

## GATHERING AND DISPERSING: THE ABSOLUTE SPIRIT IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the meaning and being of the absolute spirit in Hegel's thought by reflecting through the idea that spirit is the activity and being of gathering through dispersal. In Hegel's thought gathering and dispersing are the primary movements through which spirit engages in the processes of its absolute self-cognition, the processes, that is, that underpin the eternal becoming of communal being. Gathering and dispersing thus define the pulsating movement of the absolute spirit in all its facets.

**KEYWORDS:** Hegel; Gathering; Dispersing; Absolute

The subsistence of the community is its continuous, eternal becoming, which is grounded in the fact that spirit is an eternal process of self-cognition, dividing itself into the finite flashes of light of individual consciousness, and then re-collecting and gathering itself up out of this finitude—inasmuch as it is in the finite consciousness that the process of knowing spirit's essence takes place and that the divine self-consciousness thus arises. Out of the foaming ferment of finitude, spirit rises up fragrantly.<sup>1</sup>

How might the reader of Hegel's system prepare to engage with 'spirit's eternal process of self-cognition'? How might the finitude of one's individual consciousness come to form part of the story of spirit's 'recollecting and gathering itself' so as to ground 'the eternal becoming' of 'the community'? In what follows I elaborate the ideas of gathering and dispersing as a way of preparing to engage with Hegel's absolute spirit.<sup>2</sup>

My purpose is not to develop an argument to the conclusion that we should under-

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1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. III *Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, 3 vols., Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, § 233 n.191 (henceforth LPR III). I would like to thank Paul Ashton for drawing this passage to my attention.

2. I would like to express my appreciation to my colleagues Jorge Reyes, Paul Ashton and Toula Nicolacopoulos for our many discussions on this topic.

stand the absolute spirit in terms of its powers of dispersal and gathering but instead immanently to approach the difficult question of the meaning and being of the absolute spirit in Hegel's thought by reflecting through the idea that spirit is the activity and being of gathering through dispersal. To appreciate the role of the absolute spirit by way of preparation for reading Hegel's system I will elaborate its links to the idea of the gathering worked out from three different angles in varying degrees of complexity. In the first section of the paper I approach the tentative formulation of a definition of the absolute spirit by association with the idea of 'the gathering-we' and its key manifestations in the history of the western world as a philosophical project. In the second section I approach the absolute spirit's gathering power through the analysis of the implications of the command to finite spirits to 'know thyself' and in the final section I approach the absolute spirit through the gathering and dispersing activity in the logical inter-relations of its moments of universality, particularity and individuality. I take the view that this sort of exercise positions the thinker to appreciate the immanent connection between the unfolding of the absolute spirit in Hegel's system and the fundamental work of spirit understood in the terms of the power of gathering and the activity of gathering finite spirits. I contend that in the absence of this positioning the thinker understandably fails to engage fully with the categories of universality, particularity and individuality as a complex differentiated unity that informs the absolute self-determination.<sup>3</sup>

## I. APPROACHING A DEFINITION OF THE ABSOLUTE SPIRIT THROUGH THE MEANING AND BEING OF THE GATHERING-WE

From a speculative perspective 'the gathering-we' is fundamental for humans as thinking beings. For Hegel the gathering-we is the 'community of minds'.<sup>4</sup> For the poet, Tasos Livaditis, it is the 'great mystery': 'the beautiful mystery of being alone, the mystery of the two, or the great mystery of the gathering of us all'.<sup>5</sup> The gathering-we is the 'voyage into the open, where nothing is below or above us, and we stand in solitude with ourselves alone'.<sup>6</sup> This aloneness is the universal opening in which the gathering-we

3. To give just one example of a common failing in this regard, Michael Theunissen maintains that the question of the mediation of the particularity of the individual with an objective universal that has not abandoned the universality of inter-subjective relations in favour of the universality of an objective order that has removed all trace of inter-subjectivity remains 'the unsolved problem of Hegel's philosophy of right' despite Hegel's intentions to the contrary. Michael Theunissen, 'The Repressed Intersubjectivity in Hegel's Philosophy of Right', in Cornell, D., Rosenfeld, M., Carlson, D.G. (eds.), *Hegel and Legal Theory*, New York and London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 3-63, p. 63. Yet because Theunissen's critique presupposes reflective conditions that conflate what I refer to as the absolute power of gathering with the activity of gathering finite beings it is consequently blind to the fact that with the triadic structure of objectivity as a syllogistic unity the objective universality defining the organization of Hegel's ethical state does not erase but coheres with the differentiated universality of inter-subjective relations.

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, New York, Oxford, 1977, ¶ 69.

5. T. Livadites, *Small Book for Large Dreams* (Greek) Athens, Kethros, 1987, pp. 16-17. Translation from the Greek by Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos.

6. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic (1830), with the Zusätze: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. Theodore F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, Indianapolis, Hackett,

unfolds and re-folds as alone. The gathering-we is thus an infinite intensifying in the limitless stillness of its immediacy. It is 'self-moving self-sameness' (PS ¶ 21). The gathering-we is pulsating; it implodes in its formlessness in order to (re)create form out of itself.

*Towards a First Definition of Absolute Spirit*

If the gathering-we happens as absolute power it also happens as love. Hegel speaks of 'free power' as 'free love' and 'boundless blessedness' (SL 603). The poetic word insists that 'whatever we don't love does not exist' or that 'we dwell, not where we are, but where we love'.<sup>7</sup> As love, the gathering-we is perhaps not only the axiomatic starting point of philosophy but also of communal life itself, as well as their point of return. Moreover, in the absoluteness of its all-embracing aloneness, the happening of the gathering-we is potentially global. That is, in its opening the whole world gathers as the gathering that it is in this most powerful of openings that the gathering-we is. Everything, nature included, is thus a form of gathering that emerges as such in the gathering-we. Indeed the being and the very idea of gathering become an issue in so far as the gathering-we gathers its own gathering by dispersing and embracing its dispersal and in doing so posits the mutual informing of being and notion as a project to be realized. This process of gathering is its infinite power, the aloneness that is perfect and the (hidden) source of any vision of perfection.

So everything belongs to the embracing that the gathering-we is. The gathering-we is so powerful that it even allows divinities to spring from it without destroying itself. The only place of dwelling for the divine is the gathering of the gathering-we that is in a sense more divine than the divine itself. It also destroys the divine without destroying itself since the divine cannot ultimately withstand the power of the gathering. More importantly, the gathering-we does not differentiate between the living and dead, those in the future and those in the present, the human and the non-human. All are particulars that gather in the gathering-we and, as gathered, they are elevated to *places* of gathering. The whole of humanity can gather under one tree just as it can gather in a single death, that of a Palestinian child for instance. What is infinitely singular—that which is gathered in the gathering—is also the power to expand infinitely and to act as the *topos* of the happening of the gathering.

