

LIVING DISTINCTIONS OVER ATROPHIED OPPOSITIONS

Hegel as Critic of Reification

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Abstract: Georg Lukács, writing in History and Class Consciousness, describes modern philosophy, culminating in the work of Hegel, as providing “a complete intellectual copy and the a priori deduction of bourgeois society.” By closely considering this remark, the following essay will explore the manner in which Hegel’s philosophy stands as a register for the reification constitutive of the capitalist mode of production. After first outlining the fundamental characteristics of Lukács’s theory of reified consciousness, an investigation into culled sections of the Phenomenology of Spirit will demonstrate the conceptual affinity between reified consciousness and the consciousness of Hegel’s own protagonist. The Phenomenology follows the path of a consciousness successively failing to give an adequate account of both itself and the world. Here, the immediate and sequestered otherness of its object obscures the truth that consciousness is the substance of its own process. By analyzing the sections “Sense-Certainty” and “The Spiritual Realm of Animals and Deception,” I aim to demonstrate the extent to which Hegel’s Phenomenology can be grasped as a critique of reified consciousness grounded in both an immediacy prohibited from comprehending its own mediated composition of itself and its object, and in the reduction of social activ-

ity to an aggregate of competitive self-interests. As a result, Hegelian philosophy stands as a prescient and indispensable critical resource for grasping the requisite intellectual dispositions of the capitalist mode of production.

Keywords: Marxism, Hegel, Lukács

Introduction

A mere glance at daily economic commentaries will evince the contemporary importance of the critique of the fetish-character of economic forces. Most narratives in circulation on either end of the neoclassical spectrum, whether *laissez-faire* or Keynesian, confer upon the economy and its calamities an almost omnipotent status, one in which financial capital and currency markets are afforded spectral reverence and trepidation. The fetish-character of the economy herein entails its elevation above and against the social relations and processes that are constitutive of its dynamics. This fetish character becomes apparent in light of Marx's critical analysis of the historically specific social relations mediated by commodity exchange within the capitalist mode of production. Within the opening pages of *Capital*, Volume 1, the category of the commodity unfolds and reveals its social function as a mediator of production relations – that is, through the production and exchange of commodities, relations between people are inverted into relations between things while, inversely, relations between commodities are animated by their creators and yet come to operate autonomously. This central theme within the work of Marx was subsequently theorized through the concept of reification [*Verdinglichung*], or “thingification,” most notably with the work of Georg Lukács in his book *History and Class Consciousness* (1919-1923). In his analysis of the fetish form, Lukács attempts to historicize the phenomenon of reification by following specific changes in the modes of production of commodity society. Lukács elaborates the commodity form as a *universal* mode of social mediation which subsists outside the direct exchange relation, and through an increasingly rationalized, specialized, and fragmented world, comes to nevertheless reflect the structural principles of the commodity form.

The work of Lukács in extending the theory of reification proceeds by grounding Marx within the German philosophical tradition of G.W.F. Hegel, and as such, takes seriously Marx's warning in the afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*, Volume 1 not to treat Hegel as a “dead dog.” It is particularly in accordance with Marx's method for dialectically unfolding the categories of the critique of political economy that the importance of Hegel becomes clear. This methodological inheritance consists in the movement from the simplest and most abstract appearances proceeding through their own immanent wealth of determinations to disclose a complex and concrete totality. This logic advances from the most immediate categories, which in their own internal determinations conflict with their appearance and necessitate a sublation [*Aufhebung*] of their initial configuration. As such, the intrinsic determination of a single category, sublated through its own non-identity, or negated through its own internal contradictions,

will, for Marx, systematically yield a dynamic totality of social relations constitutive of a society dominated by the capitalist mode of production. For Marx, the categories of the critique of political economy are thereby the expressions of the concrete social relations of capitalist society, and beginning with how things *appear* to be allows for penetration into a more developed whole. Here, the *thought* of bourgeois society comes to reveal the *being* of bourgeois society. It is this aspect of the dialectic that Marx inherits from Hegel: the interrelatedness of thought and being, whereby epistemological modes are themselves constitutive of their own object – *how* one knows is not independent from *what* one knows.

Of course, despite the alleged pan-logicism said by Marx to characterize Hegel's philosophy, it is no secret that Marx lauded Hegel on a number of occasions. As Marx states in the *1844 Manuscripts*, the Hegelian dialectic, as laid out in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), illustrates a process by which reality comes to know itself and call into question all extrinsic otherness through its own internally contradictory modes of existent knowing, thereby revealing all acquired knowledge of the world to be a knowledge of oneself. Marx recognizes that it is through Hegel's dialectic that the content of even the most abstract categories of the *Phenomenology* yield a dynamism wherein the subjectivity of man unfolds in a manner constitutive of the objective world.

Hegel's *Phenomenology* traces the experiential journey of consciousness through phenomenal knowledge towards true knowledge, or science [*Wissenschaft*], along the way assuming various shapes and stages [*Gestalten*], each unraveled through their own intrinsically contradictory determinations. Through this "path of despair," consciousness experiences a loss of itself as it expands its truth through a knowledge of itself. All of its untruths contain a truth to the extent that each new result is apprehended as the result of consciousness' own activity. It is through this progressive insight into the untruth of its phenomenal knowledge and immediate appearances [*Erscheinungen*] that consciousness comes to be revealed as its own standard, wherein the truth of the object *in-itself* is compared with the truth of the object *for consciousness*. This dialectical process reveals the activity of consciousness to be a comparison of consciousness with itself, one whose movement proceeds by way of an examination into whether its concept corresponds to the object and whether the object corresponds to its concept. What for consciousness may appear, for example, as a distant objectivity of the world is in fact constitutive of its own mode of knowing and being. It is through this general framework that Hegel collapses any rigid separation between epistemology and ontology. "[E]verything hangs on apprehending and expressing the truth not merely as *substance* but also equally as *subject*."¹

This process by which a subject proceeds to supersede its own immediacies and re-

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), §17. Within the following work, all selections from the *Phenomenology* will be taken from Pinkard's translation, as yet to be published and available here: <http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html>.

veals itself to be intrinsically related to its own object, rather than simply taking refuge within the appearance of an object's otherness and thereby reifying it, pervades the work of both Hegel and Marx.² It will be this theme that the following work will explore, particularly that of grasping the dynamics of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a critique of reification. It is undoubtedly the case that the narrative of reification and its supersession pervades the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in its entirety, a narrative in which an individual recognizes him- or herself as both the subject and object of social praxis, that is, as the dialectical sublation of immediacy and of sequestered otherness into a process whereby the objective world becomes integrated by the subject of experience. As Lukács states, "Hegel's logic shows on the one hand that the objects which seem to be so fixed and rigid are in reality processes, and, on the other hand, it regards the objective nature of the objects as products of 'externalization' on the part of the subject."³ It will be the aim of the following work, however, to demonstrate and make explicit the structure of reification within Hegel's *Phenomenology* in its most perspicuous moments.

