

THE PHILOSOPHIC BEGINNING

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HEGEL SPEAKS OF THE BEGINNING OF THE LOGIC as the beginning of philosophy (L L, I 57). One could speak of two beginnings in Hegel's philosophy, one philosophical and one experimental, or of two kinds of immediacy, that of pure or scientific knowing and that of consciousness as a knowing which is "concrete and caught up in externality" (L L, I, 7). One can be called the logical beginning, the other, the phenomenological beginning. The two have to be distinguished insofar as Hegel speaks of two sciences, each of which has to have its own beginning, the pure science of the Idea and the science of consciousness or of the spirit in its appearing (*des erscheinenden Geistes*—L L, I, 53). Yet the two are not unconnected since the science of experience or of consciousness also serves as an introduction or as a presupposition for the pure science of the Idea, in the sense that the standpoint proper to the latter comes as result of the former (L L, I, 53).

The precise relation between these two forms of science and of beginning has been an object of concern among Hegel scholars,¹ but the precise nature of the philosophical beginning has been an object of even greater puzzlement.² This is not to be wondered at since, as Hegel remarks in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, "the science which is still close to its beginning and thus has achieved neither completeness of detail nor perfection of form is open to reproach . . ." (H PG, 17). But insofar as the beginning is an essential part of the method,

¹Cf. esp. Hans Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*. Frankfurt am Main: Klosterman, 1975.

²Cf., among others, Dieter Henrich, "Anfang und Methode der Logik," *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft I, Bonn: Bouvier, 1964; Wolfgang Marx, "Spekulative Wissenschaft und geschichtliche Kontinuität: Überlegungen zum Anfang der Hegelschen Logik," *Kant Studien*, 58 (1967), 63–74; Hans Wagner, "Hegels Lehre von Anfang der Wissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, 23 (1969), 339–348; Holz Harard, "Anfang, Identität und Widerspruch: Strukturen von Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik, Gezeigt an dem Abschnitt: 'Womit der Anfang der Wissenschaft gemacht werden muss,' sowie der 'Logik des Seins'," *Tydschrift Voor Filosofie*, 36 (1974), 707–761; Rolf Ahlers, "The Absolute as the Beginning of Hegel's Logic," *Tydschrift Voor Filosofie*, 37 (1975), 261–276.

which in turn is an essential aspect of the science, it is the science itself which is at issue in the question of the beginning. This is probably why people have taken issue with Hegel's beginning from the start, and no doubt why Hegel himself made it an object of special concern from the start, first by stating it as a separate question, "with what must science begin?" in the first edition of the *Logic*, and secondly, in the second edition, by revising his discussion of the question to meet some of the objections that had been raised after the first edition.

Our purpose here is to examine some of the reasons why the beginning of the *Logic*, or the philosophical beginning, had to be the sort of thing Hegel said it had to be and to see how he understood the issue of the beginning as such. Hegel speaks of Being (*Sein*) as the beginning or as what begins. This is necessary and inevitable for him, since "in no science is the need to begin from the subject matter itself (*von der Sache selbst*), without preliminary reflexions, felt more strongly than in the science of logic" (L L, I, 22). But this necessity immediately involves us with the way Hegel handles this first notion of being. Thus some of the first objections about his beginning to which Hegel alludes (L L, I, 58), seem to have stemmed, not from his idea of the beginning as such, but from requiring that the beginning be made with the adopted determination of Being (*die angenommene Bestimmung des Seins*). The assumption then would be to think only in terms of the beginning and to examine what that is. Hegel admits the assumption for a moment and then goes on to argue that Being is already contained in the beginning, along with Nothing. One could further argue against Hegel that Being is not contained in the beginning in the way that he says it is, but it is possible to accept his idea of the beginning, including the idea that Being is what begins, without going along with the idea of being he has put into the beginning or with the development he gives to that idea subsequently. This makes it possible for one to agree with Hegel's idea of the beginning and its content without agreeing with his interpretation of the content of that beginning, or at least to separate the two issues for a moment. This is what I would like to do here: to examine the question of the beginning, without going into the question of the interpretation of the Being that comes into question in the beginning. Though Hegel might argue against the possibility of such a separation, he would surely allow for at least a momentary discussion of "beginning" apart from "Being", since he did precisely that himself in both editions of the *Logic* by raising the question, "with what must science begin?" before entering into the general division and discussion of Being itself.