Throughout history we are always situated as gathered in more or less encompassing forms of gathering like the Greek polis, or the Egyptian kingdom. How does one measure the scope, or rather, the intensity of the gathering's encompassing of itself? Everything depends on the degree of power that a gathering-we can generate to embrace itself and thereby gather as the gathering. In order to appreciate this claim we must bear in mind that no gathering is unconditionally given, even though throughout history various forms of the gathering may well be presented as givens. There is something more primordial than an already historically realized gathering. That which is

1991, § 31 A (henceforth EL).

7. Graffiti in Athens attributes the first of these quotations to the poet Kostis Palamas. The second if from Thomas Stanley, 'The life', in Colin Burrow (ed.), *Metaphysical Poetry*, London, Penguin, 2006, p. 236.

more primordial than the gathering is *the primordial as gathering*. In any of its determinate manifestations the world of gathering and the gathering as a world—gatherings are always worlds—respond, implicitly or explicitly, to the power or vision to gather where the vision is itself a form of gathering.

Still not every gathering is in a position to respond directly to the primordial act of the visionary gathering/gathered. The gathering *as such* becomes an issue only when those who participate in the realized gathering make an issue of their capacity to be as gathered and, relatedly, of their capacity to generate and respond to the very idea of gathering in so far as they recollect themselves as the visionary gathered-to-be. This dual act—recollecting the vision from what is already the vision's realized form and projecting the vision's realization in what is already its realized form—is the pulse of the gathering-we, a pulse felt in all forms of gathering irrespective of their degree of comprehensiveness. So, for example, in falling in love with someone one encounters oneself as gathered in the gathering of love that is also the power to create the world of love. In this primordial sense of the gathering/gathered mutuality of the gathering, the power of the gathering-we takes the form of a command—the command to gather as loving and hence to create the world of love. As already gathered in the gathering of love and hence as already received by love, individuals are the receivers of such a command where the commanding is itself activated in and as this receiving. At the same time, once lovers have created the world of love, from within it they retrieve the command by perpetually (re)enacting their world. So the life of the gathering of love is neither simply the world of love nor is it the indeterminate gathering out of which this world springs. This life is the pulse that makes possible a perpetual return, an embracing of the beginning by the end and of the end by the beginning. The gathering is both *anamnesic* and visionary in this way and every form of gathering presupposes that it is a response to the command to gather.

Moreover, since those who gather encounter themselves as already gathered, gatherings always precede those who gather in them. Gatherings can never be reduced to gatherings of aggregated individuals. Individuality is one way of being as gathered in a gathering and of receiving the command to gather. The subjectivity of the individual is this receiving as the already received in the gathering and, as this receiving, subjectivity is the vision of the infinite expansion of its infinite singularity. As this receiving of the command to gather, the subject receives the gathering-we by providing it with the notion of the gathering *as such*. Ultimately it is this singular receiving that activates the commanding of the command and so itself commands the command to command. It is as the bearer of the universality of the notion of the gathering-we that the subject 'in his particularity has the vision of himself as the universal'.<sup>8</sup> The gathering thus gathers as a project or vision in the *topos* that its own notion is. This *topos* is in turn supplied by the subjectivity of the subject, that is, by the 'I' that is 'thought as a thinker' (EL § 24 A). Here the 'I' is the house so to speak of the visionary 'we'. Accordingly, the gathering-we

8. G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. T. M. Knox and A.V. Miller, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 172.

is the absolute object and the subject is the absolute ego that is embraced in the mutual act of ‘unbounded love’. As Hegel puts it ‘that the object [...] is itself universal, permeating and encompassing the ego, also signifies that the pure ego is the pure form which overlaps the object and encompasses it.’<sup>9</sup>

The primordial gathering of the gathered-to-be—the gathering in and through which the idea of gathering is manifested in visionary terms—is the formless, indeterminate gathering that challenges itself to create form out of its very indeterminacy. Understood as this kind of project, participation in such indeterminate gathering involves two elements of experience. One is the experience of primordial communal being that remains unconditioned by any institutional form and a second is the experience of individual agency as free to receive the command and thus as already in and beyond institutions. The formed gathering-we with the power to refer itself to the simplicity of the formless gathering and thereby perpetually to retrieve it is the gathering that is flooded with free individuals who perpetually receive the command and thus perpetually address, and are addressed by, the indeterminate (formless) gathering. This perpetual receiving through retrieving is what animates with life the formed world of gathering that manifests a radical sameness in perpetually renewing itself. The life of the gathering is the pulsating movement between the eternal command and its reception, on the one hand, and the historical world of the formed gathering, on the other. The world of such a realized gathering would be a philosophical world in the speculative sense in so far as it is a world whose being directly addresses and embodies the eternal idea of the gathering as such.

#### *First Definition of the Absolute Spirit*

At this point we can attempt a first and tentative definition of absolute spirit. In its full manifestation the absolute is the self-realizing realized world of gathering. It is the realized gathering that does not sink into the fullness of its realization only to become inert. As fully realized the absolute retrieves the indeterminate gathering without destroying what it has realized. The absolute is thus the visionary power and process of return and projection. It returns to itself as the agent of indeterminacy out of which the gathering, as the already realized project, is released. It is the releasing of the already released. In other words, as the power of releasing its world the absolute is also powerful enough not to be lost in the abyss of its indeterminacy. Out of its indeterminacy it posits its world as the world that has already been realized and as the world that retrieves its realizing. In the absolute’s pulsating movement between the realized gathering and the formless gathering the world perpetually opens itself to the eternal command to ‘be as a world’, that is, to be as the world that is posited in and by the retrieving of the command. As this kind of movement of absolute negativity the absolute manifests as the power to formulate the gathering as the project of the co-belonging of notion and being as well as

9. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830), Together with the Zusätze*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford, 1971, § 438 (henceforth EPM).

the realizing realized realization of such co-belonging. Absolute negativity is the pulsating world of the absolute. It is the aloneness of the gathering-we.

