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# The Modern Moral Individual In Hegel's Phenomenology Of Spirit

Rory Sazama

*Southern Illinois University Carbondale, sazama@siu.edu*

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THE MODERN MORAL INDIVIDUAL IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

by

Rory Sazama

B.A., U.W. Milwaukee, 2009

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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THE MODERN MORAL INDIVIDUAL IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

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Rory Sazama

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
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for the Degree of Masters  
in the Field of Philosophy

Approved by:

Dr. Sara Beardsworth, Chair

Dr. Stephen Tyman

Dr. Thomas Alexander

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rory Sazama, for the Master of Philosophy degree in Philosophy, presented on November 29th, 2012, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: THE MODERN MORAL INDIVIDUAL IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Sara Beardsworth

The subject of this thesis is an attempt to identify the modern moral individual in G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This topic will be brought out through a detailed analysis of Hegel's reconstruction of Immanuel Kant's moral system and his “sublation” of it in the self of “conscience.”<sup>1</sup> In demonstrating that Kant's moral system was grounded in the irreconcilable conflict between morality and nature, Hegel set forth “conscience” as a concrete moral self—a self that is the unity of actuality and pure knowledge. This reconstruction situates morality in the individual self-relation and leads into the dialectic of tragic action. Put briefly, Hegel's “conscience” is a transgressive structure of recognition established in a social context. Throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel's method of demonstrating action shows its unforeseeable consequences since the action, with its motivation, and the deed, i.e. what has been done, are not identical. In Hegel's dialectic the moral self develops out of Enlightenment's critique of the existing social order, the Terror of the French Revolution, and a reconstruction of Kantian morality into an ethical thought of the dialectic of evil and its forgiveness. The dialectic unfolds as a division of “conscience” into a judging consciousness and an acting consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel makes explicit the definition of his technical term ‘sublation’ in his *Science of Logic*. Sublation has a two-fold meaning where “on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease to be, to put an end to...Thus what is sublated is preserved...something is sublated only insofar as it has entered into unity with its opposite.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, (Humanities International Press: New York, 1989), 107. Hegel's sublation of the Kantian moral self-consciousness into the self of ‘conscience’ will demonstrate its preservation insofar as the crucial role of moral authority will be sustained throughout the dialectic. At the same time, the Kant's moral system as such is surpassed in the *actuality* of conscience in an intersubjective context.

It is at this point of division that the modern moral individual appears most distinctly for Hegel. Above all, it appears where the acting consciousness “confesses” to being particular, not universal, and judging consciousness fails to respond in kind—in a delay between confession and “forgiveness.” This is where I take the modern ethical individual to be situated by Hegel. The questions that I wish to take up after articulating this dialectic in detail are as follows. What is being revealed about the moral self in modernity? What implications does it have for the possibility of a Hegelian ethics as distinct from Kantian morality?

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In my thesis Hegel regarded modernity as presenting tremendous difficulties for any idea of the moral self. With the development and furthering of social orders developed out of limited or failed systems of social cooperation of the past, any conception of the moral self must come forth in the conditions of anonymity and alienation that affect the modern social context. Hegel's analysis in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of the unfolding of *Geist* (spirit) as a social being is meant to demonstrate the possibility of a moral individual within the constructs of a developed social order such as the modern liberal state (what he calls *substance* in the chapter on "spirit"). Hegel was aware that after the Enlightenment's critique of the existing social order and the Terror of the French Revolution, the Kantian attempt to create a moral system from a purely moral will also led to the felt loss in German Idealism of ethical life in having passed out of tradition into an identification of the object of knowledge with pure duty. However, in Hegel's reconstruction of Kant's moral system consciousness comes to realize that its capacity to know both itself and its world will turn out to be based *not* solely on duty as its absolute essence but, rather, on the communal process of tragic recognition. This is Hegel's "We that is I" and "I that is We." That is to say, the self can only become realizable to the self as both *substance and subject* through the historical transformation of a subject coming to discover that it creates its own history on the ground of actual duty-bound consciousness *and* in the form of "recognition and indebtedness," which is to say, in relation to others and a social world.<sup>2</sup> In moving beyond

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<sup>2</sup> The Preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* states that "everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*." (PS, 10) For our purposes, we can take this to mean that the subject will identify itself as distinguishable from the world *as well as* capable of finding itself in it. Hegel writes: "this Substance is, as Subject, pure, simple negativity, and is for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple, it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis

Kantian morality, the moral self becomes its own subject creating its own history, with the actual self taking itself to be universal, not merely particular, and at the same time experiencing itself in respect of an objective social world in and through its relation to others.

The section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* titled “Spirit that is Certain of Itself: Morality” is the essential component of my thesis since it is through Hegel's reconstruction of Kantian morality that the moral subject comes to find itself *in* the world (and not as the moral self in the transcendental subject). Further, Kant, who has brought the subject to a complete self-relation, will become the ground for Hegel's ethics. However, to develop Hegel's ethical idea we must enter into the dialectic of evil and its forgiveness as a theory of individual conviction and tragic action.

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[the immediate simplicity]” (ibid). Stern clarifies: “Hegel calls Spirit the subject that embodies this relation of identity-in-difference to the world, by finding itself in its ‘other,’ so that while it is not cut off from the world (radical dualism), it is not indistinguishable from it either (monism). Robert Stern, *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Routledge: New York, 2002), 34



## CHAPTER 2

### HEGEL'S RECONSTRUCTION OF KANT'S MORAL SYSTEM

#### (1) The Moral Worldview

Hegel comes to Kant's conception of morality as a shape of spirit that develops out of Enlightenment's critique of the existing social order (*l'ancien régime*) and the Terror of the French Revolution. He stresses Kant's identification of the object of knowledge as pure duty. For him, this is a crucial moment of spirit because Kant has brought the subject to an absolute self-relation and this self-relation is the foundation of a moral view of the world. However, Hegel also finds this self-relation to be incomplete and embedded in an irreconcilable conflict between morality and nature. This section will show how Hegel reveals that conflict in a circle of “postulates,” yet at the same time maintains the absolute self-relation of the moral self in his sublimation of Kant's pure moral subject.

At the outset of the section on the “moral view of the world” in the chapter “Spirit that is Certain of Itself: Morality,” Hegel notes that “self-consciousness knows duty to be the absolute essence. It is bound only by duty, and this substance is its own pure consciousness, for which duty cannot receive the form of something alien.”<sup>3</sup> Here Hegel makes of Kant's notion of morality a form of spirit that takes the Kantian notion of duty to be the object of its knowledge. His reconstruction of Kantian morality brings individuality and reflection to the forefront of what he calls “the moral worldview” (*die moralische Weltanschauung*). In contrast to the Kantian standpoint, the previous sections of the chapter titled “Spirit” were an analysis of responsibilities and obligations imposed upon the self by external constraints, notably in the traditional laws of

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<sup>3</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 365.

Greek ethical life. Now, however, the object of its philosophic inquiry is the subject's own self-certainty. For Hegel, this shape of spirit is rendered identical to the content of its self-knowledge. By positing duty as its central conception, self-consciousness has made both the identity of knowledge and the object of knowledge explicit for itself. The pure duty of Kantian morality is taken as the expression of what spirit is and what it knows. Put succinctly, for the Kantian, acting on the categorical imperative according to pure duty will involve acting "only in accordance with that maxim (a rule that one gives governing one's actions) through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law."<sup>4</sup>

For Hegel, for the moral self-consciousness to know duty as its absolute essence is to imply mediation. To be aware of mediation implies a relation to something other than consciousness. The otherness that consciousness stands in relation to is its own nature, "whose laws like its actions belong to itself as a being which is indifferent to moral self-consciousness, just as the latter is indifferent to it."<sup>5</sup> Even though this moment of spirit knows duty to be its absolute essence, it also knows that it has a nature which stands in an oppositional relationship to moral self-consciousness. To put the matter simply, the moral view of the world that Hegel is working through cannot stand on its own—it cannot merely be posited as a self-consciousness that knows duty as its pure essence from the position of complete abstraction from actuality. Rather, moral self-consciousness finds itself in a world—an actuality that stands completely "without significance" for the content of consciousness. There is nothing about the reality of its world that is taken to have bearing or influence *as* its reality on the inner content of duty-bound self-consciousness. The Kantian moralist knows that what is essential to it in its content is its own self-relation—both taking its orientation from its duty and the actualizing of its duty. Yet

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<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Yale University Press: New York, 2002), 37

<sup>5</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 365

this duty has no relation to a nature that is posited as operating on its own law-like regularities, and which in turn stands in a relationship of utter indifference to the essence of self-certain spirit. As a result of this opposition, the Kantian moralist finds that nature may allow for its duties to be fulfilled, or it may render this fulfillment impossible with equal indifference. Hegel will insist that the relationship developed out of the moral view of the world consists in both “complete indifference and independence of Nature towards moral purposes and activity,”<sup>6</sup> and “the consciousness of duty alone as the essential fact, and of Nature as completely devoid of independence and essential being.”<sup>7</sup>

Hegel's critique of the moral world view will now consist of the development of conflicting particular moments that present themselves in unfolding the relationship between duty-bound self-consciousness and nature. Although nature is by necessity taken to be indifferent to morality, it is nonetheless conceived in a manner in which it cannot actually be indifferent.<sup>8</sup> Although moral self-consciousness will look for a way to unite what it has posited as separate, each move made at reconciliation will merely displace the problem. In Hegel's dialectic, which treats moral self-consciousness as an experience, the inevitable and recurring displacements eventually force themselves upon moral *self-consciousness* and lead it to move beyond the rigidity of this moral worldview.

## **(2) The Postulates of the Unity of Morality and Nature**

In order to bring out this crucial turning point for moral self-consciousness, Hegel presents a reconstruction of Kantian morality as a set of “postulates.” These postulates are set forth as though they were an *experience* of self-consciousness. In presenting Kant's morality in

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 365

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 365-366

<sup>8</sup> Terry Pinkard *Hegel's Phenomenology* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1994), 195

this manner, Hegel is attempting to demonstrate that a transcendental self-relation cannot be a moral standpoint. He begins with the first postulate, the harmony of morality and objective nature, stating that “the harmony of morality and Nature—or, since Nature comes into account only in so far as consciousness experiences its unity with it—the harmony of morality and happiness, is thought of as something that necessarily is, i.e. it is postulated.”<sup>9</sup> Moral self-consciousness recognizes an incongruence between the moral order and the natural order. However, moral self-consciousness also recognizes that it must be able to take duties as something that can be accomplished in the world. Despite the distinction between nature and morality that it must make in order to escape the non-moral regulations of nature, moral self-consciousness sets forth the first postulate in an effort to show that there is a harmonious relationship between the two as a demand of reason. Hence, the unification of nature with morality is set forth by a specific consciousness and is concerned with seeing nature as hospitable to the demands of duty-bound actions. Stern notes that at this point the moral worldview “divorces morality from nature at one level, but tries to moralize it at another.”<sup>10</sup> That is to say, the moral worldview at first sees morality and nature as two conflicting and indifferent absolutes, then reason *demand*s the moralization of nature so as to accommodate actions performed from duty. This demand of reason is set forth because moral self-consciousness must be in a position to see its actions performed from pure duty as realizable in the world.