Our aim, then, is to examine how he actually formulates the beginning, first, in its essential simplicity and, second, in the face of the complications which modern reflexion inevitably raises for it. The text actually stating the beginning, as we shall see, is rather brief, barely a page, but it is hedged in by pages of ground-clearing discussion, or what Hegel refers to as negating reflexions "which aim at fending off and removing what representation and an unregulated thinking could otherwise interject. Such intrusions (*Einfälle*) into the immanent course of the development, however, are contingent of themselves, and the

effort to ward them off hence becomes tainted with the contingency” (L L, I, 19). In other words, the point of the beginning is simple, but there are innumerable ways of missing the point. Hegel tries to deal with only a few of these. We shall focus on three of them and bring in a later objection from Kierkegaard, which Hegel could not have seen but which will shed further light on Hegel’s essential beginning.

I

Hegel’s own approach to the beginning was couched in very carefully chosen language. Before we turn to his actual statement of the beginning we would do well to reflect for a moment on the language we are using to interpret him in English. Is “beginning” the best term for what we are trying to get at? This is the term that has been used to translate what Hegel speaks of as *anfangen* or *der Anfang*. However, R. D. Cumming’s recent book on *The Starting Point*³ and his insistence on that choice of terms might give us pause. To be sure, Cumming is not talking about Hegel’s dialectic, but one quite opposed to it, the Dialectic of Existence. Nevertheless he is talking about a dialectical beginning. He argues that “start” is a better term than “begin,” at least for what Kierkegaard has in mind, if not Hegel, because “start” suggests a “setting in motion,” or a “setting out on a journey,” or a “rupture” with what has gone before. The idea of “rupture” might be too abrupt for what Hegel had in mind in beginning, though he did call for a resolve, as we shall see, but the idea of “setting in motion” surely is in keeping with Hegel’s idea. On the other hand, Cumming recognizes that the term used by Kierkegaard, *begyndelse*, is cognate to our “beginning,” and that when Kierkegaard “uses the term philosophically he often has Hegel’s *Anfang* in mind.”⁴

Now it may well be that Kierkegaard and Hegel had a different content in mind when they spoke of beginning, as we shall see later, and that perhaps “start” does suggest more of the kind of rupture which Kierkegaard had in mind, especially with reference to Hegel’s System, but it is not so clear that he had a different idea of “beginning” as such for his dialectic. The issue is not so much whether we should speak of “starting” or “beginning,” but rather whether it is appropriate to fix on the idea of a point. Hegel speaks of beginning as a verb in the infinitive (*anfangen*), as a noun (*der Anfang*), and as a participial substantive (*das Anfangende*). In this last instance what he has in mind is not “the beginner” but rather “that with which the beginning is made,” namely, being: *Hier ist das Sein das Anfangende* (L L, I, 54). None of this suggests a point, but rather only movement and becoming. In fact, at one point in a later remark about the inconceivability of the beginning Hegel speaks of beginning

³Robert Denoon Cumming, *The Starting Point: An Introduction to the Dialectic of Existence*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 11.

(*der Anfang*) and becoming (*das Werden*) as though they were the same (L L, I, 91). Both present the same difficulty for the concept at the outset.

