

**TEMPORAL IMMEDIACY IN HEGEL'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT**

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**ABSTRACT**

A significant portion of recent Hegel scholarship has taken a primarily historical view on Hegel's time-sense. Any primarily historical interpretation of Hegelian time, however, ignores the fundamental role immediacy (or the 'eternal now') plays in the text's denouement: the reconciliation between Spirit and the Absolute Other. While the Hegelian time-sense does have a historical *aspect* – and this can be seen through Hegel's development of Spirit – the ultimate reconciliation between *knower* and *known* must take place *now* if it is to truly have meaning and relevance *now*. Leading up to Absolute Knowing, each chapter of the *Phenomenology* contains at least one instance of temporal immediacy; these instances largely consist of repeated attempts at reconciliation between the knower and the known, instances which, up to Absolute Knowing, come up short for one reason or another. In Absolute Knowing itself, in order for this step to be successful, this reconciliation *must* be centred in the *now*, and not in the past.

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## 1. Introduction

A great many scholars, some quite famous names among them, have regarded the Absolute Knowing chapter as the key to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. No less than Karl Marx took this chapter as "the very "secret" of Hegel's philosophy" (Blumenfeld, "The Abolition," 113). It is, in a way, the "climax" of the *Phenomenology*, the place where the progression of human knowledge reaches its apex. And if Absolute Knowing is indeed the key – or even *a* key – to the *Phenomenology* itself, then time must be considered one of the keys to Absolute Knowing. This is not just due to time's fundamental place in the natural world – the fact that we and everything around us *exist* in time – but because that relationship becomes paramount in the specific progression Hegel brings to a head in Absolute Knowing; the reconciliation between knower and known, between Spirit and the Absolute Other.

Perhaps the most important passage pertaining to time in Absolute Knowing is the well-known quote from section 801: "Time is the Notion itself that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time" (M801). What do we make of this? The answer is crucial, both in terms of figuring out what exactly time *is* for Hegel, as well as the relationship between immediacy and historicity. What does it mean for Spirit to annul Time, or for Time to present itself to consciousness as empty intuition? It is clear that one's interpretation of this passage will majorly inform one's interpretation of the process undergone in the *Phenomenology* as a whole: this interpretation, after all, will set the foundation for how one sees the relationship between Time and Spirit, and thus in the journey of Spiritual self-discovery that is the *Phenomenology*.

A fairly consistent thread through more recent Hegel scholarship holds that Hegel's time-sense is primarily historical. These interpretations, of course, differ somewhat amongst themselves; some, like Michael Murray, hold that what is annulled in this passage is "the deficient being-in-time view of Time," or the view that Time simply *is* (Murray, "Time in Hegel's," 701). Others, like Robert B. Brandom, frame the discussion more as the meeting between different historically-conscious expressions of Spirit; in Brandom's view, though, Spirit is still fundamentally historicized, and so is the reconciliation that takes place between Spirit and the Absolute Other, and the recognition between the two (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*, 585). Though these two examples are by no means exhaustive, they will do (for now) in terms of establishing what I aim to discuss: the assertion by scholars like Murray and Brandom (among others) that Hegelian time is inherently, or at least primarily, historical.

Here, I aim to argue against that narrative. Hegel's time-sense is not inherently, or even primarily, historical; rather, Hegel's time-sense is fundamentally, irrevocably that of the *eternal now*, or the continuous present. Now, I will emphasize here – and continue to emphasize throughout this project – that Hegel's time-sense *does* have a historical aspect. This historical aspect can be clearly seen through the development of Spirit, which, as one could probably guess from the title, takes up a not-insignificant portion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* philosophical progression. However, this historical aspect, expressed through the development of Spirit, is merely one aspect of Hegelian time, and to focus on it exclusively leaves out his emphasis on immediacy, or, as Reid puts it, the "explicitly Aristotelian terms, as a divine, motionless, self-contemplation of self-revelation" (Reid, "Time for Hegel," 1). This state, as we will see, is vital when it comes to the reconciliation between knower and known, between Spirit and Absolute Other. As I mentioned before, for a not-insignificant portion of Hegel scholars, this reconciliation

takes place primarily in the pages of history. However, through this project I will emphasize that this reconciliation is not something that merely *has happened*, but is something that *continues* to happen, that is happening *right now*, and that, further, this must be the case if Hegel's corpus—including the *Phenomenology*—is to mean anything for us.

In order to show this, in section 2 I will first establish, more broadly, my reasoning for choosing the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as my main focus for arguing my case; then, I will give a brief overview of temporal historicity in Hegel scholarship, followed by a brief summation of some of the views arguing for a more immediate Hegelian time-sense. With that context established, I will then move into section 3, where I will undertake an analysis of specific instances of temporal immediacy within each of the movements in the *Phenomenology*. This is necessary because it establishes a pattern that is vital to the ultimate development of Hegel's primarily-immediate time-sense in Absolute Knowing, namely through the repeated attempted reconciliation between knower and known. Not every aspect of this reconciliation is, of course, immediate, but in each movement there is at least one moment of immediacy to be remarked upon, and these moments, as I said, play into a pattern, a syllogism which progresses a little further with each movement leading up to Absolute Knowing itself. Following this, I will, naturally, analyze Absolute Knowing, which in a sense can be taken as the 'climax' of the *Phenomenology*, its denouement; this is, after all, where Spirit and the Absolute Other are reconciled. This will be the focus of section 4: in my analysis of Absolute Knowing, I will show how the reconciliation between Spirit and the Absolute Other can only be meaningful if it takes place *now*, and *continuously* takes place. This is a foundational concept for Hegelian Science. As I will illustrate in section 4, Hegelian Science, while still historical in the sense that it is a tangible set of ideas that were first written down in a certain historical period, *must* be centred in

the *now* if it is to *remain* meaningful. Once this is established, I will return to presentations of primarily historical notions of Hegelian time. I will discuss four of them, and demonstrate why each of them falls short of providing the same resonance when it comes to the all-important reconciliation between Spirit and Absolute Other, which acts as the foundational principle for the rest of Hegel's corpus.

## 2. Historicity and the “Eternal Now” in Hegel scholarship

### 2.1. Why the *Phenomenology*?

In any major research project, the question of methodology is an important one. Fortunately, when it comes to my analysis of immediacy in the Hegelian time-sense, the answer is relatively straightforward. Before I get into the answer, though, it must be stated that it is a reasonable question: why focus in so intently on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*? Why not also examine, say, the *Logic*, or the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, or any of Hegel’s various lectures and essays both from before and after he wrote the *Phenomenology of Spirit*? Why focus in so keenly on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to the exclusion of the entire rest of Hegel’s body of work?

The first reason I chose to examine the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, while excluding the remainder of Hegel’s broad corpus, was simply that to consider these other works would not have fit the scope of the project. One must remember that I am not attempting to strictly define the Hegelian time-sense as a whole: to do that would require a much more intensive and expansive level of analysis than is possible at the MA level. To do such a thing would, in my estimation, require at least one and perhaps several full-fledged books: the broad category of “Time in Hegel” is, indeed, rather too hefty for an MA thesis project to even hope to cover in full. Rather, my project deals with immediacy as an aspect of Hegel’s time-sense: the text that most clearly shows this development is the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the development of consciousness itself, and its own awareness of and relationship with itself and the world around it, is elucidated. In this elucidation, we see the progression of human consciousness from its most basic form – Sense-Certainty – all the way to Absolute Knowing. Additionally, throughout the

*Phenomenology of Spirit* we witness the conflict between immediate and historical notions of time: the text is rife with places where the immediate and the historical grapple with one another, inform one another, predicate one another. Once more, I will go into this in more detail in the next several sections of the project, but the frequent interplay between these two notions of time, their tug and pull, plays a great role in informing this foundational work. When Hegel, for instance, says that “Self-consciousness has now grasped the Notion of itself which, to begin with, was only *our* Notion of it, viz. that in its certainty of itself it is all reality” (M394), it is clear that consciousness, in its movement from self-consciousness toward Reason, has entered into an immediate relation with its own self-perception, an ahistorical relation. For, as Hegel goes on to say, “End and essence are for it henceforth the spontaneous interfusion of the universal—of gifts and capacities—and individuality. The individual moments of this fulfilling and interfusion, *prior* to the unity in which they have coalesced, are the Ends hitherto considered” (M394). In other words, each individual moment in the phenomenological journey leading up to Reason so far has been a fusion between the transcendent and the mundane: “This,” Hegel goes on to say, “being now absolutely certain of its reality, no longer seeks only to realize itself as End in an antithesis to the reality which immediately confronts it but, on the contrary, has the category as such for the object of its consciousness” (M394). Now it is clear why Hegel titled the section that this passage begins “Individuality which takes itself to be real in and for itself.” For Reason, in its certainty of its own status as reality, no longer sees itself as an antithesis, as part of the historical process of consciousness’s development, but as transcendent, immediate reality itself. In Sense-Certainty, reality was nothing but sense perception. Now, Hegel says, Reason has asserted itself as imminent, immediate reality: not sense perception, but the very process of reason itself.

Of course, Hegel will eventually demonstrate the flaws in this line of thinking. The book, after all, does not end with Reason: the above example, though, is a demonstration of the interplay between historicity and immediacy that happens throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and which I will examine in more depth later on in my project. The scope of the development within the *Phenomenology* in and of itself makes it a prime candidate for analysis: there is much we can learn from the *Phenomenology* on how Hegel viewed a great many topics, although it is doubtless true that this could be said about most of his other works as well.

This leads into three further reasons why I believe an analysis of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* best suits my aims: I will briefly list them here, then go into each in more detail. The first of these reasons is that the *Phenomenology* acts as the starting point for Hegel's system and lays the foundation for the rest of his philosophical thought. In other words, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a foundational work, not only in the wider corpus of German idealism, but within Hegel's own philosophical framework. The second is that, as I suggested before, the progression from Sense-Certainty to Absolute Knowing gives us vital insights into how Hegel viewed time as partially immediate. And the third reason is simply that a large number of scholars who comment on Hegel's sense of time and his conception of time refer primarily to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as I plan to do in my own project. And, as one might infer, I believe these scholars are justified in looking to the *Phenomenology*, and primarily the *Phenomenology*, for Hegel's views on time.

First, to say that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* acts as the foundation for the rest of Hegel's work is relatively uncontroversial. As Howard P. Kainz says, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* acts both as a sort of introduction to Hegel's system and a part of that system: Hegel includes "phenomenology" as part of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, which comprises the third part of

Hegel's system, but also seems to regard the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an introduction to the wider cycle beginning with the *Logic* (Kainz, *Hegel's Phenom.*, 12). This appears contradictory: Kainz, however, clarifies the seeming contradiction by pointing out that the entire point of the *Phenomenology* is to act as a general science of Spirit. "If one became sufficiently versed in all extant sciences," Kainz says, "to know their primary and secondary laws, their elements and subdivisions—we could not say that this knowledge of all these sciences would not be a 'science' (i.e., scientific knowledge)" (Kainz, *Hegel's Phenom.*, 12-13). He goes on to bestow this knowledge of general scientific law with the fitting name "scientific-knowledge-in-general," and states that if someone were to reach such a level of knowledge, "he would then be able, other factors being equal, to conduct a scientific meta-study of these sciences, arrange them in a systematic way according to their elements, principles, common and distinctive features, etc." (Kainz, *Hegel's Phenom.*, 13). Rather than a process of deduction, Kainz describes Hegel as using a process of induction here: Kainz gives the further example of being introduced to logic through a method of induction, by being introduced to "all the different types of terms, propositions, syllogisms, etc." and then, once the inductive investigation was concluded, the greater system called "logic" could be constructed (Kainz, *Hegel's Phenom.*, 13). This inductive model, Kainz says, is more or less how Aristotle was introduced to logic; and, in a similar way, this is how Hegel introduces readers of the *Phenomenology* to the systematic science of Spirit (Kainz, *Hegel's Phenom.*, 13).

Because Hegel introduces us to the science of Spirit through this inductive method, then, it should be relatively uncontroversial to say that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* acts as the foundational work for his philosophical corpus. As Jean Hyppolite says, Hegel "specifies the technique of phenomenological development, showing how this development is the work of

consciousness engaged in experience and how the [internal] necessity of this development can be thought out retrospectively by philosophy” (Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 4). What the *Phenomenology* describes, then, is the progression of human consciousness through experience – from Sense-Certainty to Absolute Knowing – and it is through induction, through readers of the *Phenomenology* coming back to the work and analyzing each of its sections and how they fit together, that a systemic knowledge of Hegel’s science of Spirit can be approximated. Knowledge, in the *Phenomenology*, is not considered as an absolute in-and-for-itself – not something “out there” waiting to be discovered – but as something present in consciousness (Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 4).

This, of course, leads into the second further reason: the progression from Sense-Certainty to Absolute Knowing gives us vital insights into how Hegel viewed time as partially immediate. I will not belabour this point too much here, as I will undertake a more detailed analysis of why this is the case and what this looks like throughout section 3. I will mention, however, that the earliest of the *Phenomenology*’s figures of consciousness – Sense-Certainty – is entirely immediate. It is, as Hegel says, “a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply *is*” (M90). Hegel goes on to say that “sense-certainty appears to be the *truest* knowledge; for it has not yet omitted anything from the object, but has the object before it in its perfect entirety” (M91). In other words, the objects of the world, for Sense-Certainty, appear as mere sense data, without any form of comprehension. Even something as simple as *my computer is in front of me right now* advances beyond the stage of Sense-Certainty, because of that pesky predicate: Sense-Certainty, Hegel says, must be approached in a way that is “*immediate or receptive*; we must alter nothing in the object as it presents itself. In *apprehending* it, we must refrain from trying to *comprehend* it” (M90).

Of course, once a human consciousness tries to comprehend the world around it, it begins assigning categories and predicating itself into the world, and this is where Sense-Certainty begins to fall apart. I will examine this transition, and its implications for Hegel's time-sense, in greater detail in section 3: for now, though, suffice it to say that this sense of immediacy, in a way, re-emerges in subsequent figures of consciousness. In Self-Consciousness, for instance, a similar process of immediate differentiation happens as in Sense-Certainty, except where in Self-Certainty this process happened when a consciousness began to predicate itself into a world of inert objects, Self-Consciousness sees one consciousness encounter another consciousness. "But now," Hegel says, "there has arisen what did not emerge in these previous relationships, viz. a certainty which is identical with its truth; for the certainty is to itself its own object, and consciousness is to itself the truth" (M166). Through this certainty, we have, in a sense, lapsed back into an immediacy, except instead of existing in an immediacy where all is perception without predication, this "eternal now" consists of one's consciousness of oneself as a self and one's consciousness of everything outside oneself as an "other." There is an independence ascribed to foreign objects, but this independence again exists only because they are perceived by consciousness as independent. It is important to note, though, that these objects are also perceived by consciousness as inert: consciousness perceives itself as *for itself*, as the *only* independent, observing consciousness that exists (M170).

As I have already said, I will analyze this further in section 3. For the time being, suffice it to say that this sense of temporal immediacy, while overcome in Sense-Certainty, re-emerges throughout the rest of the *Phenomenology*, culminating in its appearance in Absolute Knowing, where it once again becomes a vital part of the formula.

The third and final further reason for my focusing on the *Phenomenology* to the exclusion of the rest of Hegel's corpus is that, when it comes to discussions on Hegel and Time, this is what a large portion of Hegel scholarship has chosen to do up until now. And while I disagree with the conclusions of a significant number of the scholarship – hence the existence of this project – I agree with the decision to use the *Phenomenology* as the focal point of their arguments. Jacob Blumenfeld, for instance, in his paper “The Abolition of Time in Hegel,” says “in the history of interpretations of Hegel, how one has read the chapter on ‘Absolute Knowing’ in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has determined one’s whole perspective” (Blumenfeld, “The Abolition,” 112). In addition, Blumenfeld points out that Marx (whose idea of wealth as disposable time Blumenfeld hopes to elucidate through an analysis of Hegel’s treatment of time in the *Phenomenology*) took Hegel’s Absolute Knowing chapter as the “secret” of Hegel’s philosophy (Blumenfeld, “The Abolition,” 113). John Burbidge, referring to Alexandre Kojève, says that Hegel identifies Time and Concept in Absolute Knowing (and, in fact, refers directly to the tricky section 801 that will be investigated in greater depth later in this project) (Burbidge, “Concept and Time,” 403). Joseph C. Flay, meanwhile, says that analyzing the *Phenomenology* can assist us “in determining his [Hegel’s] conception of time as that relates to the question of knowledge itself, when knowledge is considered in the framework of this project of getting to the absolute foundations of knowledge” (Flay, “Time in Hegel,” 261). Now, the question of whether Hegel’s *Phenomenology* deals *primarily* with “the question of the nature of knowledge,” as Flay claims (Flay, “Time in Hegel,” 260), is perhaps debatable: however, there is little doubt that the *Phenomenology* deals at least partially with this question. And this question, of course, plays a large part in the arrival at Absolute Knowing (as one could likely infer from the name of the chapter itself).

