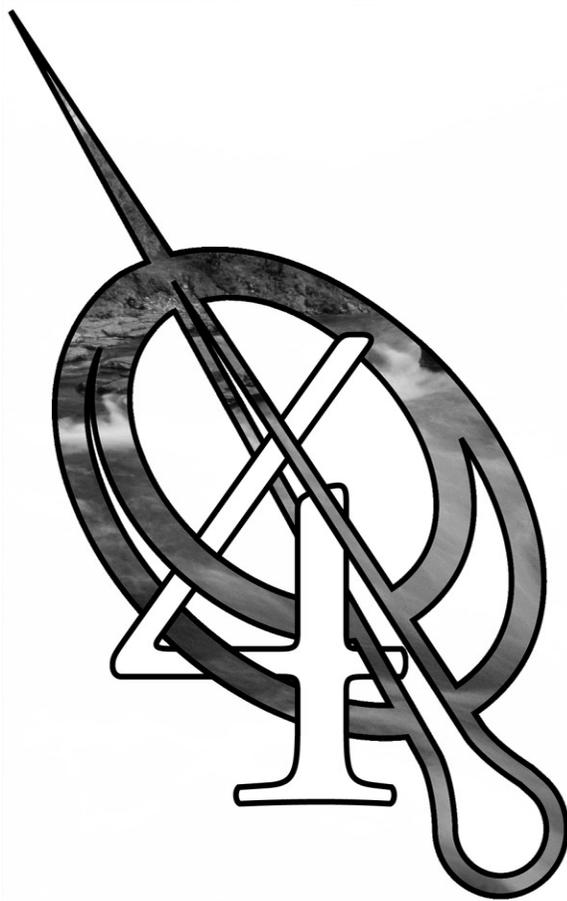


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Hegel and the Pathway of Despair

DYLAN TRIGG
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
BIRKBECK COLLEGE

Through a mesh of abstruse terminology, frenzied prose and a text constructed with apparent disorder, Hegel's overarching scheme in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* seems *prima facie* to neglect the singular existing individual and subsume it in the "world-spirit." Hyppolite even asks whether "it is possible...Hegel had not forgotten his own existential nature, for it disappears with his system."¹ However, in chapter 4 of this work Hegel illuminates within the context of his progressive system the disparity between self and other, Being and Non-being, and Universal and Particular.

It is from this chapter, which culminates in the so-called "Unhappy Consciousness," that we can extract a picture of Hegel's stance on individual existence itself. Our task is to follow Hegel's path of consciousness from the emergence of self-consciousness to its eventual dialectical limit before progressing to Reason in the Unhappy Consciousness.

This path is of one of despair and negation. Indeed, Hegel sees a spiral of anxiety as a necessary function of consciousness' realization. In becoming something other than it believes itself to be, i.e. in showing itself to be an untruth, consciousness loses its sense of self and thus its security. Hegel remarks: "The road can therefore be regarded as the pathway of *doubt*, or more precisely as the way of despair."² Hegel tells us that this progression to 'the standpoint of Science' is one of necessity and that its goal, the correspondence of subject and object, is a fixed one of knowledge no longer needing to go beyond itself.

In our present task we will not see this realization of consciousness, as that lies far beyond the discussion of the Unhappy Consciousness. We will instead witness the necessary negation that consciousness must impose upon itself to elevate itself. This negation is a violent one; it must be if consciousness is to recognize its incompleteness. Furthermore, "consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands: it spoils its own limited satisfaction."³ Hegel warns against the possibility of retreat and denial when consciousness acknowledges its own untruth:

When consciousness feels this violence, its anxiety may well make it retreat from the truth, and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing. But it can find no peace. If it wishes to remain in a state of unthinking inertia, then the thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest disturbs its inertia.⁴

Thus, we are faced with a consciousness that acknowledges its incomplete nature and hence

¹ Hyppolite, J. *Studies on Marx and Hegel*
Ed & Trans: O'Neill, J. (Basic Books,
1969), p. 22.

² Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*,
Trans: Miller, A.V.
(Oxford University
Press, 1979), p. 78.
Hereafter: *PS*.

³ *PS*, 80.

⁴ *Ibid*.

the distance between it-self and the ideal (Notion) it strives to claim. This split between the I and the Non- I (The Nothing) will underlie our exposition of Hegel's pathway of despair.

Before the arrival of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807, Western philosophy's concept of the self had to a large extent been viewed as either an illusive postulate (i.e. Hume), or contrariwise, an entity capable of existing in-itself (i.e. Descartes' *Cogito* and Leibniz's self-sufficient Monads). With Hegel the conviction in the self-sufficient autonomy of the self is radically shaken.

In the first section of Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, titled 'The Truth of Self-certainty,' Hegel argues that only in the experience of desire does consciousness come to know it-self as self-consciousness, as an I. Hegel, in contrast to the passive 'disinterestedness' prevalent in 19th century German aesthetics, arrives at this conclusion by purporting that in desiring something other than the self, consciousness becomes aware of the disparity between the I and the non-I. For instance, Schopenhauer's philosophy of the sublime is a state of union between subject and object; the subject is lost in the object when its volition is denied—its desires are annulled for there is no self to satisfy. Returning to Hegel, in everyday consciousness the self acknowledges the world at the moment it desires an object (i.e., something other than itself). The self sees it-self in a duality, on the one hand as subject and on the other hand as object, each simultaneously and interdependently. Kojève writes,

The man who contemplates is "absorbed" by what he contemplates; the "knowing subject" "loses" himself in the object that is known. Contemplation reveals the object, not the subject...the man who is "absorbed" can only be "brought back to himself" only by a Desire.⁵

⁵ Kojève, A. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* Trans: Nichols, J & Ed: Bloom, A & Assembled: Queneau, R. (Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 3. Hereafter: *LPS*.

However, the realization of self-consciousness does not emerge through the desire of an inanimate object alone; it must desire and in turn *negate* something of an equal status or otherwise its negation of the object would equate the self with that object.

⁶ *Phenomenology*, p. 178.

Self-certainty is recognition of the self in isolation. Consciousness senses objects, and even uses them, but it does not yet acknowledge itself as a self among many until other selves are recognized as such; otherwise it conceives a solipsism with only itself existing.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹¹ Sartre, J-P. *Being and Nothingness* Trans: Barnes, H. (Routledge, 1998). p. 236.

For self-consciousness to realize itself its desire must be directed towards an object that equates it with its own status. Accordingly, we move to the kernel of Hegel's concept of self:

Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.⁶

Consciousness, then, is only rendered self-consciousness when it acknowledges or recognizes the other as its counterpart, and vice-versa: “*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.*”⁷ The other is therefore never simply the isolated other; it entails the identity of the self. Hegel’s dialectic allows the opposites of self and other to co-exist and even presuppose one another, meaning that difference from self is imperative to selfhood. Solipsism, therefore, is annulled in the disclosure between self and other—in saying “I am I,” I exclude that which I am not, and that which I am not is, among other things, the other. Such an exclusion presupposes the very possibility of the other.

The realization of self-consciousness is therefore an intersubjective matter that necessarily involves the participation of the other. But this necessary participation of the other involves a tension: in being dependent upon something other than itself for its own certainty, consciousness strives to *negate* the other thus enforcing its sense of autonomous certainty.

Consciousness, in other words, “must proceed to supersede the other independent being in order thereby to become certain of itself as the essential being.”⁸

There is further cause for tension when we realize that the role of self-consciousness for self and other is the same—they both demand a negation of the other. According to Hegel, “Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same.”⁹

“*The self sees it-self in a duality, on the one hand as subject and on the other hand as object, each simultaneously and interdependently.*”

Initially, then, an apparently asymmetrical dichotomy emerges between the *recognized* and the *recognizer*. Being-for-itself, that is, the immediate I, neglects to consider in this immediacy or naivety the otherness that is the non-I: “what is ‘other’ for it is an unessential, negatively characterized object.

