

## HEGEL'S PREFACE TO THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

by Alfredo Lucero-Montaña

Hegel wrote, as it is well known, the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Spirit* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1977] after the rest —where it clearly refers to the progressive manifestation of spirit as having already taken place. The Preface can be seen as an introduction to his entire system. Of course, it is the whole *Phenomenology*, and not merely its Preface, that serves as an introduction to the whole of the Hegelian system. But this does not mean that the *Phenomenology* is simply a propaedeutic dissertation of the whole system; it is the work where the spirit has been moving toward a comprehension of itself in 'Science.'

Here the concept of 'philosophical science' finds its justification. Hegel has presented the method capable of penetrating to the interior of reality, rather than standing outside of it and inferring what that interior must be. He has sought to come to terms with reality's only *locus* of manifestation, that is, consciousness, where he has explored the 'logic' of reality's self-revelation to consciousness. In other words, if the *Phenomenology* may be seen as an 'introduction' to the Hegelian system (the first part of the system), and it plays an active role throughout the system; by the same token, we can acknowledge the active role of the Preface throughout the *Phenomenology*.

Hegel, as he begins to write, poses a question: can a Preface be written at all? Here, we must understand, he is speaking of the preface to a philosophy —to philosophy itself. The question then becomes, can philosophy be presented any other way than philosophy, that is, is it possible to 'talk about' philosophy or only to 'do' it? If the latter, then there is no 'preface-to' philosophy, there is only doing it. If the former, then there is an immediate danger in attempting to write a preface; the danger that it will seem possible to speak of the conclusions reached as they had meaning apart from the way of arriving at them (para 1).

A second danger is that a preface will attempt to enumerate the parts of the endeavor in a static way (analysis), and thus fail to grasp the dynamic interrelationship of all the parts to each

other (synthesis); nor can synthesis simply follow upon analysis, if it did, both would be external to the internal unity of what is developing.

And a third danger is when a preface will seek to show how this philosophical approach differs from other approaches to the same subject matter. In doing so it introduces an alien interest to the search of truth; philosophies are presented as pursuits of truth 'in-order-that', and hence truth is relegated to a subordinate role. It becomes a question of simply distinguishing the diversity as evidence that they are contradictory (true/ false), and not comprehending the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive development of truth. The unity of truth, Hegel maintains, is organic, and each moment of it's developing —although apparently opposed to another as the true and the false —is necessary to the whole. Thus, internal contradiction is essential to the very 'dialectic' of knowing (para 2).

If we take the Preface as a prologue, we can say that it gives an explanation of why the phenomenological process is going to be so difficult. There can be no taking for granted that we do know, nor that we know what it is to know. What the Preface sets out clearly is what characterizes knowing —'Science'. The question then becomes: 'When is philosophy 'Science'?' Here it is important to note in the Preface the insistence on the rigorousness of the philosophical enterprise. Philosophy cannot be regarded either as mere romantic intuition nor as common-sense.

The Preface contains Hegel's conviction that phenomenology introduces the philosophical 'system' by philosophizing; that the outcome will be the gradual working out of what the 'philosophical method' has arrived at in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In other words, that we know only at the end of the process, but the end means 'the result together with the process through which it came about' (para 3). In this context, it will be proper to assert that Hegel's most important contribution to philosophical development is the conceptual rigor which is available only on the level of reason, not on that of understanding —'*feeling* of the essence.' In examining consciousness, Hegel discovers thus an internal necessity in its development.

In the Preface Hegel is concerned with three aspects of the phenomenological procedure: (a) the Absolute as subject; (b) the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness; and (c) the nature of philosophical truth.

(a) The Absolute as subject. It is in the Preface where Hegel makes a claim that only the full development of the system itself will validate: that the identity of consciousness and self-consciousness will make sense only when it is realized that 'everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*' (para 17). What is comprehended and expressed will be the dynamism of self-revealing activity, not merely an objective category. The unity of thought and being consists not in a correspondence of thought with the static being of 'substance,' but in a correspondence of being with the dynamic thought of 'subject.'

