

NATURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE: THE NOTION OF PHILOSOPHY AS ESTABLISHED IN HEGEL'S *THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

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Abstract. This research provides an analysis of the role of 'natural consciousness' and 'absolute knowledge' in the process of establishing the notion of philosophy in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The author seeks to show that 'natural consciousness' does not disappear in the first approaches to *The Phenomenology*, but rather, it continues to act as the subject of the 'experience of consciousness' until the end. The material analysis directly related to the evolution of 'natural consciousness' in the first stages of 'experience' particularly supports the hypothesis about the philosopher's work on the book. The results obtained can be seen as a validation of the idea that the usual notions of overcoming 'natural consciousness' already in the first 'experiences of consciousness' do not correspond to its fundamental role in establishing the notion of philosophy in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. It represents not only the starting point of the phenomenological movement but it is also involved in the 'reversals of consciousness' at every stage of the 'experience,' which is important to take into account for the correct evaluation of the specificity of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the comprehension of the nature of philosophical knowledge as the main result of this Hegelian work.

Keywords: Hegelian philosophy; *The Phenomenology of Spirit*; the notion of philosophy; natural consciousness; absolute knowledge

Introduction

Hegel's understanding of the subject matter of philosophy, its tasks, and the place of philosophy in culture is usually perceived as a return to tradition, in comparison not only with Kant, who, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, problematized the notion of philosophy, but also with Fichte, Schelling, and the Romanticists (Ficara 2011; Sassini 2019). This judgment is based mainly on the *Encyclopedia*

of *Philosophical Sciences*, viewed as an autonomous philosophical system. At the same time, the role of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, in this case, is reduced to the substantiation of the notion as the only acceptable form of philosophical knowledge. However, while Hegel expressed some of the important innovative components of his understanding of philosophy in *The Phenomenology*, he did not provide a detailed exposition of these components in his later work, even though they continued to serve as the basis for his subsequent search for the image of a philosophical system. Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider those aspects of the development of the notion of philosophy that are usually overlooked, including the role of ‘natural consciousness’ and ‘absolute knowledge’ – the alpha and the omega of phenomenological motion – in the process of establishing the Hegelian doctrine of the nature of philosophy.

It is also important to address this topic because many of the problems that emerge in scrutinizing the text of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* can only be clarified by considering the key concepts involved in substantiating the notion of philosophy. This position is easy to understand, given that the work was conceived as the “first part” of *The System of Science*, by which Hegel understood the system of philosophy in the Jena period of his work.

Let us note at once that, concerning ‘natural consciousness’ in the commentaries on Hegel’s work and the studies devoted to the first chapters of *The Phenomenology*, the prevailing view is that it disappears from the ‘experience of consciousness’ as soon as at the stage of ‘sense-certainty’ (Koch 2008; Siep 2014, 72 – 76; Wieland 1973).¹⁾ Therefore, it is usually considered the opposite of philosophical consciousness, being the main result of the phenomenological movement. This point of view must be thoroughly verified. ‘absolute knowledge’ as the final image of the spirit’s self-knowledge becomes much more often a subject of special consideration in the context of analyzing Hegel’s doctrine of philosophical knowledge (Fulda 2008; Harris 1995, 1997; Höhle 2008), but the lack of attention to ‘natural consciousness’ as the starting point of the emerging notion of philosophy – and, as a result, the loss of “scale” of analysis of subsequent images of consciousness – does not allow for the presentation of the concept of ‘absolute knowledge’ in its totality.

Methodology

In determining the methodology of exploring the role of ‘natural consciousness’ and ‘absolute knowledge’ in the process of establishing the notion of philosophy, we must address the fact that the word ‘philosophy’ rarely appears in the main text of *The Phenomenology*. As a rule, in those cases when the author, as if ‘above’ a methodically verified description of the ‘experience of consciousness,’ directly addresses the reader, he goes beyond the limits of the way the ‘experience’ is systematized and presented following the intention of his book. The reason for

