

## **“Consciousness in Its Own Self Provides Its Own Standard”. Hegel and the Spirit as a Process of Thinking**



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**Abstract:** Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* develops not only the idea of absolute knowledge but also the notion of an inner criterion [Maßstab] of the spirit. The inner criterion or norm of knowledge is what, in the end of the speculative process, appears as the form of absolute knowledge. Experience and inner criterion are responsible for the development of the consciousness that has to become itself. Becoming and absolute, temporality and timelessness are the substance that becomes and is subject. The actuality of this method of analysis of spirit will be shown and discussed in this essay.

**Keywords:** Subject; substance; fluidity; processuality; historicity; general validity; absolute knowledge; spirit; Hegel.

### **Introduction**

In the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel formulates not only the idea of the spirit step by step developing absolute knowledge, but also the notion of an inner standard or criterion [Maßstab] of the spirit that guides the developing consciousness that has not yet grasped the essence of the idea of absolute knowledge<sup>1</sup>. The substance that becomes, and at the same time, is the subject (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 59), encompasses becoming and the absolute, temporality and timelessness.

The present contribution strives to illuminate some of those aspects of the analysis of spirit that are still current and relevant today. Hegel’s philosophical thoughts revolve around concretion, experience, facticity, historicity as well as around general validity. It is a world of concrete phenomena that leads to the absolute knowledge. Today’s philosophy would indeed choose another expression instead of absolute knowledge but its intended content is clearly actual, as will be shown in this contribution. The history of the development of the experience of consciousness is to be considered both in terms of individual history and the history of humanity. It is an invented history – it has never happened, at any time, and it will never happen (Pöggeler 1973). As we know, Hegel often

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1 Many thanks to Sigrid Gerger for the revision of this contribution.

speaks in concretely vague riddles, when guiding the intelligible process of thinking by necessary steps, as Hegel emphasises, from one form to another. The cultural shapes encountered in history, to which Hegel alludes sometimes more explicitly, sometimes more covertly, are in my view contingent, as the shapes reflect the range of Hegel's knowledge and historical experience, which in return is determined by the range of knowledge that was accessible during Hegel's lifetime. Research has made great efforts to illuminate the backgrounds to which Hegel alluded (Siep 2014; Stekeler-Weithofer 2014). The order of the concrete shapes is of systematic interest but also, to a certain extent, arbitrarily chosen. If Hegel were writing his *Phenomenology* today, other concrete shapes would undoubtedly appear to serve step by step to transform concrete immediate experience into knowledge of higher order.

The required order of shapes is a necessity with regard to the systematicity, as far as the mental capacity is constantly condensing and gaining more complexity. A capacity that begins as sensuous-certainty, then turns into perception, intellect and into self-consciousness and reason, in order to finally be able to abandon the shapes of consciousness and, with the help of the spirit, makes shapes of the world appear (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 240). The concept in the Hegelian sense can only be developed in the concrete, but the developed concept as a concept in an empathic sense, the self-consciousness as self-consciousness, the spirit as spirit are the ones that carry the necessity of thinking. It is an inner standard and norm [*Maßstab*], as Hegel calls it, that constantly checks the identities of concept and objective in order to correct and to mediate the immediate conviction of sensuous certainty and to develop new immediacies, as happens with all shapes until they become absolute knowledge (see Okazaki 2021).

Reaching absolute knowledge, the technique of critical self-reflection is at its peak of density and complexity as well as at its peak of fluidity. It is sublation [*Aufhebung*] in its threefold sense and preservation of the self. The substance, the subject, is fluidity, movement in its contents and in its executions to the same extent as it is law-giving, reliability and validity in thinking and so makes time compatibly incompatible with space.

If I call Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* an *Entwicklungsroman* (novel of development), I wouldn't be the first one to do so (for a broad discussion of this topic see Lerro 2017, 50–70). One might now expect that the differences and similarities with the literary genre of the *Entwicklungsroman* will be the subject of this article. However, this is not my intention. Instead, I take particular interest in Hegel's methodology in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which serves as an example of a process of development. Thus, not only should one study in depth Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a historical document, but it is even more important to understand the course of his analysis in order to apply it to one's own way of thinking. Hegel was not the first, but is part of a long tradition of understanding philosophy and literature as instruments that encourage individuals to enlighten themselves, to become better versions of themselves and to find the way to their true selves, so that they are able to overcome short-sited momentous insights and to

develop an understanding of the bigger picture. Writing is a process of shaping a sense of the self, but this shaping goes hand in hand with the aspiration to take one’s readers along for the trip, because writers want to have an impact – they want to make a difference and they want to change the world they live in. Kant and the philosophers who followed Kant enthusiastically explored the subject and, in particular, the acting subject.