To accomplish such a task, it will be first necessary to outline a particular understanding of the phenomenon of reification, specifically as theorized by Lukács, thereby establishing a framework for investigating choice sections of the *Phenomenology*. This framework will consist in an objective and subjective schematic for grasping the condition of reification constitutive of commodity society – that is, the extent to which capitalism, through its fetish forms, structures both the objective conditions of subjective experience and the subjective conditions of objective experience. Such an analytic distinction will enable one to select two sections of the *Phenomenology* as exemplary of the reified social life constitutive of commodity production and its contradiction. These sections will consist in Hegel's opening chapter entitled "Sense-Certainty" as well as a later chapter entitled "The Spiritual Realm of Animals and Deception." While at first these sections may appear relatively insignificant for a Marxist approach to the *Phenomenology*, most notably since Alexandre Kojève's elevation of the "Lordship and Bondage" section as pivotal for grasping capitalist alienation,⁴ my interpretation aims at suggesting that the *Phenom-*

² While of course a Marxian understanding of the concept of reification is not reducible to this methodological insight but rather should be grounded within the historical conditions of social alienation, the aim of the present work, as will become clear, is to demonstrate that these conditions nonetheless express themselves within particular forms of consciousness found in Hegel's philosophy. It should therefore be explicitly stated that the present work makes no claim that Hegel possessed insight into the *concrete* aspects of the phenomenon of reification. Rather, it can be argued that Hegel implicitly addressed reification's *philosophic* expressions, insofar as reification develops not solely within the social relations of value, but also within the metaphysical accomplishments of modern Western philosophy, ranging from Cartesian dualism to a subjectivity to which is bequeathed the omnipotent capacity of constituting its own object, exemplified in the work of Fichte and, to a certain extent, barring the problems of the 'thing-in-itself,' in the work of Kant.

³ Georg Lukács, *The Young Hegel* (London: The Merlin Press, 1975), p. 532.

⁴ Christopher J. Arthur's *Dialectics of Labour* convincingly concludes that, despite popular opinion,

enology is an inventory of deception, one in which all sections exemplify conditions of reified thought. Further, the *Phenomenology* wields the distinctive perspective that deficient modes of *thinking* are constitutive of deficient modes of *being* in the world. It thus becomes the case that any theory of reification extracted from the book cannot be reduced to an epistemological error of misrecognition,⁵ but should rather be understood as part of a social reality developing in actuality.

The return to a reading of Hegel through Lukács holds additional significance in light of what has been referred to as the rise of a “non-metaphysical Hegel” since the 1980s.⁶ In contrast to the poststructuralist and analytic philosophical traditions of interpreting Hegel’s thought as subordinating the world’s concreteness and heterogeneity to an expression of a quasi-divine spiritual substance operating from on high and taking possession of the finite, non-metaphysical readings (best exemplified by the work of Terry Pinkard and Robert Pippin) elucidate Hegel’s philosophy as a critical examination into the presuppositions of a given fixed reality. Such a reading takes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a process in which the intelligibility of both the world and ourselves unfolds through our own self-determinations and is therefore subject to transformation. Here, the self-determining character of how human beings come to regard their world as meaningful proceeds through a set of socially and historically mediated conditions of which they are the authors. However, if one were to grasp any singular moment of the *Phenomenology* in its isolation, and unrelentingly adhere to any claim of certainty towards a fixed reality expressed in that moment, such a calcified orientation to the world amounts to an exemplary instance of reification as understood by Lukács. My approach thereby allows for a nuanced Marxian approach to Hegelian philosophy that both accepts Hegel’s system as the social and historical development and instantiation of human freedom, while at the same time posing the question of what it might mean for the negative movement of this system to be stunted and how it is that this languor corresponds – in actuality – to the sociality of the capitalist mode of production.

Marx did *not* draw on Hegel’s analysis of the labor of servitude in his theory of alienation. As Arthur succinctly states: “When Marx says Hegel grasps labour as the essence he is talking not about what Hegel actually says about material labour (hence the lack of reference to ‘Lordship and Bondage’) but about the esoteric significance of the dialectic of negativity in spirit’s entire self-positing movement (hence Marx’s claim that the only labour Hegel knows is spiritual labour).” (Christopher J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel* [New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986], p. 80.)

⁵ Such a perspective, wherein reification is taken in purely epistemological terms rather than understood as a historical ontology of social labor constitutive of commodity production and exchange, is grounded most notably within the work of Axel Honneth. Here, reification is adapted to a theory of normative inter-subjective recognition, in which the concept of totality and the determinations of the capitalist mode of production are effectively abandoned. See Axel Honneth, *Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶ For a brief account of this change in contemporary Hegelian scholarship, see Simon Lumsden, “The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel,” *Philosophical Compass* 3 (2008), no. 1, pp. 51–65.

The Objective-Subjective Structure of Reification

Within Marx's immanently critical analysis, capitalist society unfolds as a totality of social relations which are mediated by objective forms that, while constitutive of social practice, attain an existence autonomous from those practices and, in turn, instantiate them. It is through this interpretation that capitalism comes to be understood as a form of domination by *real* abstractions – as a form of objective domination [*sachliche Herrschaft*], as Marx refers to it – that is, human activity becomes structured by objective forms of social mediation, specifically that of abstract labor, which is constituted by determinate modes of real, concrete practices and which are objectified through the categories of commodity, money, and capital.