this may be seen in the justification of the notion of philosophy in the structure of the work. Whether *The Phenomenology* is understood as an ‘introduction’ to Hegel’s system of philosophy or as its ‘first part’, the notion of philosophy is still in the process of being established throughout the narrative; thus, using ‘philosophy’ as a stable term would seem unnatural in a Hegelian text until the moment one can claim that this establishment has been completed. Accordingly, in Chapter I, Hegel mentions “a philosophical assertion” (“*eine philosophische Behauptung*”) only once (Hegel 2019, 94), exposing claims to this status by some implied “universal experience” and testifying, supposedly, to the right of only things to be considered as ‘sense-certainty’ truth. Similarly, in Chapter II, ‘philosophy’ is opposed only once to ‘healthy common sense’, which is considered “solid, real consciousness” because it commands those abstractions, in the cycle of which ‘healthy common sense,’ by contrast, is forced to accept as truth first one and then the other, unquestioningly (Hegel 2019, 112 – 113). In Chapter III, ‘philosophy’ also appears only once, again in a polemical context, this time in a Hegelian critique of the initiators of the ‘pseudo-philosophical’ discussion of how ‘difference’ arises from ‘identity’: “how distinction or otherness is supposed to come out of this pure essence” (Hegel 2019, 146).

In every mention of philosophy in Chapters I – III (‘Consciousness,’ the ‘first circle’ of *The Phenomenology*), it is contrasted with the supposedly homogeneous ‘universal experience,’ ‘healthy common-sense,’ which is a sort of ‘unphilosophical consciousness’; however, such contrasts define only the initial point of formation of the concept of philosophy in *The Phenomenology*, and it would be a fundamental mistake to limit ourselves to them in an attempt to restore the Hegelian understanding of the nature of philosophical knowledge. Hegel was always characterized by the conviction that human striving for philosophy grows out of life itself, this idea he expressed in his early works (Plotnikov 2004), he also returns to it in the “Preface” summarizing *The Phenomenology*, stressing here in the context of justifying the conceptual character of philosophy that it should avoid the temptation to leave the “beyond”, fully immersed in the divine substance.

Accordingly, the notion of ‘natural consciousness’ (also referred to as ‘immediate consciousness’, ‘sense consciousness’, ‘individual’, ‘imperfect spiriti, isouli, etc.) is presented not only in the first chapters, the “Introduction” and “Preface”, but throughout the narrative up to the last chapter of the work. In this case, the fundamental conditions for the establishment of the notion of philosophy begin to form already in Chapters 1 – 3, which reflect the way of ‘experience’ from ‘natural consciousness’ to self-consciousness, realizing in its activity the structure of ‘infinity’. In ‘infinity’, the development of the work’s plot reaches the point in which the objectivity of speculative philosophy is first constituted, that is, consciousness reaches the level of the structure of

philosophical thinking. This result is reflected in the text of the Introduction; however, it should be noted that the word ‘philosophy’ itself also appears only once here. At the same time, the equivalent of ‘philosophy’ at this stage of the work’s idea (still “The Science of the Experience of Consciousness”) in most contexts is ‘science’ together with the attribute ‘scientific’ (21 and 2 uses, respectively). Therefore, the notion of philosophy (at least in some essential way) may also be supposed to form here.

A similar thing could be said about ‘absolute knowledge’, that is, its outlines ‘shine through’ already in the movement of ‘experience’ reflected in the first chapters of the work; it begins to form (and, accordingly, its ‘silhouettes’, acquiring an increasingly concrete shape, “emerge” in the text) long before the chapter with the same title concludes the book. In addition to the already mentioned ‘infinity’, which first appears at the end of Chapter III and sets the structure of speculative (philosophical) subjectivity, we can point to its earlier prototypes, such as ‘the universal’ as the actual truth of ‘sense-certainty’, or ‘unconditional-universal’ in the chapter on ‘perception’, and further, of course, ‘self-consciousness’, ‘reason’, ‘spirit’, and its self-consciousness in the form of ‘religion’ (all of them may be seen as an outline of ‘absolute knowledge’). Thus, the establishment of the notion of philosophy in the space of the phenomenological narrative can be traced at each of its stages; it is composed of transitions in which – following the principle of speculative ‘reversal’ (*die Umkehrung*) – the less perfect image of consciousness (their common basis of ‘natural consciousness’) becomes a moment (logical predicate) of a perfect image of consciousness. In contrast, as the conclusion of the whole phenomenological path, the absolute knowledge becomes the ‘entelechy’.

