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‘THE MEDIATOR’ AND ‘REASON’S FORGETTING’:
TWO QUESTIONS ON THE TRANSITION OF SELF-
CONSCIOUSNESS TO REASON IN HEGEL’S
PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT

by

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ABSTRACT

‘THE MEDIATOR’ AND ‘REASON’S FORGETTING’: TWO QUESTIONS ON THE TRANSITION OF SELF- CONSCIOUSNESS TO REASON IN HEGEL’S *PHENOMENOLOGY* *OF SPIRIT*

by

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2021
Under the Supervision of Professor William Bristow

This paper is an attempt to provide a response to two questions that occur in the transition of the shape of Self-Consciousness to Reason in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*: What justifies the sudden appearance of the ‘mediator’ and Why does the shape of Reason, in its initial appearance, “forget” the path through which it came to be. I deploy an original interpretive framework upon Hegel’s dialectic, which I call the ‘tracking’ approach, that tracks ‘movement’ and ‘emergence’ of the subject consciousness so that one may know its corresponding ‘cognitive level’ that develops for it. I argue that the mediator’s appearance is the culmination of the dialectic of recognition in the Self-Consciousness chapter, which now forms a ‘peer’ relation to effect genuine unity. Self-consciousness in relation with the mediator also embodies Spirit, whose movement Hegel has been implicitly tracking throughout the chapter. I thereafter argue that the dialectic of the mediator is continued in the transition to Reason—its unifying activity is made actual and explicit as the *category*. Reason’s initial ‘forgetting’ is then nothing but the cognitive effect of the category, bringing about the (formal) dissolution of subject-object dichotomy.

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To
my parents,
for all their love and support

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I use the following abbreviations for the Cambridge edition translations of the relevant works.

Ph Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*

EL Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences: Part 1 Science of Logic*

¶ Specific paragraphs related to Ph and EL

Cr Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*

A Cr paragraph with the system of pagination in the first edition

B Cr paragraph with the system of pagination in the second edition

Any emphasis inside quotes is the respective author's, unless specified.

§1. INTRODUCTION

§1.1

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, G.W.F. Hegel advances an idiosyncratic conception of consciousness as a “logically self-determining” dialectical *movement* which moves from one *shape* to the next. His account of the transition of the shape of ‘Self-Consciousness’ to the shape of ‘Reason’, however, raises many questions, threatening thereby to be susceptible to Findlay’s (1976, p.115) charge that transitions in the *Phenomenology* can be “highly arbitrary, in some cases scandalously so”. In this paper I hope to dispel, to an extent, such continuity and expository concerns by advancing responses to two queries, namely, (1) what justifies the sudden appearance of the ‘mediator’, and (2) why does the shape of Reason, in its initial appearance, “forget” the path through which it came to be.

Answering these two queries will be part of the overall claim that transitions in the *Phenomenology* are consistent, rational and necessary steps of Hegel’s project in this work. Consequently, the task of this paper if achieved should, apart from its own merits, count as significant given the large controversy about the unity of the sections of the *Phenomenology*.¹

¹ See Pippin (1993, pp.52-56) for discussion on this. Cf. Stern (2013, p.10): “It is certainly the case that perhaps the greatest challenge to any reading of the *Phenomenology* is to show how it can be understood as a coherent and well-ordered work”

It is important to place these questions within the context of the particular transition in which they occur, from the shape of Self-Consciousness to Reason. This transition is important. It takes the reader from the theme of the first two chapters (Consciousness and Self-Consciousness where thought and being are individually separate) into that of the last four (thought and being share the same structure or conceptual space). Lauer (1982, p.125), correctly in my opinion, identifies this transition as decisive for the whole dialectic and warns that we risk "becoming engulfed in a confusion out of which we shall not subsequently be able to extricate ourselves" if we fail to understand the importance of what occurs here.

Extant literature is not only largely silent on these two questions, but has not adequately appreciated the importance of the figure of the mediator as it arises in the Self-Consciousness chapter.² The entire transition from Self-Consciousness to Reason turns on the unifying activity of the mediator, so its appearance surely deserves an explanation; furthermore, we will see that explaining the mediator will assist in explaining the implicit turnaround of consciousness's mood (its meta-attitude or *a priori* stance towards other self-consciousnesses) in the transition, which commentators have noted goes by unexplained.³ The phenomenon of 'forgetting' is, on the other hand, a prelude to Hegel's critique of the "empty idealisms" of his predecessors, notably Kant, Fichte, and Schelling amongst others (see *Ph* ¶1238). This

² Luft (2013) is an exception, though he doesn't talk about the above mentioned two questions.

³ For instance, Stern (2013) and Luft (2013).

criticism takes significance for beginning from the Reason chapter Hegel will develop his own version of idealism which will take explicit form in the Spirit chapter.⁴ So it is first necessary to understand what Hegel means when he initially says that Reason ‘forgets’ itself. Answering these two questions, then, is a pivotal step to understanding Hegel in this part of the *Phenomenology*.

§1.2

My strategy in answering these questions involves deploying an original interpretive framework upon Hegel’s dialectic which I call the ‘tracking’ approach. What is tracked in the dialectic is the ‘movement’ and ‘emergence’ of consciousness. I define both ‘movement’ and ‘emergence’ in a (Hegelian) technical sense: ‘movement’ is the dialectical progression of one shape of consciousness to the next driven by the epistemic aporia of the previous shape, and ‘emergence’ is the increasingly greater degree of rational self-awareness that consciousness has of its whole nature, as a result of reflecting on the experience of this dialectical movement. The aim is to know to what extent Consciousness has ‘moved’ and ‘emerged’ at each stage of the dialectic, so that one may know the corresponding ‘cognitive level’ that has developed for it. I take the specific cognitive level of a shape of consciousness to be the *expression* of its epistemology, that is, the way that it views and experiences the world apropos to the epistemology it espouses at that stage of the dialectic.

⁴ Hyppolite (1979, p. 228) underscores the importance of these chapters: “This is what is most original in Hegel’s philosophy, the reconciliation of the history of thought with thought itself.”

Both of my questions are answered by the ‘tracking’ approach. I argue that the mediator’s appearance is the culmination of the dialectic of recognition in the Self-Consciousness chapter, where Hegel explained that another self-consciousness is required to effect genuine unity and knowledge, but which now, at the stage of the transition is, importantly, not combative, but forms a *peer*-relation with the Unhappy Consciousness. The non-combativeness of the mediator can be inferred due to Hegel’s stress on ‘relation’ in the text as the attribute linking self-consciousness and the mediator, and the fact that the functions that the mediator performs can be better understood as one performed by someone with an amicable attitude. So construed, I further argue that the peer-relation is also the cause that transforms the unhappy consciousness’s meta-attitude towards other self-consciousnesses—from broadly negative (troubled and antagonistic) to one of rational ‘positivity’—by arguing that the phenomenon of mutual recognition should now be understood as having undertones of the kind of recognition that love engenders. Self-consciousness in relation with the mediator also embodies Spirit,⁵ whose movement and development Hegel has been quietly noting throughout the chapter.

⁵ After the shape of Reason comes the shape of Spirit and its various progressive manifestations—social, aesthetic, religious, and absolute spirit. What is distinctive here is that consciousness or the taking up of determinate empirical concepts is no longer an *individual* activity but one governed by social norms. For the purposes of my paper, one can roughly define Spirit as a normatively structured social world, produced and reproduced by self-conscious subjects. The ultimate aim of the *Phenomenology* can be taken to be a demonstration of the dialectic wherein Spirit becomes conscious of itself *as* Spirit. Robert Brandom has referred to Spirit as a *supersubject*.

