

Hegel's Phenomenology of Unhappy Consciousness

The Dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*
as the Education of Consciousness

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ABSTRACT Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a careful description of the progressive unfolding of Spirit. Its dialectic is the education of consciousness. There are three stages of unhappy consciousness: external beyond, changing individual, and achieved reconciliation. Being aware of its own mutability, the self yearns for reconciliation, which can only come from the external beyond, from the unchanging. The quest of unhappy consciousness for reconciliation is characterized by the three stages of devotion, sacramental desire and labour, and self-mortification. The self, constituted by what is other, is never able to achieve lasting satisfaction; it desires the unity of self-consciousness. Through the experience of itself, the self comes to a clearer self-awareness and transgresses its own limits.

KEYWORDS desire; education of self-consciousness; Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich; *Phenomenology of Spirit*; unhappy consciousness

When, in 2007, the Western world celebrated the two-hundredth anniversary of the first edition of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*,¹ *Spiegel*, the German magazine, famous for its interest in philosophy, conducted a conversation with the philosophers Peter Sloterdijk, Konrad Paul Liessmann, and Rüdiger Safranski about Hegel's legacy and the traces of the *Weltgeist* under the provocative title "Hegel has won."² Without wishing to polemicize about Hegel's philosophical success in relation to its *Wirkungsgeschichte*, I would like to ask about the relevance of Hegel's inquiry for the being of the human being, particularly as regards our understanding of

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the reasons for the dramatic increase in unhappiness and disenchantment with life in Western culture.³ For Hegel, the experience of despair, the unhappy consciousness, is the central and recurring shape of consciousness.⁴ The aim of the self is to free itself from confinement “in-itself” in order to become “for-itself.” It is a dialectical movement from the primitive state of self-consciousness as desire to its final stage as unhappy consciousness. Hegel is very specific about the emergence of unhappy consciousness: “It is the freedom which always comes directly out of bondage and returns into the pure universality of thought . . . a time of universal culture which had raised itself to the level of thought” (*PhG* §121, 199). Unhappy consciousness is thus a specific historical phenomenon, happening in tandem with “universal fear and bondage,” a universal mental cultivation that “has elevated culture to the level of thought.” One of the main reasons for Hegel to speak of unhappy consciousness in abstract terms is to emphasize that his task is predominantly the epistemological one of outlining the universal conditions of knowledge. Thus, the *Phenomenology* can be read as an exercise in the theory of knowledge (*Wissenschaftstheorie*), with the study of the experience of consciousness as its subject-matter. The self’s quest for reconciliation of an ultimately secure kind takes the form of the pursuit of universal truth. At the very centre of Hegel’s notion of the unhappy consciousness is the epistemological contradiction of cognition itself asserting the essential impossibility of knowledge. Cognitive certainty is

1. Hereafter abbreviated as *PhG*. The translation used here is *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arthur V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Page numbers refer to this translation.

2. “‘Hegel hat gewonnen.’ Die Philosophen Peter Sloterdijk, Konrad Paul Liessmann und Rüdiger Safranski über die Aktualität Hegels und die Spur des ‘Weltgeistes’—von der Französischen Revolution und dem totalitären Terror Stalins bis hin zu Mauerfall und neuem Europa,” *Der Spiegel* 14/2007, 2 April 2007, <http://magazin.spiegel.de/EpubDelivery/spiegel/pdf/51074774>.

3. See Andrzej Wierciński, “Melancholia, Depression, Sadness: The Disease of the Soul and the Imperative of the Care for the Soul,” in *Melancholia: The Disease of the Soul*, eds. Dariusz Skórczewski and Andrzej Wierciński (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2014), 235–66.