Therefore, the analysis of the role of ‘natural consciousness’ and ‘absolute knowledge’ in the establishing of the notion of philosophy in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* requires both the analysis of fragments containing these concepts and the identification and consideration of those contexts in which ‘natural consciousness’ and ‘absolute knowledge’ are not directly mentioned, but which nevertheless prove necessary for their understanding. The importance of preserving attention to the relationship between the “moving” images of ‘natural consciousness’ and ‘absolute knowledge’ requires the use of the entire arsenal of traditional methods of historical and philosophical reconstruction and analysis that reveal the specificity of the images of consciousness in question and their place in the establishing of the notion of philosophy in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In addition, we will have to use elements of phenomenological, comparative, and hermeneutical methods, since the described content must be correlated with the subject of the ‘experience of consciousness,’ with the content of other works of Hegel, his predecessors, and contemporaries, and also to identify the connections of specific Hegelian ideas and constructions with the circumstances of the historical era, the

features of the culture of his time and, finally, with the unique spiritual image of the author himself.

Results

a) Understanding *The Phenomenology* as a single ‘ladder of spiritual ascent’ makes it necessary to recognize the ‘experience of natural consciousness’ as the first stage of the movement towards the philosophy of ‘absolute knowledge’. It should be remembered that, throughout the whole phenomenological narrative, the principle formulated in “Introduction” that states “consciousness is for itself its concept” (Hegel 2019, 76) and “consciousness in itself provides its own standard” (Hegel 2019) remains significant. Therefore, although the ‘fate of natural consciousness’ already within the boundaries of ‘sense-certainty’ seems tragic, as the attempt to find stability and preserve itself “loses its truth” (Hegel 2019, 73), objectively it is “this self-consummating scepticism” (Hegel 2019) of the first steps of ‘natural consciousness’ evolution that guides it towards science, the philosophical point of view (Spahn 2011). A careful reading of Hegel’s text confirms the conclusion drawn from the formulas of the “Introduction” that, in transforming itself, ‘natural consciousness’ does not disappear into ‘experience’ but continues to live as its subject throughout the entire phenomenological narrative.

This whole path is already designated in the “Introduction” as the ‘cultural development’ (*die Bildung*) of consciousness, and in the role of the latter acts exactly ‘natural consciousness’ losing, as it seems to him, ‘the firm ground’, the individual as the starting point of the movement of ‘experience’: “the series of its shapes which consciousness runs through on this path is the detailed history of the cultural development of consciousness up to the standpoint of science” (Hegel 2019, 74). *Die Bildung* is the most organic designation of the ‘positive’ side of the dialectical movement of ‘natural consciousness’. Our intentionally omitted ‘rather’ (*vielmehr*) at the beginning of the above formula contrasts this result (consciousness’s attainment of the level of ‘science’) with the superficial opinion of the ‘cultural development’ consciousness itself, regarding ‘experience’ as a path of ‘doubt’ and ‘despair’: this path has only negative significance for consciousness if it deliberately persists in its desire to remain ‘natural consciousness’ regardless of the results of ‘experience’.

On how such obliquity is overcome in the phenomenological motion, Hegel speaks explicitly when ‘sense-certainty’ “closes in on itself” as a supposedly purely immediate relation (Hegel 2019, 92). In this case, the ‘observing consciousness’, or phenomenologist, ‘forces’ natural consciousness to reveal itself by returning to the movement of ‘experience’. Achieving this goal is fundamentally possible because consciousness itself as an ‘in-itself-universal’ moves in the same direction. In addition, ‘observing consciousness’ is only a ‘layer’ of ‘natural

consciousness' singled out as an independent instance in order to rid it of inertia and elevate 'chaotic' singular experiences to a regular universal movement that will finally constitute the content of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. It also follows from the latter observation that their opposition is relative. The fixation of the instance of 'observing consciousness' aims to explain the mechanism of dialectical movement, to reveal the nature of the regularities of the evolution of forms of consciousness, leading it to a philosophical point of view.

Unlike those whose being is "limited to natural life", who is incapable of going beyond its immediate being on its own, consciousness "is for itself its concept, and as a result, it immediately goes beyond the restriction, and, since this restriction belongs to itself, it goes beyond itself too" (Hegel 2019, 76). Consciousness always experiences inner restlessness and even 'violence' on its part. It exists only by going beyond itself, 'rising' above itself, revealing its 'spiritual perspectives'. The reason for this is, in the final analysis, that the notion of consciousness, its inner content, is universal, a thought which both prevents it from settling down and abiding in "an unthinking lethargy" (*gedankenloser Trägheit*) (Hegel 2019). However, going beyond its limits, it retains the status of a subject upon which only new definitions extracted inexperience can be superimposed. Otherwise, it would be impossible to speak of consciousness's same 'cultural development'.