But the ‘other’ is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual.”¹⁰

In his account of Hegel’s intersubjective philosophy, Sartre writes:

No external nothingness in-itself separates my consciousness for the Other’s consciousness; it is by the very fact of being me that I exclude the other.¹¹

Sartre is alluding to Husserl’s phenomenological theory of *intentionality*; i.e. that consciousness is always consciousness of *some*-thing as opposed to *no*-thing, but the emphasis is on the necessary elimination of otherness in being-for-itself.

But for the self to be certain it must *co-exist* with the other and this involves being recognized by the other; the idea must be transformed into truth by emerging as an objective reality, i.e. a reality that exists not only for the self but also for the other. Consciousness must recognize in itself its objective otherness in order to be realized as self-consciousness—it must see itself mirrored in the other to acquire objectivity:

[Consciousness] would have truth only if its own being-for-itself had confronted it as an independent object, or, what is the same thing, if the object had presented itself as this pure self-certainty.¹²

As Hegel states, a duality between two selves seeking certainty in the other seems to necessitate one dominating the other in order to realize itself:

In so far as it is the action of the *other*, each seeks the death of the other. But in doing so, the second kind of action, action on its own part, is also involved; for the former involves the staking of its own life.¹³

Thus, a ‘life-and-death’ struggle for exclusive recognition ensues.¹⁴ The risk the self takes to destroy the other is the pre-requisite that gives certainty to the self as an autonomous being-for-itself. Kojève remarks,

Without this fight to the death for pure prestige, there would never have been humans on earth. Indeed, the human being is former only in terms of a Desire directed towards another Desire, that is—finally—in terms of a desire for recognition.¹⁵

However, this co-dependent strife between self and other must avoid the death of one combatant. Otherwise the potential for both selves to be recognized is dissolved and the remaining survivor is isolated in the nothingness of not being recognized. In such a case consciousness would exist with a taste of its ideal, but it would be left in a melancholy reverie of longing for the potential its otherness provided. From this Hegel concludes that recognition exists when both parties survive but when one is left subordinate to the other. In other words, recognition exists within the dynamics of a master and slave relationship.

In his work *The Divided Self* the psychiatrist R.D. Laing, who was heavily indebted to Hegel and Sartre, observes the following situation:

“What the subject is, is the series of its actions. If these are a series of worthless productions, then the subjectivity of volition is likewise worthless; and conversely, if the series of the individual’s deeds are of a substantial nature, then so also is his inner will.”

Hegel, G. W. F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.
Trans. Nisbet, H.B.; Ed. Allen W. Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. §124.

An argument occurred between two patients in the course of a session in an analytic group. Suddenly, one of the protagonists broke off the argument to say, 'I can't go on. You are arguing in order to have the pleasure of triumphing over me. At best you win an argument. At worst you lose an argument. *I am arguing to preserve my existence.*'¹⁶

¹² *PS*, 186.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁴ Whether Hegel's remarks about a "life-and-death" struggle are interpreted literally or viewed symbolically as the permanent structure of an implicit tension present in interpersonal relationships is a matter of contention. However, I believe Sartre has advanced a convincing argument for the latter in the third section of his *Being and Nothingness*.

¹⁵ *LPS*, 7.

¹⁶ Laing, R.D. *The Divided Self* (Penguin, 1965), p. 43.

¹⁷ *PS*, 192.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

One might easily interpret such an interaction as an embodiment of the Hegelian Notion of recognition: the criterion of being-for-itself requires that a sense of autonomy be gained from the other, and the proof of its fulfillment is that the argument is won.