There are more examples I could give, but I believe the examples I have listed – along with the reasons preceding my examples – are sufficient. To answer the question I aim to answer, then, I believe using the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as my primary text is justified. While I cannot be so presumptuous as to say the rest of Hegel’s corpus has nothing to offer us in terms of his views on time, the *Phenomenology*’s place as the bedrock of his corpus, the fact that the progression through the different figures of consciousness gives us invaluable insights into the immediate character of Hegel’s time-sense, and the fact that so many different Hegel scholars have focused primarily on using the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the baseline for their own analyses of Hegelian time, contribute to my decision.

## **2.2. Historicity and the “Eternal Now”**

As previously mentioned, the majority of scholars who focus in any great depth on Hegel’s time-sense tend to assert that it is primarily historical: by that, of course, I mean that the concept of time itself is primarily defined by consciousness’s own experience with it through contemplation (invariably influenced by the historical context one exists within), and specifically *through* this contemplation itself. As Jacob Blumenfeld puts it, time, at least in the historical sense, is “this movement of self-discovery of spirit’s own conceptuality within the realm of simple consciousness” (Blumenfeld, “The Abolition,” 114). A Hegelian time-sense would not, for Blumenfeld, be one where “time just exists, it “is there,” as an empty container we fill with our experience” (Blumenfeld, “The Abolition,” 114). Hegel, according to Blumenfeld, contrasts two different theories of time: one historical and one presented as the “empty intuition” to which it presents itself to consciousness (Blumenfeld, “The Abolition,” 114). Of course, the theory presented as “empty intuition” presents itself as something that is “just there,” and perhaps more

importantly, something that exists outside ourselves (Blumenfeld, “The Abolition,” 115). This, however, at least according to Blumenfeld, is a view Hegel was trying to move past: instead, Blumenfeld argues, Hegel’s view of time is something that appears “as the determinate movement of people coming-to-awareness of their own freedom to think, act, and rethink themselves according to their concepts” (Blumenfeld, “The Abolition,” 115). The entire *Phenomenology of Spirit*, after all, can at least partially be summed up as Spirit’s journey of self-discovery: this self-discovery is inherently a historical process. And while it might take place in a present day (or, perhaps more accurately, in a time that we think of and perceive as the present day), our lives and our personal journeys of Spiritual discovery are informed by what has come before us. This process, this “logic of experience,” can only relate itself to that which has come before (Blumenfeld “The Abolition,” 118). Time is not an “empty intuition,” but something already pregnant with meanings that we, both as individuals and as members of collectives, bring to it. Thus, according to Blumenfeld at least, Hegel’s time-sense is primarily historical.

Terry Pinkard agrees, and even expands on this in some ways. He asserts that the *Phenomenology* examines “how we moderns came to be the people who were in a position to reconstruct our past so that it made sense as a movement from one form of ‘social space’ to another” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Pheno.*, 334). According to Pinkard, Hegel’s theory of knowledge (which, as we will see, is inextricably linked to Hegel’s conception of time) “must be historical, and the history of our claim-making activities must have developed within itself a series of practices for reflecting on the practices themselves” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Pheno.*, 15). In order to be a rational agent, then, Pinkard claims we must not only familiarize ourselves with the past incarnations of our claim-making activities, but must realize that it is through this very past that we create meaning. Not only this, but this meaning itself is historically-focused; the “being-in-

time” view cannot be valid for Pinkard, because, in his words, “we have come to understand that the only things that *could* count for us as authoritative have to do with our understanding ourselves as historical, social beings” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Pheno.*, 265). The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is thus a reflective, historically analytical text, and nothing more than that (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Pheno.*, 267).

A third scholar, Michael Murray, brings this point home when he says that, when Hegel discusses annulling time, “what is annulled, then, is merely the deficient being-in-time view of Time. The change entailed by the event of comprehension is that Spirit is no longer thought as intuited out there “in” Time, but rather gets conceptually grasped as identical with time “as” Time” (Murray, “Time in Hegel’s,” 701-702). With comprehension, then, comes the negation of our idea of time, or the idea that time exists primarily “in the now.” Instead, when comprehension has been reached, time exists as Spirit. This is what History is for Hegel, after all: “a *conscious, self-mediating* process—Spirit emptied out into Time” (Murray, “Time in Hegel’s,” 808). Time, then is a reflection of Spirit, and this reflection of Spirit comes in the form of its past forms: in other words, human history. History, then, is the crux; for commentators such as Blumenfeld, Flay and Murray (among others), historicity is at the heart of Hegel’s time-sense.

There have, however, been scholars who have asserted that Hegel’s time-sense is more immediate, at least to some degree. As I said in my introduction, while the current scholarship tends more toward the view that Hegel’s time-sense is primarily historical, this was not the case in every time and place in Hegel scholarship (although to be fair, Hegel scholarship is now an extensive field, and has been for several decades). However, what’s also true is that the debate over Hegel’s time-sense *per se* has not become prominent until somewhat recently<sup>1</sup>. There are

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<sup>1</sup> And even here, Hegel’s time sense in and of itself is not always the focal point of discussion. For instance, in Ardis B. Collins’s book *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Dialectical Justification of Philosophy’s First Principles*, the

several older, more foundational works on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that at least imply a greater role for immediacy in Hegel's time-sense, along with several more recent ones that have carried on this line of thinking and made the engagement with Hegel's time-sense more explicit (and in doing so have acknowledged how vital one's understanding of Hegel's time-sense really is, especially in Absolute Knowing).

One book that at least implies a more immediate understanding of Hegel's time-sense is John Russon's *Reading Hegel's Phenomenology*. Russon begins his reading of the Absolute Knowing chapter by pointing out that "to call knowing absolute is to call it unconditioned or unqualified" (Russon, *Reading*, 221). To know absolutely, then, for Russon, is to know without any presuppositions: the expressions "Absolute Knowing" and "presuppositionless science" thus are interchangeable for Russon (Russon, *Reading*, 221). Russon then goes on to point out that Absolute Knowing is a fundamentally metaphysical endeavour: because the "experiential shapes" of the previous figures of consciousness were/are experienced "as a paired structure of subjective comportment and metaphysical commitment, where these paired structures are themselves recognized to be practices of interpersonal communication," it then stands to reason that "when we do phenomenology, we see what the *experience* is that holds the various specific metaphysical stances; we see how metaphysical positions are structural features within experiential attitudes" (Russon, *Reading*, 224). Russon connects the *Phenomenology* to the *Logic* by pointing out that the subject-matter of Absolute Knowing is the experiential stance that Hegel uses to start off the *Logic*: that of Science (Russon, *Reading*, 221-222). Taking all this together,

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chapter "The Absolute Knowing Debate" focuses on the debate between six scholars "focused on the interpretation of absolute knowing as the end of the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of the *Logic*." (Collins, *Hegel's Pheno.*, 440). This debate, Collins states, began with a disagreement between Joseph C. Flay and Stephen Houlgate over whether the otherness of thought and being is preserved in Absolute Knowing (Collins, *Hegel's Pheno.*, 441). It is not exclusively a debate over Hegel's time-sense: however, with the crucial role Hegel's time-sense (and one's understanding of Hegel's time-sense) plays in Absolute Knowing itself (and one's interpretation of it), the implications of Hegel's time-sense on debates like these are deep.

Russon then says that “absolute knowing is the stance whose nature requires that it explicitly take metaphysics as its object” (Russon, *Reading*, 225). This is a vital plank in Russon’s interpretation of Absolute Knowing, because from here he reveals his more immediate understanding of Hegelian time: for as the *Phenomenology* begins with Sense-Certainty and then progresses toward Absolute Knowing, this progression is paralleled in the *Logic*, “but the *Logic* begins not with an experience of the *positing* of immediacy, but with immediacy itself, and we watch *immediacy*’s own dialectic, for the object of absolute knowing as logic is not experience but being” (Russon, *Reading*, 225). From these passages alone, it is clear that, for Russon, Absolute Knowing is an inherently metaphysical process, and in this metaphysical process, a sense of immediacy is present, both in the establishment of Absolute Knowing at the end of the *Phenomenology* and at the beginning of the *Logic* (which goes beyond the purview of this project, but I believe is worth pointing out there).

Another work that implies a more immediate understanding of Hegel’s time-sense as immediate is Quentin Lauer’s *A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*. In his reading of the Absolute Knowing chapter, an important assertion for Lauer is that, for Spirit, or more specifically its ‘God-consciousness,’ “looking back over all the forms it has gone through it can recognize that in each of them, including the highest, it is finding itself” (Lauer, *A Reading*, 257). Lauer goes onto say that “to *comprehend* all these forms as the dynamic totality of self-movement is to know “absolutely.” The movement described turns out to be circular; only at the end is the beginning—and the whole movement—revealed in its true (spiritual) significance” (Lauer, *A Reading*, 258). This is an important idea with various consequences for one’s interpretation of Absolute Knowing, and for one’s view on the Hegelian time-sense, for it emphasizes the role of Sense-Certainty, the first of the figures of consciousness, which was left

behind long ago and which various other commentators ascribe little to no importance to when discussing Absolute Knowing. “Neither the subject knowing nor the object known,” Lauer says, “is independent of the other. When man knows God the knowing is an action the agent of which is the self and only the self and the object of which is the divine being as a self” (Lauer, *A Reading*, 261). With knower and known so closely united, then, it becomes clear for Lauer that “Spirit in process (in time) is necessarily incompletely spiritual. The process is complete when self-consciousness has justified to itself its initial sense-certainty, i.e., when the self of which it is conscious is fully spirit” (Lauer, *A Reading*, 264). For Lauer, then, the “annulment of time” Hegel discusses in paragraph 801 is key to the fulfillment of Spirit as Spirit: one question that might arise from here is how exactly this would look in practical terms. Are we advancing past merely a *historical* sense of time, or are we advancing past time altogether? Lauer gives his answer when he says:

Science, then, demands that the whole process we have reviewed, which is the process of conceptualization, be set forth in such a way that spirit come to consciousness that this is its process. “Science contains within itself this necessity, to bring itself out in the form of pure concept and to bring about the transition of the concept into consciousness” (p. 563/806). When this is done there comes a realization that the very “sensory certainty” with which the whole process began was itself a form of self-knowing. (Lauer, *A Reading*, 267).

It is Lauer’s last line here that I believe is most important: Absolute Knowing is one that understands the truth in Sense-Certainty, a truth that goes unfulfilled because its focus was on that which is outside itself (the perceivable world), rather than what was *within* itself (Lauer, *A Reading*, 257), but one that resonates nonetheless. This, I would argue (and will argue in further detail when I get more into Absolute Knowing myself) implies that Hegelian Science is carried out within an immediate “eternal now,” rather than through History.

I would not be the first to argue this, however: Jeffrey Reid (who builds upon the work of Lauer, among others) makes this assertion in his chapter “Time for Hegel: History and the Absolute Now.” Reid asks, “if the Absolute is really *absolute*, then why should its revelation take place over time? In other terms, why would such revelation not be ever-present, eternal and eternally ‘now?’” (Reid, “Time for Hegel,” 1). If the Absolute as Hegel describes it is “a divine, motionless self-contemplation or self-revelation,” then why, Reid asks, would it appear as a historical process, instead of taking place in the “eternal now?” (Reid, “Time for Hegel,” 1). The answer to this, Reid says, is that “Science conceives of absolute revelation as concomitant with human reason” (Reid, “Time for Hegel,” 1): in other words, throughout the phenomenological journey, we experience revelation, Earth-shattering moments where our understanding of ourselves and our relationship with the world around us changes fundamentally. Due to the very nature of the human mind, this process must play out over time: because this process plays out over time, it is a historical process (recall that Hegel defines History as “Spirit emptied out into Time.”) However, absolute revelation itself is immediate: and in Science, we have the final absolute revelation, and a final, triumphant return to the stage for temporal immediacy for Hegel.

I will engage with these ideas more thoroughly – both those that emphasize the role of immediacy in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and those that downplay it – in my section on Absolute Knowing. For now, I hope to have given both sides of the debate on this issue a fair shake; I also hope to emphasize, though, that the majority of scholars that have argued for a greater role for temporal immediacy (with Reid being an exception) published their major work in the 1970s and earlier, while the majority of scholars that have argued for a more purely historical time-sense have published the bulk of their work in more recent times. That is not to say no Hegel scholar on Earth apart from Reid has argued for a greater emphasis on temporal immediacy: there are

definitely other examples out there. The broad trend, though, has been toward a greater focus on historicity, and it is this I hope to have emphasized.

### 3. Temporal immediacy in the *Phenomenology* up to Absolute Knowing

With the broad trend toward a historical understanding of Hegelian time having been established, we can move now to Hegelian temporality – and more specifically, instances of the emergence of temporal immediacy – within the *Phenomenology*. This will help establish a pattern that appears in the *Phenomenology*: that is, the branching out from and returning into a state of immediacy throughout the different figures of consciousness within the *Phenomenology*. More specifically, I hope to establish the re-emergence of moments of *temporal* immediacy within the different figures of consciousness.

Of course, an examination of immediacy in and of itself in the *Phenomenology* would be too broad for the scope of this project. My aim in this chapter is to briefly examine several specific moments of *temporal* immediacy, and to show that Hegel does not dispense with any and all sorts of temporal immediacy when he moves past sense-certainty. The structure of the *Phenomenology* has often been compared to a ladder (take the title of H.S. Harris's influential book, *Hegel's Ladder*, as just one example): it should seem intuitive, then – but is still worth saying here – that each rung on Hegel's ladder, just like a physical ladder, cannot be climbed without support from the parts of the structure already scaled. And one of the major ways this is true is that the immediate time-sense present in sense-certainty is not completely annihilated with the introduction of predication; this immediacy returns, at various points throughout the *Phenomenology*, as we work our way toward Absolute Knowing.

But, of course, we should not get ahead of ourselves. The phenomenological journey begins at sense-certainty, and it is here we find perhaps the most obvious and widely-acknowledged instance of temporal immediacy. Thus, it is here, at sense-certainty, that we must begin our look at different instances of temporal immediacy.

### 3.1. Sense-Certainty (Consciousness)

The phenomenological journey begins in a place where all that exists for the human psyche is sense data, impressions perceived by the mind without any real measure of comprehension. There is no *what* or *why* in these perceptions, no comprehension, no understanding: these sensations simply *exist*, in perpetuity. In Sense-Certainty, there is no intellectual analysis, no breakdown of the facts as one sees them: there merely *is*. As Robert C. Solomon puts it: “The ‘certainty’ of sense-certainty is not the certainty of a philosopher sure of his or her arguments; it is the naïve certainty of a novice who has not yet even thought about the question, ‘What do we know and how do we know it?’” (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 321-322). And, as Solomon adds later in his chapter on Sense-Certainty, “Sense-certainty is the view that knowledge is ‘immediate’—that is, *un-mediated* by concepts; it is the view that we can gain knowledge by *ap*-prehending (*auffassen*) an object without *com*-prehending (*begreifen*) it through the concepts of understanding” (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 324). Or, as Willem A. de Vries puts it, “that knowledge first appears as an *immediate and simple relation* between mind and world” (de Vries, Sense-Certainty, 63). There is no reflection and no mediation; a person simply exists in the world and, as Solomon says, *apprehends* the world around them without *comprehending* it. Hegel himself points out that, in Sense-Certainty, it is not certain whether the apprehended object is truly known: there may or may not be knowing, but what is certain is that the object being apprehended “is, regardless of whether it is known or not; and remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there” (M93).

As one might infer from what has been discussed so far, there is a strong temporal element to Sense-Certainty. More specifically, Sense-Certainty is the most obvious example of

temporal immediacy in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; it is by no means the last (if it were, I would have focused on something quite different for my project!), but it is the plainest. As Jeffrey Reid points out, when the apprehension that I discussed in the previous paragraph takes place, “what strikes my senses is not really the singular object that I mean but rather a pure ‘thisness.’ In other words, the singularity of the sense object can only be captured when I refer to it as ‘this object.’” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 3). What’s vital to note here is that this process happens both *instantaneously* and *continuously*. When I refer to any object as *this* object – *this* chair, *this* desk, *this* coffee cup – I am not, in the stage of Sense-Certainty, apprehending what a coffee cup *is*, in the wider context of comprehending the world and its objects. The act of predication – of attempting to bestow meaning and understanding on the world around us – has not occurred just yet. But I know what I see in front of me. I know the shapes, the textures, how a coffee cup feels in my hand as I grab it, how the coffee inside tastes as I tip my head back and drink it. This immediate knowledge that we encounter at the beginning of the *Phenomenology* is not academic knowledge: those of us who have trained for years in institutions of higher learning to try and systematically understand the world around us through logical reasoning may have trouble intuitively grasping the sort of knowledge Sense-Certainty offers. We are used to thinking of our own thinking in terms of predication: “that *is* a coffee cup,” “that *is* a horse,” and so on. But Hegel begins before we begin predicating: our thought in this stage is, as Reid pointed out, simply “*this* coffee cup,” “*this* horse.”