It is no coincidence, for example, that Hegel again mentions 'natural consciousness' in connection with his reference to "the completeness of the forms of non-real consciousness", which "will result from the necessity of the progression of and interrelations among the forms themselves" (Hegel 2019, 74 – 75). The complete series of 'the forms of non-real consciousness' is a set of prerequisites that ensures the transition to a philosophical point of view. Hegel repeats here one of his most famous ideas, the position on the concreteness of negation in the course of the dialectical movement: "the account of non-truthful consciousness in its untruth is not a merely negative movement. Natural consciousness generally has that kind of one-sidedness of that movement. A knowledge that makes this one-sidedness into its essence is one of those shapes of incomplete consciousness which in the general course of things both belongs to that path. "Itself shows up on the path" (Hegel 2019, 75). Yes, 'natural consciousness' is, of course, 'involved' in a dialectical movement in which, again, it does not disappear, but "exalts itself" by going through "the series of its shapes" constituting "the detailed history of the cultural development of consciousness up to the standpoint of science" (Hegel 2019, 74).

b) Attention to the process of grounding philosophy in the various fragments of the text of *The Phenomenology* allows us to present the structure of the work more clearly and substantiate the assumption, important for understanding the entire work, concerning the sequence of the author's work on the text.²⁾

The above-mentioned stable inclusion of ‘science’ in the vocabulary of the “Introduction” confirms the hypothesis that, although printing of the book began with this fragment (as evidenced not only by page numbering but also by the letters “A” and “A2”, located on the page with the original version of the book title and on the first page of the “Introduction”), see (Hegel 1807, 1 – 3). However, it seems to have been created after the description of the first ‘experiences of consciousness’ because “its main content is an awareness of the nature and peculiarities of the method of growing creation” (Korotkikh 2010, 172). In addition, we find here a generalized characterization of the concepts developed in Chapters I and II, for example, the concepts of concrete negation and scepticism. Thus, the reflection in the Introduction of problems related to the theme of ‘natural consciousness’ as the starting point of the process of justification of ‘philosophy’ supports the conclusion that it was created concurrently with Chapter III or even after the completion of it; Exactly in the III chapter on the ‘theoretical-cognitive’ material the theme of unity of opposites, reflected in the concept of ‘infinity’, gets its solution, which is the base of mentioned Hegelian assessment of the problem of the origin of difference from identity and typical for the first paragraphs of “Introduction” optimism concerning the possibilities of philosophical knowledge. On the other hand, in this fragment, it is not easy to notice any correspondences with the specific content of Chapter IV. First of all, the idea of describing the ‘inner content’ of self-consciousness as a movement of changing ‘forms of sociality’ in which this content is revealed through the construction of “external relations” of the “carrier” of self-consciousness (Korotkikh 2021), which is key for this chapter, has not yet been presented here. The same methodological approach will be used in Chapter V when Hegel proposes an ‘activity-based’ solution to the problem of the method of psychology; in both cases, it is established that the system of ‘external connections’ of the image of consciousness being described is equivalent to its ‘internal content’, and through the disclosure of ‘external connections’ this content can only be understood. Thus, the assumption that the Introduction was written based on comprehension of the ‘experience’ of ‘natural consciousness’ reflected in Chapters I – III, but before work on Chapter IV began, and this is also confirmed by the use of the term ‘science’ reflected in the Introduction.³⁾

c) We must pay attention to the phrase ‘a scientific progression’ (*ein wissenschaftlicher Gang*) in the final part of the “Introduction”; in addition to the regularity and universality of the phenomenological motion already mentioned above, it is also meant to indicate those ‘special conditions’ in which ‘natural consciousness’ finds itself in the ‘phenomenological situation’ modelled by the philosopher, whose evolution leads to the development of the concept of philosophy. What are these conditions? The instance of ‘observing consciousness’ rises above ‘natural consciousness’ as an object of consideration. This instance,

unlike experienced consciousness, sees not only its content (i.e., ‘knowledge of the object’, whereas the object, as ‘natural consciousness’ supposes, was found “accidentally and externally” (Hegel 2019, 82)), but also the emergence of an object in ‘experience’ as a result of the “reversal” mentioned above in connection with the general notion of the method, “a reversal of consciousness” (*die Umkehrung des Bewußtseins*) (Hegel 2019).