As the Master-Slave dialectic unfolds we see it reach its limitations. It would seem that the master has gained the desired position of being recognized, while the slave resides himself to the subservient role of the other. However, since the masters sense of independent being is dependent on the recognition of the slave, who is accordingly no longer independent himself, the objective recognition of the masters self-consciousness is now in peril:

...it is clear that this object does not correspond to its Notion, but rather that the object in which the lord has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness. What now confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one.¹⁷

The master exists, therefore, *in* the slave and not in-himself.

Meanwhile, the slave's status is reversed. Through the process of objectifying himself in work, he becomes the true being-for-itself. In work the slave expresses himself *onto* the world, moulds and forms it according to his ideas, while simultaneously forging himself as a being-for-itself that is dependent on itself and not desire: "Work...is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words work forms and shapes things."¹⁸ Thus, work provides consciousness with a means to *impose* itself on the world, thereby making it its own: "Through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail; and gets rid of it by working on it."¹⁹

The desire consumed by the master is a capricious affair that is always dependent on something other than itself for its fulfilment: "Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence."²⁰ Moreover,

the slave experiences *fear* under the master's supremacy, a fear that involves the risking of his life through service to the master, and a fear that then seizes his whole being.²¹ Through this fear the slave acquires a fuller sense of self-consciousness than is possible for the master. In his indolent compliancy the master has yet to risk his life, and, thereby, has yet to disclose the entirety of existence to himself. This is a paradox; consciousness is *freedom* and yet devoid of consciousness the world nevertheless endures. The master is perched on a baseless stool, risking nothing, and thus remains in a state of ignorant contentment. The risk to throw oneself into the groundlessness of existence is the supreme declaration of freedom, for consciousness has thus discarded the dross of the corporeal and base matter beneath it. It is at last an affirmation of the *ideal* to which only suffering and despair can give rise.

One must perhaps be heedful not to read the dialectical unfolding of the slave-master parable as a Freudian process of growth from infancy to adulthood, but rather as an unfolding of a subject that by its very nature contains in-itself every possible movement. Self-consciousness is already implicit in natural consciousness, yet it requires a dialectical 'push' to unfold it. This push is the necessary negation that consciousness encounters when it is inhibited by its own limitations.

In his now forgotten work *The Ego and His Own* (1845), the German anarchist Max Stirner presents a twist on the Hegelian master-slave parable. For Stirner, the submissive role the slave plays is ethically wrong, and the eventual transfiguration through which the slave redeems himself is an illusion. We must, he protests, exist for the-self, for the demands of our ego—as exemplified by the master:

Not till one has fallen in love with his *corporeal* self, and takes pleasure in himself as a living flesh-and-blood person...not till then has one a person or *egoistic* interest, an interest not only in our spirit, for instance, but in total satisfaction, satisfaction of the whole chap, a *selfish* interest.²²

²¹ Ibid., 194.

²² Stirner, M. *The Ego and His Own* Trans: Byington. S (Harper & Row, 1971), p. 48.

²³ *PS*, 197.

²⁴ Ibid., 198.

²⁵ Ibid., 199.

²⁶ Ibid., 200.

²⁷ Ibid., 201.

The implications of the Master-Slave parable are numerous, but as the focus of our task is to follow Hegel's pathway of despair, we now turn to the third division of chapter 4, 'Freedom of Self-Consciousness.'

Hegel's dialectical passage throughout the Master-Slave parable concludes by showing that the paradoxical outcome for both master and slave is an internalization and rationalization of their displaced roles: the "real world," now disclosed to self-consciousness as an interdependent affair, causes self-consciousness to retreat to the inner world of pure thought, to a purported autonomy of being.

