

The General Description of The Absolute | The Empyrean Trail on WordPress.com

The **Absolute** as such **is everything** with no remainder. It is the absolute sublation in which all determinations and their contradictions are cancelled and preserved in the ultimate *unity of unity and difference*. Cancelled because as particular determinations they are shown to be false insofar as they are not the complete Truth, and thus, no single standpoint has the privilege of being *the* standpoint of Truth. Preserved because their finitude, relativity, and contradiction is itself a necessary piece, or moment, of the Absolute which alone stands as Truth as such.

Where can we begin to understand Hegel's *Absolute*? Perhaps the best place is one of the famous sections from the *Preface* of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

The true is the whole. However, the whole is only the essence completing itself through its own development. This much must be said of the absolute: It is essentially a result, and only at the end is it what it is in truth. Its nature consists precisely in this: To be actual, to be subject, that is, to be the becoming-of-itself. — As contradictory as it might seem, namely, that the absolute is to be comprehended essentially as a result, even a little reflection will put this mere semblance of contradiction in its rightful place. The beginning, the principle, or the absolute as it is at first, that is, as it is immediately expressed, is merely the universal. But just as my saying "all animals" can hardly count as an expression of zoology, it is likewise obvious that the words, "absolute," "divine," "eternal," and so on, do not express what is contained in them; — and it is only such words which in fact express intuition as the immediate. Whatever is more than such a word, even the mere transition to a proposition, is a becoming-other which must be redeemed, that is, it is a mediation. However, it is this mediation which is rejected with such horror as if somebody, in making more of mediation than in claiming both that it itself is nothing absolute and that it in no way exists in the absolute, would be abandoning absolute cognition altogether.

—(*Phenomenology of Spirit*: §20; Miller Trns.)

"*The true is the whole.*" The whole which the Absolute comprises is a whole not as a mere completed end as *the final position*, but as the very way the whole has come about; thus, *the Absolute is the whole process of the Absolute*. The Absolute by its own concept *must include everything* within itself—not even *nothing (non-being)* can be outside it. One cannot have the *whole, the result, content, or unity* on one side, and the *parts, process, form, or difference* on another. To grasp a concept which can contain *everything in their full determinate difference and contradiction*, yet is not an empty abstraction like *pure being*, is one of the great barriers to understanding Hegel's

philosophy. This whole is a whole that is only by virtue of its parts, and its parts are parts only by virtue of their respective place within the context of the whole; or, this unity is only by virtue of the differences which compose it, and said differences only are differences insofar as they find themselves in a united whole.

This 'everything' of the Absolute, however, *is not the endless detail of empirical existence*. This is not to say that the Absolute does not include nature's existence, for the Absolute as thought determines itself against what is not a thought, i.e. sensuous existence. Given that the determinate content of sensuous experience is not itself a thought *as merely* mental image or conceptual linguistic articulation, it nonetheless has the structures of thought as concepts which in a literal sense 'inform' sense objects. We see in sense experience always something to conceive about it, some thought structure that minimally conveys a universal structure of things even if not the sensuous content itself, e.g. the color red at least can be spoken about as a *quality* if nothing else. The Absolute is not the complete grasping of all empirical facts or qualities, but rather of the intelligibility which inheres in all things and reveals itself as their essence and logical structures *even* if all that is intelligible in an object is revealed only to be precisely its unintelligibility or contingency. Even the acknowledgement of an empirical experience as a mere individual with no universal repetition, the notion of said individuality is universal.

As such, the Absolute is the totality of what *rationally is*: how it has come to be, what it is, and what it is coming to be. Rational because it is intelligible; true being because it is what endures in vanishing appearances. All things partake in the Absolute, but no particular thing is the lone privileged ground of the Absolute. ***The Absolute as such is not a standpoint like the relative concepts that comprise it, for it is the absolute Concept, the whole, in which all others are relative as its parts.*** Its conceptual content is *the entire system of fully developed scientific concepts*, and thus, it has no definition other than this entire development. To those who have not endeavored to enter and work through the system the Absolute is nothing but an empty phrase, a nebulous shadow with the faintest shape.