Sense-Certainty, however, is merely the first step in the phenomenological journey. Were the knowledge Sense-Certainty offered us sufficient by its own means, then the *Phenomenology* itself and all the tomes upon tomes that have been written on it since its publication have been exercises in futility. But there are indeed limitations to the sort of knowledge Sense-Certainty

offers. Perhaps the most significant of these lies in the very self that perceives: Reid points out that, in Sense-Certainty, we find an “unreflected, immediate form of selfness” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 4). Furthermore, in Sense-Certainty, when one attempts to *point out* the “here” or the “now,” “I am again confronted with a manifold of “heres.” I may point out this tree as the singular one that I mean, but as a singular object, it is only “here” because it is presented in an infinite web of other “heres.” It is above, below, left, right, further above, further below, further left or right, and so on” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 4). What this means is that, in Sense-Certainty, there is no particularity in the sense-objects we focus on. When one focuses on *this* coffee cup or *this* tree, in the unreflective, unpredicated sensuous immediacy of Sense-Certainty, the *this* is really indeterminate.

So in Sense-Certainty, knowledge is ambiguous; being, however, is not. This sense-certainty that humanity exists within at the start of the phenomenological journey is not, as Hegel says, “merely this pure immediacy, but an *instance* of it” (M92). These instances, Hegel goes on to say, proliferate: and it is in these differences that we find what Hegel calls “pure being” (or being in a state of true immediacy, where no distinctions are made) split into two different instances of “this”: the “I” and the “other” (M92). “When *we* reflect on this difference,” Hegel says, “we find that neither one nor the other is only *immediately* present in sense-certainty, but each is at the same time *mediated*” (M92). It is only through something else that we have this certainty—the “thing” that we perceive—and it is only really contained within self-certainty through the perceiver, ourselves, the “I” (M92). de Vries refers to these two elements as ‘indexicals,’ which are used, de Vries says, to express the fundamental truth of Hegel’s Sense-Certainty: that “immediate knowledge is thought of not as an element in a complex structure of knowledge, but as the very essence, indeed the exhaustive essence, of knowledge. Knowledge at

its best – true knowledge – *is* immediate knowledge” (de Vries, “Sense-Certainty,” 69). But it is here that predication also begins: the consciousness which perceives the world will predicate its own notions onto the wider world, and the wider world will ultimately predicate itself back onto the observer. As de Vries points out, “sense-certainty cannot grasp the immediate and individual *as such*. It can grasp only something universal” (de Vries, “Sense-Certainty,” 70). Sense-Certainty does not quite express what it means to express: instead, it relies on ‘indexicals,’ such as ‘This’ or ‘I.’ (de Vries, “Sense-Certainty,” 70). But these indexicals in and of themselves are already “intrinsically mediated by relations to numerous otherwise disparate individuals” (de Vries, “Sense-Certainty,” 70). This already conflicts with the heart of what Sense-Certainty is, with that absolute certainty that what is perceived “simply *is*.”

Perhaps, then, meaning is to be found not in the ‘this,’ but in the ‘I.’ For in Sense-Certainty, the ‘I’ exists in the same continuous and instantaneous relation as the ‘this.’ Not only that, but it is the ‘I’ that does the perceiving; does the meaning not then come from the ‘I’ which perceives it? “Perhaps,” Reid says, “the truth (essence or in-itself) of this form of knowledge (of consciousness) takes place in *me*, in the knowing subject. It is because this tree is the one that *I* mean, that it is truly certain and true” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 4). The problem with this, as Reid points out, is that “my ‘I’ is immediately determined by the here (or the now) that it means” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 4). Given the fact that the relationship between the knower and the known is reciprocal, Reid says, “where the knowing subject is always conscious *of* something and the object of knowledge is always the object *of* a knowing subject,” it should not be surprising that the hermeneutically empty object reflects that same emptiness into the perceiver (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 4). As Hegel himself puts it, “I do indeed *mean* a single ‘I,’ but I can no more say what I *mean* in the case of ‘I’ than I can in the case of ‘Now’ and

‘Here’” (M102). Sense-Certainty’s solution here is to universalize itself: this makes sense, to a degree, because the process of immediate perception is, as I have said already, both *instantaneous* and *continuous*. It logically follows that a consciousness in the stage of Sense-Certainty would realize the incongruence between having a multitude of heres, nows and Is, and would instead compartmentalize itself into a *universal* ‘I.’ “When I say ‘this Here,’” Hegel says, “‘this Now,’ or a ‘single item,’ I am saying all Thises, Heres, Nows, all single items. Similarly, when I say ‘I,’ this singular ‘I,’ I say in general all ‘Is’; everyone is what I say, everyone is ‘I,’ this singular ‘I’” (M102). Hegel furthers the point when he says, in the next paragraph, “Thus we reach the stage where we have to posit the *whole* of sense-certainty itself as its *essence*, and no longer only one of its moments, as happened in the two cases where first the object confronting the ‘I,’ and then the ‘I,’ were supposed to be its reality” (M103).

Thus, we see Sense-Certainty move from one sort of immediate relation to another, from a singular consciousness instantly and continuously perceiving a multitude of sense-objects to *the* singular consciousness instantly and continuously perceiving *the* multitude of sense-objects. As Hegel says, “thus it is only sense-certainty as a *whole* which stands firm within itself as *immediacy* and by so doing excludes from itself all the opposition which has hitherto obtained” (M103). Further, Hegel adds, “its truth preserves itself as a relation that remains self-identical, and which makes no distinction of what is essential and what is unessential, between the ‘I’ and the object, a relation therefore into which also no distinction whatever can penetrate” (M104). For the Sense-Certain consciousness, then, it would seem that it has appointed itself as *the* arbiter of truth. For truth, at least for the Sense-Certain consciousness, is found in the *this*, in the *immediate* and *continuous* flow of the sum of sense knowledge.

This, however, is obviously not the case. I am not the ultimate arbiter of truth (much as I might like to think I am, at times). And, as Hegel will go on to point out, beginning in Perception, the immediate knowledge given to the universal 'I' of Sense-Certainty is still lacking. This immediate knowledge we have gained is not knowledge in the true, complete sense. Thus, judging by this initial analysis in Sense-Certainty, it would seem that knowledge, for Hegel, cannot be immediate. Robert C. Solomon concurs: "what Hegel shows," Solomon says, "is that insofar as sense is immediate, it cannot be knowledge at all, and there is nothing to be certain about" (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 338). Solomon goes on to point out that, for Hegel, knowledge is unattainable without some reference to a universal: sense-certainty cannot claim knowledge without the very predication that causes sense-certainty itself to fall apart (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 338). With this in mind, it becomes clear that immediacy, or at least the sort of immediacy present at the beginning stages of self-certainty, cannot play a role in the acquisition of knowledge. And this, in turn, might lead one to think that immediacy, temporal or otherwise, will play no further role in the evolution of human consciousness, and the progress down the path from Sense Certainty to Absolute Knowing. However, as we will see, this is not the case: for while the stage of Sense-Certainty in and of itself was (and is) an inadequate path to true human knowledge, certain aspects of it (including the temporal immediacy that is so endemic to sense-certainty) stubbornly resurface at points in each of the upcoming figures of consciousness, and especially in Absolute Knowing.

### **3.2. Self-Consciousness**

In Perception, the immediate unity that was established in Sense-Certainty – that of *the* singular consciousness instantly and continuously perceiving *the* multitude of sense-objects –

collapses with the introduction of predication. The knowledge gained through this immediate Sense-Certain unity is not comprehensive: it can only describe that which is *immediately* comprehended *from one specific perspective*. What's worse, this one specific perspective – namely, the individual doing the perceiving – still has no sense of their own identity or individuality, let alone the identity and individuality of others.

Of course, while the Immediate Sense-Certain Unity is still in place, none of this matters. For the Sense-Certain individual, this immediate knowledge is all that is required to understand the world. With the introduction of predication, though, comes the introduction of identity: the most basic and fundamental conception of identity, and the one from which Hegel's thought on the subject grows, is Fichte's *ich bin ich*, the I=I (Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 158). The revelation that I=I is fatal for the Immediate Sense-Certain Unity, because it instigates an avalanche of predication, all carried out in order to sort out one's own identity. I, as a human being, might say things like "I am a human being," "I am a man," "I am about average height for a male of my species," and so on. Every assertion of this kind that we make about ourselves falls in this category.

Importantly, though, when we make these assertions about what we *are*, we are also, at the same time, making countless assertions about what we *are not*. By saying "I am a human being," I am implicitly stating that I am *not* a cat or a frog or an iguana. By saying "I am a man," I am saying I am not a woman. By saying "I am about average height for a male of the species," I am saying I am neither short nor tall according to the current societal norm. This avalanche of predication sweeps away the Immediate Sense-Certain Unity; because Sense-Certainty is predicated on an epistemological understanding that is *immediate* and *continuous*, the introduction of predication undermines this conception. Predication, after all, is *not* immediate,

and *not* continuous; to say “I am a human being” requires a certain amount of reflection, and a certain amount of foreknowledge (in this case, the definition of “human being”).

Thus, the Immediate Sense-Certain Unity falls apart, and is abandoned. This unity, however, is not the last such unity that occurs in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Another occurs, at the beginning of section B, Self-Consciousness, which I will, perhaps predictably, refer to as the Immediate Self-Conscious Unity. Both of these unities exist in a state of perpetual temporal immediacy: in other words, the Immediate Self-Conscious Unity, much like the one which preceded it, is both *immediate* and *continuous*. In this way, it acts as a sort of reflection, a sort of echo of the Immediate Sense-Certain Unity which came before.

How is this the case, though? And what does this immediacy look like, in the case of Self-Consciousness? Well, as Hegel himself says, “What the object immediately was *in itself*—mere being in sense-certainty, the concrete thing of perception, and for the Understanding, a Force—proves to be in truth, not this at all; instead, this *in-itself* turns out to be a mode in which the object is only for an other” (M166). Here, Hegel describes the inadequacy of one’s perception of objects in each stage of Consciousness; he goes on to say that “the Notion of the object is superseded in the actual object, or the first, immediate presentation of the object is superseded in experience: certainty gives place to truth” (M166). The reflection on identity through predication, then, which I described a few paragraphs ago, becomes the model for describing the objects in the world around us.

However, this understanding of the world has its own shortcomings. Hegel describes the existence of outside beings happening in two distinct moments: one where “self-consciousness is in the form of *consciousness*, and the whole expanse of the sensuous world is prevailed of it,” and another where “the unity of self-consciousness with itself and hence the sensuous world is

for it an enduring existence which, however, is only *appearance*, or a difference which, *in itself*, is no difference” (M167). The language Hegel uses here might seem rather arcane: he simplifies, though, when he goes on to say:

consciousness, as self-consciousness, henceforth has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however *for self-consciousness* has the character of a *negative*; and the second, viz. *itself*, which is the true *essence*, and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object (M167).

This is the Immediate Self-Conscious Unity. In this unity, Hegel asserts, the antithesis – or the *essence*, or what the object *actually is* – is “removed,” and the first part of Self-Consciousness’s double object is taken as the object’s truth (M167). Axel Honneth puts it succinctly when he says: “whatever ‘truth’ about reality it is capable of calling to mind is due not to its passive registering of reality, but to an active act of consciousness that has antecedently constituted the alleged ‘object’” (Honneth, “From Desire,” 78). This perception of the world around us results in a particular relationship with the world around us: that of Desire. Hegel himself is quite upfront on this point: he states that “self-consciousness is *Desire* in general,” (M167), and it is quite clear, at least to me, that the state of Desire exists in the same temporally immediate state as Sense-Certainty.

If we think back to the immediate and continuous nature of Sense-Certainty, we recall that the *immediate* and *continuous* relation of consciousness with the world around it came about due to a lack of predication. What immediately *is*, in Sense-Certainty, is taken as truth. Well, in Self-Consciousness, what immediately *is*, is once again taken as a certain type of truth, just in a different sense. If, as Hegel says, “self-consciousness is *Desire*,” and the object of Desire is not the object’s actual truth but only its appearance, then we once again find consciousness in an unmediated, immediate relation. This time, though, consciousness is not taking the immediate knowledge provided by the senses as truth: this time, consciousness is taking one half of another

being's truth as its entire truth. In other words, consciousness is predicating its own perception of the world onto the world around it, ignoring the individuality of all the other beings and objects in the world as it does. And, in order to validate this perception, it must fulfill itself through this perception, and this is where Desire comes in. As we will see, though, Desire in this form cannot be fulfilled: it is a never-ending hunger, plaguing consciousness all through the rest of the Self-Consciousness chapter, all the way up to reason. This state of Desire is perpetual, is both *immediate* and *continuous*, just like Sense-Certainty.

The state of Desire can, in short, be boiled down to an insistence on the part of the individual to predicate themselves onto the world on their own terms, no matter what the cost. In the Immediate Self-Conscious Unity, after all, consciousness, as self-consciousness, has its essence *only in opposition* to the immediate object. This absence, this emptiness, this opposition is the source of Desire, which, quite often, takes the form of consumption. Dien Winfield interprets Desire as the hunger to consume the world around us, in the name of predicating ourselves onto the world (Winfield, *Hegel's Pheno.*, 84). To validate ourselves as ourselves, to achieve Self-Certainty, we must obliterate all that is *not* us. "That act of validation," Winfield says, "is not a theoretical matter of sensing or perceiving something. It is instead an active obliterating of the otherness of the object" (Winfield, *Hegel's Pheno.*, 84). Desire, however, finds little satisfaction in using and consuming inanimate objects, for these objects have no self-consciousness of their own to reflect back onto the one doing the consuming. As Winfield says, "the consumption of the object of appetite only renews the situation where desire stands in need of satisfaction" (Winfield, *Hegel's Pheno.*, 84).

And this situation persists when Desire moves on to living things. One can eat a plant, for instance, or turn plants like trees into lumber, books, medicine, and so on, but while a plant is

alive, a plant has no self-consciousness. Something similar can be said for animals: while the way in which an animal is alive is more similar to us (as human beings) than the way in which a plant is alive, most animals have either no self-consciousness of their own at all, or a very rudimentary and limited sense. Self-conscious Desire quickly realizes that the use and/or consumption of plants and animals for our own means is not ultimately satisfying.

The object of our Desire, then, becomes the only other Self-Conscious beings in the natural world: other human beings. This is what Hegel is referring to when he says that “what Self-Consciousness distinguishes from itself as having *being*, also has in it, in so far as it is posited as being, not merely the character of sense-certainty and perception, but it is being that is reflected into itself, and the object of immediate desire is a *living thing*” (M168). Now, this desire takes different forms: one of the most prominent of these is covered in perhaps the most famous and widely-interpreted passage in the *Phenomenology*, the Master-Slave dialectic. But there is a more rudimentary form of desire, one that precedes the Master-Slave dialectic, and one that exists within the Immediate Self-Conscious Unity, that being sexual desire.

Sexual desire, too, though, ultimately goes unsatisfied. In fact, all these different facets of desire, all these different attempts by consciousness to fulfill itself through the *use* of another consciousness, go unsatisfied. This is what Jeffrey Reid calls the “essentially *persistent* feature of desire (*Begierde*) generally, which we already witnessed in Sense-Certainty, and which we will encounter again in the Reason chapter: desire’s senseless, endless repetitiveness, its bad (natural) infinity” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 38). At first, Hegel says, “Self-consciousness is Desire. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is *for it* the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself *in an objective*

*manner*” (M174). Through this movement, though, self-consciousness is “unable to supersede” the object of its Desire: “it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well” (M175).

The progression moving forward from the immediate unity of Self-Consciousness mirrors that of Sense-Certainty. The difference is that the immediate unity found in Sense-Certainty was eventually interrupted by simple predication; in other words, encountering ourselves and the world around us on a deeper, more fundamental level (or, at least attempting to). The Immediate Self-Conscious Unity, however, is interrupted by the persistent presence of another consciousness, not just as an object of Desire, but *as its own consciousness, in and of itself*. As Hegel makes clear in the Master-Slave dialectic, then moving forward through Stoicism and Skepticism, the fact of other consciousness’ independence is, at first, a thoroughly uncomfortable one for the consciousness experiencing it. Eventually, however, consciousness overcomes this state of discomfort and incorporates the fact of other consciousness’ existence into its worldview. This is where we move into Reason, where, aided by the knowledge gained through the other consciousness’ struggle for recognition, consciousness again becomes convinced that it is the source of all knowledge in the world, except this time through the use of reason.

### **3.3. Reason**

The remainder of the Self-Consciousness chapter details the struggle for recognition between the seer and the seen. This struggle has been – and is – as much a tangible, historical struggle as it is a theoretical one. Hegel’s Master/Slave Dialectic – detailed in the section ‘Lordship and Bondage’ in the Miller translation – is perhaps the most remarked-upon segment of the *Phenomenology* in all of Hegel scholarship. The struggle for mutual recognition has

undergone many different scholarly interpretations in the two-plus centuries since Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology*, from those focused on the class struggle (Marxist readings) to those focused on gendered power dynamics (feminist readings), and many, many more besides. Miller himself translates the section title as ‘Lordship and Bondage,’ which, as Reid points out, places the struggle for recognition “in the feudalism of the Middle Ages” (whereas Reid himself situates the dialectic in the Greco-Roman world) (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 37). And while there have been some ahistorical readings of the Master/Slave Dialectic more recently, I would agree with Reid in saying the dialectic cannot be called *atemporal*: there is a temporal element to it, in that the dialectic must take place *in time* (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 37).

