

Open Totality of Hegel's Absolute Knowing

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Abstract

Hegel's absolute knowing is an immanent subjectivity since all the knowledge and human history are included within it as the absolute subjectivity. Some Hegelians stressed the sufficiency of the absolute's totality; contrariwise, others interpreted absolute's immanent openness in terms of ongoing negativity, which renders human history an ongoing movement. The article attempts to propose a new conception of the absolute knowing in which there is a totality of conceptuality and openness to the future not only as negativity but also as a prospective totality. It would be entitled "open totality of the absolute knowing", and the article explains the two characteristics focusing on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegel's *Science of Logic* in addition to some crucial and prominent commentaries.

Keywords: Totality; Openness; Absolute; Absolute Knowing.

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Introduction

My interpretation of Hegel's absolute knowing is based on the openness of the knowing process, which is a part of my PhD thesis entitled *Hegel's Absolute: Suspension of Perspectives*. First and foremost, I must explain how it is not supposed to be the end of history whatsoever. As Robert Pippin concludes that absolute knowing may be right about self-redemption of human consciousness but wrong about its possible resolution.¹ Absolute knowing is the absolute standpoint that Pippin's account shows its inadequacy to put unhappy consciousness into an end. But the same quality itself can provide us to read absolute knowing as an open path towards the future. Therefore, the absolute standpoint might not be only a resolution, but it might show how philosophy cannot go beyond it. -And if philosophy is to go beyond this absolute situation, it should rethink and reconsider all philosophy's claims on the course of a speculative reasoning that it always can reflect on itself as a whole in a retrospective and prospective way. The openness of the absolute standing can explain the final potentiality of philosophy and open the possible way of going beyond philosophy at the same time. Pippin states that Hegel's answer to an absolute standpoint is in Hegel's logic.² My theoretical framework is inspired by Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the constant insufficiency of subjectivity and the permanent suspension of meaning within a free game of signification.³ It is also rooted in Gilles Deleuze's concept of difference.⁴ But I draw a different conclusion based on my interpretation of difference and negativity. Inversely, Jean Hyppolite's summary of Hegel's *Phenomenology and Logic* is my source to defend my main claim, still based on possibilities of Hegel's texts, but without accepting all foundations of his own theoretical framework, i.e. absolute subjectivity. Therefore, the package of my clarifications and argumentations should keep being consistent and coherent to show how Hegel's absolute knowing remains open to the future in a prospective way, although it is simultaneously presented as an absolute totality within Hegel's absolute subjectivity framework.

1. Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism the Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 167.

2. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 167.

3. Jacques Derrida, "Speech and Writing According to Hegel," in *G W F Hegel, Critical Assessments*, Edited by Robert Stern (London: Routledge, 1993), 9-49; Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Translated with Additional Notes by Alan Bass (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), 3-27.

4. Gilles Deleuze. *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: Épiméthée, Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

I. The Phenomenology of Absolute

Lukacs's stress on the concept of externalization as the key element of *the Phenomenology of Spirit* can help my interpretation of Hegel's absolute knowing to delineate how all the time it is both absolute totality and open. According to Lukacs,⁵ Fichte had used "Entäußerung"⁶ for the first time when he describes the action of objectification as the externalization of an object by reason. First, the consciousness externalizes its object, and at the end of history, when absolute knowing becomes aware of the actualization of history that it explains the object is not something external but belongs to consciousness. Therefore, objectivity as the externalized object is negated in the absolute knowing. Georg Lukacs' critical approach leads him to permanently read Hegel's absolute knowing within a Marxist framework, and he concludes that Hegel's phenomenology cannot hold the objectivity since his absolute idealism does not allow him to see the human as natural, sensible, and objective being. But according to his conclusion,⁷ Absolute Knowing makes objectivity converted to absolute subjectivity, and therefore, it puts history of finite subjects into an end. If it is the case, absolute idealism has to adhere firmly to unreal religious dreams. Absolute knowing seems not to be the end of history at all. My claim is that Absolute Knowing is not the end of history, but this openness comes from Hegel's idealism to which Georg Lukacs totally disagree. I require to refer to Hegel's relation of absolute knowing and religion, as noted before, to show how Hegel's absolute knowing does not entail the end of history.

