

Absolute Spirit

Georg Hegel

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☒ 453

The concept of the spirit has its reality in the spirit. If this reality is in completed identity with that concept as the knowledge of the absolute idea, then the necessary aspect is that the implicitly free intelligence liberates itself for its concept, in order for it to be a shape worthy of it. The subjective and the objective spirit can therefore be seen as the path on which this side of reality or existence forms itself (☒ 304). Conversely, this path also has the significance that the subjective spirit is seen as the first entity which exists in its immediacy without the concept, grasps its essence and forms itself from there, and thereby reaches its free identity with the concept, its absolute reality.

☒ 454

Since the subjective individuality in its free development is essentially a process that begins with immediate life, the highest identity which being has, and therefore observes all the determinate beings in the world as a nullity and entities to be sacrificed, the ethical substance has the significance of absolute power and the absolute soul, and contains the significance of the essence of nature and of the spirit.

☒ 455

The diremption of this general and pure substance of the spirit is therefore the judgment in itself and the knowledge for which it exists as such.

(a) The Religion of Art

☒ 456

The immediate shape of this knowledge is that of the intuition and representation of the absolute spirit as the ideal.

☒ 457.

The significance of the ideal is the substantiality as the identical and concrete essence of nature and of the spirit, a concrete essence which is called God. The proof that this significance is the absolute truth is the mediation by which nature is suspended into the spirit, and the spirit suspends its subjectivity through its activity into the absolute spirit, thereby placing itself as its final ground in such a way that this mediation is in itself just as much the suspension of the mediation, of the antithesis (☒ 72, 74, 105, and so on), and knows itself as the absolute first principle.

☒ 458

As this consciousness of the absolutely first takes shape, its immediacy produces the factor of finitude in art, and is also the determinate shape of God for itself at first as the abstract of an immediate existence, of an elementary or concrete natural being, or of the opposite, pure thought.

☒ 459

The truth, however, of that immediate shape and its shapeless negativity, of the here and now and of the beyond, is the concrete shape born from the spirit. In this ideal the natural immediacy appears only as the sign of thought, liberated from its contingency and transfigured through thought to express the idea, so that the shape shows it and it alone: the shape of beauty.

☒ 460

Insofar as beauty in general is the penetration of the intuition or of the image by thought, and exemplary thought, it is something formal, and the content of thought, as well as the material which it uses for its imagination, can in the first place be of the most various types.

☒ 461.

Insofar, however, as the form has its true content, that penetration itself the spiritual substance in its absolute significance (☒ 457), it is, however, for the sake of the immediacy in which this knowledge is intuition or imagistic representation, the shape, to a certain extent finite, as being is immediate and thereby external material, the content is partly therefore only a particular spirit of the people.

☒ 462

That this existence is a product of the subject, which grasps the idea and brings it to external presentation, is not because of its finitude; for the subject is only purely formal activity, and the work of art is only then an expression of God when there is no sign of subjective particularity in it, and the indwelling spirit of the people is conceived and born into the world unmixed and unspotted by its contingency. The mediation, which has gone through the pain and the activity of a subject and has taken shape, is immediately suspended. The work presents the substance of the subject, and the labour pains are precisely this absolute manifestation and negativity of the subjective particularity.

☒ 463

Insofar, however, as the image of the God is at hand as immediate, thus the relation of the others, driven by their self-subsisting essences in the act of worship through devotion and the act of lowering in thoughts, relinquishes their own subjectivity, symbolically sacrifices their particular reality, and becomes conscious in the enthusiasm and in the enjoyment of their identity with the substance. Thus the relation loses its external shape and, to the same extent, transfers its subjectivity, which is inward in substance only as general knowledge, into existence.

☒ 464

In world history, however, the absolute spirit suspends the finitude of its knowing reality and the limited existence of its idea in and for itself into generality, as well as the form of the intuition, of the immediate knowledge and existence, into self-mediating knowledge and an existence which is itself knowledge, and passes into revelation.

(b) Revealed Religion ¶ 465

Absolute spirit at this level of the suspended immediacy of its shape, and its knowledge as well at the level of reflection, is, on the one hand, the general spirit of nature and of the spirit subsisting in and for itself; but on the other hand, it exists for the representation. The subjectivity of knowledge, because it is reflection, lends independence to the moments of its life, whose totality it essentially is, making them presuppositions of each other, and phenomena which succeed each other; it makes a complex of events according to finite reflective categories.

¶ 466

In this separation the reflection separates the form from the content, and in the form the different moments of the concept are separated into particular spheres or elements, in each of which the absolute content manifests itself.

