

## THE PREFACE TO THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

At the very beginning of the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel presents himself with a challenge: what, he asks is the use of prefaces? If the preface to a work of philosophy is like the prefaces to other works it will, he says, consist of some statement of the author's aims, his motivation for writing and how his book relates to other works on the same subject. But, Hegel says:

In the case of a philosophical work... such an explanation seems not only superfluous but, in view of the nature of the subject-matter, even inappropriate and misleading. For whatever might appropriately be said about philosophy in a preface – say a historical *statement* of the main drift and the point of view, the general content and results, a string of random assertions and assurances about truth – none of this can be accepted as the way in which to expound philosophical truth.<sup>1</sup> (1)<sup>2</sup>

This “inappropriateness” does not, Hegel goes on, lie in the mere fact that the statements to be found in prefaces are general. Philosophy does indeed take place, as Hegel puts it, “in the element of universality” and so the sort of general considerations to be found in prefaces are not inherently inappropriate (1). The trouble lies in the particular kind of generalities that we find there: they are, Hegel complains, not “scientific” (*wissenschaftlich*), they are “notionless” (*begrifflos* – Miller, “uncomprehending”) (1).

Moreover, prefaces, Hegel says, conventionally set philosophical systems up in contrast to one another, and indicate the ways in which the philosophy which is about to be developed in the main body of the book stands in opposition to its predecessors. Again, Hegel finds this unsatisfactory:

The more conventional opinion gets fixated on the antithesis of truth and falsity, the more it tends to expect a given philosophical system to be either accepted or contradicted; and hence it finds only acceptance or rejection. It does not comprehend

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<sup>1</sup> ‘... scheint bei eine philosophischen Schrift nicht nur ueberfluessig, sondern um der Natur der Sache willen sogar unpassend und zweckwidrig zu sein. Denn wie und was Philosophie in einer Vorrede zu sagen schicklich waere, - etwa eine historische *Angabe* der Tendenz und des Standpunkts, des allgemeinen Inhalts und der Resultate, eine Verbindung von hin und her sprechenden Behauptungen und Versicherungen ueber das Wahre-kann nicht fuer die Art und Weise gelten, in der die philosophische Wahrheit darzustellen sei.’ Hegel, G.W.F. Vorrede *Phaenomenologie des Geistes* p.9

<sup>2</sup> Numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraph number of the English translation (translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: O.U.P., 1997))

the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth, but rather sees in it simple disagreements.<sup>3</sup> (2)

In fact, Hegel famously claims, competing philosophies are opposed to each other only as part of a more fundamental, diachronic unity, like stages in the life of a living organism:

These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole.<sup>4</sup> (2)

For these reasons, Hegel believes, the nature of true philosophical science – “*Wissenschaft*” – is incompatible with what is conventionally expected (and, indeed, found) in the prefaces to philosophical works. To conform to those expectations would give rise to the practical absurdity of employing a method which would, in the end, simply demonstrate its own “inability to grasp the truth” (1).

Now on one level the problem is obvious: plainly, Hegel *has* written a preface. Are we to understand that the next forty-five or so pages – forty-five of the densest and most studied pages in the whole history of philosophy – have no other purpose than to signal their own inadequacy, indeed their own superfluousness? Moreover, on what does Hegel base this dismissal of conventional expectations as to a preface’s role? As we have just seen, his criticism involves a series of claims which, as he himself makes clear, run directly counter to received assumptions about the nature of philosophy. But Hegel cannot consistently regard these claims – which are, after all, here being presented in the form of assertions in a preface – as *justified* by the Preface itself.

Nor, in fact, does he. While he claims in the Preface that “The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system thereof”, it is the system itself, Hegel makes

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<sup>3</sup> ‘So fest der Meinung der Gegensatz des Wahren und des Falschen wird, so pflegt sie auch entweder Beistimmung oder Widerspruch gegen ein vorhandenes philosophisches System zu erwarten und in einer Erklarung ueber ein solches nur entweder das eine oder das andere zu sehen. Sie begreift die Verschiedenheit philosophischer Systeme nicht so sehr als die fortschreitende Entwicklung der Wahrheit, als sie in der Verschiedenheit nur den Widerspruch sieht.’ Ibid. p.10

