

CHAPTER ONE
THE ROLE OF *ERINNERUNG*
IN ABSOLUTE KNOWING:
HISTORY AND ABSOLUTENESS

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The *goal*, absolute knowing, or spirit that knows itself as spirit, has for its path the recollection [*Erinnerung*, VR] of the spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm.¹

The aim of the present chapter is to explore and discuss the significance of *Erinnerung* in the development of absolute knowing, which is the culminating shape of consciousness's experience that Hegel describes in the last chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. One working assumption that I will defend in later sections is that *Erinnerung* is essential to the very nature of absolute knowing, or "spirit that knows itself as spirit." My primary aim will be to analyze and explicate the implications of this assumption for an understanding of Hegel's idea of absolute knowing.

In the last pages of the *Phenomenology* Hegel claims that spirit attains self-knowledge, or absolute knowing, through the *Erinnerung* of its own experience. More precisely, Hegel identifies *Erinnerung* with the path that spirit takes in order to reach the goal of self-knowledge. In what follows, I will show the way in which the unfolding of this path is essentially linked to spirit's temporality and to the historical dimension in which spirit's experience takes place. *Erinnerung*, I will argue, is the activity encompassing all the essential steps that spirit has to accomplish in order to achieve the

full self-comprehension that constitutes absolute knowing. Indeed, I believe that we should understand absolute knowing itself to be an exemplary case of *Erinnerung*. In other words, as the concluding moment of the *Phenomenology*, the chapter on absolute knowing provides a model of what it suggests by exemplifying the identification between, or simultaneity of, a proposed account of knowledge and the enacting of that account, insofar as it collects the preceding stages of consciousness' experience and, at the same time, it sublates and presents them in a higher, unified, and consistent shape in virtue of which they all acquire full meaning and justification.

The implications of my reading of the role of *Erinnerung* in absolute knowing mainly concern the problematic relation between science and history, or *absoluteness* and history. Absolute knowing is not only the concluding moment of a path—a destination—but also constitutes, in an equally important way, the transition to the fully developed science that will start with the logic. This raises the following question, however. If I am right, and Hegel conceives of absolute knowing as *Erinnerung qua* "conceptually comprehended history," then what happens to the "absolute" component of spirit's self-knowledge? Does this historical character imply that absolute knowing is not really absolute, as it depends on the "recollection" of a historical development? Is it possible to reconcile the absoluteness of science—the destination of the phenomenological path—and its essentially temporal/historical character? I believe it is. And I argue, furthermore, that making sense of these two equally legitimate, but apparently opposed features of absolute knowing, is a Hegelian task par excellence.

1. Time, History and *Erinnerung* in Absolute Knowing

To begin with, let us briefly rehearse Hegel's conception of absolute knowing, namely—as it is well known—the conclusive moment of a set of experiences that consciousness has traversed on the path set out in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In each of the previous stages that consciousness has traversed, Hegel characterized consciousness as opposed to its object of experience or knowledge, in ways that produce inadequate forms of knowledge. Consciousness regarded such experiences as extraneous to itself and, thus, not fully understood them. In progressing through its stages of self-knowledge, consciousness developed an increasingly broader comprehension of its object(s), eventually achieving awareness that all its experiences were necessary parts of its experience *as a whole*; and, more specifically, as components of a more comprehensive, all-

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¹ *PhG*, 433-434, [§ 808].

embracing form of knowledge. Hegel describes this awareness as consciousness's identification with its self-consciousness, or with its realization that the knowledge of its own experience—experience of the world, we might say—coincides with its knowledge of itself. In other words, with absolute knowing, which is the final stage, all of consciousness's experiences are “collected,” understood, and made part of its self-comprehension and identity as a meaningful whole. This, I submit, is precisely the sense in which the subject of absolute knowing is consciousness developed or “grown” into *spirit*. Spirit, on this understanding, emerges from consciousness' all-embracing comprehension of all forms of knowledge, action, and social and political organization produced by humanity. From a Hegelian phenomenological perspective, this does not entail that spirit may be identified with everything that pertains to human beings. Rather, we should regard spirit as that which *emerges* from the self-comprehension of the human, i.e. from the mediated and reflective relationship with its own manifestations. Therefore, absolute knowing is most clearly understood as spirit's self-comprehension.² Such self-comprehension, at any rate, pertains to spirit's previous experience, the one that has been *told* in the various stages of the *Phenomenology*. There is a strong relation, it seems, between absolute knowing and what has concretely *happened* to spirit during its journey.

