

# Understanding of the Beginning of Hegel's Philosophy

## Taking Section I in the Introduction of "Shorter Logic" as an Example

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**Abstract**—What is philosophy and the relationship between philosophy and science has always been a central concern for scholars. In the "Shorter Logic", Hegel pointed out that philosophy is a science, but he defined science beyond philosophy as other science, denying the authenticity of its knowledge. It can be seen immediately that what is philosophy is the key to determining the direction of philosophy itself. The nature of any philosophical theory and their understanding of philosophy itself are inseparable. This article is an interpretation of section I of the "Shorter Logic".

**Keywords**—Hegel's philosophy; Shorter Logic; absolute spirit; metaphysics

### I. INTRODUCTION

Many people think that mathematics science assumes numbers, physical science assumes time and space, while philosophy only assumes the existence of thinking as a being at its beginning but it can start from thinking, go through continuous understanding and negation of itself, finally return to itself and turn into a pure thinking which abandons the directness of thinking as beginning of philosophy and hence proves that true philosophy does not need any assumption. However, this understanding of true philosophy is not profound enough. The movement of thinking only stays on the surface without realizing the essence, because it still compares the beginning of philosophy to an assumption, merely philosophy can finally discard this assumption. In fact, there is neither assumption nor beginning in real philosophy. Formally, philosophy needs a beginning. And only those who have not truly realized the content of philosophy may find that philosophy has a beginning and assumption. This understanding subconsciously puts the thinking and being in philosophical thinking in opposite positions. But the truth is that philosophy is consistent both in its content and form and consistently adheres to the monism of the subject and the object of thinking rather than the dualism of intellectuality or pluralistic thinking.

### II. THE BEGINNING OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

Marx once said that Hegel's "The Phenomenology of Mind (Phänomenologie des Geistes)" is the real birthplace

and secret of Hegel's philosophy<sup>1</sup>. Can we access to Hegel's philosophy by studying "The Phenomenology of Mind"? Not really. "The Phenomenology of Mind" describes the evolution process of absolute mind itself in aspects of consciousness, self-awareness, rationality, mind, and absolute mind. It seems that the absolute standpoint is established at the end, but the way and view of its narration always lies in absolute concept. So, Hegel said, "The road to science itself has already been the science and its content is the science about conscious experience."<sup>2</sup> In this words, Hegel always emphasizes that his philosophical system is a kind of science, both its method and content are self-being and self-making and any external things should be judged as a presentation rather than reality in terms of science. Marx once indicated that "There are three elements in Hegel's system: Spinoza's substance, Fichte's self-consciousness and the unification inevitably full of contradictions of the former two elements in Hegel's philosophy, namely the absolute mind."<sup>3</sup> In fact, Hegel just gets the infinite concept of substance recognized by Spinoza united with the dynamic self-consciousness advocated by Fichte and defines the subject as a thinkable substance and dynamic mind. It is obvious that Hegel's recognition completely surpasses the intellectual standpoint in traditional philosophy. Therefore, "The Phenomenology of Mind" actually takes "Logistics" as a premise. In "The Phenomenology of Mind", Hegel consciously had a standpoint of absolute concept rather than the commonly-known intellectual standpoint.

Hegel also emphasized this point of view in the "Shorter Logic". He said, "The process of consciousness development seems to be limited to form at first, but at the same time it contains the process of development of contents which constitute the object of each special sectors of philosophy. But the process of content development must follow after the development of content, because the relationship between

<sup>1</sup> Selected Works of Marx and Engels. People's Publishing House. Vol. 42, p. 159, 1972. (in Chinese)

<sup>2</sup> Hegel (author), He Lin, Wang Yuxing (Translators). The Phenomenology of Mind. Shanghai People's Press. Vol. A, p114, 2013. (in Chinese)

<sup>3</sup> Collected Works of Marx and Engels. People's Publishing House. Vol. 1, p341~342. 2009. (in Chinese)

content and form is a potential relationship with form. Therefore, it is hard to elaborate the form of thinking because there are many specific materials about special sections of philosophy which have been partially discussed in the introduction of the philosophical system."<sup>4</sup> In this word, what Hegel emphasizes is the dialectical relationship between form and content. "The Phenomenology of Mind" studies the form of presentation of absolute concept itself, while "Logistics" studies the absolute concept itself. So, various sections themselves in "The Phenomenology of Mind" are provisions of the absolute concept itself, not just a form. Therefore, the absolute concept produces many forms through the provision itself and hence its content lies in form at first and is gradually enriched through unceasing evolution in forms. That is to say, content has to be regarded as the basis in order to fully understand the form.