A similar incongruence is present in the second postulate proposed by the moral worldview: the harmony of morality and the sensuous will. Moral self-consciousness knows duty as its absolute essence. Yet it also knows that, as a natural being, it is linked to the world by basic natural instincts and inclinations that influence its behavior. Moral self-consciousness now

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<sup>9</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 367

<sup>10</sup> Robert Stern *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Routledge Press: New York, 2002), 172

finds itself in a struggle with the demands of its natural inclinations. On the one hand, it knows that it operates from moral duty. On the other hand, as a natural being, it knows that the sensuous demands of natural inclinations may not be in conformity with pure duty. Moral self-consciousness thus aims at conforming the sensuous demands of its natural inclinations to morality. However, our basic inclinations and instincts are not something we can merely set aside. Since we cannot disregard our sense-nature, the unification of natural sensuous demands with pure duty must be presented in the form of an endless progression. The moral worldview therefore expresses a unity through infinite progress. Since the conformity of sensuous inclinations to the moral will is only something that can be aimed at, a life that unfolds without end must be postulated in order for a moral subject to make continual progress. Here, Hegel must have in mind what Kant proposed in the *Critique of Practical Reason* where he wrote:

However, the perfect conformity of will to moral law is sainthood, a perfection of which no rational being in the sensuous world is capable of at any moment of his existence. Since, however, this perfection is nonetheless demanded as being practically necessary, it can only occur in a progression, leading to infinity, toward this perfect conformity. Following the principle of pure practical reason, we have to admit such a practical progression as the real object of our will.<sup>11</sup>

Since moral self-consciousness cannot merely set aside natural instincts and inclinations, this postulate must appear as an endless progression towards the conformity of natural sensuousness with morality. Sensuous nature in the moral life is made to conform to morality through an endless progression whose aim must be projected into an “infinitely remote” future.

Lastly, Hegel presents the third postulate: the master and ruler of the world, for the harmony of morality and happiness. The need for a divine legislator arises from a distinction that

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<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Penguin Press: New York, 2008), 160

Hegel sees in the form of conflicting duties. Moral self-consciousness may find that certain circumstances require that the right course of action stems from specific duties (for example, the obligation to provide for one's family). However, moral self-consciousness experiences a conflict between specific duties and pure duty. For example, although someone may operate from the specific duty of providing for one's family, one's pure duty may be to provide for those less fortunate. By providing for those less fortunate, the specific duties of providing for one's family are cast aside. However, it certainly "feels" like the "right" thing to do would be to place the importance of one's family above the demands of the entirety of humanity's less fortunate population. The moral self-consciousness remains unable to resolve the conflict arising between pure duty and specific duty. As Stern notes, moral self-consciousness "may feel that it is 'held back' from doing what is its pure duty by the particularity of its situation, and it may therefore question the validity of the specific duties which apply to it by virtue of being in that situation."<sup>12</sup> Moral self-consciousness will now feel as though it is not capable of operating from pure duty alone. Hegel notes that when faced with multiple conflicting duties:

the moral self-consciousness in general heeds only the pure duty in them; the many duties qua manifold are specific and therefore as such have nothing sacred about them for the moral consciousness. At the same time, however, being necessary, since the Notion of "doing" implies a complex actuality and therefore a complex relation to it, these many duties must be regarded as possessing an intrinsic being of their own.<sup>13</sup>

Although the moral self may feel a conflict between pure and specific duties, she will at least try to do the right thing in hopes that God will see that she made an effort to do what is right. Thus, the divine legislator of a God is posited so that any failure to observe pure duty will be seen as not the fault of moral self-consciousness, since she has tried to do what is right given the

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Stern *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Routledge Press: New York, 2002), 173

<sup>13</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 369-370

particular circumstances that she has found herself in. In the next section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, titled “Dissemblance and Duplicity,” Hegel will demonstrate that the self-relation of the subject of the moral worldview is both incomplete and embedded in an irreconcilable conflict between morality and nature that is “dissembled” in its own standpoint.

### (3) Dissemblance and Duplicity (*Die Verstellung*)

Hegel's analysis of the moral worldview involves a detailed critique of the three postulates that he has Kant's moral system turn on. In summary, they are as follows:

1. The implicit harmony of morality and objective nature.
2. The conformity of the sensuous with morality.
3. There is a God that sanctifies moral law.

On Hegel's account, the postulates of the moral worldview will turn out to be “a whole nest of thoughtless contradictions.”<sup>14</sup> These contradictions take form in a series of displacements—a shifting of the problem in respect of action—that will make explicit state of hypocrisy in the moral worldview. In order to avoid hypocrisy, moral self-consciousness will have to return to its position of absolute self-relation with the self-intuition denied it by Kantian morality.<sup>15</sup> However, before that position can be achieved, Hegel must have moral self-consciousness go through the displacements embedded in the three postulates of the moral worldview so that we can come to see its position as one of hypocrisy.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 374

<sup>15</sup> Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Northwest University Press, 1974) 483-484

As regards the first postulate, the relationship between nature and moral self-consciousness is “supposed to be an *implicit* harmony, not explicitly for actual consciousness, not present; on the contrary, what is present is rather only the contradiction of the two.”<sup>16</sup> The first postulate asserts a harmony between moral self-consciousness and nature. The harmony is *implicit*, which is to say that it is not *actually* present for actual consciousness. For Hegel, “the *actual* moral consciousness, however, is one that acts; it is precisely therein that the actuality of morality consists.”<sup>17</sup> Before acting, moral self-consciousness postulates the harmony of morality and nature as something that “necessarily is.” However, if it were to act, it would actualize the harmony. To perform an action in nature would then be to actualize this reconciliation. However, this displaces the content of the postulate, which was asserted as something beyond the moral self-consciousness. Put succinctly, the postulate and action are in contradiction with one another. Since action is necessary to the concept of the moral self, the only way that moral self-consciousness can maintain itself is through displacement. Hegel notes that “action therefore, in fact directly fulfills what was asserted could not take place, what was supposed to be merely a postulate, because the meaning of the action is really this, to make into a present reality what was not supposed to exist in the present.”<sup>18</sup> By presupposing that nature and morality are separate *for it*, the Kantian moral consciousness fails to see that moral action is taken to be performable within nature. However, to admit this would be to say that the harmony of morality and nature is not a mere postulate of reason. As regards the separateness for moral consciousness of nature and morality, the Kantian fails to be “in earnest about this, for in the deed the presence of this harmony becomes explicit for it. But it is not in earnest even about the deed, since the deed is

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<sup>16</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 375

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 375

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 375



something individual; for it has such a high purpose, the highest good.”<sup>19</sup> The dissemblance that Hegel means to reveal lies in this. First, moral self-consciousness postulates the unity of morality and nature. As a postulate, it is implicit, not explicit. It is the final purpose of the world. For it as a moral *consciousness* nature and morality “do not harmonize.”<sup>20</sup> However, in the meaning of action for moral self-consciousness, the unity must be actualized. The content of the first postulate is hence displaced. In the concept of action, the harmony of nature and morality is actual, i.e. for consciousness, rather than beyond moral self-consciousness.

The second postulate asserts the harmony of sense nature and moral self-consciousness. The conformity of sensuous inclinations and instincts with moral self-conscious is a demand of reason because moral self-consciousness “must be perfected in its own self.”<sup>21</sup> However, consciousness must continually make progress towards bringing about this conformity, since its actualization would do away with moral consciousness. For Hegel, the conformity of natural sensuous inclinations with pure duty must lie in an infinite beyond towards which the moral self-consciousness must strive in order to *be* a moral self-consciousness. In situating the conformity of the sensuous with morality in an infinite beyond, moral self-consciousness now “asserts that its purpose is pure, is independent of inclinations and impulses, which implies that it has eliminated sensuous purposes.”<sup>22</sup> However, it now comes to discover that any attempt to bring its purpose into the world would make sensuous inclination the mediating element or “middle term” between pure duty and reality. Moral self-consciousness has maintained the elimination of its sense-nature, but it now dissembles this. It finds that sense-nature is the very instrument by which the moral self is realizable in the world. Hegel stresses that “moral self-consciousness is

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 377

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* 377

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 377

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 377

not, therefore, in earnest with the elimination of inclinations and impulses, for it is just these that are *self-realizing self-consciousness*. But also they ought not be *suppressed*, but only be in *conformity* with Reason.”<sup>23</sup> And since moral action is consciousness “realizing” itself, then sensuous instincts *do* conform to reason. However, this actual conformity of sense-nature to morality is now again displaced by the moral self-consciousness “in a nebulous remoteness where nothing can be accurately distinguished or comprehended.”<sup>24</sup> The second postulate required an endless progression towards the conformity of sense-nature with morality, the completion of which would be the attainment of moral perfection. Now, however, Hegel finds the endless progression towards moral perfection a “dissemblance, a falsification of the situation, since as a matter of fact it would be rather morality itself that was given up in its perfection, because it is consciousness of absolute purpose as *pure* purpose, one therefore *opposed* to all other purposes.”<sup>25</sup> Since moral self-consciousness is not ‘in earnest’ with regards to the perfection of morality, it displaces moral perfection into an infinite beyond. The idea of infinitely progressing towards moral perfection is to speak of morality in terms of becoming achieved in various degrees. However, moral self-consciousness took itself to be in essence pure duty, not an incremental movement towards pure perfect duty. Again, Hegel finds the moral self-consciousness to be in contradiction.

As regards the third postulate, if the moral worldview must postulate a God for the sake of sanctifying specific duties, then the fundamental principle of Kantian moral autonomy is called into question.<sup>26</sup> The moral self-consciousness is only concerned with the one pure duty.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 377

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 378

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 378

<sup>26</sup> For Kant, autonomy is that property of the will “by which it is a law unto itself (independent of any property of the objects of volition).” (G 4:440) Autonomy will involve the will’s capacity to render its own moral laws and also motivates moral action for its own sake.

The specific duties are deemed valueless according to the moral worldview. For Hegel, specific duties can therefore “have their truth only in another being and are made sacred—which they are not for the moral consciousness—by a holy lawgiver.”<sup>27</sup> The holy lawgiver is introduced in order to resolve what moral self-consciousness is incapable of resolving on its own. However, it is difficult to understand how a divine moral legislator that stands beyond the relation of morality to nature could be anything other than an unreal abstraction in which any concept of morality would be done away with. Indeed, moral self-consciousness is put in the precarious position of justifying how a holy lawgiver is not altogether beyond morality. As a pure, perfect being, the Kantian God does not have a relationship to either nature or the moral self-consciousness. It would be altogether “above the struggle of nature and sense.”<sup>28</sup> Lacking a positive relation to reality, this pure moral being is reduced to a dissemblance of facts. If pure morality is merely an abstraction with no genuine relationship to reality, then it seems as though the moral actions performed will have no moral meaning. Hyppolite reinforces this point by writing that “pure duty must be beyond actual consciousness, beyond existence, but it must also be within consciousness and, inasmuch as it is the beyond, it no longer means anything.”<sup>29</sup> Hegel’s emphasis on the postulates has therefore brought out the contradictions of the moral view of the world, which in sum rest on the absolute opposition between nature and morality. In Hegel’s dialectic moral self-consciousness renounces what it took to be true and returns to the absolute self-relation.

Hegel’s reconstruction of the Kantian moral worldview has stressed Kant’s identification of the object of knowledge as pure duty. This is a crucial moment in the development of spirit

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 380

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 381

<sup>29</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwestern University Press: New York, 1974), 489

because Kant has brought the subject to an absolute self-relation and this self-relation is the foundation of a moral view of the world. However, as we have seen, Hegel also found this self-relation to be incomplete and embedded in an irreconcilable conflict between morality and nature. Although Hegel has revealed irreconcilable conflicts in the circle of Kantian “postulates,” he will at the same time maintain the absolute self-relation of the moral self in his “sublation” of Kant's pure moral self. This is why Kant is necessary to his thought of the modern moral self. To Hegel, Kant's transcendental turn brought the subject into an absolute self-relation. Hegel then releases the moral subject from its invisible, transcendental position, yet maintains the absoluteness of the self-relation in Kantian morality as a “moment” of his own ethical thought. His movement beyond the transcendental perspective lies in his demonstration that Kant's moral system is grounded in the irreconcilable conflict between morality and nature. Given that demonstration, Hegel is now in a position to set forth the self of “conscience”: a self that is the unity of *actuality* and pure knowledge. Hegel will now turn to the dialectical unfolding of “conscience,” in the form of a dialectic of consciousness divided into the judging consciousness and the acting consciousness.