This observation introduces the first, essential point that we need to discuss in order to illuminate the role of *Erinnerung* in the attainment and nature of absolute knowing: *time*. Time, as the dimension in which those experiences have taken place, constitutes one of the most complex issues treated in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Part of the complexity arises from the fact that Hegel provides two different and not easily reconcilable accounts:

But as regards the existence of this concept, science does not appear in time and in actuality before spirit has attained to this consciousness about

² On absolute knowing, especially in relation to the topics addressed here, see (among others) G. Baptist, “Das absolute Wissen. Zeit, Geschichte, Wissenschaft,” in *G.W.F. Hegel. Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. D. Köhler and O. Pöggeler (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), 245-261; A. de Laurentiis, “Absolute Knowing,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. K.R. Westphal (Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 246-264; W. Jaeschke, “Das absolute Wissen,” in *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes heute*, ed. A. Arndt and E. Müller (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 194-214; R. Pippin, “The ‘Logic of Experience’ as ‘Absolute Knowledge’ in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. A Critical Guide*, ed. D. Moyar and M. Quante (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 210-227.

itself. As spirit that knows what it is, it does not exist before, and nowhere at all, till after the completion of its work [...].³

According to this passage, time is the dimension in which science appears once the identity of consciousness and self-consciousness, (hence also the structure defining absolute knowing) has been reached. Time, in other words, appears as the dimension in which spirit attains the full awareness of itself and consequently as the only dimension in which absolute knowing, or science, can manifest. Only *after* the completion of this kind of work, and thus only at the end of a *process* that is thoroughly *historical*, does spirit come into existence.⁴ Further on, Hegel refers to the apparent richness of the immediate—i.e. not yet comprehended—experience and the apparent meagerness of the mediated knowledge concerning such experience:

Cognition, because it is the spiritual consciousness for which what *is in itself* only *is*, insofar as it is a *being for* the self and a being of the *self* or concept, has for this reason at first only a meager object, in contrast with which substance and the consciousness of this substance are richer. The disclosure or revelation which substance has in this consciousness is in fact concealment, for substance is still *self-less being* and what is disclosed to it is only the certainty of itself.⁵

With respect to the substance of experience, as it presents itself to consciousness in its immediacy, the object of knowledge appears to be less detailed, less rich in concrete determinations. The apparent richness (“disclosure”) of substance, towards which the knowing activity of consciousness is directed, however, is unmasked as “concealment.” The actual, true determinations of substance are in fact hidden within that

³ *PhG*, 428, [§ 800]. The translation has been slightly modified (“actuality” translates “Wirklichkeit,” whereas Miller opted for “actual world”, which might make sense, but is not what Hegel wrote).

⁴ This statement might induce one to think that, according to the interpretation presented here, spirit appeared only once in history, and precisely at Hegel's time, when absolute knowing appeared. Of course, I do not mean to claim such a view, and as I will show in the course of the chapter, the kind of work consciousness does in order to become aware of itself and its experience is something that is *constantly* going on in human history, and never stops, but always gives rise to new forms of self-comprehension, and different stages in spirit's development. That this process is a historical process means that it has an essential connection with human experience, and proceeds along with it.

⁵ *PhG*, 428, [§ 801].

richness. The experience of consciousness, in other words, appears to be manifest in its immediacy, but its deep meaning—namely, its being connected with other experiences as parts belonging to the whole of spirit—can only be the outcome of a long process, a process as long as the life of spirit itself.

What is most important for present purposes is that the process at work in what Hegel calls “cognition” is one that somehow subtracts something from the immediate richness of experience, which in turn is defined as a form of concealment. Put differently, self-consciousness appropriates the content of consciousness’s experience, which at first it considered as belonging only to the “object” (as opposed to consciousness) and thus extraneous to itself, only to eventually bring that content back to itself. Once this process of appropriation has taken place, self-consciousness regards the cognitively elaborated content of its experience as the outcome of its own activity; that is, consciousness comes to see the essence of the very actuality in which it is immersed as the result of its own self-comprehension. Below, I will attempt to show that the structure of this operation is homologous to that displayed by *Erinnerung* in the relation to its content.

Before we get there, however, we need to return to Hegel’s account of time, which can be found in one of the most quoted passages from the chapter on absolute knowing, since it introduces the highly controversial question of the *Tilgung* (erasure) of time:⁶

Time is the concept itself that *is there* and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears just so long as it has not *grasped* its pure concept, i.e. has not annulled time. It is the outer, intuited pure self which is *not grasped* by the self, the merely intuited concept; when this latter grasps itself it sets aside its time-form, comprehends this intuiting, and is a comprehended and comprehending intuiting. Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of spirit that is not yet complete within itself, the necessity to enrich the share which self-consciousness has in consciousness, to set in motion the *immediacy of the in itself*, which is the

⁶ The debate on the role of time in absolute knowing and the *Phenomenology* in general is extremely rich. See, for example, G. Baptist, “Das absolute Wissen,” 245-261; F. Chiareghin, *Dialettica dell'assoluto e ontologia della soggettività in Hegel* (Trento: Verifiche, 1980); H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1997), esp. vol. II; W. Jaeschke, “Das absolute Wissen,” 194-214; C. Malabou, *The Future of Hegel. Temporality, Plasticity, Dialectic* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005); M. Murray, “Time in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 34/4 (1981): 682-705.

form in which the substance is present in consciousness; or conversely, to realize and reveal what is at first only *inward* (the in-itself being taken as what is *inward*), i.e. to vindicate it for spirit’s certainty of itself.⁷