I thereafter argue that the dialectic of the mediator is continued in the transition to Reason: its unifying activity is made actual and explicit as the *category* (Hegel's word for a form of cognition which has for itself the formal identity of being and thought). Reason's initial 'forgetting' is then nothing but the cognitive expression of the *category*, bringing about the (formal) dissolution of subject-object dichotomy.

If my interpretation is right, then three consequences follow. First, the (erstwhile neglected) importance and role of the mediator in this transition is brought out and highlighted. Second, the dialectic of Self-Consciousness is shown to be sufficiently consistent in the transition to Reason (though I realize that many more queries remain which I don't take up in this paper⁶). Third, the dialectic is also shown to fit well with Hegel's overarching theme in the *Phenomenology*: revealing the dialectic of Spirit. The overall effect, I hope, will be to prove that a coherent reading of this particular transition, as well as the work as a whole, is both possible, appropriate, as well as germane to Hegel's ends.

In §2 I detail the interpretive framework that I call the 'tracking' approach. §3 introduces and resolves the two interpretive questions. I then conclude in §4 by taking

⁶ Like: What actually *is* the mediator? How exactly does the mediator have an immediate relation to *both* the universal and the singular? What does it *mean* for the singular to unite with the universal? *How* is their unison brought about? What constitutes the mediator's *counsel*? etc. I will be assuming answers for some of these questions in my paper, and hope for my exegesis to shed peripheral light on them.

stock of my project and proposing new lines of inquiry that can take my interpretation forward.

§2. THE ‘TRACKING’ APPROACH

According to Hegel, the only way we can acquire objective knowledge of the world (without resigning ourselves to Kant’s radical conclusion that we can never know things ‘as they are in themselves’⁷) is by examining the ‘mode of knowing’ or self-consciousness itself, which is the primary *a priori* condition for the possibility and unity of knowledge.⁸ For Hegel, this will mean unhinging the assumption that this *a priori* condition of knowledge is unrevisable or static.⁹ His examination involves

⁷ See *Cr* A42/B59 as following from the results of the transcendental aesthetic, and *Cr* B148 read with B166 as following from the results of the transcendental deduction. Hegel charges Kant for not being critical enough, for his approach “presupposes a *difference between our own selves and [] cognition*” (*Ph* ¶74) This indictment is especially relevant as Kant’s assumption of a subject as separate from the perceived object was one key factor that led him to his radical conclusion.

⁸ This was Kant’s central insight which Hegel acknowledges. For Kant, self-consciousness (or the transcendental unity of apperception) is the “supreme” condition of all experience; it is the primitive *I* in which the representation of sensible intuition is unified so as to be for *one* consciousness. As Kant famously puts it, the “I think” must accompany consciousness of anything. See *Cr* A107, A123, B131-32, and B136. The problem, according to Hegel, is that Kant will eventually conclude from this that we cannot know an object beyond our representation of it, whereas for Hegel, thought is seen to directly grasp being without remainder, for it sees the same rationality mirrored in the other. Cf. Stern (2013, p.18).

⁹ See *Ph* ¶33: “[pure thinking] consists in giving up the *fixity* of its self-positing” This is the “monochrome formalism” of Kant’s that Hegel was dissatisfied with (I talk here only of its theoretical aspect). He levies this charge at various points in the *Phenomenology* (as well as in his other writings: see for instance *EL*¶41), but see especially *Ph* ¶15-16, ¶56, and ¶238. See Guyer (1993) for discussion. For Kant, the transcendental unity of apperception was only the “vehicle of concepts” (*Cr* A341), the mere *form* of any thinking, and not thought itself. In detaching the assumption of pure self-consciousness as formal, fixed, and static, and conceiving it to have a rich, dynamic, dialectical movement, Hegel in his own unique way sought to improve upon the Kantian response to skepticism. See Pippin (1989, pp.16-41) for an influential interpretation along these lines.

setting consciousness down the path of “self-consummating skepticism” (*Ph* ¶78). This means that Hegel will analyze a sequence of “shapes” of consciousness, or different modes of knowing each with its own epistemic commitments, beginning with the simplest that commits to as little as possible. Pippin (1993) explains these as the possibility of justificatory criteria of first order truths of the world, or what counts as a world and our evidence about it. In each shape except the last, there will be a difference between what the shape of consciousness knows and its knowing of it, thereby self-engendering skepticism of its mode of knowing.¹⁰ This skepticism takes the form of an unresolvable internal contradiction in its knowing of the world, fomenting doubt about what it earlier confidently assumed as knowledge and truth. Consciousness then “sublates” its conflicted truth and reaches the point of “determinate negation” wherein the contradictory state of affairs provides the generative impulse to progress to a *new* form or shape of consciousness, more sophisticated than earlier, where this contradiction is overcome.¹¹ The taking up of this

¹⁰ “Consciousness in its own self provides its own standard, and the investigation will thereby be a comparison of it with itself” (*Ph* ¶84). Hegel takes the *Phenomenology* to be the way in which natural consciousness is educated by its own experience and thereby transformed. See also Beiser (2005, pp.156-7) on how this *internal* standard improves over Kant’s *external* one.

¹¹ As an example of this process, the shape of Skepticism negates everything, all life and things, by regarding them to have no independence or reality outside thought. This negating activity is meant to secure certainty for itself, but this blanket negation sweeps up Skepticism itself and ends up undermining its own certainty of itself. Skepticism can’t both negate its changing perceptions and its unchanging self-identity, and thus falls into aporia. This aporia leads to a new shape of consciousness, the ‘unhappy consciousness’, which unites these two opposing qualities in *one* self.

For a general construction of Hegel’s process, see Houlgate (2013, pp. 19-20), *EL* ¶¶81-82. On Hegel’s method in some detail, see Forster (1993), Houlgate (2003). The main dialectical aim is to break down opposition between two seemingly unamiable concepts, so that what arises is a way forward rather than a simple repudiation.

new shape is a necessary taking up, not in the sense of logical entailment, but in the sense of a natural taking up of what organically arises (like how when learning an instrument, the learner naturally takes up the more complicated scale after mastering the simpler one).¹² The process is, however, repeated again when new epistemic inconsistencies arise in the *new* shape of consciousness, and so, by successive iterations, “the complete series of shapes comes about on its own accord.” (Ph ¶79). Eventually, consciousness reaches the standpoint of absolute knowing where subject and object (thought and being) prove within conscious experience itself to be identical in structure. This self-generated “logical” dialectic is,

“the path of natural consciousness pressing forward towards true knowing, or it can be taken to be the path of the soul wandering through the series of ways it takes shape, as if these were stations put forward in advance to it by its own nature, so that it purifies itself into spirit by arriving at a cognition of what it is in itself through the complete experience of its own self.” (Ph ¶77)

The ‘Tracking’ approach is meant to characterize the above quoted formulation of Hegel’s dialectic, which in my opinion gets to its crux. It is meant to track the path, or the ‘movement’ of consciousness through its various shapes, and the extent of self-awareness of its constitutive nature that emerges at each stage. The cumulative effect is one of noting the cognitive level at each stage of emergence of consciousness. At the same time, it must not lose sight of the fact that through a process of continuous revisions and increasing sophistication in its epistemology, it is Spirit that is coming

¹² See Forster (1993, pp.138-39, 145-49) for a detailed account of necessity in the *Phenomenology*.

to know itself as Spirit. I proceed now to explain in some detail what I mean by ‘movement’, ‘emergence’, and consciousness’s ‘cognition’.