*Towards a Second Definition of Absolute Spirit*

Unlike gatherings that do not address the notion of gathering at all and so are unable to identify the indeterminate gathering as the source of their world, an already realized (determinate) gathering-we can also be philosophical in so far as it renders explicit the visionary notion that it denies. Such a denial presupposes that the appearance of the indeterminate and visionary gathering amidst the historical being of a realized gathering that ultimately denies the vision renders explicit the project of the notion/being co-belonging of the gathering-we. Due to the radicality of the vision and its denial, the form of the realized gathering is re-appropriated via the mediation of such denial. Here, it is posited as the form of the being of the gathering-we that empties itself out of its notion and this leads to the corresponding emptying out of the notion itself from its own being, that of the realized gathering. It is the realized gathering that produces an infinite distance from itself in that it denies what mostly belongs to it, namely the very idea of gathering. In this sense the realized gathering-we dwells in the emptiness of its being. This mutual emptying out ultimately refers both being and notion to the denied indeterminate gathering in which and as which the visionary project of the notion/being co-belonging first becomes an issue philosophically. Philosophy presupposes the denial of the vision by the realized (determinate) gathering and the corresponding retreat of the indeterminate gathering in its own visionary space. Through this retreat notion and being emerge philosophically as infinitely separated.

Philosophy can only arise in a philosophical world defined in the above terms. It is pure conceptuality, the vision that is empty of being or the thinking of being without being, gathered in a single mind as the *topos* of the gathering of purely visionary concepts. As thinking thought, the thinker expands infinitely to embrace the 'we', albeit only in principle. In this sense his or her embracing remains unpopulated. The philosopher knows that the house that philosophy builds is to become the dwelling of those who arrive through history from the distant future. Philosophy is a welcoming from a far. This is the highest manifestation of the gathering's power to 'submit to infinite pain' (EPM § 382) and withstand its own self as the vortex of otherness. It sinks in the depth of its *kenosis* without losing itself. In and out of this deepening philosophy emerges as the light of a galaxy out of the cosmic darkness that the gathering itself is. In philosophy the gathering recollects its being as a *thanatology*—as the dying of its death—through which it practices a defiant and visionary emerging of life out of death—that of the notion and history.

In so far as the gathering-we challenges the ultimate given, life itself, the gathering constitutes the (di)vision: *anamnesic* (the philosophical notion) as *amnesic* (political being). The awareness incorporated in such (di)vision is the awareness of history. History is the gathering moving towards itself or the gathering that gathers itself. As history, the

gathering dwells in the opening of its aloneness and moves towards opening this opening, towards making this opening happen as a perpetual happening. Its knowledge is the wound that heals itself.<sup>10</sup> The philosophy of the gathering is the announcement of both this healing and is itself a form of healing.

*Second Definition of the Absolute Spirit*

We are now ready to attempt a second definition of the absolute. The absolute is not only what withstands its complete realization by reviving the command out of itself but also what survives its complete emptiness that the retreat of the command produces. From a speculative perspective, the absoluteness of the absolute is manifested by this active denying since, far from being destroyed by it, the gathering creates a historically teleological world through this denial and gives rise to the emergence of philosophy as absolute self-knowing. Historically, the absolute as such manifests itself as ‘pure self-recognition’ in the ‘absolute otherness’ of the notion/being emptying out—the *kenosis* of *kenosis*. It is in a philosophical world, in this sense of engagement in active self-denial, that the place is created for the emergence of philosophy. What is denied, namely the primordial idea of the command/receiving of the gathered gathering-we retreats in the free being of the philosopher whose receiving activates the thinking of the universal and formless gathering-we. This thinking, as the thinking of the universal (thought), is thinking *as such* or the gathering of concepts together with the concept of gathering. It is the particular that ‘has the vision of itself as universal’, the thinker who realizes the vision conceptually and, ultimately, invokes the idea of history to become reconciled with the actual world that denies the vision. When it is in the world as philosophical in this last sense, philosophy gives shape both to the very notion of the philosophical, notionless actuality of the present as well as to the fully actual notion of the future.

*The Gathering-We from the Greek Polis to Christianity and the French Revolution*

The historical emergence of the indeterminate and visionary gathering is always unexpected and powerful. Its first manifestation was the gathering of Socrates and his friends in ancient Athens. As a democracy that accommodated free individuals, the Greek city was perhaps in a unique position to encounter a philosophical form of the idea of the gathering as such as well as to deny it, as happened when Socrates first introduced into the *polis* a philosophical formulation of the idea of gathering as a project to be realized. Socrates challenged the gathering of the Athenian citizens by positing himself as the bearer of the very idea of the gathering and as the *topos* of gathering for the friends of the philosopher. Here the vision was for the gathering as such to institute itself in response to the command ‘know thyself’. In constituting the being of the gathering—its emerging as gathering—such a response was to function as the presupposition for (re) enacting the *polis* and its institutions.

10. G.W.F. Hegel, ‘4 Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion’ § 4, cited in Theunissen, ‘The Repressed Intersubjectivity in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right’, p. 55.



In responding to the philosopher's challenge the *polis* inaugurated the western world as a philosophical world that confronts its gathering-being by undermining the very principle of gathering. In other words, the gathering-we of the *polis* gathers in its inaugural act of rejecting the very principle of gathering when it condemns the philosopher to death. This act marks the radical disassociation of the *polis* from tradition understood as the power of gathering and it does so in a way that makes the distinctively western reflective attitude possible. The philosopher's challenge appears once tradition has lost its integrating power. By turning against the philosopher the already dispersed citizens reconstitute their gathering *as* dispersing or atomic individuals in so far as they reject the philosophical principle of integration.

Ultimately it is in the tension between the being and the idea of gathering that the other great project of the west is activated, that of visionary philosophy. The first master of this project is Plato and his masterpiece is *The Republic*. *The Republic* is a meditation on the very idea of gathering understood in the above terms. On this reading of Plato the indeterminate gathering and its corresponding vision manifest in the embrace of the philosopher whose connection with the *Agathon* enables him to create the *polis* and to function as its ruler. In Plato's ideal *polis* the speculative tension is overcome since everyone responds to the command to 'know thyself' by dwelling in the philosopher's embrace. Such a response makes possible the formation of both the indeterminate gathering-we as well as the institutions of the just *polis* out of this latter. Here for the first time in the west the individual is posited, firstly, as a member of the indeterminate gathering that institutes its sovereign being (emerging) through the sovereign act of responding to the command 'know thyself'—it is sovereign in so far as it incorporates its knowing and hence the principle of its self-institution—and, then, as a citizen of the enacted *polis*.<sup>11</sup>

So we can read Plato's philosophy as responding directly to the eternal command to gather at the notional level. Plato attempts to respond to the command by making sense of the meaning of receiving it wherein the act of making sense is the receiving. In its philosophical expression conceptuality emerges through and as this response. It is the conceptuality that belongs to the gathering as such or the gathering that is speculative since the command and its reception generate the notion/being co-belonging as the task of creating being in knowing and knowing in being. In *The Republic* Plato was able to offer a way of understanding the gathering as command and to articulate the being of the free individuals who have the ability to gather through the reception of the command that the philosopher introduces. He was also able to elaborate the idea of the just *polis* and its institutions as the realization of the gathering as such.

