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The Systematic Context of Hegel's Transition to Self-Consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Among the many transitions within Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the one from chapter three, "Force and the Understanding", to the chapter entitled "The Truth of Self-certainty" is of special significance. Here for the first time in the book, Hegel believes that a structure has been achieved, which – *in itself* – he can identify with the principle of his monistic philosophy, that is with the essentially relational structure of Spirit.¹ Indeed, he tells us that this transition is the "turning point" (GW 9, 109) of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*.

Compared with the first three shapes of consciousness investigated in the *Phenomenology* – namely Sense Certainty, Perception, and Understanding – self-consciousness does indeed represent an inversion. For whereas their modes of taking-to-be-true (*Weisen des Fürwahrhaltens*) were basically realist in that they took 'the True' or 'Essence' to reside outside and independently of the mind, self-consciousness as Hegel introduces it in chapter four is a variety of idealism. For this new shape, what Hegel calls 'the True' or true being is not something outside the mind, but rather thought itself, while anything that seems to exist independently of thought is precisely a *mere seeming* of existence waiting to be traced back or reduced to its true ground in consciousness.² As we will see, however, Hegel regards this

¹ Hegel marks the importance of the transition by describing its result with expressions like "simple infinity" the "absolute Concept", the "soul of the world", the "native realm of truth" and the "Concept of Spirit", all of which are closely linked to his conception of the Absolute. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by the Academy of Sciences of Nordrhein-Westfalia, in cooperation with the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*), Hamburg: Meiner 1968 ff., vol. 9, pp. 99, 103, 108. – Here and in the following all page references are this edition. References are given in the body of the text in parentheses as GW followed by volume and page numbers. All translations are my own.

² Cf. GW 9, 104: "Thus for self-consciousness, being-other is present as a being or as a distinct moment, but the unity of self-consciousness with this difference is also present to it as a distinct moment. With that first moment,

idealism of self-consciousness as a naïve idealism and we must not yield to the temptation of identifying it with his own position. If the idealism of self-consciousness is at best only half the story, the important other half is organic life. For Hegel obviously conceives of self-consciousness and life as intimately linked. My aim in this paper will be to explore the interconnectedness of self-consciousness and life as well as their structural affinities with the Hegelian ‘Concept’. In so doing I will also try to show why – despite the presence there of all the essential structural components of Hegelian Spirit – the ‘pathway’ of the *Phenomenology* cannot conclude with this transition into the “native realm of truth”.

In order to appreciate the significance of the transition within the *Phenomenology*, it will be helpful to look first at the status of organic life and self-consciousness in other Hegelian works. Hegel characterizes both as modes of existence of the *Concept*,³ about which in a preliminary way this much can be said: Hegel understands it as a *singulare tantum* (there is and can be only one Hegelian Concept) and it is the metaphysical principle of all reality.⁴

self-consciousness is present as *consciousness*, and the whole expanse of the sensuous world has been preserved for it. At the same time, however, the sensuous world is present only as related to the second moment, the unity of self-consciousness with itself, and hence it is for self-consciousness an existence [Bestehen] which is merely *appearance* or a difference which has no being *in itself*.” (“Es ist hiemit für es [sc. das Selbstbewußtsein] das Anderssein, als ein Sein, oder als unterschiedenes Moment; aber es ist für es auch die Einheit seiner selbst mit diesem Unterschiede, als zweites unterschiedenes Moment. Mit jenem ersten Momente ist das Selbstbewußtsein als *Bewußtsein*, und für es die ganze Ausbreitung der sinnlichen Welt erhalten; aber zugleich nur als auf das zweite Moment, die Einheit des Selbstbewußtseins mit sich selbst, bezogen; und sie [d.h. die Ausbreitung der sinnlichen Welt] ist hiemit für es ein Bestehen, welches aber nur *Erscheinung*, oder Unterschied ist, der *an sich* kein Sein hat.“) Hegel goes on immediately to indicate the deficiency of self-consciousness in this initial stage. The opposition of truth and appearance, he says, is present in self-consciousness in a manner such that only the “truth”-pole is taken as the grounding or ontologically substantial relatum, and not the opposition in its entirety. *Animal Desire* now becomes the motor for “essentializing” the complete relation between the two poles. Thus we see *both* how Hegel places his theory of self-conscious subjectivity from the very start in an ethical or proto-ethical context (desire, action, satisfaction of needs) *and* that these proto-ethical concepts are in turn embedded in the highly complex relational structure I will go on to explore in some detail in the rest of this paper.

³ Cp. *Encyclopedia*, sect. 359, schol., where Hegel says that in life the Concept itself emerges into existence. Similarly, Hegel writes in the *Doctrine of the Concept*, “The Concept, to the extent that it has achieved an existence which is itself free, is nothing other than the I or pure self-consciousness” (GW 12, 17).