Taking the fetish character of the commodity social form to be the pivotal and most essential component of the sociality constitutive of capitalism, Georg Lukács seeks to expand the structural implications of the fetish – character of commodities over time, specifically through the category of reification. Most extensively in the essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” Lukács, under the influence of Georg Simmel and Max Weber, argues that the increasingly fragmented, rationalized, and specialized system mediated by the commodity form has extended its qualities and attributes throughout other facets of social life. The examples offered by Lukács consist of the form of the state and jurisprudence with its increasingly calculative administration of justice and the subordinating dominance of bureaucracy with its formal standardization. Even examples such as the division of cognitive faculties, journalism, and marriage are all scrutinized for their development under the universality of the commodity form.⁷ Lukács thereby identifies the core of reification as follows:

Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a “phantom objectivity,” an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.⁸

⁷ Despite the dramatically different historical configuration of capitalism that exists at present, Lukács's theory of reification, grounded in the elemental form of the commodity and its fetish character, carries with it a historical prescience similar to that of Marx's critique of political economy, a prescience that remains unyieldingly valid for as long as capitalism remains in place. Said another way, insofar as the abstractions of commodity exchange remain the predominant modes of social mediation, any internal changes in the development of capitalism throughout the 20th century, through for example Keynesian state intervention or transformations in production processes, have yet to call into question the reality that “[t]he wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities.’” (Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I [London: Penguin Classics, 1990], p. 125.)

⁸ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: The Merlin Press, 1971), p. 83.

Characteristic of reified consciousness is a series of pathological modes by which the self, the world, and their interrelation are constituted, most notably through an extrinsic separation of subject and object; a static and ossified dualism which obscures the nature of social reality and abandons living and interrelated distinctions within a concrete totality for atrophied and petrified oppositions under a reign of immediacies. As a result, the relation between individuals and the result of their own activity expresses itself as a one-way causal sequence of two otherwise unchangeable objects upon one another and dominated by a principle of commensurability, in which isolated entities are uninterruptedly reconciled.

The phenomenon of reification is grounded in the suspension of human activity within the realm of appearances and immediacy, and is practically structured within commodity society by 1) a personification of things; and 2) a thingification of persons. Such a schematic refers to both the *objective* and *subjective* aspects of reification. The objective component concerns a world of objects whose laws, generating their own autonomous power, confront man in his activity as an alien force. At the same time, as the “fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject,”⁹ the subjective feature of reification has it that an individual enters into social relations with others in his isolation, at the mercy of private intention and self-interest, and bearing only the property of their labor-power. It is the truth of reification, as a social form, to oscillate between these two poles of what I refer to as the “objectivist” and “subjectivist” components of reified social life. Trapped between these two extremes, consciousness becomes both a passive observer moving in obedience to laws which it can never control, as well as a consciousness that regards itself as a fortified individual, at odds with the rest of the world and expressing its freedom only through the exchange of its property. It will be this schematic of a reified mode of experience that will be utilized in grasping the movement of consciousness within the *Phenomenology*.

The Authority of Appearances and the Untruth of Apparent Knowing

When the phenomenon of reification is grasped as both the personification of things and the thingification of persons, a relation between appearances and reality is asserted whereby an authoritative claim is made strictly at the level of appearances. The phenomenon of reification is grounded in the suspension of human activity within this realm of appearances and immediacy. It does not however indicate a mere epistemological illusion,¹⁰ but rather the domination of appearances constitutive of the practical activity of commodity

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰ Reification cannot be merely an epistemological problem, an erroneous “false consciousness” or cognitive blunder, but is rather expressive of a historically specific mode of being. Lukács emphasizes this fundamental concrete component of reification when he writes that “these manifestations are by no means merely modes of thought, they are the forms in which contemporary

production and exchange. It will therefore be the general relation of appearance and reality that will be integral to grasping Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a critique of reification.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* imparts the journey of natural consciousness as it proceeds towards true knowledge charting the ways in which it takes different shapes, developing through its own nature. It is with this experience of itself – an acquaintance of what consciousness is in-itself – that Hegel offers a vicious critique of immediacy, one which an examination into the mediated determinations of appearance is unfolded. This authoritative claim of immediacy will, for consciousness, through its voyage in the *Phenomenology*, lose its justification and disclose an abundance of determinations of which no immediacy is itself unmediated.

It is, however, crucial to recognize that the untruth of immediacy is constitutive of the experience of consciousness. While immediate knowledge entails disclosed mediated conceptualizations, new immediacies arise with every new stage of consciousness, only to thereby further deepen both the subject's consciousness of the world and of itself. For Hegel, philosophical truth as such contains both the true and the untrue at the same time, a process by which the true is brought to light by the deficiencies of the untrue, not through an abstract negation or a simple rejection of the false, but rather through a determinate negation, through which the implicit truth contained within the untrue is made explicit. As such, Hegel does not make any effort to venerate any "true reality" hidden underneath appearances, nor will he deny the deceptive significance of appearances themselves. Rather, Hegel seeks to repudiate the authority of respective appearances

bourgeois society is objectified. Their abolition, if it is to be a true abolition, cannot simply be the result of thought alone, it must also amount to their *practical* abolition as the *actual forms of social life*. Every kind of knowledge that aspires to remain pure knowledge is doomed to end up granting recognition to these forms once again." (*Ibid.*, p. 177.) The problem of understanding reification as merely an epistemological error remains key for illuminating the manner in which Hegel's *Phenomenology* can be grasped as a critique of reification. If the epistemological error is not merely contained within a deficient mode of *thought*, but is itself an untruth constitutive of a mode of *being*, and thereby a moment within the contradictory process of truth, i.e. of experience [*Erfahrung*], then the critique of reification must reside in the refusal of consciousness to remain in its discord between truth and certainty, which is itself a refusal grounded in its own internal and essential movement. A renunciation of appearances [*Erscheinungen*] therefore cannot by itself amount to a critique of reification, nor would a simple overcoming of the immediacies of semblance within the realm of thought. Since the appearance itself is constitutive of the essence, the movement against appearances must also be a movement against a particular mode of being. As such, the manner in which appearances are criticized in the *Phenomenology* corresponds to a critique of reification to the extent that reification is not merely a process of "veiling" or "mystifying" a true reality hidden underneath appearances, but rather phenomena which are constitutive of a social form and mode of production. Hegel's definition of knowledge itself implies a truth of actualization. This understanding of Hegel enables one to witness Lukács echoing the movement of consciousness within the *Phenomenology* when he writes: "since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object." (*Ibid.*, p. 178.)

in their claims to offer legitimate and robust explications of subjective consciousness and its relation to the world. Through this process, the reality of appearances is in fact affirmed. However, it is through the activity of consciousness that this reality reveals certain deficiencies that negatively prompt consciousness – and this disruption emerges at every moment in the *Phenomenology* – into calling into question the mode by which the appearance of reality is apprehended.