Time is defined as the *Dasein* (being there, existence) of the concept, and therefore as the most basic form of its manifestation. In relation to consciousness, time *qua Dasein* constitutes an empty intuition, devoid of any content. According to Hegel, this characterization refers to the activity of consciousness organizing its experience in a temporal sense. Consciousness, it has been observed, is in fact “originary temporalizing activity,” and as such it constitutes an “enigma to itself,” because it is unable to make its own activity the object of its own knowledge and understanding.⁸ Spirit, then, appears in time only until it understands its own concept—that is, the identity between itself and the object of its knowledge, which constitutes the defining element of absolute knowing. However, this seems to contradict what has been previously claimed; namely, that time constitutes the dimension in which science comes to manifestation. It seems, in fact, that time represents both the dimension of spirit’s development, and the dimension in which it is manifest in the fullness of such development. Hegel’s more radical statement, according to which spirit, insofar as it grasps its concept, “annuls” time, sharpens the difficulty of this passage. What is striking, in particular, is that we are not dealing with an *Aufhebung* (sublation), but with a *Tilgung* (erasure). The term used by Hegel, in fact, seems to refer to a radical activity, almost a violent one, that eliminates the context in which the experience of spirit took place until this present moment, and establishes a new dimension for science. If time was actually and entirely canceled, however, this new dimension would end up being completely detached from both the concreteness of the temporal flow and spirit’s experience.⁹ Hegel claims, moreover, that time is a merely intuited concept, rather than made into the object of a conceptual comprehension (*begreifen*). A basic form of apprehension, therefore, corresponds to a basic form of presence, such as the one the *Dasein* of the concept is. At the moment in which such form is overcome and a higher form of knowledge is achieved, by virtue of which the concept understands itself, time (or, more precisely, the “time-form”) is sublated. Hegel uses the verb *aufheben* (to sublimate) in this instance to refer to the dialectical process through which an inadequate form is

⁷ *PhG*, 429, [§ 801].

⁸ F. Chiareghin, *Dialettica dell'assoluto*, 443.

⁹ This would correspond to the closest interpretation of the original meaning of “absolute” as “untied,” “released,” and thus self-subsistent, independent.

overcome and at the same time preserved with its opposite in a higher unity. The crucial point is that in absolute knowing time as such is erased, while the time-form of the concept is sublated. Absolute knowing is thus spirit's self-understanding: or, to put it differently, spirit's comprehension of time insofar as time is what structures the experience of the external and merely intuited self, the still immediate self-comprehension isolated in its moments (or, in the *Phenomenology's* language, in its shapes), the dimension in which the experience of consciousness is given as a simple sequence of different and apparently disconnected phases, characterized by reciprocal externality. What is at stake in the relation of time to the concept, therefore, is the relation between consciousness and its object. Consciousness, indeed, knows its object, precisely by means of inherently temporal intuition, and consequently as constituted in accordance with external, contingent connections. Conceptual knowledge, on the contrary, knows its object in accordance with internal and necessary connections that constitute it and that can be provided only by the concept. It is in this sense, then, that we can interpret the *Aufhebung* (sublation) of the temporal form. When spirit understands its intuition, it turns the temporal, external connections that characterized it in its immediacy into internal and necessary connections, and thus into conceptual connections.¹⁰

The experience of consciousness, therefore, is deprived of its temporal and immediate dimension, and is made into the object of a conceptual comprehension. This process displays a recurring structure and, I will argue, constitutes the fundamental structure of *Erinnerung*. However, *Erinnerung* does not by itself guarantee a conceptual comprehension. Rather, it operates on immediately given, temporal content by placing it in a different dimension. Before that occurs, however,

Time [...] appears as the destiny and necessity of spirit that is not yet complete within itself, the necessity to enrich the share which self-consciousness has in consciousness, to set in motion the *immediacy of the in itself*, which is the form in which the substance is present in consciousness; or conversely, to realize and reveal what is at first only *inward* (the in itself being taken as what is *inward*), i.e. to vindicate it for spirit's certainty of itself.¹¹

¹⁰ This reading is suggested, among others, by Walter Jaeschke in what I regard as one of the most illuminating contributions to the understanding of absolute knowing (see W. Jaeschke, "Das absolute Wissen," 194-214). A significant part of the essay, to which I will also refer later, is devoted to the role of time and history in absolute knowing.

¹¹ *PhG*, 429, [§ 801].

"Destiny" suggests that spirit is condemned, as it were, because the inherently temporal dimension of its immediate experience renders it incapable of conceptually comprehending itself. Spirit is "condemned" as it is not an active knowing agent, as it is not the "master" of its own experience and therefore of itself, but remains passive and subject to the flow of its experiences. "Necessity" is that in virtue of which self-consciousness gradually appropriates the immediate object of its experience *qua other* with respect to itself. At the same time, this process corresponds to the movement through which what is only *inward* must achieve concrete realization; or, in other words, the movement through which what is only *inward* must become the object of that very same experience as knowledge of itself.