⁴ Cp. GW 12, 174. Hans Friedrich Fulda (“Hegels Dialektik als Begriffsbewegung und Darstellungsweise“, in R.-P. Horstmann (ed.), *Seminar: Dialektik in der Philosophie Hegels* (Frankfurt/Main 1978), p. 129) has especially stressed this unitary or essentially singular nature of the Hegelian Concept. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (*Ontologie und Relationen. Hegel, Bradley, Russell und die Kontroverse über interne und externe Beziehungen*, Königstein/Ts.: Athenäum 1984, p. 69 f.) has sought to relativize Fulda’s position by pointing out that Hegel also

Hegel's system is the exposition of this fundamental principle, which emerges into existence in three distinct forms – as life, as self-consciousness cognition,⁵ and in its ultimately adequate mode of realization as the absolute knowledge of itself, i. e. as the Hegelian *Idea*.⁶ Thus even rather slight acquaintance with the *Science of Logic* reveals that the “turning point” of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* involves two of the systematically most important concepts in Hegel's philosophy.

Now what is the philosophical perspective that lends the concepts of life and self-consciousness such weight for Hegel? Like Fichte and Schelling before him, Hegel is convinced that a satisfying philosophical position must be monistic and that Spinoza's metaphysics of Substance established a modern paradigm of monistic thought. Yet, too, like Fichte before him, Hegel is also impressed by Jacobi's critique of Spinozism: A metaphysical and methodological monism seems to be necessarily mechanistic, deterministic, nihilistic; it appears to be incompatible with our instinctive conception of ourselves as living, freely self-determining, ontologically irreducible, rational individuals.⁷ Viewed from this perspective, the German Idealists' *Problematik* consists in mediating their monistic convictions with their equally deep commitment to the irreducible reality of free individuals. Their goal is to integrate two essential dimensions of human existence, our organic nature as living beings and our rational self-determination, into a monistic framework.⁸

treats the so-called “determinations of pure thought” and the objects of his philosophies of nature and Spirit as a plurality of distinct concepts. Horstmann admits, however, that there are significant difficulties in reconstructing the ontological status of these plural concepts and their relation to *the* Concept.

⁵ Cp. the section “The Idea of Cognition” in the *Doctrine of the Concept*, which follows immediately upon Hegel's treatment of the “Idea of Life”; see especially GW 12, 192 ff.

⁶ Cp. GW 12, 30: “In this completion in which the Concept in its objectivity also possesses its freedom, the adequate Concept is the Idea. Reason, which is the sphere of the Idea, is the revelation of that truth to itself in which the Concept has its absolutely adequate realization and is free to the extent that it recognizes (*erkennt*) its objective world in its subjectivity and recognizes the latter in the former.” See also GW 12, 173-179.

⁷ The *locus classicus* for these criticisms is Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's work *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* (first edition 1785; English selections in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill"*, trans. by George di Giovanni [Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994]). I attempt an analysis of Jacobi's main objections to Spinoza's metaphysics in my paper “Spinozismus – Ausgangspunkt oder Endstation der Systemphilosophie?”, in Birgit Sandkaulen (Hg.), *System und Systemkritik. Beiträge zu einem Grundproblem der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*. Würzburg 2006, pp. 145-174.

⁸ A particularly concise formulation of this project can in Hegel's case be found in his review of volume three of Jacobi's works, which Hegel wrote just shortly after completing the *Science of Logic*. The review is contained in

In Hegel's case, the strategy for achieving this goal is to introduce central structural features both of organic life and of empirical self-consciousness into the very definition of the Absolute. To put it in terms of Hegel's formulation of the task in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, the strategy is to reveal substance as subject.⁹ Inevitably, to say that Hegel deliberately *introduces* the relevant features into his very definition of the Absolute is to invite the charge that Hegel is trying to derive something from the Absolute that he himself put there in the first place, so that the whole project threatens to appear viciously circular.¹⁰ However, even if it turned out to be true that Hegel had used organic life and empirical self-consciousness as models when working up his concept of the Concept, that in itself still would not be enough to justify the charge of circularity. For as the chapter "Force and the Understanding" demonstrates, Hegel intends a wholesale critique of "explanation" as an adequate mode of philosophical cognition.¹¹ Accordingly, he is not offering a derivation or explanation in the traditional sense which could appropriately be subjected to the charge of circularity. Moreover, organic life and empirical self-consciousness stand to each other and to the Hegelian "Concept" in a conceptual relation such that the complete relational structure of the Concept can be abstracted from neither of them taken in isolation. Hence in this respect, as well, we need not expect the special status of empirical self-consciousness and organic life simply to fall out of the nature of the Absolute in any merely trivial way.

Now this structural deficiency of both organic life and self-consciousness in relation to the Hegelian Concept is going to be one of the main themes of my talk. But before I turn to

vol. 15 of the *Gesammelte Werke*, but for an English translation see Brady Bowman/Allen Speight, *Hegel's Heidelberg Writings*, Cambridge University Press (forthcoming).

