an absolute difference, with the result that we say that anything in-itself is the opposite of what it appears to be for-an-other. We could indeed agree with common sense that appearances are not to be trusted; that they must, on the contrary, be negated if their true essence is to be discovered. The profound and the superficial oppose each other as inner and outer. "Seen superficially, this inverted world is the contrary of the first one; the first world lies outside the inverted world which repels it as an inverted actual reality. Thus, one world is the phenomenon, and the other is the in-itself; one is the world as it is for-an-other, but the other, on the contrary, is the world as it is for-itself" (*PE*, I, 133; *PG*, 122; *PM*, 205). Thus, in the Gospels, what is honored in this world is scorned in the other; apparent strength is in fact weakness; hidden simplicity of the heart is in-itself superior to apparent virtue. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ repeatedly opposes appearance—"it has been said"—to profound reality—"I say unto you." Hegel takes up this opposition of inner and outer and considers it in all its scope. What appears sweet is bitter in-itself; the north pole of a magnet is in its suprasensuous in-itself the south pole, and vice versa; the pole of oxygen becomes the pole of hydrogen. But Hegel passes from these examples borrowed from the science of his time to spiritual examples, which in our opinion manifest the genuine meaning of this dialectic.

He speaks in particular of the dialectic of crime and punishment, which recalls his early writings on religion. Punishment appears to be a vengeance externally imposed on the criminal; in fact, punishment is self-punishment. That which, viewed superficially, appears as a constraint is in its profound meaning a liberation. The hidden meaning is the reverse of the apparent meaning. Further, punishment, which appears to dishonor a man, "becomes in the inverted world the grace and pardon which safeguard the man's essence and render him honor" (PE, I, 133; PG, 122; PM, 204). We are reminded of Dostoevski's famous novel—and this is not the only time that we find intuitions in Hegel's dialectic which Dostoevski later developed.

The difference between phenomenon and essence, between apparent meaning and hidden meaning, has become so profound that it destroys itself; it is, in effect, absolute opposition, opposition in-itself, that is, *contradiction*.

At this point, the interior is fulfilled as phenomenon. Indeed the first suprasensuous world was merely the immediate elevation of the perceived world to the universal element; as a copy, it had its necessary original in the world of perception, which still retained for itself the principle of change and alteration. The first reign of law lacked this principle, but now it obtains it as the world "upside down" (PE, I, 132; PG, 121; PM, 203).

Now, each determination destroys itself and becomes its other; it is thought through as infinity, that is, it destroys itself in a kind of movement to its own limit, a movement that Hegel had made the technique of his first, Jena, *Logic*.²¹ But this logic of infinity makes sense only on condition that it not again make the two opposed worlds real as two substantive elements;

Such oppositions between inner and outer, between the phenomenon and the suprasensuous, are no longer present here as oppositions between actual realities of two kinds. Nor do the rejected differences redistribute themselves into two substances that would support them and furnish them a separate substance—in that case, understanding, having emerged from the interior, would fall back to its earlier position (PE, I, 133-34; PG, 123; PM, 205).

21. Cf. our article, "Vie et prise de conscience de la vie dans la philosophie hégélienne d'Iéna," in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, XLIII (1936), 50; reprinted in *Studies on Marx and Hegel* (New York, 1969), pp. 3-21.

The phenomenon itself is negative, a difference between itself and itself.

The actually real crime carries its inversion and its in-itself as a possibility in intention as such and not in good intentions. For the fact itself is the only truth of intention. But, as regards its content, the crime has its reflection back on itself, or its inversion, in actually real punishment. This punishment constitutes the reconciliation of the law with the actual reality that opposes it in the crime. Finally, the actually real punishment has its actual inverted reality within itself; it is, in fact, an actualization of the law, in which the activity that the punishment is suppresses itself. [From an act, it again becomes a quiescent and valid law], and both the movement of individuality against the law and the movement of law against individuality are extinguished (*PE*, I, 135; *PG*, 123-24; *PM*, 206).

The inverted world, therefore, is not to be sought in *another* world. It is present in this world, which is simultaneously itself and its other and which is grasped in its phenomenal entirety as "absolute concept," or infinity. It is possible to think this infinity—which Schelling did not grasp—if, instead of fleeing contradiction, we agree to think it through in the midst of determinate content, which thus becomes absolute determinateness, or self-negation.

What must be thought through now is pure change, or opposition within itself, that is, contradiction. . . . Thus, the suprasensuous world, which is the inverted world, has both encroached upon the other world and included it within itself; for-itself, it is the reversed, inverted world, which is to say that it is the inverse of itself: it is both itself and its opposite in one unity. Only in this way is it difference as inner difference, as difference within itself; only in this way does it exist qua infinity (*PE*, I, 135; *PG*, 124; *PM*, 206-7).

Instead of being posed now in their sensuous externality, the terms of the preceding law are animated toward each other like positive and negative poles. Their being consists essentially in posing themselves as nonbeing and suppressing themselves in unity. But this unity, in turn, is not—like Schelling's absolute—isolated from multiplicity. It is a moment of the splitting, a specific term in opposition to diversity. According to an image in the *Jena Logic*, the absolute itself is anxious if the finite lies outside it, for then it is only relatively absolute or infinite. For that reason, it becomes concretely infinite only by splitting itself.

The unity of which we usually think when we say that difference cannot issue from it is itself, in fact, simply a moment of the splitting; it is the abstraction of simplicity vis-à-vis difference. But to say that it is the abstraction, and therefore only one of the opposites, is also to say that by itself it is the act of splitting. Since it is a negative, an opposite, this unity is rightly posed as that which includes opposition within itself. Therefore, the differences between the *splitting* and the *becoming equal to itself* are merely the movement of self-suppression (*aufheben*) (PE, I, 137; PG, 126; PM, 209).

What we reach in this way is "absolute concept," the genesis of which we have followed since the being of sensuous certainty. More concretely, it is "universal life, the world soul, the universal blood stream which is omnipresent and whose course is not disturbed or interrupted by any difference. Rather, it itself is all differences as well as their suppressed being; it pulsates without moving and trembles in its innermost being without disquiet" (PE, I, 136; PG, 125; PM, 208). We have here the synthesis of the ἀκίνητον and the κίνησις of which Plato spoke in the *Sophist*. It is manifestation that is manifestation of self by self, mediation of the immediate with itself. It is already self.

But if this is so for us, and if the concept, as universal life, presents itself to us, then consciousness has reached a new stage in its ascent; it has grasped manifestation as its own negativity instead of distinguishing it from both itself and its intelligible object. This dialectic of self-identity within absolute difference at first appears to consciousness in an immediate form as self-consciousness. In self-consciousness, indeed, the I is absolutely other, and yet this other is the I. Consciousness has become self-consciousness. Beyond certainty, truth is posed in that very certainty. Can it preserve itself as truth in this certainty that is pure subjectivity?