There is a term in German for "starting point," *Ausgangspunkt*, a term which suggests the same kind of break as Cumming is arguing for, at least in its verb form, *aus-geben*. Hegel speaks of *Ausgangspunkt* with reference to a movement of thought that is not for him properly scientific or dialectical in E 12. He refers to those who speak of experience as a starting point for philosophy, but, reverting back to his own outlook, he adds that a philosophy which starts this way "gives itself a distancing relation to that beginning (*zu jeinem Anfang*)."⁵ In other words a mere starting point cannot be a true dialectical beginning because the beginning itself, as we shall see, has to remain at the base and be part of what is to follow. In this sense, Hegel can speak of "mediation as a beginning and a having-gone-on to a second, so that this second is such only insofar as we have come to it from another with regard to it" (*Ibid.*). This is why also, as we saw earlier, Hegel could speak of the Phenomenology as starting (*wird ausgegangen*) from sense consciousness, in order to move on to the realm of absolute and pure knowing, but he did so without fixing on a point from which to go. In fact, his argument shows that there is no such fixed point, "here and now," as sense consciousness seems to think. To introduce the idea of a point in the beginning for Hegel is somehow to move in the direction of empiricism, as becomes clear later on in E #37 ff., which then locks thought into a frame that can think of God only as an *Endpunkt*, corresponding to the *Ausgangspunkt*, and thus reduces the idea of God to a pure representation of the understanding caught in the fascination with experience (cf. E 50).

Now the point is not that Kierkegaard or even Cumming himself has fallen into this empiricist trap. It is rather that there is a danger in trying to nail down a point fixedly as a beginning for thinking, especially for dialectical thinking, since such a point might undermine the dialectical movement itself. Kierkegaard himself, as Cumming is at pains to point out,⁵ insists on the need for mediation and for not leaving the beginning, i.e., the existing individual for Kierkegaard, behind and/or out of the dialectic. It is precisely for this reason that Cumming himself, as he says, dwells so long on *The Starting Point* of the Dialectic of Existence. Even Kierkegaard himself, in the heat of his argument with Hegel about beginning, had to write: "existence did not begin with the immediate, since the immediate never is as such, but is transcended as soon as it is."⁶ This could almost be read as a commentary on the beginning of Hegel's Phenomenology, which begins with what Hegel calls, as we saw, properly immediate knowing, sense consciousness, but cannot stay with that. No true dialectical movement and transcendence can begin from a fixed point that is not itself part of the movement and transcendence. One might even go so far as to reverse the issue about points completely, as Hegel does in the Logic of *Dasein*. In con-

⁵*Op. cit.*, pp. 259ff.

⁶Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Tr. David F. Swenson & Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 102.

junctions with the concept of *Grenze*, he shows how the geometrical point, which is both beginning and end for the line, has to be viewed dialectically (L L, I, 114–116). For Hegel at least it is the beginning which sheds light on the point, and not the point that determines the beginning. For Kierkegaard also, the same was true even as he wrote: “the dialectic of the beginning must be made clear,”⁷ for, as we shall see later, his quarrel with Hegel seems to have been more with the content of that beginning than with the idea of it and he surely would not have admitted that the content could be reduced to a point, no matter how individual it had to be. It is Kierkegaard who speaks of this tendency to fix on points as a temptation: “There always lurks some such concern in a man, at the same time indolent and anxious, a wish to lay hold of something so really fixed that it can exclude dialectic; but this desire is an expression of cowardice, and is deceitfulness toward the divine.”⁸

How Hegel actually conceived the beginning, as we noted earlier, is stated in less than a page. In the original edition of 1812, this page stood at the beginning of the whole discussion (KA 11, 33–34). And all the rest of the text on the beginning (34–40) dealt with false or inadequate ways of conceiving the beginning. In the 1831 edition, those few paragraphs are pushed back a few pages and a preliminary discussion of the special difficulty which beginning presents for modern philosophy is added (L L, 51–53).

