

HEGEL'S REMEDY FOR THE IMPASSE OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

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1. The Impasse of Contemporary Philosophy

In recent years there has been a growing convergence between the two mainstreams of contemporary philosophy, the so-called analytic and continental schools of thought.¹ Despite their divergent styles, they have reached common diagnoses of past philosophical problems, proposed common cures, and finally begun to acknowledge the kindred character of their respective enterprises. The emerging dialogue, however, has revealed not that truth resides in consensus, but that philosophy today has reached a common impasse.

Be it analytic or continental, contemporary philosophical inquiry has sought to surmount the dilemmas of traditional metaphysics and transcendental thought with two complementary projects that cannot help but fall victim to the very problem they seek to avoid. These corollary approaches are represented in the analytic tradition by ideal and ordinary language philosophies, just as they are represented in continental circles, on one pole, by structuralism and the pragmatic semiotics of Apel and Habermas, and, on the other, by hermeneutic philosophy. In each case, the chosen strategy follows from the awareness that philosophy can neither make unmediated truth claims about reality, directly describing the given, as traditional metaphysics had attempted, nor begin by characterizing some transcendental subject through which the limits of true knowing are established.

On the one hand, philosophy cannot directly ask, "What is?" due to the problematic character of any immediate reference to reality. Such reference claims truth for a content whose givenness is alleged. However, the presumed givenness of this content precludes appeal to any higher principle to adjudicate between it and any other content for which immediate being is claimed. Recourse to any such standard would introduce a mediating factor undermining the putative immediate givenness of any term to which it is applied. As a consequence, each competing content can have nothing supporting it but the claim that it is, an assumption as groundless as any other arbitrary assertion. Owing to its putative immediacy, each determinate truth claim thus can only be but a mere stipulation. This dilemma cannot be surmounted by attempting to show that some given content operates as a first principle of reality from which all else is derived and ordered. Any such attempt only reproduces the same problem on another level by leaving the content of the putative first principle itself just as immediately given as whatever standards of derivation and completeness that are employed to certify its grounding role. Once again, the metaphysical appeal to the given remains unsusceptible of any justification.

Recognizing these metaphysical problems, contemporary analytic and continental philosophy has acknowledged the necessity of foregoing all immediate reference to reality and has chosen instead to investigate how truth claims are made. In making this turn to consider not reality, but the conditions of reference to reality, both schools have recognized the problem of doing so in the manner of Kantian transcendental philosophy, which appears to make immediate reference of its own to both the conditions of experience and the conditions of the object of experience. On the one hand, Kant is taken to task for metaphysically stipulating the character of the transcendental structure by conceiving it as a noumenal self determined through such unfounded devices as a metaphysical deduction of the categories, which simply adopts, with certain unargued modifications, the typology of judgment of received tradition. On the other hand, Kant is equally criticized for determining the object of experience with respect to a thing-in-itself, which is not transcendently constituted, but metaphysically referred to as something immediately given *in res*.

To avoid these lapses into unmediated metaphysical reference, the two contemporary schools have attempted to conceive the conditions of making truth claims without referring either to any thing-in-itself or any acts of a transcendental subject. Instead of construing the object of knowing as the appearance of something outside knowing from which intuitions are received, they have taken the object of knowing to be something completely constituted by and within the very structure of referring itself. On the other hand, instead of conceiving any transcenden-

tal structure as a noumenal self hidden from knowing as much as any thing-in-itself, they have taken the practice of referring to be that in terms of which all reference is to be understood. Of course, this practice can be considered either to have an intrinsic universal character or else to be overdetermined, taking shape according to the particular context in which it occurs. Consequently, the process of referring in which all truth claims are constituted here gets alternately conceived as either an ideal structure of speech or as the given usage of a natural language.

On this basis the analytic tradition has made its linguistic turn and pursued the corollary strategies of ideal and ordinary language philosophy, wherein all questions of truth are reduced to questions of how truth claims are determined through linguistic practice, be it overdetermined or not.

For its part, recent continental philosophy has followed an analogous path. On the one hand, it has developed its own versions of ideal language philosophy, formulating it both as a theory of communicative competence that specifies the ideal speech situation under which legitimate discourse is possible and as a universal structuralism that uncovers the hidden forms of signifying by which meaning gets constituted. On the other hand, the continental tradition has offered its own analogue for ordinary language philosophy, hermeneutic philosophy. Under its banner, the irreducible condition of true knowing has been construed to be the contextually bound situation of interpretation, wherein discourse is predetermined by the given system of reference in which it operates. However this system is specified, the resulting historicity of knowing offers the same overdetermined transcendental framework presented by analytic ordinary language philosophy.