<sup>4</sup> ‘Diese Formen unterscheiden sich nicht nur, sondern verdraengen sich auch als unvertraeglich miteinander. Aber ihre fluessige Natur macht sie zugleich zu Momenten der organischen Einheit, worin sie sich nicht nur nicht widerstreiten, sondern eins so notwendig als der andere ist; und diese gleiche Notwendigkeit macht erst das Leben des Ganzen aus.’ Ibid. p.10

clear, which must provide the justification for that claim: “The inner necessity that knowing should be science lies in its nature, and only the systematic exposition of philosophy itself provides the satisfactory explanation for it.”<sup>5</sup> (5) He makes the same point again in connection with the justification of one of the most famous of all his claims: “In my view, *which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself*, everything turns on grasping and expressing the true not only as *substance* but, equally, as subject.”<sup>6</sup> (17, my emphasis) Should we not, then, simply move on to the main part of the book without further ado? Is not any hesitation, as Hegel puts it elsewhere, the result of trying to swim without going in the water? But, apart from the fact, mentioned earlier, that if all we can do is to jump into the main text, it would seem more than odd that Hegel should have given the *Phenomenology* such an extensive preface, there is another ground for hesitation.

One is entitled to have reservations about the *kind* of justification that is involved here. Imagine that one is considering taking a certain step and being told that, though that step cannot now be justified, nevertheless, once it has been taken, one will be able to see to one’s satisfaction that it was justified. Even if we accept that we would in the future, having taken the step, come to *believe* that the step was justified, would it be right for us to treat the step as justifiable now? Perhaps I should distrust my future belief. A member of a religious cult might tell me, for example, that, though I’m sceptical about it now, if I only commit myself wholeheartedly to the cult, participate in its rituals – diet, chanting, communal living and so on – I will come to think exactly as he does. But the fact that I believe him might well make me *less*, not more, likely to let myself in for what would be involved in joining the group – the members of the cult strike me as being brainwashed; they have lost their critical faculties on the way to nirvana. The issue, it seems, is the *standards* involved in justification: it isn’t clear that a change in them is bound to be a change for the better. I should distrust not only my future belief that the step I will have taken is justified, but also my future belief that the standards by which I will then justify that step are superior to the ones I now have. The

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Die innere Notwendigkeit, daß das Wissen Wissenschaft sei, liegt in seiner Natur, und die befriedigende Erklärung hierüber ist allein die Darstellung der Philosophie selbst.’ Ibid. p.12

<sup>6</sup> ‘Es kommt nach meiner Einsicht, welche sich nur durch die Darstellung des Systems selbst rechtfertigen muß, alles darauf an, das Wahre nicht als *Substanz*, sondern eben so sehr als *Subjekt* aufzufassen und auszudrücken.’ Ibid. p.19

pertinence of these questions to Hegel's philosophy is evident: Hegel is asking for the employment of a certain method in philosophy, yet he appears to be postponing its justification to a point at which this method is already in play. I shall return to this issue, but, first, I should like to make a suggestion regarding the nature of interpretation.

I would like to introduce a distinction between two kinds of interpretation, which I shall call "reconstruction" and "elucidation", and, on that basis, suggest that it is possible, to some extent at least, to understand Hegel's system "from the outside" without violation of the principle that participation in the system is indispensable to its justification. Moreover my account offers a role for the Preface to the *Phenomenology* – other than simply that of sawing through the branch it is sitting on.

*Reconstruction*, on my definition, is the attempt to make an object of interpretation intelligible by presenting a (presumably more perspicuous) version that is equivalent to the original. Perhaps the plainest example of reconstruction comes when an informal argument is represented in formal or mathematical terms. In that case we can see the validity (or otherwise) of the argument in question because we can see the validity of its representation and because we accept its accuracy *as* a representation. I think that there is a tendency among analytical philosophers to assume that all interpretation is reconstruction. But that is not so: we can also explain objects of interpretation in ways that do not amount to presenting equivalents to them, to describe them without purporting to substitute for them. This is what I understand by *elucidation*. Nowhere is the role of interpretation as elucidation more apparent than in the case of aesthetic appreciation: to interpret a poem, a novel or a piece of music can never be equivalent to reading or hearing the object itself. But nor does it mean that there is nothing to be said: we can indeed ask questions like: how does the poet achieve the effect of melancholy?, why does the novel's hero seem comic but not ridiculous?, and so on. But the answers to such questions, however accurate, however comprehensive, can never *do duty* for the text itself.

