

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SCIENCE OF SUBJECTIVITY

By

Sripad Bhakti Madhava Puri Maharaja, Ph.D.

The importance of the scientific approach to philosophy

I take a very scientific approach toward Hegelian philosophy. This is something Hegel, himself, was quite emphatic about. In fact, it was only because of the scientific nature of Hegel's philosophy that I became at all interested in it, otherwise Western philosophy seemed to me to be lacking any conception, what to speak of a scientific account of consciousness. Of course, consciousness is a major point of concern and subject of intricate analysis in Eastern thought. What led me to an interest in consciousness was the quantum mechanical problem of observation, when consciousness causes the wave function to collapse from a quite universal character to a specific particular value. Anyone familiar with Hegel might recognize that the particularization of the universal is one of the central concerns of his system.

I think it is also significant that in the "Phenomenology of Spirit" of 1807, Hegel identifies himself in the middle of the title page as "Dr. and Professor of Philosophy at Jena, assessor in the Ducal Mineralogical Society and member of other learned societies." Why would Hegel want to specifically identify himself as a mineralogist in authoring a philosophical text? To me the reason is clear - he wanted to emphasize the scientific nature of his work. He is presenting the philosophy of thought and consciousness, but he is doing it in a very scientific way - what he would later present as the Science of Philosophy, or the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences. The Phenomenology is further subtitled, "The Science of the Experience of Consciousness." I think it is an incredibly difficult task to make philosophy a science, but somehow he has made the attempt and to some degree I think he has succeeded.

Kant made a similar attempt at scientifically understanding thought itself. But Kant was caught in the bind of subjectivity. He could not make subjectivity itself the object of thought. In other words he was confined to the finite conception of consciousness or of self. For Kant there is an "I," its thoughts or subjectivity, and what it thinks about - its object. Both "I" and "object" are outside of subjectivity and therefore beyond its reach according to Kant. His whole philosophy is based on what "I think" and is therefore called subjective idealism. In order to come to a proper understanding of reality one has to go beyond the finite "I think" and see that as a mere unit, only one small element in the whole of reality. The "I think" is one finite element of the whole in which there are many such units. Then what is the whole that is made up of such finitudes?



We may infer the whole to be a Universal I that is thinking and that somehow divides itself up into multifarious finite thinking entities. The task of philosophy is to try to take a vague idea like this and develop it scientifically. This would be an advance beyond Kant, but the details of it would require careful exposition. This was Hegel's accomplishment and his contribution to the advancement of philosophy. Basically it was what Albert Einstein would later call the attempt to "understand the mind of God."

The fundamental importance of Thought

There is something that we may also be made aware of that is critically fundamental in understanding Hegel, and the central point as to why Marx and others have failed so completely to comprehend him properly. I would like to emphasize this point because it deserves our full attention and I will try to re-emphasize it continually as we go along. Here it is, plain and simple: Thought.

What is Thought or Thinking? It is the most utilized and least understood - what shall we call it? - "thing" in the world. It is hard to refer to Thought as anything other than thought. This is also significant. Thought does not represent anything. In itself Thought is truly elemental in the sense that it cannot be reduced to anything else. It is simplicity itself, meaning that it is not made up of anything else. It is so simple it is called "abstract." Abstract means in a way to extract or take out everything that is in a thing yet still be left with the barest essence of that thing. This is thought. In this sense, Thought is pure negativity. In other words, if we negate all that is sensuous in a thing and all that is unessential in it we come to the pure thought of the thing.

Because Thought is so naked and simple, because of its mere-ness and bare-ness we feel it is not a big step to say it is hardly worth worrying about at all. It is not even hard to say that it is for all practical purposes nothing, or so ephemeral compared to tangible things that we lose nothing by ignoring it. After all, how can kicking a rock compare to the abstraction of pure negativity? They are hardly mentionable in the same breath!

As a note, I might mention here that the apparent simplicity and indivisibility of Thought and its seeming insignificance in the light of gross phenomena may be considered in comparison with another apparently insignificant and even unobservable entity called an electron. Although its effects can be observed, e.g. an ionized trail in a cloud chamber, an electron can only be inferred from such an observation. Despite its smallness and mere-ness it nonetheless is one of the major building blocks of the universe. To disregard Thought because of its apparent insignificance will be found to be a blunder of catastrophic significance in regard to our ordinary understanding of reality.

The main problem with Marxism or materialism

The neglect of the proper consideration of Thought is the main



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problem. Marx and materialists in general consider thought, pure negativity, to be a phantasm. If thought is a phantasm or epiphenomenon, i.e. an illusion that arises from the interaction of electrons or matter, then what to speak of the movement of thought - that is even less likely to be considered. Neither thought nor its movement is anything real in themselves according to materialists.

Basically, if thought is pure negativity then its movement would also have to involve negativity. Movement itself is change, and change means that whatever is, that is negated. So movement is also in this sense negativity.

The negativity or movement of thought is called Dialectics. We will get into more detail on Dialectics at a latter time. First we are considering why Thought and its movement has come to be disregarded. If we examine Marx's remarks concerning his difference with Hegel, we find in his 2nd Edition of "Capital" the following:

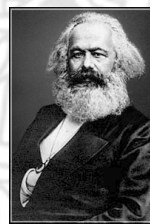
"My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea", he



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even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea". With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought."

Although Marx is not explicitly saying that Thought is just a phantasm here, in effect that is the purport of his remark - from his statement that the "ideal is nothing else than the material world." And this is the whole problem with the Marxian or materialistic interpretation of Hegel. For them everything is substantially present in the world already and whatever happens there is what is really going on and it is simply reflected in something called Mind or thought



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- whatever that may be. This is Marxism: Mind or Thought is insubstantial and does not concern us. Thought, if anything, is merely a reflection of the world and so is identical with it perhaps, but in any case we won't think about that possibility because then we would get into all kinds of problems.