§2.1

Consciousness is *moving* as it progresses through a series of different shapes driven by its own skepticism and dissatisfaction about its mode of knowledge, as sketched above. This movement is the *experience* of consciousness in knowing the object and itself (*Ph* ¶186). I note four more points on moving:

- (a) According to Hegel, the dialectical movement of the shapes of consciousness is the vehicle of truth (*Ph* ¶16). The concept of Hegelian truth is complicated, not least for its controversial premise involving natural teleology, and I will only sketch a simplified version of it below. Essentially, truth for a thing is made sharper and substantive the more closely its concept and its actual empirical realization of the concept match. Concept is the inner, dormant potential, and its actuality is the progressive realization of this potential. Only when it is *actually* what it is *implicitly* is truth attained. As one shape of consciousness transitions to the next, what is implicit in the concept of the first shape is made explicit in the second shape, and truth in general is made clearer and non-contradictory.¹³ For example, the truth of the shape of Consciousness is Self-Consciousness when the former realizes that any

¹³ Cf. Schacht (1972, 5). Hegel also construes movement as where the difference between knowledge and truth is steadily cancelled or bridged (*Ph* ¶805).

criteria for complete knowledge cannot come from the object, but instead must involve investigating the nature of self-consciousness that establishes *a priori* stances towards the object.

- (b) Movement occurs in two ways: between major shapes of consciousness (as in from Consciousness to Self-Consciousness to Reason), and between minor shapes or *moments* within a major movement (as in from Stoicism to Skepticism to Unhappy Consciousness within the major shape of Self-Consciousness).¹⁴
- (c) One might think from reading the text that there is a kind of double movement going on—the object too seems to undergo a movement simultaneously with consciousness, since for each shape of consciousness, its object is different. But in reality, there is only one movement. Although consciousness is conscious of an object, the change in the object is not different from change in consciousness, because what we mean by the object is what the object is for consciousness. So if the object is initially taken to be X, the experience of knowing X will prove that it is *not* X, but is actually Y. X and Y are not separate, X only *transforms* to Y. At a deeper level, at various stages in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel points out that the differences that arise between consciousness and its object are actually “no differences at all”, and one of Hegel’s aims is to take us to the point where subject-object dichotomy collapses (I talk more about this point in §3.2).

¹⁴ This is similar to what Houlgate (2013, p. 24) terms as ‘macro-transitions’ and ‘micro-transitions’.

(d) Movement is ultimately movement of Spirit becoming steadily more explicit. But Hegel characterizes this in a different way. Through its dialectical movement, a shape of consciousness steadily *alienates* itself or becomes *an other* to itself. That is to say, its movement estranges itself from itself so that its last moment as compared to the first makes it seem like two different types of consciousnesses have arisen (whereas in truth there is only one) due to the considerable differences in their respective epistemologies that construe the object very differently. These two epistemologies are unable to be reconciled (the contradiction or *aporia* I noted earlier). It then comes round to itself from out of this alienation in the transition to the next shape, and repeats this movement until alienation itself is overcome at the stage of Spirit. All in all, the garnering of experience of consciousness through its movement as different shapes cumulatively comprises the dialectic of Spirit which is this movement of becoming an *other* to itself, or, of becoming an object to its own self, and then transcending or overcoming this otherness. (*Ph* ¶136)

§2.2

Consciousness is *emerging* at three levels, each subtler than the other, and each intimately linked with movement.¹⁵ Firstly, there is the emergence of the new object for consciousness in the process of moving to the next shape. Hegel claims that the new object emerges out of consciousness's experience of the dialectical movement; it

¹⁵ *Ph* ¶187: "for us, what has emerged at the same time emerges as movement and coming-to-be."

is necessarily (in the organic way as noted above) adopted by the new shape in its immediate appearance (that is, the first configuration that assumes minimal theoretical presuppositions of what knowing is), which resolves the epistemic difficulties of the previous shape (*Ph* ¶186 and ¶187). The circumstances of the emergence of the new object (the *movement* which I noted above) guides the whole series of shapes in their necessity. With each emergence the epistemology espoused by the shape of consciousness grows more sophisticated.

Secondly, in so far as the new object emerges through the dialectical experience of consciousness, “This new object contains ... what experience has learned about it.” (*Ph* ¶186) So, crucially, in progressing to the next shape or epistemic framework, consciousness learns about itself and its knowledge of the world. In fact, this learning is what the next shape of consciousness makes explicit what was implicit, and thereby hidden, in the previous shape (like how in examining the realist positions of the shapes of Consciousness, we find that the subject’s *a priori* stance towards the object was implicit in all of them). So, there is a steady heightening of self-aware reflections of consciousness about its nature as it accumulates experience while moving through its dialectic.¹⁶

¹⁶ Readers familiar with the *Phenomenology* will recognize an interpretive difficulty here. Though it is apparent from the text that Hegel means the progress of consciousness through its stages in the dialectic to mark a progressive heightening of consciousness’s self-consciousness, yet Hegel also avers that, “the emergence of the new object [] presents itself to consciousness without consciousness knowing how this happens to it. It takes place for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness” (*Ph* ¶187) which seems to indicate a *deficiency* in self-consciousness. Commentators consequently have avoided a genetic account self-

Lastly, it would be superficial to say that emergence is simply consciousness emerging as increasingly self-aware. We must keep in mind the larger dialectic at play above the transformational movement of shapes of consciousness: each stage of reflection takes consciousness closer to it *emerging* as Spirit. This growing self-consciousness will reach its denouement at the end of the *Phenomenology* in the Absolute Spirit chapter. Indeed, from the previously noted quote at *Ph* ¶177, Hegel takes the entire movement of consciousness, its self-propelled and self-generated dialectical journey, as consciousness “purifying itself into spirit”. The dialectic of consciousness is then, ultimately, the dialectic of the “whole” (another term Hegel uses to refer to fully realized Spirit). Indeed, Hegel himself says that “the moments of the whole are *shapes of consciousness*” (*Ph* ¶189), that “the whole is only essence completing itself through its own development” (*Ph* ¶120), and that “the whole [is actual in so far as it] is the result together with the way the result comes to be.” (*Ph* ¶13)

consciousness (Cf. Honneth (2008), Neuhouser (1986)). Untying this interpretive knot is a task that I believe the ‘tracking’ approach is competent to undertake, but whose detailed justification I must leave for another paper. I only note that my strategy will turn on the distinction between the movement of major shapes and minor shapes —while truth which emerges for one minor shape is taken up dogmatically as the immediate mode of knowing for the next minor shape, the major shapes of consciousness undergoing the more global movement preserve their historical epistemic experience, and so, do accumulate an evolving self-consciousness of *their* own dialectic (Cf. *Ph* ¶204, ¶237).

So to summarize—

- (i) *Movement* is the self-generated progression between shapes of consciousness, propelled by the desideratum of acquiring objective, non-contradictory knowledge.
- (ii) Through this process, what *emerges* for consciousness is an accumulation of experience engendering increasing self-awareness of its nature.

§2.3

The cognitive level of consciousness at a particular stage can then be taken as the *applied effect* of the conjunction of the above. It is the use or the empirical expression of a shape of consciousness's newly espoused epistemology that is normative upon construing, grasping and representing the object. The bounds of that epistemological framework are determined by the extent that the dialectic has moved and emerged up to that particular stage along with the concomitant experience it has garnered about knowledge and self-knowledge. The expression of that (limited) mode of knowing in terms of determining and knowing the object of experience is the appropriate cognitive level of consciousness (Cf. *Ph* ¶1234). For instance, the shape of Self-Consciousness in the transition from Consciousness adopts a more sophisticated approach to knowledge by acknowledging the role that the subject plays in construing both the object and an objective criterion of knowledge, so the expression of its

cognitive level takes the form of searching to recognize itself (the subject) in whatever object it encounters.