In general, the reason for the discrepancy between the two kinds of interpretation seems to be this: for reconstruction to be possible there must be some sort of homogeneity between the interpretation and its object. Though we *can* describe the character of works of

art, such description is not homogeneous with the experience of art in such a way that it could be said to be an equivalent to or substitute for it. Now it is generally assumed that a philosophical text and its commentary are homogeneous: if the content of a philosophical text is an *argument* then it can be re-expressed in the form of another argument by another philosopher. Argument (in the common understanding of the term) is essentially exoteric – if an argument can be understood then it can be communicated fully adequately, for the standards for its validity are independent of the particular context in which it is presented.

If this distinction is plausible, it suggests a way in which the problem with which we started can be resolved. We might take Hegel's point to be as follows: whatever is said *about* the *Wissenschaft* in a Preface cannot substitute for the *Wissenschaft*, but it can elucidate what it is that the *Wissenschaft* is purporting to do and even, to some degree, how it is to do it. On this account, the *Wissenschaft* would not be an exoteric argument in the common sense of "argument" – representable or translatable without loss outside its own context – but nor would it be wholly esoteric – tied so closely to that original context that nothing could be said about it. To do philosophy in the full Hegelian sense of "*Wissenschaft*" would mean to participate in philosophical understanding and this understanding is *not* something exoteric, something that "every competent speaker" (the slave in any possible market-place) can take for granted. Why does Hegel take this view and what are its consequences? It is on these questions that the Preface has most to say to enlighten us.

In paragraph 25 Hegel begins a more detailed account of what is involved in the philosophical *Wissenschaft*:

That the true is actual only as system, or that substance is essentially subject, is expressed in the representation of the Absolute as *Geist* – the most sublime notion and the one which belongs to the modern age and its religion. The *geistig* alone is the actual; it is essence, or that which has being in itself; it is that which relates itself to itself and is determinate, it is other-being and being-for-itself, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is in and for itself. But this being-in-and-for-itself is at first only for us, or in itself, it is *geistig* substance. It must also be this for itself, it must be the knowledge of the *geistig* and the knowledge of itself as *Geist*, that is, it must be an object to itself, but, just as immediately, as an *aufgehobener* object, reflected into itself. It is for itself only for us insofar as its *geistig* content is generated by itself. But, insofar as it is also for itself for its own self, this self-generation, the pure notion, is for it the objective element in

which it has its existence, and it is in this way, in its existence for itself, an object reflected into itself. The *Geist* that, so developed, knows itself as *Geist*, is *Wissenschaft*; *Wissenschaft* is its actuality and the realm which it builds for itself in its own element.<sup>7</sup>

As is so very often the case, however, Hegel's explanations here themselves appear to stand in need of explanation. In part, of course, this must be due to the fact that the audience whom he was addressing had a quite different conceptual background to our own. But, even in his own time, Hegel met with the most varied understandings, so we may suppose that there is more to it than that. Let us take the first sentence of the quoted passage. There Hegel says that the representation of the Absolute as *Geist* expresses "that the true is actual only as a system *or* that substance is essentially subject"; that is, he appears to be saying that these two claims are equivalent. Yet, at first sight, they appear to be claims of a quite different order: the claim that the true is actual only as a system appears to be a claim about the method of philosophical argument and the form of philosophical discourse, while the claim about the nature of substance, with its echoes of Spinoza, seems plainly to stand at the level of general metaphysics.

What follows is equally problematic. Here Hegel is using the terminology of the *an sich* and the *für sich* – in itself and for itself – to say something about the nature of *Geist*. These crucial concepts would also seem to have both an ontological and an epistemological dimension – and this is not surprising, for so does Kant's distinction between "appearances" and things "in themselves" ("*an sich*") from which, surely, Hegel's contrast derives. For Kant, the thing in itself is, of course, what cannot be known (an epistemological characteristic). But it is also what has a being independent of other entities (an ontological characteristic) in

