

# The Idea Of A Phenomenology Of Spirit

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## 1. The Scope Of “The Phenomenology Of Spirit”

The title of Hegel’s masterwork states clearly what the subject-matter of its inquiry is, namely the ‘phenomenal spirit’ — the concept of ‘spirit’ so far as it appears preconceptually in the course of human experience. If phenomenological inquiry appears as a kind of history, it is no history in the ordinary sense such as would seek to identify the earliest manifestations of human belief in the existence of a spiritual dimension, then tracing the various shapes this belief has assumed up to the present time. Such a conventional history Hegel eschews as entirely inappropriate to his intention, for either it means foisting in some initial arbitrary assumption as to what the term ‘spirit’ means, or, in the name of noncommittal objectivity, gathering up everything and anything that might vaguely qualify under that head. But either way, a merely empirical history of spiritual references of this kind can offer no account of the *logic* of their connection or afford insight into the meaning of the concept of spirit itself.

That the *Phenomenology* is not a history of that sort is plain enough if only in that Hegel omits any mention of, for example, the vast variety of spiritual images to be found in animistic cultures, or even in the more sophisticated spiritualism of the Hindu, Persian or Egyptian religions, although he has a great deal to say on these subjects in other

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<sup>1</sup> James Doull, the eminent Canadian philosopher, had for some years planned a major work on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, focusing on its significance for philosophical history. He had recently prepared a summary of his views for *Animus* — “Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and Postmodern Thought” (*Animus* 7, 2002). But a search of his posthumous papers, deposited in the James Alexander Doull Archive (Sir Wilfred Grenfell College, dir: dpeddle@swgc.mun.ca), reveals no substantial earlier draft of such a work, only a number of notes-toward dating from c1970.

The present essay is based on these notes, and though both it and the article cited above cover similar ground, they differ in that while the latter emphasizes the impact of Hegelian principles on later culture, the former more directly addresses the theme of the *Phenomenology* itself: the meaning and evolution of the so-called ‘phenomenal spirit’.

The notes are study-notes, no more: scattered sentences and brief paragraphs jotted down from time to time. Recurrent themes are discernible, however, and by selecting and reorganizing the notes under their head I was able to extract a more or less continuous argument. That this entailed a great deal of dissecting, purging, bridging and rephrasing might well lead the reader to wonder how much of Doull’s original thought survives my reconstructions. It is in deference to this doubt I cite myself as co-author. The reader may be assured, however, that the language and specific arguments are in the main Doull’s own, and are consistent with views I have been privileged to share in and discuss with him over a long personal friendship. The remaining notes are my own. — f.l.j

contexts. The reason for this is that the point of departure of the *Phenomenology* is not ‘spirituality’ in some undefined sense, or even as more distinctly developed in the literature of mythology or religion as such. Rather, its concern is exclusively with the *concept* of spirit, that is, with ‘spirit’ as set forth and apprehended *philosophically*.

It is thus not with the spirit-world of cultic superstition that *Phenomenology* has to do but with ‘spirit’ so far as it is and has been conceived as a reality in and for reflective thought. This means two things: first, that the structure of a phenomenological inquiry into the concept of spirit is driven not by deference to historical sequentiality primarily, but by the logic of the concept of spirit itself; and second, that so far as the inquiry is partly historical, it is restricted to a *specific* history, namely that which commences with the first appearances of the idea of spirit — *as idea*.<sup>2</sup>

That commencement occurs specifically with the Greeks and Romans, saw its further elaboration in the theology of the Trinity forming the basis of a broad Christian culture, and culminated in modernity and its philosophy. The latter made the subjective its point of departure — or as Hegel will call it, the finite or phenomenal spirit, namely the conscious and self-conscious individuality for whom freedom is given as the truth of his inward and outward experience. The modern philosophy of experience reaches its climax at the point where the rigid distinction between an external world and the consciousness for which that world appears — between nature and human nature — collapses before the insight of a free, speculative thinking which knows the one thoroughly to interpenetrate the other. With this, the standpoint of the finite spirit, whose freedom is limited by the appearance of an external world opposed to it, gives way to an infinite spirit that knows its freedom to be one with necessity and which is at home in a world that it knows and wills as its own — the so-called ‘absolute’ spirit, i.e., “spirit that *knows* itself as spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

*Phenomenology* is the exposition of the forms of the finite or phenomenal spirit, and this from the standpoint of a philosophy that has come to know *what* spirit is. Phenomenology is an “introduction” to philosophy in that it means to reveal what is in a way already known; it is reflection on a consciousness of freedom already become general and customary but which needs to seek out its true source and principle. In this

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<sup>2</sup> The language of ‘spirit’ has evoked no end of consternation among Hegel’s readers. Commonly the term has at best a metaphoric or theological sense, at worst a superstitious one. The English translators caused further confusion by substituting ‘mind’ and ‘mental’, turning Hegel into an absurd metaphysical psychologist and rendering wholly opaque his otherwise plain references to the ‘objective’ (ethical) and ‘absolute’ (speculative) senses of spirit.

As Doull points out, the *Phenomenology* is concerned only with spirit “as it is and has been conceived as a reality in and for reflective thought”. It is a genealogy of the concept of spirit carried out from the standpoint of this concept itself so far as fully realized in and as self-conscious freedom. A freely conceptual thinking that would comprehend the range of its own pre-conceptual or ‘phenomenal’ forms is neither an empirical nor an historical reflection but a logical one — thus a ‘phenomeno-logic’ of the free spirit.