⁹ GW 9, 18: "In my view [...] everything depends on apprehending and expressing the True not [sc. only] as *substance*, but equally as *subject*." ("Es kömmt nach meiner Ansicht [...] alles darauf an, das Wahre nicht als *Substanz*, sondern eben so sehr als *Subjekt* aufzufassen und aufzudrücken.")

¹⁰ Cp. Horstmann's somewhat critical portrayal of Hegel's "organological thesis" in *Ontologie und Relationen*, loc. cit., p. 70. Christian Spahn (*Hegel's Philosophie des Organischen*, forthcoming) rejects charges of circularity against Hegel's organological conception of metaphysics.

¹¹ Hegel repeatedly criticizes the "popular tendency toward explanation" in his Jena treatise on *Faith and Knowledge* (GW 4, p. 356; see also p. 333, where he criticizes Kant in a similar vein). Significantly however, Hegel's most pointed critique of the practice of explanation falls within a scholium to his treatment of the "formal ground" in the *Logic of Essence* (GW 11, 304f). There he deals with the concept of a ground or reason (*Grund*), which he identifies with the notion of causal forces as they are postulated and investigated in the natural sciences.

the specific structure of the Concept, I would like to say one more thing about the systematic importance of the two phenomena I have been discussing. Hegel makes it clear (in the *Science of Logic* and elsewhere) that his predecessors were prevented from adequately comprehending either the nature and unity of self-consciousness or that of organic life precisely because they lacked his speculative notion of the Concept.¹² He emphasizes repeatedly that both life and self-consciousness exemplify central structural features of the Concept in a manner that is *empirically and perceptually accessible*,¹³ thus creating an immediate and pressing need for philosophical conceptualization. Hegel no doubt considered it to be one of the greatest virtues of his own speculative approach that it was designed to meet that need. Within Hegel's philosophical system, however, the problem of life and self-consciousness takes on its specific shape only in the context of an idealist monism and its speculative grounding.¹⁴ They re-

¹² Cp. GW 12, 181, where Hegel writes, "When it comes to life, this unity of its concept in the externality of objectivity [...] those that adhere to the determinations characteristic of relations of reflection and the formal Concept utterly run out of thoughts. The omnipresence of the simple in a manifold externality is, to reflection, an absolute contradiction, and since reflection apprehends that omnipresence in its perception of life and hence cannot deny the reality of this idea, it finds it to be *an incomprehensible mystery*, for reflection fails to grasp the Concept and recognize it as the substance of life." ("Am Leben, an dieser Einheit seines Begriffs in der Äußerlichkeit der Objektivität [...] gehen dem Denken, das sich an die Bestimmungen der Reflexionsverhältnisse und des formalen Begriffs hält, schlechthin alle Gedanken aus; die Allgegenwart des Einfachen in der vielfachen Äußerlichkeit ist für die Reflexion ein absoluter Widerspruch, und, insofern sie dieselbe aus der Wahrnehmung des Lebens auffassen, hiermit die Wirklichkeit dieser Idee zugeben muß, *ein unbegreifliches Geheimnis*, weil sie den Begriff nicht erfaßt und den Begriff nicht als die Substanz des Lebens.")

¹³ Kant had noted that any attempt to cognize the nature of the ego as it is in itself was inseparably bound up with the "inconvenience" that we must always already "make use of" its representation in order to think anything at all, including the thought of the pure ego; hence we "can only revolve in a perpetual circle" when we try to establish a priori knowledge of the self (cp. *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 404). Hegel responds to these skeptical remarks by insisting that "the absolute eternal nature" of self-consciousness and the Concept "reveals itself" in empirical self-consciousness, "because self-consciousness just is the *existing* (daseiende), that is *empirically perceptible* pure Concept, the absolute relation to itself [...]", of which the Kantian "circle" is an immediate *positive* manifestation (GW 12, 194).

¹⁴ Cf. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "Gibt es ein philosophisches Problem des Selbstbewußtseins?", in K. Cramer, H. F. Fulda, R.-P. Horstmann, U. Pothast (eds.), *Theorie der Subjektivität*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1990, pp. 220-248. I agree with Horstmann that it is misleading to assume that Hegel's theory of self-consciousness was meant to be a theory of the psychological phenomenon of self-consciousness as it has been analyzed and discussed in more recent philosophy of psychology. One rather negative consequence of this wholeheartedly speculative approach to self-consciousness is that Hegel's use of it as a model can appear empty precisely to the extent that his use becomes unaccountable to empirical control: There seem to be no real, phenomenally anchored criteria available for deciding whether Hegel has given a successful or even responsible account of

present models by which to conceive the relation between substance and attribute in a way that is non-mechanistic and which does not render the existence of living, rationally self-determining individuals inconceivable from the very start.¹⁵

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While continuing to maintain a certain distance from the textual details of the transition in the *Phenomenology*, I would now like to pursue the question of the specific “conceptual” structure that organic life and empirical self-consciousness realize in their differing (and ultimately inadequate) ways. My first step will be to construct an analogy between life and self-consciousness. We need not worry if the analogy initially appears to be somewhat rough; I will introduce further refinements and modifications as I go along.