## CHAPTER 3

### MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN HEGEL'S MORAL SELF

#### (1) Conscience

Hegel will now present a version of philosophical romanticism in an effort (a) to maintain the self-determination achieved in the Kantian moral system, (b) to move beyond the difficulties of realizing action that were inherent in the moral worldview, and (c) to draw out an objective social world in which consciousness experiences itself, i.e. a conception of modernity.<sup>30</sup> The first half of the section titled “Conscience. The Beautiful Soul—Evil and its Forgiveness” articulates the appearance of the attitude of conscience (*Gewissen*) in an effort to “complete” the Kantian self-relation of the subject. This will be shown through a detailed analysis of conscience, the role of language, and consciousness’s withdrawal into the 'beautiful soul.'

Kantian morality demonstrated two key features that play an essential role in the formulation of Hegel's ethical process. Put baldly, the first is the notion of a fully autonomous subject that appears in Kant’s purely moral will operating from the self-legislation that is independent of external influence. The second is that the object of knowledge for consciousness is pure duty. However, as was brought out in the dialectical unfolding of the moral worldview, autonomy cannot be actual in Kant's moral system. The moral worldview, reduced to a 'nest of thoughtless contradictions,' places the moral self in a position where moral action is rendered impossible. Indeed, the necessity for the moral self to detach itself from all perspectives but its own position of anonymity demonstrated the shortcomings of the moral worldview. That is to say, in Hegel’s view the absolute self-relation of spirit is incomplete. In order to move beyond

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<sup>30</sup> Hegel’s attitude towards romanticism and its relationship to conscience is demonstrated in greater detail in both Terry Pinkard’s *Hegel’s Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 208-213, and J.M. Bernstein’s *Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action*, 36

this shortcoming, and yet still maintain the emphasis on self-determination, Hegel introduces the self as the expression of conscience (*Gewissen*), a “spirit that is directly aware of itself as absolute truth and being.”<sup>31</sup> Conscience is the self-certain spirit, which immediately knows its actual content as pure duty, whose form is conviction. Conscience further denotes the idea that the self is the source of human experience. According to Hegel:

Moral self-consciousness having attained its truth, it therefore abandons, or rather supersedes, the internal division which gave rise to the dissemblance, the division between the in-itself and the self, between pure duty *qua* pure purpose, and reality *qua* a Nature and sense opposed to pure purpose. It is, when thus returned into itself, *concrete* moral Spirit which, in the consciousness of pure duty, does not give itself an empty criterion to be used against actual consciousness; on the contrary, pure duty, as also the Nature opposed to it, are superseded moments. Spirit is, in an immediate unity, a self-actualizing being, and the action is immediately something *concretely* moral.<sup>32</sup>

Conscience sees itself as a self-determining individual. It maintains awareness of a single obligation: “must this action be performed, or not?” Conscience is *acting* consciousness immediately aware of what is to be morally acted upon, as the content of his or her action represents the doer’s own individuality. Conscience takes the form of a “simple *self*, which is both a *pure* knowing and a knowledge of itself as this *individual* consciousness.”<sup>33</sup> When considered from the moment of action, conscience does away with the inconsistencies of the moral worldview. Moral self-consciousness attempted to maintain separation between “pure duty *qua* pure purpose, and reality *qua* a Nature and sense opposed to pure purpose.”<sup>34</sup> This distinction makes explicit what Hegel refers to as the division between the in-itself and the self. Conscience does away with this distinction by taking reality to be something produced by consciousness. That is to say, pure duty as pure knowing is the self of consciousness and the self

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<sup>31</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 384

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 385

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 387

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 385

of consciousness is actuality. Hence, acting moral self-consciousness, *through* action, overcomes the paradoxes of Kantian morality. Conscience supersedes the paradoxes of the moral view of the world (i.e. there is a moral consciousness, there is no moral consciousness, duty takes place in consciousness, duty exists outside of consciousness, etc.) by recognizing that the differences postulated by the moral worldview are not differences at all. Rather, these paradoxes were brought out by the moral self-consciousness placing outside of itself in a transcendent Being what it claimed as necessarily *in-itself*. Now however, conscience recognizes the intrinsic sameness of what was taken as separate, i.e., pure duty and nature. Pure duty, since it is merely an abstraction of thought, can only have its actuality made manifest in a reality of which conscience is a part. Bernstein explains that “conscience claims immediate awareness and certainty of its action as what it is universally and objectively obligated to do; subjective conviction and objective duty coinciding.”<sup>35</sup> Action is the immediate objective reality for consciousness. The actualization of action takes shape as the pure form of the will, no longer separating nature and pure duty, nor splitting up various duties. In moral self-consciousness we saw that any divisions of duty resulted in the impossibility of moral action. However, conscience sublates divisions of duty through simple action, renouncing the dissemblances of the moral worldview.

Through moral action the distinctions made between duties are 'demolished.' That is to say, since conscience is actualized through action, the sifting through various duties that could not be acted upon no longer takes place. Rather, instead of parsing out a situation into various potentially conflicting duties, conscience only considers whether or not an action is to be done. Hegel notes that “action *qua* actualization is thus the pure form of the will—the simple conversion of a reality that merely is into a reality that results from *action*, the conversion of the

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<sup>35</sup> J.M. Bernstein *Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel's Poetics of Action*, 35

bare mode of *objective* knowing into one of knowing reality as something produced by consciousness.”<sup>36</sup> If we consider a case of moral action, we see that consciousness *qua* conscience knows this particular case immediately. Further, it knows that this case only exists insofar as conscience exists. The situation that the adopted attitude of conscience finds itself immersed in is purely subjective. With Hyppolite, “This concrete situation is not objective, in the sense of being determined by some impersonal consciousness which could so to speak hover over the situation.”<sup>37</sup> Rather, awareness of a particular situation is the *same as* the situation itself. Reality is *willed* by consciousness by way of the adopted attitude of conscience.

Clearly Hegel is making a shift from the transcendental idealist view of the subject represented by the moral worldview to self as he or she actually appears in a world. For Hegel, conscience is the attitude of simple action that “knows and does what is concretely right.”<sup>38</sup> It knows what is right because conscience is inwardly certain of the rightness of its moral convictions. This conviction is the very essence of conscience and represents a conception of morality that seems to verge on the absurd.<sup>39</sup> This simple self takes the apparent grounding of morality to stem from conviction. The self knows that an action is right because it is convinced that it is right. Further, what makes it right for the self is the conviction that it *is* right. A moral theorist could easily hear in this position the claim, “You want to know why it *is* right? Because of my conviction that it is!” Hegel maintains emphasis on conviction so as to demonstrate the essentiality of self-legislation for conscience. The content of the moral action takes the form of “the doer's own immediate *individuality*; and the *form* of the content is just this self as a pure

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<sup>36</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 385

<sup>37</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwest University Press: New York, 1974), 503

<sup>38</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 386

<sup>39</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwest University Press: New York, 1974), 501



movement, viz. as [the individual's] knowing or his *own conviction*.”<sup>40</sup> That is, by acting in accordance with *my own* moral convictions, I am free to determine for myself what counts and what should be acted upon. True freedom consists in acting from this deeply personal point of view. Conscience thus acts according to its inner convictions, concretely making manifest its content in an empirical reality through the performance of action.

In *Hegel's Phenomenology*, Terry Pinkard suggests an objection that may be raised at this point that is worth exploring. What if there are two consciences expressing conflicting demands of inner conviction?<sup>41</sup> When moral conviction is actualized in a concrete empirical reality, conscience becomes aware of an 'other.' Hegel maintains that this other is in fact the reality that makes moral action realizable. Moral action can only be actualized in a specific reality, not in the empty abstraction of thought. This is why Hegel expresses the idea that moral laws exist for the sake of the self, not vice versa.<sup>42</sup> Hegel claims that this reality is “the reality of consciousness itself, and consciousness not as a mere 'thought-thing' but as an individual.”<sup>43</sup> Actions performed in reality take the form of the doer's individuality, based solely upon the inner convictions by which they appear in reality.

The next step vital to Hegel's argument is his acknowledgment that actions performed from one's convictions possess an enduring reality *through* the moment of recognition and acknowledgement by other members of a community. Hegel specifies that “the deed is recognized and thereby made real because the existent reality is directly linked with conviction or knowledge; or, in other words, knowing one's purpose is directly the element of existence, is

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<sup>40</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 387

<sup>41</sup> Terry Pinkard *Hegel's Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 210

<sup>42</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 387

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 387

universal recognition.”<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, reality is not a desolate island on which conscience finds itself existing in a solitary manner. Rather, conscience exists within the social context of other consciences where each member of the community acts from his or her own convictions. The inner convictions of conscience that are brought to the forefront of attention represent the common element between various members of a social community comprised of other consciences. As Pinkard stresses, in the romantic ideal of a truly free community of selves, all individuals would “freely recognize the right of conscience of others, and, since each would be genuinely free, each would be acting in concert with the others.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, conscience sees no problem with the objection raised earlier by Pinkard, i.e., that the conviction that two consciences might conflict, since each member of the community is free to act from their own conscience. What is considered as 'right' in the community is the notion that members are acting from the purity of their convictions, rather than the “duty” itself in the sense of the content that the action realizes. Each individual recognizes and acknowledges the existence and freedom of others, rather than committing members of a community to places in particular social orders.

In Hegel's critique of Greek ethical life, presented earlier in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the various members of the social structure are forced into a fixed order relative to their gender. In contrast, in the dialectic of “conscience,” members of a society are free to act on their own convictions. These actions receive affirmation from the other members of the community. It is the community that acknowledges the appropriateness of actions, and the appropriateness of an action is demonstrated through being performed solely from the convictions of the individual. Hegel stresses that that “the doer, then, knows what he does to be a duty, and since he knows this, and the conviction of duty is the very essence of moral obligation, he is thus recognized and

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 388

<sup>45</sup> Terry Pinkard *Hegel's Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 210

acknowledged by others. The action is thereby validated and has actual existence.”<sup>46</sup> The validity and actuality of the action is demanded by individual conscience from a community that is nothing more than the recognition of conviction.