The Dialectic is not my focus here, however; nor are the following two subsections, Stoicism and Skepticism. For my purposes, these are simply a few more rungs on Hegel’s ladder, leading onward and upward toward the next major figure of consciousness, Reason. As we move through the *Phenomenology*, though, and through the different stages of consciousness, it is important to remember that we are *going* somewhere. There is a certain narrative thrust to the *Phenomenology*, one that is profoundly historical. As I have said before, my purpose is not to claim the *Phenomenology* is an entirely ahistorical text: what I hope to communicate, and hope I have communicated up to this point, is that these different figures of consciousness are also shot through with temporal immediacy, and that this recurring immediacy is a vital component for understanding where it is Hegel is taking us.

For now, though, suffice to say that, during the Master/Slave dialectic, and through Stoicism and Skepticism, we are *going* somewhere: and that *somewhere* is the Enlightenment. Much of Hegel’s Reason chapter is an examination of the state of human consciousness during this historical time period (which was still very fresh in the European cultural consciousness at

the time Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology*, just after the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). To put it as broadly as possible, the Reason chapter as a whole is an analysis, a commentary and a critique of Enlightenment ideals, most notably, but certainly not exclusively, those of Immanuel Kant (who was, of course, one of the leading philosophers of the Enlightenment). Now, much could be (and has been) said on Hegel's critique of Kant, and the Enlightenment more broadly. When it comes to my analysis, though, much of this information, while interesting, is beside the point. What is most important here is the change in the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived that takes place as we leave Self-Consciousness and enter Reason. Reason, Hegel says, is "the certainty of consciousness that it is all reality; thus does idealism express its Notion" (M233). But how did we get here? In Reason, it seems, the chasm between perceiver and perceived has been bridged; some form of mutual recognition and understanding has been reached. But how did this happen? And what does this imply?

In brief, Hegel's answer to the first of these two questions is consciousness has rid itself of all autonomy and identity through mediation with the universal. "The *mediated* relation," Hegel says, "constitutes the essence of the negative movement in which consciousness turns against its particular individuality, but which, *qua relation*, is *in itself positive*" (M226). This, as Hegel goes on to say, makes clear consciousness's relation to the universal: the universal is not only the greatest *other* that humanity can possibly think of, but now it becomes clear that the universal *is one with* consciousness, as well (M226). This realization forces consciousness into a mediated relation with the universal, a syllogism "in which the individuality, initially fixed in its antithesis to the *in-itself*, is united with this other extreme only through a third term" (M227). H.S. Harris uses the analogy of Catholic liturgy to illustrate this mediation; the Priesthood acts as the mediator between the self and God (Harris, *Hegel's Ladder I*, 429). Whether the Catholic

liturgy *must* be the form this relation takes is up for debate: what is clear, though, is that, through this mediation, consciousness divests itself of its own identity, pours everything it has into the great other, into the universal (M229). It renounces itself, so that it can regain itself more fully than it ever has before: as Quentin Lauer puts it, “to have given up its own will is only from one point of view negative; from the other, in its concept, it is positive, because it has been replaced by the universal will of the other. It “does God’s will,” a will which is expressed in the counsel of the mediator” (Lauer, *Reading Hegel’s Pheno.*, 124). The universality consciousness gains from this interaction with the universal is not its own creation: because of this, “the nothingness of its own doing becomes everything in the other” (Lauer, *Reading Hegel’s Pheno.*, 124).

Thus, consciousness becomes convinced that it is all reality. “In grasping the thought that the *single* individual consciousness is *in itself* Absolute Essence,” Hegel says, “consciousness has returned into itself” (M231). It now possesses an internal unity with the universal, which had previously been externalized (M231). And this results in a change in the *immediate relation* between two consciousnesses, that originally took the form of Desire. Recall that, at the beginning of Self-Consciousness, Desire manifested itself out of a need for consciousness to fulfill itself through the world around it – and in the end through another consciousness – through predication. The discomfort that arose for Self-Conscious consciousness when presented with the separate individuality of other beings and objects out in the world was a fundamental quality of that particular stage of consciousness. For the Self-Conscious consciousness, the solution was to predicate itself onto the world through consumption.

With the advent of Reason, though, we find consciousness fulfilled. “Its hitherto negative relation to otherness turns round into a positive relation,” as Hegel says (M232). Now, Hegel says,

the 'I' that is object for me, is not merely an *empty* object in general, as it is for self-consciousness as such, nor is it, as in free self-consciousness, merely an object that withdraws itself from other objects which retain their worth *alongside* it; on the contrary, it is for self-consciousness an object such that any other object whatever is a *non-being*. But self-consciousness is all reality, not merely *for itself* but also *in itself*, only through *becoming* this reality, or rather through *demonstrating* itself to be such. (M233).

Now that there is no distinction between the self and the universal, consciousness comes to see itself as embodying all reality. And, since consciousness itself now embodies all reality, it can easily figure out that which was, before, dark, mysterious and impenetrable.

Or can it? With this new relation between consciousness and the universal established, consciousness will now attempt to understand the wider world – and thus understand itself, too – through the use of analytical reason (hence Hegel titling this section of the *Phenomenology* “Reason”). It is important to keep in mind that this relation is fundamentally individualistic: consciousness has, after all, become convinced that it *is* all reality. And so, consciousness begins its attempt to understand the world around it, first through the observation of the natural world, then through observation of the human mind, and then through observation of pseudoscience (Physiognomy and Phrenology, more specifically). Each of these attempts, however – which occur in Observing Reason, the first subsection of Reason – ends in failure. This is because, despite consciousness’s new union with the universal, there is still an ambiguity present. This ambiguity rests upon what one might call an interpretational otherness: consciousness takes nature to be immutable and unchanging, but in reality, it is anything but. As Reid points out, the natural world is finite: it itself is a ‘vanishing word’ (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 84). The finite nature of the natural world, and those who live in it, is at odds with Reason’s insistence on knowledge being dependent on a world that is immutable, static, unchanging (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 84). As Reid puts it, “Particular individuality, in its recalcitrant, lunar for-

itselfness, turns its back on the deep conceptual, syllogistic complicity between the singular and the universal” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 84).

But how can consciousness be *in union* with the universal, and yet ignore this speculative ambiguity? We find the answer in Pleasure and Necessity, the next subsection of Reason, where we at last return to the temporally immediate relation between individual consciousnesses. When we left off in Self-Consciousness, this relation existed in a state of Desire. Each consciousness wanted to predicate itself onto the other, to dominate it, to *use* it. In Reason, however, this is no longer necessary: each consciousness is fulfilled through the other in the knowledge that they both embody the universal. As a consequence, in this new relation, the script, as it were, has been flipped; whereas before, one consciousness would look to subjugate and dominate the other, now, in Reason, the immediate relation turns to one of fulfillment. It is the individuality of the two consciousnesses that, in Hegel’s words, “preserves the individuals each for himself” (M362). Hegel continues: “for it is not as *this particular* individual that it becomes an object to itself, but rather as the *unity* of itself and the other self-consciousness, hence as an individual that is only a moment, or a *universal*” (M362). This is the major distinction between the Desire that has been left behind, and what Reason has allowed the relation to become, namely one of Pleasure.

However, as idyllic as this relation may seem in comparison to the attempted subjugation of Desire, there is still a significant downside. This downside lays in what Reid calls the “bad infinity,” that is shared by both Desire and by the satisfaction found in Pleasure and Necessity (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 98). For while self-consciousness has, in Hegel’s words, “become objective *to itself*,” or fulfilled itself through its knowledge that there is no distinction between it and the universal, and thus is all reality, it has also reduced itself to a single fleeting moment (M363). This contradiction sees “the attained reality of its individuality” get “destroyed by the

negative *essence* confronting it, which is devoid of reality and content” (M363). This leads consciousness into a sort of feedback loop, where, as Hegel puts it, “the *object*, then, that is for self-consciousness as it takes its pleasure its essence is the expansion of those empty essentialities of pure unity, of pure difference, and their relation; beyond this, the object which the individuality experiences as its *essence*, has no content” (M363). This, for Hegel, defines the *necessity* part of Pleasure and Necessity: each consciousness may now be aware of the other’s individuality, but in their efforts to take pleasure in one another and fulfill themselves through each other, they refuse to confront or comprehend the very universality that fulfilled them in the first place.

This leads to the feedback loop I mentioned earlier, which takes place, as does Desire, within the here and now. Here and now I take my pleasure, and in doing so look to eliminate that speculative ambiguity that lurks in the background: taking sexual pleasure as an example, during sex each partner attempts to predicate themselves onto the other, *while also opening themselves up to predication* (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 100). But this cannot eliminate the aforementioned ambiguity. As Robert C. Solomon says, “pleasure, like the sensations of sense-certainty, are not particulars and immediate but rather interpretations, mediated by context and concepts” (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 502). Even these pleasurable activities—even this supposedly fulfilled mutual predication—are shot through with interpretive ambiguity. It is precisely these interpretations, and the inherent ambiguity behind them, that consciousness tries to ignore and suppress in the immediate relation of Pleasure and Necessity, and indeed throughout Reason. By doing so, though, and by insisting on predicating its understanding of the world and of another consciousness on its own terms (the *here and now*, in the case of Pleasure and Necessity), consciousness suppresses its own universality. In this way, Hegel argues that Pleasure and

Necessity, like the other two instantaneous and continuous relations I have gone over so far, is inherently self-limiting. And thus, it turns out to merely be another step in the journey, another rung on the ladder.

### 3.4. Spirit

Throughout the first three phenomenological movements – Sense-Certainty, Self-Consciousness and Reason – the individual perceiver has attempted to understand the individual perceived. Its understanding of the perceived – the “other” – has expanded each time, from the pure *here* and *now* of Sense-Certainty, to the attempt at consumption and subjugation in Desire, to the acknowledgement of the “other” as real, and the acknowledgement of the self as being mediated with the universal that we find in Reason, which of course leads to Reason’s proclamation that it is all reality.

Reason, however, is not the last step on the journey. For Reason, Hegel claims, has a fatal flaw, which lies within its very understanding of itself as being all reality. The Enlightenment ideal of the individual as one who can, alone, through rational thought, unravel all the mysteries of the cosmos, solve any ethical quandary with finality, objectively determine what makes ‘great’ art – in short, to solve any problem set before it – ignores the fact that no individual arises in a vacuum. Each individual is subject to wider cultural forces and longstanding societal norms: no matter how individual or rational one person might think they are, they cannot escape the grip of these forces. Or, to once again quote Solomon: “the division between chapter 5 and chapter 6 lends itself to a disastrous misunderstanding—namely that individuality and rationality are possible *prior* to membership in a particular ethical community—which Hegel considers sheer nonsense” (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 483). This is a large part of what Spirit is, for Hegel: a sort of

collective consciousness, or, to use one of his more famous expressions, “the I that is we and the we that is I.”

A large part of Hegel’s voluminous Spirit chapter is dedicated to the history of that ethical community, or in his words, the Ethical Order: Spirit, as a whole, is the most historically-focused chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, examining collective human history (or, perhaps more accurately, collective Western European human history) through the lens of first this Ethical Order, then through Culture, and then through Morality. All of this examines the different forms this collective consciousness, this *I that is we and we that is I*, has taken, from the ancient world to the time in which Hegel wrote.

But why do this at all? Well, for Hegel, Reason’s great mistake also presents a great opportunity: for while the efforts of the *individual* to apprehend the world around it *as a collection of many different individuals* ultimately ended in frustration, now a new effort can begin. With Spirit, the struggle for recognition and understanding shifts from being between different individuals and the individual “other” to being between *collections* of individuals, and the *ultimate* other, what Hegel calls the Absolute. What the Spirit chapter is really about, then, is humanity’s efforts to recognize the Absolute: as Reid puts it, the “*human, historical aspects*” of Reason’s “worldly strivings” cause them to become not just the strivings of individuals any longer, but those of this collective consciousness, this *I that is we and we that is I*, of Spirit itself (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 173). As one might expect, the Absolute will not keep silent in the face of this collective striving: it will talk back, will predicate itself into the world and onto Spirit itself, although I will forestall discussing how this looks specifically for the time being, and revisit this point in the next subsection, on Religion. For the purposes of Spirit, the most

important takeaway is that the struggle for apprehension and mutual recognition is no longer simply that of the individual: it is now that of Spirit itself.

One aspect of Reid's ontogrammatical reading of the *Phenomenology* is quite helpful for my own purposes at this point: he says that "'Historical,' in the Hegelian sense, does not just mean 'in the past.' It means being articulated in the grammatical present perfect, in the tense or time of 'having been,' part of the past (participle) but experientially possessed (in the auxiliary verb 'to have') in the present" (Reid, *Hegel's Grammatical*, 121). I believe this is vital to remember not just for the purposes of Spirit, but for understanding the *Phenomenology* as a whole, and how the *Phenomenology* can both be a plainly historical work, but also one where, as I am attempting to argue here, the moments of temporal immediacy we continue to visit through each section are vital, not just in themselves, but for our understanding of the implications of what's to come, once we reach Absolute Knowing. For Hegel, history informs the now: and, apart from in Sense-Certainty, each *now* we have experienced has been irrevocably influenced by the ones that have come before, and by the historical context which intertwines them<sup>2</sup>.

With this in mind, and with the shift from an individual struggle for mutual recognition and understanding to a collective one noted, we can move into the immediate temporal aspect of Spirit. Now, because Spirit is so historically-focused, one might be tempted to say there *is* no immediate temporal aspect to this chapter's narrative: I, however, do not believe this is the case. There is one particular instance that stands out, and that's the splitting off of self-alienated Spirit, which takes place during the transition from the Ethical Order into Culture. Hegel's examination of the Ethical Order ends with a section on *legal status*: here, Hegel maps the codification of ethics into state law – specifically Roman law – onto the earlier movements of Stoicism and

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in Absolute Knowing, Hegel explicitly defines History as "Spirit emptied out into Time" (M808). But I will go into greater detail on this in chapter 4, when I discuss Absolute Knowing.

Skepticism, which were, of course, explored back in the chapter on Self-Consciousness. Recall, briefly, that Hegel's look at Skepticism ended with consciousness discovering its own universality – or, at the very least, a mediated version of such – and thus, now aware of this union, becoming convinced that it is all reality. In the Roman historical context, something similar happens: as Hegel says, “the lord of the world becomes really conscious of what he is, viz. the universal power of the actual world, in the destructive power he exercises against the self of his subjects, the self which stands over against him” (M482). This echoes the struggle for recognition we went through in Self-Consciousness: Hegel goes on to point out that the ruler and the ruled exist “in a merely negative relationship, both to one another and to him who is their bond of connection or continuity” (M482). Reid puts the cultural context into focus when he says that “freedom is no longer a strictly individual affair but is now instantiated into the worldly, historical form of Roman, rights-bearing personhood” (Reid, *Hegel's Grammatical*, 131).

As Reid goes on to say, though, “this also means that the new, worldly, historical figure of self-consciousness is essentially unhappy. In Hegel's terms, he is ‘alienated from himself.’” (Reid, *Hegel's Grammatical*, 131). But what does this alienation look like? Well, in terms of Hegel's ‘merely negative’ relationship, it leads to a situation where the ruler attempts, again, just like in Self-Consciousness, to predicate themselves onto their subjects through fiat: however, this “ruling self,” for Hegel, is “a mere laying-waste of everything and therefore merely beside itself, and is really the abandonment of its own self-consciousness” (M482). In ruling, a King or an Emperor claims to represent the sum total of the Ethical Order in itself, but in claiming this, it alienates itself from the very ‘reality’ it claims to represent (M483).

This leads, in turn, to Spirit's self-alienation, to its splitting off into “a world that is double, divided and self-opposed” (M486). “The world of the ethical Spirit,” Hegel says, “is its

own *present* world; and therefore each of its powers exists in this unity, and in so far as they are distinct from one another they are in equilibrium with the whole” (M486). In the relationships Hegel claims make up the Ethical Order – that of the family and that of the government – “what is *present* has the significance only of an objective reality, the consciousness of which exists in a beyond; each single moment *qua* essence receives this, and with it actuality, from an ‘other,’ and so far as it is actual, its essence is something other than its own actuality” (M486). Here, Hegel asserts, the equilibrium that’s established rests not on the unity “which remains with itself,” nor with “the contentment that comes from having returned into itself,” but on “the alienation of opposites” (M486). This, to me, again suggests a situation where one power has taken upon itself to be the source of all ethical law: however, that power is ‘alienated from itself,’ precisely because it draws only on itself as a source of authority and legitimacy.