As conceived by Hegel, identity is an asymmetrical relation which we may think of in analogy to the relation of instantiation between a universal concept in the usual, non-Hegelian sense and an individual object falling under that concept. This asymmetry represents one reason, incidentally, why Hegel frequently explains the expression “universality” as meaning “unity-with-itself” instead of making reference to properties, extensions, or multiple instantiability. His characterization of the essence of the ego may be regarded as a typical deployment of his concepts of identity and universality. The ego, he says, is “pure unity as it

self-consciousness. However, I do not agree with Horstmann that Hegel is not even attempting to address experientially accessible aspects of self-consciousness. On the contrary, as in the case of life, it is the seemingly puzzling aspects that arise on a certain description of empirical self-consciousness which help to motivate Hegel’s paradoxical logic of reflection.

¹⁵ Cp. For example Hegel’s remark in the scholium to sect. 359 of the *Encyclopedia*: “The soul of absolute form, of the Concept and of the living (*Lebendigkeit*) resides exclusively in qualitative, immanently self-sublating difference, in the dialectic of absolute opposition. Until this true, infinite negativity has been recognized, it will seem inevitable that the absolute identity of life cannot be grasped without turning the difference into a merely external substrate of reflection, just as in Spinoza the attributes and modes occur in an external understanding – which is tantamount to robbing life of the salient point of selfhood, the principle of spontaneous self-motion (*Selbstbewegung*), the internal diremption of itself.” (“Die absolute Form, der *Begriff* und die *Lebendigkeit* hat vielmehr allein die qualitative, sich an sich selbst aufhebende Differenz, die Dialektik der absoluten Entgegensetzung, zu ihrer Seele. Insofern diese wahrhafte unendliche Negativität nicht erkannt ist, kann man meinen, die absolute Identität des Lebens, wie bei *Spinoza* die Attribute und Modi in einem *äußern* Verstand vorkommen, nicht festhalten zu können, ohne den Unterschied zu einem bloß Äußerlichen der Reflexion zu machen; womit es dem Leben an dem *springenden Punkt* der Selbstheit, dem Prinzip der Selbstbewegung, Diremption seiner selbst in sich überhaupt fehlt.”)

relates to itself [...] by abstracting from all determinacy and content and retracting itself into the freedom of an unbounded self-identity (*schrackenlose Gleichheit mit sich*). Thus it is *universality*: unity which is unity-with-itself only by way of that negative comportment (*negatives Verhalten*) whose appearance is the act of abstraction and which thus contains all determinacy (*Bestimmtsein*) dissolved within itself” (GW 12, 17f.). On Hegel’s description, the resulting universality is necessarily indeterminate (or ‘abstract’), for it is constituted by the very act of distinguishing itself from all determinate content. And it is precisely as such indeterminate universality that the ego both reaches over and encompasses (*übergreifen*) its intentional contents, possessing them as its own, and at the same time posits itself as identical with those very contents.¹⁶ Thus the self-conscious ego exemplifies the unity of the universal and the particular or the identity of identity and non-identity, which Hegel himself proffers as compact expressions of the nature of the Absolute.

Now since I myself have been characterizing the self-conscious ego as an empirical manifestation of the relevant ‘speculative’ structure, we might at this point want to ask what is the phenomenal or experiential basis of Hegel’s description of the ego? I believe that Hegel is moved here by the same experience that Hume evokes in an often quoted passage of the *Treatise*. “[W]hen I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*”. Hume writes,

I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. [...] If any one upon serious and unprejudic’d reflexion, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. [...] He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu’d, which he calls *himself*, tho’ I am certain there is no such principle in me.¹⁷

Of course Hegel does not share Hume’s denial of an irreducible self, but neither does he subscribe to Kant’s preferred rejoinder to Hume’s denial, which consists in rejecting as category mistakes any metaphysical conclusions whatsoever from reflection on the nature of apperception (GW 12, 193 ff.). On the contrary, Hegel understands the ego as being precisely

¹⁶ Cp. GW 9, 103, where Hegel explains that “the I is the content of the relation, and the very relating of the content.”

¹⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, hg. v. Lewis A. Selby-Bigge, second, revised ed. by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford 1978, p. 252.

this activity of differentiating itself from its intentional contents while at the same time identifying that content with itself as its own concrete particularity or individuality. Taken in this way, self-consciousness is a *higher-order relation of determinacy* arising between the two poles of determinacy and indeterminacy. Whereas first-order relations of determinacy, as Hegel understands them, pertain between states or entities which are themselves finite, being determined and bounded by their relations to each other, self-consciousness is a relation between such first-order determinacy and the first-order indeterminacy of the ego as it abstracts from its concrete particularity. Hegel calls this second-order relation “absolute determinacy” in order to indicate that the relation does not take place between numerically distinct, quasi-independent entities, but is as it were a non-relative relation. This peculiarly Hegelian notion of absolute determinacy is what I was driving at when I began this section by saying that for Hegel identity is a non-symmetrical relation.