While Kant is concerned with freedom and spontaneity, which must be grasped and comprehended on one’s own, Johann Gottlieb Fichte is the philosopher who brings the *Doctrine of Science* [*Wissenschaftslehre*] to his audience again and again preserving and at the same time transforming the one idea of *Wissenschaftslehre* in new presentations and in new and different manners, whenever he taught the *Wissenschaftslehre* (Jena, Erlangen, and Berlin). The essence of the *Doctrine of Science* is to grasp the generating of thinking in the same process of the emergence of thought and to understand and comprehend the spirit’s actions in its systematic contextuality. As early as the drafting of the first printed version of the *Doctrine of Science*, Fichte’s gaze shifts to what will then become the *Doctrine of Science Novo Methodo*, that is the story of the conditions of the self-consciousness to successively unfold starting from a simple conception of the I.

Schelling was the first to write a history of the development of consciousness and self-consciousness in *The System of Transcendental Idealism* published in 1800. Hegel followed suit when he formulated the history of the consciousness’ experience in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807.

Hegel criticizes Fichte above all for not going beyond mere reflection. This criticism can only refer to Fichte’s publications, including the *Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Science* of 1794/95, the *Foundations of Natural Right* of 1796 and 1797 the *System of the Doctrine of Ethics* published in 1798. Aside from the fact that the allegation of a non-speculative and mere philosophy of reflection does not do justice to Fichte’s method, there is one element to be highlighted that is obviously on Hegel’s mind: the thinking faculty, that searches to enlighten itself, is guided by a methodology, a language game that Fichte describes as the enlightenment of the philosophising intellect as the second series of thinking – that is a more sophisticated level of thinking than the thinking of the so-called general faculty of common sense [*gemeiner Menschenverstand*] as the first level of thinking. To speak about a first series of common sense that was clarified, reflected, and thought through by a second series of the philosopher was virulent regarding Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi.

Whatever the determination of the relationship between these two series and levels of thinking in the *Doctrine of Science*, and whatever its significance to the later *Doctrine of Science* and its introductions dealing with the *Thatsachen des Bewußtseyns* [*Facts of Consciousness*], and to the essential *Doctrines of Science* concerned with genetic thinking in the understanding of two series in the *Doctrine of Science*, Hegel took a different stance with Fichte. That will be shown in the next passage.

Hegel also vigorously rejects a conception in which an idea of the true is dark and

hardly or not at all determined, but still presumed as an idea and only becomes clear by the movements of thinking and so becomes itself. The fierce response that Hegel directs at Schelling in the preface of the *Phenomenology* has not been forgotten:

The Idea, which is true enough for itself, in fact remains ensnared in its origin as long as its development consists in nothing but the repetition of the same old formula. (...) To oppose this *one* bit of knowledge, namely, that in the absolute everything is the same, to the knowing which makes distinctions and which has been either fulfilled or is seeking and demanding to be fulfilled – that is, to pass off its *absolute* as the night in which, as one says, all cows are black – is an utterly vacuous naiveté in cognition. – The formalism which has been indicted and scorned by the philosophy of recent times and which has been generated again in it will not disappear from science even though its inadequacy is well known and felt (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 17).

Hegel calls it empty naivety in cognition and formalism, when the movement of thinking becomes apparent as such and is supposed to lift something hidden and initially inaccessible into the serenity of knowledge and consciousness. Hegel also dismisses the conception of a philosophy that originates in the dark and by undergoing the process of thinking becomes knowledge in the end. But can Hegel really offer a true alternative to this conception of a philosophy of a long and complex process?

Another philosopher, who sees philosophy as a long journey and progress in thought – aside from Plato, whom I will not discuss in this study – is Baruch de Spinoza (Waibel 2012).