Unlike the 18th century French materialists, Hegel does not take religious belief as something against the rational knowledge in general. He states that contents of religion and philosophy are the same.⁸ It is absolute knowing when it knows itself not via the symbolic images of religion but through the concept as such. Phenomenology describes the characteristics of this content: first, the universality of knowing is the same action that is constituted against nature and history; it is the transition of substance into subject; second, the absolute knowing, systematic science, is the same the universality of knowing; in the previous moments of phenomenology, subject cannot certainly succeed reach

5. Georg Lukacs, *The Young Hegel, Studies in the Relations Between Dialectics and Economic*, Trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1975), 538.

6. J. G. Fichte, *Die Grundlagen der Gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, Vol. I (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1997), 360.

7. Lukacs, *The Young Hegel*, 541-542.

8. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, Trans. by W. Wallace & A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 2010), 303.

objective truth, but in the absolute knowing, subjective certainty is the same truth as such; the phenomenological movement begins from in itself, being, and reaches in-itself-and-for-itself, spirit; or from the substance to the self who is self-conscious subject; third, nature and history are not but the self-alienated forms of the same spirit that which the first one is actualized in space, and the second one is actualized in time; Fichte's idealism does not consider the science of Being, ontology, which is the source of the I, and Schelling's idealism ignores the subjective presence of spirit within the substance since it is abstract, i.e. beyond the subject, and therefore, it is a dead absolute.

According to Hegel Absolute Knowing is living Spirit. It is not a dead God, but it expresses the same reality, i.e. death of God, which the materialist philosophers had expressed earlier, but now transformed as an immanent subjectivity. The theological-metaphysical God is dead for the self-consciousness of Absolute Knowing, but it opens possibilities unknown for the future.

Furthermore, the openness of the process of history is supported by the self-movement of Spirit. Hegel states: "The movement is the circle that returns into itself, the circle that presupposes its beginning and reaches it only at the end."⁹

I criticized John Burbidge's epistemologically pragmatist-materialist reading. I also refuted Jean Wahl's existentialist account. Now with respect to "open absolute", I examine Fredrick Jameson's Marxist account as well. Openness of the Absolute Spirit is based on the unity of the subject and object. Therefore, if left account of absolute knowing tries to read it as open to the future by means of denial of such a unity, it entails self-destruction. For instance, Fredrick Jameson states: "Yet we may as well here register one fundamental source of dissatisfaction aroused by the ideal of the speculative—or the ultimate identity of the subject and object—in Hegel. It is a dissatisfaction which I would prefer, for reasons already discussed above, to dissociate from the question of idealism in whose terms the objection is conventionally formulated."¹⁰ He as a Marxist states that philosophical deficiency of Absolute is not based on Hegel's idealism but is based on the ultimate identity of the subject and object. He adds: "No, the most serious drawback to the Hegelian system seems to me rather the way in which it

9. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. by A. V. Miller, With Analysis Of The Text And Foreword By J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 488.

10. Fredrick Jameson, *The Hegel Variations, On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London & New York: Verso, 2010), 130.

conceives of speculative thinking as “the consummation of itself”, namely, of Reason.”¹¹

Further, He wants to take Absolute into account as open to the future. He refutes existentialists' account: “For we continue to try to grasp totalities, whether phenomenological or in some other way, and we continue to try to make connections between the isolated fragments of our thinking and of our experience.”¹² He wants to give an account of Absolute as a whole and still open but in a non-identical way. However, if Absolute is not the unity of the subject and object, it cannot encompass difference into itself, which it thus gives rise to a relentless rupture. Accordingly, this rupture destroys Absolute as the whole, and there would be no unity, which can be open to additional movement. Henceforth, I reemphasize that Absolute openness first and foremost relies on this identity of the subject and object.

Spirit's self-movement from substance to self, i.e. subject, is still going on since the end of the movement is its true beginning. The circularity leads the spirit to further expansion, which occurs in-depth as externalized in time. Once the spirit completes itself as the world spirit, it reaches its consummation as a self-conscious spirit. In other words, the current stage of Spirit is self-consciousness, but there is no limit for world spirit to move inwardly again. It keeps living as a self-conscious spirit so that it can still actualize further possibilities within its consummation. Absolute Knowing is thus on-going completeness of world spirit, which transfers itself into history, which is actualized contingency in time. In other words, Absolute Knowing is to grasp complete, total, and absolute, the rationality of history. Afterward, Hegel arranges the order of systematic science: logic, philosophy of nature, subjective spirit, objective spirit, and absolute spirit.