The latter consists in the fact that the subject consciousness, having ascertained that its knowledge is not true, accepts as new knowledge what previously had the meaning of ‘in-being’, the object, and simultaneously in this new image of consciousness a new ‘in-being’ appears as a ‘horizon’ for the further movement of “experience. Thus, only ‘we’, that is, the ‘observing consciousness’, the phenomenologist, see the regularity of the emergence of the object, invisible to the experiencing consciousness, which directs “the whole succession of the shapes of consciousness in their necessity” (Hegel 2019).⁴ Thus, ‘scientifically organized experience’” acquires a new dimension: it reflects a natural succession of changes in the images of consciousness, each of which emerges in connection with the “reversal” of consciousness and the emergence of a new ‘in-being’, and this is made possible by the modelling of the ‘phenomenological situation’, the introduction of a special instance, the ‘observing consciousness’, which rises in the movement of experience above the immersed subject consciousness, that is, the same gradually ‘reshaping’ and ‘forming’ itself ‘natural consciousness’ with which experience began. This is why it is misleading to think that ‘natural consciousness’ disappears already at the stage of ‘sense-certainty’; in reality, “forming” itself and in parallel generating more and more complex types of subjectivity, it remains a subject of experience, a bearer of new structures acquired in it, of new certainty, right up to the end of the process of the birth of speculative philosophy (absolute knowledge) (Donskikh 2019).

The regularity of the emergence of subjectivity and the change of images of consciousness (Hegel even uses the term ‘necessity’) is revealed to the ‘observing consciousness’ making this very “path to science” (organized ‘experience’) “already science” (Hegel 2019, 83). Therefore, we think it is more correct to define *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as the first part of Hegel’s system of philosophy and not as an introduction to it. This conclusion seems all the more justified because “in terms of its concept” (that is, in principle, if the ‘experience of consciousness’ is fully revealed), it is capable of containing no less content than “the entire system,” or “the entire realm of spirit’s truth” (Hegel 2019) (the same idea is repeated in the last chapter of *The Phenomenology* (Hegel 2019, 717 – 718)). Thus, if it is an “introduction”, it is such that it (from its special point of view) represents the entire richness of the philosophical system! However, in a sense, *The Phenomenology* might also be defined as an introduction to philosophy, a role it plays precisely concerning ‘natural consciousness’, the ‘soul’,⁵ which by

its nature (since the universe constitutes its ‘truth’) is destined to pass through the full series of stages of its ‘cultural development’, its movement toward the discovery of the depth of the spirit. Moreover, moving forward, “towards its true existence” (Hegel 2019, 83), consciousness will finally reach the point at which it will express “the nature of absolute knowledge itself” (Hegel 2019, 84).

d) Before turning to the problem of what place ‘natural consciousness’ takes in ‘absolute knowledge’ as the completion of the process of substantiation of the concept of philosophy, we note that the most significant for understanding the specificity of philosophical knowledge from the composition of the chapters of *The Phenomenology* following the manifestation of ‘infinity’ was the introductory sections of chapters VI and VII, section VII.C (“Revealed religion”), chapter VIII and the “Preface”. In the first of these fragments, the distinction between “shapes merely of consciousness” and “shapes of a world”, that is, “real spirits, genuine actualities” is indicated (Hegel 2019, 386). In the Jena period of Hegel’s systematic thought evolution, this distinction correlated with the difference between Logic and ‘real philosophical disciplines’ in the planned second part of the System of Science. Chapter VII provides a crucial explanation of the structure of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a path to the discovery of philosophical subjectivity and describes the relationship between history and the theoretical knowledge of history, represented by the philosopher as ‘recollection’, *die Erinnerung*.⁶ Already in the last chapter, Hegel makes crucial remarks (unfortunately too brief, as he was famously in haste working on the last pages of the work) on the relationship between History as a movement of ‘natural consciousness’ and phenomenology as a ‘scientific way’ of understanding this process (and not only its ‘subjective transference’ to the gaze and gesture of the “Fate-Maiden”, in “the gleam of her self-conscious eye” (Hegel 2019, 666 – 667), which was the case in the previous chapter), as a kind of ‘recollection-inwardizing’,⁷ clarifies the specificity of speculative philosophy, which replaces History and *The Phenomenology* as modes of comprehending the Spirit. Finally, in the “Preface”, written after the completion of the main text of the work, Hegel not only gives a final assessment of the problems that were raised in the process of describing the formation of the concept of philosophy in the early stages of the ‘experience of consciousness’ (and thus prepares the reader for its perception), but finally introduces the word ‘philosophy’ itself into the lexicon of *The Phenomenology*, freely using it as an organic element of the narrative.