<sup>3</sup> The ‘absolute’ spirit is no *spuk* (Stirner, Marx) or blind cosmic agency (Schopenhauer, Taylor). As Hegel makes abundantly clear, it refers to those human activities — art, religion, philosophy — which seek explicitly to articulate, acknowledge and comprehend freedom as the ground and principle of self-conscious life.

sense “the way *to* philosophy is *already* philosophy.”<sup>4</sup>

Hegel takes the vision of an unlimited spiritual freedom as already realized in a religious form in Christianity; he assumes the seriousness of modern secularity to consist in the task of bringing this religious vision to clarity in the light of rational thought. It was for him a question as to where we stand once the Christian tradition has been broken; how to move beyond the merely abstract rejection of its authority in enlightenment; how the profound dialectic contained in the classical-Christian tradition may once again become accessible to a contemporary mentality for which a merely abstract and thoughtless vision of absolute freedom had become tyrannical.<sup>5</sup>

Phenomenology may thus be styled a sort of philosophical-theology in which the truth of Christianity is no longer a matter of faith. The logic of spirit first expounded in Neoplatonism had in view only the elevation above natural modes: spirit as spiritual *substance*. Expressed in this immediate way the exposition is still intuitive and pre-scientific. In a later Protestant and modern consciousness spiritual freedom becomes more explicitly a matter of the experience of individuals, a truth subjectively witnessed in faith, reason and will. The movement is then for this phenomenal spirit to develop to a self-consciousness in which freedom is actually known as objectively as well as subjectively true, and ‘phenomenology’ is the reflective recapitulation of this self-development on the part of an infinite thinking that already has hold of the very *concept* of spirit.

## 2.The Hellenic Spirit

Modern philosophy is the development of the concept of spirit with which Hellenic philosophy ended, namely the Aristotelian *nous* as infinite, all-comprehensive self-knowing activity. Hegel saw his own contribution as that of bringing the love of wisdom (*philosophia*) into a more scientific form (*Wissenschaft*). So far as concerns the content of such a science, this had already been uncovered in the ‘idea’ of Hellenic philosophy, but only when the moments of the idea have come to be known in their logical necessity does this content acquire clarity and precision.

Aristotle had already got hold of a principle of concrete subjectivity, surmounting the merely reflective thinking which Plato had brought to its limit in response to the Parmenidean philosophy. Parmenides begins with immediacy, with being; then turns to

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<sup>4</sup> Most conventional expositions err by taking Hegel’s metaphor of a “voyage of discovery” too literally, as ordinary consciousness spontaneously and progressively resolving itself into ‘absolute knowing’. This view guarantees in advance that the argument fails and in any case makes nonsense of its ordering. Hegel is clear that the real ordering and animating dynamic lies in the phenomeno-logical thinking which *already* occupies the ‘absolute’, i.e., conceptual standpoint, determining the course of the ‘experience of consciousness’ as a *logical*, not a subjective progression. “What this *phenomenology* of spirit describes is the coming-about of scientific knowing in general.” (*Phen.* Pref.; see also *Encyc.* 573)

<sup>5</sup> *Phen.*, vi.B.III, “Absolute Freedom and Terror” — Doull would not appear to have in mind more recent anti-western terrorism so much as the decadent perseveration into general post modern culture of the revolutionary radicalism which Hegel knew.

reflect on appearances as having their ground therein. ‘Appearance’ in his meaning is not the ‘appearance’ of modern reflection which entails relativity-to-a-subject; rather with Parmenides appearances do not emerge as a negativity within being itself but fall outside it as otherness-in-general. The Socratic period is the period of dialectical reflection, culminating in the Platonic reaction to the substantial unity proposed by Parmenides. Aristotle takes up the argument at the point where the Platonic reflection on the relation of essence to appearance is resolved to a concrete unity, and this as a *self-thinking subjectivity*.

In modern philosophy too, a concrete subjectivity emerges out of a similar reflective flight from the substance of Spinoza. In what regard, then, is this modern experience clearer and more precise than the ancient? The difference generally lies in this: that while the project of Hellenic philosophy is no less to come to know the idea in its necessity, in it the movement of thought is from nature to God, such that logical form appears only as this movement of thought that establishes the idea as the truth of the sensible world. The movement from a rational, to a reflective, to a concrete subjectivity in modern philosophy has the difference that here ultimate unity is known, as with Hegel, in the form of *self-realization*, that is, of ‘spirit’, whereas the Aristotelian *nous* was not known as self-emergent from being but as standing in a hierarchical relation to being, the latter as its subordinate moment.

Thus for subsequent thinking, while the Platonic universal and Aristotle’s self-thinking principle form the new standpoint, this unity appears nonetheless as lying beyond the ordinary human self-consciousness. The unity of thought and being is proposed, but not yet in the form of spirit. Following Aristotle, a new period of reflection arises out of just this want. It is no longer, as before, a thinking that seeks to move from the finite to an infinite principle, rather it is a thinking that already has hold of such an infinite principle but also knows it to be out of reach of a finite self-consciousness. Stoicism and Epicureanism, in which finite self-consciousness would attempt an immediate reconciliation with an infinite reason, collapse finally into scepticism wherein the futility of all such attempts is shown.<sup>6</sup>

A fuller self-knowledge only comes on the scene with the Neoplatonists, who attempt to bring subjectivity into relation with the divine, thereby to surmount the scepticism which cannot reconcile its inwardness to its otherness. For Neoplatonism nature is definitively known as derivative, but its unity with thinking has, in the “One”, an immediate form in which their difference is muted. And the apprehension of this unity is achieved on the part of an intellectual spirit (*nous*) which likewise has only the status of a transitory moment, also swallowed up in the One. In Neoplatonism the Aristotelian moment of *reflection* is thus lost, and it remained for the unity of the idea to be developed

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<sup>6</sup> Despite their differences, Hegel views stoicism, epicureanism and scepticism as one mentality: the standpoint of individuals who, having become intensely aware of themselves as the living contradiction of a universal consciousness embodied in an utterly finite existence, seek relief through a discipline of philosophical detachment — *ataraxia*. The practical counterpart is the abject subordination of all interests to absolute state power: “*Der Romermacht ist das reell Skepticismus*.” For a fuller account see J. A. Doull, “Religion and Secularity”, *Animus* v.7 (2002), [www.swgc.mun.ca/animus](http://www.swgc.mun.ca/animus).

again from this standpoint of a wholly immediate, and thus essentially abstract, spirituality.<sup>7</sup>