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<sup>7</sup> 'Daß das Wahre nur als System wirklich, oder daß die Substanz wesentlich Subjekt ist, ist in der Vorstellung ausgedrückt, welche das Absoluten als *Geist* ausspricht- der erhabenste Begriff, und der der neuern Zeit und ihrer Religion angehört. Das Geistige allein ist das *Wirkliche*; es ist das Wesen oder *Ansichseiende*,- das sich *Verhaltende* und *Bestimmte*, das *Anderssein* und *Fürsichsein*- und [das] in dieser Bestimmtheit oder seinem Außersichsein in sich selbst Bleibende;- oder es ist *an und für sich*.- Dies Anundfürsichsein aber ist es erst für uns oder *an sich*, es ist die geistige *Substanz*. Es muß dies auch *für sich selbst*, muß das Wissen von dem Geistigen und das Wissen von sich als dem Geiste sein, d.h., es muß sich als *Gegenstand* sein, aber eben so unmittelbar als aufgehobener, in sich reflektierter Gegenstand. Er ist *für sich* nur für uns, insofern sein geistiger Inhalt durch ihn selbst erzeugt ist; insofern er aber auch für sich, selbst für sich ist, so ist dieses Selbsterzeugen, der reine Begriff, ihm zugleich das gegenständliche Element, worin er sein Dasein hat, und er ist auf diese Weise in seinem Dasein für sich selbst in sich reflektierter Gegenstand.- Der Geist, der sich so entwickelt als Geist weiß, ist die *Wissenschaft*. Sie ist seine Wirklichkeit und das Reich, das er sich in seinem eigenen Elemente erbaut.' Ibid. p.24

contrast to appearances, which cannot be said to be except *for* a consciousness (whose *esse* is *percipi*). Indeed, for Kant, things in themselves have the epistemological characteristic that they have (namely, unknowability) just in virtue of their ontological character of completely independent being. To complicate matters further, there appears to be another epistemological distinction in play in Hegel's text, however: not that between what can be known and what cannot, but that between the way things are and the way things seem. This, it should be noted, was not at all Kant's distinction between appearances and things in themselves: the thing in itself, for Kant, is not the straight stick in contrast to the bent appearance of it – our knowledge that the stick really is straight is, for Kant, as much a matter of appearance as the bent presentation of it of which we are immediately conscious. But, in describing the domain of *Geist* in itself as “essence”, Hegel suggests just this contrast between the way things are and the way they seem to be: *Geist* is a truer kind of reality.

*Geist*, Hegel is claiming, has both the character of being in itself and of being for itself. Clearly, then, these are not (as the Kantian contrast might lead one to think) mutually exclusive properties. The point, I suggest, is this: to be *for* something is not so much to be ontologically dependent on that something for its being as to be capable of being “given” to it. We must be careful here – I have put the word “given” in inverted commas – about trying to ask too closely what “givenness” is for Hegel. If we say, for example, that to be “given” is to be an item in awareness, or an object of consciousness, we shall, I am sure, be going too far: to specify in this way would be to restrict being “for” to an unjustified degree – we have no right to assume that when Hegel talks about something being “for” something else what is at issue is what we would call an “object” or that its givenness amounts to what we would call “consciousness”.

When we come to look at the paragraph again it is apparent that even the account I have given so far is still something of an oversimplification: *Geist* (whatever it is) is both in and for itself, but it is so, Hegel says, only for us, that is, though it has the power or potential to be in and for itself for itself, that is not yet the same thing as being in and for itself for itself. It is not, Hegel seems to be saying, as if being in and for itself is a characteristic which

*Geist* only acquires subsequently; it already has it, but only as a characteristic in itself.<sup>8</sup> *Geist* must become “for itself for its own self”, Hegel goes on, that is, “an object to itself, but, just as immediately, as an *aufgehobener* object, reflected into itself”. Here the words “*aufgehoben*” and “reflected” are difficult. Elsewhere (in the *Encyclopedia*) Hegel explains what he means by *Aufhebung* in terms of the twin senses of removing and preserving. Something of that idea is conveyed by the English “set aside”, though that lacks the further German sense of elevation – when one crosses a border, the barrier is, in Germany, literally “*aufgehoben*”. At any rate, the everyday associations hardly seem helpful: to be *aufgehoben*, to be “reflected” seems to be just to have whatever kind of internal structure something has to have for its nature to be present to itself.

To the extent that *we* regard its *geistig* content as self-developed, *Geist* is in and for itself for us; *Geist* can become in and for itself for itself, Hegel says, insofar as “this self-generation, the pure *Begriff*, is for it the objective element in which it has its existence... The *Geist* that, so developed, knows itself as *Geist* is *Wissenschaft*; *Wissenschaft* is its actuality and the realm which it builds for itself in its own element”. Now we come to a crucial point. For it is this developed stage of *Geist* – “pure self-recognition in absolute otherness, this ether as such” – which, Hegel says, represents philosophy’s presupposition: “The beginning of philosophy presupposes or requires that consciousness should dwell in this element”<sup>9</sup> (26).