This means that substantiality must be conceived as including within itself the dynamic universality proper to 'knowing.' The notion of subject exhibits the same degree of universality concretely, as substance does abstractly. Thus, the 'self-objectification', the 'self-negation' and the 'self-realization', which are recognized as characteristic of consciousness, must be seen as characteristic of what consciousness is conscious *of*. Consciousness is activity; being is activity; and activity is one and the same. In this context the truth is its own becoming —presupposed at the beginning, achieved at the end, but only by going through the whole self-movement. Here Hegel explains the intrinsic nature of consciousness in terms of a process in which subjectivity and substantiality are interrelated.

For Hegel, there is a sense in which what is 'true' does not define what is known, but what is 'known' defines what is true. In this sense there is no knowledge short of total knowledge, and there is no truth short of the totality of what is known. This means that the 'wholeness' is essential to both knowledge and truth, and only the 'divine essence' in its development is whole. For consciousness, what is known will be true only by becoming true in a process of self-determination, which is identical with the process of consciousness coming to know it; only as the 'result' of this process is the 'absolute knowing.'

(b) The unity of consciousness and self-consciousness. In the Preface is also pointed out a problem that the *Phenomenology* has to resolve, to wit, that the consciousness and the self-consciousness are not odds with each other, that a gain in one is not a loss in the other. Hegel asserts that science is a goal to be achieved, but achievable only when consciousness is conscious of itself as spirit, not merely of spirit as substance. That is, science is actualized self-consciousness. Objective consciousness must make the implicit explicit; it must make itself one with self-consciousness, which it can do only as spirit (para 26).

The real work of the *Phenomenology* is to lead 'the individual from his uneducated standpoint to knowledge... in its universal sense, just as it was the universal individual self-conscious Spirit, whose formative education had to be studied.' (para 28). The single individual must go through the same stages in the growth of the 'universal spirit.' This passing through is the process whereby substance as universal spirit gives itself nothing but 'its own acquisition of self-consciousness, the bringing-about of its own becoming and reflection into itself' (ibid).

Another issue in the Preface is that Hegel looks at consciousness as a phenomenon, where as such it has two 'moments': the cognizing (subjectivity) and the cognized (objectivity). As related to each other, each is the negative of the other (antithesis). But what consciousness does not initially realize is that subjectivity and objectivity both designate only what is contained in its 'experience,' and what is contained in experience shares the 'spiritual' nature of experience. 'Consciousness knows and comprehends only what falls within its experience; for what is contained in this is nothing but spiritual substance, and this, too, as *object* of the self' (para 36).

As object to itself, spirit is somehow 'other' in relation to itself. Then, experience is a 'movement' whereby whatever is experienced makes itself 'other' in becoming 'the property of consciousness' (ibid). If knowing is to be an 'identity' of the knowing and known, the dissimilarity (negation) between 'the I and the substance' would seem to be an obstacle to knowing. But, if knowing is, rather, a process of 'identification', then dissimilarity is essentially the moving force as the condition of movement.

(c) The nature of philosophical truth. The movement, which the *Phenomenology* examines as the movement of consciousness on its way to a scientific comprehension of the real,

is a movement of distinguishing self from self (understanding) in order to make possible a return to self (reason). So to speak, the being of reality, like the being of consciousness, is to be a whole, which must articulate itself in order to re-integrate itself. The experience of consciousness—which is a process of recognition of the *an sich*—is the articulation of reality, which re-integrates itself into its wholeness (truth), and vice versa (para 53).

So the function of self-consciousness as 'reason' is to penetrate the heart of self-determining reality as opposed to the 'understanding' which simply imposes order in an external way, and thus 'a table of contents is all that it offers, the content itself it does not offer at all' (ibid). Therefore, only reason can be 'scientific.' As scientific, self-consciousness reason immerses itself in its content, from which it returns back into itself, and thus raised itself to a higher level of 'truth'—of wholeness. In other words, for Hegel truth is a process which generates its own dialectical moments, and as such it is the positive reality which contains its own negation.

In short, the task of the Preface should not be seen as the preliminary working out of the whole Hegelian system and thus the mere justification of the phenomenological method, but rather as Hegel's emphasis on the study of philosophical 'science'. In the Preface we can see Hegel's recapitulation of the whole, where he lets us know that nothing makes sense, unless the reality to be known is an organic totality constituted by a dialectical relationship of 'moments,' that is, the developing of consciousness from sense-certainty to absolute knowing. This is what he means by the 'coming-to-be' of knowledge in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

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