4. Many Hegel scholars argue for the centrality of unhappy consciousness in Hegel’s philosophy: Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s “Phenomenology of Spirit,”* trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974); Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James Nichols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jon Steward, “Die Rolle des unglücklichen Bewusstseins in Hegels *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 39 (1991), doi:10.1524/dzph.1991.39.16.12; Karen Gloy, “Unglückliches Bewusstsein im Lichte des Analogiedenkens,” *Jahrbuch für Hegelforschung*, 617 (2000/2001).

the point of departure for unhappy consciousness, but it is also its point of return. However, this point of return marks a higher level of cognitive maturity. It is a dialectical transformation from naïve certainty to reflexive reason. Hegel stresses that unhappy consciousness in liberal culture understands itself as a liberal cultural object and its subsequent loss of identity is perceived as a liberation. The figure of the unhappy consciousness thus parallels and prefigures Dostoyevsky's "underground man" and Nietzsche's "nihilist."⁵

The aim of this paper is to show that a reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as self-education is a plausible possibility. I open my contribution with an exegetical section of Hegel's dialectics of self-consciousness, in order to emphasize the need to thematize the transition from the "Lordship and Bondage" section to that of "The Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness." I read the sceptical state of mind, "unhappy consciousness," as a self-*Bildung*. Interpreting the intricacies of the voyage of self-consciousness as self-*Bildung* nevertheless merits a great deal more explanation and elaboration on the topic of Hegelian reflexivity than I am able to offer at this point.

THE BASIC STRUCTURES OF THE EXPERIENCE OF UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS

In Chapter Four of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "one of the most famous chapters in Hegel's philosophy,"⁶ Hegel analyzes various forms of self-consciousness: slave consciousness, stoicism, and unhappy consciousness. Unhappy consciousness develops from stoicism and scepticism. Judith Butler, in *The Psychic Life of Power*, notes that the transition from the "Lordship and Bondage" section in the *Phenomenology* to that of "The Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness" is one of the least interrogated of Hegel's philosophical movements.⁷ By the term "stoicism," Hegel understands the freedom of self-consciousness.⁸ With reference to Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus, he sees the essence of this consciousness in

5. David Bholat, "Hegel, Unhappy Consciousness and Endogenous Cultural Change," *Anthropological Theory* 12, no. 3 (2012): 240, doi:10.1177/1463499612469584.

6. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hegel's Dialectic of Self-Consciousness," in *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 54.

7. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 31. Butler discusses the unhappy consciousness in the chapter "Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection: Rereading Hegel on the Unhappy Consciousness," 31–62.

the fact that “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 essentiality of thought” (*PhG* §121, 199).

There are three phases to unhappy consciousness: the external beyond, the changing individual, and achieved reconciliation. Aware of its own mutability, the self yearns for reconciliation, which can come only from the external beyond, from the unchanging. However, in order to appropriate the desired reconciliation, the self must overcome its own mutability. This quest of unhappy consciousness for reconciliation is, moreover, characterized by the three stages of devotion, sacramental desire and labor, and self-mortification. In the first, in the immediacy of intellectual intuition, the self is captivated by the awareness of the unchanging. At this stage, the self realizes its own immediate feeling of devotion. The second stage of unhappy consciousness is an inward journey towards oneself—one characterized by desire and labor. The divided self is characterized by alienation and a lack of self-certainty. Our existence is always split, as we both belong to the world and are cut off from it. The desired reconciliation cannot come about as a result of labor, but only as an initiative from beyond. The self can respond only in the act of thanksgiving. In the third stage, that of self-mortification, the unhappy consciousness transcends its changing individuality. Yet, if one understands that the universal activity of the unchanging mediator is not one’s own, then one remains confronted by the task of transcending the isolation of one’s self-concerned individuality in order to recognize reason’s commonality with oneself and the world.⁹

“Being sameness and simplicity that relates itself to itself” (*PhG* §12, 22), we are not transparent to ourselves: the self is never able to achieve lasting satisfaction, a stable resting place. It is always incomplete, always in the process of becoming, ever restless in its desire: “[t]he realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and unfolded becoming; but it is just this unrest that is the self; and the self is like that immediacy and simplicity of the beginning because it is the result, that which has returned into itself, the latter being similarly just the self” (*PhG* §12, 22). The self is

8. Cf. Franco Chiereghin, “Freedom and Thought: Stoicism, Skepticism, and Unhappy Consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel’s “Phenomenology of Spirit,”* ed. Kenneth R. Westphal (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 55–71, doi:10.1002/9781444306224.ch3.