Following the Greeks, a second historical emergence of the gathering-we responds to the Christian command 'love each other'. Here a decisive difference marks the gathering of the community of love from the previous gathering that manifests the idea of Plato's *polis* of justice. Although in both cases there is a supreme source of value—the *Agathon* in relation to justice and the Christian God in relation to love—in the second

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11. George Vassilacopoulos, 'Plato's *Republic* and the End of Philosophy', *Philosophical Inquiry*, vol. XIX, no.1-2, 2007, pp. 34-45.



case it is not one person, the philosopher, but every believer who can be in touch with this source. Consequently, every member of the gathering of believers functions as the *topos* of the indeterminate gathering of love.

This said, the formed gatherings that have been created by the organized churches ultimately have the effect of neutralizing the power of the originating indeterminate gathering of the loving-we to perpetually inform its institutions. Consequently, collectively Christians are unable to retrieve the command in a way that perpetually gives rise to the primordial indeterminate gathering of believers. In the end, the Church-bound Christian becomes the captive of teleturgical formalism and the hierarchical structures of the clergy.

The French Revolution radicalized the universality of equality that the Christian project activated. We can make sense of its emergence in history as the irruption of the formless gathering-we manifesting itself as the unconditional maxim 'be as a world'. For the first time in the history of gathering humans gather in the gathering without appealing to some given, like the platonic Good or the Christian God. Here, the gathering is activated out of itself and moves towards itself. In a single moment it captures the idea of the movement of history as the gathering that gathers itself. With the emerging of this event we enter the third act of the western philosophical project that is also the most explicitly speculative.

The idea of the revolution invokes the command 'be as free and equal in accordance with solidarity' or, in its speculative reformulation, 'be as a world'. In the happening of the infinite aloneness of the indeterminate gathering-we that is a self-activating solidarity, each member of the collective is claimed as the place of dwelling for the other members, that is, as the bearer of the very idea of gathering. Here the subjectivity of the subject is constituted in the dynamic inter-relation of infinite expansion as the embracing of the collective and infinite contraction as being absolutely permeated by the substantive universality of solidarity.

For reasons that we need not go into here, western modernity also gives rise to the negation of this most radical idea of the gathering as such. The idea is negated through the gathering of formal subjects in their capacity as atomic and, hence, dispersed individuals who inter-relate as private property owners dwelling in the externality of the 'things' they each own.<sup>12</sup> In their mutual recognition as persons, the activity of such formal subjects replaces the possibility of infinite expansion at the heart of the command to be as a world with the momentary merging of wills that agree to exchange property items. In this case it becomes impossible for the command of the gathering-we to be heard as a world-transforming power.

The retreat of the abovementioned denied command and its vision opened the space for the emergence of Hegel's philosophy of the 'world Spirit'. Hegel's philosophy, like Plato's before him and unlike any other philosophy after him, is the reception of the last whisper of the eternal command (notion). The receiving that is philosophy is

12. See the section titled 'Modernity and Speculative Philosophy', in Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, 'The Ego as World', this collection.

always the receiving of a whispering—that of the retreating gathering-we—that only the thinker is in a position to hear. It is also the last re-opening of the silence of the world (historical being). It teaches that when the gathering gathers the power to command once again no one will fail to receive it.

Moreover, in such a radically philosophical world the production of philosophy will be a thing of the past. The participants of this world will discover that the moment of pure conceptualization has already happened and that their world has already conceptually happened in the happening of this moment. They will be in a position to understand themselves through their past by reading the speculative story of the world Spirit that the philosophers have *already* prepared. On this reading, philosophers like Hegel are the Homers of the people of the future who are the genuine *readers* of philosophy.

## II. APPROACHING THE ABSOLUTE SPIRIT AS THE COMMAND TO ‘KNOW THYSELF’

According to Hegel, conceptualization or ‘the Notion’ ‘does not require any external stimulus for its actualization’ since ‘it embraces the contradiction of simplicity and difference, and therefore its own restless nature impels it to actualize itself’ (EPM § 379 A). Hegel suggests that the impelling nature of the absolute that points to its actualization takes the form of a command. He specifically refers to the “absolute” commandment, *Know Thyself* and explains:

Know thyself doesn’t have the meaning of a law externally imposed on the human mind by an alien power; on the contrary, the god who impels to self-knowledge is none other than the absolute law of mind itself. Mind is, therefore, in its every act only apprehending itself (EPM § 377 A).

### *The Command of the Absolute and its Reception*

If for the absolute (mind or Notion) the command is not imposed by an alien agent but is part of the fabric of the absolute itself then, from a standpoint that immanently belongs to it, the absolute needs to posit not only itself as the command but also itself as the agent who receives the command. As both the command and its receiving agent the absolute is the simple or the same out of which the difference between the command and its reception is posited. Here we have the difference or contradiction between difference and sameness that is also the sameness of difference and sameness. Being the simple the absolute is immediately universal. At the same time the absolute posits itself as an explicitly self-referential universality when, from its state of immediately being the whole (substance) it also emerges as the power to realize itself as this whole (subject) and hence as not yet being what it already is. In other words, in manifesting itself as the manifestation to become, the absolute creates a disturbance (restlessness) out of the state of tranquility of its immediate universality. Its possibility is thus also its actuality and it realizes this possibility through the creation out of itself of the abovementioned

difference between the command and its reception. The absolute is and is not because by being what it is it is also the urge to become. Being both the immediate universal and the urge to become, it is the transforming of itself into its other (the not) and as such it breaks up or negates the universality of its immediate unity.

Nevertheless, since the negating of the absolute's immediate unity belongs to the unity's immediacy, immediate unity is preserved in and as this negating. The immediacy of the immediate is manifested through the negation and as this negation. In and as this self-negating immediacy, the universal preserves and transcends itself by turning itself into a command and at the same time providing itself with the agent of the command's reception. The immediate unity is therefore mediated by its self-manifestation as the power to become what it is. As a command the immediate unity emerges as the whole to become. The command here is infinite. In other words it does not fail to be received and by extension to be absolutely obeyed. Moreover, this implies that the absolute has already, or in principle, become what it is given that as the received command the absolute fully manifests itself both as the whole and as the power to realize itself.

Whereas the agent receiving the universal as a command receives it as what must be realized, in this receiving the universal is *as received* and also *as not receiving itself*. The universal that is received by its other is the 'not yet'. Here we have a differentiation of form and content. Together, the *form* of receiving the universal and the universal's *content* as received manifest the negation of the universal, the not yet. As received and in being received by its other, the universal commands the other to transcend itself in order for the universal to be realized.