So let me resume the story so far. Hegel’s claim about the distinctiveness of his philosophical method comes down, he says, to a claim about the Absolute as *Geist*. *Geist* is “in and for itself” – that is to say, it has a complex structure involving both determinacy and givenness to itself – but it is this, initially, only “for us”. *We* know (or, rather, since “know” appears to be too strong a word, it is given to us) that this is *Geist*’s nature; but it is not given to *Geist* itself. It is only when that step has been attained – that *Geist* is in and for itself not only for us but for itself – that the element of *Wissenschaft*, “this self-generation, the pure *Begriff*” (25), is present. This is the presupposition of philosophy, Hegel claims.

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<sup>8</sup> This, at least, makes it apparent that being for itself can’t be equated with consciousness in any simple way: to be self-aware at all, surely, is to be aware *that* one is self-aware.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Der Anfang der Philosophie macht die Voraussetzung oder Forderung, daß das Bewußtsein sich in diesem *Elemente* befinde.’ Ibid. p.24



Is this, then, the condition which must be fulfilled before one can commence the *Phenomenology of Spirit*? And, if so, by what right do we assume that it is so? Once again, unfortunately, the answer is not at all simple. It is indeed true, Hegel goes on to say in paragraph 26, that “*Wissenschaft* on its part requires that self-consciousness should have raised itself into this ether in order to be able to live with *Wissenschaft* and in *Wissenschaft*”<sup>10</sup> (26), but that does not mean that *Wissenschaft* and consciousness are in direct correspondence to one another. On the contrary, the two appear to be opposed:

The situation in which consciousness knows itself to be at home is for *Wissenschaft* one marked by the absence of *Geist*. Conversely, the element of *Wissenschaft* is for consciousness a remote beyond in which it no longer possesses itself. (26)

This separation between individual and *Wissenschaft* is a deficiency which requires a remedy. Consciousness, as independent and immediate, must be initiated into *Wissenschaft* – the particular individual has, as Hegel puts it “the right to demand that *Wissenschaft* should at least provide him with the ladder to this standpoint, should show him the standpoint within himself”<sup>11</sup> (26). However, the apparent opposition between individual and *Wissenschaft* should not be understood just as an inadequacy on the individual’s part – there is also something which *Wissenschaft* itself is said to lack:

*Wissenschaft* must therefore unite this element of self-certainty [the characteristic of individual consciousness – M.R.] with itself, or rather show *that* and *how* this element belongs to it. So long as *Wissenschaft* lacks this actual dimension, it is only the content as the in-itself, the purpose that is as yet something inward, not yet *Geist*, but only *geistige* substance. This in-itself has to express itself outwardly and become for itself, and this means simply that it has to posit [*setzen*] self-consciousness as one with itself.<sup>12</sup>(26)

While consciousness must be initiated into *Wissenschaft*, *Wissenschaft* too must be

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Die Wissenschaft verlangt von ihrer Seite an das Selbstbewußtsein, daß er in diesen Äther sich erhoben habe, um mit ihr und in ihr leben zu können und zu leben.’ Ibid p.25

<sup>11</sup> ‘Ugekehrt ht das Individuum das Recht zu fordern, daß die Wissenschaft ihm die Leiter wenigstens zu diesem Standpunkte reiche, ihm in ihm selbst denselben aufzeige.’ Ibid p.25

<sup>12</sup> ‘Sie hat darum solches Element mit ihr zu vereinigen oder vielmehr zu zeigen, daß und wie ers ihr selbst angehört. Als solche Wirklichkeit entbehrend ist sie nur der Inhalt als das *Ansich*, der *Zweck*, der erst noch ein *Immres*, nicht als Geist, nur erst geistige Substanz ist. Dies *Ansich* hat sich zu äußern und *für sich* selbst zu werden, dies heißt nichts anders als: dasselbe ha das Selbstbewußtsein als eins mit sich zu setzen.’ Ibid p25-6

completed, given a dimension of actuality, and this, Hegel says, is the task of the *Phenomenology*:

It is this coming-to-be of *Wissenschaft* as such or of knowledge that is presented in this *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>13</sup> (27)