The dialectical process by which this revelation takes place consists in natural consciousness demonstrating that it does not possess true knowledge, but only the certainty of apprehending the object in its immediacy. This distinction reveals to consciousness the inadequacy of its own concept [*Begriff*]. However, this disparity between certainty [*Gewissheit*] and truth [*Wahrheit*] is only revealed retrospectively. In its varying moments, consciousness apprehends its immediate object *as* true knowledge, a certainty which, pummeled against the realization of its own concept, propels consciousness into a loss of itself; a loss of its truth, and as such a “path of despair” against its own apprehended naturalisms. It is therefore through conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge that consciousness experiences a progressive maturation, retrospectively attained from the standpoint of true knowledge. As Hegel writes in his introduction, “[t]he goal lies at that point where knowledge no longer has the need to go beyond itself, that is, where knowledge comes around to itself, and where the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept.”¹¹ The object of knowledge gained by consciousness will therefore not be something that externally acts upon consciousness, but instead will be eventually disclosed as something structured by an *acting* self-consciousness.

“Sense-Certainty or the ‘This’ and Meaning Something”

The importance of the section “Sense-Certainty” [*sinnliche Gewissheit*] for distilling a critique of reification from the *Phenomenology* derives from the relation of consciousness to its object, a relation that nowhere else in the *Phenomenology* is dominated by immediacy in its most elemental form; an absolutely minimal form of knowledge in which the object [*Gegenstand*] apprehended stands over and against the knowing subject. By beginning here, Hegel allows for the relation of immediacy to be grasped in its most simplified and direct form: as a subject accosted by the appearance of a thoroughly foreign and imposing object. Hegel’s point of departure from the perspective of consciousness relinquishes presuppositions of any logical deduction and instead begins from the immediacies of phenomena whose content will eventually emerge through the interrogation of the immediacies themselves. Additionally, because the negation of immediacy takes place at every subsequent *Gestalt* of the *Phenomenology*, outlining this process in its most rudimentary form enables one to grasp the reified core of all stages of the *Phenomenology* in which the immediacy of appearances declares universal authority.

¹¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §80.

Sense-certainty begins only with a knowledge of that which is immediate, that is, of what merely *is*, a natural or naïve [*natürliches*] awareness of oneself and objects within a non-inferential and pre-reflective mode of knowledge. The immediacy of such a direct acquaintance evokes an absence of any active endeavor on the part of consciousness to achieve conceptual abstraction or reflection, and instead pushes consciousness to passively adhere to a truth of the mere *existence* of an external object, apprehended in its mere appearance. As Hegel begins the section, “Knowledge which is our object at the outset, that is, immediately, can be nothing but immediate knowledge, *knowledge* of the *immediate*, that is, of *what is*. Likewise we ourselves have to conduct ourselves *immediately*, that is, *receptively*.”¹² In this immediate existence, the object is devoid of any ascribed predicates, and its truth is to be located only within its bare singularity. As such, the content of immediate knowledge appears as an infinite wealth, whose proximity to truth is expressed by the immediate object in all its concrete fullness, unspoiled by the exclusions of conceptual comprehension.

The articulation of sense-certainty through the indexical demonstrative “this” locates truth in the authoritative being of the object, the *this*. However, once sense-certainty attempts to articulate this truth, it inadvertently evokes a claim to *plurality*, rather than to *singularity*, or as Hegel describes it, the object is an example among many. This revelation first emerges when Hegel situates the *this* of the object’s being within the twofold indexical demonstratives of the “here” and “now.” Beginning with the *now*, Hegel offers an answer to the question of “What is the now?”: “The now is the night.” But in the effort to preserve the truth of what the *now* is, the *now* becomes stale as soon as it is no longer night. “To be sure, the now itself maintains itself but as the kind of thing which is not the night.”¹³ The *now* thus maintains itself but only in a negative fashion, always altering by virtue of an other, a mediated *now* never static, but rather always in flux. The *now* exists through its negation, the non-identical *not-this* indifferent to any particular being, refusing to be restrained under one particular or singular state.

It is through the ineffability of linguistically referring to particularities that the truth of sense-certainty reveals itself to be a universality, one in which even the sensuous is expressed as universal: being *as such*, or one among many. It is in language, Hegel explains, that although one may *mean* [*meint*] to articulate solely the singularity of the object, what is instead *spoken* [*gesagt*] is its universal character. Sense-certainty consistently says the contrary of what it means: *a linguistic revelation of universality within a meaning grounded in bare singularity*.

While the truth of sense-certainty was initially located within the immediate awareness of the object, it turns out that the content of this experience cannot be held firm in

¹² *Ibid.*, §90.

¹³ *Ibid.*, §96.

a singular definite moment. In attempting to find refuge in the pure immediate intuiting activity of the articulated “Now is daytime,” this certainty remains ignorant of the transformation from day into night, wherein its truth resides in its immediate relation to a self-limited non-temporal *now* or non-spatial *here*. However, if this truth were taken up, its meaning would be lost and, in the case of *now*, it would emerge as *what has been*. Any *now* therefore turns out to be *an overturning sequence of nows*. The *now* itself is thereby elusive and possesses no truth *of being*; its fleeting propensity instead leaving a trail of sublated moments. The universality disclosed by the activity of sense-certainty therefore reveals a union of an interrelated multiplicity of instances in both space and time, a universal dynamically *in process*, whereby the pure being of sense-certainty loses its immediacy through negation. Hegel has begun to demonstrate the necessity of *mediated* knowledge.