Now the agency that functions both as the absolute other of the universal and as the unconditional recipient of the universal command is the finitude of the particular. As the agent receiving the command of the universal, the particular acts as the *topos* of the not yet of the universal. Basically this means that the command commands in and through the particular's receiving. But the particular is in a position to perform the role of receiving the universal in the terms explained so far when it provides the universal with its pure notion without at the same time providing the universal's being. It follows that as the bearer of the notion of the universal the being of the particular is also the negation of the universal—the absolute singularity of the particular. This is the particular that thinks; it is finite mind. In this capacity the particular does not lose itself in its particularity in the process of receiving the command. It is that which thinks or receives the universal of the whole as the universal to become and thus receives itself as the agent of enacting the whole. The particular then is as thinking. In being as thinking in the way just explained, the particular experiences the differentiation of being and thinking as a differentiation that must be overcome.

So the absolute is the immediately realized whole that is also posited as realizable. Through such positing it recaptures itself as realized, albeit only immediately. Once fully realized through the execution of what the command commands, the absolute overcomes the contradiction of simplicity and difference, or substance and subject, without however forgetting their difference. It incorporates itself as realizable by recollecting

the command and its receiving. It thus perpetually renews itself as the already realized absolute—that is, as the result of the absolute's circular movement that repeatedly retrieves its beginning and realizes its end. Here what is realized cannot fail also to be as both realizing and realizable.

So it seems that both states of the absolute—its forward movement, through which it posits itself as realizable and ultimately as realized, and its backward movement of recollection from its state of completion—rely upon the mediating power of the moment of the command and its reception. In both of its forms such a state manifests the 'not' at the centre of the absolute. This state is the absolute's power to mediate between its immediate and its mediated states of being the whole. As this power of mediation the absolute is the mutual informing of the infinity of its command with the finitude of its reception.

*The Absolute Spirit as the Dispersal and Gathering of Finite Spirits*

Hegel observes that 'absolute Spirit [...] opposes to itself another spirit, the finite, the principle of which is to know absolute spirit, in order that absolute spirit may become existent for it'.<sup>13</sup> The absolute spirit is what withstands the opposition between the infinite command and its finite reception. As being received by the finite, the infinite does not crush the finite. So too, as receiving the infinite, the finite does not distort the infinite. Consequently, as the creator of its own opposition, the absolute already contains in itself that which, when released, posits both its infinite command and finite spirits as the agents of receiving and activating the command through their receiving. It follows that in the absolute's state of being immediately what it must become, finite spirits are already incorporated in some form of gathering—the immediate communal being—that affirms that the absolute is immediately the whole. It is out of this gathering that the absolute posits the command together with finite spirits as the command's recipients. In doing so the absolute posits finite spirits as beings with the appropriate form of agency for receiving its command. Indeed, by positing individualized unities, the absolute posits a form that involves dispersal and so negates the immediate universal communal unity of the agents in question.

Now, as we noted above, the commanding of the command is activated through its being received as a presupposition for the actualization of what is commanded. Significantly for Hegel 'to know absolute spirit', that is, to receive it, is the 'principle' of finite spirit. So finite spirit receives *as receiving*. In other words, finite spirit's whole being is this receiving; the receiving is not just a mere faculty of its agency. Now if the principle of finite spirit is to receive the command 'Know Thyself' and if the being of finite spirit is its receiving the command and activating the commanding, then finite spirit manifests the very principle of finite spirit as such in the specificity of its receiving being. At the same time it also renders explicit the very meaning of the command since the command

13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. III Medieval and Modern Philosophy, 3 vols., Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1995, p. 553 (henceforth LHP III).

can be received only by the agent capable of providing its meaning. More specifically, if the command commands me to know myself and if 'know' involves no specification—the like 'know yourself as a patriot'—then I can only know myself as receiver of the command to know that I am already positioned to receive in so far as I provide the very meaning of knowing. So the command manifests as command in the field opened up by the activation of its meaning through the agency of finite spirit.

Now if, as the agent of receiving the command through its specificity, the specific finite spirit provides the meaning of the command *and* the principle of finite spirit, finite spirit must also be the embracing of all finite spirits. This is because in enabling the command to command through its receiving and in thereby receiving the received—the absolute spirit that in already being what it must become has already gathered the finite spirits in itself—the gathered finite spirits must themselves dwell in the single finite spirit as the receiver of the command. This *landing* of the infinite in the finite makes it possible for the finite unconditionally to embrace every particular spirit as *already* gathered by the absolute and hence as *what must be* gathered. That is, it makes it possible for the finite to embrace communal being. Due to its ability to receive the command the singularity of the finite spirit is also an infinite expansion that is the place of dwelling or the gathering of the already gathered finite spirits in their capacity as the gathered to become. This state manifests the power to gather out of which what is commanded is to be realized. In other words what receives the command is what the absolute already *is* and *must become*, namely immediate communal being gathered in the singularity of the 'I'. That it *must become* is manifested in that its bearer is the singular mind whose mode of being is one of dispersal. Here the absolute is the 'I' that is in a position to say 'we'.

In the light of our discussion so far we can now say that the command commands finite spirits to gather since, as already being what it must become, absolute spirit immediately affirms itself by incorporating finite spirits as gathered into its field of self-affirming. For to posit finite spirit as the receiver of the command is simultaneously to manifest *what* the absolute spirit is and *that* it must become what it is. Absolute spirit is affirmed as both in being received as the command by finite spirit. It also follows that finite spirit must itself simultaneously dwell in both moments: it must dwell in the gathering of finite spirits that absolute spirit already incorporates and yet in receiving absolute spirit as command, finite spirit manifests the not yet of the absolute. In this second role as receiver finite spirit dwells in the world of finite spirits that must be gathered and, as the not yet gathered, remain in a state of dispersal or indeterminate gathering. Therefore as command absolute spirit commands finite spirits to re-gather or to become what they already are. In so commanding the infinite is itself the power that gathers or *the gathering* itself.

### III. APPROACHING THE ABSOLUTE SPIRIT THROUGH THE GATHERING AND DISPERSING IN THE LOGICAL STRUCTURE OF UNIVERSALITY, PARTICULARITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

So far the analysis of the notions of gathered and gathering offers a way of appreciating the immanent becoming of absolute spirit. The absolute is always already itself or the whole. But it also must become the whole that it is. This task is made explicit in the self-positing of the absolute as a project to be realized. Here the absolute is realized without however laying to rest the power of realizing. For Hegel this developmental logic concerns the challenge of making sense of the speculative absolute in terms of the relationship between thinking and being. The absolute has being in knowing or, in other words, its mode of being is what Hegel calls ‘manifestation’.