Finding ourselves in a situation where, out of all this abundance of material within the boundaries of the paper, we need to select the most necessary to determine the role of ‘natural consciousness’ in the process of establishing the notion of philosophy, let us dwell on Hegel’s remarks on ‘self-emptying’”, which appear in the last chapter. Overall, these truly enigmatic sketches suggest that Hegel had not yet decided on the form in which his systematic thought was

to be pursued at the time of the book's completion. Hegel outlines three such 'self-emptying' possibilities (i.e., directions of development of the system of philosophy) here. A return to the beginning of the 'experience of consciousness', that is, just to 'natural consciousness', as well as transitions to 'nature' and to 'history'. The last two paths, as is clear, correspond to the idea of developing 'real philosophical disciplines', which, together with Logic, were supposed, in Hegel's thought, to constitute the second part of the "System of Science", but in the end turned out to be the second and third stages in the unfolding of the philosophical system in the *Encyclopaedia* presented later. For self-knowing spirit, precisely because it grasps its concept, is an immediate selfsameness with itself, which within its distinction is the certainty of the immediate, that is, is sensuous consciousness – the beginning from which we started" (Hegel 2019, 718). What does Hegel see as the reason, even the necessity, "to empty itself of the form of the pure concept" (Hegel 2019) for having attained 'absolute knowledge' of thought? In general terms the answer is that the 'immediacy' of 'equality to itself' always conceals, according to Hegel, an 'infinite negativity,' a complete and infinite mediation through which it can only return to itself; it is like that famous Beethoven's lake surface which in reality conceals the struggle of passions.⁸⁾ However, it is more interesting for us to understand why this first possibility of 'a reversal of consciousness' (that is, a return to 'natural consciousness') is, in Hegel's words, "still incomplete" (Hegel 2019), as it encourages the transition to 'nature' and to 'history', that is, the need for the movement of systemic thought toward the model of the 'encyclopaedic system' is accepted.

Hegel associates this 'imperfection' with the fact that concerning consciousness, the object – as only an object of consciousness – does not obtain 'complete freedom' because it is constituted by consciousness and preserves its dependence on it, i.e., it cannot be regarded as real 'negative', 'limit' concerning consciousness; only abjection as a 'free contingent event' can do it; that is, abjection as nature and spirit. However, does the modern reader always have to agree with how the philosopher himself presented the path of systemic thought? Does not Hegel here confuse 'being-determination' and 'mere indivisible existence', thereby going beyond the boundaries of the supposed 'experience of consciousness' transcendental formulation of the question and essentially finding himself "above the abysses" of naturalism?

As we can see, in this key point for the prospects of constructing a system of philosophy Hegel already determines the preference, the realization of which the *Encyclopaedia* will prove to be. However, the reader who is guided primarily by the immanent logic of the unfolding of thought, sees here, in this 'bifurcation point' of the system formation, the possibility of other variants of developments: after Phenomenology, only Logic, which builds a sequence of

categories equivalent in its content to the sequence of images of consciousness, could be the only continuation of the 'system'; moreover, the indications mentioned above of the philosopher himself on the equivalence of the content of Phenomenology and the future Logic allow to conclude the following. The rejection of the 'imperfection' of the first of the outlined types of renunciation, that is, of the necessity, postulated further by Hegel, of a transition to 'mere indivisible existence', would also permit the identification of Phenomenology with a 'system of philosophy'. By returning to 'natural consciousness' as its beginning, Phenomenology as 'a scientific progression' would rise ("purify itself") to 'absolute knowledge' without requiring any more continuation in the form of other philosophical disciplines. In reality, however, it is precisely reflection on alternative variants of the disclosure of the content of Spirit that will constitute, as is well known, the main subject of Hegel's later search for the image of the system of philosophy. However, these, too, were invariably associated by Hegel with the concept of philosophy developed in *The Phenomenology*, to which 'natural consciousness' was elevated through a completed series of forms of its 'cultural development'. The changes in the understanding of the essence and tasks of philosophy, reflected in the new ('encyclopaedic') conception of the system structure, do not cancel the significance of the search of the adequate image of the philosophical system in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*; it is the idea of philosophy, formed by the end of the Jena period of work and found the final expression in the concluding chapter and "Preface" that has always remained the basis of the later models of philosophical knowledge. As we have seen, such important themes for the Hegelian understanding of philosophy as 'the self-consummating scepticism', 'cultural development', and 'self-emptying' could not have been formed without taking into account 'natural consciousness' as the unchanging subject of spiritual activity leading to 'absolute knowledge'.