The key to understanding Hegel's conception of conviction, then, lies in what he means by recognition. For Hegel, one's deepest conviction implies a relation to other consciousnesses. Conscience is the common relational element between groups of self-consciousnesses. This element is “the substance in which the deed has an *enduring reality*, the form of being *recognized* and *acknowledged* by others.”<sup>47</sup> This leads Hyppolite to claim that “when I am convinced, I presuppose that my conviction is as valid for others as for myself; I seek or demand recognition for my conviction.”<sup>48</sup> Conscience requires others to whom to declare his or her convictions. In turn, others are necessary for the acknowledgement of these convictions. Actions have moral meaning only insofar as they are expressed within this social setting. The moment that an action has been performed, it must be acknowledged as done from conviction. In so doing, “the deed is recognized and thereby made real because the existent reality is directly linked with conviction or knowledge; or, in other words, knowing one's purpose is directly the element of existence, is universal recognition.”<sup>49</sup> The action performed by conscience is the simple expression of the form of its content. Hegel states that “the essence of action, duty, consists in conscience's conviction about it; it is just this conviction that is the in-itself; it is the implicitly universal self-consciousness, or the state of being recognized, and hence a reality...but taken separate and alone without the content of self, duty is a being-for-another, something

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<sup>46</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 392

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 388

<sup>48</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwest University Press: New York, 1974), 506

<sup>49</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 388

transparent which has merely the significance of an essentiality in general, lacking all content.”<sup>50</sup>

In sum, conscience in Hegel articulates a self-determining conscientious self, a self capable of determining for itself what is morally required of it. However, Hegel will implement the same criticism of displacing and dissembling that he used in relation to the moral worldview in order to demonstrate conscience's shortcomings. Conscience will soon find itself falling victim to the indeterminateness of its convictions, as well as the arbitrariness of the actions it performs. The following section of this chapter will demonstrate how conscience develops into two ways of being the moral self—acting conscience and the beautiful soul—in an effort to overcome the criticism of displacement and dissemblance.

## **(2) Fallibalism and Interpretive Pluralism**<sup>51</sup>

When conscience acts, it is aware that it is acting in a context and cannot possibly render all of the particularities of circumstance knowable. Reality for conscience is a “plurality of circumstances which breaks up and spreads out endlessly in all directions, backwards into their conditions, sideways into their connections, forwards in their consequences.”<sup>52</sup> Knowledge is faced with incomplete knowledge, or 'non-knowledge.' That is to say, the circumstances of any particular situation extend beyond the limits of human comprehension. In order to have knowledge of what is the absolute 'right' course of action, conscience would have to be in possession of all the present conditions of a situation and all possible foreseeable consequences. However, this is an untenable position for conscience, since past circumstances, present particularities, and future repercussions are shrouded in uncertainty. Hence as Bernstein

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 388

<sup>51</sup> The terms “fallibalism” and “interpretive pluralism” and their relationship to this section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* come from J.M. Bernstein’s *Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel’s Poetics of Action*

<sup>52</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 389

proposes, conscience is in a position of moral fallibility. It could only be objectively certain of its duty if it was in possession of complete knowledge. Hegel stresses this position by stating that, when conscience acts, it is not acting with “full acquaintance of all the attendant circumstances which are required, and that its pretense of conscientiously weighing all the circumstances is vain”<sup>53</sup> However, conscience acknowledges that its knowledge is, although incomplete, sufficient in virtue of it being its *own* knowledge.

Similarly, when conscience acts, it “enters into relation with the many aspects of the case.”<sup>54</sup> The case is perceived by conscience to have multiple components through which the case becomes a ‘multiplicity of duties.’ These multiple components signify the various possible duties that conscience may act on. Although conscience no longer experiences a conflict between multiple duties, Hegel notes that “conscience knows that it has to choose between them, and to make a decision; for none of them, in its specific character or in its content is absolute; only pure duty is that.”<sup>55</sup> However, since pure duty itself is merely an empty formality, conscience limits itself to the pure conviction of *a* duty. As such, actions performed by conscience may be construed by others to have disastrous consequences. Bernstein stresses that, “No choice nor the action that it engenders can be beyond deliberative reproach even, and especially from those most affected by it.”<sup>56</sup> Unforeseeable consequences are, for Hegel, a necessary component of the complexities of a community inhabited by self-determining selves.

Nonetheless, conscience *must* act because of its own self-conception according to Hegel. The actions performed by conscience shape its individuality in the sense that in performing the action, conscience determines on its own which convictions are to be acted upon. For Hegel,

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 390

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 390

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 390

<sup>56</sup> J.M. Bernstein *Conscience and Transgression*, 85

“action is called for, something must be determined by the individual, and the self-certain spirit in which the in-itself has attained the significance of the self-conscious 'I,' knows that it has this determination and content in the immediate certainty of itself.”<sup>57</sup> The conviction that actions stem from is a pure knowing by which all acts attain permissibility, provided their inception stems from the individuality of a conscience.

However, this introduces an arbitrariness into the actions of acting consciousness. Conscience knows that actions are necessary. With arbitrariness entering in at this point of the discussion, we have to recognize that acts are done through the determinations of 'natural consciousness' via its “impulses and inclinations.”<sup>58</sup> Hyppolite explains that “we can justify anything provided we are able to convince ourselves of the conformity of our action with duty by firmly holding onto the way in which the action can be considered as duty.”<sup>59</sup> Once an action has been performed, although it remains the action of conscience, others may not necessarily acknowledge it. As Hegel specifies, the duty which conscience fulfills “is a specific content.”

it is true that this content is the self of consciousness, and so consciousness's knowledge of itself, its identity with itself. But once fulfilled, set in the medium of being, this identity is no longer knowing, no longer this process of differentiation in which its differences are at the same time immediately superseded; on the contrary, in being, the difference is established as an enduring difference, and the action is a specific action, not identical with the element of everyone's self-consciousness, and therefore not necessarily acknowledged.<sup>60</sup>

The conscience that acts *and* the community that recognizes and acknowledges are free of the actual content of the action. Freed from the specificity of any particular duty that may be performed, there is no way to affirm its moral value. Moreover, since a self of conscience is not in a position to control the 'meaning' of its action as others interpret it, the meaning of an action

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<sup>57</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 390

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 390

<sup>59</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwest University Press: New York, 1974), 509

<sup>60</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 394

is open to multiple interpretations. This is what Bernstein refers to as “interpretive pluralism.”<sup>61</sup> It is the way in which what Hegel calls dissemblance reappears in the dialectic of conscience. In addition, what conscience places before the community, the community in turn displaces or dissembles as it is “something expressing only the self of another, not their own self.”<sup>62</sup>

At this point in the discussion, there is no way to attach a moral signification to the deed. Hegel has, I believe, set forth the idea that conscience is not at this point responsible for the unintended repercussions of its actions, since it is not yet bound to the content of its actions. The problem of “being bound” will require a more complex dialectic of recognition than what the shape of consciousness is presenting at this point. It can only be demonstrated when the dialectic of recognition encompasses actions and responses of others. At our current juncture Hegel shows that since conscience is freed from the specifics of the actualization of its duty in actions, others cannot know if its intentions are good or evil. An action may be seen differently relative to the social situation in which it was committed. For example, I increase the amount of property that I own in an effort to better maintain and provide for my family, which I maintain as my duty. Others however, believe that my actions are pure humbug, insisting that my duty rests in a different facet of this particular 'case.' In effect, others do not value my actions in the same way that I do.

What conscience is lacking is a way of interpreting the value of an action. For Hegel, “what is acknowledged is not the determinate aspect of the action, not the intrinsic being, but solely the self-knowing self as such. The element of lasting being is the universal self-consciousness; what enters into this element cannot be the effect of the action.”<sup>63</sup> Conscience now seeks a way to interpret action. What subsists as the true mode of conscience’s self-

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<sup>61</sup> J.M. Bernstein *Conscience and Transgression: The Exemplarity of Tragic Action*, 85

<sup>62</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 395

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 395

expression is what conscience verbally articulates. So Hegel now brings language to the forefront as the shape of the “existence of Spirit.”<sup>64</sup>

### (3) Language and the Beautiful Soul

Hegel places a tremendous importance on the role of language throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indeed, it is language that initiates the very first movement of sense-certainty, where it attempts to affirm knowledge of the immediate, what simply is, through the assertions “This!” “Here!” “Now!” But language says the universal not the immediate. As Hyppolite says, language has accompanied “every important moment of the life of spirit, it incarnates the originality of every moment.”<sup>65</sup> It has taken on various roles throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. For example, in Greek ethical life, language expresses the laws by which individuals are commanded. Yet at the moment of Greek ethical life, language exists for the sake of directing the conduct of the members of a community.<sup>66</sup> That is, it does not yet exist for the self. Now, however, language serves to alter the appearance on the scene of conscience. Through language, convictions are verbally articulated by a specific individual consciousness, thus giving meaning to the act for others. Hegel stresses this point by writing that “we see language as the existence of spirit. Language is self-consciousness existing *for others*, self-consciousness which *as such* is immediately *present*, and as *this* self-consciousness is universal.”<sup>67</sup> The language of conviction gives rise to an objectivity of the self, serving as the common medium by which conscience preserves its actuality and is concretely recognized by others. The language of conscience will make manifest self-consciousness’s ability to assert its

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 395

<sup>65</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwest University Press: New York, 1974), 511

<sup>66</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 267-289

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, , 395



inner certainty as a universal truth for others to recognize *as* universal. It is what Hegel refers to as the emergence of the 'middle term,' a mediation between the individuality of conscience and the plurality of other self-consciousnesses whose recognition is intrinsic to the meaning of conviction. He elaborates as follows:

The content of the language of conscience is the *self that knows itself as essential being*. This alone is what it declares, and this declaration is the true actuality of the act, and the validating of the action. Conscience declares its *conviction*; it is in this conviction alone that the action is a duty; also it is valid as duty solely through the conviction of being *declared*. For universal self-consciousness is free from the *specific* action that merely is; what is valid for that self-consciousness is not the *action* as an *existence*, but the *conviction* that is a duty; and this is made actual in language.<sup>68</sup>

At this point in the dialectic, self-consciousness believes that its actions are valid through the public declaration of its internal conviction. Conscience openly asserts that its actions are based upon its innermost duty. In so doing, conscience translates its content into the form of 'immediate self-certainty.' That is, through verbal affirmation, conscience affirms the conviction that its duty stems from *and* that it knows what its duty is. Bernstein notes that "it is only through language, through the performative declaration of conviction, that the expressive dimension of action achieves actuality, and so a being there for others."<sup>69</sup> The innermost conviction of conscience becomes determinate for the self and others, together, when articulated through language. Conscience takes language to be the only adequate form of expression of its action.

This is a crucial point for conscience for it is, in effect, publicly *declaring* that it acts on and from its own conscience *through* pure self-determination in a way that is clearly recognizable for other members of a community. Individuality is being made manifest through the self's ability to determine on its own what is right for it to act upon. Conscience states that "its knowing and willing are right. The declaration of this assurance in itself rids the form of its

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 396

<sup>69</sup> J.M. Bernstein *Confession and Forgiveness: Hegel's Poetics of Action*, 36

particularity. It thereby acknowledges the *necessary universality of the self*...but it is essential that he should *say so*, for this self must be at the same time this *universal self*.”<sup>70</sup>

Elevated above specific law and the content of duty, conscience now sees that it is free to assert what is its own 'knowing and willing.' Hegel explains that “the self's immediate knowing that is certain of itself is law and duty. Its intention, through being its own intention, is what is right; all that is required is that it should know this, and should state its conviction that its knowing and willing are right.”<sup>71</sup> What is taken to have value is not the action performed but rather the means by which it is made actual in the world. This gives rise to what Hegel refers to as the 'moral genius.' The moral genius knows “the inner voice of what it immediately knows to be a divine voice; and since, in knowing this, it has an equally immediate knowledge of existence, it is the divine creative power which in its Notion possesses the spontaneity of life. Equally it is its own divine worship, for its action is the contemplation of its own divinity.”<sup>72</sup> For the moral genius, what counts is the active internal consideration of its 'divine force.' Hegel explains that “this solitary divine worship is at the same time essentially the divine worship of a *community*, and the pure inner *knowing* and perceiving of itself advances to the moment of *consciousness*. The contemplation of itself is its objective existence and its objective element is the declaration of its knowing and willing as something *universal*.”<sup>73</sup> What Hegel means by this is the certainty of conscience that has an actual existence as community. This is a crucial moment in the text, taking us up to the beautiful soul. Hegel stresses that “the actuality and lasting existence of what it [conscience] does is universal self. On account of this utterance in which the self is expressed and acknowledged as essential being, the validity of the act is

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<sup>70</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 397

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 397

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 397

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 397

acknowledged by others.”<sup>74</sup> The moral genius verbally declares its knowing and willing as something that is universal. Through its declaration, “the self acquires moral validity and the act becomes an effective deed...on account of this utterance in which the self is expressed and acknowledged as essential being, the validity of the act is acknowledged by others.”<sup>75</sup> What supports this “moral validity” is the certainty of conscience that it is the immediate unity of self and absolute Being.

