

# The Evolution of Content and Form: Hegel's Definition of Specific Philosophical Department

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**Abstract:** How many specific departments of philosophy and the relationship between philosophy and empirical science have always been the core issues of philosophy. In general, the relationship between philosophy and empirical science is a relationship between universality and particularity, content and form. Philosophy represents a kind of flatulent universality. As a necessary form, it often lacks the content of reality and contingency. At the same time, empirical science as a kind of sundry particularity requires philosophy provides its necessity form as a guarantee. How many specific departments in philosophy exist, how many forms of cognition in empirical science will exist. Therefore, the alternating evolution of content and form not only embodies the definition of philosophy at different levels within itself but also the cognition and transcendence of external empirical science.

## 1. Introduction

Hegel emphasized in "The Logic of Hegel." He said: "The process of development of consciousness seems to be limited to form at first, but at the same time it contains the process of content development, which constitutes the object of each special department of philosophy. But the process of content development must follow the development of content, because the relationship of content and form is a potential relationship (with form). Therefore, the explanation of the form of thinking is more difficult, because there are many specific materials belonging to different special departments of philosophy, which are partly discussed in the introduction of the philosophical system"[1]. What Hegel emphasizes here is the dialectical relationship between form and content. The "Phenomenology of Mind" studies the form that using absolute ideas to develop ourselves, while the "Logic" is to study the absolute idea itself, so in the "Phenomenology of Mind", each link in the process itself is the stipulation of the absolute idea itself, not just a form. Therefore, the absolute idea produces many forms through the regulation itself, and its content exists earlier than the form. Through the continuous evolution between the forms, the content itself is also constantly enriched. That is to say, in order to fully cognize the form, the content must be the basis.

## 2. The form of Consciousness Development: the Evolution of Content

In general, the relationship between philosophy and empirical science is a relationship between universality and particularity, content and form. Philosophy is based on concept and requires inevitability to get the universality cognition of things, but it lacks the rich content of reality. Empirical science is based on experience, with experience induction and intellectual interpretation as the core. Although its purpose is also to identify the truth, it can only cognize the form of truth, not the content. So, empirical science needs philosophy, and philosophy also needs empirical science. The content the two trying to cognize is the same. The difference is the change of the category and the change of cognitive style. Although in real life, empirical science often regards

philosophy as a dispensable thing, ignoring the value of philosophy, philosophy should not treat empirical science in this way and it is necessary to recognize the value of empirical science in the cognition of the particularity of things, to use the cognition of the level of empirical science to enrich its cognition of universality, and to dialectically view the traditional formal logic and the old metaphysical thinking methods on which empirical science depends. It is necessary to preserve, cognize and absorb them for absolute cognition, and to use discerning logic to promote, discard and transform them.

As a pure reason, philosophy is based on experience. The experience here is not only the empirical investigation that people take on external things, but the direct consciousness and abstract reasoning based on thoughts. Although philosophy only takes itself as cognitive objects, and always recognizes ourselves according to the inevitability. However, this requirement is potentially premised on the development of empirical science with the cognition of representation as a task. If there is no empirical cognition of external things, then the cognition of philosophy to the world can only stay at the level of directness and contingency, and unable to reach the inevitable cognition, and the thinking can not be satisfied by itself. In connection with the development of the history of philosophy, we can accurately cognize the meaning that Hegel emphasized at the beginning of this section. The experience emphasized by Hegel is a true examination of thinking mind to external things. This is also the requirement of modern science and modern philosophy for themselves. Hegel saw modern science and philosophy turned to the aspect of the infinite amount of material in the phenomenal world, clearly distinguishing them from the Greek philosophy attached to the purely rational investigation. The reason is that thinking always exceeds the natural. The feeling of consciousness, further speaking, thinking cognition itself, stipulates that its own progress will never be limited to the cognition of its own directness, and its arbitrariness, which is often beyond its own to the purely uncomplicated realm. Therefore, the turn of Greek philosophy to modern philosophy is not created by a creator like Descartes, we can only say that Descartes first saw the nature of thinking, because this kind of turn is inevitable.