With the ancients, then, the idea of spirit, of an infinite divine life, remained intellectual only. Their world still stood as alien with respect to it and so they do not get beyond a sceptical or mystical account of it. In the Christian religion, on the other hand, spiritual life takes on the form of an absolute *fact*, a truth revealed in and to the world. Yet the worldly consciousness still knows it not, for it is a revelation so far available only inwardly in representation, in belief, and in the infinite figure of a trinity of Persons. So far as attempts are made to grasp this image in thought, that is, theologically, recourse was had to the reasoning of the older philosophy that had already shown itself inadequate to comprehend it. In its form as a religious representation only, therefore, the meaning of spirit had to remain a mystery, an actual spiritual *self-knowledge* still wanting.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.Christian Spirituality

If before Christianity spiritual striving was dedicated to the *discovery* of the idea of spirit, with Christianity spirit itself comes on the scene in the representation of the Trinity: of the idea self-manifest in creation and returning to concrete unity. In Neoplatonism there is a similar trinitarian scheme, except that the moment of the One remains exalted above the others. The form of pre-Christian spirituality is in this way essentially still monotheistic, as also in Jewish and Muslim thought, a position that must remain hostile to philosophical thought, except as a mere *ancilla theologiae*.<sup>9</sup>

Christianity ultimately means the overcoming of history rather than just a teaching about it.<sup>10</sup> In undertaking to realize its idea objectively, it came into relation with pre-existing forms of the objective spirit, i.e., with cultures both barbaric and civilized. In Europe it is a matter of peoples who had only begun to absorb classical Roman culture. Christianity, completing what was only sought after in the classical era, is not alien to the latter culture, requiring only that it be taken up into Christian spirituality and subordinated to it. There follows a long period — the ‘middle age’ — during which the Christian consciousness is still developing; at this point the spiritual relation is one of an inner world to another outside and beyond it. In Protestantism, Christianity attains the

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<sup>7</sup> Where ‘world’ and ‘*nous*’ are as such distinct and have their unity only in a third, in the One, then the moments in this trinity both are and are not truly divided and are and are not truly united. A thinking that sinks itself in the immediacy of the One becomes itself immediate, content-less, abstract, having lost the self-reflexivity that comprehends difference.

<sup>8</sup> Latin-Christian theology is marked by the ambiguity that it would interpret the revelation by means of a rational thinking it judges incapable of the task, thus repudiating theologically the very compatibility of spiritual and intellectual which makes theology possible.

<sup>9</sup> Doull elsewhere comments that recently renewed appeals to Neoplatonic arguments are driven by post-modern (thus post-theological) positions in which far more is assumed than ever was or could be contemplated in historical Neoplatonism. See his “Neoplatonism and the Origin of the Older Modern Subject” in *Philosophy and Freedom*, eds. D.Peddle, N. Robinson (U. of Toronto Press 2003), Chap.5.

<sup>10</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (ed. Suhrkamp, 1970) p.386.

fuller form of spirit which engages the external world as implicitly its own; it is marked by a tension between the inner life and the historical world, a division which, since itself a spiritual one, is yet more crucial than in the earlier form.

Thus at first, Christianity stands in relation to a secularity already decaying. Then the spiritual community, the Church, asserts itself as a worldly power, thereby corrupting its own principle. Reform comes when inwardness of faith is made the basis of a true Christian freedom and where mere secularity is supplanted by *Sittlichkeit*: by an *ethical* consciousness of community. The later Christianity would protest the ambiguity in which the secular and the spiritual worlds remain outside one another, insisting on their preordained conjunction as a truth justified by faith alone.<sup>11</sup>

But religion generally is spirit's knowledge of itself in its *alienation*. The alienation consists in the fact that, for a religious self-consciousness, though spiritual life is positively affirmed as actual, it has the form nonetheless of a life 'not of this world'. In religion, a finite spirit bears witness and subordinates itself to an infinite spirit that remains nonetheless quite beyond it, the actual reconciliation of the two belonging only to a world to come as the object of hope. In religious faith there is indeed the certainty of a spiritual truth to which worldly life *ought to be* conformed, but there is the consciousness also that the latter, as such, *is not* so conformed, is separated from God, wholly *unspiritual*. This divided awareness belongs to *all* religious consciousness, though in the Christian image of the Trinity this division between the divine and the worldly life is expressly declared to have been overcome. So far as the Christian reconciliation still remains in a doctrinaire form, i.e., remains a *religious* representation, then traditional Christianity no less than other religions retains the mark of spiritual dividedness, even while it is just the overcoming of this alienation that constitutes its principal article of faith.

Thus even where the division between the divine and the human spirit is, in Protestantism, rendered inward, it assumes the form of a division within spiritual consciousness itself; the alienation that belongs to the religious experience is only raised to a higher pitch. The residue of the externality of the Catholic cultus remains, the inner truth to which Protestant faith holds fast is not yet adequately realized objectively. It is an imperfectly realized freedom since a dualism clings to it, a mere 'correspondence' between the truth of religion and the ethical, worldly spirit, this truth not *itself* fully in the world, but only empirically, i.e., for *experience*.<sup>12</sup> In Protestantism there is thus generated a need to overcome the religious perspective itself as inadequate, and *inadequate specifically with respect to just that which is revealed in it*. The impetus is to move beyond narratives, symbols and rituals toward a reasoned comprehension of what, in the

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<sup>11</sup> That in the worldly church of Catholicism, secularity in its Roman ('historical') sense remains residual; that in Protestantism this is supplanted by a practical-ethical order sustained by individuals who in faith have the subjective certainty of their spiritual freedom; that this new secularity yet has the character of a moral world that only *ought to be*: these are themes which Doull elaborates more fully in the article referenced above in note 6.

<sup>12</sup> See section 4, below.