¶ 467

(1) In the moment of generality, the sphere of pure thought or the abstract element of the essence, it is therefore the absolute spirit which is in the first place the presupposed principle, and as a substantial power in the reflective determination of causality is creator of heaven and earth. But in this eternal sphere the spirit only generates itself as its son, whose generation or positing is equally, however, suspended and the eternal being of the concept; just as its determination to be different from the general essence eternally suspends itself and, through this mediation of the self-suspending mediation, the first substance is only concrete individuality is the spirit.

¶ 468

(2) In the moment of particularity, however, as judgment, in which individuality in general is included or becomes itself again in the moment of reflection, it is this concrete eternal essence which is presupposed. Its movement is the actual creation or disintegration of the eternal moment of mediation, of the only son, who is divided into the independent antithesis. On the one hand, namely, are heaven and earth, elemental and concrete nature, and on the other hand, standing in relation to such nature, the spirit, which therefore is finite. That spirit, as the extreme of self-subsisting negativity, completes its independence until it becomes wickedness, becomes directly an extreme through its relation to an opposing nature and through its own naturalness thus posits it.

¶ 469

(3) In the moment of individuality as such, namely, of subjectivity and of the concept itself in which the antithesis of general and particular has sunk to its identical ground, the place of presupposition (a) is taken by the general substance, as actualised out of its abstraction into an individual self-consciousness. This individual is also as such identical with the essence, and thereby evil in and for itself is suspended. Further, this immediate concreteness expires in the absolute pain of negativity, in which it, as concreteness, is identical with itself and thus, as absolute return from that negativity and as general unity of the general and individual essentiality for itself has realised its being as the idea of the spirit, eternal, but living and real.

¶ 470

(b) This totality, since it exists in the sphere of reflection, is the self-subsisting totality or presupposition, and in opposition to this totality stands the division and finite immediacy of individual subjectivity. For this subjectivity the initial presupposition and its movement are at first an other and an object of contemplation;

the intuition of its self–subsisting truth, through which this finite subject, on account of its immediate nature, at first determines itself as nullity and evil. It is, therefore, according to the example of its truth, the movement to relinquish its immediate natural determinacy and its own will, and to unify itself with that example in the pain of negativity, in general abstraction. In this way the subject recognises itself as identical with the essence, which (c) through this mediation brings about its own dwelling in self–consciousness, and is the real, general spirit.

☒ 471

The revelation of the absolute, whose life is presented in a cycle of concrete shapes of representation, follows from its separation into independent parts with a temporal and external sequence, and in this last result it gathers itself as the true and the real in the general, simple, and eternal spirit. In this form of truth, truth is the object of philosophy.

(c) Philosophy ☒ 472

Philosophy is the unity of art and religion, as the simple intuition and substantial production of art are elevated to self–conscious thought through the separation into parts and the mediation of religion. In this element the self–conscious idea purifies itself just as much from its first immediacy as from the appearance of the event, from the contingency, the externality, and the sequential nature which its content has in religion. This knowledge is thus the concept of art and religion in which the diverse elements of the content are recognised as necessary, and this necessity and immediacy are recognised as free.

☒ 473

This recognition of the necessity in the content of the absolute representation, as well as of the necessity of both forms, on the one hand, immediate intuition and its poetry, and on the other hand, the presupposed representation, the objective and external revelation, and the subjective retreat and inner identification of faith with representation. This recognition of the content and the form and the liberation of these forms completes itself when philosophy in the end grasps its own concept, that is, looks back on its knowledge.

☒ 474

This concept of philosophy is the self–thinking idea, truth aware of itself (☒ 183), or logic with the significance that it is generality preserved in concrete content. In this way science returns to its beginning, with logic as the result. The presupposition of its concept, or the immediacy of its beginning and the aspect of its appearance at that moment, are suspended.

☒ 475

This initial appearance is formed by the syllogism, which has logic basically as its starting point, with nature for the middle term and is linked ultimately to spirit. Logic becomes nature, and nature becomes spirit. Nature, which stands between the spirit and its essence, divides itself though not to the extremes of finite abstraction. For the syllogism is in the idea and nature is essentially determined as a transition point and negative moment. But the mediation of the concept has the external form of transition, and science takes the form of being.

☒ 476

In the second syllogism this appearance is suspended, for the spirit is the mediating factor. This is a syllogism which is already the standpoint of the spirit itself presupposes nature and joins it with logic. It is the

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syllogism of reflection on the idea; science appears as subjective cognition.

☒ 477

These appearances are suspended in the idea of philosophy, which has self-knowing reason, the absolutely general, for its middle term a middle which divides itself into spirit and nature, with the former as its presupposition, and the latter as its general extreme. Thus immediate nature is only a posited entity, as spirit is in itself not a presupposition, but rather totality returning into itself. In this way the middle term, the self-knowing concept, has as its reality primarily conceptual moments and exists in its determinacy as general knowledge, persisting immediately by itself.