The development of philosophy requires empirical science, and empirical science also requires philosophy. As a self-discipline and a self-conscious initiative spirit, philosophy lacks the cognition of the rich experience of the phenomenal world. Empirical science gives philosophy a confidence that frees philosophy from the swamp of abstract universality, and elevates the direct, ready-made, and contingent representational knowledge in empirical science to its own concept of freedom. That is to say, philosophy develops the potential truth in the empirical science into reality. The cognition of the empirical science is not the whole of the real truth, or it is rather a part of the whole, and the whole truth can only be cognized by philosophy. This dialectical relationship between philosophy and empirical science can be explained as that, on the one hand, philosophy absorbs and stipulates the representational representation of things in empirical science through thinking, on the other hand, empirical science makes itself cognize truth through philosophical speculation and makes things develop only according to the inevitability of the thing itself. Therefore, philosophy is inseparable from empirical science, and it is in the process of negating and transcending empirical science all the time, not always affirms and accepts the empirical science.

The relationship between empirical science and philosophy can also be expressed as a dialectical relationship between directness and indirectness from another perspective. From the perspective of common sense, empirical science is mastered as a kind of direct knowledge. Philosophy is based on empirical science and seems that there is no philosophy without empirical science, which is always defined as an indirect knowledge. However, from the perspective of self-conscious and self-discipline with pure thinking, the order of thinking is reversed. Philosophy always treats itself as the basis and object. It always serves as a kind of direct knowledge cognition and reflection on itself. This is a kind of advanced rational intuition. And empirical science is the result of philosophical thinking itself, and is an indirect knowledge with pure thinking as its content. These two ways of thinking seem to be opposite and contradictory, but the two are only different in form, and the content of their cognition is actually the same. The key here is to clearly understand the directness and indirect dialectics of rational thinking: everything can be directly recognized and

mastered by people, and people often overlook that any direct existence is taking indirect links as intermediaries. Whether is God with profound rational connotation or pure materials like flowers and trees, its external form is direct, and its content is an indirect knowledge that requires people to negate the external form. God as infinity is a denial and transcendence of all finite existence. People often first recognize the finite things in the phenomenal world and then recognize the existence of God. That is to say, God absolutely taking limited existence of the phenomenal world as the intermediary exists in the empirical consciousness, and transcends the empirical consciousness all the time, so we cannot equate God with a limited empirical consciousness, because this absolute knowledge can only be realized by negating direct empirical consciousness and sensory experience. Before this, knowledge was only directly realized by people in the empirical consciousness, and there was no conscious independence at all.

### **3. As the Whole of Truth: Philosophy's Understanding of Itself**

Philosophy itself is a unity of circles, each of which exists as a whole. The reason why Hegel defines philosophy as a circle is because philosophy is always the spirit of self-discipline and self-conscious. The process of philosophical understanding itself is to constantly return to query itself, that is, to constantly set up its own antithesis, through the sublation of the antithesis and the transcendence, from the original pure form without content, to the dichotomy and opposition of form and content, and finally returning to the concept of both is developed to the absolute concept. The existence of each single circle is only a kind of existence. It is only because of the particularity that it becomes a circle as a whole. In fact, there is only one true circle, that is, pure reason itself as universality. As soon as each single circle start thinking and recognizing itself, its self existence will be broken and return to the whole of the idea to build a larger circle. So, from a static point of view, the idea itself is indeed a large circle composed of countless single circles, in which each single circle exists as a whole. However, from the dynamic point of view, circle only have pure reason itself, because countless single circles are constantly returning to pure reason under the influence of thinking, and together constitute the whole of the idea. Obviously, philosophy is not only a circle, but also a rising spiral. Philosophy always goes transcended itself when it recognizes itself. For example, the process of absolute idea transcended itself is the process of natural philosophy and spiritual philosophy. Hegel emphasizes: "Truth is its own completion process. It is such a circle, which indicates that its destination is its purpose and its destination is its start. And it will become real only when it realizes and reaches its destination." [2] Therefore, truth is an in-itself and for-itself idea, a closed circle. Any understanding of the formalization and subjectivization of ideas will turn the truth into a rigid dogma, ignoring its inner spirit. Only the movement is real, and the stillness can only be the phenomenon of rigidity.