For this reason it must be said that nothing is *known* that is not in *experience*, or, as it is also expressed, that is not *felt to be true*, not given as an *inwardly revealed* eternal verity, as something sacred that is *believed*, or whatever other expressions have been used. For experience is just this, that the content—which is spirit—is *in itself* substance, and therefore an *object of consciousness*. But this substance which is spirit is the process in which spirit *becomes* what it is in *itself*; and it is only as this process of reflecting itself into itself that it is in itself truly *spirit*.¹²

Experience constitutes the indispensable foundation of every form of knowledge, upon which all knowledge is possible. Hegel then provides two different characterizations of experience: in the first, he defines experience in relation to the content of representation, in particular of religious representation (all examples refer to the sphere of faith and religious feeling); in the second characterization, Hegel defines experience in specifically phenomenological terms, as the *object* of consciousness. The object of consciousness, however, is spirit itself in the different modes in which it knows itself. What Hegel means by spirit, in this context, is the coming to be what it is in itself, a becoming that reflects itself into itself. Spirit, therefore, just *is* its own development, a continuous movement and actualization of what is only implicit in it, as a reflection into itself. Consequently, spirit reaches its complete actualization, its truth, through a reflecting movement in which—having started from its completed experience—it returns to itself and proceeds to the comprehension of its experience. This movement carries out the transition from substance to subject that Hegel indicated as the ultimate goal of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The full meaning of this transition, however, emerges only with

¹² *Ibid.*, 429, [§ 802].

spirit's attainment of absolute knowing.¹³

Until spirit has completed itself in *itself*, until it has completed itself as world-spirit, it cannot reach its consummation as *self-conscious* spirit. Therefore, the content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does science, what *spirit is*, but only science is its true knowledge of itself.¹⁴

Here Hegel reiterates, in more explicit and concise terms, what he claimed before: spirit, in order to complete its development, and therefore to become spirit conscious of itself, must "complete itself" as *world-spirit*. *Spirit qua world-spirit* is embodied in a concrete actuality that unfolds in a historical, and therefore necessarily *human*, becoming. By human, however, Hegel does not mean to single out the accidental experiences of one or many human beings. Rather, humanity *qua* world-spirit pertains to the whole of what humanity achieves when spirit fully comprehends itself, as the outcome *of all* of its experiences.¹⁵

The movement of carrying forward the form of its self-knowledge [*die Form seines Wissens hervorzutreiben*, VR] is the labor which it [*spirit*, VR] accomplishes as actual history [*wirkliche Geschichte*, VR].¹⁶

Consistently with what we have seen above regarding time and the *Aufhebung* (sublation) of the form of time as establishing conceptual connections that replace the purely external temporal ones, Hegel describes the actual historical process in terms of a movement through which spirit develops the *form* of its self-knowledge. What results from

¹³ The passage I am referring to can be found, as is well-known, in the Preface, *PhG*, 18, [§ 17], and it is very reminiscent of what Hegel is talking about in these pages of the book's concluding chapter: "Everything turns on grasping and expressing the true, not only as *substance*, but equally as subject." Also the following part of the Preface is specular to the discussion of absolute knowing in these pages, especially regarding the completeness of the development that is reached only at the end of it, the circularity of this process, the necessity of exteriorization, and the relation with the negative in order to attain the truth.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 429-430, [§ 802].

¹⁵ I will not broadly discuss the reference to religion, except for noting that religion comes earlier than science to spirit's comprehension because it itself constitutes a form of spirit's experience and will become the object of spirit's self-comprehension. It is different from science, nevertheless, because religious consciousness fails to attain to the identity with its object (God), which it can express, but not really understand as one of the forms—one of the highest ones, indeed—in which it experiences and comprehends itself.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 430, [§ 803].

this movement, therefore, is the production of the *form*—namely the essence or the conceptual structure—that defines absolute knowing. The movement, fundamentally, is that through which spirit *draws forth*¹⁷ an internal awareness of its identity with the preceding stages of its own development, with its necessary exteriorization.

The role of history, as an essential dimension for the understanding of the nature of absolute knowing, becomes central both as characterizing spirit in itself, *qua* world-spirit, and as the name for spirit's path, for its experience. Both of these dimensions of history play an essential role in the definition of *Erinnerung*, insofar as history constitutes both its object and the dimension in which science, i.e. absolute knowing, appears and acts.

2. *Erinnerung*, or: Making Time into History

Time and history are deeply connected in the context of absolute knowing, and their relation is fundamental to understand the notion of *Erinnerung*.