This universality is also its determinate sphere of being. Having a being of its own, the universal is self-particularizing, whilst it still remains self-identical. Hence the special mode of mental being is ‘*manifestation*’. The spirit is not some one mode or meaning which finds utterance or externality only in a form distinct from itself: it does not manifest or reveal *something*, but its very mode and meaning is this revelation. And thus in its mere possibility mind is at the same moment an infinite, ‘absolute’, *actuality* (EPM § 383).

Here Hegel invokes the logical categories of universality, particularity and individuality to refer to the absolute’s fundamental mode of being and becoming. Drawing upon the inter-relations between these categories we can now re-present the ideas of the gathering, the dispersing and the command in greater depth and with greater precision.

#### *The Moment of Universality*

Summarizing our discussion so far we note that the absolute is the realizing of what is always already realized. Precisely because it is already the realized whole it seeks to render itself as the self-realizing whole. Using the terminology of gathering we can say that the absolute is the immediate gathered-gathering that ultimately formulates itself as the gathering-gathered—the gathered that involves the appropriate knowing as gathering—through the reflective moment of self-dispersal.

But what precisely is this original and originating state of the absolute that Hegel refers to as the moment of universality, the moment of utter simplicity or the absolute’s infinite equality with itself? In a passage partially cited above Hegel observes:

The Notion does not require any external stimulus for its actualization; it embraces the contradiction of simplicity and difference, and therefore its own restless nature impels it to actualize itself, to unfold into actuality the difference which, in the Notion itself, is present only in an ideal manner, that is to say, in the contradictory form of differencelessness, and by this removal of its simplicity as of a defect, a one-sidedness, to make itself actually that whole, of which to begin with it contained only the possibility (EPM § 379 A).

Universality is the mode of being of the absolute when the absolute is in its state of im-

mediacy or 'differencelessness'. Here the absolute is affirming but immediately so. In other words, its mode of being is the in-itself. Yet, the absolute is absolute irrespective of its mode of being because it always performs the impossible. So in the moment of universality the absolute is immediate yet without *sinking into* or *evaporating in* its immediacy and so without moving beyond its immediacy in whatever form. In its state of immediacy the challenge for the absolute is to not lose its absoluteness in the light of its state of immediacy. The immediate absolute must remain an absolute immediacy, that is, an affirming immediacy. Here immediacy is the mode of being that determines mediation or, in other words, 'differencelessness' is the mode of being of the absolute that determines difference.

Being an affirming immediacy the absolute does not go beyond itself into the externality of otherness in order to affirm itself in a mediating way through some return to itself from the state of otherness or self-loss. Even though this is the ultimate aim of the absolute such a move nevertheless presupposes the immanent affirmation of what must be superseded as well as the activation of the superseding process through such affirmation rather than despite it. Precisely because the absolute does not lose itself in its state of immediacy, it is also the power to move beyond to its other moments of self-realization. Of course the reverse is also the case. Because it is the power of moving beyond, it can also affirm itself in its immediacy. Moreover, the absolute is the power to move beyond in so far as it has *already* moved beyond. The task is for this movement to be perpetually recollected from within the moments of its development.

In the light of the above we can say that in order to be both immediate and affirming the absolute must go deeper into what already is the case for it and hence to stay with what it already is. So the reality of the absolute at this point calls not for a transition but for unlimited intensification of its already realized affirmation. It follows that we should understand the immediate as incorporating mediation within itself, albeit without going beyond its own immediacy. The immediate is a return-without-going-beyond. In the mode of being of immediacy the absolute moves with infinite speed in the infinite depth of its immobility.

This said affirmation involves some kind of difference, difference involves otherness and otherness involves mediation. In order for immediate affirmation to be affirming it therefore needs an other, albeit one in whom, as already suggested, the absolute does not lose itself in order to return to itself in a triumphant gesture of accomplishment. It requires of otherness not that it should enable immediacy to pass through it to something else but that it may stay where it already is and thereby traverse the infinity of its remaining where it always already is. This is the realization already involved in what is already realized as intensification or deepening. If the immediate is affirming in so far as it is the infinite power of affirming itself in its absolute other, then moving deeper into itself means moving towards its other *as itself* or itself as *its other*.

How can the immediate be both itself and its other in a way that manifests its power to locate in its other only itself? According to Hegel,

The universal is free power; it is itself and takes its other within its embrace,



but without doing violence to it; on the contrary, the universal is, in its other, in peaceful communion with itself. We have called it free power but it could also be called free love and boundless blessedness, for it bears itself towards its other as towards its own self; in it, it has returned to itself (SL 603).

Here we have a return without self-loss. As we noted above returning means infinitely intensifying what is already the case or as Hegel says ‘boundless blessedness’. What is the other of the universal that the universal is, yet without losing itself? It is the already permeated and embraced particular that the universal permeates and embraces. Thanks to the immediacy that belongs to the other itself the absolute’s universal equality with itself retains its immediacy in the particular and thereby affirms this immediacy in and as such retaining. The other of the universal neither expresses the loss of the immediate universal nor offers it a place of dwelling by providing the universal with its notion. The other neither ‘expels’ the immediate absolute nor ‘receives’ it. In other words the particular is non-thinking, immediate being. It is the immediate and infinite embraced that the universal immediately and infinitely embraces. In embracing it the universal ‘finds’ in its other the other as always already embraced by the universal. The universal is the power of life of its other who is already ‘living’, a power that its other drives to intensification. According to Hegel, ‘as parts of the whole, [particular] individuals are like blind men, who are driven forward by the indwelling spirit of the whole’ (LHP III 553). From this perspective there is no violence between the universal and its other since the other is always already in the universal’s embrace. Let us proceed to explore Hegel’s metaphor of ‘blindness’ in order to further specify the relationship between the universal and its other.

With the immediacy’s determination of the mediation the embracing in question is *only* embracing and, correspondingly, the embraced is *only* embraced. Accordingly, the embraced excludes embracing and does not itself embrace the universal in order thereby to transform the embracing into the embraced. What would it mean for the embraced also to embrace the universal? It would offer the very idea of universality and in this way function as the *topos* of the universal. Instead, thinking is excluded here.<sup>14</sup> The universal is thought, but immediately so, since it is not received by the embraced as the agent who thinks or embraces the universal. It follows that the embraced particular does not manifest any form of agency. Moreover, in not reflectively relating to itself it does not make possible its own thematization of its embraced being. This is the essence of its ‘blindness’. Being unable to receive thought by thinking it, the embraced being manifests a form of awareness that is blind to thought itself or indeed anything beyond itself. It is an unthinking thought that thought occupies immediately. The embraced being is thus always already open to the universal that in turn, finding itself in the embraced being, takes the particular beyond itself towards the universal. It is in this movement of the universal—of taking beyond as this taking beyond—that the particular is determined as lacking agency.

<sup>14</sup>. At this stage thinking is wholly external and derives exclusively from the reflecting ‘we’ or the philosopher.