The comment at the end of Part Five of Spinoza's *Ethics* shows that the journey of thought that Spinoza unfolds philosophically, is a long, challenging, sophisticated one. The following comment expresses Spinoza's philosophical intent:

By these propositions I have completed what I wished to show concerning the power of the mind over the emotions, and concerning the liberty of the mind. Whence it appears, that the more knowledge we possess, the more does our power exceed that of the ignorant, who act solely from passion. For the ignorant man – besides that he is agitated in many ways by external causes, and possesses no true satisfaction of mind, lives without true consciousness of himself, of God, and of things, and as soon as he ceases to suffer, ceases also to exist; while, on the other hand, the wise man, so far as he is such, has a soul scarcely moved by external things; he has true consciousness of himself, and of God, and of things in virtue of an eternal necessity; he never ceases to exist; and always possesses true repose of mind. If the way which I have shown to lead to this result appears very difficult, it can nevertheless be found. And in truth that must be difficult which is so rarely attained. For if salvation were close at hand and could be obtained without great labour, how were it possible that it should be neglected by almost all? But every thing excellent is as difficult as it is rare (Spinoza 1677/2020, Part V, prop. 42, schol.).

It is a tedious, difficult and long path on which Spinoza takes his readers – and which is necessary in order to step out of the mostly prevailing ignorance and to lead a broad-minded, perceptive, mindful and contented life.

Spinoza places great trust in the arranging and discerning power of reason, a path of careful and intellectual engagement with the world, but one that is difficult to find. To

find this path requires ontological orientation (*Ethics*, Part I), a sophisticated theory of knowledge (*Ethics*, Part II), a theory of affects and feelings (*Ethics*, Part III), an analysis of all the reasons that lead people to hurt and dominate each other (*Ethics*, Part IV) and a theory that brings together all the divergent currents of intellectual life and that points the way to a right, ethical and content life (*Ethics*, Part V). Happiness and contentment are, according to Spinoza, not the reward of virtue, but virtue as such. However, virtue requires an exceptional way of thinking, which from time to time has even been described as elitist.

Finding the path that leads to the kind of knowledge that is wisdom and holds the prospect of a life in happiness, peace of mind and inner balance, requires three steps of cognition and a series of concrete lessons that are only learnt in life. The first kind of cognition is a cognition that is called inadequate, because it is perceived through affections in other words – perceptions, affects, emotions and sensations that are perceived or felt immediately, and without reflection. The second kind of cognition verifies, tests, unifies in order to arrive at a legitimate, permanent, eternal cognition, founded in substance or in God. A deep and long experience of this kind of knowledge, which of course always starts from the direct perception of the first kind of cognition and from which it gains access to the world, finally results in what Spinoza calls the third kind of cognition (knowledge), or *scientia intuitiva*.

Researchers have long pointed out that there is a link between this third kind of cognition, which in its highest manifestation is called amor Dei intellectualis, and the intellectual intuition of the idealists such as Fichte, Hölderlin and Schelling. However, as far as I can tell, one essential idea has not been addressed with the necessary importance: Spinoza’s third kind of cognition is the result of a long process of thinking in the first and second kind of cognition, which then suddenly turns into deeper insight. Mysticism and similar beliefs are not the reason for this change. In my opinion, both the poet Friedrich Hölderlin and Hegel formulated a concept of spirit that, despite many differences, is remarkably internally related to Spinoza’s intuitive cognition [*scientia intuitiva*]. I cannot go into detail here about Hölderlin and his discussion with Hegel in Frankfurt in the period between 1797 and 1800. I can, however, go into the convergence between Hegel’s concept of spirit of absolute knowledge and Spinoza.

This brings me to what is probably the most famous passage in the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which unites Hegel’s and Spinoza’s thinking:

Furthermore, the living substance is the being that is in truth *subject*, or, what amounts to the same thing, it is in truth actual (...). That is, it is only this *self-restoring* sameness, the reflective turn into itself in its otherness. – The true is not an *original unity* as such, or, not an *immediate* unity as such. It is the coming-to-be of itself, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal and has its end for its beginning, and which is actual only through this accomplishment and its end (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 18).

I would like to mention that Hölderlin formulated his famous criticism of Fichte in one of the most important philosophical letters, written on January, 26 1795, only a few years after Hegel and Friedrich Hölderlin had studied together in Tübingen. Probably every sentence of this letter has been subjected to an in-depth philosophical analysis. In this letter, Hölderlin addresses and discusses a comparison of Spinoza's conception of substance with a theory of the I or of the subject, when he writes: "Fichte's (...) absolute I (= Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; it is everything, and outside it there is nothing" (Hölderlin to Hegel, 1795/2009, 48).