A distinction is made between the principle (*das Prinzip*) of a philosophy, which is a beginning in a sense, but a beginning of all *things* where the focus is on a determinate content such as water or *nous* or *substance*, or even on a criterium of knowledge as something objective, and the beginning as such as something subjective “in the sense of a contingent way of leading into a discourse (*Vortrag*)” (L L, I, 52). Concern for the content had led to overlooking the need for the question, with what to begin?, in favor of the need for a principle or for going to the absolute ground of everything. The modern perplexity about the beginning, however, proceeds from yet a further need, one that has not been seen clearly either by those who insist dogmatically on proving a principle, or those who look for a subjective criterium against dogmatic philosophizing, or those who begin like a shot out of a pistol as though from some inner revelation, faith or intellectual intuition, without attending to method or logic. As thought has been driven from concern only for principle as content to the other side, namely, that of setting knowing straight (*das Benehmen des Erkennens*), the subjective act has come to be grasped as an essential moment of objective truth and along with that has come the need to unite the method with the content, the form with the principle.

The question that arises then is whether logic begins as a result, something mediated, or properly as a beginning in an immediate way. Hegel makes the point that everything in heaven or in nature or in spirit can be shown to contain both immediacy and mediation, and logic is no exception. This is why the

⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁸*Op. cit.*, p. 351 note.

relation of the Logic to the Phenomenology has to be brought in, since the standpoint of the Logic comes as a result of the Phenomenology and hence is mediated. But the standpoint reached at the end of the Phenomenology, i.e., the Idea as pure knowing (*die Idee als reines Wissen*), itself has to be seen in its immediacy. This idea, as Hegel points out, "has determined itself in that result as the certainty that has become truth," where there is no longer an opposition between knowing and object, but a "subjectivity that is exteriorized and is unity with its exteriorization" (L L, I, 53).

With this summation of the standpoint that has been reached at the end of PG in absolute knowing, Hegel then proceeds to clear the ground of anything extrinsic to the movement of logic or pure knowing, i.e., all reflexions, all approximations (*Meinungen*), and to take up only what is at hand (*was vorhanden ist*) in this determination of pure knowing. Two things should be noted about this insistence on only what is at hand. First, it has to do with what is at hand, not in general or for consciousness or for whatever else one might wish to bring in, but in the movement of pure knowing as it has been determined as a result of the Phenomenology. Secondly, it is an attempt only to focus on what is at hand, not to prove what is there, since every argument has to begin from something and it is the very beginning of all argumentation, so to speak, which is at issue. Thus, to look for proofs for Hegel's claim that Being is the beginning, as Hans Wagner does,⁹ is to misrepresent the very notion of beginning and to fall into an infinite regression. More precisely, as could be shown from the kinds of exigencies which Wagner sets down,¹⁰ it is to deny the unity of knowing and content in the *true* Idea and to reduce it to a separation of the two on the level of what Hegel would call understanding and representation. If one needs an argument for the standpoint of pure knowing, then one has to look to the Phenomenology for it, not the beginning of the Logic itself. How one gets to the standpoint which is pure knowing, where Hegel wishes to begin his pure science, is no longer a concern for setting that science in motion, i.e., for beginning the Logic. The only thing to be done is to open up this idea of pure knowing as a beginning and to disclose what is at hand as a way of beginning.

As a knowing that has come together in this unity of knowing and content, pure knowing has superseded all relations to an other or to mediation; it is something without distinction (*das Unterschiedslose*), and as such it ceases to be knowing: all that is at hand is simple immediacy (*es ist nur einfache Unmittelbarkeit vorhanden*). But simple immediacy is itself an expression of reflexion and related to the difference of something mediated. Hence, in its true expression, this simple immediacy is pure being (*das reine Sein*), being in general, without further determination or filling, in the same way that pure knowing means nothing else than knowing as such, quite abstractly.

Each term in this development is precisely weighed. To speak of simple

⁹Art. cit., p. 342.