In contrast, the universal is beyond the particular because it is beyond any particular. In fact, it marks the beyond in a dual sense: it is beyond its embracing of the particular not only because it can also ceaselessly embrace another particular and another but also because the universal is *the world of embracing*. After all, the particular is embraced in the world of embracing. Now this is another way of saying that the universal is the power of gathering the particulars which particulars always already manifest the being of being gathered. It is in the particular as gathered that the universal finds itself. At the same time as the other of the universal in which the universal returns to itself the gathered particular is an individual.

The universal's embracing gathers the particulars as already gathered by the universal. Here, the particular does not recognize itself as gathered and so does not involve itself in acts of gathering. The particular is always already gathered; its being is gathered being. Its being is completely determined by the universality of the always already realized gathering. So the universal is both infinitely (non)divided and the infinite embracing of such (non)division. It is the 'differencelessness' that incorporates difference. Here we have intrinsically communal being as a world, yet without communality understood as the reflective element of the notion that makes manifestation possible. Here the moment of universality is the life of communal being without the happening of the reflective appropriation of such being. Communal being is thus without its happening.

Yet this non-happening is infinitely affirmative. The philosophical task then is to show how the absolute releases its manifestation through the moments of its self-releasing in and through which the absolute recollects itself. Each moment thus becomes a form of the absolute as a whole and the power that releases the other forms. This is why the act of superseding one moment through the release of a second, 'higher,' moment also activates the release of the first and a return of the second to the first. It also explains why even in its fully realized state the absolute releases its previous moments in a perpetual movement of recollection as perpetual recreation. In exploding so to speak from its state of immediacy to its state of realized manifestation the absolute also implodes into the primordial state of immediacy in order to reactivate itself through the recollection of the primordial activation.

We referred above to the universal as *the world* of embracing. Indeed the absolute is always a world in the sense of the whole that inter-relates the being and notion of the absolute spirit. (This is why Hegel refers repeatedly to the world spirit that is, of course, spirit as world. It also explains my reformulation of the command to 'know thyself' in terms of the command to 'be as a world'.) Returning to the absolute's immediacy as affirming, note that in this state the inter-relating of notion and being is itself immediate, or unthinking, but it is still an inter-relating and so constitutes a *world*. Following my earlier analysis we can read this world in terms of the idea of gathering, albeit not any particular gathering but the gathering as such that has yet to become reflective. Here, the gathering simply is 'boundless blessedness,' to use Hegel's phrase.

*The Moment of Particularity*

According to our story so far in the mode of being of universality the absolute is immediately complete and thus infinite. So it must release itself from the simplicity of its completeness into a state of incompleteness or finitude. Being immediate it must release itself *as* immediate that is as the immediate that recognizes that its immediacy is already mediated by its power to be, a power that is itself mediated by the fact that it can be. Consequently the absolute releases itself as a project to be realized, a project that locates its justification and draws its inspiration so to speak from the very completeness of the immediate whole. According to Hegel, as universal in the mode of particularity, the absolute:

*determines* itself freely; the process by which it makes itself finite is not a transition, for this occurs only in the sphere of being; it is *creative power* as the absolute negativity which relates itself to its own self. As such it differentiates itself internally, and this is a *determining*, because the differentiation is one with the universal. Accordingly, the universal is a process in which it posits the differences themselves as universal and self-related. They thereby become *fixed*, isolated differences (SL 605).

In the mode of being of universality the universal finds itself in the particular but it does not recognize itself in it as the power to be; it simply is being. In a sense such an encounter is also a loss since locating itself in the immediate is itself an immediate locating that excludes the thinking that is associated with the notion of the universal. Still, because it incorporates otherness, the immediate is infinitely affirming and thus nevertheless powerful enough not only to affirm itself in its immediacy but also to affirm itself as the immediate that is able to be.

As far as philosophizing is concerned, this recognition—of immediacy as already being mediated—has already taken place in *our* reflecting on universality. This is the reflecting of the thinker that belongs to the absolute itself. We reflect upon the absolute as immediate without it recognizing our act of thinking. Yet to think the absolute presupposes that it is already received as immediate in the sense explained above. Once we complete our reflection by revealing the affirmingness of the immediate we turn our reflection on itself and thus reveal the immediate as what it always was. That is, we reveal it to be the mediated immediate or being that presupposes its power to be. This basically means that we are ready to receive this being as what it is and thus also to receive ourselves in it. It follows firstly that the abovementioned release of the gathered finite takes place in and through us and, secondly, this process incorporates reflectiveness in the being we reflect upon. In other words the absolute in the mode of being of universality is powerful enough to release itself from its state of immediacy in order to make its state an issue.<sup>15</sup>

Now the moment of particularity manifests its affirmative power as *absolute negation*. With the release of the absolute's immediacy—the release that renders explicit its presupposed power—the absolute is released as the not yet and hence as *the absolutely not*.

15. See Toula Nicolacopoulos and Goerge Vassilacopoulos, 'The Ego as World', this collection.

Because it is itself not it withdraws in and as this not. This is the moment of finitude, the moment that, in exhibiting its power to be the absolute, is not yet. But this is also affirmation, the element of recognition in negation that renders the negation absolute since it posits the aim of affirming that the affirmed *is not yet* the affirming affirmed. It is as this *not* that the absolute relates itself to itself. In other words its negativity is absolute because it is also a self-relation.

How exactly does the absolute manifest itself in the mode of being of particularity simultaneously as absolute negativity *and* as self-recognition in the form of a project? Now, the moment of particularity is also the infinite division of the immediacy or simplicity characterizing the moment of universality. As this division the moment of universality is retrieved as an aim to be realized and as a realizable aim. Its realizability has already been demonstrated both in the affirming of the whole that the moment of universality is and through this moment's power of negativity in releasing its immediate being. As such it has shown itself to be the realizable whole that formulates itself as the project that is in the process of realizing itself.

Now the moment of particularity is division, the dispersal of particulars and hence the positing of their singularity, something that the universal has previously absorbed. Even so particularity is not a state of affairs that depends upon the external differentiation of particulars; it is instead the mode of being of the particulars. Particularity is thus the universal condition of particulars and hence the universal itself. So it is a way of gathering the particulars. However, in so far as gathering is also a dispersing, gathering as dispersing is the gathering as the aim to become what it is *not yet*. Transforming dispersal into the gathering-to-be is the absolute power of gathering.