Manifestation of philosophy is the last stage of Hegel's systemic Science, i.e. the Absolute Spirit, although it primarily concerns objective spirit. I shall consider the philosophy of history to explicate the relationship of history with the objective and the absolute spirit in the final chapter. Therefore, the problem we must attempt to deal with in this part of the chapter is exactly how speculative manifestation of absolute knowing can offer itself as both the most significant instance of the self-presentation of the absolute and as a self-knowledge for natural consciousness existing within the natural languages and

11. Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*, 131.

12. Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*, 130.

particular spirits. In other words, we must attempt to formulate in what sense philosophical discourse is both a response to a requirement on the part of a particular spirit and its historical situation for self-knowledge, and a necessary mode of absolute self-knowledge. In other words, our question is that in what sense does the finite endeavor of people for self-knowledge fall together with an absolute spirit that desires to be manifested of its own volition? It is only through speculative thought that the knowing spirit is able to be its own absolute determination, and hence be aware of objectivity as its own, i.e. self-consciousness. Manifestation and self-presentation interiorize the externalization of natural consciousness, and in so doing raises that natural consciousness to self-consciousness, which becomes absolute. However, absoluteness as “perpetual negativity” has already been working through its own process. In other words, there is no beginning since Spirit (*Geist*) is always actualizing and knowing itself. Therefore, we as particular people are always in the middle of the process of *Geist*'s self-manifestation.

Robert Grant McRae deals with the relation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and system in terms of the conception of “presentation” that it would be a rich description for my interpretation. According to him, the instigation to manifestation and self-presentation derives from the primordial need of consciousness to grasp its essence, which in natural consciousness is merely a potential, a transition-point. This characteristic of natural consciousness is conceptualized in *the Science of Logic* from the logical-ontological point of view. Being and Essence are transitional, and the Concept is the truth of both of them. Therefore, here from the view of natural consciousness, the discursive manifestation of the absolute in speculative thinking is as much a self-knowing by natural consciousness as a knowing of the absolute.¹³

Absolute knowing highlights the manifestation of self-consciousness of the previous unconscious determinations of subjectivity, and one may say that absolute knowing is the complete presentation of the absolute which closes off the historical manifestation of spirit in art and revealed religion, to the extent that this absolute knowing, i.e. philosophy contains their truth. This relation between the self-certain absolute knowing and the historical manifestation of art and revealed religion poses one of the most difficult problems in our understanding of Hegel's "finality" of speculative thinking. In other words, the

13. Robert Grant McRae, *Philosophy And The Absolute, The Modes of Hegel's Speculation* (Dordrecht/ Boston/ Lancaster: Martin US Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 114.

vital problem as to my approach is that why and how philosophy as absolute knowing is the final moment of speculative thinking.

McRae states that within the system itself, the dialectical relation of art and revealed religion determines philosophical manifestation as the moment of absolute individuality (*Einzelheit*), the moment which is the result of the discursive movement of the absolute and its potential presupposition which is hidden at the outset. This movement within *The Phenomenology of Spirit* between an absolute presupposition and an absolute result that are finally the same is determined as a succession of configurations which are not temporally or chronologically linked, but linked in terms of the relative "fullness" or depth of their grounding of all previous configurations. Therefore fullness is a function of recollection, and, through manifestation, reflects the relative self-consciousness of absolute determination. Each configuration recollects all antecedent configurations. However, before each configuration is raised to its truth through presentation, it has its fortuitous appearing in history, and it is important that we distinguish between the historical connotation and the phenomenological manifestation. While *The Phenomenology of Spirit* also recollects these historical appearances, speculative thinking empties them of their temporally chronological succession.¹⁴

According to McRae, through "presentation" Hegel has left us evidence of the absolute depth of his philosophical situation. McRae asks that has the system truly accounted for the supersession of its historical appearing? However, he adds that it is a substantial question, originally posed by Kierkegaard, which is at the heart of the critique of Hegel by Merleau-Ponty.¹⁵ McRae points out that only a self-conscious interpretation of the system as a "presentation" of the absolute subjectivity can initiate to make sense of this supersession. According to him, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* itself does not provide such a self-conscious interpretation since it presupposes the system as its truth. Furthermore, speculative thinking, as the intended recollection of the externalization of the absolute subjectivity, tends to behold the historical appearances superseded by its presentation in a teleological manner. In other words, the scientific philosophy brings history to an "end" when it invokes an in-depth analysis of the present moment. He adds, indeed, the absolute self-consciousness of the present moment conceived as result, i.e. totality is the

14. McRae, *Philosophy*, 114-115.

15. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et Non-Sens* (Paris: Les Editions Nagel, 1966), 3.

implicit presupposition of the philosophical understanding. Therefore, the finality of the system vis-à-vis its chronological appearances is less the result of an objective necessity working through history than the subjective attempt of philosophy to present its self-consciousness as a result. If it is the case, then speculative thinking never fully supersedes the historical residue of natural consciousness.¹⁶ This is a substantial relation of absolute knowing and contingent consciousness to which I will return in order to demonstrate how any sort of absolute knowing can be interpreted as “open horizon” to the future.