This, as I have already suggested, strongly echoes the attempted subjugation we found in the movement of Self-Consciousness: more so, it suggests that the *bad infinity* of Desire (and, later on, of Pleasure and Necessity) can be repeated in a wider, cultural context, between the collective *I* (whose ethical will has been co-opted by a despotic ruler) and the ultimate collective *not-I* (the Absolute). Spirit, at least in this stage, greatly misunderstands, undermines, and even abuses the idea of the Absolute: at this point, when Spirit becomes self-alienated, it “falls apart into a realm in which *self-consciousness* as well as its object is *actual*, and into another, the realm of *pure* consciousness which, lying beyond the first, is not a present actuality but exists only for Faith” (M486). These two realms, for Hegel, represent two different time periods: the first is the Roman world of individuality, which ends in Empire, and the individuality of each of its citizens being subjugated under the Emperor; but the second, too, will end this way, for the second realm is “the *universal self*, the consciousness which has grasped its *Notion*,” which,

Hegel says, apprehends itself, grasps its Notion, and dissolves into “pure intellectual insight” (M486). This corresponds with Reason’s apprehension of itself as being one with the universal: however, this world still eschews Faith. “It upsets the housekeeping of Spirit in the household of Faith,” Hegel says, “by bringing into that household the tools and utensils of *this* world, a world which that Spirit cannot deny is its own, because its consciousness likewise belongs to it. In this negative activity pure insight at the same time realizes itself, and produces its own object, the unknowable *absolute Being* and the principle of *utility*” (M486).

All told, both the Ethical Order and Culture each ultimately lead humanity down a road to despotism and alienation, a world of *here* and *now*. In Culture, this culminates in the French Revolutionary Terror, which for Hegel is the ultimate modern expression of the *here* and *now*, as brought about by this march forward absent the Absolute (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 155). This is embodied especially well, for Hegel, with the strike of the guillotine, which Hegel describes as a “flat, commonplace monosyllable,” which contains “the wisdom of the government, the abstract intelligence of the universal will” (M591). The problem here is that this *universal will* of the totalitarian government is *not*, in fact, a universal will: it is, in fact, a *particular* will, which only *claims* universality. In Hegel’s own words, “it excludes all other individuals from its act, and on the other hand, it thereby constitutes a government that is a specific will, and so stands opposed to the universal will” (M591). The only result of a universal freedom of this kind – the kind given to the people by a despotic government – is death, and a meaningless death at that (M590). “What is negated,” Hegel says of this specific instance of death, “is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water” (M590).

Thus, in the Terror, the guillotine's strike comes to represent the ultimate *bad infinity*. Each strike represents the ultimate exclusion of its victim, the ultimate abstraction and negation of their value. While historical forces may have brought about the use of the guillotine, its dull, monotonous, continuous strikes expose that historical progression as one divorced from the Absolute, the ultimate end result of the splitting off of self-alienated Spirit. *Here and now* the victims are condemned, and *here and now* the victims are executed, consumed by the tyrannical bloodlust of the despotic rulers. Again I will emphasize the similarity here between the relationship of Desire from self-consciousness and the relationship between the despot and the condemned: now, however, it is a collective *I that is we and we that is I* futilely represented in a single individual which is bent on consuming all which contradicts it. This course, Hegel says, is divorced from the Absolute: thus, there can be no reconciliation. And without this reconciliation, the despotism of the Terror will repeat itself: the same endless hunger, an endless striving by the despots to shape the world after themselves. But this fulfillment cannot be accomplished unilaterally, and it cannot be accomplished through force. As we'll see in the final two segments, for Hegel, human Spirit can only be fulfilled through mediation with the Absolute.

The splitting off of self-alienated Spirit, then, leads to a sort of cultural *bad infinity*: each *here and now* that Spirit collectively encounters, though, endures to some degree in the annals of history. This is a large part of what distinguishes this *collective* struggle from that of the individual in Self-Consciousness. And this also, for Hegel, acts as a measure of hope: there is no need to repeat the cycle, and indeed, if we allow the Absolute to talk back to us, to predicate itself onto the ultimate *I*, just as the ultimate *I* predicates itself onto the Absolute, then we can walk further down the path toward true, Absolute Knowing.

### 3.5. Religion

In Spirit, we encountered a narrative shift away from singular predication and toward collective predication. The attempts by the singular ‘I’ to predicate itself onto the world, and to understand the world on its own terms, ended in failure; thus, in Spirit, the plural ‘I,’ the *I that is we and the we that is I*, began a similar process. This process, Hegel insists, is a historical one: or, perhaps more accurately, it is a process that embodies itself in discrete historical moments.

Much like we saw when the singular consciousness attempted to predicate itself onto the world around it, though, the *I that is we and the we that is I* cannot predicate itself onto the ultimate collective *other* – the Absolute – without the Absolute, in turn, predicating itself onto it. This is endemic to the very act of predication itself: recall, briefly, that for a singular person to make statements about what they *are*, they must also implicitly make a wide range of statements about what they are *not*. This is true of Spirit, as well, and Hegel makes clear that any attempt for Spirit to predicate itself onto the world in a way that ignores or downplays the Absolute will result in disaster, meaninglessness, death. This, in Hegel’s eyes, was the Enlightenment’s fatal flaw, the disastrous defect which led directly to such atrocities as the French Revolutionary Terror.

Now, though, we reach Religion, and we take another step, this time with the Absolute in full view. In fact, in Religion, the Absolute takes a primary role: the chapter on Religion, in short, is where the Absolute begins to talk back. Further, in the context of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, it is the beginning of the end, the first part of the final movement that will climax with Absolute Knowing. How, exactly, this works will, of course, become clear as I examine Absolute Knowing in chapter 4; for now, though, it will suffice to say that Religion is the beginning of that final movement. As Jean Hyppolite reminds us, “That religion is the self-consciousness of spirit

puts it in contrast to all prior experience, which was only experience for us, that is, for the philosopher, but which did not manifest itself in that way for phenomenal consciousness” (Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 534).

In beginning this final movement, though, it is necessary to take a brief look back through the movements of consciousness we have encountered so far: Consciousness (beginning with Sense-Certainty), through to Self-Consciousness, then to Reason, and then finally to Spirit. This look back is necessary, because, as Reid says, “through its revelatory agency, the Absolute not only gives itself to be known but must come to know itself, just as the goal of human reason is likewise self-knowledge” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 174). The Absolute, too, must express itself in the world as a tangible sign (or, to use Reid’s onto-grammatical language, a vanishing word): in other words, to make itself known to human beings (creatures who exist in the tangible, empirical everyday world), the Absolute must also make itself comprehensible to that which yearns to know it (Spirit) (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 178). But how is this possible? If the Absolute is the ultimate *other* (the tentative definition I posited in the Spirit section), how can the ultimate *we* ever truly come to know it?

Hegel’s answer, at least for the time being, is religion. Now, there is some debate among Hegel scholars as to what, exactly, religion meant to Hegel. Hegel quite clearly frames the progression of Absolute self-knowledge in a religious milieu: otherwise, he would not have called the chapter *Religion*. But there is some debate over whether Hegel was merely advocating a historical look at different ways the Absolute has manifested itself through historical religious expression, or whether there was one particular religion Hegel felt was *right* and *necessary*. In other words, is a belief in God, in something *out there* that can literally *speak back* to us, necessary? Or can we interpret the Absolute as something areligious, as something that does not

necessarily have to do with a deity at all? While this is admittedly a broad topic, and one that could probably serve as the subject of a thesis-length examination in and of itself, I would fall in the latter camp: when Hegel mentions the Absolute, he is not necessarily referring to the Christian God (or any particular religion's idea of God): rather, the Absolute, for Hegel, is something more like the sum of everything humanity does not and cannot comprehend. Robert C. Solomon describes it as "mankind's impulse to a better life. It is not the lust for "otherworldly" after-life of the Christian Heaven but the "this worldly" aspirations of great artists, philosophers, statesmen, and truly religious people" (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 589). The Absolute can be understood as the sum total of everything beyond expression, everything beyond comprehension: and, once again, this understanding will come into play again when I discuss absolute knowing.

So, with Religion's context in both the wider arc of the *Phenomenology* and the movement of the Absolute established, we can move into the religious expressions in themselves. Now, because the Absolute must come to know itself, just as human consciousness and then human Spirit had to come to know itself, its movements mostly mirror the movements of human consciousness. As Reid reminds us, "as a vanishing word, the absolute substance as a predicative subject must (now) predicate itself into bodily forms. It must invest itself in signs that allow it to *be* meaningful. Put differently, the Absolute must take on finite forms, without which it would be meaningless" (Reid, *Hegel's Grammatical*, 179). Each of these finite forms represents a religious tradition that has existed in the world, whether as a rigid set of dogma and rituals, or a less organized, more primal connection with the Absolute. Whatever the case, these forms remain the self-consciousness of Spirit, as it tries to reconcile itself with the Absolute: as Jean Hyppolite says, "the different religions, which are also like aspects of a single religion, differ only by the

form in which they present to consciousness the essence that is common to them, the self-consciousness of spirit” (Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 535). Or, as Hegel himself says, “In its consciousness, there is antithesis, and in consequence the *specific character* of the ‘shape’ in which it appears to itself and knows itself. It is solely with this that we are concerned in this treatment of religion” (M684). Thus, it is clear that, in order to express itself and make itself knowable, the Absolute must express itself through religious tradition, at least at this point in the phenomenological narrative.

As I have implied already, the entire arc of Religion will be important in the transition to Absolute Knowing: the final religious movement, Revealed Religion, will in particular warrant an examination, as it sets the stage for Absolute Knowing. For the time being, though, my focus will be not on Revealed Religion, but on Religion’s first section, Natural Religion. More specifically, when it comes to examining the recurring moments of temporal immediacy which crop up in each chapter leading up to Absolute Knowing, the logical section to examine would be the very first subsection of Natural Religion: God as Light. Here, since the progression of the Absolute’s self-knowing more or less echoes that of consciousness, God as Light shares several similarities with Sense-Certainty. Most pertinently, God as Light is the religious expression most firmly entrenched in the *here and now*. In God as Light, we begin with the same alienation that marked both Reason (on an individual level) and Spirit (on a collective level): Hegel reasserts here that this alienation only takes place because the Absolute has been ignored; it has been treated “as contrasted with the daylight of this explicit development, the night of its essence” (M685). “As contrasted with the outer existence of its moments as independent shapes,” Hegel continues, “it is the creative secret of its birth” (M685). The Absolute has played a role in human consciousness’s development all along: it is just, up until this point, that role has gone

unrecognized, with calamitous results. Now, though, in Religion, we come to realize that “this secret has its revelation within itself; for the existence of its moment has its necessity in this Notion, because this Notion is self-knowing Spirit and therefore has in its essence the moment of being consciousness, and of presenting itself objectively” (M685). Hegel calls this the “pure ‘I,’” which is certain of its own self and which penetrates all thought and all reality (M685).

This, for Hegel, is the first concrete expression of the Absolute in the sensible world, and closely mirrors the first form of consciousness in Sense-Certainty. Hegel himself says as much quite explicitly: “In the immediate, first diremption of self-knowing absolute Spirit,” Hegel says, “its ‘shape’ has the determination which belongs to *immediate consciousness* or to *sense-certainty*” (M686). In this form, however, the Absolute is present: Hegel goes on to say that “it also includes the form which appeared in immediate *self-consciousness*, the form of *lord and master* over against the self-consciousness that retreats from its object” (M686). This, Hegel says, gives Absolute Spirit a relation which he compares to sunrise (in its presence) and darkness (in its otherness) (M686).

Now, in terms of mapping this idea of God as Light onto a specific religious tradition, I think pantheism would be the natural choice. In this early stage, Absolute Spirit is everywhere: it is *here* and it is *there*, it is *me* and it is *you*, it is all around us, all the time. Again, there is an obvious similarity to Sense-Certain consciousness here, where all we encounter is part of an *instantaneous* and *continuous* flow of *here* and *now*. However, the simple presence of Absolute Spirit provides an important distinction from the relation we saw in Sense-Certainty. As Reid reminds us, “In Sense-Certainty, however, universality appeared as an emptiness, and thus as the failure of our attempt to know objectivity through the immediate, natural singularity of its signs. Here, universality is experienced as absolute ‘revelation,’ which inevitably presents itself as

*absolutely* ‘here’ and ‘now’” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 184). But what does this mean, exactly? Well, again, I think Hegel himself puts it succinctly: “this being which is filled with the Notion of Spirit is, then, the ‘*shape*’ of the *simple* relation of Spirit to itself, or the ‘shape’ of ‘shapelessness’” (M686). In this stage of Absolute Revelation, “Spirit beholds itself in the form of *being*, though not of the non-spiritual being that is filled with the contingent determinations of sensation, the being that belongs to sense-certainty; on the contrary, it is being that is filled with Spirit” (M686).

Of course, this multiplicity of immediate Absolute signs will eventually break apart into, as Hegel puts it, “the numberless multiplicity of weaker and stronger, richer and poorer Spirits” (M689). After all, the experience of the Absolute Other as being “restricted to the singular, punctual apprehension of singular, natural things,” where every name given to an object immediately sensed is simply a name for “the many-named One” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 185) does not tell us much about the *nature* of the Absolute. We come to know its signs, but in order to know it in and of itself in greater detail, we must go deeper. And thus, the Absolute’s journey continues, just as that of consciousness did, progressing through more and more intricate and involved modes of expression until, at last, we reach Absolute Knowing, where human and Absolute Spirit unite.

#### 4. “Bringing It All Together”: Absolute Knowing

At this point, I have hopefully established the recurring nature of temporal immediacy in the *Phenomenology* up to Absolute Knowing. Each movement has, at some point, a temporally immediate aspect, an irrevocably immediate step. And while the *Phenomenology* as a whole is not explicitly focused on the immediacy of time in and of itself – the *Phenomenology* as a whole is not a treatise on temporal immediacy *per se* – its presence and influence are vital to the project as a whole.

This vitality, though – the centrality of temporal immediacy to the wider project of the *Phenomenology* – truly becomes apparent once we study the chapter on Absolute Knowing. For while Absolute Knowing is the *Phenomenology*’s shortest chapter, it is, in my estimation, its most important. It is, in a way, the work’s climax: if Sense-Certainty is the introduction (human perception at its earliest and basest state), and the remaining chapters between it and Absolute Knowing are the rising action, then Absolute Knowing itself could be considered the work’s climax (though that’s not to say it is a *conclusion*, necessarily: for while Absolute Knowing concludes the text of the *Phenomenology*, it also acts as an introduction to the rest of Hegel’s corpus, as I established back in section 2). Everything leading up to it – every step on Hegel’s ladder, to again use Harris’s metaphor – has brought us here.

Thus, the next logical step would be to examine Absolute Knowing, in the same way I examined the previous chapters. The main difference here, I hope to show, is that temporal immediacy permeates Absolute Knowing much more completely than any of the previous sections I looked at, save perhaps Sense-Certainty (and my mention of Sense-Certainty here is no coincidence: again, I will get into this in more detail shortly). Once this is done, I will change tack somewhat and discuss common positions held by scholars who see Hegel’s time-sense as

primarily historical; my look at temporal immediacy in Absolute Knowing will make this possible.

#### **4.1. Temporal Immediacy in Absolute Knowing**

##### **4.1.1. Uniting the Human and the Absolute: The Final Steps**

As I said earlier, Absolute Knowing is, in many ways, the ‘climax’ of Hegel’s phenomenological project. With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that an analysis of how temporal immediacy plays into this climactic moment would be more in-depth than those I have undertaken thus far. This is necessary in order to go over the shortcomings of the primarily historical view of Hegelian time.

Absolute Knowing begins, naturally, at the end of Revealed Religion, where Spirit has come to be self-knowing (M786), and has come to be in an *implicit* union with the Absolute, but which has not yet made this union *explicit* (M787). In plainer language, what this means is that, throughout Religion, Spirit has come to know the Absolute in more narrowly defined terms; in Revealed Religion, it comes to know the Absolute in itself, or more specifically, in its own sense of community. However, as Hegel points out, “the community is not yet perfected in this self-consciousness; in general, its content exists for it in the form of *picture-thinking*, and the duality in this thinking still attaches even to the *actual spirituality* of the community, to its return out of its picture-thinking” (M787). *Picture-thinking*, here, is Miller’s translation of *Vorstellen*, in Hegel’s original German (Hegel, *Phenomenologie des Geistes*, 584), which can also be roughly translated as the act of *representation* (Collins German-English Dictionary). Reid, in his ontogrammatical analysis, takes this to mean representational language, which “tries to set its meaning in stone, unilaterally closed to foreign interpretation” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*,

208). What becomes clear here, no matter what terms we use, is that the gap which still exists between the human and the Absolute stands, even in the world of Revealed Religion, because of this picture-thinking, of this representational thought and representational language, where one term, one image, one idea can be taken to mean the same thing through eternity. In the context of the religious community specifically, this comes in the form of, to quote Reid once more, “shared doctrinal language” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 209); that is, shared religious creeds such as the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed. These are representations of shared belief that, supposedly, stand the test of time, providing a sort of unwavering marker in order to bridge the gap between the human and the Absolute (or the Divine, in the specific case of shared doctrinal language like the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed). However, as both Reid and Hegel himself point out, the way this representative language is used and interpreted can and does shift over time; for instance, in many cases, the creeds are translated from their original languages, and in any translation, no matter how faithful, some meaning may be lost or changed. And even in the original language, the meanings of words – both in the strict sense of their dictionary definition, and in the sense of their implied connotations – change. Thus, this representational language cannot, by its very nature, represent the Absolute, because its very nature as *Vorstellen* means it is bound to shift and change over time.