The other side of [*spirit's*, VR] becoming, *history*, is a *conscious*, self-mediating process—spirit emptied out into time.¹⁸

Spirit that realizes itself in time, in actuality, is history. Hegel identifies history with spirit's becoming, and therefore with the succession of its manifestations and experiences. He does not, however, identify history with such experiences in their immediacy, but as they are the object of spirit's knowledge and mediation. Hegel describes spirit's development as a *slow* movement, in which different spirits or images follow one another, since each of them has to become the object of the understanding of the self, which, in turn, needs to appropriate the substance of its own experience in order to access the next stage. This movement is *slow*—an apparently unnecessary qualification—I claim, because spirit must fully and deeply experience each stage of its development in order to reach the point at which it is able to integrate them in a single, comprehensive whole. The set of experiences that Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology* are objects of spirit's comprehension in absolute knowing and spirit must incorporate that *cycle* of experiences in its entirety to achieve that comprehension. Spirit can comprehend itself in itself only because it has

¹⁷ This is the translation that, in my view, most reflects the meaning of the German term used by Hegel in the passage quoted above (*hervortreiben*).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 433, [§ 808].

undergone multiple stages of development, which makes a complete comprehension of those stages possible. Absolute knowing becomes possible only with respect to a complete and meaningful, although apparently polychrome, cycle of spirit's experiences.

The activity that enables the movement described above, and which constitutes the central component of the achievement of absolute knowing, is the activity of *Erinnerung*. For *Erinnerung*'s activity unifies the internalization and the preservation of experience beyond its temporal immediacy:

As [*spirit's*, VR] fulfillment consists in perfectly *knowing* what it is, in knowing its substance, this knowing is its *withdrawal into itself* in which it abandons its outer existence and gives its existential shape over to recollection.¹⁹

The completeness of spirit's development coincides with the knowledge it has of itself and its *substance*, i.e. of its existence and experience. Spirit achieves self-knowledge by internalizing its existence and experience, and thus it is able to detach itself from its existence and to treasure it by placing it in a different dimension from the (immediate) one where it was in the first moment; such dimension is one of *recollection*, or *Erinnerung*, upon which, I argue, Hegel builds the whole concluding part of the chapter on absolute knowing and thereby of the whole *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The similarity between the conceptual structure of absolute knowing and the structure of the activity of *Erinnerung* can now be explained. Spirit achieves absolute knowing as comprehensive knowledge of itself when it *withdraws into itself*, thereby abandoning its present and immersing itself into its inwardness, where it is presented with its experience as detached from its immediacy. Its experience has been transfigured by *Erinnerung*, which has taken the *data* of experience away from the time in which it was given, and preserved it in a different form:

Thus absorbed in itself, [*spirit*, VR] is sunk in the night of self-consciousness; but in that night its vanished outer existence is preserved, and this transformed existence—the former one, but now reborn of the spirit's knowledge—is the new existence, a new world and a new shape of spirit.²⁰

The process operating here is thus one in virtue of which the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

experiential content of spirit is preserved in its inwardness, and thereby *aufgehoben* (sublated). Experience is not given to spirit in its *presence* anymore, but is simultaneously preserved in its inwardness, and more precisely in its knowledge. This operation gives rise to an entirely *new world*: that is, the world as it appears as mediated by spirit's knowing activity. We can thus describe *Erinnerung* as a structure of *Aufhebung*, as it "eliminates" the immediate existence of something, but at the same time preserves it and takes it to a higher level.

In the last chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and especially in the very last pages, Hegel attributes a central role to *Erinnerung*, but devotes little space to explicating its nature. To better understand the kind of activity it carries out, we may refer to Hegel's Jena writings, the first drafts of his system.²¹ However, the context of Hegel's considerations on *Erinnerung* in these texts differs significantly from the *Phenomenology*. Hegel produced the Jena writings in the context of what he will later refer to as psychology—that is, the theory concerning the structure and functioning of intelligence. From a systematic point of view this marks a fundamental difference, because spirit, in this context, is characterized as *finite* spirit, or, in other words, as spirit embodied in the individual. In the 1803/04 drafts, Hegel discusses the intuition of the immediate data as placed in space and time. Initially, the relation of the subject, here defined as "consciousness," to such an object is characterized by a substantial passivity. Gradually, however, the subject "extracts" the object of its knowledge from the immediate space and time in which it is placed, and starts to exert an active role by *recalling* the intuitions it has had "in another time and place," an ability that Hegel defines as an "active reproduction."²²

In the text of the 1805/06 *Lectures*, the discussion has been preserved in more detail. A passage in particular offers clear echoes with the previous quotation from the *Phenomenology*. In this process sensation, starting from its initial immediacy, is gradually appropriated through its *idealization* by the knowing subject:

This image [...] is stored in the spirit's *treasury*, in its *night*. The image is *unconscious*, i.e., it is not displayed as an object for representation. The human being is this night, this empty nothing which contains everything in

²¹ The *Encyclopedia*, especially in its second and third editions, is the (mature) systematic *locus* where the role of *Erinnerung* in the framework of intelligence's global activity is examined in more detail. For a discussion of the psychological account in the *Encyclopedia*, see chapter 4 of the present volume.