McRae states that as long as philosophical presentation is understood as a finite externalization of natural consciousness, and not, equally, as absolute recollection, it would seem that the historical concerns of the intended present-as-result determines the content of its dialectical representation. It is these concerns which are the unconsidered determination of the intended present and the necessary configurations that mediate it, for the self-consciousness of this present stands in a relation to its epochal disclosure. In order to understand the unconsidered concerns, which determine the spiritual configurations of the system, we must understand the relation of its presentation to the natural consciousness of Hegel's era.¹⁷

He states that, on the contrary, the system claims to have superseded the historical appearing of its configurations through their presentation in the dialectical framework of absolute self-knowing. The finality of this presentation, vis-à-vis the historical appearing of the configurations, takes on a timeless presence in which absolute presentation is completely mediated. But this finality owes much of its significance to the determination of absolute knowing as the recollection of its "prior" externalization, and leaves totally open the meaning of this finality for the future.¹⁸ He immediately refers to G.R.G. Mure who remarks, quite appropriately, that “The reflective historian interprets the accumulated record of the past, but anachronistically. The philosopher interprets the past as a process sublated in result, and so as a present which is in a sense timeless, but not as a present in which the future, too, is sublated.”¹⁹

I should now state that how a sensible consideration of the world distinguishes in the wide realm of outer and inner existence; that is, the

16. McRae, *Philosophy*, 115.

17. McRae, *Philosophy*, 115.

18. McRae, *Philosophy*, 115-116.

19. G. R. G. Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 183.

distinction between what is only appearance, transient and meaningless, and what in-itself truly deserves the name of actuality. McRae asks that is the act of presentation the result of a merely sensible consideration on the part of the knowing subject, or does the absolute knowing, knowing itself in the process of consciousness, appropriate and determine this presentation as the last moment of its complete self-knowledge?²⁰ It is a substantial question with regard to the absolute knowing.

To answer this question, McRae distinguishes Hegel's system as a whole and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a part of the system. However, I now insist to describe *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a Hegelian work par excellence, starting point of his own philosophical project, although he provides us a real presentation of the system only through *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*.

McRae regards how the spiritual configurations that mediate absolute knowing, as presented in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, receive their existence and are contained through their union with subjective self-certainty. I add *The Phenomenology of Spirit* itself to the system, which is presented for natural consciousness as long as we understand it as the presentation by a knowing subjectivity; it is, therefore, the absolute, which achieves self-certainty. It is upon this description of the absolute knowing as an appropriation by the knowing subjectivity of its absolute determination that rests the conviction of natural consciousness that this absolute knowing is a realization of its self-consciousness. Thus any introduction to absolute knowing that takes the form of an absolutely necessary cultural history which culminates in speculative thinking must fail to convince natural consciousness, since it does not account for speculative thinking as essentially self-knowing presentation.²¹ McRae immediately points out that it is for this reason that the various Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy, religion, etc., cannot never act as an introduction to the system itself, because they already presuppose the absolute self-knowledge presented by the system.²²

He says that speculative presentation is also an externalization of the absolute, so that natural consciousness tends to understand the system as somehow historically final. He delineates how this finality is an appearing for

20. McRae, *Philosophy*, 116.

21. McRae, *Philosophy*, 116.

22. McRae, *Philosophy*, 159.

natural consciousness. The path of phenomenal knowing that leads to absolute knowing in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* has the aspect of chronological succession until we have grasped it as a presentation for consciousness. If absolute knowing is such a finality, it would be a totality related not to chronological succession, but to “perpetual timelessness”. It is the knowing of an exhaustively mediated present, and the suite of spiritual configurations, which formulate this completely mediated present are dialectically, and not chronologically, constituted.²³ It is the same comprehension of Hegel’s absolute knowing that I, too, seek to demonstrate.