Christian religion, had formerly been held only on faith.<sup>13</sup>

With this coincides ‘enlightenment’, which opposes to the concrete immediacy of religious faith a reflective reasoning that stresses rather division, difference and the objective as it is there for consciousness. Enlightenment brings out what is lacking in faith with its merely passive, unreflective reception of truth; to this it opposes an active, objectifying spirit which is, however, equally one-sided. The opposition between a finite human knowledge and the knowledge of faith is already present in the medieval church, but now has the form of a division within belief itself. The source of the division between enlightenment and faith thus lies already in religion itself, as evidenced in the Lutheran/Calvinist debate over whether and how the eternal is actual in the present.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. The Modern Spirit

Christianity had developed the standpoint of the free spirit it inherited from the oriental and classical cultures to the point of an explicit intuition: a ‘faith seeking understanding’. The phenomenal or reflective-empirical spirit of modernity was founded in turn in the collapse of that immediate or intuitive spirit of Neoplatonism and the medieval appeal to faith. Modern philosophy appears as making an entirely new beginning; that and how it in fact grew out of the ancient and medieval only comes to light later on when, in the *concept* of spirit, it arrives at the explicit knowledge of what its principle is.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In his history of religion Hegel notoriously describes Christianity as the ‘consummate’ or ‘absolute’ religion. But this is not, as often represented, to advance the simplistic claim that, of all religions, the Christian alone is true. The argument rather has to do with the Trinitarian doctrine that the human relation to God is already given *in* God, who, being thus apprehended as wholly *self*-revealed, reconciles humanity to himself through the spirit. In the Christian religion, therefore, the separation of divine and human that defines the religious relation as such is inconsistent with what is believed, namely that the divine and human are one; that God has *actually* overcome the world. Hegel’s remarkable thesis is thus that in the Christian revelation *the aim and intent of religion itself* (thus of all religion) has been brought explicitly to light. The Christian believer, accordingly, cannot remain satisfied with images, doctrines or sacraments alone, but is impelled beyond them toward a reasonable and objective this-worldly life, and it is precisely in this sense that Christianity is spoken of as the consummated or completed religion.

Christianity in its developed form thus cannot be hostile to the philosophical spirit. On the contrary, it can find its proper fulfillment only in passing beyond mere religiosity toward a rational freedom consistent with the spiritual freedom from which it springs.

<sup>14</sup> So far as Protestant religion finds in the human or secular world only the *appearance* of a divine providence, and not its manifest *actuality*, the ambiguity remains as to how the world must appear for the believer. Either it will be seen as a reality open and amenable to the believer’s own experience and practical will, or else a world that is not as it ought to be and alien to the world as it is for faith. The certainty of reconciliation thus yields contrary attitudes toward worldly life, the one trusting in the efficacy of enlightened action, the other holding aloof to the world, judging it according to a moral law revealed in faith.

<sup>15</sup> Even though subjectivity is implied in the very concept of spirit, in ancient and pre-modern thought ‘spirit’ is generally represented as something immediate: a ‘thing’, being or substance (e.g. ‘soul’). Neoplatonic-Augustinian intuition is still of a substantial spirit in this sense. Modernity, however, has as its principle the inward spirit of consciousness and self-consciousness, free subjectivity, the ‘I’, the principle alike of Protestant faith and Cartesian self-certain thought. Modern philosophy is then the reflection on this

The new reason-centered enlightened science and morality, while in fact owing its very origin, logic and substance to Christian presumptions, thus claimed to have achieved complete independence from the religious mentality. Yet, in its classical development from Descartes to Kant, it is indeed nothing else but the content of Christian faith resolved to a speculative form. This denial of its basis in the Christian doctrine of spirit, and its insistence upon a wholly empiricist, secularist and even atheistic approach in all matters theoretical and practical, thus constitutes a contradiction that pervades its revolutionary and scientific-technological attempt to achieve, in radical humanism, a more valid and objectively concrete spiritual life. In bringing the light of reason into a darkened, superstitious world, it accomplishes just the opposite: the despiritualization of human life through a new and *self-inflicted* alienation.<sup>16</sup>

The Baconian world of human advancement and modern liberal-technological society is a spiritual world, but such as is known only in the form of an outward appearance. Another form of the same vision is found with Böhme: the world as already wholly fulfilled, overcome and brought within spirit.<sup>17</sup> Protestant Christianity is the religiosity out of which both these forms spring. In earlier Christianity these appearances could not emerge since, at that point, the experience of a secular spirit lay outside belief, had not yet been brought into it, so that what lay in Christian belief had yet to become the form in which the world itself was actually experienced. When the externality of the medieval church came to be challenged, only then could the authority of belief really become comprehensive.

Thereafter, the division between the inward and outward forms of spirit became a division within spirit itself, no longer a division between a spiritual world on the one hand and the world as alien and unspiritual on the other. This overcoming of this division is the work of historical Christianity, and its accomplishment is what is assumed by modernity and its philosophy. Modern secularity too takes this principle of self-reconciled spirit as its starting point and is the working out of it.

In its initial forms, modern reason opposed itself to the Christian religion, especially

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relation of subjective reason to its objective world — a philosophy of ‘experience’ — a reflection that can and does commence from either side, from the objective content of experience (empiricism) or from its ground in consciousness (idealism)...

<sup>16</sup> Hegel’s remarkable argument, which Doull presents here much abbreviated, is that the conflict between the standpoints of ‘faith’ and ‘enlightenment’ conceals a deeper logic according to which both are shown to have the same origin and intent, namely the resolution of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity into alternative accounts of a purely human freedom, neither of which, however, transcend the dualism that belongs to religious ‘representation’. It is this residual ambiguity that generates the conflicting *anti-religious* and *ultra-religious* versions of the same position, which Hegel knew in his time and which still predominate. Doull views the history of post-modernity as the continuing exacerbation, but also the progressive self-destruction, of this stand-off between the secular humanism of enlightenment and the reaction against it on the part of religious conservatism and later existential ontology. See the debate between Doull and Emil Fackenheim: “Would Hegel Today be an Hegelian?": *Dionysius* v.10 (1986) pp.129--135.