Now from Hegel’s point of view, metabolic organisms present an exactly analogous phenomenon. An animal produces and maintains itself in self-identity by continuously exchanging the inorganic “content” of its organic “form” by way of assimilation and excretion. As before, the animal’s identity is an asymmetrical relation since although the animal cannot be wholly identified with any single one of its material incarnations, it does in fact posit each such state as in an important sense identical with itself: The animal is not *something else* over against its particular, finite states. With Hegel we might express this state of affairs by saying that the animal maintains its self-identity by sublating each and every one of its metabolic states and *positing* them *as sublated*.

In Hegel’s view there is yet a further analogy to be noted here. To be precise, it is a whole second tier of analogy involving the relation between a given species and the individual animals belonging to it. These individuals represent indispensable, yet transitory states within the reproductive cycle of the species in its totality. Thus we come to see nested within organic life itself a further analogy between the relation of the species to the individual species members, on the one hand, and the relation of the organic individual to its own metabolic states, on the other. As I hope to show, this nested structural analogy plays an extraordinarily important role for understanding how life and self-consciousness relate to each other and why the transition to self-consciousness is a crucial turning point but by no means an end-point in the trajectory of the *Phenomenology* as a whole.

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At his point in my talk I would like to insert a methodological excursus which will lead us into the specific way Hegel effects the transition from “consciousness” to “self-consciousness” in chapters three and four of the *Phenomenology*. Up to now I have spoken of analogies between empirical self-consciousness and organic life, between the individual animal and the species, and between both these analogies and the structure of the absolute subjectivity which Hegel believes can and must take the place of substance as the fundamental metaphysical principle. However, notwithstanding further refinements to these analogies, the question of how much methodological and especially how much metaphysical weight we can make them to bear is already becoming pressing. The passion that Romantic thinkers such as Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis or Schelling evinced for analogies is well known – as is Hegel’s scathing criticism of the formalism inherent in the analogies favored by Schelling and his disciples.¹⁸ Yet we must not allow Hegel’s criticism of Schelling to blind us to the fact that Hegel himself makes extensive use of analogies and obviously does not doubt the existence of *real analogies* in nature. By real analogies I mean analogies which (to the extent that for Hegel anything at all can be understood as mind-independent) are independent of our subjective cognition and are “out there”, so to speak, for us to discover. Thus in strictly Hegelian terms it is wrong to speak, as I have been doing, of life and self-consciousness as “models for thought” which have merely heuristic or didactic value. However, any talk of homomorphism or isomorphism would be equally in need of correction if it is not to mislead us into assuming an all too rigid structural identity between life and self-consciousness as modes of existence of the Hegelian Concept, on the one hand, and the Concept itself as it is in truth.

For the respective structures of life and self-consciousness differ in crucial respects both from each other and from the structure of Spirit or “übergreifende Subjektivität”.¹⁹ The

¹⁸ Cp. the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, GW 9, 16 f. and esp. 36-38. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830). In *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. By W. Bonsiepen u. Ch. Lucas, vol. 20, Hamburg 1992, § 246, S. 236.

¹⁹ Cp. *Encyclopedia*, sect. 215, schol.: “Die Einheit der Idee ist Subjektivität, Denken, Unendlichkeit und dadurch wesentlich von der Idee als *Substanz* zu unterscheiden, wie diese übergreifende Subjektivität, Denken Unendlichkeit von der *einseitigen* Subjektivität, dem einseitigen Denken, der einseitigen Unendlichkeit, wozu sie

expression that best captures the sense of a real analogy in Hegel is perhaps the biological term *homology*. In the biological sense, homologous structures are ones that evince a shared evolutionary or developmental ancestry. Life and self-consciousness might thus be best described as homologous realizations of the Hegelian Concept, but as realizations which differ in highly specific ways both from each other and from the fully adequate realization of the Concept in the absolute Idea.

A defining feature of Hegel's concept of the Concept is that it is intended to bridge the gap between structure and genesis, between substantial being and becoming. Indeed, it is a conspicuously anti-Platonic feature of Hegel's thought in general that he regards any determination of an abstract structure as incomplete until the internal necessity of that structure to realize itself in appearance has also been indicated or determined. Hegel locates that necessity at the level of the higher-order relation I have been referring to as "absolute determinacy", and it is intimately linked to his conception of negativity – an aspect I am intentionally confining to the margins of this paper. Now this anti-Platonic feature of Hegel's thought is especially salient in the chapter on "Force and the Understanding", whose goal (as Hegel indicates) is to complete the determination of the interior of nature as itself identical with appearance²⁰ and the demonstration that "the principle of change and flux" necessarily emerges within the "realm of natural law" itself, which at first appeared to be a "motionless image" of the world of fleeting appearance (GW 9, 96 f.). The presence of this central methodological assumption of Hegel's thought serves to underscore in yet another way the importance of the transition.