²² *JS I*, 285. (My translation).

its simplicity [...]. This [is] the night, the interior of [human] nature, existing here—pure self.²³

The use of the metaphor of the night is, I submit, a sign of Hegel's consistency in his treatment of *Erinnerung* through the different versions of his system²⁴ and in the *Phenomenology*. One might object that the phenomenological and psychological contexts are extremely different, but I insist on the comparison for two reasons: first, the structure of the activity described is the same; second, the subject of such activity is the same—spirit—in both cases.²⁵ What I find most interesting here is the kind of operation undertaken with respect to a given content, and while it is necessary to consider the different context (and consequently, the different object) of such an operation, this does not prevent to examine the conceptual structure at work in both cases. In the same way as the shapes that have followed one another in the phenomenological path are preserved in the *night of self-consciousness* as spirit focuses on its inwardness, intelligence preserves the images of the externally intuited objects in its *night*.

Hegel refers to an *unconscious* dimension, a dimension in which the legacy of spirit's experience, or of intelligence's experience in the latter case, is preserved until the knowing subject becomes *active* in its relationship with that content; that is, until the subject will avail itself of that content in order to build for itself, with those images, a *new* world, which is "new" compared to the one that it faces in its immediacy and that does not *belong* to spirit. The new world is spirit's *own* world, one it has made *for* itself and *by* itself. This crucial transition is made possible, as already mentioned, in accordance with what Hegel describes as a process of appropriation:

The object has thereby received form in general, the determination of being mine. And in being looked at again, its being no longer has this pure signification of being [as such], but of [being] *mine*: e.g., it is familiar to me, or I remind myself of it.²⁶

The role of *Erinnerung* is thus crucial. It is precisely the activity that

²³ *JS III*, 186-187, [86-87].

²⁴ This includes his works until the third edition of the *Encyclopedia* in 1830, where he refers to a "nocturnal pit."

²⁵ An integrated reading of the role of *Erinnerung* in different contexts of Hegel's philosophy has been suggested by V. Verra in "Storia e memoria," in *Su Hegel*, ed. C. Cesa (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 5-30.

²⁶ *JS III*, 188, [87-88].

enables intelligence to perform the transition from the initial passivity through which it relates to the content coming from intuition, to the freedom and spontaneity of making the content its own. If we recall what we read in the chapter on absolute knowing, we see that this is the same kind of activity, namely the one by which spirit becomes free, and the actual author of its contents. More specifically, Hegel attributes to *Erinnerung* the essential function of universalizing spirit's experience. The universalization of experience is what constitutes its preservation and, at the same time, its rise to a spiritually more complex form, thereby realizing the pivotal transition: for what concerns the psychological investigation of the Jena writings, this is the transition to the freedom of thought, and for what concerns the *Phenomenology*, it is the transition to the absolute concept and therefore to science. What enables an integrated reading of both texts is the concept of spirit, which constitutes the outcome²⁷ both of absolute knowing and of intelligence, as we can find at the beginning of the section on intelligence in the lectures of 1805-06:

The thing *is*. It is not *in* being; rather it itself *is*. That, in immediate form, is the essence of intuition [*Anschauung*]: knowing some being [*Seyenden*]. Spirit, however, is this mediated with itself. Spirit is what it is only in transcending what it is immediately, stepping back from it. In other words, we are to consider the movement in spirit, i.e., how a being becomes universal for it, or how it makes a being universal, positing it as what it is.²⁸

At this point (yet as we have also seen above) it appears to be true that spirit is what emerges through the inwardization of the content of intuition and through the mediation accomplished by distancing itself from the presence of this intuition. In this context *Erinnerung* can be regarded as what allows spirit to overcome the mere givenness of a content (intuition for intelligence, experience for spirit) and to develop knowledge, which makes being into something universal and places it in a dimension of truth.

We can now return to the phenomenological account of *Erinnerung*, whose specific contribution we are now in a better position to appreciate.

Recollection, the *inwardizing*, of that experience, has preserved it and is the inner being, and in fact the higher form of the substance. So although this spirit starts afresh and apparently from its own resources to bring itself to maturity, it is nonetheless on a higher level that it starts.²⁹

²⁷ And the source, if we apply a circular reading and keep in mind that spirit is always *there*, although in different shapes or modes.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 185, [85].

²⁹ *PhG*, 433, [§ 808].

Erinnerung plays the essential role of *preserving* spirit's experience. Not only does *Erinnerung* preserve spirit's experience, but it also *mediates* experience by making it spirit's own content. Such content has a higher status, because it is no longer something that spirit happened to "find" passively, but a content that is now the product of spirit's internalizing and reflective activity. Therefore, the spirit of absolute knowing, which constitutes the scientific standpoint, is indeed a "new" spirit starting "afresh" and apparently without presuppositions; its standpoint, however, is the result of the path along which consciousness has traveled, eventually attaining its comprehension. Absolute knowing is thus founded in an essential way upon the role of *Erinnerung*. We find evidence of this in the last lines of Hegel's *Phenomenology*:

The *goal*, absolute knowing, or spirit that knows itself as spirit, has for its path the recollection of the spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm. Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is history; but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the science of knowing in the sphere of appearance: the two together, comprehended history, form alike the *inwardizing* [italics mine, VR] and the *Calvary* of absolute spirit.³⁰

In absolute knowing, through the internalizing of spirit's previous existence, *Erinnerung* produces the "new shape of spirit," the shape of spirit that can venture into the mission awaiting it, on the strength of the legacy constituted by the history of the spirits that preceded it; this new shape will be moving from what is certainly a starting point, but at the same time at a "higher lever" as well. This mission is the attainment and unfolding of what Hegel defines in terms of conceptually comprehended history and conceptual organization. The former is understood as the preservation of spirit's existence, previously given in the form of contingency, and the latter as the conceptual comprehension deriving precisely from the recollection and rationalization of its previous experience. The activity of *Erinnerung* constitutes, therefore, the tool for the elaboration of experience, upon which every form of knowledge—in this case, absolute knowledge—is founded. *Erinnerung* is identified by Hegel precisely with the "path" leading to the goal, i.e. to absolute knowing.