On the face of it, both versions of the convergent analytic and continental approaches seem to escape the particular difficulties of the thing-in-itself and the noumenal self. By making the practice of discourse what constitutes both the object of knowing and the knowledge of that object, they avoid any immediate reference to either subjective or objective reality.

Nevertheless, in so doing, they have hardly removed the central dilemma of transcendental argument, which is by no means a special affliction of the Kantian formulation, but concerns the status of the entire transcendental inquiry itself. In a word, what the two contemporary schools have failed to resolve is the problem of legitimating the discourse they themselves exercise in asserting the primacy of their chosen systems of reference. It matters not whether their system of reference be specified as an ideal or ordinary linguistic practice, or as semiotic structure, communicative competence, or the hermeneutic situation. Whatever its guise, the constitutive structure of reference remains a metaphysical stipulation so long as the discourse specifying it is not itself already

constituted in terms of that structure.

The dilemma is simple enough. If the indicated framework of referring be the condition of all truth claims, then the philosopher's own characterization of that framework can claim no truth unless a further condition be met. Namely, this thematization by the philosopher must proceed according to the same critically established conditions of the referring it investigates. For this to occur, the "metalanguage" of the philosopher must lose its metalinguistic transcendence and coincide with the discourse whose constitutive structures are being uncovered. To avoid any metaphysical reference to the transcendental structure itself, the philosophical practice of the ideal or ordinary language philosopher must thus become fully self-referential, which means that the truth claiming under consideration must perform its own critique.

What leaves analytic and continental thought at a common impasse is that the required equalization of transcendental argument with its object actually eliminates the very framework for doing transcendental philosophy of any sort, regardless of whether it makes the conditions of knowing a noumenal self, an ideal speech situation or an overdetermined hermeneutic context. This becomes manifest once one observes what happens when the discourse of transcendental inquiry becomes self-critical, forsaking all immediate metaphysical reference by becoming one and the same as the structure of referring under investigation.

To begin with, what transcendental discourse itself generically performs is a knowing of true knowing in terms of the conditions that make truth claims possible and give them their proper limit. The controversy between the different proponents of transcendental philosophy does not concern this general task, but rather the specific content assigned to knowing and the constitutive structure of its referring. Consequently, whatever its particular shape, if transcendental discourse is to exercise true knowing instead of an unfounded metaphysical stipulation, then it must relate to its subject matter just as true knowing relates to its object. Since transcendental discourse comprises a knowing of true knowing, it can validly embody the structure of true knowing, its object, only if the transcendental investigation, the knowing of true knowing, is the same as what it knows. For this to be true, true knowing must itself be a knowing of true knowing.

The achievement of this, however, removes not only the distinction between transcendental discourse and the knowing under critique, but also the distinction between knowing and its object, or between referring and its referent. Namely, if true knowing is itself a knowing of true knowing, then what knowing refers to is identical to knowing's relation to its object.

What makes this outcome of fatal consequence is that transcendental discourse can only be undertaken if knowing can be differentiated from its

particular object. Only then can knowing be considered apart, independently of any specific knowledge, that is, independently of any objective reference. Yet if knowing is indistinguishable from what it knows, then, to use Kant's terminology, knowing cannot be examined prior to experience. As a result, when transcendental philosophy makes itself self-referential, eliminating all distinction between itself and the knowing it investigates, the accompanying equalization of knowing and its object eliminates the very possibility of transcendental discourse itself. By being driven to this result, transcendental inquiry testifies to the bankruptcy of its own enterprise. Since the analytic and continental schools have held on to its program, while merely substituting linguistic practice for noumenal subjectivity, the self-elimination of transcendental argument signals their common failure.

2. The Alternative of A Non-Transcendental Phenomenology

If this outcome indicates that philosophy can begin no more with any reference to knowing than with any reference to reality, it does not leave thought bound to the impasse of contemporary philosophy. In fact, the philosophical tradition has already offered an alternative to metaphysics and transcendental argument, an alternative that presents an all too neglected strategy for overcoming their difficulties and pursuing a systematic philosophy of an entirely different order. The original proponent of this alternative is Hegel and in the Introduction to his *Phenomenology of Spirit* he sketches out its basic strategy. In face of the dilemmas of contemporary thought, this strategy warrants reconsideration now more than ever, irrespectively of whether Hegel actually succeeded in carrying it out.