9. Cf. John W. Burbidge, “‘Unhappy Consciousness’ in Hegel—An Analysis of Medieval Catholicism?” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 11, no. 4 (1978), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24777597>.

like an uneasy and elusive synthesis of opposites, without being aware of its being a single undivided consciousness of dual nature: "The Unhappy Consciousness itself is the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself is both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature. But it is not as yet explicitly aware that this is its essential nature, or that it is the unity of both" (*PhG* §126, 207). We experience a profound inability to reconcile opposites internal to the self. Our despair is the grief and longing of the self which yearns for unity but experiences only inner division at every turn. As the thought of itself, the unhappy self-consciousness "knows what the validity of the abstract person amounts to in reality and equally in pure thought. It knows that such validity is rather a complete loss; it is itself this conscious loss of itself and the alienation of this knowledge about itself" (*PhG* §454, 752).

Hegel stresses that in and through oneself, one can never become such an autonomous, fully self-conscious subject.¹⁰ In its immediate self-understanding, the subject is rather persuaded to remain unaware of its individuality by its experience of itself. As an end-in-itself, it understands itself as the center of the world, and approaches everything that exists as a means to self-affirmation. On the one hand, the self is an external actuality; on the other hand, as this concrete actuality it can only achieve selfhood in the process of recognition by the other. It is in and through the other that one can become fully conscious of one's particularity and individuality. What is essential here is the relationship to the other: Hegel's absolutization of the other happens at the cost of sacrificing the individual as the particular human being. The self is never its own identity: it is always also outside of itself. The self comes to itself only in the other. This is the only way in which the unity of itself in its otherness can become explicit for self-consciousness. Hegel's dialectics is the dynamics of love: to lose oneself is the necessary prerequisite to becoming united with the other. Therefore, self-renunciation, self-denial, and withdrawal from oneself are the privileged *modi* of existence on the way to a higher union with oneself and the other. Losing oneself carries with it the promise of returning to oneself:

Consciousness feels itself therein as this particular individual, and does not let itself be deceived by its own seeming renunciation, for the truth of the

10. Cf. Philip J. Kain, *Hegel and the Other: A Study of the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), especially "Self-Consciousness and the Other," 39–67.

matter is that it has not *renounced* itself. What has been brought about is only the double reflection into the two extremes; and the result is the renewed division into the opposed consciousness of the *Unchangeable*, and the consciousness of willing, performing, and enjoying, and self-renunciation itself which confronts it; in other words, the consciousness of *independent individuality* in general. (*PhG* §134–5, 222)

The self is always already constituted by what is other. With reference to the relationship between the self as an individual and the other, Hegel argues for the interdependence of the individuals within society as the very condition for self-sufficiency:

Spirit is thus self-supporting, absolute, real being. All previous shapes of consciousness are abstract forms of it. They result from Spirit analyzing itself, distinguishing its moments, and dwelling for a while with each. The isolating of those moments *presupposes* Spirit itself and subsists therein; in other words, the isolation exists only in Spirit which is a concrete existence. In this isolation they have the appearance of really existing as such; but that they are only moments or vanishing qualities is shown by their advance and retreat into their ground and essence; and this essence is just this movement and resolution of these moments. (*PhG* §264, 440)

For Hegel, self-consciousness is desire, a self-conscious desire for the unity of self-consciousness (*PhG* §105, 167).

Thus self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well. It is in fact something other than self-consciousness that is the essence of Desire and through this experience self-consciousness has itself realized this truth. (*PhG* §109, 175)

The desire for wholeness itself, which unhappy consciousness longs for, is the source of despair. Since the self can never achieve perfect unity, perfect satisfaction, and the peace of wholeness, desire is an inherently self-consuming state.