At the beginning of this section I observed how Hegel's conception of time, as displayed in the last chapter of the *Phenomenology*, can seem confusing and contradictory. By looking at the role of *Erinnerung* and

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 433-444, [§ 808].

reading it in light of the notion of time, which in turn constitutes an essential component in its activity, we can draw some conclusions. The different characterizations of time that we can find in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* are, in a very Hegelian way, all true. The path spirit goes along (its experience), of which the work is a sort of scientific narrative, is a path taking place in time; time is not only the element in which a content is *naturally* offered to consciousness's apprehension, but also the element in which a content must *necessarily* be to become an object of knowledge.

When spirit becomes aware of its experience, it appropriates it and makes it an integral part of its own identity, it *annuls* that (natural) temporal determination by internalizing the conceptual content of experience; it annuls it, however, only insofar as that determination has allowed for the establishing of external connections in the content of experience, for its organization functioned in terms of "before" and "after," but not on the ground of conceptual and, therefore, necessary and intrinsic determinations. Spirit cannot gain any access to this accidental mode of the content when the experience is *over*, and therefore it is *that time* that is annulled; this is also because, as Hegel claims in different contexts,³¹ time is the flow that makes everything necessarily vanish, it is the immediate and natural "version" of negativity. The authentic version of negativity is the properly spiritual one, which alone is able to reveal the finitude of experience—as constituted by reciprocally isolated moments—and to attain a higher dimension in which only the totality of experience has actual subsistence and meaning. This is the sense in which science can appear in time: spirit emancipates itself from the form of time, in the immediacy of which it has initially been bridled, and thus becomes *free* to appear in time, because time constitutes the "form" of its externalization, in which spirit sacrifices itself (i.e. it sacrifices its absoluteness) by trying itself. Only in this way, by remaining by itself in its externalization, is it really free:

[*Spirit*, VR] is *time*, which is for itself, and [it is] the freedom of time as well—this pure subject that is free of its content but also *master* of it, unlike space and time which are selfless.³²

Time seems to have two sides: a first, "natural" one, representing the immediacy and lack of freedom in which objectivity is for the subject; and a second, "spiritual" one, representing the manifestation of spirit's

³¹ I am referring to the different versions of his philosophy of nature. See for example *EN*, §§ 257-259.

³² *JS III*, 186, [86].

freedom (“the form of pure freedom in face of an other”). Thanks to spirit’s activity, objectivity has become spirit’s possession and at the same time its product, because it has been eventually comprehended. In this sense, time is transfigured by spirit, and becomes *history*, *conceptually comprehended* history, the mode of time in which spirit is able to appear because, once it has completed its development, it is able to remain by itself even in the otherness and externality that time itself is.

The fundamental dimension of immediacy in which spirit must operate in order to develop its self-comprehension and *step back* from the immediacy of its experience is thus the temporal one, and as it is now clear, this is the “field” in which the operation of *Erinnerung* takes place in the proper sense. *Erinnerung*, in fact, accomplishes and makes possible, even if it does not exhaust, all the steps necessary to the completion of spirit’s path and to the attainment of absolute knowing. It is the *key* that enables spirit to abandon the present in which it is immersed, by placing the content of intuition “in its *own space* and its *own time*,”³³ and to open the dimension of universality (the concept). It makes natural time into *human* time, by turning natural connections into meaningful connections and, therefore, it makes time into history, the material of spirit’s self-comprehension, and—most importantly—the product of its own activity, which is now recognized as such. This is in line with Merold Westphal’s observation that “Absolute knowledge consists in recollecting not the timeless but above all the historical.”³⁴ The acknowledgment of the key role played by *Erinnerung* in absolute knowing and that of history as its material has significant consequences for the nature of science and its relation to time. Science, which can be unfolded in the system starting from the standpoint of absolute knowing, is thus itself not a timeless entity, but something that stands in an essential relation to history, at least from a genetic point of view. I now turn to expand on these consequences.

3. Absoluteness vs. Historicity?

As we have seen, absolute knowing is the comprehension of a cycle of spirit’s experiences from the observation point (the only possible one) constituted by the moment in which this specific cycle is concluded.

³³ *EG*, § 452, 258, [186].

³⁴ M. Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1990³), 225. He also recognizes the central role of *Erinnerung* for absolute knowing: “The whole theory of absolute knowledge as spirit’s self-consciousness is summed up in this process of alienation [*Ent-dusserung*] and recollection [*Er-innerung*].”

