

*The Doctrine of Being*

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## WITH WHAT MUST THE BEGINNING OF SCIENCE BE MADE?

It is only in recent times that there has been a new awareness of the difficulty of finding a *beginning* in philosophy, and the reason for this difficulty, and so also the possibility of resolving it, have been discussed in a variety of ways. The beginning of philosophy must be either *something mediated* or *something immediate*, and it is easy to show that it can be neither the one nor the other; so either way of beginning runs into contradiction.<sup>1</sup>

The *principle* of a philosophy also expresses a beginning, of course, but not so much a subjective as an *objective* one, the beginning of *all things*. The principle is a somehow determinate *content* – “water,” “the one,” “nous,” “idea,” or “substance,” “monad,” etc. – or, if it designates the nature of cognition and is therefore meant simply as a criterion rather than an objective determination, as “thinking,” “intuition,” “sensation,” “I,” even “subjectivity,” then here too the interest still lies in the content determination. The beginning as such, on the other hand, as something subjective in the sense that it is an accidental way of introducing the exposition, is left unconsidered, a matter of indifference, and consequently also the need to ask with what a beginning should be made remains of no importance in face of the need for the principle in which alone the interest of *the fact* seems to lie, the interest as to what is the *truth*, the *absolute ground* of everything.

But the modern perplexity about a beginning proceeds from a further need which escapes those who are either busy demonstrating their principle dogmatically or skeptically looking for a subjective criterion against dogmatic philosophizing, and is outright denied by those who begin, like a shot from a pistol, from their inner revelation, from faith, intellectual

<sup>1</sup> There is an allusion here to Fichte. Cf. *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), English trans., *The Science of Knowledge*, Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 93ff. GA, I.2, 255ff.

intuition, etc. and who would be exempt from *method* and *logic*.<sup>2</sup> If earlier abstract thought is at first interested only in the principle as *content*, but is driven as philosophical culture advances to the other side to pay attention to the conduct of the *cognitive process*, then the *subjective* activity has also been grasped as an essential moment of objective truth, and with this there comes the need to unite the method with the content, the *form* with the *principle*. Thus the *principle* ought to be also the beginning, and that *which has priority* for thinking ought to be also the *first* in the process of thinking.

Here we only have to consider how the *logical* beginning appears. The two sides from which it can be taken have already been named, namely either by way of mediation as result, or immediately as beginning proper. This is not the place to discuss the question apparently so important to present-day culture, whether the knowledge of truth is an immediate awareness that begins absolutely, a faith, or rather a mediated knowledge. In so far as the issue allows *passing* treatment, this has already been done elsewhere (in my *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, 3rd edn, in the Prefatory Concept, §§21ff.). Here we may quote from it only this, that *there is* nothing in heaven or nature or spirit or anywhere else that does not contain just as much immediacy as mediation, so that both these determinations prove to be *unseparated* and *inseparable* and the opposition between them nothing real. As for a *scientific discussion*, a case in point is every logical proposition in which we find the determinations of immediacy and mediacy and where there is also entailed, therefore, a discussion of their opposition and their truth. This opposition, when connected to thinking, to knowledge, to cognition, assumes the more concrete shape of immediate or mediated *knowledge*, and it is then up to the science of logic to consider the nature of cognition in general, while the more concrete forms of the same cognition fall within the scope of the science of spirit and the phenomenology of spirit. But to want to clarify the nature of cognition *prior* to science is to demand that it should be discussed *outside* science, and *outside* science this cannot be done, at least not in the scientific manner which alone is the issue here.

A beginning is *logical* in that it is to be made in the element of a free, self-contained thought, in *pure knowledge*; it is thereby *mediated*, for pure knowledge is the ultimate and absolute truth of *consciousness*. We said in the Introduction that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the science of consciousness, its exposition; that consciousness has the *concept* of science,

<sup>2</sup> The allusion here is most likely to Jacobi. Cf. also the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, GW 9, 24.10–12.

that is, pure knowledge, for its result.<sup>3</sup> To this extent, logic has for its presupposition the science of spirit in its appearance, a science which contains the necessity, and therefore demonstrates the truth, of the standpoint which is pure knowledge and of its mediation. In this science of spirit in its appearance the beginning is made from empirical, *sensuous* consciousness, and it is this consciousness which is *immediate* knowledge in the strict sense; there, in this science, is where its nature is discussed. Any other consciousness, such as faith in divine truths, inner experience, knowledge through inner revelation, etc., proves upon cursory reflection to be very ill-suited as an instance of immediate knowledge. In the said treatise, immediate consciousness is also that which in the science comes first and immediately and is therefore a presupposition; but in logic the presupposition is what has proved itself to be the result of that preceding consideration, namely the idea as pure knowledge. *Logic* is the *pure science*, that is, pure knowledge in the full compass of its development. But in that result the idea has the determination of a certainty that has become truth; it is a certainty which, on the one hand, no longer stands over and against a subject matter confronting it externally but has interiorized it, is knowingly aware that the subject matter is itself; and, on the other hand, has relinquished any knowledge of itself that would oppose it to objectivity and would reduce the latter to a nothing; it has externalized this subjectivity and is at one with its externalization.