Needless to say, Hegel has commonly been interpreted as the final representative of the metaphysical tradition, who makes the last grandiose attempt to reach absolute knowledge of things as they are in themselves with a theory of subject-object identity.² Nevertheless, his approach is actually no such relic of the past, but as contemporary as can be.

Contrary to received opinion, Hegel begins by considering precisely that impasse at which today's thought has arrived. Confronting the failure of metaphysical and transcendental philosophies, Hegel asks how philosophy can begin at all. Their examples have shown that philosophy cannot begin with any immediate truth claims about either reality or knowing. This seems to leave one option open: that one begin with no given content whatsoever by casting aside all assumptions and resolving to think independently of any unmediated references to reality or any transcendental structures. Hegel recognizes, however, that such a resolve could not help but be a mere subjective postulate if philosophy began immediately

with it.³ Doing so would tacitly presuppose both the primacy of contentless indeterminacy and the primacy of that non-metaphysical, non-transcendental knowing that here presumably begins without any specific knowledge. In effect, this immediate resolve to think without assumption would assume prior to philosophical investigation that philosophy is properly presuppositionless knowing.

To avoid this recursion to metaphysical truth claims, Hegel offers the radical alternative of a non-transcendental phenomenology. It is conceived as an explicitly *positive* science observing what occurs to the project of foundational knowing common to metaphysics and transcendental argument when foundational cognition tests its own fundamental claims. What is at stake is whether this investigation, where the knowing under view does its own critique, can result in some threshold where knowledge claims can be made free from the pitfalls of metaphysical reference and transcendental constitution. If phenomenology can arrive at such a result, then, independently of all subjective resolve, a starting point will lie secured for a new type of philosophy that takes nothing for granted.

In line with this strategy, Hegel gives phenomenology its specific method and subject matter in direct challenge to the basic problem of metaphysics and transcendental philosophy. Their inquiries have shown how no immediate truth can be legitimately claimed by any knowing whose object or knowledge has some definite predetermined content. What Hegel therefore proposes is that, instead of making truth claims, one begin by stipulating knowing that claims truth for its knowledge by appeal to some given, and then observe how this explicitly presupposed subject matter develops itself by making and testing truth claims of its own. In this way, a wholly immanent critique can be undertaken of the strategy of knowing that justifies its claims by appeal to some foundation, be it construed as some factor *in res* or a transcendental condition.

In these terms, Hegel presents a phenomenological inquiry that is not only non-metaphysical in the traditional sense, but radically non-transcendental as well. Since this phenomenology will simply observe a structure of foundational knowing that it openly takes for granted as a given content, its investigation avoids metaphysics by making no claims concerning either the unqualified reality of its subject matter or the truth of the claims made by the subject matter itself. Unlike so many of his subsequent interpreters, Hegel is well aware of the problem that would arise if phenomenology did make such assertions, claiming either that it presents the true doctrine of knowing as it is in itself or that the truth claims made by its subject matter were those generic to knowing per se. If phenomenology followed that course, it would be but another version of transcendental philosophy, making the indefensible metaphysical assumption that it was itself rigorous science, laying bare the true underlying structure of all discourse. This is the fate of Husserlian phenomenology,

which remains transcendental by claiming presuppositionlessness for its own observation, dogmatically assuming that all knowing must have the shape of intentionality as it is stipulated by Husserl.

By contrast, the phenomenology that Hegel here proposes forgoes all such unqualified assertion by openly accepting the limits of positive science. Stipulating the content it observes, this phenomenology appropriately admits that what claims do emerge are not truths in themselves, definitive of either reality or knowing. The observed truth claims are rather only beliefs generated by the subject matter, a subject matter that is itself ascribed no ontological or transcendental status, but merely taken for granted as a version of knowing posited by the phenomenologist herself.

Nevertheless, non-transcendental phenomenology is a very special positive science because its given object has the unique character of making its own truth claims and also testing them by itself. In so doing, the structure of knowing stipulated by phenomenology gives itself successive shapes of knowing, each with a different knowledge claim and a different standard of truth. Thereby the subject matter determines its own development, unlike in other positive sciences where the act of the investigator must be relied upon to introduce every new content. Consequently, the method of the positive science of phenomenology has the peculiar character of being what Hegel aptly calls a pure observation,⁴ pure in that the phenomenological investigator need not interfere with the self-examination of the subject matter. For this reason, phenomenology has a singularly non-arbitrary character, even though it is only a positive science. Despite its stipulated subject matter, phenomenological discourse is ruled by the internal necessity that whatever content comes into view does so not by any intervention of the phenomenologist, but by being generated from nothing but the bare structure of knowing taken up at the start.