Although philosophy itself does not start with assumption, it maintains that the absolute unification of thinking and being everywhere and the inseparable relationship between the subject and object of understanding. The reason is simple, namely the standpoint of true philosophy is the absolutely surpassed intellectual intuition rather than limited common sense of thinking. Hegel once thought that his philosophy system had a beginning, that is, people's consciousness of common sense can reach the standpoint maintained in absolute mind by studying "The Phenomenology of Mind". In other words, "The Phenomenology of Mind" can be regarded as the beginning of Hegel's philosophy system. "Logistics" should take "The Phenomenology of Mind" as the basis. But in fact it is not the case. Actually, "Logistics" is the logical premise of "The Phenomenology of Mind", because the standpoint maintained in "The Phenomenology of Mind" has already been the absolute mind standpoint of "Logistics" rather than the standpoint of limited thinking of intellectuality. Therefore, the so-called beginning of Hegel's philosophy system is actually a misunderstanding. The speculative philosophy system or the true philosophy is the absolute knowledge taking oneself as the medium and cognitive object. Thereby, true philosophy neither has any beginning and precondition nor has dimidiated and opposite concepts of thinking and being. In short, true philosophy is an absolute thinking. As long as it realizes, the represented thing certainly exists. The reason for existence of being lies in the thinking behind it rather than its existence in reality. This understanding of the absolutization of philosophy completely guarantees that there is no assumption in any link within the big circle of philosophy itself and the concept of being is also the same even it is the most abstract and even as the most abstract and worst concept in special section of philosophy namely in the link of the theory of being.

Philosophy is an absolute knowledge, so how can ordinary people really access to Hegel's philosophy system instead of hovering outside it? In fact, Hegel himself had answered the question, which is using intellectual intuition ability. The intellectual intuition ability in Hegel's understanding is not Kant's formalized understanding and

Schelling's mysterious and ready-made intuition, but an always-dynamic conceptual thinking to unceasingly deny oneself taking itself as the object. To put it simply, this intellectual intuition ability is a dynamic creative mind, or pure thinking itself. By using this conceptualized intellectual intuition to understand Hegel's philosophy, it is found that what appear throughout his philosophy system are direct and indirect dialectics, rather than rational arbitrariness and mysterious intuition. That is to say, the content of intellectual intuition is the unification of thinking and being. It is a direct thinking in form. Its cognitive object directly points to metaphysics, namely pure thinking itself, but it also has medium. Its medium is the thinking of perceptual and intellectual levels. By denying and surpassing the said medium, its potential pure thinking is evolved into reality and finally reaches the requirements of logistics itself for oneself, namely to be positive, negative or negate the negation and further form a perfect trinity structure. The dynamic nature of pure thinking proves that intellectual intuition is not only a kind of ability but also a direct and indirect dialectics. This objective pure thinking of pure thinking can only be produced in pure mind realm.

Even if philosophy is an absolute knowledge without any beginning and assumption, this does not mean that the beginning of philosophy in form can be chosen at will. The system of pure thinking inevitably takes the concept of being (the most abstract in form, the worst in content and the most direct in thinking) as the beginning. This is not a kind of arbitrariness. On the contrary, it has a solid rational foundation. The first thing to be clear is that pure reason is always an absolute unification of thinking and being no matter it is the beginning or the ending. When pure reason begins to think about itself, it does not know that it is a kind of thinking. It can only treat itself as a kind of direct being without medium. Therefore, this being is an abstract existence of "nothing" and "being" without any content. But reason itself is not a zombie. Its development is always a dialectical movement from abstract to specific, from potential to real situation. Therefore, the abstract being in the theory of being can be evolved into the reality in essentialism and finally return to the concept in conceptualism, namely start from abstract being and finally return to the concept of being itself.