I do not want to go into this specific passage, but to demonstrate how close the passage is to Hegel's attitude, which he first presented in this way in the preface of the *Phenomenology*. Addressing Spinoza, Hegel formulated the expression and the closely related concept of a living, sometimes fluid substance. Both catch my imagination. The famous idea of considering the true not only as a substance but also as a subject is closely connected to Hegel's understanding. Similar to Fichte, Hegel unfolded a thinking that generates a process of thinking; similar to Spinoza, Hegel's philosophy is a path that leads to a final and open destination. Nothing is given from the beginning and must first be revealed. The consciousness that knows itself has an inner norm [*Maßstab*] that helps to find the way through doubts, fallacies, illusions and negativity and finally to arrive at a destination that deserves to be called spirit in its densest content or absolute knowledge. It is an inner compass that guides people to a consciousness and self-awareness that becomes ever more sophisticated, dense and sublime – spirit.

Georg Moder, the author of the wonderful book *Hegel and Spinoza. Negativity in Contemporary Philosophy* published in German by Turia & Kant in 2003, is one of those who has recognized and examined the immense significance of Spinoza for Hegel. Moder also demonstrated that the key difference between Spinoza and Hegel is that one developed a relatively static system of thinking, whereas the other one designed a dynamic one.

### **I. Dynamic Dialectic – Education of Developed Thinking and Judgments**

There is a methodology we find in Hegel's *Phenomenology* that can be an inner compass, an inner standard [*Maßstab*] for contemporary thought, provided it is willing to engage with complex relations or contexts. Spinoza's process of thinking can be understood as a technique of general psychoanalysis aspiring later Nietzsche or Freud to heal psychoses and neuroses, whereas Hegel's process of thinking is a general analysis of the spirit. Both have not lost their systematic relevance over time (see also Quante 2011, 64–88)

I want to highlight those parts of the analysis of spirit that are still relevant today. Hegel's philosophical thoughts and examples of concrete shapes, experiences, of historicity as well as general validity are taken in their systematic function. The history of

the development of the experience of consciousness must be considered from the point of view of individual history as well as the history of humanity. It is an invented history, as already mentioned – it never took place, at any time, and it will never take place. As I said earlier, if Hegel were writing his *Phenomenology* today, there is no doubt that different, concrete shapes would appear, reflecting the different stages of development of consciousness. The specific content of every single shape chosen by Hegel serves as an exemplification of the stage of development of consciousness or spirit. “The series of the figurations of consciousness which consciousness traverses on this path is the full history of the cultivation of consciousness itself into science” (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 56).

It is common knowledge that the chapter on the spirit marks a crucial turning point, as Hegel writes:

Spirit is the *ethical life* of a *people* to the extent that it *is* the *immediate truth*; it is the individual who is a world. It must advance to a consciousness about what it immediately is, it must sublimate the beautiful ethical life, and, by passing through a series of shapes, it must attain a knowing of itself. However, these shapes distinguish themselves from the preceding as a result of which they are real spirits, genuine actualities, and, instead of being shapes only of consciousness, they are shapes of a world (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 240).

The required order of shapes is, as Hegel claims, a necessary order, in which the reflexions of mental capacity gain step by step complexity. A capacity that begins as sensuous-certainty, then turns into perception, intellect and into self-consciousness and reason, in order to finally be able to leave behind the shapes of consciousness and to make the shapes of a world appear with the help of the spirit (see Weisser-Lohmann 2006).

Hegel’s philosophical approach is to use these shapes of a world to reflect forms of consciousness. Compared to Fichte’s approach discussed in the early *Doctrine of Science* of 1794/1795, Hegel does not only want to generate abstract constructions of the different shapes of consciousness, but from the beginning to move shapes of the actual world as well as forms of consciousness and thinking in a concrete and unified way.

The concept can be developed only in the concrete, but the developed concept as a concept in an empathic sense, the self-consciousness as self-consciousness, the spirit as spirit are what carry the necessity of thinking. It is an inner standard, as Hegel calls it, that is constantly testing the identities of concept and objective in order to correct and to convey the immediate convictions with those shapes that are to be developed and create new immediacies.

Reaching absolute knowledge, the technique of critical self-reflection is at its peak of both complexity and fluidity and preservation of self-certainty. The substance, the subject, is fluidity, flexibility in its meanings and in its actions to the same extent as it is law-giving, reliable and valid in thinking and thus, making time and space compatible with the sensual world on the one hand and the world of general laws beyond time and space.