¹⁰Art. cit., p. 347.

immediacy presupposes a relation to mediation, since immediacy is the negation of mediation and hence is mediated through that concept. Hence, as Henrich has pointed out,¹¹ to stay with that as an expression of what is *vorhanden* would not be true to the beginning, since it would be to shift the origin of the thought of immediacy into the logic of reflexivity, which is the logic of essence, and to pervert it into its opposite. There is a sense in which one can speak of Essence as a beginning (cf. L L, II, 501), but this is not the beginning in pure knowing; it is a beginning mediated precisely by the logic of Being. Hence to properly begin one cannot simply determine what is first in terms of what will come second, since that will have to be determined from what came first. This is why the only true expression for the beginning cannot be simple immediacy, but pure Being. And inasmuch as we are speaking of pure knowing quite abstractly, then the Being contained in this knowing can only be Being in general: Being and nothing else, without any further determination or filling.

This approach, however, Hegel goes on to add, presents the being which begins (*das Anfangende*) as arising through mediation and with the presupposition of pure knowing as a result of finite knowing, that is, of consciousness. "But if no presupposition is to be made, and the beginning itself is to be taken immediately, then it determines itself only in that it has to be the beginning of the Logic, of thinking for itself. The only thing at hand (*vorhanden*), then, is the resolve (*der Entschluss*), which some may view as something arbitrary, namely, that one wills to consider thinking (*das Denken*) as such." But it is not the resolve as such which is at hand, and which an existentialist like Kierkegaard might take as the beginning, that properly constitutes the beginning for Hegel. Rather it is the thinking that begins with the resolve. This is why he goes on to insist on absoluteness or abstractness for the beginning, which should presuppose nothing, must be mediated by nothing, and must not have any ground; rather it has itself to be the ground of the entire science. "Hence it must be something quite immediate, or rather the immediate itself. As it cannot have any determination with respect to what is other, so also it cannot contain any determination within itself, no content, because that sort of thing would be distinction and relation of different things (*von Verschiedenen*) to one another, hence a mediation. Thus the beginning is *pure Being*."

Once again in this second part of his presentation Hegel brings in the language of mediation to clarify what the beginning is, but what he is driving at does not require that mediation, except to justify the qualification of "pure" which is added to Being. Any determination of Being, any content in that concept, would introduce distinction, relation and hence mediation into the beginning, because every determination entails a relation to an other (*gegen Anderes*), as Hegel will show in the logic of *Dasein*. Perhaps this insistence on the purity of Being for the beginning is exaggerated, since even for its formulation it requires an appeal to a later moment in the movement of knowing; and perhaps it imposes an undue

¹¹*Art. cit.*, p. 28.

restriction on the concept of Being which may backfire in Hegel's treatment of Being as the beginning. But at least this much is clear: in the immediacy of thinking it is Being that is at hand and so constitutes the beginning, whether it has to be qualified as "pure" or not.¹² To think without separating form from content is to think Being. Insofar as the thinking in question is the "pure knowing" that comes out of the resolve to consider simply thinking as such, the Being in question can be characterized as "pure Being." Hegel is consistent in his position at least up to this point. Whether he remains consistent in his elaboration of the thinking of Being as he moves beyond this beginning remains to be seen, but space will not allow us to go into that here. We can only pass in review some of the difficulties that can keep us from grasping or conceiving the very simple point Hegel has made about beginning to think purely and simply.

It is normal and inevitable for any other science to have *presuppositions* that are not examined in that science. Every other science, for example, presupposes the idea of science and keeps its method distinct from its object. Moreover, the content of such sciences does not constitute an absolute beginning, but depends on other concepts and busies itself with other material. Those sciences are allowed to speak of their domain and of their method by way of supposition (*lemmatischer Weise*) without any need to establish the ordinary art of reasoning (L L, I, 23).

But not so the Logic. It cannot presuppose any of these forms of reflexion or rules and laws of thinking, because they are part of its content and can be grounded only within it. "Not only the statement of the scientific method, but even the very concept of science in general belongs to its content and indeed constitutes its final result" (*Ibid.*), something which cannot even be expressed at the outset but can only be brought out by the full treatment of this scientific knowing as such. Its object is conceptual thinking (*das begreifende Denken*), the concept of which can be generated only in the course of its development.