According to McRae, this relationship of thought, absolute knowing, to experience, natural consciousness, through the mediation of its present objectivity is neither wholly a posteriori nor a priori. Thinking is indebted to experience, indeed it is primordially the negation of what is immediately before us, but it is equally mediated with itself and indifferent to the descent into particulars. He says that here we comprehend that absolute knowing, the necessity of the mediation of the absolute with itself at a given moment, is balanced by the infinite subjectivity of thought itself, which presents these determinations.²⁴ This is exactly what I conceptualize as “retrospection” of the absolute. What McRae conceptualizes as “neither a posteriori nor a priori” situation is the suspension of all mediated moments achievable only through a retrospective consideration, which is prospective too; philosophy is such a special consideration that can be both at the same time.

I use McRae’s thick description of “philosophy as presentation” and its relation to system in order to discuss the openness of Hegel’s absolute knowing from the phenomenological standpoint. To be sure, absolute knowing is the very same philosophy as such, although Hegel explains such identity in *the Encyclopedia* that I shall explain it in the third chapter. According to Hegel, philosophy is the systematic science, “*Wissenschaft*”. The systematic science can grasp the essence of reality that it is rationality. It is an endless endeavor of reason through history, which Hegel calls *Geist*. It is an endless process, that is, reason always moves, and it never stops. Therefore, there is no end of history chronologically, although there might, and should, be the eternally logical-ontological end of the *Geist*’s moments, which returns into itself again. The phenomenological ladder leads human knowledge to reach the threshold of such a moment.

23. McRae, *Philosophy*, 116.

24. McRae, *Philosophy*, 117.

To be sure, above all other interpretations, Jean Hyppolite's interpretation can aid me to justify and expand my account, since his texts on Hegel's texts find how Hegel's philosophy is the final limit of philosophy within which philosophizing is possible, and it also motivates us to go beyond itself so as to destroy any philosophical speculation in a way in which there is not possible to philosophize any more. Therefore, his account is able to assert that how the absolute knowing could be read as an open finale of the drama of knowledge.

The mainspring of the phenomenology as a part of the Science, i.e. the System, is that the object of consciousness is a spiritual substance, but it presents to natural consciousness only in the last station of the phenomenological itinerary. As Hyppolite defines, this spiritual substance or "self exists only as self-opposing".²⁵ He appeals to Hegel's preface to his work where he defines Self as a spirit or life who first becomes another separated from itself and then suppresses (*aufheben*) this otherness by means of becoming as its own immanent content.²⁶ This self-opposing is the negativity, which is Hegelian philosophy of subjectivity, and it is much obvious for all commentators that they are whether proponent or opponent of the idealistic conclusions that Hegel draws from this negativity. Hegel negates the first negativity and then he concludes, an internal unavoidable conclusion, Self-regrasps itself within a positively identity. Hyppolite delineates such an idealistic framework of argument much convincingly, maybe better than anyone else, and it is why I use it. But although Hegel's own conclusion to which natural knowledge grasps positivity as negation of negativity, I want to show how a potential endless negativity underlies within absolute knowing. Logic is supposed to fill this potential gap that it cannot do it completely because self as the Concept is still devoid of becoming embodied as nature and becoming time as history. This gap is supposed to be filled in philosophy which the last and most complete expression or manifestation of Self, but there is still a potentially endless negativity within it. My claim is to prove this endless negativity even in the phenomenological approach. In other words, I try to propose that Hegel's system always suspends the absolute closure, even here from the phenomenological approach.

Now I should remain within the realm of absolute knowledge to demonstrate how the negation of negativity as positivity can be interpreted as

25. Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure de la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit de Hegel* (Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montagne, 1946), 556.

26. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 32.

an ongoing movement even by remaining within the phenomenological course of self-consciousness. In other words, I should show how absolute knowing could be an endless movement, different from Hegel's own idealistic conclusion based on his theoretical framework of absolute subjectivity.

Hyppolite asserts, which is accordance with Hegel's own text, that Consciousness expresses the division of negativity and negation of negativity as a "laceration", i.e. an opposition between self and being, for-itself and in-itself, thought and reality, and subject and object that it is an internal opposition within the concept.²⁷ What Hyppolite stresses is that Self as life opposes itself permanently, although this opposition is supposed to be, and should be from idealistic position, suppressed into an absolute knowing. This self-opposition is the key concept on which Lacan, Deleuze, and Derrida emphasize in order to draw anti-Hegelian, i.e. anti-idealistic conclusions. Ego or Self cannot attain an absolute picture of itself from psychoanalytic view, and to attain an identity of a final meaning from linguistic standpoint.