The two tasks go together: to initiate consciousness into *Wissenschaft* is to complete *Wissenschaft*. But to carry out the initiation is itself a form of *Wissenschaft*: the *Wissenschaft* of “experience” (36). In this context the importance of the distinction made earlier, between the nature of *Geist* as in and for itself for itself and of *Geist* as in and for itself for us, finally emerges, in my opinion. For, if it is indeed the case that *Geist* has the character of being in and for itself, then there is a sense in which the element of *Wissenschaft* can be said already to obtain – albeit not completely. Thus the act of initiating the individual into *Wissenschaft* is, at the same time, the completion of the self-realization of *Wissenschaft*. So the apparent paradox – that the initiation of consciousness into *Wissenschaft* is itself a form of *Wissenschaft* – turns out not necessarily to involve a vicious circle at all. It does, however, make two presuppositions:

- (1) That we can justify the claim that *Wissenschaft* does obtain – even though in a not fully self-realized form
- (2) That this already attained *Wissenschaft* is – again, in some sense – already *available* to the individual self-consciousness, to make use of as necessary.

With regard to these requirements, it is worth recalling Hegel’s expression in paragraph 26: the individual has the right that *Wissenschaft* should “show him the ladder to this standpoint” or, as Hegel then puts it, extremely significantly, “show him this standpoint *within himself*” (my emphasis). Like the Platonic *anamnesis*, the Hegelian *Wissenschaft*

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Dies Werden der *Wissenschaft überhaupt* oder des *Wissens* ist es, was diese *Phänomenologie* des Geistes darstellt.’ Ibid p26

initiates the individual by recalling to him something which, at one level, is already in his possession.

To achieve this it is necessary to present *to* the individual the way in which *Wissenschaft* has been attained by what Hegel calls the “universal individual”, namely, “self-conscious *Geist*”. What the individual (the individual in the ordinary sense of ourselves as particular persons) has to deal with, Hegel says, “is the already acquired property of universal *Geist*, which constitutes the substance of the individual and hence appears externally to him as his inorganic [by which Hegel means “ideal” or “spiritual” not inertly material] nature”<sup>14</sup> (28). For this reason, *Bildung* – the formative education of the individual, which initiates him (or her) into *Wissenschaft* – consists in the individual appropriating this “inorganic nature” for him or herself.<sup>15</sup>

The individual (the particular individual) recapitulates what *Geist* has achieved, but it not in exactly the same way as *Geist* did in originally achieving it.<sup>16</sup> The development of *Geist* has been such that the content of *Wissenschaft* is now “a property of the substance” (29) – it is already something “recollected in itself”, ready to be transformed into the form of being for itself – and this gives the *Phenomenology* its characteristic, peculiar structure.<sup>17</sup>(30)

What is present but requires transformation, Hegel says, is “representation [*Vorstellung*] and acquaintance with the forms”<sup>18</sup> (30). The “acquired property” of *Geist* –

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Dieses vergangne Dasein ist bereits erworbnes Eigentum des allgemeinen Geistes, der die Substanz des Individuums und so ihm äußerlich erscheinend seine unorganische Natur ausmacht.’ Ibid. p.27

<sup>15</sup> ‘...regarded from the side of the individual, consists in his acquiring what thus lies at hand, absorbing his inorganic nature, and taking possession of it for himself.’ (28) (‘Die Bildung in dieser Rücksicht besteht, von der Seite des Individuums aus betrachtet, darin, daß es dies Vorhande erwerbe, seine unorganische Natur in sich zehre und für sich in Besitz nehme.’ Ibid. p.27)

<sup>16</sup> ‘...since all this has been in itself completed; the content is already the actuality reduced to a possibility, its immediacy overcome, and the embodied shape reduced to abbreviated simple thought-determinations. (29) ???’