§2.4

Now, proclaiming that there is some sort of an emergence of the nature of consciousness happening by way of a dialectical movement might come across as obvious for previous readers of Hegel. But precisely because this collective phenomenon of movement, emergence, and the corresponding level of cognition is uncritically taken as background while analyzing particular details in the dialectic, commentators inadvertently commit trespasses in their interpretations by inaccurately attributing a level of rationality that has not yet emerged for consciousness. Some accounts of Self-Consciousness, like Shklar's, Kojève's and Forster's for example, can be critiqued on this account. While talking about the dialectic of recognition in the Self-Consciousness chapter, Shklar (1976, p.28) reads empirical history and personality into it ("This is the treadmill of history"; "the duel between epic heroes"; "They now mutually recognize each other not only as persons, but as men"), and so does Kojève (1969, p. 41) when he equates the 'life and death struggle' to "human historical self-conscious existence...where there have been, bloody fights, wars for prestige." Forster (1989, p.62) considers the shapes of Stoicism and Skepticism each with a capital "S," i.e., as specific historical movements in philosophy. Finding none, he (erroneously) concludes that Hegel's account of transitions "looks rather thin and unconvincing."

Now, it is a controversial matter whether the stages of consciousness prior to the Spirit chapter should be read as corresponding to historical periods or not. I will briefly argue against a direct historical interpretation (in line with my approach), but for reasons of space a fuller argumentation must be left for another paper.¹⁷ The first thing to note is that the above authors don't provide us with an explicit argument about the viability of reading empirical history into Hegel's meta-cognitive arguments before going on to do so, so we very well have grounds to challenge this assumed premise. Next, their interpretations not only take the focus away from the meta-cognitive arguments that are relevant and at stake in these sections, but can be critiqued on the line that historical examples and connections are meant to be allegorical at this stage. What Hegel began from the first chapter on Consciousness is a discussion on the ways that an object is understood and taken up by a consciousness, and this discussion most plausibly continues on to how consciousnesses understand and take each other up, given that self-consciousness is found to be a necessary part of the criterion for experience. This dialectic is primarily intra-cognitive, as consciousness searches for epistemic certainty for itself in various ways throughout the chapter on Self-Consciousness. Consequently, one of the key results that Hegel points to in the transition of Self-Consciousness to Reason is that certainty seems to

¹⁷ Note that I do not dismiss the possibility of using historical allegory as aids to understanding and clarification in places where Hegel is abstruse. My intention here is only to deny that what Hegel says, at least in the first two chapters of the *Phenomenology*, has any direct empirical instances in any historical period.

only be possible in the actualization of an *inter*-subjective criterion (rather than one within an individual consciousness) that dissolves the boundaries between the thinker and what is *other* to it.

At any rate, given that consciousness in this chapter is one sided and antagonistic, a direct application on human history will unsurprisingly yield an interpretation that is one sided and antagonistic. What is needed at the very least is the ‘positive’ turn in Reason to ‘balance’ any interpretation out, should it be made further along the dialectic. In other words, the dialectic hasn’t reached the stage where a concrete relation to world history can be read into it. Lastly, it further seems to me that such an enterprise especially glosses over the complex and interlinked empirical determinants of historical events, even if *a priori* attitudes too are important determinants of how we grasp the world. Even if Hegel had in mind an allusion to the transition of society from Medieval Christianity into the Enlightenment in the transition at the end of the Self-Consciousness chapter, the *philosophical* import of this transition is meant to mark the self-transformation of consciousness more than any historical fact. Therefore, until the dialectic has moved and emerged to a point where at least a positive relation to the world can emerge, historical relata at this stage are best construed as allegory and the shapes of consciousness as general second-order psychological attitudes.

In my reading, then, I am merely urging the reader of the *Phenomenology* to be attentive to the dialectic in the way I sketched above, with the overarching intention

of arguing for coherence in Hegel's dialectic, a coherence that is contested and not easily apprehended. Tracking 'movement', 'emergence', and 'cognition' at each stage of the dialectic will help us in this, in not only avoiding interpretive trespasses, but also in making sense of sudden claims made by Hegel that go on to play important roles in the dialectic, like in the following two questions involving the 'mediator'.

§3. FROM SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS TO REASON: RESOLVING TWO QUESTIONS

Having explained the 'tracking' approach, in this section I apply my approach in answering two important interpretive questions that arise in the transition of Self-Consciousness to Reason. In §3.1 I resolve the question: what justifies the sudden appearance of the 'mediator'? and in §3.2 I provide an explanation to the question: why should the shape of Reason, in its initial configuration, "forget" its coming to be? Without an understanding of these two phenomena, the transition between Self-Consciousness and Reason cannot be understood completely.

The answers to both the questions will involve the figure of the 'mediator' as it arises in the Self-Consciousness chapter. Mediation is an important theme in the *Phenomenology* as well as in Hegel's other works. Not only does Hegel open the *Phenomenology* with it (see his opening remarks on knowledge of both the self and the object as mediated at *Ph* ¶92) but its implicit concept in the Consciousness chapter will be seen to become explicit in the Self-Consciousness chapter, and its role will

often involve a crucial reconciling between two opposing aspects of consciousness with the consequence of revealing the dialectic of Spirit.¹⁸ Within the space of this paper, I examine two queries that bring out the importance of this theme, and illuminate the figure of the mediator as it arises in the Self-Consciousness chapter.

§3.1 THE FIRST QUESTION

Self-consciousness, despite what its name suggests, initially remains object oriented. It becomes self-consciousness proper (that is, the common-sensical understanding of self-consciousness as self-reflective awareness about one's nature) only at the stage of the 'Unhappy Consciousness'. Hegel describes the Unhappy Consciousness as, "one that is *for itself* the doubled consciousness of itself as self-liberating, unchangeable, self-equal self-consciousness, and of itself as absolutely self-confusing, self-inverting – and *it is the consciousness of its being this contradiction.*" (*Ph* ¶206, my emphasis on the latter phrase) Unhappy Consciousness is thus 'unhappy' because it is aware of its internal contradiction of being singular (contingent or inessential) and the universal (unchangeable) essence at the same time, oriented in such a way that the universal essence is something transcendent, (the *beyond*) and, as such, is unattainable, always beyond reach. Unhappy Consciousness thus seeks a reconciliation to "free itself from itself" (*Ph* ¶208). It seeks to give up its individuality or its singular standpoint in a

¹⁸ See for instance, Hegel's remarks on *language* as mediation making what each opposing shape of consciousness is "*in itself*" into its *spirit*" at *Ph* ¶508-09. The role of the mediator or the 'mediating middle' is no doubt inspired by the inference-facilitating role played by the middle term in Aristotelian syllogism, though Luft (2013, p.314) warns us against a hasty Aristotelian construal of the mediator.

genuine way (that is not covertly self-deceptive) so as to be able to unite with the universal essence, from which it finds itself alienated. It attempts to seek a way out of the negative stance it has acquired towards itself that has created an inner estrangement of it with itself, setting it apart from its own universal essence.¹⁹

In trying to achieve genuine self-surrender, however, it begins to scrutinize and obsess over itself and its actions so as to remove any sort of deception in them. Hegel says that self-consciousness here is “a personality limited to itself and its own petty acts”. (*Ph* ¶1225) It is obsessing over its distinct individuality and its own doing which, far from being universal and of no real importance, is being given the highest importance by consciousness. By being obstinately fixated over its own individual actions, consciousness is unable to free itself from itself.