The main point of my discussion, though, is this: The complete structure of the Hegelian Concept encompasses its very becoming and cannot be divorced from it. In turn, this methodological fact entails a teleological structure for the specific process of becoming which the *Phenomenology* is intended to exemplify and realize (*darstellen*). Just as each stage in the growth of a plant mirrors the structure of the whole in an incomplete way, so also do we discover homologies between the various "moments" in the becoming of Spirit. In this sense Hegel is able to say at the beginning of chapter three that the consciousness we are observing is itself bound up with, involved and implicated in the becoming of its object so that "the re-

sich urteilend, bestimmend herabsetzt, zu unterscheiden ist." See also sect. 219, schol., where the analogy with organic life is again salient.

²⁰ GW 9, 96: "Das Innere is damit als Erscheinung vollendet."

flection on both sides is the same, or rather it is but *one single* reflection” (GW 9, 82). Hegel does not mean to imply that the reflection displays the same structure both on the side of the object and on the side of the subject, for as we are about to see there are significant differences between them. Rather he is indicating that a common, as it were ancestral root is developing and articulating itself in each shape – consciousness and its object, respectively – in an exactly complementary fashion. When, therefore, we presently discover significant differences between organic life and empirical self-consciousness, Hegel need not attribute them to the inevitable limitations of analogies and partial models; he can instead interpret them as teleologically meaningful differences that are conditioned by the specific stage they represent in the realization of the Concept.

Now in light of my remarks so far it might seem striking that Hegel himself makes no explicit use of the analogies between life and self-consciousness I have been playing on in order to effect the transition between “Force and the Understanding” and “Self-Consciousness”. This fact must not be taken to imply that those analogies are completely absent in the transition or that they play no motivating role. Even so, however, Hegel situates the transition in a purely methodological perspective, motivating it by means of aporiae in the practice of scientific explanation on the one hand and of the Platonism latent in talk of natural laws on the other.

The details of Hegel’s critique of mainstream notions of scientific explanation are historically embedded, unusually complex, and in places highly obscure. Allow me therefore merely to note the implicitly self-referential nature of the whole chapter in relation to Hegel’s own deepest methodological premises. Differently than in the chapters on Sense Certainty or Perception, “Force and the Understanding” takes up the classical modern conception of scientific knowledge – a conception which despite intervening scientific revolutions continues to set modernity apart from pre-modern world-views. According to this conception the goal of science is to *explain* nature, and a scientific explanation consists in formulating a universally valid causal law from which the phenomenon in question can (under a suitable description) be derived by logical deduction. In the form in which Hegel takes it up, this conception is essentially mechanistic. Causal laws are mechanical laws, which is to say laws that Hegel in other contexts explicitly claims to be ineffective in organic contexts.²¹ The philosophical opponent whose methodology Hegel is critically portraying, therefore, is none other than the

²¹ Cp. Encyclopedia, sect. 204 and GW 12, p. 174 and esp. pp. 183 ff.

mechanistic determinist who celebrates his speculative apotheosis in Spinozism and who Jacobi identified as the archetype of the scientific metaphysician and proponent of philosophy as an all-encompassing system.

By subjecting the practice of scientific explanation as conceived by *mechanistic* monism to an immanent critique, Hegel is attempting to draw from it precisely those determinations of the objects of explanation which such a methodology would per se seem to rule out per se. To this extent, Hegel's treatment of scientific explanation may be characterized as an immanent overcoming of precisely those difficulties which an opponent of *Systemphilosophie* like Jacobi held to be insurmountable. The question as to whether Hegel's strategy succeeds, is an open one; it seems beyond doubt, though, that this is the philosophical strategy he is pursuing.

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I have now laid out the most important historical, systematic, structural and methodological groundwork needed for gaining a proper perspective on chapters three and four of the *Phenomenology*. In this last part of my talk I would like to begin by sketching out the symmetry Hegel sets up between the activity of scientific explanation and what he calls the "inverted world", since it is by way of this symmetry that he effects the transition to self-consciousness. I will then go on to develop several very general structural points in order to answer the question why, since all the essential structural features of absolute subjectivity or Spirit are present in that transition, the *Phenomenology* cannot simply end here at the beginning of Chapter Four.