<sup>17</sup> See note 15, *supra*. Hegel places Bacon and Böhme in the role of the great-grandfathers of the modern philosophy of experience, of its empiricist and idealist wings respectively.

in its older medieval or catholic form, but also as protestant faith. The former's theology, conscious of the limits of Graeco-Roman logic, declared the revelation of spirit to be in principle beyond reason, made available to the sinful inhabitants of a spiritless world only through the mysteries and sacraments of the church. The later protestant affirmation of the essential unity of the spiritual and human worlds opened the way to a new logic and philosophy, in which thinking appealed to just this principle of unity as a means of bringing the finite human experience of the world under the form of reason. This new mentality gave rise to a new science of nature and a new practical spirit, both deriving from the confidence of self-conscious individuals for whom nothing the world offers can be alien to the spirit of reason and freedom disclosing itself in them. Modern philosophy is the account of the world from this standpoint of a human thinking which, though finite, finds the principle of an infinite spirit 'innate' in it. Modern philosophy is in this sense the Christian religious representation raised to the form of thought.<sup>18</sup>

But the empirical spirit, though certain of its unlimited power over nature does not know itself as spirit, a blindness which the modern scientific-technological spirit ever retains. It seeks in experience the realization of what is otherwise for it a certainty: the essential unity of thought and life. It takes as its end the domination of nature technically and epistemically, a manifold, ongoing work that is ever potentially complete but otherwise endless. It is because the end is already in a way present in it that this work is not abandoned but continues to be fervently pursued; for the real underlying aim of all work is simply to *experience* this unity.

The Cartesian and subsequent modern philosophies spring from the *still abstract* thought of the identity of spirit and nature, of subject and object, of self-consciousness with what is there for it. The forms of a finite reasoning only are applied to that unity as something presumed — given to an intuitive or metaphysical thinking. They thus do not grasp this unity specifically as *essential*. Modern philosophy in its progressive forms as rationalism, empiricism and idealism is thus the work of a finite thinking seeking to comprehend the unity of itself with that which is other than it — of its self-consciousness with its consciousness. None fully succeed in this unification of reason with experience. If finally the ungroundedness of Hume's preference for experience is thought to be overcome by a new scepticism in the form of a critique of finite human reason, the limits of this position are in turn brought to light by Jacobi, Fichte and others. These matters are summarized by Hegel in the Introduction to the *Encyclopedia* (the three "attitudes of thought toward objectivity") which provides an alternate introduction to the standpoint of the Hegelian system.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The progressive appropriation of the Christian religion by modern philosophy, on Hegel's account, entailed not only the assimilation to conceptual terms of the *content* of the Christian *Vorstellung* (the Trinitarian principle) but initially also of its *form*, i.e., of the reflex or representational character of the religious relation itself. The resulting standpoint is that of a thinking *subject* — thinking consciousness, the 'I' of 'understanding' — reflecting on its given objective world, on which view modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant is to be characterized as a thinking within the form of '*experience*'.

<sup>19</sup> See *Enc.* 26-78. The general terms of the philosophy of experience laid down by Descartes divides into an empiricism and a rationalism which reach the limit of their logic in Humean Scepticism and the Critical Philosophy respectively. Later idealism (Fichte *et al*) set as its task to reconcile and sublimate this division

The ordinary ‘fact’ of experience is of course that thinking and being are *not* the same: that being is quite the *other* of thought. But it is just this otherness that the will to investigate and control denies. Man regards himself, all and each, as the end and purpose of nature. The empirical attitude is thus not at all what at first it may seem — it is not a passive awe of man before nature, which holds it up to worship as higher than himself (really a quite recent view), nor is it an exploitation of nature for purely human ends such as would assume man to be *already* above nature (a questionable alternative since human ends are in fact as often frustrated as achieved). Moreover, as concerns the technical spirit, there is in any case always the question whether means are adequate to intentions, requiring that the world first be better known. But such ‘better knowledge’ lies nowhere else but in the original certainty that all knowledge is self-knowledge; or more explicitly put, it is knowledge as a ‘reason’ wherein otherness is known as the otherness of self-consciousness. Underlying all work, desire, knowledge therefore, and alone sustaining their stability, is their relation to this infinite *telos*, the *original* unity of life and universality.

The overcoming of the alienation that infects modern enlightenment, driving it toward spiritless materialism, requires that the spirit which knows itself only in *opposition* to nature and the world — the spirit equally of traditional Christianity and of the subsequent enlightenment — arrive at the point where “spirit knows itself as spirit”; that is, where the free individual knows *expressly* that it lies in his own nature to be spirit, that indeed “spirit is all reality”. From this standpoint there arises first of all the need to reflect on the legacy of this spiritual principle, in order to come to know the whole range of the limited forms of human self-consciousness as both latent and fulfilled in it. A reflection of this kind, carried out from the standpoint of self-conscious freedom and comprehensive of the whole range of its latent (and to that degree limited) expressions in human experience, is a ‘phenomenology’ of spirit.<sup>20</sup>

### 5. A ‘Phenomenology’ Of Spirit

It is by means of a phenomenological reflection that the free, self-conscious spirit achieves confirmation of its truth and universality. It becomes thereby the basis for a philosophical knowledge in which the tendency of the finite spirit — as consciousness subjectively certain of itself but still not quite knowing what it is — attains to completion. Phenomenology is a reflection on the part of such philosophical consciousness on its own origin and free self-development, a philosophy which no longer takes its rise ‘historically’, that is, on the basis of some contingent intuition or dogma, but *knows* what

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in an ‘absolute’ theory of consciousness, the limits of which in turn forms the commencement of the argument of *Phenomenology*.