It would appear, then, that with the moral genius we have left behind the difficulty of *others* acknowledging the purity of her knowing, for this knowledge is religion as the community. Hegel explains that “the spirit and substance of their association are thus the mutual assurance of their conscientiousness, good intentions, the rejoicing over this mutual purity, and the refreshing of themselves in the glory of knowing and uttering, of cherishing and fostering, such an excellent state of affairs.”<sup>76</sup> Although this is a form of self-consciousness and spirit, it is one in which self-consciousness has, in effect, withdrawn from externality into its 'innermost being.' Hyppolite stresses that what the self discovers within itself is a divine voice, “its enjoyment of itself is at the same time its enjoyment of the divine within it.”<sup>77</sup> In order for us to grasp that this divine voice has an objective existence, the moral genius must be understood as a participant in a community of moral geniuses in which each member publicly asserts and all recognize the divinity of the self. This community is like a kingdom of heaven on earth in which the divinity of the individual has the form of objective universality because that divinity is “for” the community: the meaning of self-consciousness. The moral genius's claim that its knowledge of itself is divine self-knowledge “is religion, which as knowledge that has a perceived or outer

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 398

<sup>75</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 398

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 398

<sup>77</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwest University Press: New York, 1974), 514

existence is the utterance of the community concerning its own spirit.”<sup>78</sup>

For Hegel, although the utterance of the moral genius is an act and although the individual is immediately a community, the moral genius is in dread of action and of an existence. The withdrawal into itself is the inability to endure its very existence. The moral genius now appears as what Hegel calls the 'beautiful soul.' It has taken a turn towards an extreme in which the certainty of its self will collapse in its untruth. Hegel writes that “self-consciousness has withdrawn into its innermost being, for which all externality as such has vanished—withdrawn into the contemplation of the 'I='I', in which this 'I' is the whole of essentiality and existence.”<sup>79</sup> In abstracting itself from the realm of the external, the beautiful soul has eliminated action from its essentiality. Yet, action was what initiated the attitude of conscience and what was taken as its essential content. As Hyppolite explains, the arrival of the beautiful soul has led self-consciousness to sink “into the void of its subjectivity and [it] becomes incapable of any positive action because it refuses to alienate itself, to give determinate and external content to the concept.”<sup>80</sup> It sees that the only way to maintain its absolute purity is to abstract itself from externality, so that any action it performs would taint the preservation of the purity the beautiful soul so deeply cherishes. The beautiful soul “lives in dread of besmirching the splendor of its inner being by action and an existence; and, in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with the actual world, and persists in its self-willed impotence to renounce its self which is reduced to the extreme of ultimate abstraction.”<sup>81</sup>

Without any content, the beautiful soul cannot but waste away in the emptiness of its lost soul.

Both the beautiful soul and acting conscience that we began with designate incomplete

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<sup>78</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1977), 398

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 398

<sup>80</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwest University Press: New York, 1974), 513

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 400

moments of the self of conscience that necessitate reconciliation between the two. The beautiful soul hoped to maintain the universality of its divinity through abstraction and withdrawal into itself. However, this has effectively extinguished the possibility of action, thus rendering the self into a “shapeless vapor that dissolves into thin air”<sup>82</sup> In contrast, conscience took itself to be pure self-determination made manifest through its conviction. However, acting conscience came to grief on the finitude of its knowledge in respect of action and on interpretive pluralism. To resolve the matter, Hegel will delve deeper into the problem of human action by way of acting and judgment. He writes in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that:

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. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass onto something else; on the contrary, spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.<sup>83</sup>

The fallibilism that rendered action problematic and the extinguishing of the self through pure contemplation demonstrates the need for the moral self to restate itself. This process will be taken up in the third chapter through a reexamination of conscience considered as action and judgment parsed out into the relation between two individual self-consciousnesses. Hegel’s notion of conscience will ‘tarry’ with the communal process of tragic recognition, presented in the dialectic of evil and its forgiveness, as I will show in the following chapter of my thesis.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 19

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DIALECTIC OF EVIL AND FORGIVENESS

The aim of this chapter is to explain the unfolding of Hegel's dialectic of evil and its forgiveness located in the final subsection of the chapter entitled "Morality." Hegel's goal is to demonstrate a dialectical standpoint whereby an ethical spirit is made *actual* through the relationship, conflict, and movement between two forms of consciousness—a self-determined *acting* spirit and a spirit of *judgment*. The distinction between these two forms of consciousness arises from Hegel's consideration of conscience from the standpoint of *action*. Reconciliation between these two standpoints, and hence the establishment of an 'objectively existent Spirit,' will be demonstrated through acting consciousness's confession of its one-sidedness to judging consciousness *and* judging consciousness's failure to respond in kind to this confession. The repulsion of the confession establishes judging consciousness as the 'hard heart' and determines the necessity of a 'throwing away' of oneself in order for spirit to attain self-certain unity. The delay that occurs between the act of confession and the act of forgiveness followed by the breaking of the hard heart is the crucial moment for understanding Hegel's ethical idea, since it ushers forth the actualization of individuality through the *tragedy* of human history for the modern moral self. Furthermore, it is at this particular moment in the dialectic where the transformation of the self discovers that it is creating its own history in relation to others in a social world. In order to establish this worldly, historical spirit, I will provide a careful analysis of (a) the relationship between acting consciousness and judging consciousness, (b) the confession of evil, and (c) the breaking of the hard heart.

## (1) Acting Consciousness and Judging Consciousness

After the 'internal collapse' of the beautiful soul, Hegel insists that “the evaporated life has, however, still to be taken in the other meaning of the *actuality* of conscience, and in the *manifestation* of its movement: conscience has to be considered as acting.”<sup>84</sup> In taking up this ‘other meaning’ of the actuality of conscience, Hegel intends to make clear the process that conscience enters into *when it acts*. Hegel presents three important features of conscience as acting consciousness. First, conscience *still* takes itself to be morally authoritative.<sup>85</sup> This carryover from Hegel’s sustained critique of Kant’s moral theory suggests that Kant still remains very much in the background of the ethical idea that Hegel is attempting to establish. Hyppolite reinforces this point by stating that “acting spirit determines itself by itself, but at the same time demands that its own truth be recognized as absolute truth.”<sup>86</sup> Second, conscience knows that it is distinct from other individuals. Hegel stresses that conscience knows that “*qua this* particular self, [it is] distinct from other selves... each consciousness is just as much simply reflected out of its universality into itself.”<sup>87</sup> I take Hegel to be formally indicating the necessity of a community for ethical action to take place in. In this community each individual consciousness maintains certainty of its distinction from other members of the community, and yet also has a reflective continuity with the community. Third, Hegel insists that conscience must be engaged in the world, since he aims to show that it is only through *active* participation in a social world that consciousness can express its inner determination. However, the implications of active participation in a world suggest that, once again, the *purpose* of acting conscience’s actions *for itself* may not coincide with what it is *for others*, i.e. the deed and how it is perceived by others will develop into an antithetical position that cannot be maintained.

Hegel returns to language in order to begin the development of the antithesis between the purpose

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<sup>84</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York. 1977), 400

<sup>85</sup> Robert Stern *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Routledge Press: New York, 2002), 180

<sup>86</sup> Jean Hyppolite *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Northwestern University Press: New York, 1977), 520

<sup>87</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York. 1977), 400

of the action for-itself and what it is for others. When acting conscience speaks of the conscientiousness of its actions, “it may well be aware of its pure self, but in the *purpose* of its action, a purpose with an actual content, it is aware of itself as this particular individual, and is conscious of the antithesis between what it is for itself and what it is for others, of the antithesis of universality or duty and its reflection out of universality into itself.”<sup>88</sup> From the very moment *when* it acts, individual conscience knowingly enters into this antithesis. The *action* of conscience will immediately lead to a disparity between the purpose in a particular individual’s action and its interpretation by others. It would appear that we have merely reproduced the previous oppositional moments of the text with an all-too-familiar conflict in which another attitude of the moral or ethical self cannot be maintained. However, Hyppolite clarifies this issue by explaining that “the opposition has taken a concrete form; more exactly, it is two figures of consciousness that are presented to us, each containing the two moments—the universal and the specific—but with different values.”<sup>89</sup> Further, the starting point of analysis for both selves is the commonality of self-certainty of duty.

The manner in which this antithesis will play itself out can be parsed out as follows. When conscience acts, it is expressing its morally authoritative inner being. It places “itself, its ends, and the ends of others, against an inert universality that claims to be devoid of all individuality (because [it takes itself as] a perfected expression of it [its inner being]).”<sup>90</sup> However, this demonstrates an inevitable conflict between acting consciousness and what Hegel refers to as ‘universal consciousness.’ Universal consciousness should be interpreted as the expression of consciousness for which takes its essential being to be a universal duty. It is a form of consciousness that views duty as ‘universally acknowledged’ principles standing over and above the individual. According to Bernstein, acting consciousness appears to universal consciousness “as only a self, an individual posing its individual claims in opposition to those

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 401

<sup>89</sup> Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*. (Northwestern University Press: New York, 1974), 518

<sup>90</sup> J.M. Bernstein, *Hegel’s Poetics of Action*, 41



of the community at large.”<sup>91</sup> From the perspective of universal consciousness, acting conscience is viewed as *evil*, since it affirms *its* inner determination over and above the universal duty that constitutes the essential being of universal consciousness.<sup>92</sup> This is taken by universal consciousness as a denial of what acting consciousness claimed made it conscientious. However, acting consciousness *must* affirm this claim, since this affirmation represents the very manifestation of its individuality.

Further, acting consciousness is held by universal consciousness to be *hypocritical* since it “it declares its actions to be in conformity with itself, to be duty and conscientiousness.”<sup>93</sup> Although acting consciousness claims to be conscientious, its actions do not coincide with what is duty for universal consciousnesses because the individual act will be in opposition to the claims of the community. Stern introduces universal consciousness as “*individuals...who abide by the established moral order.*” This interpretation is, I believe, effective in articulating Hegel’s general argument. Consequently, if we navigate our way through this section of the text under the parameters that Stern has introduced, then the argument looks something like this: acting consciousness seeks partnership with other members of a community on *its own* terms. Accordingly, at the moment when acting conscience “declares its actions to be in conformity with itself, to be duty and conscientiousness,”<sup>94</sup> acting conscience believes that it has the sufficient conditions under which its ethical content can be established. On the other hand, universal consciousness takes acting conscience to be masking its hypocrisy by making a ‘show’ of its respect for duty. Rather than pat the acting consciousness on the back and sing high praises for demonstrating that its actions are in conformity to his inner being, universal consciousness perceives acting consciousness in

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>92</sup> Hegel is using the term *evil* in a technical sense. Acting consciousness’s insistence on its position is “evil” when it is seen as excluding from consideration the universal standpoint. Not only will acting consciousness’s position be taken to be hypocritical from the standpoint of universal consciousness, it will also be viewed as evil in virtue of the insistence of its one-sidedness. Second, the one-sidedness of pure *being-for-self* must go together with absolute self-certainty for it to be considered evil. Third, in order for an attitude of consciousness to be taken as evil by the community, that form of consciousness must eliminate from consideration any and all external sources of ethical determinations. Taken together, these three prerequisites situate the source of evil in the form of consciousness that finds itself in opposition to the community.