This is where the ‘mediator’ (*Diener*)²⁰ steps in to help this consciousness out. Hegel outlines two functions of this mediator, negative and positive. It is negative in

¹⁹ Thus, Hyppolite (1979, pp.207-17) sees this transition as grounded in and propelled by alienation, specifically, the self-alienation of self-consciousness. Beiser (2005, pp. 136-39) takes Hegel in this chapter to be advancing a critique of traditional Christianity that alienates Man from God that withdraws from the world after the death of Christ, leaving no direct mediators between the individual and God.

²⁰ A.V. Miller, and commentators before and after him, translates *Diener* as ‘priest’ or ‘minister’. This matches the religious theme of this chapter, and the mediator has often been thought to be a reference to the Church or any part thereof. I do not deny that Hegel perhaps intended that allusion, but following Pinkard, I stick to the more neutral ‘mediator’ and prefer a more heterodox and phenomenological interpretation. This is also in line with what Hegel says in his *Science of Logic* taking mediation to be anything comprehended through the categories (*EL* ¶62).

The concept of mediation is rich (See O’Connor (1999, pp. 84-91) for his taxonomy of the concept), and its reference to Kant is often noted in the literature—for instance, Houlgate (2013, p. 118) compares it to the Kantian schema and Kain (2005, p. 63) compares it to Kant’s use of God as mediator that reconciles virtue and happiness. It can however, I suspect, be

the sense that singular consciousness is merged with it, and it is positive in the sense that it brings forth the unity that the unhappy consciousness has been longing for with the universal essence (*Ph* ¶1226).²¹

The problem is that Hegel introduces the notion of the ‘mediator’ abruptly and without providing any preparatory reasons; almost like a *deus ex machina* to help consciousness out over the last stage of its movement into the next major shape, Reason. So one must naturally ask, what explains the occurrence of the mediator here?

I argue that if we track the movement and emergence of the dialectic as it has progressed up till now in the *Phenomenology*, the presence of the mediator is best explained as the completion of the dialectic of recognition that self-consciousness initially was concerned with, the lesson of which was “self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness” (*Ph* ¶175).

The motive behind seeking recognition is securing certainty. Subject consciousness seeks certainty in the world: of itself as well as for its epistemic claims against other consciousnesses and modes of knowing. This certainty is at first attempted by assuming an antagonistic stance towards the world.

anything that performs the function of mediation and unification at a higher cognitive level, and that I think is the larger import of Hegel’s point over and above the religious references.
²¹ I presume this unity goes through successfully, and do not say *how* this unification happens. I will note the consequences later though, *given* that this unity is achieved.

What has occurred is this. At that point in the dialectic, consciousness learnt that it needed to posit another self-consciousness for the challenge of recognition raised by another self was qualitatively greater (and thereby more substantively satisfying) than that posed by normal objects. The two independent self-consciousnesses, however, fight for being recognized as the sole subject, and thereupon reject each other's subjective self-determination by rendering each other as merely an object. For it, the *other* only exists as a means for securing its own self-certainty that *it* is the real subject, and the shape for which truth emerges in its movement.

I argue however, that consciousness in its continued antagonism towards the second self only learns this lesson superficially. We see its self-centeredness resurface again in the unhappy consciousness being obsessed over itself. But now the dialectic has moved, and what has emerged through experience is not a need for egotistical recognition, but a need for self-knowledge and inner harmony (apropos to the title of the chapter).

And now, Hegel completes the lesson for consciousness. At a time when self-consciousness is unable to fathom its own nature and reconcile its internal contradiction, he shows that another consciousness (the mediator) is required to unify it and resolve its inner opposition. By unifying so, I contend that the mediator expresses the true lesson of the dialectic of recognition: "*A self-consciousness is for a self-consciousness*. Only thereby is there in fact self-consciousness, for it is only therein that

the unity of itself in its otherness comes to be for it.” (*Ph* ¶1177).²² Consciousness thus takes forward its earlier lesson of the sociality of recognition, of knowing yourself through another, by not relating with the *other* as an inert, or rival, or a dominating consciousness (as it did before at various stages in the dialect), but one that I argue is now taken up as its own *peer*.

It is important to understand what I mean by the mediator as a peer. I only mean it in the sense that the mediator possesses a peer-like attitude towards the unhappy consciousness, that it is sympathetic to its despair and amicable to helping it out of its negativity. The notion of “peer” suggests a relation on the same level, but the mediator, by virtue of being a “Diener” (the literal translation being “servant”) and serving the Unhappy Consciousness could be thought of as lower than the Unhappy Consciousness, and by virtue of having a closer relation to the Unchangeable, also simultaneously higher than the Unhappy Consciousness. That the mediator is both higher and lower at the same time is internal to the way the dialectic develops and what allows it to be a bridge between the singular and the universal essences. But instead of thinking about the peer-relation in terms of being on the same level, I mean here that we should think about it in terms of an interpersonal attitude; that the two

²² Houlgate (2013) thinks that just because consciousness “cannot bring *itself* into contact with the latter [the unchangeable essence], it must allow itself to be brought into contact with it by *another*, by a mediator.” (p. 118, Houlgate’s emphasis) While this makes straightforward logical sense, I contend that more is going on with the mediator’s introduction.

consciousnesses—the Unhappy Consciousness and the Mediator—are not opposed to one another. We will see the advantages of this interpretation in what follows.

It is only upon construing the mediator as possessing a peer-like attitude that mutual recognition in the productive sense that we understand it—which leads to genuine intersubjective self-discovery—takes place. Consciousness thus, in its sociality with another peer consciousness, is able to develop true reflective thinking about its nature, and be in harmony with itself.

Importantly, it is able to finally genuinely give itself up to the mediator by acting upon its *counsel*.²³ This act is the means through which the unhappy consciousness achieves unity of the singular and universal essences within it, and thereby lose its ‘unhappy’ moniker. Its relinquishing of its individual willing means that willing is now found only in its eternal essence, and as eternal essence, it is therefore universal and thus objective willing. The fact that the mediator gives advice, not a command or an opinion or anything else, is suggestive of the link the mediator has to the unchangeable essence. Just as an experienced teacher, who knows the complicated subject, advises the confused student in figuring the problem out, similarly, the unchangeable essence, aware of itself as ultimately the true essence of the lost singular fixated consciousness, gives advice to it through the mediator. This advice would be received only if the mediator is taken up as a consciousness towards which the subject

²³ According to Hegel, it is through the mediator’s counselling services that “consciousness frees itself from [its own] doing” (*Ph* ¶228).

consciousness is not antagonistic. Perhaps the mediator may be taken to give its advice from a position of benign authority, but it does not do so in an authoritarian way.

Since for the first time Consciousness posits the *other* as its peer, it can form a *relation* with it. Hence Hegel's stress on 'relation' both at *Ph* ¶224 (where he begins the third movement of the Unhappy Consciousness), and at ¶226 (where he introduces the mediator). Forming a relation makes possible three events (I talk about the third one a bit later). First, consciousness's knowledge of the world will no longer be a consumption or a negation of it, but a relation to it, which is more suited to the process of reconciling its singular and universal essences within the same conceptual space. It also anticipates the positive relation it will develop to the world post its transition to the shape of Reason. And second, as noted above, the act of relation is what plausibly enables the activity of *counsel* and *mediation*.