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Now starting with this determination of pure knowledge, all that we have to do to ensure that the beginning will remain immanent to the science of this knowledge is to consider, or rather, setting aside every reflection, simply to take up, *what is there before us*.

Pure knowledge, thus *withdrawn* into this *unity*, has sublated every reference to an other and to mediation; it is without distinctions and as thus distinctionless it ceases to be knowledge; what we have before us is only *simple immediacy*.

Simple immediacy is itself an expression of reflection; it refers to the distinction from what is mediated. The true expression of this simple immediacy is therefore *pure being*. Just as *pure* knowledge should mean nothing but knowledge as such, so also pure being should mean nothing but *being* in general; *being*, and nothing else, without further determination and filling.

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Being is what makes the beginning here; it is presented indeed as originating through mediation, but a mediation which at the same time sublates

<sup>3</sup> Cf above, 21.32.

itself, and the presupposition is of a pure knowledge which is the result of finite knowledge, of consciousness. But if no presupposition is to be made, if the beginning is itself to be taken *immediately*, then the only determination of this beginning is that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such. There is only present the resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering *thinking as such*. The beginning must then be *absolute* or, what means the same here, must be an abstract beginning; and so there is *nothing* that it may *presuppose*, must not be mediated by anything or have a ground, ought to be rather itself the ground of the entire science. It must therefore be simply *an immediacy*, or rather only *immediacy* itself. Just as it cannot have any determination with respect to an other, so too it cannot have any within; it cannot have any content, for any content would entail distinction and the reference of distinct moments to each other, and hence a mediation. The beginning is therefore *pure being*.

After this simple exposition of what alone first belongs to this simplest of all simples, the logical beginning, we may add the following further reflections which should not serve, however, as elucidation and confirmation of the exposition – this is complete by itself – but are rather occasioned by notions and reflections which may come our way beforehand and yet, like all other prejudices that antedate the science of logic, must be disposed of within the science itself and are therefore to be patiently deferred until then.

The insight that absolute truth must be a result, and conversely, that a result presupposes a first truth which, because it is first, objectively considered is not necessary and from the subjective side is not known – this insight has recently given rise to the thought that philosophy can begin only with something which is *hypothetically* and *problematically* true, and that at first, therefore, philosophizing can be only a quest. This is a view that Reinhold has repeatedly urged in the later stages of his philosophizing,<sup>4</sup> and which must be given credit for being motivated by a genuine interest in the speculative nature of philosophical *beginning*. A critical examination of this view will also be an occasion for introducing a preliminary understanding of what progression in logic generally means, for the view has direct implications for the nature of this advance. Indeed, as portrayed by it, progression in philosophy would be rather a retrogression and a grounding, only by virtue of which it then follows as result that that, with which the beginning was made, was not just an arbitrary assumption but was in fact *the truth*, and *the first truth* at that.

<sup>4</sup> Reinhold, *Beyträge* I (1801), p. 101.

It must be admitted that it is an essential consideration – one which will be found elaborated again within the logic itself – that *progression* is a retreat to the *ground*, to the *origin* and the *truth* on which that with which the beginning was made, and from which it is in fact produced, depends. – Thus consciousness, on its forward path from the immediacy with which it began, is led back to the absolute knowledge which is its innermost *truth*. This truth, the ground, is then also that from which the original first proceeds, the same first which at the beginning came on the scene as something immediate. – It is most of all in this way that absolute spirit (which is revealed as the concrete and supreme truth of all being) comes to be known, as at the *end* of the development it freely externalizes itself, letting itself go into the shape of an *immediate* being – resolving itself into the creation of a world which contains all that fell within the development preceding that result and which, through this reversal of position with its beginning, is converted into something dependent on the result as principle. Essential to science is not so much that a pure immediacy should be the beginning, but that the whole of science is in itself a circle in which the first becomes also the last, and the last also the first.