Thus, a gap remains between the human and the Absolute. In Absolute Knowing, though, that gap is closed, and the human finally finds that long-sought union. The movement toward that union is relatively brief: of the *Phenomenology’s* main sections, Absolute Knowing is by far the shortest. However, in that short time, Hegel elucidates not just the most vital points in the phenomenological journey, but (because the *Phenomenology* acts as the bedrock for the rest of Hegel’s corpus) also Hegel’s full body of work. Thus, in the long-running scholarly debate over

the meaning and significance of the Absolute Knowing segment, I am firmly in the camp which considers it not just important, but the most important segment in the book, and arguably across his entire body of work.

So how is that final gap bridged, in the end? Well, to begin with, Hegel again acknowledges the Spiritual content of this representational thought, or picture-thinking: he says that “the *content* of this picture-thinking is absolute Spirit; and all that now remains to be done is to supersede this mere form, or rather, since this belongs to *consciousness as such*, its truth must already have yielded itself in the shape of consciousness” (M788). Here we see an ever-important Hegelian concept returning to play once more: that of the syllogism. In order to bridge that final gap, the *mere form* of the religious symbol must be superseded: however, in a way, this has already been done, in the shape of consciousness; the only issue is consciousness itself has not realized this yet. As Hegel goes on to say, it is the movement of consciousness itself through its moments, relating itself “to the object in accordance with the totality of the latter’s determinations,” thus grasping itself “from the standpoint of each of them” that leads to the individual’s determination of itself as a Self (M788). In other words, here Hegel reiterates and reframes his wider argument: this is the entire reason for the phenomenological journey. The self can only know itself as a Self – and truly know itself – by coming to know the reality of the world around it. This goes both for the individual self and the “collective” self of Spirit: to truly know one’s self, one must know the Absolute, and to truly know the Absolute, one must come to know one’s self.

Thus, Hegel says, the object of consciousness is partly an immediate being – “corresponding to immediate consciousness” – and partly *essence*, “in the form of a universal” (M789). “It is,” Hegel continues, “as a totality, a syllogism or the movement of the universal

through determination to individuality, as also the reverse movement from individuality through superseded individuality, or through determination, to the universal” (M789). So we know individuality and universality inform one another: Hegel is clear on this point. However, even at this point, our knowledge is not Absolute: something is still missing. For we still do not purely comprehend the object in terms of the Notion: instead, we know it only in the stages of its emergence, “or in the moments of the Notion proper or of pure Knowing in the form of shapes of consciousness” (M789). In other words, we do not know it for itself but for our own constructions of it: on one side, it appears as a “shape of consciousness,” and on the other side it appears as “a number of such shapes which *we* bring together, in which the totality of the moments of the object and of the relation of consciousness to it can be indicated only as resolved into its moments” (M789).

Here, when Hegel refers to “shapes of consciousness,” he is talking about the stages of consciousness previously encountered in the *Phenomenology*: thus, in thorough Hegelian fashion, he then takes us back through each of these movements, summarizing them and where they took us on the journey. However, he does this for more than just the sake of summary: this time, when he reaches Religion, he goes beyond mere representational thinking and spells out that this unity we seek, containing both itself and its opposite, not just implicitly but explicitly, is present within the “simple unity of the Notion” (M795). In this simple unity, the Notion is present on the side of the perceiving self; however, the perceiving self has yet to realize that the Notion is present within its perceptions (M795). This is, in large part, what the phenomenological journey is meant to help us discover: that in order to know the Absolute, it is necessary to realize that part of the Absolute dwells within us. We are, inherently, Spiritual beings; that is, beings who possess and embody *Geist*. This realization does not occur, however,

until we move through the stages in the phenomenological journey, and then finally move past representational thinking and into the realization that self-consciousness is not determinate, and does not rely on the Notion in order to fulfill itself (M795); instead, it becomes a universal, both one with the Absolute *and* completely distinct from it. This state of affairs allows us to enter into a new relationship with the Absolute; as the ‘beautiful soul’ (Hegel’s term for one which knows itself as Spiritual), we can now finally move into Absolute Knowing.

There has been a great deal of scholarly debate over what, exactly, Absolute Knowing even is. Hegel himself gives the following definition: “the knowing of pure knowledge, not as an abstract *essence* such as duty is, but of knowledge as an essential being which is *this* knowledge, *this* pure self-consciousness which is, therefore, at the same time a genuine *object*, for the Notion is the Self that is for itself” (M795) Or, as Hegel also puts it a few paragraphs later, it is “Spirit that knows itself in the shape of Spirit, or a *comprehensive knowing* [in terms of the Notion].” (M798). Hegel also points out that this knowledge has “the shape of self-certainty,” or “the form of self-knowledge” (M798). Put more simply, Absolute Knowing is the sort of knowledge attained by the beautiful soul. It is the sort of knowledge which becomes available when one is both united with and distinct from the Absolute, and when one knows oneself as inherently Spiritual. It is the knowledge we gain when we bridge the representational gap that existed at the end of Revealed Religion, and realize that we ourselves are not just the conduits of Spirit, but that we *are* Spirit.

At this point, it would be fair to point out that even my simplified definition above is still fairly abstract. It would be fair to ask: what does all of this look like, practically speaking? What are its real-world consequences? Many Hegel scholars, in their commentaries on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, have attempted to answer this question; perhaps unsurprisingly, these

interpretations have been quite varied. Robert C. Solomon, for instance, says that “in the broader cultural context, “the Absolute” is the philosophical shadow of Hölderlin’s grand metaphor, a quasi-religious attempt to understand the underlying unity of life and its ultimate purposiveness” (Solomon, *In the Spirit*, 636). Personally, I find this definition too passive: it treats Absolute Knowing as more a revelation visited upon us by the Absolute than as something that is both revealed *and* discerned. Hegel’s own definition emphasizes the Notion that “is the Self that is for itself,” and that Absolute Knowing has “the form of self-knowledge.” Hegel’s language here makes clear that this sort of self-knowledge cannot be gained through a mere revelation from something *outside*, but must also be attained *through ourselves*.

Terry Pinkard, meanwhile, describes Absolute Knowing as a historical process, as modern life bringing to a close the progression of political history, by developing “a modern constitutional state with representative political institutions” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Pheno.*, 336). Pinkard’s plainly historical interpretation here ignores the role immediacy plays in Hegel’s system: I will discuss this in more detail in the next several subsections, but put briefly here, Pinkard’s emphasis on historical process ignores the *immediate, continuous* generation of *new* thought that occurs within Hegel’s Scientific system (Science being Absolute Knowing systematized). The revelation of Absolute Knowing (which, again, must be attained *both* through the Absolute Other and the Self) is something which is, as Reid puts it, “ever-present, eternal, and eternally now” (Reid, “Time for Hegel,” 1); this is inherent both in Absolute Knowing itself (where the human and the Absolute continually inform one another) and in its systematized form, as Science.

Dien Winfield describes Absolute Knowing as “a pure self-knowing that understands itself to be universal and spirit, an I that is we and a we that is I,” and disputes it as being part of

“some ethical community,” but is instead knowable “in a purely conceptual way, where representation has given way to a pure self-consciousness of spirit that has as its object the very same universal self-knowing” (Winfield, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 381). Like Solomon’s definition, I find this one too passive, although unlike Solomon, Winfield has perhaps put too much emphasis on the self’s role in its attainment, and not enough on Absolute revelation (the Absolute is not merely revealed through self-reflection, although that revelation cannot be fully reached except through self-reflection; this is an important distinction to make).

Meanwhile, H.S. Harris and Jean Hyppolite come closer to the mark, but with both Harris (“Hegel was concerned with Comprehension as the human goal of *self-realization*. That is what his Science was about” (Harris, *Hegel's Ladder II*, 753)) and Hyppolite (consciousness recognizes itself in the “I=I” (Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 600)), the definitions are partially correct but incomplete. Like Winfield, both these definitions rely too heavily on the idea of *self-recognition*. I say these definitions are partially correct because self-recognition is indisputably part of Hegel’s Absolute Revelation. I said as much earlier in this very subsection. However, more than merely recognizing ourselves in the I=I, Absolute revelation also, at the same time, recognizes itself in the I=Not-I, or I=the Absolute (which is, at least in my interpretation, the ultimate *Not-I*). It is important to recognize that, first, the human (the I) and the Absolute (the not-I) inform one another, and second, that this process occurs *instantaneously* and *continuously* (not in the sense of it occurring in the blink of an eye, but in the sense of it occurring in the *eternal now*, the continuous present moment that is always happening. Again, I will discuss this further throughout the next few subsections).

That Absolute Knowing involves both the recognition of “I=I” and “I=Not-I,” there can be little doubt. Hegel himself says as much when he states that “what in religion was a *content* or

a form for presenting an *other*, is here the *Self's own act*" (M797). This is a Self that knows itself as both a Self and as the Absolute in itself: not only that, though, it is also a Self that knows itself as both a part of Spirit, and knows Spirit as part of it. That is a vital distinction to make, because it is the main thing that distinguishes Hegel's Absolute Knowing from, say, the sort of knowing arrived at by the rational individual of the Enlightenment (which Hegel disparaged in his chapter on Reason). We no longer have to resort to the representational picture-thinking of Revealed Religion, because we understand that *we* are identical to the content. Such representation is no longer needed.

What replaces this representation, in the end, is what Hegel calls Science. Science, as I said earlier, is the systematization of Absolute Knowing: it is the method through which we generate Absolute Knowledge. In Hegel's own words, it is: "that which is the very essence, viz. the Notion, has become the element of existence, or has become the *form of objectivity* for consciousness. Spirit, *manifesting or appearing* in consciousness in this element, or what is the same thing, produced in it by consciousness, is *Science*" (M798). Science is Hegel's final epistemological form: it is the process by which we can generate the deepest, most profound sort of knowledge humanity is capable of producing. And it is from here that Hegel begins the transition away from the *Phenomenology* and into the rest of his works: in fact, the rest of his corpus is itself one historical instance of Science. For the moment, through, we must keep focused on the *Phenomenology*. For before I can move on to more closely examining some of the arguments for a primarily historical view of Hegelian time, it is necessary to back up, in more depth, the claim I have already made that Science is a fundamentally *immediate* process which takes place in the "eternal now." In fact, as we shall see, Science is Absolute Knowing's *immediate, eternally-now* expression in the real world: and it is because of this, and because of

the fundamental role of Science in Hegel's system (one might in fact argue that Science *is* Hegel's system) that any primarily historical view of Hegelian time is bound to be fundamentally flawed.

#### 4.1.2. Temporal Immediacy in Science

The first, and perhaps most obvious, point to make in terms of Science's deeply immediate temporality could be expressed through a rhetorical question: *when* does this process happen? Recall how Hegel defined Science: "that which is the very essence, viz. the Notion, has become the element of existence, or has become the *form of objectivity* for consciousness" (M798). In other words, it is the active, real-life consequence of a Self that knows itself as both a Self and as the Absolute in itself, and a Self that knows itself as both a part of Spirit, and knows Spirit as part of it. To put it more simply, it is the process of generating Absolute knowledge: for Hegel, we attain Absolute knowledge through Science. And, to ask the question again, *when* does Science happen? It happens in the "now."

But what does it mean, to say that Science takes place in the "now?" What difference does the *when* of Science make? Well, for one thing, it means that the Hegelian Science is a *continuous* process: new content is generated continuously, rather than being mere reinterpretations of that which has come before. It is also an *instantaneous* process, not in the sense that Scientific thought happens in the blink of an eye, but more in the sense that, when it is indeed occurring, Scientific thought happens *in this continuous instant*. As we will see shortly, there is a role for History to play here, but it is not the primary driver of content-generation in itself. Rather, content is generated through new experience and new ideas; these can both be (and

often are) influenced by that which has come before; to reiterate, though, what comes before is not the primary driver behind this process.

To further illustrate this, and also further illustrate the implications, I will at last return to the passage in M801 that has generated such scholarly debate. The passage reads: “Time is the Notion itself that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time” (M801). Much has been written on what Hegel meant by the ‘annulment of Time.’ For my purposes, though, it would be useful to put this passage in its proper context: in doing so, I hope to illustrate how this passage fits within my interpretation of both Hegel’s broader goal within the Absolute Knowing chapter and my interpretation of his time-sense.

First, Hegel reminds us that “Science does not appear in Time and in the actual world before Spirit has attained to this consciousness about itself” (M800). Here, Hegel basically restates the necessity of the phenomenological project: Science cannot be reached before Spirit moves past its reliance on representational thinking, and Spirit cannot move past that reliance before embarking on all the previous steps in the journey. However, Hegel then makes it clear that “Spirit that is in and for itself and differentiated into its moments is a knowing that is *for itself, a comprehension* in general that, as such, substance has not yet reached, i.e. substance is not in its own self an absolute knowing” (M800): in other words, substance (or the in-itself) is not itself identical to absolute knowing. Or, at least, not yet. Hegel, after all, reminds us that substance is “the *inwardness* of the Self of the Spirit that does not yet *exist*” (M801). As of this moment, we are still beholden to representational thinking.

However, just before the prominent passage, this situation changes: Hegel says that “in the Notion that knows itself as Notion, the *moments* thus appear earlier than the *filled* [or *fulfilled*] whole whose coming-to-be is the movement of those moments. In *consciousness*, on the other hand, the whole, though uncomprehended, is prior to the moments” (M801) Here, we see consciousness shown as being distinct from the Notion, whereas in Absolute Knowing, the two will be united. In the infamous passage, what we see is that, when we come into union with the Absolute, we realize that the moments and the whole are not independent of one another, but are one. The Notion *already is*; and, on a related note, the whole comes neither prior to nor after the moments, it comes *along with* the moments. This is similar to what we saw in Sense-Certainty. Now that we have undergone the phenomenological journey, though, our knowing is Absolute: once Spirit comes into contact with the Absolute, knowledge can be gained in a way that is both totally similar and yet totally different to the way knowledge is gained through Sense-Certainty.

Now, one major distinction between Absolute Knowing and Sense-Certainty is that Sense-Certainty has no role for history: the very concept of history cannot be conceived during the stage of Sense-Certainty, since Sense-Certainty is the mere intake of sense data without comprehension. However, in what I might term the Absolute Present (the “eternal now” in the stage of Absolute Knowing), there is a similar continuous process going on, where new input constantly turns into new data; however, in this new, more enlightened arrangement, history constantly informs the generation of new knowledge. More specifically, the previous parts of the phenomenological journey, and the historical processes that lead to the progression spelled out in the *Phenomenology's* pages, leads to this state of affairs. This is supported by the sentence after the infamous passage, where Hegel says “it is the *outer*, intuited pure Self which is *not grasped*

by the Self, the merely intuited Notion; when this latter grasps itself it sets aside its Time-form, comprehends this intuiting, and is a comprehended and comprehending intuiting” (M801). The language Hegel uses here is circuitous, but another way to put it could be that when Spirit grasps the other side of itself (that is, the Absolute), it is able to comprehend not only its own intuiting but the method of its own intuiting: that is Absolute Knowing in itself. Here, Spirit’s “certainty of itself” is vindicated, and consciousness is fulfilled, in an immediate sense (M801), where what we have gone through before, *vis a vis* the phenomenological journey, now ‘pays off’ in the sense that consciousness has been fulfilled.

However, Hegel makes clear that this is not a sort of idealism, that sense experience plays no role in the generation of knowledge. It is in fact through sense experience that we once again encounter the syllogism: the outside world (which we experience) or the “inwardly revealed eternal verity” (which is a different type of experience for Hegel) leave their mark on us through the mediation of the copula (as we saw in Self-Consciousness) (M802). Thus, we undergo the process anew, except this time, we undergo it with the knowledge of the phenomenological process that has come before: this is the role of History. And this, too, is the role of the syllogisms I mentioned at the end of the previous section: the ‘I=I’ and the ‘I=*not*-I.’ It is here, in Absolute Knowing, that we come to realize that in the process of revelation (the word revelation here being used in the sense of ‘finding out more about that which was comprehended as completely *other*, or *not-I*’), we are not only coming to know the Absolute, but we are coming to know ourselves.