<sup>93</sup> *G.W.F. Hegel Phenomenology of Spirit (Oxford University Press: New York. 1977)*, 401

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 401

the worst possible manner. Hegel appears to regard the manifestation of this will, *as* evil, to be necessary. He stresses that “the *movement* of this antithesis is in the first instance the formal production of an identity of what the evil consciousness is in its own self and what it declares itself to be; it must be made apparent that it *is* evil, and thus its existence made to correspond to its essence; the hypocrisy must be unmasked.”<sup>95</sup> Universal consciousness will *judge* acting consciousness in order to unmask its evil and hypocritical position.

## (2) The Confession of Evil

The developments of the previous section announced two forms of consciousness at work in this section of the *Phenomenology*. In taking itself to be morally authoritative, acting consciousness is one side of what leads to an inevitable conflict between itself and a universal consciousness that knows its essential being to be universal duty. Consequently, universal consciousness holds acting consciousness to be both evil and hypocritical. The goal of this section is to unpack the complexities of evil in this crucial stage of the dialectic.

Acting conscience must be made aware that its attitude is both evil and hypocritical. The process unfolds as follows: Acting consciousness expresses its inner being by publicly declaring the conscientiousness of its actions to others. It demands that others recognize its moral authority, since its ‘essential being’ (that which makes conscience what it is) *is* its moral autonomy. In the moment of action, the moment when the self determines itself, it also demands that its inner convictions are acknowledged *in order for* the action to have moral relevance in an intersubjective environment. This is the true moment of opposition whereby the universality of the articulated statement and the particularity of the purpose, which appears in the deed’s content, finally appears to consciousness.

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 401

At the moment when acting consciousness acts, universal consciousness views it as evil, since the ‘universal’ element of acting conscience is not the same ‘universal’ duty-bound element of universal consciousness. It *judges* acting consciousness to be affirming the individuality of its purpose *over and above* the duty that universal consciousness takes as the essential certainty of *its* being, since the latter looks at every action “from the point of view of conformity to duty rather than from the point of view of the doer.”<sup>96</sup>

From the moment when acting consciousness publicly asserts that its action is a duty, universal consciousness is in a position of judgment. Universal consciousness, henceforth *judging* consciousness, “looks at what the action is in itself, and explains it as resulting from an *intention* different from the action itself, and from selfish *motives*.”<sup>97</sup> Through the process of judgment, judging consciousness anticipates that acting consciousness will admit both (a) that its action is particular, not universal, and subsequently (b) that its action is in accordance to its own inner law, and hence in opposition to the acknowledged universal. However, there is more to the claim of judgment than what is immediately apparent to judging consciousness. When acting consciousness is denounced as hypocritical, judging consciousness is “appealing in such judgment to its *own* law, just as evil consciousness appeals to *its* law. For the former comes forward in opposition to the latter and thereby as a *particular* law. It has no superiority over the other law, rather it legitimizes it.”<sup>98</sup> Although this is not apparent to judging consciousness, the complex interplay between universal law and particular manifestations of holding universal law demonstrates that the gulf between these two attitudes of consciousness may not be as clear as initially constructed.

The problem of judgment is further complicated when judging consciousness is considered from the standpoint of action. Put succinctly, universal consciousness is unwilling to act. Instead, it remains content in its realm of universal thought. Parallels to the ‘beautiful soul’ of the previous chapter are obvious. Judging consciousness maintains itself in *thought*—its judgment is one of passivity vis-à-vis

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 404

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 404

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 402

action. It does not enter into the same position of entanglement that acting consciousness entered into *when it acts*, i.e., from the antithesis of universality and individuality. Rather, “it does well to preserve itself in its purity, for it *does not act*; it is the hypocrisy which wants its judging to be taken for an *actual* deed, and instead of proving its rectitude by actions, does so by uttering fine sentiments.”<sup>99</sup> Nonetheless, Hegel insists that its nature is the same as the acting consciousness that it reproaches. That is, he has attempted to establish a complimentary relationship between (a) the attitude of a consciousness that maintains the ‘selfish purpose’ of its actions, and (b) an attitude of consciousness that has effectively reduced duty to the realm of utterances through its failure to act at all. For Hegel, “the consciousness that judges in this way is itself base, because it divides up the action, producing and holding fast to the disparity of the action with itself.”<sup>100</sup> Further, judging consciousness has itself adopted a hypocritical position, since it still takes its judgment to be a form of action. However, judging consciousness has effectively rendered its position to one of unreality and conceit. Neither consciousness can therefore claim the identity of universal duty and their action.

Acting consciousness takes judging consciousness to be “according to its own nature and disposition, identical with himself [i.e., acting consciousness].”<sup>101</sup> Acting consciousness seeks to establish this through a confession of commonality. The language of conviction now takes the form of the language of confession as an expression of the identical dispositions between the two forms of consciousness.

Perceiving this identity and giving utterance to it, he confesses this to the other, and equally expects that the other, having in fact put himself on the same level, will also respond in words in which he will give utterance to this identity with him, and expects that this mutual recognition will now exist in fact.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 403

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 405

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 405

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 405

The key point at this moment in the dialectic is that this is *not* an abasement, humiliation, or a throwing-away of oneself. Acting consciousness is not declaring that its position is evil and hypocritical. Rather, acting consciousness is merely stating that it recognizes its judge to be the same as itself, i.e. particular, rather than a universal consciousness. The ramifications of this moment in the dialectic are significant. In recognizing what is common between the judge and itself, the other's standpoint appears as particular too. Further, it appears that Hegel is demonstrating that the certainty that acting consciousness operates from does not warrant entitlement to claims of universal authority. Rather, it is through confession that acting consciousness attempts to establish the shared, common condition of the community. It is the hope that you, the other, can find yourself in my words that is motivating acting consciousness in the confession. The aim is to make concrete what Hegel has sought to establish throughout the entirety of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely, the "pure self-recognition in absolute otherness"<sup>103</sup> made determinate.

However, the doer's confession is met with icy silence. Rather than return the confession in kind, the judge rejects commonality with the doer. Hegel states that judging consciousness "repels this community of nature, and is the hard heart that is *for itself*, and which rejects any continuity with the other."<sup>104</sup> Why has the confession not been followed with a reciprocal confession by the judge? Here, Bernstein points to three important points regarding the doer's act of confession. First, the assertion of confession has failed to truly confess anything at all in the eyes of the judge. The confession articulated the commonality between two individuals acting from conflicting principles. Hence, judging consciousness perceives a *violation* of its adopted moral law, i.e., a transgression taking place at the level of individual human activity, rather than an action at the level of the ethical community. Second, on what grounds does this act of confession truly warrant a reciprocal response in kind? Acting consciousness knows that it cannot eliminate the passions that it operates from, in the certainty of its conviction. This, however erroneous, is nonetheless *its* conviction. Even though acting consciousness recognizes a commonality with its judge, it does not follow that it can now claim absolute moral confidence through its

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 14

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 405

confession or commonality with the other on moral grounds. Lastly, the act of confession does not usher forth any sense of mutual dependency. Rather, it appears to cloak the necessity of communal dependency in the interest of demonstrating a sense of equality between the consciousness that stands by the principles of the community and the individual that has come into opposition to it. However, this is where judging consciousness differentiates itself from the acting consciousness, who, in an effort to maintain its individuality, stands in opposition to the community.

Perhaps most significant to the confession is its value as a ‘moral investment’ for acting consciousness. Acting consciousness takes its confession to be something that demands repayment from its judge. There is a noted level of expectation that judging consciousness will return the confession, thereby contributing his part in the community. However, this expectation of moral repayment through a reciprocated confession gives acting consciousness’s confession what Bernstein refers to as a ‘prudential character,’ or what may be interpreted as a non-moral ‘ought.’ It is a direct result of expecting repayment in kind that acting consciousness does not yet see its confession as a throwing away of itself in relation to the other. Rather, its justification lies in the confessor having recognized the judge to be the same as himself. The confession merely takes the form of yet another transcendental ‘ought.’ Through its confession acting consciousness expects repayment in kind—“He ought to confess his identical nature to me as I confessed to him.” Acting consciousness appears to be still searching for a logical structure by which to support the justification of its actions. That is, since acting consciousness has done its part, it believes that judging consciousness ‘ought’ to perform what is expected of it. However, this is precisely what Hegel was seeking to avoid. To view the confession in this manner would be to invest in an abstract principle beyond the activities of moral action. This naturally would give rise to moral detachment from the subjective experience of the confession.

We conclude this part of the dialectic with two conflicting modes of consciousness that have failed to find continuity with each other. The silent refusal of the ‘hard heart’ to respond in kind to acting consciousness has allowed for a reflective moment in the dialectic whereby it becomes essential to further

explore what is lacking in the act of confession. Specifically, the confession has failed to demonstrate the necessary component of a kind of humiliation, a throwing away of oneself in relation to an ‘other.’ For Hegel, this throwing away of oneself is essential for eliminating the misrecognition regarding universality of the purpose of the action performed in the social setting. The acting consciousness acknowledges its particularity in the confession. What Hegel means by humiliation is the throwing away of that particularity, i.e., giving up attachment to one’s self. However, acting consciousness has *not* recognized this. This will be further demonstrated in the following section, where I will explicate the breaking of the ‘hard heart’ and the subsequent birth of ‘absolute spirit.’

### **(3) The Breaking of the Hard Heart**

Acting consciousness now sees a reversal of roles in the situation at hand. The silence of the judging consciousness has been taken by it *not just* as a repulsion of social continuity but also as a gesture of wrongdoing. Hegel writes that:

The one who made the confession sees himself repulsed, and sees the other to be in the wrong when he refuses to let his own inner being come forth into the outer existence of speech, when the other contrasts the beauty of his own soul with the penitent’s wickedness, yet confronts the confession of the penitent with his own stiff-necked unrepentant character, mutely keeping himself to himself and refusing to throw himself away for someone else.<sup>105</sup>

In failing to reciprocate the confession with the other, judging consciousness takes the form of the ‘hard heart’ and withdraws into isolation. Hegel sees this as the ‘extreme form of rebellion’ whereby judging consciousness shows that it is evil through its withdrawal into itself.

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<sup>105</sup> *ibid*, 405-406

Both attitudes of consciousness that we have been examining have failed to realize that “in its confession, [acting consciousness] had *ipso facto* renounced its *separate being-for-self*, and thereby expressly superseded its particularity, and in so doing posited itself in continuity with the other as a universal.”<sup>106</sup> It is only at this moment of delay in the dialectical process (namely, the moment where the confession of acting consciousness is met with the stony silence of the hard heart) that this crucial point of renunciation is made apparent. If we follow Bernstein’s interpretation on this subject, the act of confession involves the risk of humiliation. In virtue of the humiliation that acting consciousness experiences through the silence of judging consciousness, acting consciousness sees that its confession is not a ‘moral investment.’ To confess is to throw oneself away in relation to another, i.e., it is the throwing away of what Hegel calls one’s *being-for-self*, since what is being revealed to consciousness is the necessity of absolute dependence on others in order to establish the continuity of one’s identity as a moral agent with the community. There is a tremendous risk involved in this process of action, which cannot be underestimated. One must be willing to face social criticism and humiliation when acting on moral conviction in the modern social realm. The very process of action involves the risk of humiliation before others. In turn, all actions, moral or otherwise, *are* acts of personal confession because they expose us to the judgment of others. In Hegel’s logic, the confession of the penitent is what reveals the dependency of the actor upon her judge and the community.