<sup>20</sup> For Hegel, modern philosophy reaches its consummation in passing beyond this subjective standpoint of what he terms the experiential or phenomenal spirit, to a more concrete concept of spirit known as at once subject *and* substance — thus the principle of an *actual* as opposed to a subjective freedom. The *Phenomenology* is intended as the account and justification of this transition, while in the system Hegel abandons the standpoint and language of ‘consciousness’ and ‘experience’ for a more strictly conceptual comprehension of the very *idea* of spirit, in this more complete sense of ‘the spirit *knowing* itself as spirit’.

its thinking is. A phenomenology of spirit thus provides the starting-point for an ‘absolute’ knowing, i.e., a philosophical consciousness fully in possession of its own concept.<sup>21</sup>

The *Phenomenology* is about the emergence of subjective freedom, then the emergence of an objective freedom out of it. This emergence is explicated first through a recollection of the Hellenic discovery of spirit, then how the Hellenic practical spirit itself was formed; how it collapsed through the abstract individualism of the Romans; how the conflict between individuals and state power in the middle ages led to the later formation of civil society and the principle of a moral order. The aim is a unity of subjectivity (will, reason) and nature (feeling, instinct) which is not simply immediate, as with the Hellenic ethical spirit (*Sittlichkeit*) in which this unity is realized only as beauty, a unity still itself natural and wanting for a fuller withdrawal into subjectivity. This fuller inwardness is developed in Christianity, a culture first imposed externally on the world as Catholicism, whose limits Protestantism will later seek to surpass.

More proximally considered, the *Phenomenology* is a critique of Enlightenment moralism and science, aimed at bringing these back to their origin in the Protestant reconciliation of secular freedom with religious consciousness. It seeks especially to overcome the empiricism and rationalism of early modernity in which an abstract, but not a concrete unity of subject and object is attained. The individual is to overcome this residual division between a subjective inwardness and an abstract outwardness (‘nature’, ‘body’, etc.) with which it finds itself confronted. It is to become an *actually* free individual, not merely an *inwardly* free spirit. This means rendering actual what lies already in the imagery of religious representation, but rendering it in a form which gets beyond religiosity and its servility.<sup>22</sup>

The *Phenomenology* begins with the ‘subjective’ spirit — with consciousness, self-consciousness and reason. Why? So that the form of ‘experience’, or the immediate aspect of ‘consciousness-object’, be known from the start to belong to the eternal

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<sup>21</sup> This most succinct summary contrasts strikingly with what has long stood as the conventional account of the argument of *Phenomenology*. The latter takes too literally Hegel’s metaphor for the argument as a sort of ‘ladder’ on which the reader may ascend from his finite, sensible consciousness to the heights of ‘absolute knowledge’. The conclusion is then typically drawn that it is a futile exercise, pretending to pull an infinite rabbit out of a finite hat. But (a) a finite subject is in principle not up to such a task and (b) were there such a thing as absolute knowledge any need to climb to it would be superfluous.

But as Doull makes clear, Hegel’s conception of the project is exactly the converse. The phenomenological reflection is undertaken, not by a finite subject, but on the part of a self-conscious thinking which already knows itself free, thus as already an unconditional knowing, at least in principle. It is then from this standpoint, not that of an empirical subject, that the reflection is carried out, to the end that this infinite, speculative standpoint come to recognize and be reconciled to its own pre-conceptual forms. What is called ‘absolute knowing’ is thus not the end-product of the argument of *Phenomenology* but its *presupposition*.

<sup>22</sup> This overview summarizes the account of the ‘true’ or ‘objective’ spirit in *Phenomenology* vi and vii. Beauty is the spiritual as aesthetically self-aware in a natural form, especially in the human figure and in virtues represented in the mythical life and doings of heroes and divinities. The ‘fuller inwardness’ of Christianity requires an objective embodiment that is more than aesthetic, an actual ethical life that is first defined in terms of a worldly church and then in free institutions.

movement of spirit itself. The subjective spirit seems only to know itself as so divided and not as one in and for itself — not as self-consciousness. This self-unity cannot be known directly, however, but only in the end result, so that at the beginning all that is present is the instability of the standpoint of sheer immediacy and difference — i.e., ‘consciousness-of-an-object’.<sup>23</sup>

The argument assumes a standpoint that is already *beyond*, and yet *not* beyond, the modern standpoint of experience. As implicitly beyond it, it can at least recognize the standpoint of consciousness itself as having become problematic and unstable; and because consciousness is *implicitly* spirit, it can also follow the course of transcendence of this its immediate form. The object of consciousness too already has implicit in it the form of spirit, but not as for consciousness itself unless and until it assumes the fuller standpoint of reason. For this fuller standpoint to become stable and not simply revert to the simple attitude of consciousness, it is first necessary that it pass into a new scepticism and self-alienation of which reason is then the reconciliation. That is, for reason to become established and certain of itself as such, consciousness must discover an object that is not alien to it but such as is known to be its *own* very other, its *own* true self.<sup>24</sup>

The *Phenomenology* further intended to correct the abstractness of modern accounts of freedom. It meant to uncover the fact they are in reality secularizations of Christian religion itself.<sup>25</sup> The need is to rediscover their roots in the Christian religion so that the secular world can become explicitly known as nothing other than the manifestation of the religious. Freedom as it is in emergent liberal-socialist forms of humanism — moral idealism translated into an endless activism — extends no further than a presumed capacity to conquer the world for human uses. Of this tendency the *Phenomenology* would be the telling critique. Freedom, the unity of life and thought, where grasped only in the form of an *assumption*, is a unity that keeps falling apart into antagonisms that are again resolved only ideally, i.e., only in a literal endlessness of progress and revolution. That this unity is *already* actual, is ‘spirit’, remains beyond humanism, which can thus never give a clear account of what freedom is. It affirms a certain reason in history —

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<sup>23</sup> The first cycle of the *Phenomenology* (ss. i-v) is not addressed, as is often supposed, to the ‘ordinary’ consciousness, but has in mind the elements of the idealist theory of consciousness, which brought the Enlightenment philosophy of experience to a denouement, and formed the proximate context of Hegel’s own thinking. In it he shows how the standpoint of experience itself — of consciousness and self-consciousness — has its principle and completion in the concept of a free subjectivity such as knows all otherness as its own — ‘reason’ or ‘spirit’. On the basis of this insight Hegel then recommences the argument from the explicit standpoint of the concept of spirit and its history (ss. vi-vii).