Immediately after that moment the experience of spirit will continue to follow its own course, because spirit is a never-ending movement and development, and, exactly like life, it would cease to be if it stopped moving and developing. Absolute knowing, therefore, is situated in what (with a term that appears to be still connected with the immediate and natural dimension, and requires a conceptual effort for one to grasp clearly) can be defined as a moment, an instant, an almost imperceptible point in which spirit’s self-understanding is accomplished, and the new epoch still has to begin. But in this instant, absolute knowing gives rise to a collection of “specific concepts”³⁵ that extend their grasp beyond this determined moment, and that—as a result of *Erinnerung*’s activity—will become the legacy of spirit, a legacy that is precious (absolute, we might say) also for the comprehension of the experiences that will follow that instant; in this sense, I agree with Ermanno Bencivenega, who stresses that “Hegel is located at the threshold of the future: after everything there is but before everything there isn’t (yet).”³⁶

Because of its absoluteness, absolute knowing cannot be regarded as such that it remains unchanged in some sort of sacred eternity. On the contrary, it should be understood as a form of knowledge that, on the strength of the awareness generated by its past experiences, will be able to face the *history* awaiting itself by remaining, at the same time, open to new events. These events, in turn, will need to be understood and will probably give rise, once mediated by spirit’s internalizing activity, to further, new specific concepts to be integrated into the legacy that is already in spirit’s possession. This cannot happen if knowledge does not sacrifice itself by realizing itself in time and actuality. Once it has reached its absoluteness, it *must* continue being in time, and therefore going through its experience, because time constitutes the proper dimension of experience, that is what confers it its richness, its life, the *concreteness* that alone makes science complete but, most importantly, that alone constitutes its object. As Franco Chiereghin has noted, “Logic—the non-temporal knowledge of the idea, or (in the same way) of being that has made itself completely transparent to thought—is intrinsically destined to

³⁵ See *PhG*, 431-432, [§ 805]: “Spirit, therefore, having won the concept, displays its existence and movement in this ether of its life and is *science*. In this, 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 concepts* and as their organic self-grounded movement.”

³⁶ E. Bencivenega, *Hegel's Dialectical Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71. I also owe Bencivenega the idea of the instant. For this, and for the related idea of spirit’s self-comprehension as a “flash,” see *ibid.*, 80-83.

history. Time is therefore an accidental dimension for it, yet necessary for its manifestation.³⁷ The reference to the logic is essential as absolute knowing is placed exactly on a transition point, the one that leads to the unfolded system starting precisely with the logic. It is essential to note that where the transition to the system takes place, this happens through the recollection and internalization of spirit's past experience, which in turn produces the "specific concepts" in which the shapes of consciousness are idealized, i.e. separated from their immediate content and preserved in their conceptual meaning.³⁸

What is perhaps most striking about recognizing the central role of *Erinnerung* in absolute knowing (so central, indeed, that we might say absolute knowing *is Erinnerung*) is the fact that it seems to question the absoluteness of its standpoint. More specifically, the fact that absolute knowing is essentially constituted by the recollection and inwardizing of spirit's previous experience might suggest that since this knowledge, and thus the resulting science, is historically determined, it cannot really aim at the absoluteness it claims. In my view, however, the suggestion we can draw from the reading I have proposed here is more appropriate to Hegel's general project. The absoluteness of absolute knowing is related to its conceptual structure, to its gathering from spirit's concrete experience the conceptual tools to understand and make sense of its *present*, of its time.

To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy. As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case *a child of his time*; thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time or leap over Rhodes. If his theory does indeed transcend his own time, if it builds up itself a world *as it ought to be*, then it certainly has an existence, but only within his opinions—a pliant medium in which the imagination can construct anything it pleases.³⁹

The nature of philosophy, as Hegel claims in his mature system, is to be essentially related to its time. Philosophy *is* the comprehension of one's

³⁷ F. Chiareghin, *Tempo e storia. Aristotele, Hegel, Heidegger* (Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2000), 77.

³⁸ The essential connection between logic and phenomenology is pointed out, again, by Bencivenga, *Hegel's Dialectical Logic*, 56: "Hegel's logic is one of recollection, of memory, its necessity is the internal consistency of what is remembered, and in this sense it is also essentially a phenomenology—of spirit, to be sure."

³⁹ *PhR*, 15, [21-22].

own time, and it cannot transcend it. At the same time, from the point of view of its content, it is never complete once and for all, but is open to the time that *will* be, and that it will have the task to comprehend, in order to make history out of it and, more specifically, "conceptually comprehend history." This recalls the classical, vexed question whether Hegel's system is *closed*, in the sense that everything is *already* and *forever* comprehended in and by it, or *open*, meaning that its "borders" are flexible and permeable, that it is still capable of allowing for new, unexpected or even shocking experiences to enter it and re-structure it. The beginning of an answer toward this second option seems to emerge precisely from the examination of the role of *Erinnerung*, and its specific operation on time and on spirit's experience.