

HEGEL

HIGHLIGHTS: AN ANNOTATED SELECTION

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New York

1960

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I

CONSCIOUSNESS

Starting now with the initial phase of the six stages of experience which have been named as Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason, Spirit, Religion and Absolute Knowledge, we have first of all Consciousness. This lowest form of experience shows itself in three grades, namely: Sense Certainty, Perception and Force or Understanding. The first grade is that of Sense Certainty. It is the most elementary and in reality the poorest kind of truth. Yet at first it seems to be the richest and most reliable. By sense certainty is meant the report which the senses give to consciousness. I, this particular I, am certain of this tree before me. The I in this case does not deliberate. It merely reports the fact of a tree here and now. The first item for us to note is that the experience at once breaks up into two factors which are not distinct and therefore they are not determined and are not immediate. Neither factor can exist alone. They are mediated the one through the other. The I feels certainty through the other, likewise the other exists through the I. All the elements which constitute the sense-certainty of the fact "I see a tree here and now," can be shown to be universals which are only held together momentarily on account of their relationship. The now is no sooner named than it is already another now. "Here is a tree" with but a turn of the head becomes "a not-tree," and "a not-here." A simple entity of this sort which is neither this nor that, but is constantly vanishing according to its relation is called "A Universal." The "I" seems to be the store house that holds all of these in validity, but this I can be shown to be a Universal also,

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as far as sense-certainty is concerned. For a hundred I's could assert as many distinct verdicts all equally true. Yet, sense-certainty itself remains unaware that its essence is the empty abstraction of pure being. It thinks, on the contrary, that it has to do with solid material and content. This in meagre outline is sense-certainty.

The next movement of consciousness characterized by Hegel is Perception. In Sense-Certainty, we had a series of "acts of apprehending," each act certain of itself—each instantly annulled—as consciousness did nothing more than "merely sense". But in the next phase of the operation of consciousness, where the mind realizes also the fact of its own operation in grasping what the senses furnish, we rise one step in our function to perception. Hegel gives the example of salt, which is white, hard, cubical and of distinct taste. These qualities are kept distinct by the mind and also held together by the mind as characteristic of salt. Thus all the wealth of sense knowledge belongs to perception, but besides there is distinction, negation, and multiplicity. For instance, the mind distinctly negates the fact that these different properties of the salt are isolated and separate. The mind can see them in their multiplicity, yet it holds them in their relationship. To quote Hegel: "In this way, we have in the case of perception as happened in the case of sensuous certainty, the aspect of consciousness being forced back upon itself; but, in the first instance, not in the sense in which this took place in the former case, i.e., not as if the truth of perception fell within it. Rather consciousness is aware that the untruth, that comes out there, falls within it. By knowing this, however, consciousness is able to cancel and supersede this untruth. It distinguishes its apprehension of the truth from the untruth by its perception, corrects this untruth, and, so far as itself takes in hand to make the correction, the truth . . . of perception, certainly falls within its own consciousness. The procedure of consciousness, which we have now to consider, is thus so constituted that it no longer merely perceives but is also conscious of its reflection into self, and

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keeps this apart from the simple apprehension proper." (169)

And further: "These pure determinations appear to express the essential nature itself; but they are merely a self-existence which is fettered at the same time with existence for another. Since, however, both essentially exist in a single unity, we have before us now unconditioned absolute universality; and it is here that consciousness first truly passes into the sphere of Understanding, of Intelligence." (175)

Before proceeding with a consideration of the Understanding, there will be a pause, in order to make a few comments regarding Hegel's characteristic method of treating his theme. It is made at this point because the reader has now been led into the shallow waters at the edge of this ever widening and deepening ocean of thought. He has also experienced Hegel at first hand in the quoted paragraphs. As Hegel advances in this unfoldment, the play of thought becomes more subtle and more intricate. Hence a few words to prepare the way for this journey. As a matter of fact, it is a journey in which one goes no-where. Instead, one stays at home and from that center known as consciousness, attempts an expansion of insight until there is established the realization of free Enlightened Reason. This journey is a long one. It may be said to reach the distance of man's evolutionary span, or the distance between two declarations of the simple statement of "I am". The first is that of the infant, or the infantile mind of primitive man. He vaguely senses the statement "I am", in the mere fact of being alive. The second statement is the "I am", of Enlightenment. This statement of "I am", far from being meagre, holds within it a knowledge of its universality and its universal power. Between these extremes travels the eternal pilgrim—humanity. It is the mission of Philosophy to explain this way. In summarizing Hegel's findings, Dr. W. T. Harris epitomized in words to this effect: "The world is not divine but it has a divine mission to perform in the creation of immortal souls who forever emerge into the consciousness of freedom."