Importantly, for the purposes of the larger dialectical theme of the emergence of self-conscious Spirit, the mediator as the conscious *other* is further justified in its occurrence as it represents progress in the actualization of Spirit. For a brief moment, Spirit shows itself in the sociality and unity-in-difference projected by the harmonious consciousness with the mediator, before it goes underground again in Reason. This is a key point that my approach illuminates in tracking movement and emergence in the dialectic; most commentators have recognized the dialectic of Spirit in this chapter but have failed to connect it to the mediator.

Throughout the chapter on self-consciousness, Hegel leaves hints about connecting the dialectic of self-consciousness to Spirit. The lines at *Ph* ¶177 where Hegel informs us that “the concept of Spirit is present for us” in the feature of the doubling of self-consciousness (*Ph* ¶178) (we see that a salient feature of Spirit is its sociality) are the most widely noted in the dialectic of recognition. But, importantly to my interpretation, this observation is made in context of the realization that emerges from the quotes of *Ph* ¶175 and *Ph* ¶177 that I noted above. In other words, genuine self-knowing is possible only through the *other* and in unity with the *other*—two events that move forward in the dialectic to the point where the mediator, as an instance of the doubled consciousness, brings them about for the unhappy consciousness; and the harmony and eventual reconciliation of consciousness’s doubling within itself (both as singular and universal) “brings to life” the concept of Spirit, as Hegel notes at *Ph* ¶206-07.²⁴

This, I argue, is the important implicit function that the mediator performs. The concept of Spirit is neither unity, nor difference, but unity-in-difference. The mediator does not *annihilate* the doubled self-consciousness as such but rather *counsels* so that it may unify the unhappy consciousness while still preserving the duality, thus taking forward the dialectic of Spirit. This is also why, continuing from above as my third point, the stress on *relation* by Hegel is all the more important, and why I construe it

²⁴ See also *Ph* ¶210: “While the other unchangeable is a shape of singular individuality like itself, consciousness becomes, thirdly, spirit. It has the joy of finding itself therein, and it is aware that its singular individuality is reconciled with the universal.”

as bringing to completion the dialectic of recognition: in relating, the I disappears in favor of the shared relationship.²⁵ In other words, in a relation the ‘I’ is transformed to a ‘we’. Hence the importance of Hegel’s famous words on Spirit *is in fact brought about by the mediator*: “The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*”.

If Consciousness has its turning point in Self-consciousness, then Self-Consciousness has *its* turning point in the mediator, as bringing out the emerging movement of Spirit expressing its implicit sociality, or the general claim that the possibility of objective judgment must require a social relation between mutually related subjects. The latter is the larger point that Hegel, in his usual obscure way, is implicitly making; something that he will explicitly develop later but which he foreshadows here. Positing normative criteria for experience solely through the subjective capacities of an isolated subject leads to frustration; the way forward is to posit normative criteria for experience as forming through (a) inter-subjective relations between subjects (b) within a particular socio-historical context. Hegel will argue for the former in the chapter on Reason, consequently arriving at the latter in the transition to Spirit. Therefore, in recognizing Spirit here upon my reading, we can see how this transition is connected as a part to the whole of the *Phenomenology*.

²⁵ This coheres with the advice that the mediator gives to the unhappy consciousness which I succinctly reconstruct as: you must destroy the I by transferring your individuality to me (c.f. *Ph* ¶228). The destruction of the I makes possible the reflective objective perspective that comes from getting out of your own subjective point of view into an intersubjective form of understanding and determining the self’s relation to the world.

Hence, I claim that the peer-relation is what justifies counsel, induces consciousness out of its self-alienation, perceives the form of Spirit, cultivates genuine self-knowledge and self-discovery, and brings the dialectic of recognition to its fruition in this chapter.²⁶ Without this conceptual transformation, it will be impossible for consciousness to see the world without apparent incoherence or antagonism.²⁷

I make a small excursus here to address an interpretive problem that commentators have noted but not resolved, but which is illuminated upon construing the mediator as forming a peer-relation with consciousness. This is the problem of the unexplained change in the ‘mood’ or the meta-attitude (its *a priori* stances towards other self-consciousnesses) of consciousness in the transition. As Stern (2013, p.95) observes, there is a sudden mood shift “from gloomy religiosity to rationalistic optimism” when Hegel says in the opening lines to Reason “Since self-consciousness is reason, what had so far been its negative relation to otherness is now converted into a positive relation” (*Ph* ¶1232). This shift is tacitly understood to accompany the unification of the two opposing essences. This is unsatisfying and we must make its tacitness explicit.²⁸

²⁶ Not to mention that this, with the change in the meta-attitude that is to follow, is an essential step towards Consciousness being “at home in oneself in one’s other” (*EL* ¶124)

²⁷ Therefore, after the transition, when Reason says that all reality is for it, it means not just all things, but also all other rational self-consciousness’ which had earlier provided resistance in securing unity.

²⁸ One reason could plausibly be the working of the *category* which I note at §3.2.

To put this in context, one way to characterize the source of the Unhappy Consciousness's unhappiness is that the essential or unchangeable consciousness is represented as a "beyond" relative to itself and to this changeable world, and in the attempt to unite with it, the unhappy consciousness is constantly negating the changing phenomena of this existing world, most especially itself, in recognition of the truth as the Unchangeable that is represented as a "beyond". The negative attitude toward "this world" follows from this. What is generally happening through "mediation" (first with the incarnated Unchangeable, but then, more concretely, with the mediator) is that the divide between the unchangeable and the changing consciousness is bridged, and that results in a changed attitude to this world, a positive relation to it.

Upon my interpretation, construing the mediator as a peer allows us to see how the meta-attitude of the troubled, self-concerned self-consciousness changes to one amenable to rationalistic optimism. A peer relation, in general, is founded on mutual trust and not antagonism. Something along these lines is going on that allows the two crucial acts of reconciliation of the unhappy consciousness—its receptiveness to the mediator's advice, and then, acting upon that advice that involves the complete entrusting of its individual willing to the mediator—to take place. It is clear that these acts would not have been able to take place if self-consciousness had continued its antagonistic stance towards the mediator as well.

So the self-satisfaction of consciousness is found in a peer consciousness that accounts for the change in the relationship that consciousness has with the world. This only underscores how far the dialectic has moved and emerged from egoistic mutual recognition as the key desideratum sought through most of the chapter.

I also think that interpreting the mediator as a peer consciousness that brings about unity, especially unity-in-difference, and that changes the fundamental normative stance of the subject to an identification with the object construed in positive terms that sees no formal difference between them and yet has the subject and object as separate harks back to Hegel's early writings on love. I think Hegel's thoughts on love are apt here to envision what he means by subject-object identity that the mediator as peer brings about. In fact, there is more going on here, for I have just argued that the concept of Spirit is present in this peer relation, and Beiser (2005, p.112-3) informs us that, "Hegel's concept of Spirit grew out of his early attempt to formulate the meaning and structure of love."

Hegel's writings in his early Frankfurt period, specifically the 1797 fragments on religion and love, and the set of manuscripts entitled *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate* portray love as involving a kind of pure subject-object identity between the two parties, realisable only in self-consciousness, for only in this single, shared conceptual space are the subject and object of consciousness one and the same. In love, Hegel believed the self finds itself in the other as the other finds itself in the self; they both realize their natures together. But not only is there identity, but difference as well, for

loving consists in appreciating the other *just because* it is other to the self. Further, love is a paradoxical experience. As Beiser clarifies, in love the self both loses itself (in the form of self-surrender and selflessly giving to the other) and regains itself (as a form of self-discovery through the other).²⁹ Importantly, he says that the self in love “is no longer something opposed to the other but [in] unity of itself with the other” (p. 114) Lastly, there cannot be love if either of the consciousnesses tried to dominate or subordinate the other to itself: love requires a coequal stance towards the other to begin, to treat each other minimally as *peers*.