At this point, I should also point out that the arrival at Science, in the context of the Hegelian system, is itself a historical moment; as I have reiterated several times, Hegel’s system is by no means a-historical. The *Phenomenology* is intended to serve as the basis, the starting

point of Hegel's wider lexicon: thus, with this in mind, his system's arrival at Absolute Knowing is a historical moment, placed at the time of the *Phenomenology's* writing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, as an expression of Hegelian Science. The phenomenological journey, then, shows how, in the context of Hegel's own time, this arrival at Science was reached. However, it is important to distinguish between Hegel's corpus being historically situated, and the principle of Science itself being historically situated. Reid articulates this distinction when he says: "Hegelian history leads to a 'Now' understood as a self-knowing (*gnothi seauton*) where the selfhood of humanity (what Hegel calls Spirit) recognizes itself in the history of its own course, apprehended as essentially *past*" (Reid, "Hegel and Time," 9). This, taken together with Hegel's statement that "the movement of carrying forward the form of its self-knowledge is the labour which it [Science] accomplishes as actual History" (M803) means, in Hegel's system, History is merely the way this self-knowledge is preserved, and passed down through multiple generations of learners. It is the reason why Spirit does not have to start over at Sense-Certainty with each new generation. It is something that, within the eternal now, is already possessed, where, as Reid points out, "the content of the present is expressed through the auxiliary verb 'to have,' which affirms the whole past experience as *having been* acquired and thus possessed by and constitutive of the present" (Reid, "Hegel and Time," 8).

We have thus established that Science – the vehicle of Absolute Knowing – is the end product of Hegel's figures of consciousness. It is our destination, the top rung of Hegel's ladder. In it, "the moments of its movement no longer exhibit themselves as specific *shapes of consciousness*, but – since consciousness's difference has returned into the Self – as *specific Notions*, and as their organic self-grounded movement" (M805). Science is a realm not of figures of consciousness but of pure knowledge, at last fulfilled within itself. Here, we have moved

beyond the syllogism, which is made clear when Hegel says that “whereas in the phenomenology of Spirit each moment is the difference of knowledge and Truth, and is the movement in which that difference is cancelled, Science on the other hand does not contain this difference and the cancelling of it” (M805). The knowing Self is, in itself, the Notion itself. Perhaps most strikingly, though, in the next paragraph Hegel says the following:

The self-knowing Spirit, just because it grasps its Notion, is the immediate identity with itself which, in its difference, is the *certainty of immediacy*, or *sense-consciousness*—the beginning from which we started. This release of itself from the form of its Self is the supreme freedom and assurance of its self-knowledge (M806).

Here, Hegel says in plain language that we return to where we started. The Self has, in a way, returned to the *continuous, instantaneous* cognitive state of Sense-Certainty; however, here, the Self is externalized in two directions: Nature and History. Both Nature and History, however, serve to inform the *continuous, instantaneous* process taking place: nature through taking shape as “living, immediate becoming” through what Hegel calls “free, contingent happening” (M807) and History as a “gallery of images” that continuously informs the present (M808). Hegel makes it clear, though, that Spirit, through Science, is constantly evolving. Spirit, Hegel maintains, must start fresh with each new succession: however, it is not necessary to start *completely* fresh, since the “gallery of images” that is History is constantly available to self-fulfilled Spirit (M808).

Hegel’s *Phenomenology* may be a historical text; however, it continues to exist here and now, as I write my MA thesis on it, over 200 years after the *Phenomenology* was originally published. In Hegel’s world, then, I – and all those who have read and understood (or attempted to understand?) the *Phenomenology* start on a higher level than those who lived in a world where the *Phenomenology* did not exist. And Spirit – the human collective, the *I that is we and the we that is I* – continuously starts further along in the journey, with the help of that which has come before.

It is my view that, for Hegel, Science is the process through which Spirit makes that progress. It is also my view that this process is *immediate* and *continuous*, that it takes place in the eternal now. Hegel's *Phenomenology* may, as a text, be historically situated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and as the first part of his wider corpus of work (which is followed up by the *Logic*), but it also stands as part of the "gallery of images" that Spirit *currently possesses*, within the eternal now, in order to generate new knowledge and engage in Absolute Revelation (which, in my view, can more or less be expressed as coming to uncover and understand the unknown). The truth is out there, Hegel asserts, and it is out there *right now*. Now that we, as a society, have reached the stage of Scientific thinking (assuming we have, in fact, reached that stage), it is our job to go out and find it.

#### **4.2. Arguments for Temporal Historicity in Hegel Scholarship, and their Limits**

Now that we have (in a necessarily abbreviated manner) gone through Hegel's phenomenological journey, I have established the vitality of temporal immediacy throughout, and especially in its concluding movement, Absolute Knowing. I have established that the Absolute revelation of Science takes place in the 'eternal now,' and that Hegel's time-sense is not, as many scholars have argued, primarily historical. Rather, in Spiritually fulfilled human existence – in other words, the Scientific stage – the Self has returned to the *continuous*, *instantaneous* cognitive state of Sense-Certainty.

With all this established, it is at last time to contrast this view to those of some of the more historically-inclined Hegel scholars. Of course, I have neither the time nor the space here to refute every single scholar who has ever argued for a primarily historical Hegelian time-sense, nor every single way they have presented this view. Rather, what I intend to do here is go

through some of the more prominent commentators who have held this position and summarize four of the major arguments for a historical Hegelian time-sense. I will then – armed, of course, with the arguments I have established from the previous sections of this project – provide a brief counterargument to each. While this is, by no means, an exhaustive exercise, I believe my approach here will, at the very least, cover a lot of ground in terms of arguing against a primarily historical Hegelian time-sense *in general*.

#### 4.2.1. Time and History as Identical

The first argument for a historically-based Hegelian time-sense is simply that, for Hegel, Time and History are identical, or are at least treated by Hegel as being more or less so. John F. Hoffmeyer states it outright: “Time and history are identical,” Hoffmeyer says, “Time is the presentation, the acting out of Spirit’s becoming” (Hoffmeyer, “Absolute Knowing,” 201). Michael Murray says something very similar: that Hegel conceived Time “as the very constitution of Spirit and of world as historical process” (Murray, “Time in Hegel’s,” 683). Tom Rockmore states that “For Hegel, as distinguished from, say, Descartes and Kant, knowledge is a thoroughly historical product,” (Rockmore, *Cognition*, 189) and that “knowledge is not instantaneous but the result of a process” (Rockmore, *Cognition*, 189), by which he, naturally, means a *historical* process. And Cynthia D. Coe states that “time, for Hegel, becomes subsumed under the rationality of history when *Geist* passes out of the merely natural into its spiritual self-development and begins to represent its own actions to itself, found concretely in historical annals” (Coe, “Domesticating Time,” 421). For time to be subsumed “under the rationality of history,” as she says, it must rely on the historical progression of Spirit, which, as she says, are present in the world as historical texts.

For Hoffmeyer, Murray, Rockmore and Coe, then, Time and History are identical. Taking Hoffmeyer's words about time being "the acting out of Spirit's becoming" into account, as well as Coe's about time being subsumed under the rationality of history, we can infer that, for one who holds this view, Time and Spirit are also identical, or at the very least so intimately linked that one cannot be talked about without mentioning the other. Considering what Hegel himself had to say about History, this should, perhaps, not come as a surprise: in the final paragraph of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel defines History as "Spirit emptied out into Time" (M808); further, he refers to it as a "*conscious, self-mediating process*," which, taken by itself, would seem to suggest that, for Hegel, it is not only true that Spirit is inherently Historical, and that History is inherently Spiritual, but that Time is inherently Spiritual, and Spirit is inherently temporal; take all this together, and the next logical step seems to be that Time is Historical.

Indeed, Murray in particular makes this clear: when talking about Hegel's 'annulment of time' from paragraph 801, his view is as follows: "what is annulled, then, is merely the deficient being-in-time view of Time. The change entailed by the event of comprehension is that Spirit is no longer thought as intuited out there "in" Time, but rather gets conceptually grasped as identical with time "as" Time" (Murray, "Time in Hegel's," 701-702). The issue here is that Murray (as demonstrated above) conflates Time with History; thus, when he speaks of Hegel's 'annulment of Time,' what Murray believes is annulled is the very notion of time that I would assert lies at the heart of Hegel's Absolute Knowing. For while Murray asserts that the time-sense annulled is the sort that takes Time as an externalized representation, "routed through the passive intuition," (Murray, "Time in Hegel's," 701), as we saw early in the Absolute Knowing chapter, when dealing with the Absolute Other in a similar way, we eventually came to learn that the Absolute Other was already present within ourselves; for Murray, to annul time is to annul

the representational thinking present at the end of Revealed Religion *specifically* with regards to Time, so that we are left with what Murray calls “the actualization of freedom, as the homecoming and self-reconnaissance of Spirit,” or, in other words, “history conceptualized” (Murray, “Time in Hegel’s,” 702). What I believe is missing here, though, is that Absolute Spirit *is*: it exists in the present, and *continuously* expresses itself. It not only ‘looks back’ through the ‘gallery of images’ Hegel mentions in the *Phenomenology*’s final paragraph (a process which, if one might recall, also takes place in the *now*), but *also* synthesizes *new* discoveries and generates *new* content.

To put it another way, to say Spirit is temporal is obvious: if it were not, the phenomenological progression through Spirit and into Religion and Absolute Knowing would not make sense. To say Time is Spiritual, however, does not strike me as accurate. While it is accurate to say that Time *can* be Spiritual in the Hegelian sense (History is, after all, ‘Spirit emptied out into Time,’) it is not necessarily so. For proof, we need look no further than that infamous passage in paragraph 801: while Hegel does indeed say that Spirit “necessarily appears in Time” as long as it is “the Notion itself that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition” (M801), this stops being true once Spirit has annulled Time through the reconciliation between itself and the Absolute Other. Once this reconciliation has taken place, the time-form of unfulfilled Spirit is set aside, and is replaced by the ever-present, *instantaneous* and *continuous* time-sense of the eternal now<sup>3</sup>.

It seems clear to me, then, that Time cannot be identical to History, at least not in an absolute sense. However, saying that Hegel believed Time and History to be identical is very

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<sup>3</sup> This, in my view, is further supported by the verb Hegel uses in the original German: *tilgen*. Miller has translated *tilgen* as ‘annul,’ but it can also be translated as *redeem* or *erase*. *Erase* carries a similar connotation to *annul*, but to *redeem* suggests that the time-sense has been exchanged, perhaps even transformed; in the context of the final Spiritual transaction of Spirit’s reconciliation with the Absolute Other, this fits.

different from saying the Hegelian time-sense is *primarily* historical. The next three arguments I will cover, then, will assert just this: that Hegelian time – if such a thing can be pinned down at all – is *primarily* historical.

#### 4.2.2. The Nature/History Dichotomy

In my earlier discussion of Science, I briefly touched on the distinction Hegel makes at the end of the Absolute Knowing chapter between Nature and History. Hegel describes Nature and History as more or less a dichotomy: he describes Nature as “the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*, intuiting its pure Self as Time outside of it, and equally its being as Space” (M807), and then History as “a *conscious, self-mediating* process—Spirit emptied out into Time” (M808). Right away, we can see a distinction; Hegel describes Nature as largely *unconscious*, as something that *just happens*, while History is *intentional*. This was, indeed, part of the justification for Hoffmeyer and Murray’s position that History is identical to Time. However, because Absolute Spirit exists and acts in the *now*, it could not be purely historical. It could be argued that the clear dichotomy Hegel provides between Nature and History – between Nature as something unconscious and inert, something that is “just there,” and History, which is active and intentional – is also a clear indication that Hegel’s time-sense favoured the historical.

Murray and Hoffmeyer would have both agreed. In his analysis of Hegelian Time, Murray states that the “present, future and past” dimensions of time do not appear in Nature, “whose foundation is Space and whose distinctive time-sense is the Now” (Murray, “Time in Hegel’s,” 703). Further, he says that “temporalization here differs radically from the developed, objective, and absolute formation it finds in Spirit, for the presence of Spirit is “absolute

presence” or the full dilation of Time, not the constricted present of the natural Now” (Murray, “Time in Hegel’s,” 703-704). This very much supports the idea that Nature is inert, ineffective, almost dead in a certain sense. Meanwhile, Hoffmeyer, focusing in his work on the dichotomy between Nature and History as the two sides of Spirit’s becoming, states that in Nature, Spirit is not present as subject (Hoffmeyer, “Absolute Knowing,” 205). Instead, Nature is only the *emergence* of the subject, which expresses itself through history. “Were there no history,” Hoffmeyer says, “there would be no nature. Nature taken abstractly is movement without a mover” (Hoffmeyer, “Absolute Knowing,” 205).

Both Murray and Hoffmeyer take the Hegelian contrast between Nature and History to be between that which is inert and unrealized, and that which is vital and active. Or, in other words, Nature is itself *devoid* of Spirit, while History is itself the expression of *fulfilled Spirit*. To say that Nature is devoid of Spirit, however, or that Nature is devoid of subject, would be, in my view, a mistake. Rather, Nature and History represent the two sides of Spirit’s becoming. Recall that, for Hegel, identity is just as much about difference as it is about similarity. Hegel, generally speaking, does not operate in shades of black and white: identity is just as much about what we are *not* as it is about what we *are*. Take the foundational “I=I” for instance: in asserting “I=I,” the one making the assertion not only asserts that *I am all that I am*, but also implies that *I am not all that I am not*. Because of this – as we have already seen throughout our examination of Hegel’s phenomenological journey – the subject is *produced* in what was, before, the predicate. As Reid says, “in M807, Hegel presents the transition from signs to words in terms of the overcoming of natural contingency, in a movement that ‘produces [*herstellt*] the subject’ in what appeared as the substance/predicate [*Natur*]” (Reid, *Hegel’s Grammatical*, 217). In Science, the Absolute embodies itself in the natural world; this is part of the process of continuous discovery (both of

the Self and of the Other) that goes on in Hegelian Science. Thus, to claim that Nature is devoid of Subject, as Murray and Hoffmeyer both do, ignores this vital aspect of the Hegelian syllogism; the syllogism, as Hegel devises it, does not work without this fundamental aspect of identity.

It is worth noting that Hoffmeyer does acknowledge this. “In the form of happening,” Hoffmeyer says, “space is already itself history. History exhibits the form of freedom and contingency that is already present in space: the gallery of successive spirits’ ‘preservation, with regard to the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency’” (Hoffmeyer, “Absolute Knowing,” 204). And yet, Hoffmeyer will continue to assert that Hegelian Time is fundamentally historical: he does this by also insisting that Hegelian *Space* is fundamentally historical (Hoffmeyer, “Absolute Knowing,” 204), and that History is “externalization’s self-externalization,” by which he means History is the end result of Nature’s movement from inert substance to active subject (Hoffmeyer, “Absolute Knowing,” 205). However, this assertion – that Nature becomes Subject via History – implies that Nature was not a Subject in the first place. But, as Hegel himself says, “Nature, the externalized Spirit, is in its existence nothing but this eternal externalization of its *continuing existence* and the movement which reinstates the *Subject*” (M807). There is an externalization going on, but it is an *eternal* externalization, one that is always happening and thus, in a way, *has already happened*. Indeed, the phenomenological journey itself is evidence of this, as Nature, as immediacy, is present in Sense-Certainty, and reappears throughout the phenomenological journey until we reach the final reconciliation between Spirit and the Absolute Other, which, of course – as I have already established – takes place in the *now*. Nature and History are, at a glance, polar opposites, but Hegel is again employing a syllogism here: their identity lies not only in their difference, but also

in their sameness. Nature not only reinstates the Subject, but already *has* reinstated the Subject. Thus, Nature cannot be devoid of Subject, and thus the Nature/History dichotomy is neither proof of a primarily historical Hegelian time-sense, nor the fatal blow for the immediate Hegelian time-sense.

#### 4.2.3. Knowledge as Historical

Another potential objection from those holding the primarily historical position on Hegelian time concerns the temporality of knowledge. Tom Rockmore gives voice to this objection when he asserts that “for Hegel, as distinguished from, say, Descartes and Kant, knowledge is a thoroughly historical product” (Rockmore, *Cognition*, 189). The thing is, Rockmore is not entirely wrong to say this: recall the point I made in the previous subsection on Science, that the arrival at Science, within Hegel’s system, is in itself a historical moment. Rockmore himself acknowledges this: he correctly states that “if knowledge depends on human beings, then ‘Science does not appear...before Spirit has come to consciousness of itself,’” which in turn requires working through the various shapes of knowledge until the point is reached in which “in this way to equate its *self-consciousness* with its *consciousness*” (Rockmore, *Cognition*, 189). At the risk of repeating myself, this is a chief aspect of Time’s historical aspect, for Hegel; it allows us to both comprehend what has come before, and situate it amongst the ‘gallery of images’ Hegel talks about at the end of the *Phenomenology*.

