

Comments on the PhoS: Consciousness

Up to now I've been writing expositions of the chapters, but here I'll add my thoughts on the *Phenomenology* up to the end of the first section, "Consciousness".

What Is Logical About the *Phenomenology of Spirit*?

First off, I'd like to make a comment on the *logical*—meaning Hegelian logic—structure of the *Phenomenology* so far. Hegel claims that the development of the investigation in the *Phenomenology* is strictly logical, but this is a truth that I think is interestingly qualified in the work so far. The structures *internal* to the forms of consciousness do not arise from a *strict logical development* of categories following from prior forms of consciousness, e.g. from the results of *Sense Certainty*, the categories posited by *Perception* do not follow. In *Sense Certainty*, *Perception*, and *Understanding*, the structure of the object and consciousness's knowing are *historical* forms of consciousness which Hegel takes up and abstracts from their empirical forms into *pure forms*. These forms are arranged in an order in which they are brought into consideration as forms that posit an answer to the problems resulting from prior forms of consciousness, and as the Introduction tells us, the problem before us is the problem of knowledge and knowing. Why begin with Sense Certainty? Is it because it is the simplest claim to knowledge possible, and here Hegel is a good believer in the principle of simplicity against unnecessary complexity? If we shall entertain claims of knowledge, the simplest one that can do the trick should be our first target of observation, right? This *would* be only reason I could think of IF the systematic character of the future system did not already loom in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel already has the *Logic's* path in mind, and thus the form of the beginning is really for a logical reason. The way that science begins is always with the greatest level of abstraction possible, with the bare immediate being of things.

Since the forms of consciousness are not what follow any immanent logical chain, what does? Well, what does follow so far is the specification of the general concept of the object. With Sense Certainty we began with pure abstraction facing determinate sense experience, and therefore a lack of any determinate knowledge. In the experience of Sense Certainty, through its very *experience of its act of knowing*, immediate knowledge turns out to necessarily be mediated by the temporality, spatiality, and conceptual cognition of consciousness. From this result, restated into the proper category of determinacy, Perception attempts to give a determinate conceptual account of an object that is mediated in itself as a sensuous unity with individual differences *and* mediated through a universal concept. The failure of Perception is the inability to capture the experienced *unity of unity and difference* that is the object with a universal determined by sensuousness. Its categories fail, and what is learned from its experience is that the logical structure of the object has a unity that falls into

difference and vice versa regardless of what perspective it takes of it.

Understanding then appears on the scene and offers new categories that take up this result and further develop it. In Understanding the categories of Force and Law take on the role of an *unconditioned universality* within which the dependence of unity and difference are taken as a single movement of a unity which contains both—a unity of unity and difference. Understanding is able to see that its answer requires a single concept that can generate this movement in itself, but in attempting to find a third concept to ground the movement it fails to attain anything but the concept of an object that is merely the movement of unity and difference. This movement has no third in its relation to act as grounding substance or essence, and any attempt to formulate a third ends in collapse back into the movement. From this experience of the Understanding we are left with the structure of opposed inversion in the movement of unity and difference in its pure form of pure opposition, i.e. self-opposition, or what appears in the future *Logic* as Something and Other, which immediately contain their opposite as their familiar inner essence and remain in difference and unity at the same moment. Through the incessant logical movement of inverted oppositions Hegel shifts to the category of *infinity*, and in an aside through infinity—via the slingshot of the Hegelian Universal—he brings forth *life*.

Here the forms of consciousness which correspond to traditional epistemology concerning an external world come to their end. Hegel sees no use in any further forms of consciousness of this kind for they have developed themselves to the point where the object of understanding shares the very structure of the consciousness which apprehends it, consciousness faces only itself in its object. Through the self-opposition of this pure concept of infinity he calls forth *self-consciousness* in this moment of consciousness facing its object. Consciousness, in opposing itself to an external object, posits itself as for-itself against it, and through the cognition of the other as an other to itself it becomes aware of itself as non-distinct from it for it has learned that this process of distinction in infinity is itself a non-distinction. In this awareness that what it faces is not distinct from it, consciousness is self-consciousness. We find here that the very cognition of external objects can only be for a self-consciousness, as such self-consciousness is a necessary condition for consciousness as we have observed it. What and how this self-consciousness is is what remains to be seen in the following developments.

One can also see something else that's interesting: that the structure of the object of a form of consciousness is only as complex as the form of consciousness itself, or put in another way, the object faced is structured in the way it is known, and a form of consciousness is a *knowing*. The object of the forms of consciousness correspond to the shape of consciousness itself, which—jumping ahead a bit into Self-Certainty—is

why self-consciousness curiously begins the development of its object with the categories of *life*, *desire*, and *self-consciousness* itself, for only an object which has these structures properly corresponds to the knowing of self-consciousness, that is, the knowing of itself.