I believe that the following two thoughts are of utmost importance. First, that of a

fluid or living substance, and second, the standard or norm provided by ourselves, which corrects and becomes itself in the unfolding process of thinking and thus becomes and is the spirit. I want to elaborate on these two key thoughts as I want to pay tribute to Hegel's essay as a historical document that is highly relevant in its core and methodology, even though the issues that move Hegel are sometimes testimonies to the time in which Hegel lived and to his horizon of experience. At the same time, *Phenomenology*, with all its time-bound and concrete shapes of representation, is of paradigmatic significance for a modern understanding of the world. The book should be read as a school of thought that, in my opinion, can also incorporate, discuss and confront shapes that are relevant today.

First, I will take a closer look at this continuously self-correcting standard or norm [*Maßstab*] and then illuminate the idea of a fluid substance. As early as 1803/04 Hegel presented his concept of a fluid substance as an epistemological category in the *Jena System Conception*, which builds on Kant and goes beyond him (Waibel 2018). In *Phenomenology*, published in 1807, Hegel further elaborated this thought.

## II. The Self-Correcting Standard

In the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, readers will find the phrase that gives my presentation its title. The passage reads as follows:

Consciousness in its own self provides its own standard, and the investigation will thereby be a comparison of it with itself, for the difference which has just been made falls within consciousness (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 59).

The emerging consciousness, the emerging spirit does not only start and operate in a field of immediacy, but also in one of indeterminacy in order to come to itself. Hegel's thought is highly remarkable as the idea of the true, which is only understood at the end of the philosophical process in *Phenomenology* and only through attainment of absolute knowledge, or even more precisely, only through the attainment of *Logic*. It is not apparent at the beginning of the process, because it does not exist at all. However, there is an inner standard or norm of thinking. This standard or norm does not only alter the process of thinking by showing it the path, but the standard itself is involved in the process of change. It is clear that Hegel shares the very realistic view that the path to the truth of knowledge, the path to absolute knowledge and the *Science of Logic* resulting from this, must be constructed and begun from the place where the simplest figures of the knowing relation to the world can be found, out of the parts being, essence, concept. For Hegel, this is sensuous certainty. In its immediate use, it is a union of meaning-something by the subject, the meaning-something of its object and at the same time the immediate grasping of itself, without knowing that all these differences exist, since they can only be observed from a meta-level.

This view is not at all too different from Spinoza's, as Spinoza asserts in the Second



Part of his *Ethics*, which deals with his theory of knowledge in proposition 33: “*There is nothing positive in ideas on account of which they can be called false*” (Spinoza 1677/2020, Part II, prop. 33). Here, ideas are considered to be representations and not ideas in an empathic sense, as understood by Plato or Kant. In proposition 35, Spinoza also asserts: “*Falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which is involved in inadequate or mutilated and confused ideas*” (Spinoza 1677/2020, Part II, prop. 35). The sentence may seem cryptic at first glance, but it can be easily decoded, if one considers the difference between the so-called inadequate kind of Cognition and the Second, the adequate, kind of Cognition. Spinoza’s assertions made here are very closely related to the Hegelian sensuous certainty, although the language and methodological approach used by the two philosophers are different. An example by Spinoza expresses a thought similar to Hegel’s famous sentence, when understood in its context, in which the Now [*Itzt*] is the night. In a note on proposition 35 of the Theory of Knowledge (Spinoza 1677/2020, Part II), Spinoza explains:

So when we look at the sun, we imagine it to stand about 200 feet distant from us; an error which does not consist in this imagination solely, but also in the fact that when we so imagine it we are ignorant of its true distance and of the cause of this imagination. For although we afterwards know, that it is more than 600 diameters of the earth distant from us, we not the less shall imagine it to be near; for we do not imagine the sun to be thus near to us, because we are ignorant of its true distance, but because the affection of our body involves the essence of the sun, only in so far as that body is affected by it (Spinoza 1677/2020, Part II, prop. 35, schol.).

The example is directly followed by proposition 36, in which Spinoza asserts: “*Inadequate and confused ideas follow each other by the same necessity as adequate or clear and distinct ideas*” (Spinoza 1677/2020, Part II, prop. 36).

Inadequate or confused ideas, as Spinoza calls them, are figures of an immediate sensuous certainty that encompasses those faculties that perceive feelings and perceptions in all their immediacy. Spinoza’s so-called inadequate cognition, as well as Hegel’s sensuous-certainty, necessarily demand that objects be grasped and understood in no other way than as they are presented to the senses, as they are present to the subject and as they can be expressed linguistically. The positive, the positivity of this kind of cognition, is not false in itself, regardless of whether we think in a Spinozean or Hegelian way. It is the experience of perception that is directly expressed in its immediacy. The sun is “about 200 feet distant from us” in the here and the now.