However, there is more to be said regarding the silence of judging consciousness. The repulsion of the confession demonstrates a reversal of order in the dialectic. Now perceived as another incarnation of the beautiful soul, the mute judge refuses to throw *himself* away in the same manner that acting consciousness did. The judge continues to be the moral conviction of the necessity to abide by the abstract universality of duty that it does not act on. It attempts to maintain moral *omnipotence* through its stiff-necked silence. Nonetheless, as we have now seen in various incarnations throughout the entirety of this chapter, action maintains its absolute import for morality in Hegel’s thought. The silent judge is entangled

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 406



in the “contradiction between its pure self and the necessity of that self to externalize itself and change itself into actual existence.”<sup>107</sup> He remains locked-up in his thoughts, denying actuality to both himself and the penitent. The beautiful soul of the last chapter was reduced to ‘shapeless vapor’ dissolving into thin air. Similarly, judging consciousness, now taken as another form of the self-destructive withdrawal of the beautiful soul, becomes “disordered to the point of madness.” It “wastes itself in yearning and pines away in consumption.”<sup>108</sup> The beautiful soul effectively destroys itself through its refusal to respond in kind to acting consciousness. Bernstein affirms this point by writing that, “madness, in modernity, is perhaps the only adequate metaphor we have for the self-destruction that is consequent upon the refusal of the other.”<sup>109</sup>

The judge’s abstraction from reality has resulted in self-induced chaos. However, it also represents part of the historical development of the moral self in bringing to light the tremendous difficulty involved in moral action, communication, and recognition in a modern context. That is to say that we all want our autonomy, but the established norms and principles of the community necessarily repress our capacity for individual legislation. The constant activity of acting and judging is, I think, meant to demonstrate that we can never be in a position that affords us the possibility of completely identifying with either the principles of the community or the individual convictions of consciousness. The reconciliation of the hard heart with acting consciousness will be the attempt to establish the birth of the absolute self, by which Hegel means an ethical self that is derived neither from acting on human law nor from acting on divine law. Further, reconciliation is necessary for acknowledging that the morality of an action cannot be gauged merely by focusing on its particularity. For the dialectic to arrive at this position, the crucial moment of forgiveness is required.

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 406

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 407

<sup>109</sup> J.M. Bernstein *Hegel’s Poetics of Action*, 51

Hegel writes that “the breaking of the hard heart, and the raising of it to universality, is the same movement which was expressed in the consciousness that made confession of itself.”<sup>110</sup> The hard heart denotes a side of consciousness breaking away from reality in its withdrawal into itself. In order to overcome this withdrawal the hard heart must break. This takes place through the renunciation of the unreality of the hard heart’s position. This can only take the form of forgiveness. Judging consciousness extends forgiveness to acting consciousness since it now understands that its ‘universal’ standards of duty cannot be universal if they are independent of the possibility of actions being recognized by others as such. Bernstein helps to clarify the important role of forgiveness as follows:

Forgiveness is a performative act of recognition. In forgiving you I call you back to my presence and so return you to yours. Figuratively, forgiveness reverses the vengeful, metonymic shift of taking your action for you: I turn away from the act towards you, as you in confessing had turned away from your act and exposed your (whole) self to me.<sup>111</sup>

Through the performative act of forgiveness the hard heart renounces the universality that it identified itself with. For Hegel, the concept of forgiveness belongs to the conditions under which interaction between modern agents is possible. The hard heart moves from the standpoint of opposition to a point of subjective continuity with the penitent. The wounds of its madness “heal, and leave no scars behind.”<sup>112</sup> The healing takes place in the same manner in which acting consciousness confessed and so threw away its separate being-for-self. The process of reconciliation demands that the hard heart set aside the abstract universality of its judgment and therefore its identification with its universality. The forgiveness that the ‘hard heart’ extends to acting consciousness is “the renunciation of itself, of its unreal essential being which it put on a level with that other which was a real action, and acknowledges that what thought

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<sup>110</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 407

<sup>111</sup> J.M. Bernstein *Hegel's Poetics of Action*, 60

<sup>112</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 407

characterized as bad, viz. action, is good.”<sup>113</sup> To openly forgive is to extend to the doer a self-renunciation and thereby establish ‘objectively existent Spirit’ as the continuity and identity of the ‘I’=‘I.’

This *change of heart* is significant, as it represents a shift being made by consciousness to a new position by way of reconciliation of the appearance of opposition. In surrendering his one-sidedness, the judge affirms his recognition of himself in the other. Through extending forgiveness, the judge in turn renounces himself, i.e., he in turn throws himself away by acknowledging that he cannot stand by abstract universality. The language of confession becomes the “objectively existent spirit, which beholds pure knowledge of itself *qua* universal essence, in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself *qua* absolutely self-contained and exclusive individuality—a reciprocal recognition which is absolute spirit.”<sup>114</sup> Further, just as each confession is a confession of commonality, so too is each instance of forgiveness a forgiveness of being human, thus reinstating commonality through recognition.

What we have seen is that a new inter-subjective standpoint is ushered forth by way of the *tragedy* embedded in the process of recognition. A tremendous amount of literature has been dedicated to conceptualizing Hegel’s idea of tragedy and the role that it plays in the development of spirit. While I cannot provide an exhaustive account of the subject given the limited scope of my project, I believe that it is important to pause and examine its role at this moment in the dialectic. It must be stressed that Hegel never constructed a formal theory of tragedy. Nonetheless, his ‘use’ of Sophocles’ *Antigone* demonstrated certain themes in which a Hegelian idea of tragedy can be understood and found applicable to the

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 408. Bernstein clarifies the “necessity” of the transgression. There is a transgression when an autonomous subject (i.e. a subject not inhibited by the universal duty of a community) has acted beyond the socially established rules of a community. What is crucial to the idea of transgression is that since the possibility to act beyond and/or exceed the limits of a community establishes transgression as the necessary condition for the possibility of individuality in an ethical community, it must be interpreted as “good,” since without transgression social agents become “marionettes, dolls in the house of society or, like Ismene, a stone.” (J.M. Bernstein’s *Conscience and Transgression: The Exemplarity of Tragic Action*, 84)

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 408

reconciliation of acting consciousness and judging consciousness. In the remainder of this chapter I will draw extensively on Bernstein's reading of the dialectic of evil and its forgiveness.<sup>115</sup>

Earlier in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel's use of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone* was meant to demonstrate the failures embedded in Greek ethical life.<sup>116</sup> These failures culminated in an ethical impasse whereby the conflict between two figures could not be resolved. Hegel's interpretation of this tragedy suggested that individuals of the Greek ethical life simply acted under their respective obligations towards their social responsibilities. Consequently, since no other course of action was available for the individuals of Greek ethical life, there is no method by which the conflict can be overcome. We can consider this a traditionalist interpretation of tragedy.<sup>117</sup>

In Bernstein's idea of tragedy the absolute reality of freedom is established in the sublation of Kant's absolute self-relation into Hegel's ethical idea. The absolute reality of freedom provides both the necessary conditions under which tragedy in a modern ethical state is possible (since only a *free* subject can fall victim to tragic fate) and offers the means for resolving a tragic conflict.<sup>118</sup> What is of philosophic import to the current section of the *Phenomenology* under consideration is that what takes priority in the tragedy is *not* a hero falling victim to tragedy, *not* a conflict of good against evil, but rather the conflict between right and right, i.e., between individuals staunchly maintaining legitimate positions irrespective

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<sup>115</sup> J.M. Bernstein, "Hegel's Poetics of Action."

<sup>116</sup> Hegel makes the elements of this failure explicit in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* where he states that "Everything in this play is logical; the public law of the state is set in conflict over against inner family love and duty to a brother; the woman, Antigone, has the family interest as her 'pathos' [a quality that invokes sadness], Creon, the man, has the welfare of the community as his. Polynices [Antigone's brother], at war with his native city, has fallen before the gates of Thebes, and Creon, the ruler, in a publicly proclaimed law threatened with death anyone who gave this enemy of the city the honour of burial. But this command, which concerned only the public weal, Antigone could not accept; as sister, in the piety of love for her brother, she fulfills the holy duty of burial. In doing so she appeals to the law of the gods; but the gods whom she worships are the underworld gods of Hades..., the inner gods of feeling, love, and kinship, not the daylight gods of free self-consciousness national and political life." (*Lectures on Aesthetics* volume I, trans. T.M. Knox, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 464)

<sup>117</sup> In this I am thinking of Goethe's notion of tragedy. See footnote 118.

<sup>118</sup> This is a controversial position for Bernstein to maintain. The controversial nature of this idea of tragedy is demonstrable through Goethe's thoughts on the subject. Goethe insisted that "all tragedy rests on an irreconcilable opposition. Whenever reconciliation comes on the scene or is possible, then the tragic vanishes." Goethe, cited in *Plato's 'Laws': A Critical Guide*, ed. Christopher Bobonich, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 227. Bernstein appears to maintain that we can have tragedy *and* resolution of tragic conflict.

of any other potentially overriding ethical principle. Stern helpfully clarifies this point by writing that “it is because each individual identifies him or herself wholly with one overriding ethical imperative that Hegel characterizes the clash between Antigone and Creon as tragic. Neither is able to step back from the obligations that go with their naturally determined place in the ethical order.”<sup>119</sup> However, we have arrived at a point in the dialectic where the two forms of consciousness under consideration, Hegel’s post-Kantian notion of conscience, are at a moment where they *can* stand back from the obligations of their place in the ethical order. For Bernstein, Hegel’s dialectic has developed to a moment where a resolution to tragedy (irrespective of the melancholic results) is possible.

I take Bernstein’s viewpoint on tragedy as a conflict between two positions that are both (a) equally justified, and yet (b) wrong in the sense that they fail to take into account an oppositional standpoint. What makes the situation so disconcerting is that tragedy begins when an individual declares a legitimate position that stands in violation of a contrary yet equally legitimate position, thus exposing the one-sidedness of the initial claim and/or the one-sidedness of its oppositional standpoint. I have demonstrated how acting consciousness’s insistence on establishing the certainty of its position effectively disrupts the ethical balance of the community. This disruption is a threat to both the community *and* the acting individual. If the individuals and/or the individual (Hegel’s ambiguity in the text suggests that this could be interpreted either way) are unable to establish reconciliation, they will in Hegel’s view either be condemned to humiliation or pine away in rumination on the hurt they feel in having experienced a trespass on their position in or loyalty to the community. If reconciliation *does* occur, it can only occur through tragic action, the transgression of acting consciousness and all that follows. This implies that the methods of ethical justification from the standpoint of identification with

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<sup>119</sup> Robert Stern, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Routledge: New Your, 2002), 142

the community (i.e. the appeal to abstract universality), since they do not coincide with self-determining individuality, cannot stand alone as adequate principles of action.<sup>120</sup>

From a certain perspective, we can take Hegel to be attempting to resolve the problems set by Kant's moral system by appealing to an idea of tragedy. Recall that for Hegel, "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."<sup>121</sup> At this point in the dialectic, it appears that *both* acting consciousness and judging consciousness are unaware of this crucial point made at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Lordship and Bondage." Throughout the development of Hegel's modern moral individual in the *Phenomenology*, Kant's autonomous, self-legislating subject has taken different shapes as Hegel attempts to bring into action and community and show the consequences of doing so. At our current position in the dialectic, a transgression had to occur, one that could take place *only if* a Kantian autonomous subject is in a position to declare its autonomy from within a community that adheres to abstract universality. It had to occur in order for both attitudes of consciousness to be confronted with the necessity of a non-traditional social context for the possibility of individual ethical action. However, this reconciliation only demonstrates that the boundaries of ethical conduct must remain in an 'unwritten' malleable state, since any appeal to *absolute certainty* only reveals itself as an *absolute untruth* that collapses in the continuity of *absolute dependence* in the modern ethical community.