The phenomenology as the science of experience shows the identity of the certainty of consciousness and the truth of reality itself is attainable within the absolute knowing that it is a true certainty since self-consciousness reflects on itself as consciousness. In other words, certainty ultimately overcomes truth when Spirit discovers itself as the only object of consciousness through all the experience of consciousness. However, there is a lack mentioned by Hegel that it is the internal opposition of knowledge and being within the experience of consciousness even in the absolute knowing. It is the case that this opposition is supposed to be overcome, but the process of knowing as experience of knowing always experiences this opposition even after it is dissolved as if this opposition never vanishes in the experience of knowing, and it operates an entry to logic where the Concept discovers this opposition as its own internal division. I call it "suspension of the experience of truth" in the phenomenological process since it finally discovers necessity of the logical dialectic as the conceptual expression of absolute as though the experience of knowing never completes itself from the pure conceptual form as the basis of Hegel's System to overcome the dualities of his era. However, philosophy is supposed to be the last and final expression of Spirit into the absolute form. In other words, philosophy expresses and manifests the same conceptual categories through history of philosophy as Spirit's absolute manifestation.

27. Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure*, 557.

Therefore, the “phenomenological suspension” has its own potentiality to lead natural consciousness to the logical self-opposition of the Concept itself.

The last problem before transition to the logic I should raise is the relation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and Hegel's Logic. Hyppolite explicates the foregoing problem within the framework of Schelling's dogmatic ontology of identity and Kant's critical epistemology. According to him, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel takes up the Kantian problem that is the foundation of experience, but from the speculative approach. In the *Logic*, he takes up Schelling's problem.²⁸ Hyppolite's interpretation of the Hegelian relation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *the Logic* is that Schelling's absolute is nothing to do with the problem of knowledge, but Hegel's absolute requires reflection on itself. According to him, Hegel's speculation sees Schelling's absolute from the scope of Fichte's philosophy of reflection. Therefore, reflection is the absolute itself that is reflected, and reflection is itself absolute. He concludes Hegel's absolute is subject, and the categories of Hegel's absolute are the logical categories before the actualization of nature and finite spirit.

II. The Phenomenology and the Logic

What is important for my interpretation is that how Hegel's phenomenological foundation of the experience of consciousness arrives at the simplicity of knowing, and how it still depends on the *Logic* in order to be explicated from the standpoint of pure thought. As Hyppolite refers to Hegel's *Phenomenology*,²⁹ *The Phenomenology of Spirit* arrives at the scope, which is simple, but it is as concrete as all moments of historical human experience. Hyppolite quotes the following passage from it:

“The element . . . of the separation of knowledge and truth is overcome. Being is absolutely mediate; it is substantive content, which is the equally immediate property of the I; it has the characteristic of self, that is, it is the concept. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* terminates at this point . . . Moments no longer fall apart from each other into the opposition between being and knowledge; rather, they remain within the simplicity of knowledge, they are the true in the form of the true and their diversity is only a diversity of content.

28. Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure*, 561.

29. Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure*, 562.

Their movement, which develops into an organic whole in this element, is the logic, or speculative philosophy.”³⁰

According to this conclusive passage, being has been mediated to the become concept; in other words, concept which has been the highest potentiality of being at the outset manifests itself in the end of the phenomenological experience of consciousness. All moments of consciousness remain within the simplicity of knowing as an organic whole. However, cognition of this wholeness as a movement requires another approach, which is speculative philosophy. In other words, cognition of this organic whole brings consciousness to the level, which philosophy should go to the pure movement of consciousness regardless of its relation to being, i.e. nature and finite spirit. The most crucial problem appears exactly at this moment: why and how absolute knowing, even from Hegel’s own philosophical system, dissolves into a next level of the system. The answer to this question should be searched from the relation of absoluteness and Hegel’s absolute subjectivism.