The epistemological thoughts presented by Spinoza operate on different levels. Those kinds of cognition that only perceive how the objects are presented to the senses and how they are then expressed in language are called inadequate kinds of cognition. By contrast, the adequate cognition is the one that processes sensations and perceptions, or as Spinoza says, the affections, by reflecting, generalising, forming an opinion, or put in a nutshell, by the techniques and general laws of thinking and so arriving at a state of general validity of thought. Perceptions are not false in and of themselves, they are

only false when their definiteness, uniqueness, their thisness, their here and now is not understood and they are passed off as general truths. In a specific sense, an opinion can never be false, since it is a subjective and personal expression. However, to mean something without verifying it and pretending that it is the truth, is every now and then an irresponsible generalisation.

It is in immediacy, in meaning, that Hegel's sensuous certainty comes into play. He does not employ Spinoza's example of the sun, of its this and now of its light and of its sometimes even deceptive self-transparency (as is the case with Spinoza), but he uses its negativity, the night. The this, now, here whether it is night, day or sun is both true and also not.

Both inadequate cognition and sensuous certainty are standards of truth in themselves. They are the knowledge of something and its truth immediately and without distinction, the content is present in their truth pre-reflexively. As long as the this, now and here grasps itself and must grasp itself as *the* this, *the* now, *the* here, it is night, when night falls, which negates itself through the dawning of day. It is the distance to the sun that negates itself either by leaving the here and now or by dusk setting in and then eventually becomes night. Since the standard of truth not only states the verbal fact "Now is the night" or the "sun, we imagine it to stand about 200 feet distant from us" in the here and now, but maintains and renews the expression in its representation, it correlates them and the standard of the true expression, very briefly put, corrects itself. The inner standard comprehends through the constant correlation of object and consciousness, of consciousness and object, the different flowing and staying of one player and then the other.

The following passage of proposition 43 in Spinoza's Second Part of the *Ethics* has attracted meticulous attention from many philosophers after Kant: "Further, what can be clearer and more certain than a true idea, so as to be a criterion of its truth? As light manifests itself and darkness, so truth is the criterion of itself and of falsehood" (Spinoza 1677/2020, Part II, prop. 43).

The context is devoted to the rational kind of cognition that is adequate cognition. The passage mentions epistemological implications of a notion of a criterion or standard of truth, which Hegel obviously incorporated into his theory. Instead of speaking of truth and error, of light and darkness, Hegel comes up with a course of reflection highlighting the negativity of the posited content as a principle of movement of the self-correcting and elevating inner standard of truth. To elevate oneself is to measure oneself by all the things that are offered as standards including self-criticism and, beyond that, the criticism of others that is then either accepted or denied according to the inner standard; the inner standard measures itself by the examples provided by things and individuals to improve and become whatever may develop within the individual.

Taking this into account, I think this means that every concrete shape has paradigmatic validity according to its content. Examples can be used to demonstrate and

study the way in which immediate thought and expression refer out of themselves to the negative Present Absent that must be grasped in living, differentiated thinking through mediating reflection. The mighty power of thinking that should not be underrated is negation, is the thinking of the Other through negation that drives experience and its inevitable relation to the object. In experience, alienation and estrangement are both driven by negation.

Reaching a new level of knowledge, gaining knowledge, admittedly means at first only the quantitative increase of immediate thinking, which is transformed through mediation. Standard indeed also implies a normative element, which I believe Hegel brings with him on his path of experience of consciousness without commenting on it. Knowledge is, as it is understood, an emphatic concept that always includes truth, but which is a certain provisional kind of truth, and not the whole truth, and so the quantitative increase in insight beyond oneself always implies an increase in truth. Immediate parts of the truth are distorted and give way to deeper insights and bits of truth. Truth itself is fluid. What is true now proves to be wrong or open to manipulation and so pushes thinking to look for alternatives. Philosophy’s main objective, as Hegel puts it, is the “path of natural consciousness pressing forward towards true knowing” – the “*cultivation of consciousness itself into science*” (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 56). This cultivation is already introduced by Hegel at an earlier point of the introduction, as a series of experiences of consciousness that must work out the negativity of objects and shapes, then come to itself, and become identical with itself:

The immediate existence of spirit, *consciousness*, has two moments, namely, knowing and the objectivity which is negative to knowing. While spirit develops itself in this element and explicates its moments therein, still this opposition corresponds to these moments, and they all come on the scene as shapes of consciousness. The science of this path is the science of the *experience* consciousness goes through. Substance is considered in the way that it and its movement are the objects of consciousness. Consciousness knows and comprehends nothing but what is in its experience, for what is in experience is just spiritual substance, namely, as the *object* of its own self. However, spirit becomes the object, for it is this movement of becoming an *other* to *itself*, which is to say, of becoming an *object* to *its own self* and of sublating this otherness. And experience is the name of this very movement in which the immediate, the non-experienced, i.e., the abstract (whether the abstract is that of sensuous being or of “a simple” which has only been thought about) alienates itself and then comes round to itself from out of this alienation. It is only at that point that, as a property of consciousness, the immediate is exhibited in its actuality and in its truth (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 29).

Hegel’s thinking understands truth as a truth that is learnt and unlocked in thinking, however provisional as it may be. Thinking, the unlocking of truth, does not happen once, but happens time and again and verifies itself in its reliability. The substance, as it is said here, “is considered in the way that it and its movement are the objects” that is, the objects of consciousness. A substance in motion, a substance that is also a subject – these expressions invoke the image of a fluid substance as I already pointed out and which Hegel discusses in depth in the first sections of the chapter on consciousness titled “IV.

The Truth of Self Certainty.”

### III. Substance and Subject. Continuous Flowing and Stably Existing

The Kantian and Fichtean approach to thinking has focused in a very insightful way on the acting nature of thinking subjectivity in all its spiritual actions. Schelling and Hegel, on the other hand, generate an understanding of this dynamic world as the starting point, the *prius*. Their philosophical interest no longer lies in finding the flowing, the moving in the solid, but rather they seek to highlight the anchors and the consistent in the dynamics of continuous movements. The understanding of the subject as something that exists in a flow applies in particular to the subject as self, that Hegel describes as follows:

This very fluidity, as self-equal self-sufficiency, is their *stable existence*, or it is their *substance* in which they are thus differentiated members and parts, where each is *existing-for-itself*. The meaning of 'Being' is no longer that of the *abstraction of being*, nor is it that of their pure essentiality, of the *abstraction of universality*; rather, their being is just that simple fluid substance of the pure movement within itself (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 105).

Since self-consciousness refers to another self-consciousness, the “concept of spirit is thereby present and available for us” (Hegel 1807/2018, GW 9, 109), as Hegel points out. The concept of spirit is present and available in the battle for recognition, which will not be specified in this contribution (see Kloc-Konkołowicz 2015, as well as Honneth 1994 for more on this topic), as it is in morality, law or religion.

[T]he object of desire is only *self-sufficient*, for it is the universal, inerasable substance, the fluid self-equal essence. While a self-consciousness is the object, the object is just as well an I as it is an object. – The concept of *spirit* is thereby present and available for us. What will later come to be for consciousness will be the experience of what spirit is, this absolute substance which constitutes the unity of its oppositions in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency, namely, in the oppositions of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves: The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*. Consciousness has its turning point in self-consciousness, as the concept of spirit, where, leaving behind the colorful semblance of the this-worldly sensuous, and leaving behind the empty night of the supersensible other-worldly beyond, it steps into the spiritual daylight of the present (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 109).

In *Phenomenology*, spirit as spirit is the highly developed shape of consciousness and its intersubjective relations as ethical substance. Spirit in its simple form, however, can be encountered where communities have practiced and practice religion. The practice of religion has been part of humankind since the dawn of humanity. This explains why Hegel, in the chapter on religion, goes as far back as the early history of humankind and then, period by period, approaches Christianity. I wanted to mention this here because I think it serves as evidence for the hypothesis about the paradigmatic nature, which the depicted shapes have for the self-understanding of the respective time. Especially the chapter on religion demonstrates that only a few shapes are allowed on the scene and that

important religions including Judaism, Islam or Indian religions are hardly mentioned or not mentioned at all.

In the final chapter on absolute knowledge, Hegel summarizes some of his thoughts succinctly. In this chapter he presents, for instance, his thoughts on the substance that becomes the subject or the self:

Now, in actuality the substance that is knowing is there earlier than the form, or the conceptual shape of the substance that is knowing. For the substance is the still undeveloped *in-itself*, or the ground and concept in its still unmoved simplicity, and it is therefore the *inwardness*, or the self of spirit which *is not yet there*. What *is there* is the still undeveloped simple and immediate, that is, the object of *representational thinking consciousness* per se. Cognizing, because it is spiritual consciousness, is that to which what is *in itself* is only to the extent that it is as *being for the self* and being of the *self*, or is concept. For this reason cognizing initially has only a meager object in contrast to which the substance and the consciousness of this substance are richer (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 428).

