

PhoS: Is There Justification of Method?

The method of the *Phenomenology's* development is mysterious to the uninitiated, but even when you understand the movement of the method you cannot help but wonder: why this method with this content and in this manner? The lack of justification or explanation of the method in the *Phenomenology* itself is an interesting and good critique leveled at Hegel by some (see the interesting draft of ["The Greatest Mistake: A Case for the Failure of Hegel's Idealism"](#) by Peter Wolfendale for one such critique).

Now, the development is *logical in Hegel's peculiar sense*, i.e. we have an immanently logical development ordered by a progression from immediate abstraction to mediated concreteness expanding into a system of concepts which take up the entirety of concepts before them, in this case a mix between *phenomenal forms of consciousness* and purely *logical categories* discovered and developed through phenomenal forms. Hegel does not give us a justification or explanation as to why he can proceed with the inquiry of the *Phenomenology* in its immanently dialectical manner. Indeed, Hegel does not bring up the question of method *until the end of the Science of Logic*.

The original title of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was **Science** of The Experience of Consciousness, i.e. the work was clearly already intended to have the form of science *despite supposedly being the journey of consciousness to discover science* through 'natural consciousness'—the unscientific form of thought. It is peculiar indeed that Hegel should be so bold as to give us the power of his science implicitly without yet having justified ground to do so. Without Hegel's implicit logical method we would have no capacity to choose between forms of consciousness in any ordering which would allow for such a progression as Hegel gives us, but at the outset of the *Phenomenology* Hegel has no way to justify this method, indeed, he himself had not yet completely explicated it as he would in the *Science of Logic*.

This issue seems, to me, to be a more specific form of the general issue of Hegel's claim that his work is *presuppositionless*. This is usually considered to mean *logical presuppositionless*, but such a lack of presupposition does not deny much of any other presupposition. When Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology*, we can be certain that he's presupposing his own final insight, or some form thereof—as a matter of fact, he tells us this much in the Preface and Introduction. If we did not presuppose that the Absolute was with us already, and knowledge was possible, why would we bother? He wouldn't have written the *Phenomenology* if all he thought to be doing was to reiterate ancient skepticism on a more general ground, *and then he just happened to find a form of consciousness that achieves Absolute Knowing while going through a random order of claims one could be immanently skeptical about*. He presupposes, as Bernstein aptly tells us, that one is part of the tradition of philosophy that has accepted that

Kantianism made pre-critical dogmatism impossible to return to. He presupposes his standpoint ending in the present he is in as a historical trajectory, and he presupposes his language and way of thinking.

Because of all of these presuppositions allowed in the work, Hegel can never really convince *everyone* that the *Phenomenology* really accomplishes what it claims. Partly because, let's face it, most people seem to not realize *what the method which is driving the movement even is*, and partly because even understanding the basic immanent logic one is left with the question of *why this logic? How* he could do such a thing within the *Phenomenology* is a big question. Could he have done so at all, or did he really have to wait until the end of the *Logic* to finally justify or explicate his method? If the *Phenomenology* is supposed to justify the conclusion of the basic concept of science, and the concept of science is fully fleshed out only afterward, yet the *Phenomenology* already is in the form of science, where in the theory is the justification for science itself really made?

One could, perhaps, consider that it might be impossible to deduce science from any other method but itself, and that science is merely stumbled upon in the process of history, after which it retroactively justifies itself. It seems like this is what some may have already said; take for example Zizek, who never tires of reminding us of retroactive necessity. Another position to take is what I think Hegel's own may be: *science has always been present as it is the true form of cognition, unrecognized, but nonetheless present as the engine which forces all forms of knowing which stand against it to fall apart*. Science is, then, the only standpoint that can explain or judge just why natural consciousness's forms cannot sustain themselves as knowledge, and indeed, why their failures through history have come to lead to the explicit final appearance of science out of all their failures.

Does this satisfy? Wolfendale says no, and I'm just pondering it now.