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel indicates how these generic features all follow from the character of the given subject matter which the positive science of phenomenology begins observing. Hegel calls this presupposed content the structure of consciousness.⁵ Although he will later attempt to confirm in his *Philosophy of Spirit* that consciousness is defined by the representational model of knowing that phenomenology addresses as a posit, the introduction of conscious knowing here involves no further claim than that it denotes the cognitive structure that phenomenology stipulates for itself. The structure of consciousness thus denotes simply knowing that claims truth for its knowledge, referring its putative cognition to some given as the standard of its validity. Such a structure provides the appropriate subject matter if one is to forgo making all immediate truth claims and instead observe a given structure that makes them on its own.

As accordingly stipulated by phenomenology, this structure consists in knowing that refers to what it knows as something both in relation to it and determined in itself independently of that relation.

These two aspects, which Hegel terms the being-for-consciousness and the being-in-itself of the object,⁶ are necessary if the knowing under consideration is to make truth claims. Only with their distinction from one another can knowing have knowledge of what is not merely a subjective posit but putatively determined in its own right. Consequently, the knowing that phenomenology observes has this dual structure where, on the one hand, knowing's relation to its object is its knowledge, whereas, on the other hand, the truth of that knowledge is the known object taken by itself as that to which the knowledge refers.

Granted this characterization, it still might appear a contradiction in terms for knowing to refer to what is not merely in relation to it, but in itself independent of that relation. This problem poses no difficulty at all, however, just given the structure of the knowing under observation. Since this truth-claiming knowing consists in the polar relation of knowledge and truth, of what is *for* it and what is *to* it, what is in itself actually falls within knowing as one of its constitutive contrast terms.

For this important reason, as Hegel duly notes,⁷ testing the truth of knowing's knowledge requires no introduction of any criterion of validity by the phenomenologist. If that were necessary, phenomenology would end up having to make metaphysical claims concerning what is the criterion of truth. This reversion to metaphysics need not arise precisely because the given structure of knowing not only claims truth for its knowledge, but contains within itself the standard by which its knowledge can be verified. This criterion of truth is none other than the constituent pole of in-itselfness, which is to knowing as that to which its knowledge should correspond. Since knowledge is knowing's relation to this content, the standard of truth for this knowledge is concomitantly given for knowing as its referent.

If this removes the traditional metaphysical problem of providing a criterion of truth, which is tantamount to gaining access to what is in itself, it also removes the transcendental problem of determining true knowing, which is the object of transcendental knowledge. That dilemma falls away as well, since phenomenology is equally relieved of having to apply the criterion of truth and thereby uphold some specific principle of method. As Hegel observes,⁸ this difficulty is also overcome because knowing claims truth for its knowledge only by referring its knowledge to what it knows. In making truth claims, knowing considers not just what it knows, but *both* what it refers to and what its own knowledge is. Since knowledge and its referent are accordingly linked together for knowing as the corresponding terms of its own relation, knowing not only supplies the truth criterion of its knowledge. It further compares its knowledge

with this its referent and only recognizes the truth of its cognition through this comparison.

Nevertheless, given the stipulated structure of knowing, the comparison of the standard of truth and knowledge cannot sustain certainty. Once knowing has its two constituents before it, relating them one to another, its truth criterion is not in itself any longer, as something given independently of cognition, but something for knowing, determined in virtue of how it appears within cognition. As a result, knowing finds that what it refers to is not the factor in itself that it took to be its standard of truth. Rather, the object of reference is that criterion *in* its relation for knowing, as it stands defined in the referring underway. By virtue of nothing but its own constitutive truth testing, knowing thus ends up before a new referent, consisting in the being-for-knowing of the former standard of its knowledge. Of course, when what is taken to be in itself gets transformed, the corresponding knowledge cannot remain the same. Since knowledge is knowing's relation to its referent, once the referent changes, so does the knowledge.

In this dual manner, then, the stipulated structure of knowing undergoes what Hegel terms an inversion of consciousness,⁹ independently generating a whole new shape for itself with entirely revised poles of truth and knowledge. The referent of knowing has here changed from being what was putatively in itself to become the givenness of this truth as it fell within knowing.¹⁰ On the other hand, the corresponding knowledge has changed from being knowing's relation to what was formerly in itself to become knowing's relation to the transformed object.