According to his absolute subjectivism, subject becomes absolute at the final stage of knowing, although it is absolute at the outset. That is, subject rediscovers itself as being without any opposition between itself and being. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* describes all the stages of the experience of consciousness, individually from sense-certainty to spirit and collectively within human history, as movement of an organic whole that it is the process of knowing. However, it cannot speculate the movement itself. Hegel describes this situation as a sort of surpassing to the next level of philosophizing. I describe it as dissolution of absolute knowing. Although in Hegel’s system more concrete levels internally encompass previous levels, that is, *the Logic* encompasses *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and objective spirit does subjective spirit and absolute spirit does all the previous levels together and goes back to the *Logic* again, unsystematic interpretation of Hegel’s system is able to deconstruct such systemic circle. Absolute knowing dissolves since the relation of knowing and being disappears at the moment of absolute simplicity. This absolute simplicity is the other presentation of ‘absolute suspension’. ‘Absolute suspension’ of all determinations or formations related to the process of knowing’s content. Each in relation to the other lets go (*läßt . . . ab*) of the independent determinateness with which it comes forth against it. This

30. Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure*, 562.

letting-go (*dies Ablassen*) is the same renunciation (*dasselbe Verzichtttun*) of the one-sidedness of the concept that in itself constituted the beginning.³¹

Cognition of absolute knowing requires natural consciousness to be speculated as the conceptual movement. In other words, the phenomenological reflection on the natural consciousness is not able to see the movement itself. The pure logical deduction of the categories of the movement is what is able to arrive at the level of speculation.

According to Hegel's absolute idealism, unmediated being becomes into nothing and vice versa, and therefore, there is no distinct between mediated being and knowledge at the end of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In other words, unmediated being is not object of knowing. Even if this crucial presupposition accepted, it would remain a distinction between the process of the mediation of being and beings as objects. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* excludes the foregoing process since it is something beyond all the mediated objects of knowing. It is what is supposed to be included within the *Logic* in terms of the Hegelian system, and it is explicated via the logical movement of speculation. From the phenomenological scope, the insufficiency of absolute knowing in terms of the Hegelian system excludes the movement of the mediation of being. A special openness within the absolute knowing remains to grasp the movement of the phases of mediation, which Hegel names it the speculation. I name it insufficiency of the concept to include all aspects of being. In other words, even from the Hegelian absolute subjectivity, it permanently remains a gap between absolute subject and being in triple levels of the system. Here in *the Phenomenology of Spirit*, the mentioned gap appears a difference between the moments of consciousness and the movement of them as an organic whole.

According to Hyppolite,³² the element of existence of the spirit is no longer *Dasein* of consciousness, but it is the concept, i.e. universal self-consciousness. A vital problem is raised that how absolute knowing is no longer spirit, and it dissolves into the concept, which goes back to being. In other words, how the process of consciousness becomes circular when the spirit manifests as absolute. As if the spirit cannot carry consciousness into itself, and it thus manifests as a universal concept, i.e. *λογος*. Now it carries all

31. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, Trans. by A. V. Miller, Foreword By Professor J. N. Findlay (New York: Humanity Books, 1991), 554.

32. Hyppolite, *Genèse et Structure*, 560.

historical experience of human consciousness, and there is no more object to grasp. Therefore, it is the only object of its subjectivity. Here is the moment in which absoluteness of consciousness appears; it is no longer *Dasein* of consciousness, but the pure universal concept. Absoluteness of consciousness is identical with a mediated purity and simplicity that carries all human history. It can no longer present itself as consciousness, but the movement of its conceptuality appears within absolute knowing.

My main claim now expresses itself from the phenomenological standpoint. Hegelian phenomenology does not attempt to prove the absoluteness of reality, in a rationalistic way that philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz do. The phenomenological approach is neither rationalistic epistemology, which starts from a self-evident principles nor empirical epistemology, which starts from our sensual experience. Besides, it is not Kantian transcendental epistemology, which finally arrives at the transcendental conditions of the possibility of our experience. It is expression of the process of our consciousness as phenomenon.

The right and the left interpretations, and even the pragmatic interpretation, can keep absolute knowing only as something meta-historical. The right interpretation states absolute knowing as God's self-consciousness through our self-consciousness, therefore it has to assert that history is finished since God's creation is finished, and God's self-consciousness is absolutely complete through our self-consciousness. But in Hegel's own text there is no evidence to help such an interpretation. Contrariwise, history goes on, and as if God's creation, i.e. human history goes on. Therefore, the right interpretation has to accept either continuation of history or absolute spirit, and it has chosen the absolute instead of lack of continuity. The left interpretation stresses the force of negativity in order to explicate openness of human history, i.e. the Hegelian main idea of freedom, and indeed it rejects any sort of absoluteness from the idealistic point of view, although the left interpretation sometimes proposes an absolute final moment of history, which seems to be the end of negativity. All the accounts cannot keep both absolute and its openness at the same time.