Marx emphasized: "The sublation of self-alienation and self-alienation walk on the same path." [4] Philosophy is a whole, there is no beginning of any form, and there is no any special department that exists independently. The true science, that is, philosophy, is an absolute knowledge that always takes itself as the cognitive object. It is the absolute spirit of self-conscious and self-denial. Therefore, for the division of special internal departments of philosophy itself, only when we fully cognize the content of the idea can we truly master it, any understanding of the formalization of philosophy can only understand the empirical science that Hegel strongly criticizes, which lost speculative connotation philosophy contains. Then, a crucial question raises, how many special departments there are in philosophy and its proof. In fact, Hegel has already stated this issue in this section. He clearly pointed out that the division of each special department of philosophy is only a hypothesis at first, but as a spirit that can think and act, idea is a pure thinking in which thinking and existence are absolutely identical. Therefore, the idea can completely sublimate this preliminary hypothesis, and develop this hypothesis to reality. Because Hegel always stood in the rational and intuitive position of absolute transcendence, he directly mastered the logic of the pure thinking movement itself, so he was able to pre-inform the existence of various special departments in philosophy in the introduction. But his assertion is not a rational arbitrariness. On the contrary, he is to stand in the position of pure thinking to prove the inevitable existence of three special

departments—logic, natural philosophy, and spiritual philosophy. It must not be understood as a scholastic philosophical ontological argument.

Logic is an in-itself and for-itself science of research idea. Simply speaking, it studies abstract or direct pure thinking itself. Because in the stage of logic, pure thinking has not yet actualized itself, or materialize, it can only be said to be an abstract form of thinking. But this abstraction is not the usual abstraction of real existence in the intellectual meaning. This abstraction simply cognizes the opposition of thinking and existence, the abstraction of thinking as a stiff concept. But the abstraction of research and cognition in logic is an objective, absolute abstraction, and what is known is the abstract thinking hidden in the thing itself. This kind of abstraction is alive because it can progress from abstraction to concreteness, from abstract ideas in logic to existence as nature and spirit, which the abstraction of intellectuality level cannot reach. Obviously, the process of idea thinking itself in logic is also the process of purely thinking and self-discipline. Pure thinking of abstraction is in itself, because it is directly realized by itself, but thinking does not stop there. It will further recognize and deny its direct existence, and thus develop the in-itself thinking into the in-itself and for-itself absolute spirit. That is to say, what logic shows is a dialectical movement about how does abstract pure thinking built itself from in-itself to in-itself and for-itself step by step. Therefore, the content of logic itself is not only a pure thinking, but also a full consciousness of pure ideas for their own potential spirit. Without logic interpreting and understanding the idea itself, natural philosophy and spiritual philosophy will not become a pure reality. Therefore, Hegel believes that logic is the soul of his entire philosophical system. Obviously, this is not a random assertion, but has a profound rational foundation.

The second special department of philosophy is the natural philosophy. It is a science studying the idea of alienation or externalization (*Entäußerung*). In simple terms, it studies the *Anderssein* form of absolute idea. Obviously, the concept of nature here is not the nature that usually understood by people in terms of human intellectual position. The usual understanding of nature of people is only the cognition that arbitrarily thinks human beings and nature are opposed. The basis of epistemology is still the dichotomy and opposition between thinking and existence. This cognition of nature itself is undoubtedly very rough and shallow. Hegel's cognition of nature is always to cognize and treat nature at the level of absolute philosophy, because he clearly pointed out: "The in-itself idea according to its unity with itself, is intuition and intuitive idea is nature. The idea is nature." [3], which means that nature is the inevitable result of cognition and self-discipline. And here comes a problem, that is: nature comes from the thinking and cognition of absolute idea itself, but why should it emphasize that nature is the *Anderssein* of absolute idea? Understanding this question is the key to understanding Hegel's natural concept. First of all, we must clearly recognize that the so-called nature is the *Anderssein* of absolute idea, not to say that nature and absolute ideas are irrelevant, but emphasize that absolute ideas do not know themselves in nature and don't have a self-conscious cognition about the existence of themselves. The consciousness has not yet reached a level of consciousness, so the absolute idea is only a kind of alienation and *Anderssein* in nature, but not a pure and inevitable cognition. Secondly, we must not equate the absolute idea of self-conscious in natural philosophy with the concept of existence in logic. There are two reasons for this. First, the concept of existence in logic is only a direct cognition of its own. To be precise, it only cognizes its own primary form and lacks real content, so the concept of existence is cavernous and poor. The concept of nature is just the opposite. It is the inevitable progress of absolute idea thinking itself. It is the absolute spiritual reality. It is rich in content and diverse in form. It is not the same as the concept of existence as beginning. The two are not in the same concept level. Second, nature is a kind of real existence and existence is a purely abstract existence. Nature is thought and grasped as the whole of absolute idea by thinking, and existence is only a link of the ontology of logic stage. Therefore, we can accurately and clearly say that nature is similar to the essentialism stage of logic, which is always in the external state of absolute ideas, but this does not mean that nature and absolute ideas are incompatible with each other, but that nature only regard itself as a direct in-itself existence when it started thinking and knowing itself, and it has not yet realized its own potential pure thinking. Therefore, nature is the absolute idea of