The first stage of Hegel's progressive passage from the fallibility of the previous section is in the mode of Stoicism. If consciousness is free only when it is independent from others, and if freedom is something to be sought, then this freedom can, according to the present mode, exist only in thinking: "In thinking, I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself."²³ With this, Hegel accords a mode of being to Stoicism, a mode whose principles are "that consciousness is a being that *thinks*, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such."²⁴

Thus, under the guise of Stoicism, the dynamics of the Master-Slave dialectic are seen as something outside of the self, and, therefore, as something to be treated with indifference (*apatheia*). This, of course, was a major tenet of the Stoic philosophy: that divine providence is sovereign in the world, and that the only freedom people have is how they react to this providence. Thus, Epictetus' famous maxim, which declares that a man can find solace even on a rack, is echoed in Hegel when he remarks,

Whether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence, its aim is to be free, and to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence, alike from being active as passive, into the simple essentially of thought.²⁵

Stoicism emerges as an inadequate mode of being because it is essentially abstracted from the whole. It denies the realism of the objective (natural) world and replaces it with the subjective interior of pure thought. According to Hegel, there is admittedly a "freedom in thought," but this freedom has only "pure thought as its truth" and it is therefore "a truth lacking the fullness of life."²⁶ Here, then, in the embodiment of the Stoic is a person who lives with recourse to constant abstraction. Having perched him or herself upon a plateau of indifference, this morose person exists, but only as a shadow does—with form and no content. Having now realized that only in the opposition of the other can he or she disclose oneself, the Stoic person has withdrawn into oneself. The Stoic has sought autonomy and found it in pure thought, but in the process he or she has sacrificed the essence of life.

Stoicism, having now emerged as a hollow and inadequate form of self-consciousness, and one that has not achieved its aim of complete negation,²⁷ forces consciousness to go a step further and negate the *external* world—thus



“The Stoic is a person who lives with recourse to constant abstraction.”

we arrive at Scepticism. The introversion of Stoicism progresses to external negation. By declaring that the natural world is an illusion on account of the unreliability of the senses, and by declaring that morality, knowledge and truth are unattainable, the Sceptic severs the dependence between himself and the world. He or she denies the reality of the outside world so that the objective world is absorbed into the self; “abstract thought becomes the concrete thinking which annihilates the being of the world in all its manifold determinateness.”²⁸

²⁸ Ibid., 202.

²⁹ Ibid., 204.

³⁰ Ibid., 205.

³¹ Norman, R. *Hegel's Phenomenology: a Philosophical Introduction* (Sussex University Press, 1976). p. 59.

However, Hegel claims, the Sceptic not only denies the external world by adhering to a consistent Scepticism, but also his or her own relationship to it, a relationship “in which the ‘other’ is held to be objective and is established as such, and hence, too, its *perceiving*, along with firmly securing what it is in danger of losing, viz. *sophistry*, and the truth it has itself determined and established.”²⁹ In other words, in the act of perceiving and thus negating the external world, the Sceptic erroneously believes his or herself to be confirmed in the presence of The Nothing.

There is, Hegel tells us, further contradiction when we see the Sceptic purporting to be poised in a secure position while around him or her exist the flux and ephemeral nature of the natural world. If the Sceptic’s Scepticism were consistent then he or she too would be annihilated in the absolute negation of Being. The consistent Sceptic must turn upon him or herself as an object of Scepticism: the Sceptic must admit to “being a wholly contingent, single, and separate consciousness—a consciousness which is empirical, which takes its guidance from what has no reality for it, which obeys what is for it not an *essential* being...”³⁰ The Sceptic is, therefore, now lost in a labyrinth of self-contraction and inconsistency, and, as Richard Norman writes,

[Hegel’s] remarks apply equally to a modern sceptic like Hume, who, when he is engaged in philosophy, is ‘ready to reject all belief and reasoning’, but when he leaves such speculations in order to dine, play a game of back-gammon...finds himself ‘absolutely and necessarily determined to live, and talk, and act like other people in common affairs of life.’³¹

Indeed, it is this unavoidable self-undermining hypocrisy that annuls the Sceptic’s position.