Nevertheless, to the degree that this emergence of a new shape of knowing has not eliminated consciousness' basic bi-polar structure of referent and reference, the process of knowing's truth testing does not halt. In so far as the new correlative contents *are* differentiated and compared together as the constitutive truth and knowledge of a new shape of knowing, the same inversion process automatically proceeds anew. Since, as Hegel observes,¹¹ the knowledge of the new object stands contrasted to its object in order to be knowledge for which truth is claimed in the criteriological, foundational, representational mode of consciousness, the referent once again falls within knowing as something for its consideration. Accordingly, the referent is no longer what is just in itself, but rather what appears to be in itself within and for knowing.

As is evident, the process of inversion will go on unabated so long as knowing persists in claiming truth for its knowledge in the manner of distinguishing what it knows from its relation to it. It matters not whether the referent be construed as sense data, the noumenal essence of sensible appearance, an element of an encompassing conceptual scheme in coherence with which its meaning is determined, a text awaiting interpretation within a hermeneutic circle, or a stimulus causally affecting

the behavior of a naturalized cognition. So long as referent and reference are differentiated, with reference relating to an independent factor of any sort, knowing exhibits the structure of consciousness, where the putative standard of truth remains caught in a double bind. On the one hand, the truth criterion, the "in itself," can verify knowledge only by figuring as a transcendent given, enjoying some independence from knowing's relation to it, whereas on the other hand, this same standard can only be appealed to in terms of how it appears immanently within the horizon of knowing. As a result, the standard of truth cannot help but be transformed into a knowledge claim in need of its own truth criterion, setting in motion anew the same tension and the same self-mutation.

It is this unstable, self-transforming relation of transcendence and immanence defining the stipulated structure of knowing that affords phenomenology a method unique among the positive sciences. Due to its process of inversion, the given subject matter of phenomenology stands apart from other objects of positive science not just by making truth claims and verifying its knowledge, but by further determining itself, continually generating new shapes of knowing through the workings of its basic structure. Because the self-examination of knowing produces the development of its own different shapes, whose succession provides what phenomenology considers, the phenomenologist introduces neither any truth criteria or procedures to verify the knowledge of knowing, nor any content at all other than the basic structure stipulated at the start. Non-transcendental phenomenology thus has no need to engage in the arbitrary assertions of eidetic variation, with its dogmatic appeals to the self-evidence of inner intuition to generate new content for some transcendently privileged structure of intentionality. Instead, the phenomenologist here has nothing left to do but to observe the subject matter as it is given and allow it to develop by itself without any outside interference. Exercising this passive observation, phenomenology attains a non-arbitrary, scientific character of its own so far as all it considers emerges through the inversions of knowing that necessarily follow from the structure stipulated at the outset.

Accordingly, phenomenology must begin with a shape of knowing containing nothing more than the structure of foundational knowing itself. The starting point therefore consists in a knowing where what is known to be true has no other content than that it is in itself, that it is a given factor to which knowing refers, while the corresponding knowledge has no other content than that it is a relation to what is given. This entails a shape of knowing whose truth criterion is being and being alone, and whose knowledge is but an immediate certainty of what is. Hegel begins the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with just such a knowing, calling it the shape of consciousness of sense-certainty.¹²

As for what follows, this is already mandated by the phenomenological

method: all further content must derive from inversions of knowing succeeding from this rudimentary shape, whose certainty of being will entail an inversion of its own. Of course, this general guideline by no means indicates the actual content of the ensuing succession of shapes. Indeed, whether or not Hegel has accurately described them is a question yet unanswered by Hegel scholarship, which by and large ignores the non-transcendental character of the discourse and treats the description of each shape as if it constituted a true doctrine about the knowing and corresponding objects under view.

Nevertheless, how the succession must come to an end, if at all, can be foreseen from the process of inversion that provides the motor of development. Given how the inversion process is determined through the stipulated structure of knowing, there is only one way that the generation of new shapes of knowing can cease. This is if the referent of knowledge becomes identical to knowing's relation to it. If that happens, then the truth of knowledge no longer becomes something else by getting referred to as something for knowing during knowing's comparison of its truth and knowledge. Since the referent has here acquired the same structure as knowing's relation to it, to grasp it in its relation to knowing is to consider it as it is in itself. Consequently, the content of truth has become completely indistinguishable from that of knowledge, leaving no further comparison to be made.

If such a shape does arise through the successive inversions of consciousness proceeding from sense-certainty, then and only then does the whole process of inversions grind to a halt. Because this process is unique and non-arbitrary, with a definite starting point and a continuous unitary development, Hegel can rightly suggest that the emergence of a shape of knowing where truth and knowledge coincide would signal the completed development of the totality of shapes of knowing.¹³ Accordingly, phenomenology would here face its final object, exhausting its own investigation by having observed in the preceding movement every possible manner of making immediate truth claims by referring to what is in itself.