The Reified Structure of Sense-Certainty

In order to grasp the reified structure of “sense-certainty,” it is first necessary to recall that the chapter resides among the first three sections of the *Phenomenology* constituting a unit aptly described by Quentin Lauer as “Objective Consciousness.”¹⁴ In the particular case of sense-certainty, the authority of truth for consciousness resides in a mode of awareness entirely dependent on the object in its petrified and undifferentiated singularity. It is therefore important to recognize that Hegel utilizes the German word *Gegenstand* rather than simply *Objekt*.¹⁵ Here, the immediacy of this mode of knowledge prides itself

¹⁴ It is the approach of consciousness to at first always distinguish something from itself and relate itself to that object. At the outset, the object for consciousness is therefore posited as existing externally, and it is as such that the fundamental structure of consciousness operates by way of a distinct subject/object framework. The first sections of the *Phenomenology* indeed proceed with consciousness gravitating in a predominantly object-oriented manner. These sections, under the title of “Consciousness,” include “Sense-certainty,” “Perception,” and “Force and the Understanding.” Within these sections, consciousness locates truth within the object of apprehension, a knowledge that is to be attained “out there” and which has yet to reflect upon its own practical modes of knowing. As Terry Pinkard writes in his commentary on the *Phenomenology*, “Hegel wishes to show [within the first three sections of the *Phenomenology*] that the basic candidates for such knowledge logically lead to and culminate in what we can call the subject/object model of knowledge and practice: a picture of our epistemic practices and our various practical endeavors that interprets them in terms of a subject, an independent object, and a representation [*Vorstellung*] that supposedly serves as a metaphysical intermediary between the subject and the object.” (Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994], p. 21.)

¹⁵ In his seminal reading of the *Phenomenology*, Quentin Lauer reminds us that the imposing character of the object is indeed disclosed in the very opening words of the section: “Das Wissen, welches zuerst oder unmittelbar unser Gegenstand ist...[The knowledge which is at the start or is immediately our object...]” (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §90). Cf. Quentin Lauer, S.J., *A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976), p. 43.

on adding nothing to the passive reception of the object whereby it “appears as the *most true*; for it has not omitted anything from its object.”¹⁶ Throughout this section, Hegel employs an archetype of the pure or vulgar empiricist, one which attempts to preserve the truth of an immediate singularity and, more importantly, undermines itself on its own terms through its own claim to truth, which ends up shattering both the extrinsic separation between thought and the world posited by sense-certainty, as well as the essentially atemporal and ossified character of its initial efforts at locating the truth of the object. The fundamental dynamism of this first section offers a critique of reification as it shatters the essentially ahistorical and ossified character of consciousness’s initial efforts to locate the truth of the object. As such, sense-certainty can be grasped as an archetypal form of reified consciousness, specifically in its limited capacity in apprehending the intrinsically relational and mediated aspects of modes of knowing.

The immediacy of sense-certainty demands that both consciousness and its object must be apprehended in their isolation, an isolation in which “Consciousness is I, nothing further, a pure *this*, and the *individual* knows a pure this, that is, he knows *the individual*.”¹⁷ As such, the certainty of immediacy possesses no movement, and therefore is incapable of recognizing itself as *undergoing* experience. Instead, it is under the illusion that it needs nothing beyond the immediate singularity of itself and its object in order to be complete, thereby destined to engage in a tragic conflict with an *externalized* reality. This reality for consciousness is abstract and incoherent, one in which the external structure of the world ordains its singularity upon an equally singular and abstract consciousness. It is for this ordinary and naïve *individual* consciousness that the world appears as an already established and undifferentiated datum, merely *existing* independently of consciousness as an objective reality. Here the “objectivist” component of reification emerges through the narrative of sense-certainty, particularly through the external and indifferent relation of consciousness and world.

Sense-certainty offers an instance by which a rigid formalism, characterized by an immediate apprehension of an alien world externally imposed upon a thinking subject, is rendered thoroughly untenable. The reified structure of sense-certainty – grounded not in the constitution of the object of consciousness, but rather in the latter’s own *existent mode of awareness* – collapses within its own claim to totality.

For Lukács, the social existence of the proletariat is placed *wholly* on the side of the object, as the proletariat’s own objective appearance confronts it *immediately* as a commodity, not as an active part of the social process of labor. While the social-historical element is not explicitly problematic for sense-certainty at this stage in the *Phenomenology*, socially constitutive modes of historical knowing and being are here nevertheless structurally prohibited from being reflected on by consciousness. This is due to the

¹⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §91.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

impossibility of accounting for particulars within a framework of bare immediacy that does not turn attention to universals; this reveals the immediacy of sense-certainty as structurally contained within a reified social existence. The reified forms of objectivity occasion unmediated modes of knowledge in order to make the phenomena of capitalist society appear ahistorical and eternal. Grounded within a falsity of extreme nominalism, the immediacy of sense-certainty mirrors the reified mode of consciousness. The untruth of the reified structure of sense-certainty reveals itself precisely through its own articulated indexical demonstratives of the *here* and *now*, expressions which cannot help but point beyond themselves. Lukács therefore aptly notes the structural similarities between faulty certitude and the consciousness of the proletariat when he writes the following: “the habits of thought and feeling of mere immediacy where the immediately given form of the objects, the fact of their existing *here* and *now* and in this particular way appears to be primary, real and objective, whereas their ‘relations’ seem to be secondary and subjective. For anyone who sees things in such immediacy every true change must seem incomprehensible.”¹⁸

Ensnared within the elemental untruths characterized by the immediacies within sense-certainty, the reified social life of commodity society is “[u]nable to discover further mediations, unable to comprehend the reality and the origin of bourgeois society as the product of the same subject that has ‘created’ the comprehended totality of knowledge,” and “its ultimate point of view, decisive for the whole of its thought, will be that of immediacy.”¹⁹

“Individuality, Which in Its Own Eyes Is Real in and for Itself”

Turning now towards what has been described above as the “subjectivist” component of reification, one is reminded that its fundamental features arise from the individualism cultivated by bourgeois social relations. It is the self-reliant and solitary individual, at odds with the social world and the collective demands that world might impose upon private activity. Indeed, a society dominated by commodity production wields as both its result and presupposition an aggregation of isolated individuals, all bearing the capacity to sell their labor power within a division of labor. Within such an environment, the primacy of subjectivity eclipses the objective and social character of all individual activities, and as such, the immediacy of an individual’s activity appears to be solely the result of private intention and self-interest, rather than the expression of a socially-integrated whole by which individual subjective activity self-consciously articulates an objective truth.

