

## ***57. Hegel in Brief***

- Well, let me tell you that he took a Hegel course and had a very hard time with it. Here's the paper.*
- Is it worth reading?*
- It's very difficult.*
- Any paper on Hegel is difficult.*
- But it's complicated by the fact that, while trying to look entirely like a paper on Hegel, it wants to be something else.*
- We haven't got time to read the whole thing. Just tell me what you mean by this.*
- Basically it's the problem of writing on Absolute Knowledge when you don't actually believe in it and at the same time trying to get a good grade.*
- Why the good grade? I thought he didn't give a damn about — alright, what else do you have to say about it?*
- Well, he tried to work within the notion of Absolute Knowledge while sort of surreptitiously exploding it.*
- Why surreptitiously?*
- Because you don't attempt to overthrow Hegel in a few pages unless you want a low grade.*
- Perhaps in some classes.*
- The professor of this course at McGill University (he went there as a visiting student) was a noted Hegelian scholar who was attached to his own particular interpretation.*
- Well, read the part you think is important.*
- I'll read the last paragraph. It gives a good idea of how he was trying to stay both in and out of Hegel.*

In sum, the experience of Consciousness, its historical trajectory, may be distinguished as three transitional

stages. The first stage is the earliest manifestation (but then always abiding condition) of the consciousness which simply unfolds itself. The second stage is the earliest manifestation (but then always abiding condition) of the consciousness which unfolds itself to itself. And the third stage is the earliest manifestation (but then always abiding condition) of the consciousness which unfolds itself "beyond" itself.

*Notice the quotation marks around the word "beyond." They were simply a concession to the assignment. I think he felt that, if he'd left them out, he'd be making it too apparent that he was treating Absolute Knowledge as necessarily but also essentially (or is it essentially but also necessarily?) an overblown concept. And that the fulfilling of itself by constantly falling short of itself, by constantly being in the process of learning from its errors, is both the rule and ruse of reason and non-reason together.*

The first corresponds to Phenomenal Knowledge, the second to Phenomenological Knowledge, and the third to Absolute Knowledge. The first is aware of its unfolding but not aware of it as its unfolding. The second is aware of its unfolding but not aware of itself as a complete unfolding. And the third is aware of itself as a complete unfolding which it posits for itself, in and as itself, and in this very "explicit" positing implicitly sublates itself in the process of a deconstruction and a fresh positing of Absolute Knowledge. Consciousness thus goes beyond the point at which it first articulates itself as Absolute Knowledge, historically, logically, and dialectically, both by undermining this express articulation of itself and articulating itself further or over again in a movement at once away from and back to itself. Such a consciousness as Absolute Knowledge knows that only in this way (i.e., as the absolute notion or determination of itself) is consciousness in touch with itself as a philosophical consciousness.

*And here's a quote from Hegel.*

The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the

organization of their realm. Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History; but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, s. 808)

*And the rest goes:*

The movement of history, in other words, is a constant regeneration or throwing up of new "organizing spirits." Their recollection is thus the path along which the goal of Consciousness receives ever new forms of, and impetuses for, Absolute Knowing. In such manner, Consciousness, while fulfilling the vital task of keeping itself alive and whole, is no dead march through time, no complaisant coasting or lack of risk-taking, but an ongoing voyage of quest and discovery.

*– It's difficult, as you say.*

*– I don't think he can read it now without wondering if he knew exactly what he was saying.*

*– Absolute Knowledge sounds like some sort of regulatory principle that's also a fiction.*

*– How powerful that fiction is in a course controlled by it!*

\*