The breaking of the hard heart denotes a conversion whereby one adopted standpoint is transformed into another, with all previously adopted moral standpoints *sublated* into the current position. A similar process of conversion took place in the penitent's confession by way of the judge's silence, but only retrospectively. Rather than viewing the confession as something that 'ought' to be rewarded with a response in kind, the confessor was forced to see that his confession must involve a throwing away of himself in relation to another person. The confession demonstrates the necessity for acknowledgment by

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<sup>120</sup> In following Bernstein, we are considering Hegel's notion of abstract universality in this context to be consistent with the "abstractness" of modern liberal principles.

<sup>121</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111

others in order to have a moment of continuity and commonality in modernity. Further, in renouncing its omnipotent moral self, judging consciousness renounces its abstract universality, as well as the pain, anger, and hurt that it may feel in light of acting consciousness's trespass upon its abstract universality, thereby situating itself in relation with the other in respect of the duality and relation of universality and particularity. In forgiveness, in the moment of self-overcoming, the breaking of the hard heart provides us with a glimpse of ethical community. Hegel summarizes as follows: "The reconciling Yea, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself."<sup>122</sup> The reconciliation of the hard heart with acting consciousness establishes *absolute spirit*, its appearance in and through the drama of misrecognition.<sup>123</sup> That is, Hegel has attempted to show that the reconciliation between acting consciousness and judging consciousness is the acknowledgement that action cannot be gauged merely by focusing on its particularity, nor by insisting on abstractly defined universal duty. If we are to have any notion of meaningful assessment of moral action in a modern community, it must be from the perspective of the experience of conscientious subjects who undergo the diremption of the universal and the particular in their relations to one another and their recognition of this experience.

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<sup>122</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 409

<sup>123</sup> The idea of misrecognition is crucial to Bernstein's interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. He writes that "Forgiveness must express my particularity as well as renouncing it. Forgiving obeys the 'unwritten law' which inscribes my originary debt to the other, my having meaning and being through her. This originary debt to the other... is always both to be redeemed and always already acknowledged as the continuous exchange of misrecognition and recognition," (J.M. Bernstein, "Hegel's Poetics of Action," p. 62) The idea here is that, for example, my claim of particularity, as a transgression against an established law of the liberal state is not made complete until the community accepts my claim and forgives me for it, thus renouncing the pains of trespass.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

In my conclusion to this thesis we must return to the questions posed at the outset. What is being revealed about the moral self in modernity? What implications does it have for the possibility of a Hegelian ethics as distinct from Kantian morality? After a brief summary, I will address these questions.

This thesis has attempted to identify the appearance of the modern moral individual in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel first reconstructed the Kantian moral worldview, where the object of knowledge is pure duty. As I have shown, Hegel found Kant's moral worldview to be founded in a self-relation that was incomplete and embedded in an irreconcilable conflict between morality and nature. What Hegel maintained from Kant is the idea of the absolute self-relation in morality. Herein lies the necessity of Kant's contribution to Hegel's ethical thought. Kant's autonomy of the will serves as the starting-point for the possibility of a modern ethical thought for a community of ethical agents. In chapter two I demonstrated how Hegel released the Kantian moral subject from its transcendental position, while still maintaining the absoluteness of the self-relation as the fundamental moment beginning his ethical thought. However, in making the shift from the transcendental idealist view of the subject to a self as it actually appears in the world, we found Hegel's 'conscience' falling victim to both (a) the indeterminateness of its convictions, and (b) the arbitrariness of the action it attempted to perform from the point of view of morality. Both the fallibilism that rendered action problematic and the loss of the moral self through pure self-contemplation demonstrated the need for the moral self to reinstate itself in some other fashion. This was unfolded in chapter three, where I



examined conscience from the standpoint of action. Chapter three explored how ethical spirit is made actual through the relationship, conflict, and movement between two forms of consciousness—a self-determined *acting* consciousness and a consciousness of *judgment*. Reconciliation between these two standpoints was demonstrated through acting consciousness's confession of its *one-sidedness* to judging consciousness and judging consciousness's failure to respond in kind to the confession. The rejection of the confession established judging consciousness as the 'hard heart' and determined the necessity of a 'throwing away' of oneself in order for spirit to attain self-certain unity. Acting consciousness throws away the one-sided affirmation of its particular self. Judging consciousness throws away the one-sidedness of its abiding by abstract universality. This is the moment where the modern moral individual becomes identifiable in Hegel. At the same time, we can recognize in Hegel's dialectical treatment of moral action, the moment in which the self comes to recognize itself as creating its own history in relation to others in a social world.

Hegel's development of spirit as both substance and subject is meant to transcend the pure subjectivity of the individual.<sup>124</sup> Further, as seen in the breaking of the 'hard heart,' it is meant to force consciousness to abandon its claim of self-identification solely through abstract universality. Herein lies what is being revealed to the self in the modern social order. Specifically, if we are to have any hope for the possibility of a moral individual, it must be from the perspective of the context of a modern community comprised of actively participating ethical agents. Spirit thus moves beyond Kant's moral theory in an effort to become its own subject creating its own history, with the actual self taking itself to be universal, not merely particular,

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<sup>124</sup> See footnote 2 in the Introduction, above.

and at the same time experiencing itself in respect of an objective social world *in and through* its relation to others.

What implications does this have for the possibility of a Hegelian ethics as distinct from Kantian morality? The answer to this question can be addressed in terms of the possibility of a Kantian morality and Hegel's ethical idea as they might appear in a community. I will first raise a common objection against Kantian morality followed by an example of Hegel's ethical idea.

The idea of appealing to a universal procedure of duty was taken by Hegel to be void of any and all content as demonstrated in the dialectical treatment of the moral worldview. In fact, it was the moral worldview that insisted upon this. Hegel found the formalities and abstractions from reality that the moral world view insisted upon to be completely empty, since the moral worldview insisted that "duty cannot receive the form of something alien."<sup>125</sup> Yet if we are to have any notion of an immoral mode of conduct, it is necessary to bring an outside world *into* our thought. Relying solely on a categorical imperative procedure that is void of all content will not yield meaningful results. In fact, it will not yield anything at all. Any notion of duty that is to be willed must be willed "for the sake of some content."<sup>126</sup> The Kantian, in maintaining that moral law is prior to both experience *and* the enactment of social norms/practices has failed to take into account what gives morality its content, namely a world.

Nonetheless, even if we grant the Kantian the benefit of the doubt and allow for the possibility of the performance of actions from pure duty in the world, I believe that the arguments raised against Kantian morality in the *Phenomenology* still hold. For example, Kant attempted to demonstrate in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* that if we could make

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<sup>125</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 365

<sup>126</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 135.

lying a universal action, then language would no longer be a reliable source of communication since we would no longer have a criterion for truth. For Kant, if I can conceive of a world in which people lie in order to achieve their goals, then I am effectively conceiving of a world where the idea of 'truth' is valueless. Language in turn is rendered useless since there is no longer a criterion under which any assertion can be validated. Further, no one would believe anything that anyone states 'to be the case' because everything articulated would be presupposed as a lie. Since this deception is deliberate the Kantian would have no choice but to view the act of lying as completely forbidden *regardless of* any personal convictions that might view this particular act of deception as 'good' or what one 'ought' to do under a certain set of circumstances. This argument should sound familiar given Hegel's examination of the moral worldview's 'postulates.' Hegel's view of the *displacements*—a shifting of the problem in respect of action— of the second postulate (the conformity of the sensuous with morality) placed outside of itself what it initially took to be the basis of its certainty. We arrive at a position where the moral worldview is not in earnest about its elimination of inclinations (i.e. that an action 'feels' like the right thing to do even though it stands in a contradictory relation to one's pure duty) since it is positing the harmony of sensuous inclinations and pure duty in an infinite beyond. However, this is in direct opposition to the initial claims of the autonomous subject and hence the possibility for the absolutes offered by a Kantian moral system remain in a transcendent state beyond the possibility of actualization in a world

Does Hegel's ethical idea offer us a better alternative to Kant's moral theory? The move beyond Kant's moral worldview expresses Hegel's idea that we can only become conscientious ethical agents *within* a community of conscientious agents. This crucial move demonstrates that the modern moral self must develop beyond its initial understanding of itself as a morally

autonomous self that knows itself in a community. However, this development comes at a heavy cost since it establishes our position in a community as one of absolute dependency and vulnerability. Our actions, as individuations against the community (and hence against oneself insofar as the agent performing an act *in* a community is part *of* the community) are on the one hand interpreted as transgressions on the community and, on the other, are the method by which we aspire to establish ourselves in it. Consequently, every conscientious action that we perform deprives us of what it is that we take ourselves to be *as well as* our commitment to the ultimacy of any conception of modern liberalism underlying a community.<sup>127</sup> However, the realization of deprivation is only arrived at retrospectively, i.e. in the silence of our judge. The silence of the hard heart brings to the center of our attention the idea that in order to gain possession of oneself, one must risk the humiliation of not being recognized by the community.<sup>128</sup> On the other side of the dialectic, Bernstein's treatment of the hard heart suggested, as we have seen, that its silence is indicative of an injured status. If I were to act on a principle that I firmly believe in (and hence transgress a principle of the community), you will experience injury, suffering, or some degree of resentment towards me. This resentment is not unwarranted. However, you run the risk of withdrawal from the community if you turn inwards and ruminate over your grievances. If one remains in this purely inward state of rumination over injury—what Hegel refers to as the 'extreme form of rebellion of spirit'—one would effectively render oneself incapable of acting again. Extending forgiveness becomes *inter alia* the act of recognition in the form of the release of the built-up anger we feel over the act of transgression. If there are reservations concerning Hegel's ethical idea, it might be in respect of his insistence that the "wounds of Spirit heal, and

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<sup>127</sup> I am, again, following Bernstein's reading in which the abstract universality that the judging consciousness abides by is consistent with the notion of modern liberal principles.

<sup>128</sup> This is what Bernstein means by insisting that the confession is the act of staking ourselves through nakedness and impotence.

leave no scars behind.”<sup>129</sup> It is important to note that what has been forgiven is not the action itself (since temporally the action belongs to a causal ‘past’), but rather its relation to the transgressor.<sup>130</sup> The wounds of deeply felt injury nonetheless have the capacity to stay with us throughout our lives. We may aspire to a point where we can be forgiven our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass upon us, yet Hegel has shown that this hope is not ethical as a mere expectation. Moreover, the human condition is simply too complex to yield a model of reconciliation whereby the hurt we experience from trespass can ever be said to truly vanish. Let us call this melancholia. This melancholia that we experience in respect of the trespasses of others is constitutive of the tragic unfolding of our ethical history as it continues throughout the constant reinstituting of the commonality of self-overcoming and the forgiveness that we extend to each other for being human.

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<sup>129</sup> G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford University Press: New York), 407

<sup>130</sup> This point is made explicit by Hegel where he writes that “the deed is not imperishable; it is taken back by spirit into itself, and the aspect of individuality in it, whether as intention or as an existent negativity and limitation, straightaway vanishes.” (PS, 407)

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VITA

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University

Rory Sazama

rory.sazama@gmail.com

U.W. Milwaukee  
Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, December 2009

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