What this leaves is not at all some subject-object identity with absolute knowledge of things as they are in themselves, as Hegel interpreters since Marx and Kierkegaard have commonly maintained. Instead of entailing any such return to metaphysics, the one possible terminus of phenomenology offers a radically novel result, permitting a complete break with the dilemmas of metaphysical and transcendental philosophy that continue to leave contemporary thought at an impasse.

3. The End of Phenomenology and The Starting Point of A Systematic Philosophy Without Foundations

The nature of this breakthrough has been obscured by the fact that Hegel does call the concluding shape of phenomenology "Absolute Knowing,"¹⁴ which has unfortunately led many readers to interpret it as the privileged form of philosophical knowing that conceives what truly is. However, if, as Hegel explicitly argues in the *Science of Logic*,¹⁵ phenomenology were to end up presenting a doctrine of true knowing within its own distinct positive science, it would fall into the familiar mistake of stipulating the concept of philosophy prior to the doing of philosophy. This mistake is committed the moment true knowing is rooted in any determinate standpoint. Once this move is taken, as it inveterately is by all transcendental thinkers no matter how they characterize the conditions of knowing, truth is made dependent upon an epistemological foundation that can never be legitimated in its own right, given how all valid claims are assumed to emanate from it.

The true significance of "Absolute Knowing" is better understood by considering what character it must have to be the concluding shape of phenomenology. In the first place, if the stipulated structure of knowing does develop from an immediate certainty of being into a shape where the distinction between truth and knowledge falls away, then much more has occurred than the passing of one shape into another. With the rise of a shape where referring and its referent become one and the same, consciousness has arrived at the point where it itself is forced to recognize that the domain of what is given to it is actually no more than its own posit. With the realm of the given thereby rendered indistinguishable from the reflection of knowing, the entire process of truth-claiming constituting the structure of consciousness immediately collapses. For once such "Absolute Knowing" is achieved, where truth and knowledge can no longer be differentiated, there is nothing left for knowing to distinguish from its own subjective referring as something in itself to which any *objective* knowledge could correspond. Consequently, there can not be any *relation* to a referent, let alone any possibility of claiming truth for such a relation. Without something in itself to which knowing can relate and contrast itself in the dual manner constitutive of the foundational, criteriological, representational knowing that Hegel calls consciousness, knowing can claim no truth for its knowledge. This does not signify a supplanting of truth with "warranted belief" or any such version of justification where the standard for adjudicating knowledge claims has a conventional, posited character. These "naturalized" or historically defined criteria remain versions of foundational knowing since referent and reference remain distinct. "Absolute Knowing," by contrast, presents a much more radical outcome. With its equalization of truth and knowledge, where reference has nothing distinct to which to refer, there is

simply nothing to be known, nor any knowledge to be held. Consequently, once knowing and what it knows become indistinguishable, there arises no absolute knowledge of what is in itself. What results is rather a complete elimination of truth and knowledge themselves, as they are construed in defining the framework of foundational, criteriological, or representational cognition. As Hegel observes, absolute knowing is really no knowing at all, but the dissolution of the structure of consciousness,¹⁶ a dissolution that occurs wholly through the efforts of the foundational model of knowing to test its claims and undertake its own critique.

By arriving at this shape of absolute knowing, where there is nothing given to refer to, nor any referring to perform, knowing that claims truth for its knowledge by appeal to an independent referent collapses into literally nothing. Nevertheless, as much as all contrast is removed and no determinate truth claims remain, the one possible conclusion of phenomenology immediately comprises a new point of departure free of the constraints of either metaphysical, transcendental, or phenomenological discourse.

To begin with, since the stipulated structure of foundational knowing has eliminated itself, phenomenology has lost the specific subject matter on which its investigation depends. So deprived of its constitutive object, phenomenology's pure observation is accordingly annulled. Since nothing determinate is left, there is no given subject matter with which any new positive science could proceed to take its place.

Furthermore, since no truth claims remain either about the objects of knowledge or about knowing itself, metaphysical and transcendental discourses have no room for themselves either. With no given about which absolute claims might be made nor any determinate structure of knowing to which authority could be conferred, the metaphysical and transcendental options are set aside.