The mature Hegel gave up construing Spirit in terms of love (he confined love to the realm of the family, as between man and woman performing designated roles, underscoring the realm of ethical life). But that is not to say that his original reflections have lost their importance; the parallels between what was said above to the events involving the mediator and self-consciousness are too close to not merit remarking on their probable past influence. As Beiser argues, “The later concept [of Spirit] still shows the same structure and development as love itself...from unity to difference to unity-in-difference.” (p. 122) Understanding the peer relation between the mediator and self-consciousness as possessing undertones of love allows us to comprehend the paradoxical unification of the singular and the universal within one consciousness, to recognize the latent face of Spirit in the unification and transition,

²⁹ C.f. Yovel’s (2005, p.100) remarks on love in his commentary on Hegel’s preface to the *Phenomenology*.

and to obtain an explanation as to the change of consciousness's 'mood' from negative to positive.

The preceding discussion makes my reading of Hegel advantageous in two ways: not only does it establish a coherent link between the two shapes of consciousness, it also establishes a link between the young and the mature Hegel, a link that at least Beiser notes is crucial for making sense of the Hegelian concept of Spirit by referencing its provenance. This only further cements the claim to a coherent and cogent reading of the *Phenomenology* which, as I noted in the Introduction, is what my paper argues for as a whole.

To summarize this section then, I have argued for two main points. First, the sudden appearance of the mediator is best explained as the final product of the dialectic of recognition in the chapter. The mediator brings the individual self out of itself and into a peer-relation, transforms its attitude from egoistic and confused to trusting and optimistic, and thereby provides perspective for genuine self-reflection to happen. This forging of a peer-relation further allows the mediator to offer counsel and unify the unhappy consciousness. Second, the mediator in relation with individual consciousness represents the dialectic of Spirit whose developmental progress is brought out through the role of the mediator.

§3.2 THE SECOND QUESTION

Continuing from the results of the above section, I argue that the transition from Self-consciousness to Reason is made more transparent, for we can provide an answer using the ‘tracking approach’ to a perplexing, relatively unexplained claim that Hegel makes in the context of introducing Reason—that Reason “forgets” the path through which it has come-to-be (*Ph* ¶1232, 233). Why should this be so? I argue that “forgetting” must be interpreted in a specific way, as the felt effect of the cognitive expression of the shape of Reason as it is immediately taken up, whose epistemology is defined by what the mediator brings about in the transition—the unification of the singular with the universal essence, actualized as the *category*.

The explanation of this question is interlinked with Hegel’s claim of Reason as “the certainty of being all reality” (*Ph* ¶1230, 233, 235) which will require an exegesis as well. Indeed, what causes confusion for the reader, in my opinion, is that Hegel inverts the order of presentation in the text, putting the claim of forgetting before his diffused remarks on certainty. In what follows, I will first explain what Hegel means by Reason as the certainty of being all reality, and then go on to explicate why Reason “forgets” its coming-to-be.

What Hegel means can be understood if we pay attention to the extent of self-realization (the extent to which the dialectic has moved and emerged) that has occurred for consciousness in the transition from Self-consciousness to Reason.

Previously, there was an opposition between the standpoint of Consciousness (where what made knowledge claims true or false was the object) and the standpoint of Self-consciousness (where truth claims regarding the object were settled by the subject's representation of it). It is at the end of the dialectic of self-consciousness, in the facilitated unity through the mediator, that this opposition is disembroiled, and the shape of Reason emerges as a unity of the two standpoints in which each sheds its one-sidedness (*Ph* ¶¶231-32). The mediator thus unites self-consciousness with what is *other* to it and brings about their *identity*. Specifically, this means that the unity of the individual and universal essence that the mediator brings about implies that *thought* or self-consciousness and *being* or existence now share the same conceptual structure, so that what was earlier in the dialectic a projection of the will on to an *other*, as something *for* consciousness and separate from it, becomes a universal willing (or willing *in itself*). By universal willing I take Hegel to mean that there is now only one kind of willing, a reaching *inwards* which is only possible if the object is not *separate* from the apprehending subject, or that there is no formal difference between subject and object, or that they share the same *form*.³⁰ Thus what was earlier *for* consciousness becomes what consciousness is *in itself* as a sharing of the same form, or as Hegel says, “the content becomes the concept” and “moving about in concepts is a movement within myself” (*Ph* ¶197).

³⁰ Cf. Houlgate (2003, p.375): “The experience that Hegel describes does not involve an increase or a change in our empirical knowledge of the world [rather, it involves] a change in the fundamental logical form of what it knows.”

The explicit expression of this unity takes the form of the *category*. Hegel explains that through the category “Self-consciousness and being are *the same* essence, or *the same* not in comparison with each other, but rather the same in and for itself.” (*Ph* ¶235) The category, then, is nothing but the explicit actualization of the unifying effect of the mediator. It is “the *simple* unity of self-consciousness and being”. And in so far as my argument from the previous section holds—on the dialectic of the mediator as representative of the dialectic of Spirit—the actualization of Spirit is continued in the category. Hegel declares the category as the unity of being-in-itself and being-for-itself³¹, which, in fact, is nothing but the essential standpoint of Spirit.

What does this all mean? Taken together it means two things. First, that there are not two different essences, one belonging to the object and one belonging to the subject; subject and object now share the same essence, and are therefore essentially one.³² The direct implication of this is that subject-object dichotomy is finally (formally) overcome.³³ Second, relatedly, this also means that Reason in its epistemology sees no external *difference*. The category is “immediately self-equal in

³¹ See *Ph* ¶233 where Hegel says that the truth that has emerged for Reason is: “what *is*, or the *in-itself*, is only insofar as it is *for* consciousness, and that what is *for consciousness* is also what is *in itself*.”

³² This unity is not to be construed as an identity of types or mere isomorphism in structure. This is a deeper kind of unity. See footnote 35.

³³ Note that if we’re tracking the movement and emergence of the dialectic of self-consciousness, this event is nothing but the actualization of what Hegel says in the beginning of the Self-Consciousness chapter, at the end of *Ph* ¶167: “Self-Consciousness exhibits itself [] as the movement within which this opposition [of itself and the object] is sublated, and within which, to itself, *the equality of itself with itself comes to be*.” (my emphasis). This equality, however, is only formal. Reason’s reality is a universal, pure abstraction (*Ph* ¶235), and subsequently, its claim is also abstract and empty (*Ph* ¶238).

otherness” (*Ph* ¶235), so any differences will be differences *within* it as the “plurality of categories”, but which will, in truth, be “no differences at all”.³⁴ Whatever experience there is, comes mediated through its own use of the category for which consciousness and existence have the same essence. Any knowing, consequently, is only knowing of its own self, and so the world is *its* world, and it develops a ‘positive’ relation to it (*Ph* ¶232). Reason, when it views the world, sees only itself reflected back. And this is why Hegel claims that Reason is the certainty of being all *reality*.³⁵

Intriguingly, Hegel links this certainty to the mediator (*Ph* ¶231: “This middle expresses...the certainty of being all truth”), as well as to the phenomenon of forgetting (*Ph* ¶233: “It [Reason] only gives the assurance of being all reality, but does not itself comprehend this, for the comprehension of this immediately expressed assertion is that forgotten path itself”). These linkages are confusing for the reader for they occur prior to Hegel’s claims at *Ph* ¶235 describing what reality is for Reason. But since I have already elucidated Reason’s worldview through the *category*, the explanation of these claims that I provide should be more clear and digestible.