From a more enlightened perspective we might call this stupidity or barbaric, and Hegel was not above referring to such materialistic thinking in this way. Despite Hegel's epithets, however, Marx and others proffered their philosophies to the world and they were eagerly accepted by the ordinary minds of the people, educated and otherwise, for it is basically the viewpoint of ordinary consciousness. We have, for the most part, inherited such philosophy in our modern culture of scientific materialism.

The proper way to learn Hegel

But what actually happened to Thought? Were all the thoughts Hegel had about Thought simply discarded? Were they ever recognized to begin with? Did anyone ever really understand what Hegel was presenting? Certainly Kant started things off in the right direction with his Copernican revolution in recognizing the contribution of Mind or Thought to our observation of objects. Fichte continued basically along the same lines as Kant, attempting to add more unity to Kant's merely juxtaposed concepts of subjectivity and objectivity. Shelling came from a similar mold and tired to ex-

press the unity of the Absolute Whole in terms of indifference - but this could never explain differentiation. When Hegel died it was assumed that Shelling was the only one who could understand and teach what Hegel had given the world. Unfortunately that was decidedly not the case. Hegel's students had recorded what Hegel gave in his lectures, but that was not enough to enable them to counter the charges that were being brought against his teachings, or to stem the rising tide of materialism that would sweep Thought back into the abstract oblivion from which it had come previous to Hegel.

In the same way, it is not enough to simply read and record what is being presented here and expect to make any progress in knowledge. Knowledge is not just the accumulation of information and ideas. If we are not changed by what we learn then how have we learned anything - how have we actually acquired any knowledge? It is required to internalize, actualize or realize what is being presented otherwise it becomes superficial information. That is why it is important to attempt to answer the questions and to involve oneself in what is being presented. Try to reproduce in your own mind of its own determination what is being presented here. Sometimes we may even find that it is possible to answer the questions and not be able to represent Hegel's philosophy on our own. No less than a maturing or development of mind is required for that purpose.

In this regard we may reply to a question that is sometimes asked about presenting Hegel to High School students. Hegel, himself, taught High School and expressed the need for teaching students abstract thinking. However he concluded that prematurely teaching them his philosophy may produce only a feeling of familiarity with the concepts, a mere semblance of knowledge, and thwart any attempt latter in life to actually learn philosophy in the gradual maturity of thought that is required.

What is Thought?

So before we begin studying Hegel we may do well to consider the fundamental significance of Thought and what it is. I am capitalizing Thought to give it special importance - as an absolute element. It is only when we come to recognize that Thought is something real, irreducible and absolutely essential and that however abstract or insubstantial it may seem - we have to deal with it! We have to take it seriously. This is the whole thrust of the Kant-Fichte-Shellling-Hegel period of history. In the history of western civilization that we have received, the study of Thought as Thought was part of early Greek philosophy from whose language we can trace back the origin of our words for logic (logos), idea (idee), phenomena, etc. But even there we find the tendency to fall back into what was considered ordinary thinking - the thought of existence. The thought of thought was extraordinary - something that was considered beyond the domain of the ordinary man. And certainly that is the case even today. We can begin by asking if thought or pure negativity can have anything to do with the world of experience. As soon as

we bring in the word "experience" we automatically drag along another element, viz. consciousness. We cannot have an experience of the world without consciousness. At this point we won't explain in detail why that is, but we know intuitively that it is the case. In fact there are three things that logically come into play in any experience, viz. the experiencer or agent, the experience itself, and the object that is experienced.

This is all just common sense at this point. Eventually we want to be able to scientifically develop and show how all this is necessarily so. We can make the same three-fold logical division for seeing, knowing, thinking, etc. In all these, two elements are subjective and one is objective, viz. the experiencer (agent) and experience are subjective, and only the thing experienced is considered objective. For a certain set of objects, viz. sense objects this is problematical. How does an object in the world produce an effect in a subjective observer? We may call this the problem of thought and being, where thought represents the subjective and being the objective component in this interactive event.

The principle of distinction and inseparability

In order to resolve this problem we have to look more carefully at the situation to make sure we understand what is going on more clearly. Let us take the example of "seeing" as something that may be easier to understand. Between (1) "seeing" and the (2) "thing seen" we may at first think we have two independent things. I have my subjective seeing capacity and there are objects in the world which are subject to my seeing capacity. Are these two really independent? Does it make any sense to speak of "things seen" unless the "seeing" capacity is already operating on them? Can we talk of an experience in such a way that what was experienced is different from the experience of it?

We mean them to be different, their difference is not being denied. But are they independent or separable from one another? Whether we consider knowing, thinking, or whatever subjective activity we may come up with, it cannot be separated from the objective element that it is operating on.

This interdependence of subjective and objective elements is crucial. Basically it is a situation where we have distinct elements inseparably connected to one another. This is not an extraordinary situation. It is rather most commonplace when we think about it. The sunshine is different from the Sun. No one would argue that when the Sun is shining in your room that the Sun is in your room. Distinct they are, but it would not be possible to separate the sunshine from the Sun and still have it be what we call the Sun.

The point we are making is that Reality is not simply a matter of sensuous experience. Thought or conception is intimately tied up with our perception of Reality. As Kant explained, intuitions (perceptions) without conceptions are blind (indeterminate) and conceptions without intuitions are empty. Reality is a composite unity of both.