The requirement of philosophy for itself is not about the inevitability of the external argument form but about the satisfaction of inner thinking. Philosophy is a purely free concept and more a pure mind of thinking and a kind of basis for real existence of all realities and inner links of mind. Feelings, intuition, imagination and will are all real and finite minds and their contents are not produced by their own mind but are given. Pure thinking is the real content of their minds. They are just pure thinking and mind to dynamically think about their external forms instead of a self-being and self-making dynamic mind. When the minds of those finite real beings such as feelings and intuition realize their own illiberality the opposition between their own contents and forms, the mind is surpassing this passive splitting state, raising to the level of pure thinking and seeing that only pure thinking is the basis of real beings of all realities instead of

<sup>4</sup> Hegel (author), He Lin (Translator), *Shorter Logic*. Commercial Press, 1980. (in Chinese)

the real being itself of reality. The real being itself is nothing but a superficial external form without content. Only pure thinking is the absolute mind providing content to a form.

### III. PARADOXICAL MOVEMENT OF THINKING

Thinking will inevitably fall into contradiction, because thinking itself is dialectic. When thinking begins to think about itself, it will enter the negative thing set by itself. Here, thinking seems to have lost the original unification in itself. In fact, the true free thinking never stops in its own inflexible opposition. Rather, thinking will certainly surpass its own negative being and return to itself. "Logistics" is also evolved like so. Thinking realizing itself in the link of the theory of being is one thing. But this one thing is extremely weak and abstract so that it may continuously think about and regulate itself and evolve to the link of essentialism. In the link of essentialism, thinking falls into its own disparity, appearing dimidiate and opposite concepts of form and content, internal and external and thinking and being. However over constant regulation of thinking, it finally realizes that this opposition is actually formal and false and they are one thing in nature, but this one thing has rich content. Over this process of evolution, thinking enters the link of conceptualism. In the link of conceptualism, as a concept, thinking is unified absolutely, abandons the abstract form of thinking in the link of the theory of being and the rich content of thinking in the link of essentialism and truly reaches unification between the two things.

In the history of philosophy, understanding the nature of thinking and studying the process of thinking has always been one of the main themes of logistics. Plato, Parmenides, Kant and Schelling had made outstanding contributions to this field. But their understandings of the nature of thinking are far from reaching that of Hegel, because only Hegel really saw that thinking is not only a kind of self-denial but also returns to a negation of negation. Thinking will inevitably produce contradictions and will also inevitably have the ability to resolve this contradiction and return to its own unification. But, thinking can only give subjective affirmation, groundless assumption and occasionally arbitrary decision to the recognition of itself just as Hegel's saying mentioned above, when thinking takes a meaningless negative attitude towards the generation and resolution of contradictions, such as using other method than rational method to seek for information of thinking and being in form. Hegel believed that this extreme and distrustful altitude towards reason itself is fully embodied in Jacobi's theory of direct knowledge, because Jacobi held that only direct knowledge (feeling, faith and intuition) can access to truth, and reason can't do any contribution to it. Hegel opposed direct knowledge because the basis of this theory is intellectual and the understanding of God is finite. The so-called beliefs and feelings are precisely the shallowest recognition and understanding of God. One can know God without relying on any power other than reason if he/she is truly reasonable.

The concept once begins to think about itself, it surpasses all the finite objects and real beings in real life and directly realizes the existence of pure reason regardless of such

thinking and understanding of the reality as is the link that itself must goes through as regulated by the concept. The reason why Greek philosophy is such a simple abstract idea as lacking connection with the reality is because the Greeks began to think themselves and realized that there is such a free and pure reason on real perceptual being as that it specifies and produces all things in reality. So, the core category of Greek philosophy is directed at the recognition and understanding of this pure reason, such as Heraclitus' logos, Anaxagoras' Nous, Parmenides' being, Plato's concept and so on. It is obvious that they are all quite abstract categories. Many people criticize that Greek philosophy is an arbitrary and speculative philosophy. This view is right, but it is absolutely impossible to regard the concept of Greek philosophy as a pure form of empty idea in scholasticism. This is because the productivity in Greek period had not reached the level that people can recognize the hidden ideas. Therefore in the eyes of the Greeks, nature and mind are both irrational, only pure ideas are truly rational and connotative beings.