Discussion

The analysis of the discussion of the chosen topic should take into account the peculiarities of the language of *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. These include the variability of lexical composition determined by the nature of the 'images of consciousness' that are 'given the word' at this stage of the evolution of 'experience', and, as a consequence, the lack of a stable conceptual structure of the narrative, reminiscent of categorical 'patterns' of *Logic or Encyclopaedia*. Inattention to these features leads to researchers often not noticing the presence of 'natural consciousness' and 'absolute knowledge' as soon as these modes of consciousness take on a new look in the text. In this regard, we should recall G.G. Shpet's wise remark about the language of *The Phenomenology*: "Terminology, clear in application to one stage, turns into a continuous allegory at another" (Spet 1959, XLVI – XLVII).

Among the Russian authors who have avoided such an error, it is necessary to point out the actual work of A.D. Vlasov (1997, 145), which contains separate articles devoted to the “images of consciousness” that interest us. Although it is not possible to agree with all the provisions of these articles, it is important to note that, for example, the scope of ‘natural consciousness’ is not limited to A.D. Vlasov’s ‘sense-certainty’; it extends to the entire ‘first circle’ of *The Phenomenology* – “at the stage of consciousness and self-consciousness” (Vlasov 1997). Following this, he rightly notes the ‘dynamics’ of ‘natural consciousness’ and its development and transition “into other types of subjects” (Vlasov 1997, 146): “The subject of ‘natural consciousness’ has many faces, develops, and each of its images expresses a certain stage of this development” (Vlasov 1997).

In foreign literature, as an equally revealing study (in the form of a complete commentary on *The Phenomenology*), we can call the two-volume H.S. Harris, the content of the two chapters of the first volume is directly related to our topic. This is, first of all, the chapter in which the punctual analysis of ‘sense-certainty’ is given (Harris 1997, 208 – 237), and the chapter devoted to the “Introduction” (Harris 1997, 162– 207); in the last fragment, as we said above, Hegel gives the main assessments of ‘natural consciousness’, based on the experience of chapters I-III of the growing work. Harris defines the sphere of ‘natural consciousness’ as ‘everyday life’, according to which he identifies it directly with “the human soul” (Harris 1997, 172). In general, Harris understands the path of *The Phenomenology* as “the pilgrimage”, to which ‘natural consciousness’ is sent (which is fundamentally important) (Harris 1997, 174), and the history of his “travels” is preserved by “scientific observers” (Harris 1997), that is, the ‘we’ instance already mentioned above, identified by the author (quite traditionally) with some “absolute philosophical point of view.” In general, it should be noted that the thoroughness of the commentary proposed by H.S. Harris is connected with his deep understanding of the connection between *The Phenomenology* and the “encyclopedic system”, which can also be judged by his previous work (Harris 1995). Let us mention in this connection another highly qualified commentary by M. Kettner (1990) on the first chapter of *The Phenomenology*, the content of which H.S. Harris notes with regret that he did not have the opportunity to take into account fully.

Conclusion

The movement of ‘natural consciousness’ towards conceptual (philosophical) knowledge, which is achieved in *The Phenomenology* in the final chapter, is not reduced to the activity with which the understanding of the nature of philosophy is usually associated – to the activity of the mind, to thinking; this movement is a holistic ‘experience’ (*die Erfahrung*), that is, cognition in which the various ‘abilities of the soul’ have not yet been completely separated, even

if the advantage of reason has been revealed already in the first ‘experiences’. Therefore, in order to understand the ‘journey of discovery’ described by Hegel, a special ‘phenomenological vigilance’ is required, catching the transitions from less perfect images of knowledge to more perfect ones, in which the first ones are not fixed but ‘removed’, that is, they continue to live in a new form. Therefore, the original ‘natural consciousness’, acquiring new forms, is preserved throughout the narrative, although the sensory-figurative component of the experience is gradually ‘thinning’. Taking into account the role of ‘natural consciousness’, an individual rooted in a historical and cultural context turns out to be necessary for the process of ‘deciphering’ experience, which, in the end, leads to the formation of the concept of philosophy of absolute knowledge.