One key to understanding the relation between explanation and the "inverted world" as its objective correlate lies in abstracting from the manifest goal and the intended structure of scientific explanation in order to focus with Hegel on the practice of explanation as a specific form of intellectual activity. Hegel takes the differentiation of "moments" within a natural law (say mass, time and distance in the case of falling bodies) and their simultaneous synthesis or correlation as mutually dependent factors *of a single force* (say gravity) to be a "movement" indicative of a necessity inherent in the very nature of the understanding (GW 9, 94). Qua understanding, consciousness posits a determinacy (i. e. a difference or opposition of distinct moments) and negates or sublates that difference at the same time by positing the re-

lata of the relation as essentially derivative (*unselbständige*) “moments” of a *single* force. Thus a natural law as conceived by the understanding expresses a second order relation in which one element (for example gravitational force) distinguishes itself from another element (the mutually related moments of space, time, and mass), to which however it also stands in the peculiarly asymmetrical relation of (Hegelian) identity: On the one hand, gravitational force *just is* the relation between space and time and mass formulated in the law. On the other hand, it is also posited over against them as the *ground* of their relation. Since the understanding itself grasps this “movement” as expressive of its own (we might say: *logical*) necessity, the second order relation between elements of the law is explicitly present to consciousness.

Hegel emphasizes that this “internal difference” (“*innerer Unterschied*”) or this “difference which is not a difference” (“*Unterschied, der keiner ist*”) is at first only present in and for the understanding and hence “not as yet posited in the thing itself (*an der Sache selbst*)” (ibid.). However, if we now turn to consider the same movement of explanation from the perspective of the explanatory goal and the intended structure of its objective content, then we arrive at the outcome Hegel calls the “inverted world”. As we can glean from parallel passages in the *Logic of Essence*,²² what is decisive in the case of the inverted world is that the Platonic “world” of natural laws, assumed to exist in and for itself, comes to be identified in its totality with the sphere of the phenomenal world. Such an identification is, on Hegel’s view, indispensable if the laws are supposed *really to explain* the appearances they address. A natural law must be its explanandum’s *own proper law*. In Hegel’s presentation, this identity entails a kind of flip-flopping of each totality into the other: The world of natural law is supposed to represent the ground of the motions of appearances and hence makes a transition into that very motion and flux. The world of appearance in turn is supposed to be lawful in itself and hence it makes a transition into the world of natural law. In this way, a second-order relation again arises between these two totalities which are themselves already essentially relational in character. This second-order relation consists in the perpetual transition and transformation of the one into the other, without one or the other of the totalities being able to establish itself as basic and thus stabilize the situation. Hence just as the intellectual activity of explanation turned out in Hegel’s description to have *precisely the same structure* as self-consciousness, the “inverted world” now turns out to have *precisely the same structure* as the relation between the individual animal and the species as a whole. With this insight, the actual

²² Cf. GW 11, 347-352.

transition from “Force and the Understanding” to the “turning point” in Self-Consciousness has effectively been accomplished.

This sketch will have to suffice. You will have noticed that I characterized self-consciousness and the activity of explanation as having *precisely the same structure*. Organic life and the inverted world also have *precisely the same structure*. The same is not however true of the relation between self-consciousness and organic life: They do not have precisely the same structure. As I hinted before, the strict analogy I have been assuming up till now must at this point be modified and refined. To that end I will now give an overview of the development of the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* up to and including the transition to self-consciousness, in order to identify the decisive asymmetry between organic life and self-certainty. The terms of this concluding analysis will be taken from Hegel’s highly idiosyncratic logic of relations.

Rolf-Peter Horstmann has formulated three necessary conditions which an entity must fulfill before the predicate “subjectivity” in the ambitious speculative sense of the Hegelian Concept can be attributed to it. These conditions are

- (1) that it can be regarded as a specifically structured relation between two or more definite elements and (2) that it can distinguish itself from itself in such a way that it can relate to itself as an Other of itself, which Other in turn (3) must have the same structural constitution involving the same elements as itself.²³

Observing the unity of structure and genesis noted above, we may say that this full relational structure already begins to emerge into being with Sense Certainty, so that the transition to self-consciousness is in fact taking place from the very start of the *Phenomenology*. In “Sense Certainty”, consciousness moves from an initial non-relational understanding of “the True” to a conception in which an indeterminate “pure Being” stands in an as yet unspecified relation to concrete determinacy. With this transition, the *first* – and only the first – Horstmann-condition of a structured connection between two definite elements is fulfilled.

The shape of consciousness Hegel calls Perception takes this relation as its point of departure and (by way of a series of aporetic determinations) comes to grasp the True as the

²³ Horstmann, *Ontologie und Relationen*, p. 96.

“unconditioned universal”. This new version of the True is an internally relational unity of being-for-itself and being-for-others, which is in turn related as a unity to so-called “things” which are themselves structured by precisely the same relation. Thus (not the second, but) the *third* Horstmann-condition is fulfilled, for as you can see, the unconditioned universal that is the starting point for “Force and the Understanding”, is thus related to an Other which has the same structural constitution as it does itself.