According to Hegel, philosophy portrays this journey of

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expansion. It is accomplished on the ocean of consciousness. The reason Hegel's text is difficult to follow is because he renders a painstaking account of every phase of the movement of mind as it makes this expanse from the meagre affirmation of sense-certainty to the highest efflorescence of Enlightened Reason. He starts with the first ripple on the Ocean of Being. From there, it is as if he pointed out each succeeding ripple, as it arose, swelled to initiate a second—then both collapsed into the Ocean, only to begin again in greater volume. Thus, we have the expanse and the reason for it. This is followed by its augmentation to a second and the reason for it. Then comes the inevitable inadequacy that causes a collapse. So it goes, on and on, to a third, a fourth, a fifth; each time Hegel delineates with elaborate detail, how the mind takes hold of these advancing concepts, establishes them in their positive and negative aspects, and then must needs let them collapse into the great ocean of the unconditioned universal as they prove inadequate to answer the quest which will be the perfect fulfillment for consciousness. All the while, it is consciousness alone with which we deal as it was when we began with sense certainty and perception. These Hegel had characterized. We had seen them collapse and we were left in the unconditioned universal. Here we shall resume our analysis of the journey of consciousness.

Now, in coming to this next phase of Mind, which is Understanding, Hegel says it has an objective counterpart, namely, Force. Force is a unity; the differences are expressions of force. In like manner does understanding explain differences in the unity of itself.

To expand the idea of force as Hegel sees it, and at the same time get a clear example of the dialectical necessity that carries through the whole system which his insight penetrated, let the words of the originator make clear the facts. To quote: "The difference between force proper, withdrawn into itself, and force unfolded and expressed in independent constituent elements would at the same time have no being at all if they had no subsistence; i.e., force would

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have no being, if it did not exist in these opposite ways. But to exist in this way as opposite aspects means nothing else than that both moments are themselves at the same time independent. It is this process we have now to deal with—the process by which both moments get themselves fixed as independent and then cancel their independence again.” (184) More on the same. Says Hegel: “When we thus keep both moments in this immediate unity, it is Understanding to which the conception of force belongs, that is, properly speaking the principle which carries the different moments . . . (as) different. For, *per se*, they are not to be different; the distinction consequently exists only in thought (183) . . . Consciousness takes up a mediated relation to the intervening play of forces into the real and true background of things. The middle term combining the two extremes, understanding and the inner of things, is the explicitly evolved being of force, which is now and henceforth a vanishing process for understanding. Hence it is called Appearance.” (190)

“Within this inner truth, this absolute universal which has got rid of the opposition between universal and particular, and become the object of understanding, is a supersensible world which henceforth opens up as the true world lying beyond the sensuous world which is the world of appearance. Away remote from the changing vanishing present (*Diesseits*) lies the permanent beyond (*Jenseits*) an immanent, inherent reality (*ein Ansich*), which is the first and therefore imperfect manifestation of Reason, i.e., it is merely the pure element where the truth finds its abode and its essential being.

“Our object henceforth has thus the form of a syllogistic inference (*Schluss*), whose extremes are in the inner being of things and understanding, and its middle term the sphere of appearance.” (191)

“The relation of understanding to the inner world through mediation is, however, its own process, by which the inner world will be found to receive fullness of content.”

“The play of forces is what understanding has directly to

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do with; but the real truth for it is the inner world bare and simple. (193-194)

“But change, when planted in the inner reality as it (change) truly is, forthwith is taken up into that (reality) as equally absolute universal difference at peace with itself, and remaining at one with itself. In other words, negation is an essential moment of the universal; and negation or mediation in what is universal is universal difference. This difference is expressed in the law, which is the stable presentment or picture of unstable appearance. The supersensible world is in this way a quiescent ‘kingdom of laws’, no doubt beyond the world of perception—for this exhibits the law only through incessant change—but likewise present in it, and its direct immovable copy or image.

“This kingdom of laws is indeed the truth for understanding; and that truth finds its content in the distinction which lies in the law.” (195)

“So far, however, as it is not *law* in general, but *a law*, it has determinateness within it; and as a result there are found an indeterminate plurality of laws. But this plurality is rather itself a defect; it contradicts the principle of understanding, for which, since it is consciousness of the simple inner being, truth is the inherently universal unity. It must, therefore, let the many laws coalesce into a single law, just as, e.g., the law by which a stone falls, and that by which the heavenly bodies move have been conceived as one law. When the laws thus coincide, however, they lose their specific character. . . . The unification of all laws in universal attraction expresses no further content than just the bare concept of the law itself, a concept which is therein set down as existing. Universal attraction says merely that everything has a constant distinction for anything else. Understanding pretends by that to have found a universal law which gives expression to universal reality as such; but, in point of fact, it has merely found the conception of law itself, although in such a way that it at the same time thereby declares all reality to be in its very nature conformed to law. The idea of universal

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attraction has, therefore, to this extent great importance, that it is directed against that unthinking way of representing reality, to which everything appears in the shape of accident and chance, and for which determinateness, specificity, takes the form of *sensuous independence*.