Conversely, it follows that it is just as necessary to consider as *result* that into which the movement returns as to its *ground*. In this respect, the first is just as much the ground, and the last a derivative; since the movement makes its start from the first and by correct inferences arrives at the last as the ground, this last is result. Further, the *advance* from that which constitutes the beginning is to be considered only as one more determination of the same advance, so that this beginning remains as the underlying ground of all that follows without vanishing from it. The advance does not consist in the derivation of an *other*, or in the transition to a truly other: inasmuch as there is a transition, it is equally sublated again. Thus the beginning of philosophy is the ever present and self-preserving foundation of all subsequent developments, remaining everywhere immanent in its further determinations.

In this advance the beginning thus loses the one-sidedness that it has when determined simply as something immediate and abstract; it becomes mediated, and the line of scientific forward movement consequently turns *into a circle*. – It also follows that what constitutes the beginning, because it is something still undeveloped and empty of content, is not yet truly known at that beginning, and that only science, and science fully developed, is the completed cognition of it, replete with content and finally truly grounded.

But for this reason, because it is as absolute ground that the *result* finally emerges, the progression of this cognition is not anything provisory, still

problematic and hypothetical, but must be determined through the nature of the matter at issue and of the content itself. Nor is the said beginning an arbitrary and only temporary assumption,<sup>5</sup> or something which seems to be an arbitrary and tentative presupposition but of which it is subsequently shown that to make it the starting point was indeed the right thing to do; this is not as when we are instructed to make certain constructions in order to aid the proof of a geometrical theorem, and only in retrospect, in the course of the proof, does it become apparent that we did well to draw precisely these lines and then, in the proof itself, to begin by comparing them or the enclosed angles – though the line-drawing or the comparing themselves escape conceptual comprehension.

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So we have just given, right within science itself, the *reason* why in pure science the beginning is made with pure being. This pure being is the unity into which pure knowledge returns, or if this knowledge, as form, is itself still to be kept distinct from its unity, then pure being is also its content. It is in this respect that this *pure being*, this absolute immediate, is just as absolutely mediated. However, *just because* it is here as the beginning, it is just as essential that it should be taken in the one-sidedness of being purely immediate. If it were not this pure indeterminacy, if it were determined, it would be taken as something mediated, would already be carried further than itself: a determinate something has the character of an *other with respect to* a first. It thus lies in the *nature of a beginning itself* that it should be being and nothing else. There is no need, therefore, of other preparations to enter philosophy, no need of further reflections or access points.

Nor can we derive a *more specific determination* or a *more positive* content for the beginning of philosophy from the fact that it is such a beginning.<sup>6</sup> For here, at the beginning, where the fact itself is not yet at hand, philosophy is an empty word, a received and yet unjustified notion. Pure knowledge yields only this negative determination, namely that the beginning ought to be *abstract*. If pure being is taken as the *content* of pure knowledge, then the latter must step back from its content, allowing it free play and without determining it further. – Or again, inasmuch as pure being is to be considered as the unity into which knowledge has collapsed when at the highest point of union with its objectification, knowledge has then disappeared into this unity, leaving behind no distinction from it and hence no determination for it. – Nor is there anything else present, any content whatever, that could be used to make a more determinate beginning with it.

<sup>5</sup> i.e. as Reinhold thought.

<sup>6</sup> The allusion is still to Reinhold.

But, it may be said, the determination of *being* assumed so far as the beginning can also be let go, so that the only requirement would be that a pure beginning should be made. Nothing would then be at hand except the *beginning* itself, and we must see what this would be. – This position could be suggested also for the benefit of those who are either not comfortable, for whatever reason, with beginning with being and even less with the transition into nothing that follows from being, or who simply do not know how else to make a beginning in a science except by *presupposing* a *representation* which is subsequently *analyzed*, the result of the analysis then yielding the first determinate concept in the science. If we also want to test this strategy, we must relinquish every particular object that we may intend, since the beginning, as the beginning of *thought*, is meant to be entirely abstract, entirely general, all form with no content; we must have nothing, therefore, except the representation of a mere beginning as such. We have, therefore, only to see what there is in this representation.

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As yet there is nothing, and something is supposed to become. The beginning is not pure nothing but a nothing, rather, from which something is to proceed; also being, therefore, is already contained in the beginning. Therefore, the beginning contains both, being and nothing; it is the unity of being and nothing, or is non-being which is at the same time being, and being which is at the same time non-being.

Further, being and nothing are present in the beginning as *distinguished*; for the beginning points to something other – it is a non-being which refers to an other; that which begins, as yet *is* not; it only reaches out to being. The being contained in the beginning is such, therefore, that it distances itself from non-being or sublates it as something which is opposed to it.

But further, that which begins already *is*, but *is* also just as much *not* yet. The opposites, being and non-being, are therefore in immediate union in it; or the beginning is their *undifferentiated unity*.