<sup>17</sup> At this stage it has, indeed, expressed itself in relation to the individual; but such a relation to the self is, Hegel says, only an immediate one: “The existence that has been taken back into substance has only been immediately transposed into the element of the self through that first negation.” (30) (‘Das in die Substanz zurückgenommene Dasein ist durch jene erste Negation nur erst *unmittelbar* in das Element des Selbst versetzt...’ Ibid p.28)

<sup>18</sup> ‘...die *Vorstellung* und die *Bekanntschaft* mit den Formen.’ Ibid p.28

namely, that it has reached a point at which development, so far as existence (*Dasein*) is concerned, is complete – is, Hegel says, still limited, for it

...has the same character of uncomprehended immediacy, of passive indifference, as existence itself; existence has thus merely passed over into *Vorstellung* [representation]. At the same time it is thus something familiar, something with which the existent *Geist* is finished and done, so that it is no longer active or really interested in it.<sup>19</sup>(30)

When we look at it from the point of view of the individual, the completed development of *Geist* thus expresses itself as a kind of familiarity, at the level of what Hegel calls representation. But this is *not* enough for *Geist* to fully comprehend itself, not enough for *Wissenschaft*. For, in general, says Hegel, what we are familiar or acquainted with we do not therefore recognise or know (31). For this reason, true knowing both draws on, but is also directed against, such acquaintance:

If the activity [of *Geist*] that has finished with existence is only the movement of the particular, not self-comprehending *Geist*, knowing, on the other hand, is directed against the *Vorstellung* thus formed, against this acquaintance; knowing is the activity of the universal self, the concern of thought.<sup>20</sup>(30)

It is time now to resume what this examination has told us about the task of the *Phenomenology* and to draw some conclusions about the nature of Hegel's project.

What we have seen is that Hegel's distrust of prefaces and introductions rests on a conception of philosophical method which itself, in turn, derives from a metaphysical understanding – of the need to conceive “substance” as “subject” or “the Absolute” as “*Geist*”. The new *Wissenschaft* which this implies is not arbitrary (that is why it cannot just take issue with whatever philosophical conception seems to be of greatest contemporary force, in the way which, Hegel thinks, is customary in prefaces). Nor is it presuppositionless. What it presupposes, however, is not something like a proposition, granted for the sake of

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<sup>19</sup> ‘...hat also noch denselben Charakter unbegriffner Unmittelbarkeit, unbewegter Gleichgültigkeit wie das Dasein selbst; dieses ist so nur in die *Vorstellung* übergegangen.- Zugleich ist es damit ein *Bekanntes*, ein solches, mit dem der daseiende Geist fertig geworden, worin daher seine Tätigkeit und somit sein Interesse nicht mehr ist.’ Ibid. p.28

<sup>20</sup> ‘Wenn die Tätigkeit, die mit dem Dasein fertig wird, selbst nur die Bewegung des besondern, sich nicht begreifenden Geistes ist, so ist dagegen das Wissen gegen die hiedurch zu Stande gekommene Vorstellung, gegen dies Bekanntsein gerichtet; es ist Tun des *allgemeinen Selbsts* und das Interesse des *Denkens*.’ Ibid. p.28

argument, but something historical: the attainment by *Geist* of a certain historical stage. But this stage of “being in and for itself” has been attained by *Geist* only “in itself” – it requires completion. So the activity of initiating consciousness into *Wissenschaft* (which presupposes that consciousness possesses *Wissenschaft* in the form of *Vorstellung* – that it is “acquainted” with it) is, at the same time, the way in which *Geist* completes its own self-understanding.

All of which leads me to three conclusions about the nature of the work to come.

- (1) First, the *Phenomenology*, as an employment of *Wissenschaft* at the same time as an initiation into it, involves some discontinuity between what it presents and what have traditionally been understood as “arguments” by philosophers elsewhere in the Western philosophical tradition.
- (2) The *Phenomenology* is *historical* in that the initiation of consciousness into *Wissenschaft* involves the recapitulation of the stages of *Geist*’s own development. But it is certainly not history in any way in which the historian understands it; nor, even, is it “philosophical history” of the kind described (and practised) in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Although Hegel does refer to events and epochs (though how far is, again, not wholly clear) the progress of the *Phenomenology* does not follow a simple chronological sequence.
- (3) Finally, we are faced with the question: is the *Phenomenology* an exercise in the theory of knowledge? According to Hegel, the *Phenomenology*’s subject-matter is the science of the experience of consciousness. But – though surely there must be some overlap – is this what we would understand by epistemology? The question is complex, for there is no single understanding among philosophers of what epistemology is. However, *prima facie*, at least, an account of the development of

consciousness seems to be something different from either an analytic examination of the contents of our consciousness to see which amongst them could count as certain or a transcendental attempt to move from the consciousness we do, actually, have to what are its “conditions of possibility”. How, we might ask ourselves, does the enterprise of the *Phenomenology* compare with what has traditionally been epistemology’s subject-matter?

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