Mere understanding or faith cannot grasp this total exigency of first science as such, which for Hegel has to be both logic and ontology at once, because they know no other way of beginning a science than to start "with the presupposition of a representation (*Vorstellung*) which is then analysed, so that the outcome of such analysis yields the first determinate concept in that science"

¹²In this insistence on Being as that with which knowing begins, Hegel is echoing, at least in part, a fundamental insight of St. Thomas Aquinas: "That which the intellect first conceives as most known, and in which it resolves all its conceptions, is being (*ens*) . . ." (*On Truth*, quest. 1, art. 1). "That which first comes into apprehension is being, the intelligence of which is included in whatever else anyone apprehends" (*Sum. Theol.*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2). Aquinas himself refers this idea of being as the beginning of conception back to Avicenna: see, for example, the beginning of his *Opusculum, On Being and Essence*. Aquinas, however, did not restrict this beginning with being to a "pure knowing of pure being" as Hegel did, who remained perhaps still too much under the influence of Kant with regard to his conception of being. Instead, he took being as a concrete universal from the beginning in which even becoming, the first concrete whole for Hegel, had to be grasped. Thus, while agreeing with Hegel's idea of the beginning, he probably would have objected to Hegel's initial formulation of the distinction between "pure Being" and "pure Nothing."

(L L, I, 58). Hegel can accommodate himself to such a procedure by starting from a representation of a mere beginning and arguing from that to a content that includes both Being and Nothing even as distinct from one another, thus leading into the concept of Becoming. But that is not for him the true way of beginning, "It lies in the nature of the beginning itself that it be Being and nothing else. Hence no other preparation is required in order to enter into philosophy, nor any further reflexions and points to latch onto" (*Anknüpfungspunkte*—L L, I, 57). One could say, of course, that Hegel himself presupposes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* for his beginning, but he is not satisfied with that presupposition. He looks for his beginning in pure knowing as such, where he finds Being at hand. One could also say that the *Phenomenology* itself is a form of accommodation to bring consciousness to the standpoint of pure knowing.

There is, then, the claim, made by Reinhold in Hegel's day (L L, I, 15) that philosophy begins with a hypothetical and problematic truth and that philosophy can only be a quest (*suchen*) at the outset. This claim seems to follow from the insight that Absolute Truth has to be a result, and conversely that a result presupposes a first truth which however, as first, is not objectively necessary or subjectively recognized. This view presents a genuine interest for Hegel in what concerns the speculative nature of the philosophical beginning. It brings out how "going forward logically is a going back into the ground, to what is primordial and truthful, from which that with which the beginning is made depends and in fact is brought forth." (L L, I, 55). This indeed pertains to the essential circularity of science as a whole. But it cannot justify calling the beginning merely hypothetical or problematic, because, even if the circularity be granted, as Hegel is more than ready to do in the science of absolute spirit as well as in the science of consciousness, there is still the nature of going forth logically from the beginning to be considered. "It happens that, on the other side, it is equally necessary to treat as a result that into which the movement has gone back as into its ground. In this respect the first is indeed the ground, and the last, something derived; insofar as one starts from the first and through correct inferences (*Folgerungen*) arrives at the last as at the ground, the latter is a result" (L L, I 56). In other words, the beginning, precisely as the beginning of the logical movement of thought, remains the beginning of that whole and cannot be treated as hypothetical or problematic, if the whole is going to be grasped as absolute truth. Going on further from that which constitutes the beginning is to be seen as only a further determination of that beginning, so that that which begins (*das Anfangende*) remains underlying (*zugrunde liegen*) all that follows and does not disappear from it. "Thus the beginning of philosophy is the foundation (*Grundlage*) present and maintained in all the following developments, what remains quite immanent in all its further determinations." Hence the beginning not only has to be Being, but Being considered absolutely.