As a thinker of human finitude, Hegel is preoccupied with the question of the relationship of the universal/infinite subject to the finite world. Unhappy consciousness is a split subjectivity, torn between its own particularity and finitude and the infinite God. The dialectic of unhappy consciousness is an attempt to reconcile the finite and the infinite. Unhappy

consciousness is a subject between the human and the divine. Longing for the divine expresses itself in searching for the beyond as the ultimate place of dwelling. However, the concreteness of finite existence is a very strong and defining feature of the split subjectivity. The subject is aware of the intrinsic duality of self-consciousness. Self-identification with one's own subjectivity discloses the absurdity of one's external actuality. The internally contradictory unhappy consciousness is aware of being a subject and a concrete existence, but refuses to deal with this duality. Hegel's dialectic is an attempt at overcoming the duality and alienation of unhappy consciousness in order to make the split subject feel at home in the world. In fact, the alienation of unhappy consciousness is, for Hegel, one of the conditions of any knowledge. The subject is called to explicitly approve of duality and to overcome the negativity toward concrete particularity typical of unhappy consciousness. Reconciliation with the externality of the subject becomes possible by negating its own negative attitude toward it. The promise comes from the reconciliation of the subjectivity with its own finitude. Interiority is the last refuge of the unhappy consciousness against the external world. In order to achieve reconciliation with the world, unhappy consciousness must overcome the division between inner and outer, and this overcoming happens through the negation of purely private subjective interiority. Spirit wins its truth only when it finally finds itself:

This is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure "I". Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. (*PhG* §19, 32)

The primary strategy of unhappy consciousness in its attempt to overcome duality is humility and self-sacrifice. To unite with the divine, the subject must radicalize self-sacrifice, but this radical renunciation of the self does not happen. Although unhappy consciousness, in an act of self-renunciation, receives its sense of self, it does not *know* what it is doing in terms of self-renunciation. In this context Hegel speaks of unhappy consciousness as an ideal of Christian ascetic renunciation of worldly happiness. However, even the Christian ideal of self-

renunciation, though condemning the pride of philosophers, is not radical enough. It can misleadingly suggest that self-renunciation could be an activity of the subject capable of renouncing itself through various practices of self-denial. Hegel is very clear that self-renunciation can only be a gift from above:

But in the sacrifice actually carried out, consciousness, having nullified the *action* as its own doing, has also *in principle* obtained relief from its *misery*. That this relief has been obtained *in principle* is, however, the action of the other extreme of the syllogism, which is the essence posited of *intrinsic being*. But that sacrifice made by the inessential extreme was at the same time not a one-sided action, but contained within itself the action of the other. For the surrender of one's own will is only from one aspect negative; in principle, however, or in itself, it is at the same time positive, viz. the positing of will as the will of an "other," and specifically of will, not as a particular, but as a universal will. (*PhG* §137–8, 230)

This, in fact, only confirms the unbridgeable divide between the human and the divine. The escape from the circularity of this dialectic historically came from a mediating third. For Hegel, the medieval Catholic Church played the role of mediator between the human and the divine.¹¹ If the self loses its particularity and individuality through the mediating activity of the Church, it enters through this loss of its own will into a universal will and gains the recognition of the other. Hegel sees the answer to unhappy consciousness as a bringing together of the finite and the infinite, the inner and the outer worlds. It is a joining together of extremes: identity within difference or, in other words, the identity of identity and non-identity.

Hegel takes the concrete particularity of the self seriously right to the point of selfless thinghood, and makes this into a necessary moment of intersubjective recognition. The self, concerned with finite particularity in its concreteness, is aware of its inability to reconcile the concrete internal experience and the experience of itself as an external self, the self as an object in the world. Hegel attempts to achieve harmony out of the alienation of unhappy consciousness.