Guided by this theme of the vanity of the individual – a subjectivist prejudice by which the social world is grasped as estranged – one can now approach a different section of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, which exhibits a further aspect of reification. The subjectivist

¹⁸ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 154 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

aspect of reification concerns an individuality ignorant of its own social presuppositions. The analysis of reification extracted from the *Phenomenology* thereby highlights a form of bourgeois individuality – that is, a purely introspective and egoistic individual grounded within an extrinsic and absolute separation between itself and the social world. Therefore, by turning to the later section entitled “Individuality, which in its own eyes is real in and for itself,” with a particular focus on the subsection “The Spiritual Realm of Animals and Deception; or the Thing that Matters,” the dynamics of what was described above as the “subjectivist” component of reification within Hegel’s *Phenomenology* will now become lucid.

Once consciousness proceeds from its object-oriented efforts at grasping truth, it is propelled to engage with itself, as Hegel describes within the sections under the title “Self-Consciousness,” where authority for consciousness becomes *self*-authority. *Self*-consciousness, having comprehended that its modes of knowing the world warrant knowledge of itself, returns to the world in the section entitled “Reason” [*Vernunft*], specifically with the intention of imposing its standard of rationality upon the world, manifested as the individual rational activity of consciousness. Within “Reason,” various expressions of subjectivity are positioned within an opposition between the self and the prevailing social world, an individual consciousness in an arduous, and often harrowing, pursuit for its own identity. Within the final subsection of “Reason,” however, the world has become a mirror of the individual consciousness, one that reflects the latter’s own rational activity; the reality of this new world consists only in the *I* of consciousness. Here, self-consciousness becomes subjectively certain of itself through its own individual activities and thereby attains its own objective truth, while conversely the individual activities of self-consciousness seek their own subjective certainty. The impotence of this pure subjectivity is expressed by the emergence of a world in which the truth of all reality is the self, or more specifically, the immanent rational activity of the individual consciousness, is its own authority, not dependent on any objective world. Within such a certainty, the individual consciousness and its activity are regarded as self-sufficient and complete.

“The Spiritual Realm of Animals and Deception; or the Thing That Matters
[*die Sache selbst*]”

As rational activity itself emerges as the truth of reason, individual consciousness begins to wield a vague awareness of its own universality, one which, as it actually expresses itself in the world, does not yet possess any specific content which might assist in differentiating its universality. Instead, the purity of its thought presides over any actual employment in the world. At its foundation, individual consciousness places itself within a “spiritual animal kingdom” in which all activity derives from an originary natural existence [*ursprüngliche Natur*] according to which the self-preserving individual treats its surroundings only as a means for survival. The determinate limitations of this natural existence cannot confine the free activity of individual consciousness, and so while all of individual consciousness’s activity may derive from this originary nature, it actively imposes itself

upon the world around it. This originary natural existence is merely a moment in which the individuality of consciousness unfolds; it is not what constitutes individuality itself. The activity of individual consciousness consists first in a subjective purpose *opposed to* the given reality, second in a process by which this aim is achieved in actuality, and finally in a realized end which stands independent of the acting subject. Each of these individual moments becomes, for individual consciousness, moments within its own identity. It is thereby only within activity itself that individual consciousness becomes aware of its own aims and, as such, is actualized.

Hegel refers to the wholly subjective experience of being “interested” as the individual’s experience of producing something through its activity. The *interested* activity of the individual consciousness is productive both of an actualization and of an activity of immanence that procures the individual itself – that is, the individual in the process of coming-to-be, whose “*doing is his being.*”²⁰ Hegel’s distinction between *being*, as the framework of natural processes, and *doing*, as the framework of individual or *spiritual* processes, constitutes a movement by which the individual consciousness negates its merely natural existence, asserting itself above its originary and wholly determinate nature and, through its activity, affirms the individual as standing above the limits of nature. This negativity is self-reflective rational activity – that is, natural existence developing into free existence. The rational activity of the individual consciousness is at once individual and universal, and it is the relation of the result produced to the activity producing it that is immanently related to the developing consciousness of the individual.

The universal character of an individual’s activity, however, can be distinguished from any of its singular expressions, and it is the product or work [*das Werk*] of an individual’s activity that renders explicit the universality of its consciousness. As such, it is “the essence of the work, which is to be a self-expression of an individuality,”²¹ and:

The work is the reality which consciousness gives itself; it is that in which the individual is for himself what he is *in itself*, and in such a way that the consciousness *for which* the individual comes to be in the work is not a particular consciousness but rather *universal* consciousness.²²

Within the work, all of the circumstances of its production, whether the intention, means or process of its procurement, are each extinguished and become, within actuality, an alien object to the subject. Within the work, the individual places himself outside himself and within a universality, in a “space of being which is utterly devoid of determinateness.”²³

²⁰ Lauer, *Reading*, p. 190.

²¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §402

²² *Ibid.*, §404.

²³ *Ibid.*

The individual consciousness has produced a work that has a life of its own. It is not merely the expression of the individual consciousness's own individuality but must, in its objectivity, escape its individual grasp. It thereby becomes accessible to all other individuals. As a result, the work now appears as transitory and not strictly his own, a deprivation settling upon the individual consciousness as it now experiences a separation between *doing* and *being* in which its activity risks failure.

The various elements of individual consciousness are now inclined to emerge in discordance. The essential unity of an individual's activity may contradict itself, and so the possibility of a contingent failure within actuality lurks around every corner within these distinct moments of activity. The work takes on a life of its own; it is simply "out there" in the world for others to judge and does not strictly characterize the individual.