³⁴ This theme continues from the dialectic of the mediator whose introduction was meant to solve the problem of difference. Difference moves now from ‘difference from the *other*’ to ‘difference as inner difference, as difference within unity’. Cf. Kain (2005, p.65)

³⁵ Having noted the shallowness of this claim at footnote 33, I want to now underscore the depth of this point. Hegel at ¶233 says, “However, not only is self-consciousness *for itself* all reality; it is also *in itself* all reality, as a result of its *becoming* this reality”. The unity of subject-object means that the fundamental structure of reality has changed for consciousness—it itself makes that reality, and awareness of it is awareness of itself and the active meta-conceptual concepts at play. What will follow in the Reason chapter is a growing self-consciousness of *how* it makes this reality, leading to the momentous realization that the construction of reality is not an individual, but a *shared* or *communal* effort.

When Hegel asserts that Reason in its initial appearance ‘forgets’ its own coming-to-be, he can be understood in three ways, all tracing their provenance to the above discussion. First, as a more metaphorical but interesting point, Hegel notes in the opening paragraphs to Self-Consciousness at *Ph* ¶1166 and ¶1167 that the previous shapes of Consciousness and their truths have “vanished” in the experience of Self-Consciousness. This “vanishing” is again noted by Hegel at *Ph* ¶1233 where, in the transition to Reason, *otherness* as existing *for* self-consciousness “vanishes” which is then subsequently linked to forgetting. I conjecture that by “vanishing” Hegel means that the earlier truths cease to exist on account of the newer, more sophisticated and adequate truth that emerges at each major stage of transition that incorporates the learnings from the previous truths. That is not to say that the earlier truths lose relevance; they retain their relevance as steps in consciousness’s journey of transformation, but that means that consciousness, in grasping its new object, lets go of what they earlier used to signify as truth. What disappears in the transition to Reason is the one sided, partisan truth of Self-Consciousness the results of which I have noted above, and the effect of which I note below.

Second, by “forgetting” Hegel means nothing but the expression of the mediating activity continued from the mediator to the category which now precludes consciousness to think of *things* in its previous, ordinary, naïve sense (as an unknown

other, separate from it).³⁶ If we interpret, as I do, “forgetting” not literally, but in a very particular sense, in the sense of the use of cognition at a stage which has moved and emerged to the point of an absence of any formal differences existing between subject and object, thereby preventing thinking of an object in an ordinary way, Hegel’s unusual claim will not seem so strange to us. For what could Reason really comprehend or understand (in its initial appearance), if to do either of these things, it needs an object, but the only object is the form of itself? To take this in another way, we have memories of objects, of *other* beings, of us in relation to an *other*, but what can Reason have a memory of, if all that is, all that it experiences, is not objects as separate from it, but the world as its own essence as abstract certainty?

In conjunction with the above point, thirdly, knowledge for Reason is an *immediate certainty*: hence Hegel’s emphasis on immediateness when he says, “consciousness...has this path behind it and has forgotten it while it *immediately* comes on the scene as reason.” (*Ph* ¶1233) This is reminiscent of the immediacy of the first shape of consciousness, sense-certainty, though, of course, is different from it. While for sense-certainty immediacy implied direct, non-conceptual grasping of the object, here immediacy implies a lack of awareness of the socio-historical content of the intellectual meta-conceptual mediation that determines knowing, which, in the initial formal unity between subject and object, consciousness has not yet self-consciously

³⁶ See *Ph* ¶236: “we can no longer really talk of *things* at all”; *Ph* ¶237: “In the course of this movement, it is to intuit the object as something to be sublated, to *appropriate* the object”

realized.³⁷ The standpoint of Reason conceives of its norms as ahistorical, elevated above history, transcending social relations. Consciousness will have to learn that its truth as reason is not separate from the path that has produced it (essentially history), but is in fact identical to it. And if the subject has as its object its own historical progression, it should not be surprising or perplexing for us now when Hegel says “consciousness and object alternate in these reciprocal determinations” (*Ph* ¶237). This intermixing of subject and object taken in an unthinking immediacy is what, in my view, characterizes “forgetting” as a cognitive activity for consciousness at this stage.

To sum this section, the point I make here is that “forgetting” is nothing but the cognitive effect of the initial shape of Reason’s epistemology which, characterized at this stage of the dialectic by the emergence of the formal identity of subject and object coupled with an immediacy that is normative on its first empirical use, sees no differences that earlier were the different stages of its dialectic. This unity, temporarily, prevents the shape of consciousness from knowing its previous dialectical moments and history which were present to it as its different moments, but which it now takes as a whole as its object. Since this object is Reason’s own essence which is

³⁷ Hence Hegel’s use of the adjective “unthinking” in the opening lines describing Observing Reason at *Ph* ¶244. Cf. *EL* ¶63 where Hegel connects Reason with mediation and immediate knowing.

unified, these different moments are not seen as different but as one, and hence as “forgotten”.

§4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have labored to resolve two queries which are important not only for improving our understanding of the transition of the shape of Self-Consciousness to Reason, but also in understanding key themes of Hegel’s project in the *Phenomenology*. I have done this through proposing a novel interpretive approach which I call the ‘tracking’ approach, tracking how the dialectic moves, what amount of self-awareness emerges through and as a result of the movement, and the corresponding cognitive level that the shape of consciousness finds itself with. The first query was explaining the sudden occurrence of the mediator. I hope to have provided an explanation of its occurrence by arguing that the mediator continues the dialectic of recognition, which posits another self-consciousness, but this time to form a peer-relation and unite two opposing aspects, and ultimately, display the dialectic of Spirit in its relation with consciousness. The second query was explaining why the first shape of Reason “forgets” its coming-to-be. I argued that its explanation involves taking forward the dialectic of the mediator as the expressive use of the *category* as Reason’s epistemic filter. Consequently, Reason “forgets” because of the combined effect of the mediating *category* that sees no subject-object dichotomy and Reason’s expression of that *immediately*. In providing these answers, I hope to underscore the point that though

Hegel is often dense, there is a sophisticated and logical dialectic running through the entire *Phenomenology* if the reader is willing to look for it.

If my interpretation is right, the results of my efforts show that, in continuing the dialect of the mediator, the dialectic of Self-Consciousness is sufficiently consistent in the transition to Reason, and that this dialectic fits well with Hegel's overall intentions of revealing the dialectic of Spirit. I also hope for my interpretation to have simultaneously highlighted the importance of the mediator, as the finishing crescendo of the entire dialectic of Self-Consciousness.

Inevitably, the present paper covers only a small territory within all that may be said about Hegel's dialectic, the mediator, and the events surrounding the transition from Self-Consciousness to Reason—I have attempted to propose answers to only two queries here after all. However, my interpretation must be taken to be part of a larger project, where many more queries can potentially be resolved. In fact my approach, in revealing the dialectic of Spirit, purports to lend (a little ambitiously) its substantive interpretative framework to the entirety of the *Phenomenology*. For instance, potentially, interpretations with respect to Hegel on *desire* can be critiqued by construing carefully what Hegel means by Desire appropriate to how much the dialectic has moved and emerged. Gadamer (1976, p. 62 fn), for instance, in a manner befitting the 'tracking' approach, criticizes Kojève (and Hyppolite) for his conception of desire as desire of another (i.e. love) as "not yet apropos at the stage here"; desire as love, according to Gadamer, will see its emergence in the dialectic of Spirit. I am

optimistic that within the framework of my thesis, such interpretive problems can effectively be raised, analyzed, and illuminated.

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