Unhappy consciousness is the central figure in the chapter on Christianity as a revealed religion (*PhG* §453–78, 748–87). It is a necessary condi-

11. John W. Burbidge, "Unhappy Consciousness' in Hegel," 67. And for Hegel, always the good Protestant, once this state is reached, the Catholic Church, together with its heteronomous compulsion, is no longer necessary; the Protestant confessional that concludes Chapter Six of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* happens freely, without a mediating third.

tion for the appearance of such religions. It can be seen as a disunity of self in relation to God, the soul in a state of despair before God, a split in the self between finitude and infinitude. Hegel thematizes unhappy consciousness by discussing the longing of the self for salvation in its turning toward God. Thus, unhappy consciousness has to cope with the awareness of its own despair. Hegel first approaches unhappy consciousness as the inwardly disrupted self in abstract modes of its being (*PhG* §126, 207). It is clear that unhappy consciousness is unable to heal itself: it can only experience its own incompleteness and witness its own fragmentation into two (*PhG* §131–3, 219). In the master–slave dialectic (*PhG* §115–19, 189–96), Hegel shows the paradox of liberation. The slave cannot through labor transform the very condition of being a slave, but can experience the liberating power of labor, even if this is an experience of alienation. This experience leads the slave to stoicism. “Thinking consciousness as determined in the form of abstract freedom is thus only the incomplete negation of otherness. *Withdrawn* from existence only into itself, it has not there achieved its consummation as absolute negation of that existence” (*PhG* §122, 201). Thus, unhappy consciousness finds its retreat from the harsh conditions of reality in the self-absorbed realm of freedom in thought alone.

Hegel's ascetic unhappy consciousness is a form of despair, which can bring with it the possibility of a resolution to despair. Asceticism is a self-deception which pursues a false tranquility while sinking into helplessness, anxiety, and self-distrust. By turning its despair into a rage against itself, the self arrives at the possibility of resolution. The unhappy ascetic consciousness wills its own nothingness: “its actual doing thus becomes a doing of nothingness, its enjoyment a feeling of its wretchedness. Work and enjoyment thus lose all *universal content* and *significance*” (*PhG* §135, 225). It is a withdrawal into mere particularity. Hegel suggests that the ultimate ideal of despair is for the self to become like God, to be absolute (*PhG* §455, 752). The ascetic unhappy consciousness wishes to be absolute, to create itself, and, in fact, does so through self-destruction, turning against its own desire as the enemy. The ascetic self is limited to itself, and the experience of this confinement allows Hegel to offer a logical syllogistic solution to despair (*PhG* §136, 227). The logic of despair points beyond itself, but *for itself*. The despairing soul, for its own sake, remains in despair: “Action and its own actual doing remain pitiable, its enjoyment remains pain, and the overcoming of these in a positive sense remains a *beyond*” (*PhG* §138, 230).

Hegel is concerned with the possibility of overcoming insecurity and despair. He understands that a sceptical, liberal person must be sceptical

about the value of her own scepticism. Unhappy consciousness arises out of scepticism and remains sceptical, since it is aware of its own mutability and insecurity. However, it longs for what it does not and cannot have. Thus it is aware of what it lacks. Since the logic of despair points beyond itself to a resolution in reason, Hegel's therapeutic solution to the torn consciousness is the transition to reason: "In this object, in which it finds that its own action and being, as being of that *particular* consciousness, are being and action *in themselves*, there has arisen for consciousness the idea of *Reason*, of the certainty that, in its particular individuality, it has been absolutely *in itself*, or is all reality" (*PhG* §138, 230). Finally, it is the transition to philosophical thought, conceived as a decisive choice: one which is the actual sacrifice of one's particular individuality, happening as the surrendering up of one's own will. Faith and Reason can thus come together in a mutual understanding of their incommensurability.

UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS OR THE UNATONED STATE OF MIND?

Andrew Shanks, describing unhappy consciousness as "the state of mind that remains trapped in a relationship to God precluding relationship to God," suggests translating *das unglückliche Bewußtseyn* not as "unhappy consciousness" but, instead, as "the *unatoned state of mind*."¹² Shanks calls for a discovering of "our *primordial* need for atonement; looking beyond the way it is represented in different particular religious cultures, to sense its real universality."¹³ He further emphasizes that this, *qua* universal, is something that holds for more than just religion. Any attempt at self-understanding is such an undertaking, a wish to reawaken to the truth of our being a human being: our being in need of atonement. There is no other option, since being unatoned means fooling oneself.