<sup>24</sup> With Kant and the idealists, philosophical thinking remains preoccupied with the logic of experience, seeking to resolve the enigma how the ‘ego’, and what appears over against it — the Kantian ‘thing-itself’, Fichte’s ‘non-ego’ —, are to be reconciled. Phenomenological reflection commences where the tension in idealism between an ‘I’ that only *ought* to comprehend the objective and an objectivity that only *ought* to comprehend the subjective fall into extreme instability at which point the distinction itself collapses. Phenomenology presupposes this reconciliation as achieved in the concept of spirit, of a unity-in-difference in which the standpoint of experience, of the phenomenal spirit, is then superseded.

<sup>25</sup> For Hegel, the spirit of modern enlightenment is but the negative, *unmediated* secularization of the Christian principle and as such antagonistic toward, or unconscious of, its religious root. Its cognition is thus a radically human cognition (science of ‘experience’), its willing a radically human willing (economic-technical activism) and its freedom a radically human freedom (individualism).

man as ‘controlling’ both history and nature — but also assumes a radical separation of the subjective and the objective. How or why this can be so, it cannot say.

Phenomenology thus has a very specific content, theme and end, and is not some abstract ‘method’ merely. It is reflection on the progress of modern thought to the point of a properly philosophical reconciliation of experience and thought: the resolution of the division between consciousness and self-consciousness — of truth and the knowing of it — in the ‘concept’ of thought. It is an enterprise presaged theologically in the effort to experience the unity of the divine and human in Christ. The *Phenomenology* thus sets forth the itinerary of ‘fallen’ man, not historically, but as this fallenness has been rendered inward and thereby potentially overcome in modern man. This confidence in the human capacity for goodness and freedom, if it has been thought arrogant and pretentious in its first statements with Goethe or Hegel, is in our own day something every American or European who is committed to democratic and scientific perspectives believes implicitly.

If modern humanism can be accused of perpetrating many evils of its own, there can nonetheless be no fleeing back into some earlier position. For it is not that the modern spirit itself is evil, but rather that it still imperfectly knows what its freedom is. It is in this respect, as acutely self-conflicted, that it is capable of the greatest violence and confusion. The overcoming of this conflict within the standpoint of freedom itself requires opening oneself up to the historical in all its various extremes, and also moving beyond them. This is what the *Phenomenology* seeks to do: to bring together all the diverse standpoints developed over the course of the history of the human spirit under the form of their outcome, the standpoint of free, conceptual thought.

## 6. The Post-Modern Spirit

What we find after Hegel is a series of positions in which the modern tradition of a merely subjective freedom is still somewhat assumed in attempts to affirm the technical-existential human world as absolute. They all thus imply radical atheism, as well as opposition to the philosophical standpoint as such. The idea of free subjectivity is dogmatically clung to, the issue being how it may be subsumed under some concept of worldly existence, thus rendered self-sufficient. They fall generally into two camps: a technological activism that would free the world through the complete overcoming of a freedom that is no more than immediate and subjective, and the contrary affirmation of just this immediate or existential freedom itself as against *techné*. In both there is the consciousness of a conflict between the *presumption* of freedom and its *actuality*: an ambivalent freedom which, as so limited, can neither be denied nor affirmed or else must be affirmed and denied at once.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> On this ambiguity see F.L. Jackson, “The New Faith: Strauss, Kierkegaard and the Theological Revolution” (*Dionysius* xii, 1988) and “The Beginning of the End of Metaphysics” (*Dionysius* xv, 1991). It is clear the decline of religion and philosophy over the past two centuries is far from a passive or arbitrary falling-away; rather the result of a concerted intellectual and practical effort to deconstruct their very

One may say all these positions include Hegel's own. In the argument of *Phenomenology*, the distinction and relation of self-consciousness to consciousness — a thinking being standing in relation to an objective other-in-general — is already surpassed and reduced to a subordinate status. It is just this Hegelian standpoint that in the 19th century was taken up, but construed as an *assumed* coalescence of nature and freedom. It is through its own inherent ambiguity that this assumption falls into a 'left' and a 'right' point of view, according as one or the other moment of this assumed but unstable identity supplies the dominant paradigm. It supports both freedom as radical revolutionary activity, aimed at overcoming human nature and history, and equally freedom as the radical affirmation of the natural-historical individual's immediate subjective existence.

Hegelianism of the left derives from criticisms of Hegel's philosophy of religion. D. Strauss' position is equivalent to taking the conclusion of *Phenomenology* as Hegel's final position, as if the *Phenomenology* were the whole of the Hegelian philosophy. Bauer expresses this outcome in terms of 'absolute self-consciousness', Feuerbach in terms of what this excludes, namely the general form of life that *has* this self-consciousness — 'universal humanity' — for whose sake he would dissolve religion into political philosophy. Marx accepts this unification of humanity with natural self-consciousness but as something to be struggled for, not an immediate condition.<sup>27</sup>

Liberalism and socialism are alike in attempting social and technical control without penetrating to the primary assumption of both, namely free individuality. In the older liberalism a universal freedom is to some extent realized in the form of subjective idealism. The original Marxism too had a certain recognition of this principle, gleaned from Hegel and the Enlightenment. But more recent liberalism and socialism have tended beyond the older classical empiricism and beyond modern subjectivity to a more radical empiricism: a return to nature such as takes its identity with freedom as something directly achieved. This return to nature not only does not appeal to a foundation in independent individuality but profoundly rejects any reference to an inner freedom.<sup>28</sup>

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standpoint. From scientific materialism and post-Marxist political theory to existential ontology and the linguistic deconstruction of thought, all the ultra-modernist schools have participated in this attempt, and all driven by the same presumption of an unlimited subjective freedom, a presumption originating in Hegel's time and requiring that any and every mediation, whether historical, religious or philosophical, that would represent the autonomy of the individual as derivative rather than absolute be repudiated.