Finally, there is the seeming arbitrariness which appears to affect this beginning, no matter how absolute it might otherwise be thought to be. To begin, Hegel says at the very center of his argument, one has to resolve to want to consider thinking as such, a resolve, he adds, "which one could also view as

an option (*eine Willkür*)” (L L, I, 54). For science, this kind of option in the beginning could undermine the very necessity that is supposed to characterize the whole. Nevertheless “only that resolve is at hand” (*Nur der Entschluss . . . ist vorhanden*) and Hegel sticks by his initial resolve “to take up only what is at hand” (*nur aufzuheben, was vorhanden ist*). For the beginning to be absolute here means for it to be abstract, to presuppose nothing, to be mediated by nothing; it must be the immediate itself, namely pure Being. We saw earlier how Hegel excludes all otherness and determination from this beginning because that would be to introduce mediation where none can be allowed or justified. This is something he insists on time and again as he elaborates on the beginning later on (cf. L L, I, 70–71; 89–90). But does that absolve the philosophical beginning from all arbitrariness?

The key to Hegel’s thinking at this point seems to lie in his insistence on abstractness for the beginning, the pure resolve to consider thinking as such which ends up, or rather finds itself thinking pure Being. For Schelling there is an intellectual intuition to begin with, but Hegel would not accept any such beginning. Kierkegaard claimed that Hegel “never told us how the Method was related to the intellectual intuition, or whether a *leap* is not here again required.”¹³ But if we keep in mind the total abstractness of the beginning as Hegel saw it, we see that neither an intuition nor a leap is required, since there is nothing to be intuited in the beginning, only pure Being in its absolute abstraction; and there is no need for a leap, since there is nothing outside of pure knowing to leap to. Pure Being is not a thing or an individual or anything concrete. It is simply at hand as the beginning in pure knowing or in the resolve to consider thinking as such: to think as such is to think Being and to think Being as the beginning is to know it as abstract and even as one-sided, so that one knows from the beginning that one will have to go on to the whole, which is concrete. This is why for Hegel Heraclitus had it all over Parmenides, for though the latter had the simple thought of pure Being, he grasped it only in its absolute abstraction, while “the penetrating Heraclitus, in opposition to this simple and one-sided abstraction, elicited the higher total concept of Becoming and said: Being as little is as Nothing, or also: all flows, that is, all is Becoming” (L L, I, 68). Though Hegel insists that Being is the beginning, he conceives it as purely abstract and still one-sided, that is, as only beginning to be. In a sense, beginning is becoming (cf. E 88, par. 3), so that, though pure Being is the true expression of simple immediacy, as we saw in the first part of Hegel’s account of what is at hand in pure knowing, the Truth of both pure Being and pure Nothing is “this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: Becoming” (L L, I, 67).

It might be argued further that this simple resolve to begin remains an irreducible presupposition for beginning which contains something that Hegel has not taken into account. This would perhaps be the ultimate objection raised by Kierkegaard about Hegel’s absolute beginning. Kierkegaard speaks of an “es-

¹³*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 134.

sential decisiveness . . . rooted in subjectivity" and of an "infinite need of a decision" which simply escapes any "contemplative spirit" or "objective subject" which "sees no decision anywhere. This is the *falsum* that is inherent in all objectivity; and this is the significance of mediation as the mode of transition in the continuous process, where nothing is fixed and where nothing is infinitely decided; because the movement turns back upon itself and again turns back, so that the movement becomes chimerical and the philosopher is wise only after the event."¹⁴ Later on Kierkegaard also speaks of "essential individualities, men of decisive subjectivity."¹⁵