What there is is neither something in itself nor something in relation to some shape of knowing, but the totally undifferentiated, indeterminate unity into which truth and knowledge have collapsed. As Hegel properly recognizes,¹⁷ absolute knowing's elimination of all knowledge of an in itself has resulted in being, that is, simple indeterminacy, freed of all transcendental conditions and claims to immediate truth. Contrary to prevalent interpretation, this is not being *in res*, the absolute, God before creation, a category of reason, or some transcendently constituted horizon. Rather, as Hegel repeats time and again,¹⁸ it is utterly unqualified, unanalyzable indeterminacy, which is all that remains when all reference to the given and all correspondingly determinate referring are set aside as a defining framework for arriving at truth.

Although such being is a result of the possible self-elimination of the stipulated structure of foundational knowing, as well as of the phenomenology observing it, its genesis in no way conditions or mediates

it. Rather, being is indeterminate and immediate precisely by issuing from a self-annulling mediation. By developing itself to Absolute Knowing, phenomenology serves this introductory role as a process that eliminates itself as a presupposition the moment being emerges from it. Because being here arises with no relation to anything else nor any distinction within itself, there is nothing about it which refers back to any preceding ground or derivation. For this reason, being is really no result at all, but a pure beginning taking nothing for granted nor anticipating anything-further.¹⁹

Paradoxical as it may appear, this sheer indeterminacy is what enables being to provide a remedy for the common impasse of contemporary philosophy. If determinations of any sort were to develop from being without any outside interference, they would comprise the content of a discourse presupposing neither method nor subject matter. Taking nothing for granted, this development of determinations would be immune from the dilemmas of traditional metaphysics and transcendental philosophy, as well as from the relativity of positive science.

In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel attempts to inaugurate presupposition-less systematic philosophy precisely by showing how determinations do emerge from being. Although it might appear inexplicable how anything could arise from such complete indeterminacy, the bare outline of Hegel's argument certainly suggests a possibility.

As should by now be evident, being can be considered as it emerges from phenomenology only if nothing else be admitted. If any other factor were at hand, either as an antecedent ground or a coeval contrast term, the indeterminacy of being would be violated, together with the exclusion of all reference to givens and determinate standpoints from which being has resulted. Therefore, since no other resource can be admitted, any further determination must follow from being by itself, independently of any external positing of either method or subject matter. Conversely, since this being has no internal distinctions or external relations, it cannot be a ground or cause or determiner of anything, nor can anything arise from it that involves relations or difference to something determinate. Thus, if any other content is to develop out of being, it can only arise utterly groundlessly and be just as undifferentiated and unmediated as being itself.

Although this indicates that nothing can arise from being, Hegel recognizes that nothing does indeed arise from being without any ground at all. As he observes, in so far as being is neither something in itself nor a category of reason, but entirely indeterminate, it is *immediately* nothing, just as nothing is *immediately* the same absence of all form and content comprising being.²⁰ Consequently, the indeterminacy of being, far from precluding further determination, actually immediately gives rise to a contrast that is no contrast at all, one of being that is nothing and nothing

that is being, where each is the groundless emergence of the other.

Indeed, this transition from being to nothing immediately cancels itself as a transition since what emerges from being is really no different than being. Nevertheless, as Hegel recognizes, being has given rise to something other than itself. This is the process of becoming within which being and nothing continually and without intermediary resolve themselves into one another.²¹

If this emergence of becoming suggests how being can be a beginning of presuppositionless determination, of determinacy liberated from the assumption of the foundational framework of consciousness, it also indicates the character of the possible conclusion of the ensuing development. Since what develops from being-nothing-becoming does so without any introjection of given content, be it through reference to what is in itself or what is assumed to constitute true or warranted knowing, the succession of determinations must be an immanent development. In other words, the development from being must be determined through nothing but itself and thereby be self-developing. However, because here the self-development begins with nothing determinate, it is not the self-determination of some content. Such was the case in phenomenology's observation of the self-development of the given structure of consciousness. What proceeds from being is rather self-determination *per se*.

Hegel draws the necessary conclusion: what determines itself from being can only be manifest at the end of the development. Only then has the self-determination fully determined its subject, which is, of course, the development itself in its totality. Thus, being does not comprise the abiding substrate of development, acquiring ever new determination for itself. Being instead actually emerges as the beginning of what finally results only at the conclusion of the development, for at that point that of which being is a beginning first comes into view.²²

Consequently, what the presuppositionless development from being is a development *of* is left open till the end. Nevertheless, its character can be anticipated in virtue of what is required to bring the self-determination to a close. Since the advance is immanent in character, if the development from being is to come to any conclusion, this can not be certified by any external criterion of completeness or any outside reflection upon the preceding succession of determinations. Instead, the development must itself arrive at a determination that is so structured as to present the interconnection of all the preceding determinations and do so in such a way that they are related together as component elements of a self-determined totality that is both their result and encompassing unity. Such a determination allows the development to close with itself because it not only incorporates all the emergent content within a completed whole, but does so from within the development itself. Accordingly, this

final content not only incorporates everything preceding, but renders the development of which it is a part the very process of that incorporation.