<sup>27</sup> To regard the *Phenomenology* as representing Hegel's own final position — the view especially of 'left' Hegelians who either reject the 'system' or argue it only extends the same method — is to remain fixed at the standpoint of consciousness and its experience. It then becomes a question how to characterize the authentic or absolute form of this human consciousness, whether as radical egoism (Bauer, Stirner, Husserl), absolute self activity (Schopenhauer, Marx, Nietzsche), the 'feeling of humanity' (Strauss, Comte), the being of *Dasein* (Heidegger) and so forth. The whole trend runs completely contrary to Hegel's explicit account, where in 'absolute knowing' there is the transition from the subjective-objective, I-and-other reflexivity of experience to the *self-knowing* freedom of the thinking spirit. The dogmatism of post-modern philosophy may be described as the perseveration of the phenomenological standpoint, the human *experience* of freedom, taken as absolute.

<sup>28</sup> By the turn of the present century, this belief in the identity of freedom and nature has become a broad and powerful dogma, with cultic overtones: the fusion of 'spirituality' and natural or emotive feeling, the

In liberalism and socialism as they are now, one has radical empiricism reduced to absurdity. Heidegger's anguished flight from *techné* is, however, into the 'unconscious' only, thus no real alternative. He is right that liberalism is the contradiction between determinate technocratic action and an arbitrary freedom beyond it, and that freedom does not come to know itself in technical action. If socialism would suppose that with absolute control of the social-technical process freedom is satisfied, still such total control does not alter the fact that the relation of the process to individuals denies this freedom. For Heidegger, the social-technological revolution would return to a relation of man to nature that had already been abandoned in antiquity; he attempted to expose this in taking up another view of the Greek experience itself as a counterfoil.

The naturalism of the later liberalism and socialism was indeed conflicted and inconsistent. Heidegger saw it as still tainted with the assumption of an unlimitedly free subjective will. That the aim of dominating and controlling nature assumes a universal human self-determination, if especially clear in the utopianism of earlier forms, is less so in the later, where freedom itself is more fully drawn into the finite process. As against this, subjective freedom reasserts itself in the protest of individuals against the technological order, against globalism etc., demanding that the system be changed here and now and confident that the collective efforts of dissenting individuals will accomplish this, appealing to justifications which range from the need to bring subjective moral idealism more into line with the new immediacy or, more extremely, to a direct Heideggerean flight back into 'nature'.<sup>29</sup>

All such positions are relapses into standpoints already superceded in *Phenomenology*, though distinguished from the latter in their deepened sense of a concrete autonomous self-hood which they are nonetheless unable clearly to articulate. On the one hand there is the attempt to fulfil Enlightenment without appeal to an abstract universal self, that is, to 'Reason'. On the other, the possibility that the liberation of humanity is unattainable generates counter-humanist philosophies in the manner of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and their progeny. The outcome is that, in their present plight, men can neither undo nor restrain the work of science and technology, but are totally captured by it nonetheless.

What belongs essentially to this modern secularity? Above all, the idea that

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valuation of aboriginal over civilized life, the burgeoning obsession with the sexual dimension of personal relations, the mysticism of 'natural medicine', the distrust of morality, science, technology and globalism as inimical to the environment and society of an imagined pristine human animal; and so forth. The presumption of subjective freedom, once raised to an absolute, conjures the ideal of an unconditional human experience free from every form of objective or universal mediation, a vision finding its popular expression in a new ultra-moralism based on the human 'return to nature'. The contradiction lies in the fact that the freedom to which return would be made is already presupposed, and that in any case freedom is far from itself a 'natural' state of mind. It should be noted that Doull's most developed reflections on liberalism, in his "The Philosophical Basis of Constitutional Discussion in Canada" (*Animus*, 1997), do not so directly identify liberalism and naturalism.

<sup>29</sup> See the essay "Heidegger and the State" in D.G. Peddle and N.G. Robertson (eds.): *Philosophy and Freedom: the Legacy of James Doull*. (Toronto, 2003) p.357.

knowledge can be practical and not contemplative only, that it is useful in the improvement of human life. Such an idea is not present in antiquity where *techné* is separate from *praxis* and both are subordinated to *theoria*. On the other hand, were it possible, as with Heidegger, that the original modern confidence in secular freedom be destroyed, then certainly a cultural flight from the useful and technical would inevitably result. The subjective, having passed over wholly into objective spirit (*Sittlichkeit*), comes to the point where it is lost in particularity and naturalness: where the state is nothing more than the individual as immediately existing.

There is no alternative but to understand this primary modern confidence and come to terms with it. The *Phenomenology* supplies the means to this. The opposition of objective-materialist and subjective-idealist attitudes arising out of the concretely free self-consciousness is, in the *Phenomenology*, seen as overcome. But Hegel avoids pressing this unity as an immediate identity of nature and subjectivity, but rather would preserve the difference, a difference *not lost* in that unity. The difference of nature and spirit should not, however, be a matter of a subjective reflection only, where the difference keeps dissipating into indifference (as Schelling), or oscillates between the one and the other. That standpoint of subjective reflection is the standpoint of which the *Phenomenology* is the resolution, in a thinking which holds nature and spirit together as comprehended.

The appropriate critique of the technological spirit is thus one that exposes its spiritual basis; that shows that reason, as the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness, is its indispensable presumption: in short, *that reason is spirit*. Accordingly, the technological spirit is only overcome where the sheer historicity of its enterprise, the blindness of its liberal faith, is finally revealed. Escape from it into an existential subjectivity, into naturalistic idealism or the vanity of caprice, are to no avail. It is necessary to bring out that, and how, this ‘appearing’, or phenomenal spirit is founded upon a merely *abstract* unity of subjective with objective, i.e., a unity that is only *assumed*.

The argument of the *Phenomenology* intends precisely to show that this unity is indeed present in every form of knowing and willing, a unity into which all division and manifoldness fall. An authentic philosophy recognizes that such a unity cannot be a matter for experience as such; that all forms of empirical thinking and willing are abstractions from the concreteness of the concept of freedom itself, i.e., of the unity-in-difference of nature and spirit. If in all such forms, their content and logic are inadequate to one another, from the philosophical standpoint it is rather assumed that the content does not escape from or stand alien to thinking but that thinking is nothing except the logical movement through which any content is what is it.