The Sceptic is forced to concede to the existence of the external world—otherwise his or her argument refutes itself. Simultaneously, then, self-consciousness is severed in an explicit awareness of the self as divided between being, on the one hand, a contingent, empirical self that

fluctuates in the phenomenal realm, and also, on the other hand, as a self that “recognizes that its freedom lies in rising above all the confusion and contingency of existence.”³² This division, of which the self is conscious, is a division with unity, viz. the self. Thus, self-consciousness observes itself as both being-in-itself and being-in-another, i.e. as itself yet alien to itself. Previously, the dynamics master-slave dialectic occurred between two individuals, whereas now they have been compounded into one: “The duplication of self-consciousness within itself, which is essential in the Notion of Spirit, is thus here before us, but not yet its unity.”³³ This internal contradiction gives rise to a new shape of consciousness: the Unhappy Consciousness.

Without tracing the development of Hegel’s dialectic to arrive at this point, the Unhappy Consciousness—the core of despair in the *Phenomenology*—would emerge as an arbitrary and groundless shape of consciousness. Now that we have followed the path to this point, our task is to explore Hegel’s transition from the denial of the Sceptic to the concession of the Unhappy Consciousness.

Throughout the section on the Unhappy Consciousness Hegel alludes to the bifurcation that the Christian/Judaeo tradition leaves between individuals and God, individuals and society, individuals and nature and, as we see with the Sceptic, between the individual and him or herself. Hegel seeks a union similar to that of the Greek *polis*: a synthesis of morality, art, religion and politics without recourse to empty abstraction, i.e. one that is experiential as well as theoretical. In the Greek *polis* the world was the world for man, while in the Christian/Judaeo tradition, man’s true world lies elsewhere—humanity is a naysayer to the present world, they renounce it in favour of another world. The ethos of Christianity is essentially insular—its concern for society is annulled in the pre-occupation with self-redemption and piety. In the figure of Abraham this distinction between the harmony of the Greeks and the otherworldly anxiety of the Christian/Judaeo tradition is made explicit. For example, as Hyppolite writes, “[Abraham] was incapable of an attachment to a finite and limited object. Life was reflected in him but as a totality, the negation of all its determinate forms.”³⁴

Hence, in becoming conscious of the Universal, the pious individual, Abraham in this case, severs his connection from the Universal by seeing himself as something inferior to it. Hegel elaborates,

“If the Sceptic’s Scepticism were consistent then he or she too would be annihilated in the absolute negation of Being.”

³² *PS*, 205.

³³ *Ibid.*, 206.

³⁴ Hyppolite, J. *Studies on Marx and Hegel* Ed & Trans:

With his herds Abraham wandered hither and thither over a boundless territory without bringing parts of it nearer to him by cultivating and improving them...he was a stranger to soil and men alike...The whole world Abraham regarded his opposite; if he did not take it to be nullity he looked upon it as sustained by a God who was alien to it. Nothing in nature was supposed to have any part in God; everything was simply under God's mastery.³⁵

Thus, unable to project himself on the world as the slave does by 'cultivating and improving' it through labor, Abraham remains estranged from a world that he sees as distinct from God.

As we have seen, the Sceptic emerged as being conscious of oneself, but it is a self that is dislocated; the duality between the I and non-I is fused without reconciliation, thus forming the Unhappy Consciousness. Self-consciousness acknowledges itself as incomplete and fragmented, and yet, because it is unable to unite this division, the Spirit towards which it implicitly moves is currently unattainable. Consciousness is now conscious of the Whole, and thus, conscious of its finitude. This development of consciousness rouses a despair that is the consciousness of being conscious of what consciousness lacks—a Truth (an Absolute where it *should* be).