Concepts, as *unifying structures*, are the intelligibility to everything which serves as such a structure, including non-mental things. When the development of Hegel's science closes in on itself and finally points back to the beginning such that Absolute Spirit closes with the pinnacle of Philosophy and connects back to the *Science of Logic*, this closure of the systems of Logic, Nature, and Spirit is the concept of the Absolute finally come to its own as ***the Concept*** of which all other concepts are shown to be a part of. This concept, like all other concepts, is a unified structure consisting of systems (the concepts of Logic, Nature, Spirit) of concepts, and it is the most complex and mediated concept of them all. Its content is the entire developed system into which the thinker and thinking of the Absolute themselves are taken into. Unlike all

other concepts which find themselves transcended as they are shown to be relative, the Absolute has no other transcendence beyond it. Its transcendence is an inner self-transcendence as finite and relative moments, but this self-transcendent process remains wholly within itself in all its developments. The Absolute thus shows itself to be a process with moments of identity and difference in respective views, a restless becoming that is in its restlessness at rest, and to be in its products the famous "circle of circles."

To completely butcher it in order to give a summary: *The Absolute is ultimately nothing but the **completed process** of the unity which dirempts itself, and which in its diremption returns to unity. In the Absolute unity and difference are of equal importance; there is no unity without difference, and no difference without unity. The Absolute is a process which becomes other to itself in its own immanence, i.e. in being itself it becomes other than itself while remaining wholly itself. Its completion as **system** is nothing but the full course through the finite self-determinations which of their own immanent content and form go beyond themselves as the finite modes of the Absolute. **The system is itself only the result of an absolute method with a unity of content and form which alone can yield the Absolute. For an absolute content only an absolute form and method can do.** This process come to full closure, where it can generate nothing new within itself, is alone the true intelligible Absolute. From unities which show themselves relative and divided, to differences which show themselves necessarily united, the Absolute looms as their immanent truth and nature.*

Process is, I think, one of the terms which best captures the strangeness of the Absolute. Process is both becoming and being, for in common understanding a being undergoes process. Hegel's philosophy differs from common understanding in that for it process and being are immanently united as being and becoming. Being becomes *in being*. In the *Science of Logic* this is epitomized in this: the *thought* of Being is necessarily the *thinking* of Being, and in thinking Being it has already become Nothing. It is in the intimacy of thought and thinking that we find ourselves somehow both able and unable to split being and its becoming in the experience of thought as thinking, i.e. without thinking, a thought as concept is no thought at all.

It may be helpful to grasp the *true Infinite* and the [*Universal*](#) to grasp the Absolute.

Absolute vs. Relative

The **Absolute** as such **is everything**. However, it is not simply the totality of being, but also the point of reference and measure against which all things are compared to as relative. This is to say: The Absolute is eternal unchanging Truth, the relative is relative to it as incessant vanishings which are by virtue of partaking in the Absolute. Insofar as they are it is because they are a part and moment of Truth. *How much Truth they attain is known only in comparison to its place in the process of development towards the*

Absolute. The Absolute is, one may say, the still image of the restlessness of every moment in the system—it is a 'resting restlessness'. Without the relative moments which disappear into each other—this restlessness—however, we could not have the Absolute which is the restlessness at rest *as the unifying structure of restlessness*.

The Absolute itself *includes* the relative within itself and is not separate from it, neither as a separate grounding entity—such as being as something grounding yet separate from beings—nor as a fundamental concept such as matter which constitutes all else. To separate the Absolute from the relative moments as if they were independent, or as if one was more fundamental than the other, is itself a mistake which if carried out makes the Absolute relative to the relative, undermining its all encompassing absoluteness. As its individual moments, the Absolute is relative and incomplete, but as the totality of individual relative moments, their generation out of and into each other, and their mutual structural determination and constitution, it is truly Absolute.

There is more to say on the Absolute, especially concerning its deep connection to the basic concept of the Infinite, but that shall be expanded in another blog at a later date.