An analysis of the beginning would thus yield the concept of the unity of being and non-being – or, in a more reflected form, the concept of the unity of differentiated and undifferentiated being – or of the identity of identity and non-identity.<sup>7</sup> This concept could be regarded as the first, purest, that is, most abstract, definition of the absolute – as it would indeed be if the issue were just the form of definitions and the name of the absolute. In this sense, just as such an abstract concept would be the first definition of the absolute, so all further determinations and developments would be only

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<sup>7</sup> This is Hegel's earliest formulation of his position. Cf. *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801), p. 156. GW 4, 6.23.7–21.

more determinate and richer definitions of it. But let those who are not satisfied with *being* as the beginning, since being passes over into nothing and what emerges is the unity of the two – let them consider what is more likely to satisfy them: this beginning that begins with the representation of the *beginning* and an analysis of it (an analysis that is indeed correct yet equally leads to the unity of being and non-being) or a beginning which makes being the beginning.

But, regarding this strategy, there is still a further observation to be made. The said analysis presupposes that the representation of the beginning is known; its strategy follows the example of other sciences. These presuppose their object and presume that everyone has the same representation of it and will find in it roughly the same determinations which they have collected here or there, through analysis, comparison, and sundry argumentation, and they then offer as its representations. But that which constitutes the absolute beginning must likewise be something otherwise known; now, if it is something concrete and hence in itself variously determined, then this *connectedness* which it is in *itself* is presupposed as a known; the connectedness is thereby adduced as something *immediate*, which however it is *not*; for it is connectedness only as a connection of distinct elements and therefore contains *mediation* within itself. Further, the accidentality and the arbitrariness of the analysis and the specific mode of determination affect the concrete internally. Which determinations are elicited depends on what each individual *happens to discover* in his immediate accidental representation. The connection contained within a concrete something, within a synthetic unity, is *necessary* only in so far as it is not found already given but is produced rather by the spontaneous return of the moments back into this unity, a movement which is the opposite of the analytical procedure that occurs rather within the subject and is external to the fact itself.

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Here we then have the precise reason why that with which the beginning is to be made cannot be anything concrete, anything containing a connection *within its self*. It is because, as such, it would presuppose within itself a process of mediation and the transition from a first to an other, of which process the concrete something, now become a simple, would be the result. But the beginning ought not itself to be already a first *and* an other, for anything which is in itself a first *and* an other implies that an advance has already been made. Consequently, that which constitutes the beginning, the beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalyzable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy; and therefore *as being*, as complete emptiness.



If, impatient with this talk of an abstract beginning, one should say that the beginning is to be made, not with the beginning, but directly with the *fact* itself, well then, this subject matter is nothing else than that empty being. For what this subject matter is, that is precisely what ought to result only in the course of the science, what the latter cannot presuppose to know in advance.

On any other form otherwise assumed in an effort to have a beginning other than empty being, that beginning would still suffer from the same defects. Let those who are still dissatisfied with this beginning take upon themselves the challenge of beginning in some other way and yet avoiding such defects.

But we cannot leave entirely unmentioned a more original beginning to philosophy which has recently gained notoriety, the beginning with the "I."<sup>8</sup> It derived from both the reflection that all that follows from the first truth must be deduced from it, and the need that this *first* truth should be something with which one is already acquainted, and even more than just acquainted, something of which one is *immediately certain*. This proposed beginning is not, as such, an accidental representation, or one which might be one thing to one subject and something else to another. For the "I," this immediate consciousness of the self, appears from the start to be both itself an immediate something and something with which we are acquainted in a much deeper sense than with any other representation; true, anything else known belongs to this "I," but it belongs to it as a content which remains distinct from it and is therefore accidental; the "I," by contrast, is the simple certainty of its self. But the "I" is, as such, *at the same time* also a concrete, or rather, the "I" is the most concrete of all things – the consciousness of itself as an infinitely manifold world. Before the "I" can be the beginning and foundation of philosophy, this concreteness must be excised, and this is the absolute act by virtue of which the "I" purifies itself and makes its entrance into consciousness as abstract "I." But this pure "I" is now *not* immediate, is not the familiar, ordinary "I" of our consciousness to which everyone immediately links science. Truly, that act of excision would be none other than the elevation to the standpoint of pure knowledge in which the distinction between subject and object has disappeared. But as thus immediately demanded, this elevation is a subjective postulate; before it proves itself as a valid demand, the progression of the concrete "I" from immediate consciousness to pure knowledge must be demonstratively exhibited within the "I" itself, through its own necessity. Without this