Now let’s look at the situation at the point where the transition to self-consciousness occurs. Qua explanation, consciousness relates itself to an Other (namely to the “interior of appearances”) in such a way that it can distinguish itself from itself and then relate itself to itself as to an Other. This is the movement of explanation Hegel describes as “tautological” and goes on to characterize by saying that self-consciousness now has a “double object”, namely

On the one hand the immediate object, that of sense certainty and perception, which however for self-consciousness is marked with the character of the negative, and on the other hand *self-consciousness itself*, which is true essence and initially present only in its opposition to the first [sc. immediate object]. (GW 9, 104)

Here we finally have the fulfillment of the *second* Horstmann-condition, for self-consciousness distinguishes itself from itself in such a way that it can relate to itself as an Other. Note, however, that for self-consciousness at this initial stage the Other is (as Hegel says) “marked with the character of the negative” Hence the third condition, which for Perception *had already been fulfilled on the side of the object, is clearly unfulfilled* in the initial self-conception of the shape called self-consciousness.

We have, then, the following highly interesting situation: Organic life, in its turn, fulfills precisely this third Horstmann-condition, but it does so in such a way that the *second* condition remains unfulfilled. In other words, organic life is a structured relation among several definite elements, within which the individual animal distinguished itself from itself in such a way that the difference disappears. And in the superordinate shape of the species this relation is such that life qua species relates itself to living individuals who in turn display the same structural organization of the same elements as the species itself. This relation, however,

is not such that the species is *consciously related* to its Other, and the same is true of the individual animals. Their relation is not, in Hegelian terms, *for itself*.

The heart of the matter is this. In Hegel's transition to the chapter "Self-Certainty", all the Horstmann-conditions are fulfilled that need to be fulfilled in order to speak of "übergreifende Subjektivität" or Spirit. However, they are not jointly fulfilled by a single, integrated shape of consciousness but are instead distributed across two relational elements which continue to stand to each other in the relatively external relation of self and object. To this extent, at the beginning of chapter four self-consciousness is still just a form of what Hegel disparagingly refers to as consciousness. Nor is it a coincidence that in this context Hegel speaks of "infinity" and the absolute Concept, but finds that it is merely *the concept* of Spirit which is present and not Spirit as it is in truth, i. e. in its completely adequate realization. For as in the *Logic of Being*, so here too the category of "infinity" is only the abstract matrix of the Absolute, the presence of its relational elements, but devoid of the integration and being-for-itself which are necessary to the (Hegelian) Idea.²⁴

The relative one-sidedness of this initial shape of self-consciousness is very much in keeping with the overall structural situation as I have described it. We are confronted with a self-consciousness which is merely the negation of the realistic mode of taking-to-be-true which was typical of what Hegel calls "consciousness". Yet in its one-sidedness as a quasi-Berkeleyan, subjective idealism, this initial form of self-consciousness remains, so to speak, beneath the par of absolute subjectivity that has *in itself* already been achieved in tandem with organic life: For absolute subjectivity the opposition between subject and object which is still operative in the initial stages of self-consciousness, is itself merely a moment within a much more complex relational structure. In order to achieve the full structure of subjectivity that

²⁴ The situation at this juncture in the *Phenomenology* is altogether comparable to what we find at the beginning of the so-called logic of "essence as reflection in itself" in the first chapter of the *Doctrine of Essence*, GW 11, pp. 244-257. There Essence emerges from Being as its negation or, as one might also say, Being sublates itself in Essence. At the same time, however, in its transition to Essence, Being retains its full determinacy as negated (as *nichtig*) or as sublated, so that it stands over against Essence in such a way that Essence at first is forced to persist in a relation of otherness toward Being – a relation which is itself peculiar to the logic of Being supposedly superseded in the transition to Essence. The "task" of Essence, as it were, is to identify this external determinacy as its own internal determinacy by revealing that that determinacy is of the same relational structure as Essence itself. The complete development of this relation issues for Hegel, as we know, in the Logic of the Concept or of Subjectivity and hence in the overcoming of Spinozist metaphysics.

characterizes Spirit, self-consciousness must discover the own proper independence of its putatively purely negative, illusory object – it must, in other words, discover the organic life of nature as its privileged objective correlate. The underlying conceptual structure which self-consciousness, due to its merely subjective attitude, realizes in a highly inadequate manner, drives self-consciousness beyond itself and brings about an architectonic situation in which it becomes manifest that “Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness” (GW 9, 108) – the famous prelude to the struggle between lord and bondsman. Thus we see how the logic or dialectic of recognition is itself grounded and embedded in a far-reaching ontology of relations of which it is just one – albeit crucial – moment.

These, then, are the factors, grounded in Hegel’s system and its peculiar logic of relations, which make it impossible for the *Phenomenology* to conclude with the transition to self-consciousness – even though, or rather precisely because here for the first time in the work we are confronted with the essential structural components of the concept of Spirit, but then again merely with the *concept* of Spirit. Only when those components have been integrated into a single-self-conscious whole will the concept of Spirit be realized and Spirit itself emerge as it is “in truth”.