However, precisely by being this retrospective ordering of all that has preceded, an ordering in which every content stands as a stage in the concluded self-development containing them all, the last determination is the totality of determinations itself. Hegel calls this final determination the Absolute Idea and appropriately describes how it comprises the resultant self-ordering whole by incorporating all the preceding categories as constituents of its own self-determination.²³ As such, it is the actual subject of the development following from being, comprising what each and every category is a determination of. Consequently, Hegel can rightly say that being is implicitly the Absolute Idea.²⁴ Furthermore, since the totality of the Absolute Idea provides the ordering principle of its own developed content, it also comprises the method by which all the categories are determined. This is why Hegel can call the Absolute Idea the method of presuppositionless determination.²⁵

It can be the method since truth and justification no longer fall apart as they do when the validity of knowledge claims depends upon conformity with an independently given standard, as in the foundational knowing of consciousness. Wherever truth and justification remain distinct, the justificatory process is rendered something outside truth and thereby invalid and incapable of providing any legitimating sanction. This is the basic pitfall of any foundationalism. For if some factor or procedure provides justification for what is to count as true, that justificatory principle cannot enjoy the truth it confers upon knowledge claims since it is given prior to and separately from what it validates. To escape this discrepancy between what it is to possess truth and what it is to confer truth, the justificatory process would have to be determined in accord with itself, which is to say that it would have to be self-determined. In that case, however, its truth would be united with its justification and the distinction of privileged foundation and legitimated knowledge claims would be overcome in the same way in which the attainment of "absolute knowing" eliminates the opposition of consciousness residing in the differentiation of the moments of "in itselfness" and "for itselfness".²⁶ The positive fulfillment of such a unification of truth and justification is exhibited in the Absolute Idea, whose determinacy owes its truth to itself since what it is is determined by nothing other than itself. The self-grounding process by which presuppositionless determinacy unfolds is thereby nothing other than the self-legitimizing account by which truth rests upon itself in express departure from the incoherent dogmatic appeals to extraneously given criteria, conceptual schemes, cultural contexts and the like plaguing the foundation-ridden efforts of so much thought past and present.

If Hegel's strategy be taken seriously and there be granted a

presuppositionless development from being, then both its method and subject matter will emerge at the end of the development, instead of being presupposed at the start in the ill-fated manner of positive science, metaphysics, and transcendental philosophy. Whether such a discourse can break through the impasse of contemporary analytic and continental thought must remain an open question until a properly completed phenomenology secures a starting point of being from which follows a completed development of determinacy giving non-metaphysical, non-transcendental philosophy its mandate.

Certainly the predicament of present day philosophy testifies to how it has yet to be shown whether the tasks of phenomenology and of the systematic philosophy without foundations it might introduce have actually been fulfilled by Hegel or any one else. Nevertheless, this same predicament poses the challenge of making these tasks the central problems of philosophy today, while leaving the well-worn path of transcendental argument a thing of the past.

1. This paper is a revised version of an essay delivered under the title, "Hegel's Answer To The Impasse of Contemporary Philosophy," in October, 1980 at the 6th Biennial Meeting of the Hegel Society of America, held at Trent University, Peterborough, Canada.
2. It is the young Schelling who better fits this description.
3. G.W.F. Hegel, *Logic* (Part I of *The Encyclopedia of The Philosophical Sciences* {1830}), trans. by William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), paragraph 78, pp. 111-112.
4. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 141.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 149 ff.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 135, 137, 145.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 789 ff.
15. G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), pp. 75-77.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 82 ff.
19. For a more extended discussion of how phenomenology can introduce the starting point of foundation-free philosophy without strapping it with a mediation, see "The Route To Foundation-Free Systematic Philosophy," in Richard Dien Winfield, *Overcoming Foundations: Studies In Systematic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 26-31.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 71 ff.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 825 ff.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 829, 838.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 838 ff.
26. For further discussions of the dilemma afflicting any distinction of truth and justification, see Robert Bruce Berman, *Categorical Justification: Normative Argumentation In Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (Ph.D. Dissertation, New School For Social Research, 1983), Chapters 1 and 2; and Richard Dien Winfield, *Reason and Justice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), Chapters 6 and 7.