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<sup>8</sup> The reference here is to Fichte. Cf. *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), §1.

objective movement, pure knowledge, also when defined as *intellectual intuition*, appears as an arbitrary standpoint, itself one of those empirical *states* of consciousness for which everything depends on whether someone, though not necessarily somebody else, *discovers* it within himself or is able to produce it there. But inasmuch as this pure “I” must be essential, pure knowledge – and pure knowledge is however one which is only posited in individual consciousness through an absolute act of self-elevation, is not present in it immediately – we lose the very advantage which was to derive from this beginning of philosophy, namely that it is something with which everyone is well acquainted, something which everyone finds within himself and to which he can attach further reflection; that pure “I,” on the contrary, in its abstract, essential nature, is to ordinary consciousness an unknown, something that the latter does not find within itself. What comes with it is rather the disadvantage of the illusion that we are speaking of something supposedly very familiar, the “I” of empirical self-consciousness, whereas at issue is in fact something far removed from the latter. Determining pure knowledge as “I” acts as a continuing reminder of the subjective “I” whose limitations should rather be forgotten; it leads to the belief that the propositions and relations which result from the further development of the “I” occur within ordinary consciousness and can be found pre-given there, indeed that the whole issue is about this consciousness. This mistake, far from bringing clarity, produces instead an even more glaring and bewildering confusion; among the public at large, it has occasioned the crudest of misunderstandings.

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Further, as regards the *subjective* determinateness of the “I” in general, pure knowledge does remove from it the restriction that it has when understood as standing in unsurmountable opposition to an object. But for this reason it would be at least *superfluous* still to hold on to this subjective attitude by determining pure knowledge as “I.” For this determination not only carries with it that troublesome duality of subject and object; on closer examination, it also remains a subjective “I.” The actual development of the science that proceeds from the “I” shows that in the course of it the object has and retains the self-perpetuating determination of an *other* with respect to the “I”; that therefore the “I” from which the start was made does not have the pure knowledge that has truly overcome the opposition of consciousness, but is rather still entangled in appearance.

In this connection, there is the further essential observation to be made that, although the “I” might well be determined to be *in itself* pure knowledge or intellectual intuition and declared to be the beginning, in science we are not concerned with what is present *in itself* or as *something inner*, but

with the external existence<sup>9</sup> rather of what in *thought* is inner and with the *determinateness* which this inner assumes in that existence. But whatever *externalization there might be* of<sup>10</sup> intellectual intuition *at the beginning* of science, or – if the subject matter of science is called the eternal, the divine, the absolute – of the eternal or absolute, this cannot be anything else than a first, immediate, simple determination. Whatever richer name be given to it than is expressed by mere being, the only legitimate consideration is how such an absolute enters into *discursive*<sup>11</sup> knowledge and the enunciation of this knowledge. Intellectual intuition might well be the violent rejection of mediation and of demonstrative, external reflection. However, anything which it says over and above simple immediacy would be something concrete, and this concrete would contain a diversity of determinations in it. But, as already remarked, the enunciation and exposition of this concrete something is a process of mediation which starts with *one* of the determinations and proceeds to another, even though this other returns to the first – and this is a movement which, moreover, is not allowed to be arbitrary or assertoric. Consequently, that from which the *beginning* is made in any such exposition is not something itself concrete but only the simple immediacy from which the movement proceeds. Besides, what is lacking if we make something concrete the beginning is the demonstration which the combination of the determinations contained in it requires.

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Therefore, if in the expression of the absolute, or the eternal, or God (and *God* would have the perfectly undisputed right that the beginning be made with him), if in the intuition or the thought of them, *there is more* than there is in pure being, then this *more* should first *emerge* in a knowledge which is discursive<sup>12</sup> and not figurative;<sup>13</sup> as rich as what is implicitly contained in knowledge may be, the determination that *first* emerges in it is something simple, for it is only in the immediate that no advance is yet made from one thing to an other. Consequently, whatever in the richer representations of the absolute or God might be said or implied over and above being, all this is at the beginning only an empty word and only being; this simple determination which has no further meaning besides, this empty something, is as such, therefore, the beginning of philosophy.

This insight is itself so simple that this beginning is as beginning in no need of any preparation or further introduction, and the only possible purpose of this preliminary disquisition regarding it was not to lead up to it but to dispense rather with all preliminaries.

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<sup>9</sup> external existence = *Dasein*.

<sup>10</sup> whatever *externalization there might be* of = *was vom . . . da ist*.

<sup>11</sup> *denkende*. <sup>12</sup> *denkendes*.

<sup>13</sup> *vorstellendes*.