THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY
AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT

JOSEPH C. FLAY

The Pennsylvania State University

In this paper I shall be concerned with two problems in Hegel which are usually considered separately: the significance of the history of philosophy for the Phenomenology of Spirit and the question of the proper beginning of Hegel's system. The first problem has traditionally been approached by either interpreting the Phenomenology in terms of the history of philosophy, or indicating passages or sections in which an argument of some one of Hegel's predecessors is to be found. For the most part it has been a question of articulating how the history of philosophy, as an external form of the development of philosophy, is reflected in and reflects the Phenomenology of Spirit, the internally coherent organization of the same development. I shall be concerned with these aspects of the problem only in so far as they might contribute to an understanding of the beginning of Hegel's system.

The question of beginnings has usually taken one of two forms: either it has involved a dispute over whether the Logic or the Phenomenology forms the true and proper beginning of the system, or has been an inquiry into political or religious presuppositions for the system. Recently, however, in writings especially by Pöggeler and Kimmerle,¹ suggestions have been made that perhaps the history of philosophy itself has some bearing upon the problem of beginnings. Their researches into Hegel's Jena period have brought two facts to the attention of scholars. 1) Hegel's development at Jena involved as a central issue a struggle to find a proper beginning for a scientific system of philosophy. The first attempt to begin with logic itself had failed, and the issue was only resolved with the conception of the Phenomenology of Spirit.

menology as a propaedeutic to Logic. 2) At the same time that Hegel was thinking out and composing the Phenomenology, he first presented lectures on the history of philosophy.

The occurrence of this resolution together with the first lectures on the history of philosophy may be understood as coincidental. I shall argue, to the contrary, that the history of philosophy is a presupposition for the beginning of Hegel's system, and that this beginning is to be found in the Phenomenology.

First, I will examine a distinction made by Hegel between two meanings of a beginning in order to clarify in what way the Phenomenology is the beginning of the scientific system and in what way it is not. In the second section I will examine the way in which the Phenomenology begins and how this beginning is necessitated. In the final section, I will show how and why the history of philosophy is presupposed by this beginning and briefly indicate two implications of this presupposition.

I

In the Science of Logic Hegel distinguishes between two meanings of beginning. In the first place, he is absolutely clear that the Logic itself is the first part of the system. In contrast to his first announcements describing the Phenomenology as the first part of the system, Hegel now claims that "it lies in the very nature of a beginning that it must be Being and nothing else." This pure beginning with Being in the immediacy of pure knowing "simply takes up what is there before us." But he is equally clear that this beginning presupposes a propaedeutic science which is to justify the standpoint and nature of the system, a science contained in his Phenomenology of Spirit.

In the Phenomenology of Spirit I have exhibited consciousness in its movement onwards from the first immediate opposition of itself and the object to absolute knowing. The path of this movement traverses every form of the relation of consciousness to the object and has the concept of science for its result. This concept therefore (apart from the fact that it emerges within logic itself) needs no justification here because it has received it in that work; and it cannot be justified in any other way than by this emergence in consciousness, all the forms of which are resolved into this concept as into their truth....The concept of pure


b Ibid., 54; Miller, 69.