The presented approach to the analysis of *The Phenomenology* makes it possible to identify new components of the Hegelian image of philosophical knowledge, which have not yet been given due attention in Hegelian studies. These include: a) understanding of ‘natural consciousness’ as the subject of ‘experience’ throughout its entire course, which is finally revealed in the ‘recollection-inwardizing’ of the spirit, pointing to *The Phenomenology* as the necessary starting point of all the system constructions of the philosopher; b) characterization of the connection of the problems of the “Introduction” with the first three chapters of the work and a more concrete idea of the sequence of Hegel’s work on the text of *The Phenomenology*; c) analysis of the connection of ‘natural consciousness’ and ‘absolute knowledge’ as ‘extreme points’, closing, eventually, into a circular path of formation of the concept of philosophy, with the Hegelian concept of ‘a reversal of consciousness’; d) clarification of the place of Hegel’s sketches about the ‘self-emptying’ of the spirit in ‘absolute knowledge’, taking into account the variety of possibilities for the evolution of Hegel’s system projects after the completion of work on *The Phenomenology*.

NOTES

1. Some scholars, such as J. Stewart (2000, 53 – 63), consider the movement toward self-consciousness, which implies overcoming the ‘natural consciousness’ viewpoint and “with self-consciousness we have now entered into the native realm of truth” (Hegel 2019, 152), to be the central theme of *The Phenomenology* that determines the specificity of Hegel’s speculative philosophy.
2. We have very little information about the history of the emergence of *The Phenomenology*; the evidence that remained in Hegel’s papers after his death has not survived; only from references in letters to F. Niethammer, J. Voss, and others, we can get an approximate idea of this process.
3. Written, printed, and bound before the completion of the main text, this fragment has no title in the corpus of the book (Hegel 1807, 3); “Introduction” (*Einleitung*) appears only in the table of contents printed at the end of the entire work, apparently,

due to the need to distinguish this earlier version of familiarizing the reader with the problems of the work from the later one designated as “Preface” (*Vorrede*). However, the latter is mostly regarded in modern Hegelian studies as an introduction to the system of philosophy as a whole, as Hegel conceived it at the beginning of 1807.

4. We should acknowledge that the role of ‘we’ or ‘observing consciousness’ in Phenomenology still remains not researched enough, although there have been written remarkable works during last decades (Dove 1970; Dove 1983; Marx 1975; Marx 1981; Parry 1988). We should also point out, that the material of I chapter of Phenomenology, which commonly limits active zone of ‘natural consciousness’, was used by W. Wieland who interpreted the content of ‘Sense-certainty’ as a complex dialogue between sense-certainty (considered as the consciousness analyzed) and asking ‘Socrates’ responding character’ marked as ‘we’ (Wieland 1973).
5. In the “Introduction”, one of the few instances in *The Phenomenology* where the word ‘soul’ is used in a direct rather than metaphorical sense, this may be due to stylistic reason of avoiding repeating the expression ‘natural consciousness’, which is certainly here equivalent to ‘soul’; perhaps Hegel thus intentionally contrasts ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’; however, this word in its direct sense is uncharacteristic of *The Phenomenology*.
6. Various aspects of the concept *die Erinnerung* in “Absolute knowledge” are considered in (Lukács 1973; Pöggeler 1973, 331; Ricci 2013); for an analysis of the meaning of *die Erinnerung* for other sections of Hegel’s system of philosophy, see: (Ricci 2013).
7. The necessity of translating Hegel’s *die Erinnerung* with not only ‘recollection’ but also ‘inwardizing’ is pointed out by D.Ph. Verene (1985).
8. J. Hyppolite fairly relates the regularity of the ‘recollection’ in “Absolute knowledge” to the fact that only Spirit possesses history, only in it the past does not disappear, so the comprehension of ‘absolute knowledge’, this most obscure, in his view, image throughout the ‘experience of consciousness’, has to begin already in ‘sense-certainty’ (Hyppolite 1974, 33).

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