What persists however is the awareness that the individual consciousness at least made an attempt to give its own individuality actuality in the world. It therefore becomes irrelevant whether or not the realization of a work's intention is successfully accomplished. The work itself emerges as indifferent to its own failure, and what becomes crucial instead is the task as such, or the "thing that matters" [*die Sache selbst*]; activity seen "precisely as activity which produces no *result* other than itself."²⁴ The individual's recourse is to affirm the "thing that matters" not in the work produced, but in the activity through which the individual develops. The work of the individual is therefore only a moment of its essential reality, wherein a distinction is made "between the mere 'actuality' characteristic of a 'thing' [*Ding*] and the 'reality' which characterizes 'what matters' [*die Sache*]."²⁵

The "thing that matters" is the thing of practical life, combining intention with execution, as well as circumstances and medium with the product itself. It is the achievement of the "thing that matters" to unite subjective individuality with a universal objective reality, possessing goal, method, process, and product, each as differentiated moments within a unity of individual activity. As Hegel writes,

The thing that matters thereby expresses the spiritual essentiality in which all these moments are sublated as valid on their own, and therefore valid merely as universal moments, and in which the certainty that consciousness has of itself is, to consciousness, an objective essence, *a thing that matters*.²⁶

Here the individual objectively grasps its own individuality, not however yet as a subject in the *full sense*, that is, as a universal subjectivity, but only as the universality of its substance, or as a predicate of itself. The universality of this individual consciousness thus remains abstract, without injecting any subjective prejudice into its objectivity.

²⁴ Lauer, *Reading*, p. 191.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §409.

Hegel here introduces the honest consciousness in order to demand that the “thing that matters” articulate the individual subject’s efforts, regardless of success. Even if the subject ineffectively achieved its intended goal and even if the external world nullified its work, it would nonetheless have effectively confronted the “thing that matters” by demonstrating an interest in it. The honest consciousness is completely subordinated to its activity; its work is venerated as an end in itself, an aim divorced from any individual, specific work, elevated above the producer as the predicate of activity. In venerating its work, individual consciousness purports to give up its egoism and ascribes a public aim to its activity, investing it with validity beyond the mere self-expression of individuality, validity that becomes objective.

However, the honest consciousness is not as forthright as it first appears. The enthusiasm of the honest consciousness for objectivity is revealed to be more subjective than objective; it has *an interest in being disinterested*. Its concern with the “thing that matters” is revealed to be in fact a strict preference for its *own* performance, for *some* “thing that matters,” for reality rather than *the* “thing that matters.” As such, it has little concern for the activities of others. Hegel describes the honest consciousness’s lack of commitment to objectivity in the following manner:

The *pure* activity is essentially *this* individual’s activity, and this activity is likewise essentially an *actuality*, that is, something that matters. [...] Since in his eyes, what seems to be his concern is only the *thing that matters* as *abstract actuality*, it [is] also the case that he is concerned with it as *his* activity. However, as in his eyes it has just as much to do with what *engages* and *absorbs him*, he is likewise not really serious about the whole affair.²⁷

Deceptively ardent in its venture for accomplishment, the honest consciousness deceives other individuals by its egoistic intentions. This individual frustrates others around it in demonstrating that its activity is only advantageous and worthwhile if conducted by itself and in isolation.

Here there remains no interrelation between self and the world. Since the individual consciousness refuses to be judged by standards outside itself, and therefore only yields an interest in the self-expression of its own individuality, the attempt by the individual to give universal significance to the immanent activity of its own consciousness amounts to a deception. The fraudulence of the honest consciousness arises from its ignorance of the real, social significance of acting. In spite of its objectivist posturing, the honest consciousness “in his eyes [...] is concerned with *a thing that matters* and that thing mattering as *his own*.”²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, §414.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

This egoistic consciousness is preserved under the treacherous umbrella of a pseudo-submission to the “thing that matters,” a maneuvering which enables one to remain alone in one’s work so long as the work is regarded as an end in itself. The blindness of the honest consciousness is expressed in the disinterested way it participates in the validation of its work, a perspective from which it is only *this consciousness’s* attitude to *its* cause that matters to it, an activity reflective of its self-absorption; “the self playing with itself”²⁹ has not yet risen above its own egoism.³⁰

At the same time, the dismay of others in witnessing the self-centeredness of this egoistic consciousness reflects their *own* egoistic and private concern with their respective activities, and so they share a similar disregard for the objective “thing that matters.” Hegel describes the sociality of dishonest consciousness as such:

[...] what thus comes on the scene is a game individualities play with each other. In this game, each is deceiving himself as much he is finding all to be mutually deceiving each other.³¹

Each individual is convinced they are acting disinterestedly with respect to others. Yet because the “thing that matters” emerges regardless of which individual acts, and because individuals must nonetheless submit the work of their activities to the daylight of the socially objective world, they must also contradict themselves in their supposed denial of the “thing that matters.” It is true that all individuals in their self-authority desire to constitute their activity and the objects produced by it as strictly their own. However, the “thing that matters” does not mean individual self-interest. Instead, the “thing that matters” is sought precisely because it is of interest to *everyone*. In the unmasking of the honest consciousness, the falsity of its perspective is revealed. It “is only as a member of society, as a man among others that his actions, works, facts and causes have any real significance.”³² The illusion of the self-legislating ego is that while the individual acts in what appears to it as its own self-interest, it inadvertently acts for a common interest. The truth of the deceptive consciousness emerges therefore with all individual action amounting to social action, collectively instituted forms of mutual recognition. Both objectivity posited as separate from the subjective activity of an individual, as well as subjectivity which presumes that its actions are not constitutive of an objectively consti-

²⁹ Judith N. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Mind* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 128.

³⁰ As Hegel clarifies: “A consciousness that opens up such matters learns from experience that others come hurrying over like flies to freshly poured milk, and they too want to busy themselves over the matter. Likewise, those others then likewise learn from experience that he is not concerned with such a matter as an object but only with it insofar as it is *his concern*.” (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §417)

³¹ *Ibid.*, §415.