The shared knowledge of a group of persons is already to be conceived of as substance even if it is undeveloped and exists for a community, a we, as a mode of representation, that is, as unclear and not yet enlightened knowledge. It is the form or shape of the concept that has to be worked out by means of the process of auto-correction, by the analytic-therapeutic method. The more subjects take part in this self-enlightening process of moving towards being for and in itself, the better the chances are that the substance can transform and elevate itself into truthful spirit.

For experience consists in precisely this, namely, that the content – and the content is spirit – is in itself, is substance and is therefore the object of consciousness. However, this substance, which is spirit, is its coming-to-be what it, the substance, is in itself; and it is as this coming-to-be which is taking a reflective turn into itself that spirit is truly in itself spirit. Spirit is in itself the movement which is cognition – the transformation of that former in-itself into for-itself, of substance into subject, of the object of consciousness into the object of self-consciousness, i.e., into an object that is just as much sublated, or into the concept. This transformation is the circle returning back into itself, which presupposes its beginning and reaches its beginning only at the end (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 429).

## Conclusion

In the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel does not only formulate the idea of the spirit turning into absolute knowledge, but also the notion of an inner criterion and standard [*Maßstab*] of the spirit that guides the developing consciousness, which has not yet grasped the essence of the idea. The substance that becomes, and at the same time, is the subject comprises becoming and the absolute, temporality and timelessness (see Baptist 2006; Jaeschke 2020, 71–97). Or as Hegel put it: “*Time is the concept* itself that *is there* and is represented to consciousness as empty intuition. Consequently, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time as long as it does not *grasp* its pure

concept, which is to say, as long as it does not erase time" (Hegel 1807/2018, GW IX, 429).

The developing spirit [*der werdende Geist*] operates not only in a field of immediacy, but also in one of indeterminacy in order to come to itself. Hegel's thought is highly remarkable in that the idea, the inner standard, does not only alter the process of thinking, but the standard itself is included in the process of change.

Truth is the standard that, in the course of experience, proves to be provisional and then becomes a deeper insight and a more differentiated truth. Every concrete experience, which is indispensable for the development of a concept, is always, more or less, dependent on the situation. Nevertheless, the concept always carries the essence of what the general, the universal, the intersubjective validity means or has to mean – the standard accompanies us throughout our lives and guides us to the true, the good and the beautiful. On this path, in the encounter with insights, fragments of truth, distortions and illusions the standard develops, solidifies and liquefies.

Spinoza and his ontology of substance gave Hegel the opportunity to explore an evolving thought and a long process of thinking, that goes through three kinds of cognition to reach *scientia intuitiva*. At the same time, this thinking is visualised above all through the image of a spatial construction consisting of the five parts of *Ethics* that demonstrate the unfolding of important fields and areas, but not the dynamics of a continuous movement as proposed by Johann Gottlieb Fichte – who, in Hegel's opinion, did not get beyond reflection and did not reach speculative thinking. By contrast, Hegel speaks of the becoming of spirit and its dynamics of constantly sublating thinking that an initially simple substance finally becomes the fluid subject.

Spinoza's general psychoanalysis which, as stated above, I see in his *Ethics*, the specific psychoanalysis which we know from Freud and others as well as Hegel's analysis of the spirit are aware of their own starting point: the immediacy of subjective private thought. Their need to bring about change within thought is different in their justification. The aim in all these cases is open and tries to ameliorate the form of thinking, understanding, acting in a common world. For Spinoza it is the pacification of adversarial social relations towards a peaceful life, Hegel seeks the examination of the various diremptions and distortions of existence which he forms into a dialectic of life in which he seeks to depart towards general validity of scientific thought in concrete reality through an inner criterion [*Maßstab*], Freud and others wanted the dissolution of pathological conflicts. For all this, analysis alone is not enough. It is a creative synthetic way of thought that is inscribed into all of them even if not explicitly so. As I have suggested, the creative process and progress is carried by the faculty of imagination and the reflective power of judgement as discussed by Kant in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. There would be a lot to elaborate on here. Hegel's path of analysing spirit is, in any case, different from the one brought forth by the philosophies and methodologies of Fichte and Schelling.

But more on this issue next time!

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