Here the universal re-emerges as a task. The gathering that gathers those that have yet to be gathered—the dispersed ones—is a gathering yet to come. Accordingly the universal cannot yet embrace the particular *as gathered* but only as what must become gathered. An important consequence of this is that in recognizing itself as an aim—that is in recognizing its *not* that dispersal manifests—the universal is transformed into a command. It transforms itself into a task by commanding the particular to be as gathered. Here the infinite blends with the finite. Whereas the command is infinite, its reception is finite. In other words the infinite is precisely received as what must become and hence as what is not. But the universality of dispersing is also the retrieval of the immediate universal and therefore of the universal that has already gathered the particulars. So the universal commands the particular to gather as the immediately and hence already gathered.

From the above it follows that the particular is the gathered-dispersed that manifests its power to gather by receiving the gathering as a command. Moreover, it must recognize, or rather, it is the recognition of dispersal as its mode of being since the particular is already beyond the pure state of immediacy in which it dwells as immediately gathered and thereby manifests its singularity. In so far as this recognition is possible and necessary, in recognizing particularity as the mode of being of the particular the particular is also the recognition of the universal as a command. Drawing on our earlier

analysis we can say that the particular must be the power of receiving the command without being crushed by this reception. This involves the particular in thinking since it can only receive the universal as a command and thereby activate the latter's commanding by providing the notion of the universal—the notion of the gathering.

So as thinking, the finite performs the impossible; it survives the reception of the infinite. This is the speculative miracle of finitude, the very idea of the finite. But the finite can only do this *as* gathered. From immediately being gathered the particular moves to the reflecting state of being as immediately gathered. It does this by turning its being into the receiving of the gathering as the command to gather or as the command for it to become what it already is, namely gathered and therefore to receive the command as gatherable. This is also none other than a retrieve of immediate communal being in its entirety—that is as universal—as receiving the command to become or as capable of being communally. Here the particular is the being of communal being, albeit in a thinking manner that provides the notion of the universal in order to receive the universal as command.

In other words the particular receives the command by generating the mutual embracing of being and notion out of itself. It is this being/notion inter-relation that makes possible the universality of the absolute as command in terms of the thinking or receiving of thought. It follows from this that it is the command that commands the realization of the mutual embracing of being and notion. Here we have the explicit genesis of conceptuality, that is, the conceptual emergence of the absolute as manifestation, as the realizable that is also to be realized.

From the above analysis it also follows that two different forms of immediacy characterize the immediate whole in its respective connections with the universal as command and the particular as receiving the command. Even though it is this whole that both commands and receives the command, it nevertheless does so in a way that retains two forms of immediacy as separate and self-subsistent. One is the form of the particular as gathered—in the immediacy of its being the particular provides thinking as the notion of the universal and therefore as gatherable—and the other is the form of the universal as gathering—it is the power to bring about gathering.

Now because the particular receives the universal as command by providing the universal's notion and because the universal commands in this receiving of the particular the commanding of the command is manifested *in the form of the individual*. If this is indeed the case then the realm of particularity or dispersing happens as a command in the particular that incorporates the universal as an individual and thus transforms itself into a totality. What we have here is the logical articulation of the idea of the 'I' that is 'we'. This is perhaps the absolute speculative mystery, the mystery of absolute singularity that in receiving the command of the communal 'we' is transformed into the bearer of the 'we' that commands every single 'I'.

Here of course the totality is the formless gathering whose formlessness manifests as the command to create form out of formlessness. Formlessness concerns the retrieve of the immediate whole as something that must become and this becoming must of course

involve the creation of a structured whole. So the formless is the activity of retrieving-positing; it retrieves the whole in order to render it an aim. Still, what is retrieved does the commanding and receiving. This latter is immediate being that must happen as what it is and can only happen in the *topos* of its notion. So the question of the notion/being inter-relation—this, as we noted above, is at the heart of the absolute—becomes explicit here in the realm of the formless gathering. In other words, the realm of the formless gathering posits that which creates being and notion out of itself as self-manifesting, or the absoluteness of the absolute, and through this positing the absolute is itself also posited as an aim to be realized.

It follows from the above analysis that the command is in some sense empty; it is purely a command without commanding something specific. Accordingly, the *what* of the command that is received is the purity of thought in its complete indeterminacy. Moreover, it is received in so far as the particular offers it its notion, the notion of thought, which is none other than pure thinking. The command is thought and commands thinking that is activated as the notion of thinking, that is, as thinking that receives thought. In order for thinking to receive thought it cannot just be a thinking *about* thought; it must be a thinking thought and it is a thinking thought because what is thinking is the being of the particular, the thinking particular, that is in itself universal. In this way thinking already incorporates being and being already incorporates thinking.

### *The Moment of Individuality*

I have argued that each particular is the *topos* of the gathering and that the gathering takes place as what receives the command to gather. The gathering of particulars is thus a gathering of infinite gatherings. As members of the indeterminate gathering, particular individuals encounter each other as both commanding the other and receiving the command from the other. They greet each other with ‘be as a world’ or ‘know thyself’. For this reason individuals are exactly like one another—the other is like me in that he or she also receives and commands—and yet there is an infinite asymmetry in the inter-relation of individuals in so far one commands and the other receives.

Still, individuality is the mode of being of the absolute as the whole that is both realized and realizing. Since the absolute never remains in the mode of being of an aim to be realized it also never limits itself to the mode of being of the realized that has forgotten its realizing. The realized absolute is the power of infinite construction and infinite deconstruction. It never allows its fully established world of gathering to transform itself into a lifeless given by cutting its ties with its presupposition, namely its very power to be created as a world. So its fullness relates to the fact that it is at once fully realized and also radically yet to be realized. Nevertheless it allows itself to be absorbed in the immediate element of its unity and does not permit the systematization of its difference to become systemic in a way that would empower this difference to destroy its immediate unity.

What follows from the above for our understanding of the logical form and existen-

tial manifestation of the realized world of the communal gathering? I have been arguing that the command to be as a world that is linked to the creation of form out of the formless gathering is what commands the gathering to gather. Moreover, since it is the gathering itself that must gather, the formed gathering must be a gathering of gatherings. So too each particular form of gathering must be a particular manifestation of the world of the gathering of gatherings. Not only must the particular forms be gathered as aspects of the universal gathering but also each particular form must realize the gathering of gatherings, that is, each particular form must realize the whole. Accordingly, we might expect the unity of the moments of particularity and universality, the moment of individuality to be a unity of three syllogisms whose form manifests the whole as the gathering of gatherings. In Hegel's system this logical inter-relation will in turn manifest existentially as the moments of the constitution of the ethical state wherein 'each [of these moments] contains the other moments and has them effective in itself'.<sup>16</sup> When we are informed by the ideas of gathering and dispersal we are in a position to appreciate how this existential manifestation of the syllogistic unity results from spirit's 'fragrant rising up' out of the 'foaming ferment of its finitude'.

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16. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox, New York, Oxford, 1980, § 272.