To be atoned means to be opened up to and *with* reality. It is openness to new experience. This is an openness to be challenged and transformed by new experience.¹⁴ "We learn by experience that we meant something

12. Andrew Shanks, *Hegel and Religious Faith: Divided Brain, Atoning Spirit* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 45–7. Shanks contests the overemphasizing of the connection between *das unglückliche Bewußtseyn* and Christianity. Instead, he argues for understanding this phenomenon independently of any specific culture.

13. *Ibid.*, 48.

14. Essential to the notion of *Bildung* is a cultivation of awareness of the perspectives of *others* and openness to the possibility / necessity of changing one's own perspectives: "That is what, following Hegel, we emphasized as the general characteristic of *Bildung*: keeping oneself open to what is other—to other, more universal points of view. It embraces a sense of proportion and distance in relation to itself, and hence consists in rising above itself to

other than we meant to mean; and this correction of our meaning compels our knowing to go back to the proposition and understand it in some other way" (*PhG* §39, 63). Hegel calls the unatoned state of mind (*das unglückliche Bewußtseyn*) the Unchangeable (*das Unwandelbare*). It is not because nothing can be changed, but because the self does not feel any need for change and is unable to hear the call to conversion. Here I find the Greek word for conversion, *μετάνοια*, to be helpful, because it refers to a turning of the mind, a changing (*Wandlung*) of mind (*Geist*).

Hegel elevates the notion of self-understanding to the status of a paradigm for any sort of understanding: we understand ourselves, and therefore understand the world. Thus, we participate in the event of understanding (*das Ereignis des Verstehens*). To understand a human being is to recognize the enactment of one's freedom (*Vollzug der Freiheit*). To understand a human being as a dialectical consciousness is necessary for personal success. A human being, because it is a spirit, can strive for the highest. Since freedom is the dignity of the spirit, this means that a human being can constantly transgress itself: i.e., transform itself. And every transformation is a formation. The vocation of the human being is to form oneself, not in order to fulfill any specific individual and social expectations, but to gain an independent standing in life.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel carefully describes the story of the progressive unfolding of spirit. It is a journey of the self-discovery of consciousness from its naïve awareness of itself in its relationship to the outer world to genuine self-knowledge. A development of consciousness can be traced by analyzing how human consciousness works through its own experience. For Hegel, it is the labor of its own (trans)formation. The Hegelian way of conceiving reflexivity as aiming at unlocking its deepest critical potential can be seen as the precursor of Freudian psychoanalysis.¹⁵ Hegel's hermeneutics of reflexivity is already, and as such, a therapeutics of despair. The experience of despair occupies a central place in the spirit's narrative of self-presentation. The journey of consciousness is a loss of its own self; it can be understood as "the pathway of *doubt*, or more precisely as the way of

universality. To distance oneself from oneself and from one's private purposes means to look at these in the way that others see them. This universality is by no means a universality of the concept or understanding. This is not a case of a particular being determined by a universal; nothing is proved conclusively. The universal viewpoints to which the cultivated man (*gebildet*) keeps himself open are not a fixed applicable yardstick, but are present to him only as the viewpoints of possible others. Thus the cultivated consciousness has in fact more the character of a sense." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 15–6.

despair" (*PhG* §49, 78). In searching for truth, consciousness abandons the fear of error, and in deliberately opting for doubt does not expect to turn its doubt into certainty: "This path is the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge, for which the supreme reality is what is in truth only the unrealized Notion" (*PhG* §50, 78). The self is only the thought of itself and, as such, an unhappy consciousness. Paradoxically, consciousness is happy, but its happiness is a complete emptying of its substance and a rejoicing because "God is dead": unhappy consciousness is "the tragic fate of the certainty of self that aims to be absolute. It is the consciousness of the loss of all *essential* being in this *certainty of itself*, and of the loss even of this knowledge about itself—the loss of substance as well as of the Self, it is the grief which expresses itself in the hard saying that 'God is dead'" (*PhG* §455, 752). Unhappy consciousness, as a torn self which, after losing the meaning of existence, cannot work out any alternative, does not know itself and does not know its own unhappiness; it does not know that "God is dead." For Hegel, unhappy consciousness is a torn self that, after losing the meaning of life, cannot work out any alternative. Unhappy consciousness is the knowledge of the complete loss of the self: "The grief and longing of the Unhappy Self-Consciousness which permeates them all is their center and the common birth pang of its emergence" (*PhG* §456, 754). It is the birth pang of unity coming into being. Unhappy consciousness is the despairing self in the quest for unity and wholeness. Hegel's idea is to achieve oneness for unhappy consciousness by reconciling the changeable, mutable, and finite with the unchangeable and eternal dimensions of consciousness.

THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT* AS A *BILDUNGSTRAKTAT*
(*TRACTATUS PAEDAGOGICUS*)

If we understand the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a *Bildungstraktat*, then it will be crucial to see how the vexed relationship between the self and the world can be a constructive relationship. We do not have to lose ourselves in the world, but neither do we lose the world in a life of self-introspection. It is exactly the spirit that guarantees that we can be the inhabitants of

15. Cf. Jon Mills, *The Unconscious Abyss: Hegel's Anticipation of Psychoanalysis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002). Mills discusses unhappy consciousness as an inwardly disrupted self in the chapter "The Dialectic of Desire," 135–57, especially 152–5. See also Molly Macdonald, *Hegel and Psychoanalysis: A New Interpretation of "Phenomenology of Spirit"* (New York: Routledge, 2014), doi:10.4324/9780203744451. However, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to substantiate the claim that Hegelian reflexivity can be seen as a precursor to Freudian psychoanalysis.

both worlds. The dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the education of consciousness: "The task of leading the individual from his uneducated standpoint to knowledge had to be seen in its universal sense, just as it was the universal individual, self-conscious Spirit, whose formative education had to be studied" (*PhG* §16, 28).

The self journeys through the series of its own configurations: "The series of configurations which consciousness goes through along this road is, in reality, the detailed *education* of the consciousness itself" (*PhG* §50, 78). Through the experience of itself, the self may come to a clearer self-awareness of itself: consciousness "goes beyond its limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself" (*PhG* §51, 80). The notion of education is the calling for a transgressing of one's own limits.

In his "Inaugural Address" at the University of Berlin in 1818, Hegel spoke of the seventh day as the "Sunday of life," and the "Sunday of the history of the world" as the privileged timing for announcing "the last philosophy" (*die letzte Philosophie*).¹⁶ Philosophizing with Hegel in this sabbatical setting is the fulfillment of human existence. Philosophy needs to incorporate all that has been previously thought in its *Wirkungsgeschichte* and yet cannot stop thinking its end. Since "the general level of insight now is altogether more educated, its curiosity more awake, and its judgment more swiftly reached, so that the feet of those who will carry you out are already at the door" (*PhG* §45, 71), we need to accept the call for thinking with radical responsibility. Nobody can do this for us. Too much is at stake to remain unmoved. It compels our personal transformation (*Verwandlung*) rather than mere alteration (*Veränderung*). Everything which can be understood requires understanding and an understandable answer. And we cannot forget that not only what is seen and said, but far more what persists unseen and unsaid, belongs to an infinitely diverse and changeable horizon of meaning.

The overcoming of "unhappy consciousness" or the "unatoned state of mind" cannot be discussed productively without engaging with the whole of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. "Unhappy consciousness," as a condition of humanity, emerges as a necessary stage in the development of subjectivity. Being a stage in the education of consciousness, the process of formation of self-consciousness is historically conditioned. "Unhappy

16. Georg W. F. Hegel, "Inaugural Address, Delivered at the University of Berlin (22 October 1818)," in *Political Writings*, eds. Laurence Dickey and Hugh B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 181–5, doi:10.1017/cbo9780511808029.008.

consciousness,” as the self’s struggle with itself, is a journey towards *Aufhebung* through the mediation of Reason. And in this way, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as Hegel’s contribution to scholarship concerned with human reflexivity, can thus be read as a *tractatus paedagogicus*.

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