Transcendental Deductions

I had heard/read about this before, but I can see now reading the *Phenomenology* that there is reason to think it might be one giant transcendental deduction of the conditions of possibility for knowing. Through each of the first three forms of consciousness we find something immanent to their experience which requires a further expansion in the concept of the object. In Sense Certainty we find that its immediacy requires mediation. In Perception we find that its cognition of the sensuous requires the use of pure universal structures, and at the end of Understanding we find that the very cognition of any object other to us—sensible or thought—requires a self-consciousness to make a distinction between itself and an other. Each consequent form of consciousness functions as the presupposed condition of possibility for the prior. Whether this holds after the first section, I don't know.

Connections to the *Science of Logic*

Through these first three chapters—if one has read the first two chapters of the *Science of Logic*—interesting conceptual structures show up in an unfinished and disconnected form prior to the writing of the *Science of Logic* where they would properly be explicitly developed in their pure conceptuality. Particularly pertinent are *pure Being*, *Determinateness*, *Becoming and Ceasing/Coming to be*, and *Something and Other*.

Pure, or abstract, Being appears structurally in Sense Certainty (SC) in its concept of the object. SC merely took its object as Being and refused to determine it conceptually, and this is all that Being is in the *Logic*, indeterminate meaning. Determinateness comes up at the end of SC and plays a major role in Perception, and it first appears interestingly as the mere fact of mediation. In Perception it is indirectly defined as a "this which is *not this*," a very close definition to the development in the *Logic* where it is 'Being with non-Being taken up into itself'. Becoming comes into prominence in the Understanding's concept of Force, in which the moments of Becoming are structurally present in the Force and Expression which are nothing but the yet-to-be of the other. Becoming's moments are Coming to Be and Ceasing to Be, which are just this same self-vanishing transition. Something and Other, by contrast to these other concepts, is *very prominent* through Perception and Understanding. The issue of substantive or essential being in these chapters is an unmistakable presence of this structure, for each posited moment either as the universal medium or the one, or as Force and Expression, repeats the movement of Something and Other in their

positing of themselves as different when in fact their substantive essence is their Other. While structures from the logic of *Essence* in the *Logic* appear in this same movement, Essential and non-Essential, and Ground and Grounded, I haven't read these portions and thus do not know to what extent they are of importance here. What I do know, however, is that the end of Understanding is basically the pure concept of Something and Other as the first true concept in the spirit of the *Logic*, as such Hegel calls the development of this concept as belonging to the realm of *science*, i.e. his later system.

The Connection of Forms of Consciousness

As the chapters go on, there is something noticeable, and that is that prior forms of consciousness return. Sense Certainty is taken up in Perception, and both are taken up into Understanding. This is not something hard to see, for Hegel constantly is reminding us of the sensuous and the perceived through Perception and Understanding. Since self-consciousness has been shown to be a precondition and logically prior to the consciousness of external objects which are other to consciousness, it should be interesting to see how these forms of consciousness will return in later chapters once self-consciousness develops up to consciousness proper again.

Whose Consciousness?

The layers of the *Phenomenology* run deep, and one can interpret the forms of consciousness in a few ways. One is that the forms of consciousness are akin to our own *individual* development of consciousness. As an infant we begin with Sense Certainty, as children we Perceive, as teens we Understand, and as adults we become explicitly self-conscious and aware of our role in the world. It seems like plausible reading for this first section.

Another one is, of course, that these are actual historical forms of consciousness, but in these three chapters this actually does not make much sense to me. Sense Certainty, as a historical form of knowing, would have to correspond to a far gone pre-human stage of mere symbolic reference, a stage of "thinking" which is hardly any thinking at all, and that is pure signaling without memory. The first three forms of consciousness seem almost inseparable in actual life beyond this logical division into determinate moments once we move into Perception in which Sense Certainty dominates over the Understanding, yet the Understanding is implicitly present in its function already, and indeed finds its way out given the conditions for its free speculation. That said, Perception seems to be the pre-Socratic Greek's naturalist world views, such as the universalization of a determinate element into the essence of all things.

Another view is that this is the very process of cognition of the general human being. First we encounter the sensuous object and have no determinate knowledge of it, but in perceiving we begin to determine the object through sensuous and conceptual categorization, after which we begin to engage in the pure understanding of the object. Were the inquiry to be one inquiring after absolute knowledge, we would then have to conceive of ourselves as knowers and our relation to the known explicitly, hence self-consciousness would come into the picture.

Ontology and Epistemology: The Structure of Objects and Knowing

Part of what smacks you, or at least *should* smack you in the face, when reading the introduction and this first major section is that ontology and epistemology come *hand in hand* and never are apart from one another. An ontology always has an epistemology to justify its knowing, and an epistemology always already presupposes the ontology of the knower, its knowing, and the objects it knows. The only ones that probably escape this criticism are the pragmatists because, well, they don't care about Truth.