Søren Kierkegaard's analysis of the Unhappy Consciousness in *Either/Or* contains a parallel to the division that underlies Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness. Kierkegaard writes,

The unhappy person is one who has his ideal, the content of his life, the fullness of his consciousness, the essences of his being, in some other manner outside of himself. He is always absent, never present to himself.³⁷

Indeed, such an estrangement from oneself, seen in Hegel as the division between the I and non-I and centred in the religious/existential void, is echoed in Kierkegaard as the *angst* that discloses itself in pure-freedom, and thus, the choice between reason and faith. The ideal that lies outside oneself is the Absolute, and consciousness undergoes despair when it acknowledges what it lacks, and thus, the incomplete status it has.

We now arrive at a position of existence that is distinctly a human mode of existence. Self-consciousness exists in the shadow of the Whole, in the shadow of its totality and everything that is opposed to it—it sees itself as a being but as being that exists only in contrast to what its not: "Consciousness of life, of its existence and activity, is only an agonizing

*“the unification of
concrete subjective
existence,
finitude and
existence, on the
one side,*

over this existence and activity, for therein it is conscious that its essence is only its opposite, is conscious only of its own nothingness.”³⁸ Despair is the thirst of consciousness to become something other than itself, something other than a particular; it is the endeavor of consciousness to fuse itself with its opposite—the Universal and the Unchangeable. This desired or expected unification with the Universal and Unchangeable is groundless; it is a fruitless dream insofar as it already involves the presence of the particular changeable self. Above all, consciousness recognizes its own finitude, and furthermore, that this finitude frames its being.

The dilemma Hegel presents is one that is perennial in philosophy: it concerns the unification of concrete subjective existence, finitude and existence, on the one side, and Being *qua* Being on the other; the boundless realm of the Absolute, where in subsuming everything that is, it too becomes the Nothing that isn't. Severed from the unity of which it presupposes, consciousness therefore sees itself as inferior and extraneous to totality of Being – it has no part in the particular as it has yet to find its place in the Universal. We see an example of this in the artisan's of Plato's Republic who in being conscious of a world of Forms, but as yet unable to grasp them, are rendered less ontologically 'real' than their counterpart, the Guardian.

The Unhappy Consciousness seeks to destroy itself so as to re-emerge in union with the Unchangeable; but in seeking complete annihilation the very access to unity—the self—is also destroyed. It is only through the self, not the purported other-world, that a union can be acquired between Being and the Nothing without recourse to self-dissolution.

Hegel suggests three ways in which consciousness seeks to unite itself with the Unchangeable, that is, three ways in which consciousness seeks to stand itself in relation to the Unchangeable. First, it distinguishes itself from the Unchangeable by projecting its Universality, i.e. the Notion into the beyond. This, however, merely re-affirms the original alienated struggle insofar as it embraces the disparity between the mutable and the immutable. Second, it believes that its very contingency is part of the Unchangeable, i.e. as a mode of God thus equating man *with* God. Similarly, this mode proves unsatisfactory as consciousness is again divided between itself as a being identifiable with God and itself simultaneously as base matter, replete with the sin, guilt and suffering that is interdependent with humanity. Third, it reconciles these two poles, the mutable and immutable, by identifying itself *in* the Unchangeable—as Spirit.

³⁵ Hegel, G.W.F. *Early Theological Writings* Trans: Knox, T.M. (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

³⁶ Although the allusions to religion are frequent, if not explicit in the present section, the reconciliation Hegel seeks is as much existential as it is religious.

³⁷ Kierkegaard, S. *Either/Or* Vol.1 Trans: Swenson, D. & Swenson L. (Princeton, 1971). p. 220.

³⁸ *PS*, 209.