From this position of the essential decisiveness of individual subjectivity, which seems to parallel at least in part Hegel's resolve, Kierkegaard argues against the Hegelian idea of philosophy and its beginning in two ways. First, he questions whether it really begins with the immediate without any presuppositions: "How does the System begin with the immediate? That is to say, does it begin with it immediately?"¹⁶ Kierkegaard's unconditional "no" to this question starts from the presumption that the System comes after existence; it is "*ex post facto*, and so does not begin immediately with the immediacy with which existence began . . . The beginning which begins with the immediate *is thus itself reached by means of a process of reflection*."¹⁷ In the Hegelian perspective this could be taken as referring to the way in which the Logic presupposes the Phenomenology and hence as by no means an objection, but Kierkegaard will not allow for this solution. For the further question arises: "How do I put an end to the reflection which was set up in order to reach the beginning here in question? Reflection has the remarkable property of being infinite," which is equivalent to "saying that it cannot be stopped by itself."¹⁸ And "if a resolution of the will is required to end the preliminary process of reflection, the presuppositionless character of the System is renounced."¹⁹ Kierkegaard thus maintains that, not only is the pure resolve to consider thinking as such, Hegel's unmediated beginning, arbitrary from the viewpoint of the logical system, but so too is the passage from the reflection of Phenomenology to the pure knowing of Logic. It is the very idea of an absolute beginning for a logical system that is, like pure being, a pure chimera.

Kierkegaard's second argument against the philosophical beginning proceeds more from his own idea of the "infinite reflexion" alluded to and from "the infinite passionate interest in a personal eternal happiness," which, he maintains, is higher than any speculative happiness or interest and which "will wholly prevent [the speculative philosopher] from beginning."²⁰ This is what gives the existing individual its validity over against any System, so that "an existential

¹⁴*Op. cit.*, pp. 33–34.

¹⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁶*Op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁸*Op. cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁹*Op. cit.*, p. 103; cf. also *Papirer* V A 70.

²⁰*Op. cit.*, pp. 54–55.

system is impossible." To forget that one is an existing individual is to become a comic figure, "since existence has the remarkable trait of compelling an existing individual to exist whether he wills it or not."²¹ Kierkegaard's argument here hinges on the supposition that a logical system is possible, but cannot explain movement or have any relation to existence.²²

To examine whether this does justice to Hegel's logic would take us far beyond the question of the beginning. But the inclusion of an infinite reflexion and an infinite passion in the existing subject touches on a key moment in Hegel's logic of *Dasein* which is closely related both to the beginning and to the idea of movement, since true infinity for Hegel is a form of becoming, even though, as a circular form, it can be spoken of as without starting point and end (*ohne Anfangspunkt und Ende*). "This [true] infinite as being-returned-back-into-self, relation of self to self, is being, but not abstract being without determination . . . it is also *Dasein* . . . it is and is there, present, at hand (*präsent, gegenwärtig*, L L, I, 138–139). Thus, from Kierkegaard's point of view, it might be argued that Hegel should have begun there, with true infinity in *Dasein*, but then the question would remain whether that would change anything about the idea of beginning as such or as distinct from a mere starting point. The problem remains for Kierkegaard himself in his existential dialectic, for even he insists that nothing, whether "it be a word, a proposition, a book, a man, a fellowship or whatever you please" can "serve as limit, in such a way that the limit is not itself again dialectical. . . . Even the most certain of all things, a revelation, *eo ipso* becomes dialectical whenever I attempt to appropriate it, even the most fixed of things, an infinite negative resolve, the infinite form for God's presence in the individual, at once becomes dialectical."²³ Kierkegaard cannot escape the need for a resolve and the content of his own "infinite negative resolve" in the face of the Hegelian System calls for a beginning of elaboration.

Hegel's own philosophical beginning then can be viewed as an infinite resolve, but a positive one bent on thinking through the content of that resolve. Even if he has not rightly presented the content of that dialectical beginning, as Kierkegaard would still argue, he has rightly conceived the beginning as an act of taking cognizance of what is at hand through thought. "Pure knowing" of "pure Being" may be an undue restriction of the content of that simple resolve, since the concrete expresses more than the merely abstract, but there is no other way to begin than in such a resolve to think all that can be thought. And even if such a resolve can always appear as arbitrary, inasmuch as one can always abstain from thinking or entertain a negative resolve with regard to thinking, its content has to be seen as necessary, absolute and without presupposition. The beginning of philosophy can only be an attempt to lay bare what is at hand in that simple but infinite resolve.

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²¹*Op. cit.*, p. 109.

²²*Op. cit.*, p. 100.

²³*Op. cit.*, p. 35.