"In contrast then, with determined law stands universal attraction or the bare conception of law." (196-197)

Hegel goes on to say that in like manner as we see the unity, force, expressing itself in repeated manifestations of force which return to the universal store, so we have in the kingdom of laws the endless process of change which was formerly the play of force, with the rise of appearance constantly coming to be, and as constantly annulled. The specific laws belong to the sphere of appearance, to the sphere of sensible existence. The inner being is the implicit universal out of whose permanence arises universal difference. This thought brings to birth the idea of infinity.

"This bare and simple infinity, or the absolute notion may be called the ultimate nature of life, the soul of the world, the universal life-blood, which courses everywhere, and whose flow is neither disturbed nor checked by any obstructing distinction, but is itself every distinction that arises, as well as that into which all distinctions are dissolved; pulsating within itself, but ever motionless, shaken to its depth, but still at rest. It is self-identical for the distinctions are tautological; they are distinctions that are none." (208)

"Infinite, this absolute unrest of pure self-movement, such that whatever is determined in any way, e.g., as being, is really the opposite of this determinateness—has from the start been no doubt the very soul of all that has gone before; but it is in the inner world that it has come out explicitly and definitely. The world of appearance, or the play of forces shows its operation; but it is in the first instance as Explanation that it comes openly forward. And since it is at length an object for consciousness, and consciousness is aware of it as what it is, consciousness is in this way Self-Consciousness." (209-210)

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"This self identical reality stands, therefore in relation solely to itself. *To Itself*; which means this is an other, to which the relation points; and relation to itself is, more strictly, breaking asunder; in other words, that very self-identity is internal distinction. These sundered factors have, hence, each a separate being of their own; each is an opposite,—of another; and thus with each the other is herein *ipso facto* expressly given; or it is not the opposite of an other, but only the pure opposite; and thus each is therefore, in itself the opposite of itself." (208)

The world of appearance, the play of forces—Law, Understanding cancelling these distinctions in the concept of Infinity which Hegel designates as the absolute unrest of pure self-movement—we have, as stated, here come to consciousness as Self-Consciousness. Hegel says, "In that this notion of infinity is its object, it is thus a consciousness of the distinction as one which at the same time is at once cancelled. Consciousness is for itself and on its own account, it is a distinguishing of what is undistinguished, it is Self-Consciousness. I distinguish myself from myself; and herein I am immediately aware that this factor distinguished from me is not distinguished. I, the self-same being, thrust myself away from myself; but this which is distinguished, which is set up as unlike me, is immediately on its being distinguished no distinction for me. Consciousness of another, of an object in general, is indeed itself necessarily self-consciousness reflected into self; consciousness of self in its otherness. The necessary advance from the previous attitudes of consciousness which found their true content to be a thing, something other than themselves, brings to light this very fact that not merely is consciousness of a thing only possible for a self-consciousness, but that this self-consciousness alone is the truth of those attitudes. But it is only for us (who trace this process) that this truth is actually present; it is not yet so for consciousness immersed in the experience. Self-consciousness has in the first instance become a specific reality on its own account (*für sich*), has come into being for itself; it is

not yet in the form of unity with consciousness in general.” (211-212)

Hegel says, “This curtain (of appearance) therefore hanging before the inner world is withdrawn, and we have here the inner being (the ego) gazing into the inner realms—the vision of the undistinguished self-same reality, which repels itself—affirms itself as a divided and distinguished inner reality, but as one for which at the same time the two factors have immediately no distinction; what we have here is Self-consciousness. It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain, which is to hide the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless we ourselves go behind there, as much in order that we may thereby see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen. But it is clear at the same time that we cannot without more ado go straightway behind there. For this knowledge of what is the truth of the idea of the realm of appearance and of its inner being, is itself only a result arrived at after a long and devious process in the course of which the modes of consciousness, ‘meaning’, ‘perception’, and ‘understanding’ disappear. And it will be equally evident that to get acquainted with what consciousness knows when it is knowing itself, requires us to fetch a still wider compass. . . .” (212)

With this analysis of Consciousness which we traced through the stages of its phases,—(A) Sense-certainty; (B) Perception; (C) Understanding (force, appearance, law, infinitude;)—we are now truly face to face with the second of the major divisions, namely—Self-Consciousness.

Arrived at Self-Consciousness, let us see it unfold—under Hegel’s guidance.