*and Being qua Being
on the other.”*

It is this final option, Hegel argues, that proves to be the successful one:

In the first relationship it was merely the notion of an actual consciousness...which is not yet actual in action and enjoyment; the second is this actualization as an external action and enjoyment...but here, now is where the enemy is met with in his most characteristic form.³⁹

Consciousness, however, having now returned to itself from outward despair into the acquiescence of nothingness is still unhappy. “This third relationship in which this true actuality is one of the terms is the *relation* of that actuality, as a nothingness to the universal Being.”⁴⁰

It is only through the process of “mediation” that consciousness comes to redeem itself, for it is this that fills the middle term of a syllogism left by the polarities of Particular and Universal. In being conscious of its unity with the Absolute, albeit manifest as nothingness, consciousness comes to realize that a mediator must exist in order for there be such a relation, viz. between Particular and Universal. It is this mediator that acts as the mercurial transforming-agent, as it were, that alters both the Universal and the Particular.

Religiously, this mediator would seem to be symbolic of Christ—the divine-human, insofar as within the figure of Christ both finite and infinite conjoin while the bind between consciousness and concrete existence is persevered. Indeed, as Hegel suggests, the very possibility of there being a mediator presupposes that there is a consciousness to do the mediating: “This middle term is itself a consciousness Being, for it is an action which mediates consciousness as such; the content of this action is the extinction of the particular individuality which consciousness is undertaking.”⁴¹ From this mediator, seemingly embodied as the minister or indeed as the medium through which Being articulates itself (i.e. the mystic), consciousness finds consolation and accordingly rejects its own will in favour of following the mediators. In this process of self-denial, consciousness is no longer responsible for itself and so to ascribe joy or woe to consciousness would be absurd – one can only be happy or morose if one has played part in obtaining that mood. But in this mode of consciousness the ‘I’ is all but shielded in the mediator.

Hegel’s argument is that through the negativity of self-denial a positive (i.e. an affirmative) consciousness opens up that is receptive to the Unchangeable; as the Changeable is

“The Unhappy Consciousness seeks to destroy itself so as to re-emerge in union with the Unchangeable; but in seeking complete annihilation the very access to unity –the self–is also destroyed.”

increasingly mortified, the Unchangeable fills its void. Furthermore, through the renunciation of possessions and the actuality of itself manifest in work, consciousness loses its sense of autonomy, thereby rendering it a 'thing.' Thus, according to Hegel, consciousness "has the certainty of having truly divested itself of its 'I', and of having turned its immediate self-consciousness into a *Thing*, into having an objective existence."⁴²

The particular will has been sacrificed for the Universal self through the action of a mediator, thus reconciling the two polarities. It therefore transpires that the certainty consciousness derives emanates from the mediator, and consequently, Hegel announces the arrival of Reason—that which allows for the possibility of such a shift, i.e., the Particular consciousness identifying itself in the Universal through the middle term—the mediator.

Hegel's announcement of Reason at the end of the section on the Unhappy Consciousness seems somewhat thin after the grand dual between Master and Slave. Even more problematic than a desire for a dramatic finale is the somewhat abrupt emergence of Reason.

Certainly, the announcement of Reason does not seem to be a logically necessary development in the *Phenomenology*. Rather, it seems to have been posited as a pre-requisite for Hegel's Idealism.

Nevertheless, by equating reason with reality, Hegel has offered a remedy for the Unhappy Consciousness. By way of Reason, consciousness has discovered that the world is not in fact alien to it, but rather, it is consciousness' own Universal nature:

Now that self-consciousness is Reason, its hitherto negative relation to otherness turns round into a positive relation. Up till now it has been concerned only with its independence and freedom...at the expense of the world...but as Reason, assured of itself, it is at peace with them, and can endure them; for it is certain that it is itself reality, or that everything actual is none other than itself; its thinking is directly actuality, and thus its relationship to the latter is of idealism.⁴³

In correlating reason with reality consciousness has arrived at Objective Idealism, which the remainder of the *Phenomenology* explores, but because that is beyond the limits of our present task, and because we have followed Hegel's path until its Reasonable redemption, our journey is complete.

³⁹ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 224.

⁴¹ Ibid., 227.

⁴² Ibid., 229.

⁴³ Ibid., 232.