alienation, because it has not fully cognized itself. This process is not the arbitrary fabrication of Hegel, but the inevitability movement of thinking to cognize itself. It is completely consistent with Hegel's understanding of the pure thinking movement itself in logic. The two are consistent.

The third special department of philosophy is spiritual philosophy. Compared with the objects and characteristics of logic and natural philosophy, it is the result of the unity of opposites of the two. Spiritual philosophy is a science whose research idea returns from its alienation to itself. That is to say, spiritual philosophy is the inevitable return of its absolute idea to its pure form hidden in natural philosophy. It is both in-itself and for-itself, it unifies the spirit of in-itself existence in the logic and the for-itself existence in natural philosophy and rises to an idea that constantly develops towards both in-itself and for-itself direction. Nature is the absolute idea of alienation and *Anderssein*. To be more specific, it is the *Anderssein* of logic and spirit. Natural philosophy is not the destination of absolute idea thinking. Nature is still a kind of alienation. The absolute idea will never stay in its own and alienation, that is, nature. It must return to itself from this external thinking. While returning to itself, thinking establishes all stages of natural philosophy and can subdue and transcend it, and constantly return to its pure form. The completion of this movement declares the emergence of its purely realistic spirit, and it transitions itself to a more advanced form of existence, that is, spiritual philosophy. Therefore, the spirit of pure freedom is the premise of nature. The nature without spirit cannot be understood by people. For example, the heavens advocated by Chinese philosophy which lacks spirit can only lead people to a mystery and nothingness. It can be seen that the idea of the unity of heaven and man that Chinese philosophy has always been proud of does not go beyond the understanding of natural simplicity, and there is not much rational connotation in it. It is worth noting that although the spirit develops from nature, it does not mean that nature exists independently of the spirit. The relationship between spirit and nature is only a logical connection. The spirit is hidden in nature. When the idea goes beyond itself from nature, it develops the hidden spirit into reality. Obviously, the process of this speculative movement is beyond time. To be precise, it is not subject to time and space. Therefore, it is an absolute movement that absolute idea using to know and regulate itself.

#### 4. Conclusion

Marx once said that Hegel's "The Phenomenology of Mind (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*)" is the real birthplace and secret of Hegel's philosophy[5]. Although philosophy is divided into three special departments (logic, natural philosophy, spiritual philosophy), these three departments are not equal and juxtaposed, but a transition to a more advanced form. Therefore, Hegel clearly emphasizes in this section that the science of these individual departments, such as logic, is not the only form of the direct existence of idea. The other way in which the idea reveals itself are natural philosophy and spiritual philosophy. That is to say, each way in which the idea reveals itself proves that it is also a transitional link between the idea cognition and the self-discipline itself. The basis for the division of special department of philosophy is not according to the time but the logic. Logic is only a direct cognition of the idea to itself, which can only recognize the abstract direct form and cannot really recognize its clear content. Its idea that taking itself as basis and cognitive objects will never be obsessed with formal satisfaction. It must go to pursue an absolute, inevitable content. Therefore, the idea progresses from logic to natural philosophy. If the idea in logic is in-itself, then the idea in natural philosophy is for-itself, because it is always the externality of the idea itself. It through investigation of existence that seemingly external to the idea makes the ideas hidden in itself appear as a content, which is real and continuously enriching the idea. But the idea is always the absolute identity of thinking and existence, content and form. Therefore, the idea will never stay in an alienation or external state, it must require the thinking to return to its absolute form, digest the rich content of natural philosophy and rose it to a pure form. Therefore, the idea has evolved from natural philosophy to spiritual philosophy, and has raised the in-itself idea into an in-itself and for-itself pure thinking. It unites the purely abstract form recognized and investigated in logic and the rich content recognized in natural philosophy, start from the existence and return to the existence of being as existence, thus proving that it is an absolutely perfect circle without any

hypothesis and the beginning.

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