According to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, what moves being is *polarity* between two oppositions such as finite and infinite. Being is manifested through our self-consciousness in the world, i.e. reality. In other words, polarity between our self-consciousness, namely concepts, is the same polarity

between aspects of reality itself. Therefore, the science of the experience of consciousness is the dialectic of concepts and reality at the same time. The final stage of being, i.e. consciousness of reality as spirit, is absolute knowing.

There is a third sort of interpretation according to which even a conceptual absoluteness has non-absolute characteristic within itself since concept does not grasp historical reality as the whole. Hence, it keeps self-destruction within itself, but there is no further conceptual factuality, namely concept/reality, which can embrace it in the process of phenomenological dialectic. Consequently, the self-destruction of absoluteness is the absolute self-destruction. It is the same point Hyppolite draws out of Hegel's own text. The absolute self-destruction is to present itself within the pure logical process of the concepts. In other words, only speculative philosophy is now able to grasp the internal movement of the process of consciousness/reality from the pure logical framework.

There would be other classification of Hegel's *das Ende* to which Eric Michael Dale draws attention. According to his division, there are three ways to read Hegel *das Ende*. First, the mechanistic reading which is to see Hegel's end of history as a finite, concrete historical end driven by an agent-oriented teleology; second, processive or eventual reading of Hegel's *das Ende* in which Hegel's agent-oriented terms (such as the cunning of reason, world-historical individuals) are interpreted as forms of Hegelian metaphoric *Vorstellungsdanken* which must be seen only as conceptual configurations at describing a nonstop dynamic process through time and history; third, the tragic interpretation of Hegel's *das Ende* by Žižek who finds Hegel's tragic vision of the social process where no hidden teleology is guiding us as agent, where every intervention is a jump into the unknown, where the result always thwarts our expectations.³³

Contrariwise, Dale's classification can be transformed into the same classical division of the right and left reading. The first one is the right interpretation and the second one is the left with which Dale agrees. The third one is based on Lacanian psychoanalytical interpretation of the gap between knowledge and reality. I think that any sort of post-Hegelian acceptance of such a gap between knowledge and reality could not be classified within Hegel's text based upon his own limitations. Rather, it can be classified as radical criticism of Hegel's absolutism as well as subjectivity. Therefore, that

33. Eric Michael Dale, *Hegel, the End of History, and the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 211-212.

kind of interpretation attempts to find some Hegelian materials to be accordance with post-Hegelian philosophies. Rather, I used some Hegelian materials to push Hegel's textual limitations above and beyond his own text, but still through Hegelian perspective.

My interpretation of Hegel's absolute knowing is as if a hybrid of the second and the third accounts. I agree that there is no self-isolated totality in which the process of knowing/history terminates. If there be a totality of absolute knowing, it would be a new opening again. In addition, I agree with Žižek's interpretation where he implicitly wants to assert the Lacanian gap between divided subjectivity and the real.³⁴ He states that: "What, then, divides the subject? Lacan's answer is simple and radically new: its (symbolic) identity itself—prior to being divided between different psychic spheres, the subject is divided between the void of its cogito (the elusively punctual pure subject of enunciation) and the symbolic features which identify it in or for the big Other (the signifier which represents it for other signifiers)."³⁵

Conclusion

I accept that the absolute knowing cannot grasp the totality of subjectivity/reality, but nonetheless it is supposed to propose a total, absolute knowing based on Hegel's systematic philosophy. I stressed that Hegel should end its phenomenological way with an absolute situation, but nonetheless the absolute totality should not be understood as a dead end. In addition, he implicitly admits that the future is not totally hidden in the past; henceforth, Žižek's interpretation is helpful to discover that absolute knowing does not allow the process of knowledge to make reality as a predictable object in advance, although Hegel's last phenomenological moment seems to be a foreseeing moment of modernity. In other words, I explained how the Hegelian way of thinking allows us to discover a hidden unfinished openness of grasping reality by the concept of the absoluteness, although Hegel's own result is supposed to be a sort of absolute totality because of his absolute idealistic framework. I did not attempt to ascribe a non-Hegelian orientation to Hegel's text but I pushed his text beyond its own limitations, only and only through Hegel's own starting point and philosophical insight.

34. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and The Shadow Of Dialectical Materialism* (London & New York: Verso, 2012), 405-408.

35. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 408.

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