Does this, however, prove that Rockmore is right, and that Hegel’s time-sense is primarily historical? No. The major difference between my own argument here and Rockmore’s is that he argues for the *primacy* of history in Hegelian time: more specifically, Rockmore argues that the syllogism between subject and object, bridged in Absolute Knowing, is bridged through

a *historical* process. The cognitive process, for Rockmore, is fundamentally historical: as Rockmore says, “our later views develop on the basis of our earlier views. Our systematic grasp of various objects arise through a self-correcting process out of the earlier forms of comprehension” (Rockmore, *Cognition*, 189-190). And, in a way, this does seem to make a sort of sense. What we see and comprehend before us, in any given moment, depends entirely on what we have seen and comprehended before. I cannot, for instance, pick up a book and know what it is without having first, at some point, learned what a *book* is. I also cannot pick up a book and read it without a knowledge of the English language, or whichever language the book has been written in. And the cycle goes back: for the author to have written the book, they had to have command of that language, which they had to have learned from others who had command of said language. This is a historical process; each language has its own history, which is influenced greatly by the society it grew and was used in.

Indeed, Rockmore is not completely wrong to assert that knowledge has a historical aspect: much like with time itself, though, asserting knowledge has a historical aspect is different from asserting it must be wholly historical. What Rockmore leaves out here, I believe, is the primacy of Hegel’s ‘eternal now.’ The syllogism, for Rockmore, is bridged specifically through the historical process of the phenomenological journey: the movement from Sense-Certainty all the way through to Absolute Knowing spells out a historical process that leads to the fulfillment of the syllogism through that very process itself. However, what I have argued over the course of this project is that the syllogism is, in a way, *already fulfilled* before we even reach Absolute Knowing (with Spirit just not being fully aware of this fact yet). Spirit is *unconsciously* fulfilled before it becomes *consciously* fulfilled; it can only become consciously fulfilled once it moves past the limited representational language of Revealed Religion, but throughout Religion Spirit

has at least attempted to commune with the Absolute, to make itself known to it, and thus make it known to itself. And once Spirit finally does come into this knowledge, this syllogism *is fulfilled*, within the ‘now,’

This is a subtle but important distinction; for while Rockmore argues that knowledge is not instantaneous but the result of a process, for Hegel, this process happens *instantaneously* and *continuously*. This does not, of course, preclude the historical aspect that allows us to construct narratives of what *has been*, the very narratives we as a species use to make sense of the world. Quite the opposite. What Hegel argues, and what I believe Rockmore is missing from his argument, is that, for Hegel, we *already possess* History’s knowledge, here in the *now*. Cognition is not as slow as Rockmore makes it out to be: he states that “the human historical record presents a slowly moving series of images that are slowly known by human beings” (Rockmore, *Cognition*, 194). However, there is no reason to think this series of images must be slowly-moving, or that they are known slowly by human beings. Instead, the historical record (such that it is) *is there*: by the time Spirit reaches the stage of Absolute Knowing, the historical record is widely and freely available within the collective consciousness. Rockmore himself follows up his statement on the slowly-moving, slowly-apprehended gallery of images by saying that “the “fulfillment” of this process consists in human being “perfectly knowing” itself, “its substance,” in that the subject returns into itself from existence in order to scrutinize the past as preserved in memory” (Rockmore, *Cognition*, 194). This is, in essence, correct, but the vital temporal situation in the *now* is left out; the preservation in memory has already happened, and is continuously happening as Spirit apprehends new data and inputs it into its memory reservoir. This memory reservoir contains a large part of Spirit’s identity: it is, remember the ‘gallery of

images,' the expression of Spirit's historicity. But that historicity *exists* within the 'now,' and is *apprehended* in the 'now.'

Thus, for Hegel, knowledge cannot be purely historical. It is temporal – the *Phenomenology* is, after all, largely an epistemological text, and as Joseph C. Flay points out, divining Hegel's time-sense from the *Phenomenology* will necessarily involve analyzing it as it appears with relation to the fundamental question of knowledge itself (Flay, "Time in Hegel's," 261) – but that temporality is *eternally now*. For we *know* in the now, we *recall* in the now, and on the level of Absolute Spirit, we *already know* History as it is presented to us. This History in itself may change, of course, as new events and new data are apprehended, but History, and all the knowledge which stems from it, exists in the *now*.

#### 4.2.4. Cultural Normativity – Reconciliation

In the introduction to his book *Hegel's Phenomenology*, Terry Pinkard states that Hegel's theory of knowledge "must be historical, and the history of our claim-making activities must have developed within itself a series of practices for reflecting on the practices themselves, on what it means in general to be a legitimate ground of knowledge, and what it means to be a rational agent" (Pinkard, *Hegel's Pheno.*, 15). Put this simply, Pinkard's claim here sounds similar to Rockmore's, which I took up just before: that any Hegelian theory of knowledge must be historical. And while Pinkard's views overlap with Rockmore's in broad ways, his views on the historicity of knowledge, and the historicity of Hegelian time, are thoroughly distinct. Rockmore's analysis of the phenomenological journey at large is focused more on elucidating the cognitive subject in Hegelian terms (thus, the title of Rockmore's book, *Cognition*); Pinkard's goals, in the meantime, are different. Pinkard is one of several prominent Hegel scholars—along

with Robert Pippin and Robert B. Brandom—whose analyses centre around the reconciliation between knower and known as mediated by cultural normativity. It is the second part of this sentence—*as mediated by cultural normativity*—that is important here. For it is through this process of mediation that Pinkard, Pippin and Brandom—among others—assert that Hegelian time shows itself to be primarily historical.

It is Brandom who perhaps says this most clearly: “what we are eventually to comprehend,” Brandom says, “thereby achieving ‘Absolute Knowing’—is the way in which a process of negotiation involving the normative attitudes of the self-conscious individuals occupying the two perspectives is intelligible as instituting a normative status” (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*, 584). This, Brandom goes on to say, takes the form of “a cognitive or practical commitment resulting from the application of a conceptual norm whose determinate content is expressed, clarified and developed in that very process” (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*, 585). The main way this process happens, in the context of the entire phenomenological journey, is not through the entirety of the journey itself, however; for Brandom, this is achieved through the historical transition laid out in the progression through Spirit, from the Greeks to Hegel’s own time and place. It is specifically through these historical developments that this reconciliation takes place, and the phenomenological journey even becomes possible.

Pippin and Pinkard think along similar lines; that the reconciliation between knower and known is fundamentally historical. Pippin says that “only as historical can consciousness be given ‘the form of free actuality’ and so be understood as spirit,” (Pippin, “The ‘Logic,’” 217). Pinkard builds on this idea by stating that “Absolute knowing is a reflection on the accounts that the modern community has given of what is authoritative for us and why these ‘ground rules’ ‘really are’ or ‘really should be’ taken as authoritative” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Pheno.*, 261). In other

words, the process of generating new knowledge and developing new norms is irrevocably dependent on the cultural histories that already provide the ground rules; it is only through going through these histories and analyzing the reasons we hold to them, and what our holding to them means for us today, that Spirit can, as Pippin says, gain what Hegel called the “form of free actuality.”

It is through this “form of free actuality,” then, that the historically-conscious expressions of Spirit can meet one another and enter into recognition. Brandom states that “the adoption of normative attitudes toward one another (the attribution and acknowledgement of normative statuses) is a specific recognition” (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*, 585). Brandom goes on to say that these relations give form to their self-consciousness and structure to their community; and this, of course, is essentially what happens throughout Hegel’s chapter on Spirit. Brandom’s assertion that Hegel’s main project ends with Spirit, and that Religion and Absolute Knowing more or less restate what he asserted at Spirit’s end, makes sense in this context: if Hegel’s main goal is to indeed show “the way forward out of modernity to a more adequately self-conscious structure of recognition, and so of selves, norms and communities,” then Religion and Absolute Knowing could be interpreted as restating that premise (which is, indeed, Brandom’s interpretation) (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*, 584). For Pinkard, this manifests itself as Absolute Knowing being “the way in which absolute *spirit* articulates itself in modern life; it is the practice through which the modern community thinks about itself without attempting to posit any metaphysical ‘other,’ or set of ‘natural constraints’ that would underwrite these practices” (Pinkard, *Hegel’s Pheno.*, 262). Furthermore, for Pinkard, Absolute Knowing in this historical sense is the product of this intermingling, of this conflict and reconciliation that Brandom (and Pippin) point to in the pages of (specifically Western) history: for Pinkard, Absolute Knowing is

more or less a historically-focused reflection on social norms and practices (Pinkard, *Hegel's Pheno.*, 262).

Like some of the other positions articulated so far, what I believe is missing from this one is the *when* and *how* of the reconciliation that happens through the mutual recognition between Spirit and the Absolute. When Pinkard says the following:

We cannot leap out of this “social space” to take a look at the “real world” in order to see if our concepts match up to that world – to see if, for example, our mathematical concepts and procedures “match up” with the Natural Law, not because we live behind a curtain of appearance that keeps us away from the things in themselves, but because we have come to understand that the only things that *could* count for us as authoritative have to do with our understanding ourselves as historical, social beings (Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 265).

He makes it clear that this “social space” (which, remember, for Pinkard and others holding similar views, is fundamentally historical) cannot be escaped. What Pinkard argues here, essentially, is that we cannot know the world at all except through our own culturally- and historically-situated perspectives. What Hegel himself argues, though, is that when Spirit and the Absolute *are* reconciled, Spirit gains knowledge of the Absolute both through itself *and* through a ‘revelation’ from the Absolute Other (with these processes happening simultaneously, and depending irrevocably on one another). The distinction between Pinkard’s position here and my own might seem subtle, but it is vital: Pinkard argues that we cannot “leap up” from our social space in order to see whether our ideas match up with those of an objective, outside reality. Hegel, however (at least in my view) argues that what we gain from the reconciliation of Spirit with the Absolute *is* just this kind of knowledge. In his chapter on Reason, Hegel criticized the Enlightenment ideal of the individual thinker seeking and finding objective truth through empirical science and critical thought, precisely because this picture ignores the reality that no human being lives their intellectual life in a vacuum; no matter how ‘individual’ one thinks

themselves to be, there is a constant socio-cultural background radiation which has influenced their thoughts in ways too profound to express. However, when this socio-cultural background radiation is acknowledged and engaged with, Hegel asserts that we *can*, in fact, know the world around us, and know it Absolutely. This, of course, does not mean that we will know everything there is to know immediately, that we will achieve the ultimate enlightenment, that we will ascend to some omniscient godhood if we achieve Absolute Knowing. What Hegel does argue, though, at least in my view, is that humanity will not unlock its full intellectual potential until it does confront this socio-cultural background radiation, until it does undergo this process of reconciliation with the Absolute Other. And it must do so as one, as Spirit. For Hegel, there is no other option. Indeed, the purpose of the *Phenomenology* is to act as a blueprint for this process.

That this reconciliation is an *immediate* process, at least in its end stages, is also clear. The mistake of someone like Brandom, in my view, is insisting that Absolute Revelation—which, remember, Brandom defined as the process of negotiation between differing normative attitudes<sup>4</sup>, more or less a restatement of Hegel’s syllogism—takes place *over time*. But, to restate the question from Reid, why is it necessary that this revelation take place over time? (Reid, “Time for Hegel,” 1). Indeed, the movement itself does not appear in time: the *determinate shapes* of the Concept do, but the movement *itself* is ongoing (Rawlinson, *The Betrayal*, 188). Instead, the movement itself takes, as Rawlinson puts it, “the unmoving form of becoming”; true freedom, then, comes from identifying with this unmoving becoming, this eternally-present agent of change (Rawlinson, *The Betrayal*, 189). It is through this process that the *determinate shape* of the Concept is created, and taken down in our collective scientific and cultural memory as

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<sup>4</sup> That Brandom refers here to *individuals*, too, says something, when the ‘I’ of Hegelian Spirit is so clearly a collective one (‘the I that is we and the we that is I.’) For the sake of presenting the strongest potential counter-argument to my own positions—and to acknowledge it is always possible I have misinterpreted Brandom’s meaning—I will assume when Brandom refers to *individuals* that he means the *collective* individual of Spirit.

many different histories (the history of science, the history of politics, the history of art, and so on and so forth).

Not even this content, though, is static and unchanging. The very words and symbols used to communicate ideas and crystallize the Concept shift in their meanings; the same text, taken word-for-word, can mean something very different to someone reading it in its own time than it will for someone hundreds of years later. This is reflected in Reid's concept of *vanishing words*; that even language itself (which is by no means limited to the linguistic signs of the alphabet, which are literally meaningless until we ascribe meaning to them) is not permanent (Reid, *Hegel's Grammatical*, 217). Taken more broadly, this means that meaning itself is not permanent; it changes over time, as new generations come back to old texts, old concepts, old ideas and process them intellectually in new contexts. However, paradoxically, as long as we do indeed take the reconciliation between Spirit and the Absolute Other to be *immediate* and *continuous*, there is a *permanence* to meaning; because, assuming the process of Absolute Knowing is ongoing, that meaning is continually being updated, rediscovered, reinterpreted. And it is *this* process which Hegel refers to when he defines Absolute Knowing as "the knowing of pure knowledge, not as an abstract *essence* such as duty is, but of knowledge as an essential being which is *this* knowledge, *this* pure self-consciousness which is, therefore, at the same time a genuine *object*, for the Notion is the Self that is for itself" (M795). This continuous, instantaneous production of new knowledge is the 'essential being' of which Hegel speaks here. And thus it is that the reconciliation between Spirit and the Absolute Other is necessarily immediate.

Since this reconciliation is immediate, so must be Brandom's "series of practices for reflecting on the practices themselves, on what it means in general to be a legitimate ground of

knowledge, and what it means to be a rational agent” (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*, 584). So too must the influence of the social space, the cultural norms, the reconciliation which Pippin and Pinkard claim take place through the annals of history, and the intertwining of those histories. In *Absolute Knowing*, all of this happens immediately. It is all a part of that *instantaneous*, *continuous* process, which is the culmination of Hegel’s phenomenological project, and the entry point into his wider corpus.

## 5. Conclusion

Taking everything I have discussed in this project together, it is clear that Hegel's time-sense must be, to at least a significant degree, immediate. This is seen both in the frequency with which Hegel's phenomenological outlook circles back into immediacy (during the phenomenological journey), and the return into immediacy in Absolute Knowing, into almost an enlightened Sense-Certainty. It is clear, too, that Time and History cannot be identical; while the reconciliation between Spirit and the Absolute Other does have a historical aspect (namely in History itself, or the memory of past expressions of Spirit which influence the generation of new expressions), this reconciliation itself takes place *in the now*. And while I could not, due to the limited nature of this project, argue against every single argument for a *primarily historical* Hegelian time-sense, and could not argue against every *possible* argument for such (since that would be impossible, as some of these arguments may not have even been formulated yet), I have examined three of the major arguments for such a time-sense and found them flawed. This, I believe, further backs up my assertion: that immediacy is fundamental to Hegel's time-sense, and to argue against this perspective ignores important portions of the text, especially in the Absolute Knowing chapter.

While the *Phenomenology of Spirit* might not have contained every word Hegel spoke on the subject of time, the *Phenomenology* was – and remains – the cornerstone of Hegel's corpus (as I established back in section 2). Not only this, but the chapter on Absolute Knowing, brief as it may be, is quite possibly the most important piece of writing in that entire corpus, as it outlines specifically how Spirit and the Absolute Other are reconciled, and thus how Science originates and is expressed. Keep in mind, too, that Hegel's own work is an expression of Science, as I emphasized in chapter 4; the Absolute Knowing chapter is, then, also *self-explanatory* in a way,

giving us the ultimate insight into why the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and by extension the rest of Hegel's body of work, even matters.

What matters, too, is the temporal expression of Hegel's thought. Yes, again, it is true that Hegel's work is inherently one historical expression of ideas: the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is, indisputably, a product of its time. But the *Phenomenology* (along with Hegel's other works) can still give us insight today, and scholars can (and do) still interpret its ideas in new ways. This is because the history, both leading up to the time of the *Phenomenology's* writing and that which has taken place since, is there to inform the present. The *Phenomenology* itself, and the commentaries and reinterpretations that have been written since then, all form part of the historical context that is drawn upon by present-day thinkers, when they go back and read the *Phenomenology* and its later interpretations. This is where I believe some of the thinkers I discussed, who hold to a primarily historical view of Hegelian time, are in error: they take the history informing the continuous process of reconciliation as the medium in which this reconciliation takes place, when in fact it is merely part of the contextual backdrop. Now, make no mistake, the reconciliation could not take place without history to inform us; if we did not have that ever-accumulating collection of historical texts and perspectives, we would be forever stuck in the time and intellectual space of the original text. But this reconciliation *is taking place right now*, in the eternal present.

The *Phenomenology* is, in this way, *alive*; but the way Hegel's *Phenomenology* stays alive is through influencing new thought, new insight, new content, while at the same time renewing itself through that same process of constant reinterpretation. All of this is part of that reconciliation between Spirit and the Absolute Other, and all of this takes place *instantaneously* and *continuously*, as Spirit embarks on that never-ending journey. For this reconciliation – and

this is vital – does not just happen once, and then become unnecessary for the remainder of human existence. Rather, this reconciliation is, again, *instantaneous* and *continuous*, meaning it is still happening now. This project, even, is a part of that process (though an infinitesimally small part). And this process will continue, on and on, long as there is still a Spirit left in the world to perceive.

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