If the beginning of philosophy is seen only from time, philosophy is indeed produced on the basis of experience. For example, in pre-Socratic period in ancient Greek philosophy, philosophers such as Thales and Heraclitus were looking for primordium on the basis of experience. But this time-based beginning is meaningless to philosophy itself, because it only regards philosophy as the result of the development of empirical science itself, instead direct experience becomes the decisive force of philosophy. The absurdity of this argument is that it believes that people may eat as long as there is food and may think as long as there is a feeling and it can not explain why only people can eat and animals can not and why people can think and animals can not. If there is only experience in people's thinking, people will neither realize why people are human beings rather than animals at all nor say the word "me/I" because only those who have reached a certain level of rational ability can accurately say "me/I". "Me/I" represents that people realizes his/her own rational ability, while animals don't have the concept of "Me/I" other than their own instinctive consciousness. Hegel saw that philosophy began with the pure reason realized by the ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides. This absolutism is the being really at the beginning. Any empirical science is the inevitable result of pure rational thinking itself. Truly connotative empirical science will not be produced if there is no thinking of philosophy meaning. Obviously, this kind of speculative thinking is contrary to empirical science. Hegel never used Darwin's theory of evolution to explain the development of human history, because this theory is just an empirical reduction and induction and can not be used to explain why people are rational beings. In Hegel's understanding, anything at earlier time is not the true beginning. Any beginning must be the purest being in logic. Only the most advanced and purest thing is the truly absolute basis. Therefore in Hegel's philosophy system, "Logistics" is in the first position and is the soul throughout the entire philosophy system, while "Philosophy of Nature" and "Philosophy of Mind" are returned to itself as the inevitable progress of pure

rational thinking itself. This path of rising from absolute concept to absolute mind is a direct and indirect dialectics.

Thinking is a kind of universality and only in the universality can thinking be satisfied. This thinking is a kind of pure thinking. It achieves a specific universality through self-examination and discards all dimidiated and opposite concepts of thinking and being in finite reality, such as thinking of various dualism, theory of reflection, naive materialism and theory of reduction. The satisfaction of pure thinking does not need to rely on any external power but only need to know itself. It often sets the seemingly-external particularity in the process of understanding and defining itself, return to the universality of itself by discarding the contradiction between content and form in the particularity and further realize an absolute unification in internal universality content and external particularity form. As a self-being and self-making dynamic mind, pure thinking may never ignore any real being, because the reason why being can exist is not that it has mass and volume and can be touched and felt by people but that the being itself is an inevitable result of mind defined by pure thinking.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Pure reason will inevitably appear separation between the thinking object and the cognitive subject in the process of thinking itself, but the thinking does not stop there. This separation will be grasped and returned by the thinking itself. Pure thinking is an absolute and will exist in the same way as how it thinks about itself. But at the beginning of reason, it only knows that itself is a direct thinking and don't know its own content. But the process of thinking in thinking itself is also a process of denying itself, so the thinking will negate its abstract form and seek for ascertained content. In this way, it will be evolved from theory of being to the link of essentialism in which the subject seems to be separated from the object. But this seemingly-external subject can never be regarded as the absolute concept itself, because the absolute concept is always unified with the being, the seemingly-external subject is only the form defined by pure thinking, and in the theory of concept, this definition will finally be abandoned and returned to the original unification. In fact, when pure thinking truly completes the task of deepening itself and understanding oneself in theory of concept, it becomes a concept of concept and absolute absolute, and also truly satisfies itself and realizes its original goals and targets, namely to fully know and understand itself.

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