³² Shklar, *Freedom and Independence*, p. 129.

tuted reality, are themselves illusory and fallacious scenarios. As Hegel writes, “Rather it is an essence whose *being* is the *activity* of *singular* individuals and of all individuals, and whose activity exists immediately *for others*, that is, it is a *thing that matters*. It is only that kind of thing insofar as it is the *activity of each* and *all*, the essence that is the essence of all essence, that is *spiritual essence*.”³³

Reified Structure of the Individuality Which Takes Itself to be Real in and for Itself

In “The Spiritual Realm of Animals and Deception; or the Thing that Matters,” Hegel describes the attempt by the individual consciousness to give universal significance to the immanent activity of its own consciousness, attempting to achieve an identity between itself and the world through its own rational activity. Beginning with the sections under “Self-Consciousness,” consciousness, as a necessary condition of its own *self*-consciousness, has had to tangle with the objectivity of the world now under the authority of itself. However, no longer suffering from the anxious compulsion to compare itself with others, the individual consciousness remains momentarily content with the universality of its abstract activity for its self-realization. However, because this individual consciousness produces both itself *and objects* in the world, its ego faces the problem that the result of its activity risks standing in discordance with itself. In order to act, the individual consciousness must conceive of some end or purpose that may or may not correspond to the circumstances of the world, which calls into question this supposedly strictly subjective experience of being *interested*.

Hegel here recognizes that activity is necessary for the self-realization of self-consciousness. Because the self of the individual consciousness is in conflict with its own externality in the world concretized in particular works, it is plunged deeper into its own abstract and universal egoism, an egoism in which gratuitous and insincere gestures are made in accordance with consciousness’s own omnipotent principle of self-interest. This deceptive concurrence between subjective interest and objective reality, however, stands on precarious ground, specifically because it comes to reveal the necessarily social character of individual activity. With the unfolding of the honest consciousness, the reification portrayed in this section of the *Phenomenology* begins to emerge. As the subjectivist component of reification reflects a mode of individuality hostile to its own social character, by which an extrinsic and absolute separation between itself and the social world is torn asunder, “what the acquisition of rationality means to the individual consciousness is that he gradually comes to perceive that the real character of society and history is something created by men together.”³⁴

Hegel begins the section with a phenomenological figure at the center of the world, one whose activity remains resolutely solitary and private. Such an individual springing

³³ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §417.

³⁴ Lukács, *Young Hegel*, p. 470.

from his originary natural existence resembles an isolated and self-sufficient Robinson Crusoe, content to remain alone and moved only by self-gratification, refusing to be judged by standards outside itself. Such a detached and empty individuality stands in opposition to the world, grasping itself as an abstract universal that takes itself to be all of reality. Oriented toward its own immanent rational activity, the activity of consciousness becomes identical with consciousness itself, and it is this reflection that accompanies the reified subjectivist prejudice by which the social world is grasped as estranged.

This estranged quality at first derives from the objectivity involved in producing a work. No matter how conceited it may be, the individual consciousness has produced an object which has a life of its own, with other individuals possibly appropriating it for their own self-expression. Here the reified structure of the individual consciousness emerges most distinctly in the objectifying process of the work itself, in which external forces call into question the freedom of consciousness's own individuality. If the subjectivist component of reification concerns the extent to which abstract labor renders one's own individuality as an opposing force, an individuality concretized in its thinghood in the case of commodity society, the very concrete existence of the work heralds a denial of bourgeois subjectivity. The work, or the commodity, exists in actuality, that is, within a social domain constituted by other individuals, and, in the case of the historical specificities of commodity production, within the domain of exchange relations. The individual consciousness, however, still refuses to regard its own activity as of a social process, and so the honest consciousness arrives in an effort to reclaim the universality of its individuality.

The honest consciousness seeks satisfaction in work for its own sake, not necessarily in any *particular* work produced. This form of self-consciousness remains severed from its sociality, taking itself to be, in and of its own *abstract* activity, complete. By denying the concrete specificity of the work, the honest consciousness seeks self-realization in the abstract universality of its own activity, independently of its work as real and actual, and withdrawn from its *determinate* quality. When the work does take on a concrete reality, it becomes an objective alien work, at odds with the intention of the individual producer. Put simply, it becomes an object which stands *over and against* the producer, no longer expressing the producer's individuality but governed by an abstract objectivity; *a separation of doing and being*. The particular work constitutes an alien reality for the individual consciousness, which propels individual consciousness inward, into a deeper refuge of the egoistic consciousness.

As its first attempt to see itself in its work endangered a fortified individuality, the honest consciousness is precisely that effort at reconciling itself, for a second time, with objective reality. With the turn to the "thing that matters," all of the distinct moments of activity, including activity's aims, means, or objects, are dissolved into the predicate of an abstract universality. This turn is therefore an attempt by consciousness to concede its stubborn egoism so that the world itself isn't simply eradicated. This recourse taken by the individual consciousness reveals the difficulty of constituting a universal that is

not wholly abstract and empty of determinacy. If the individual consciousness is to wield a universality with its own determinate content without abandoning the realization of its individuality, its attempted egoism discloses socially objective conditions through which all individual activity expresses itself in the dishonesty of the honest consciousness. The fallacy of self-interest emerges as the dishonest consciousness consists in its disregard for the “thing that matters” beyond its *own* self-interest. It is in the interest of each that the “thing that matters” be *their own* doing, and as such, “there is deception all around, because pure objectivity is not really the motive on any side, and yet something has been brought forth for all.”³⁵

The realization of an individual’s activity must take place within an objective world, never solely within the fortified bourgeois ego. Hegel “explains the dialectics of self-interest and in particular [of] that false consciousness which persuades the individual to live in accordance with the principles of self-interest while in reality his selfish actions are necessarily connected with the labours of others and so flow into the stream of social, socially useful species-activity of mankind.”³⁶ In the *Phenomenology*, the sociality of all individual activity occurs in its explicit form through the contradictions of the individual positing an abstract universality that cannot sustain the truth of its claim. The reified structure of its claim is revealed in the disparity between the individual and society, a chasm that remains even as the two collapse into one another. In this process, the rigidity of the individual and the universality of its assertion are transcended as false conceptions of self-expression. The goal of ethical life becomes the transcendence of the self-sufficiency of the individual, the attainment of a justified sociality in which the freedom of others becomes *admittedly* necessary for the freedom of the individual, as a freedom of a reciprocal recognition. While such a development does not occur explicitly at the conclusion of this section in the *Phenomenology*, the advancement can be heralded as a substantial move in this direction. “It is the universal, which is a *being* only as this activity which is the activity of each and all.”³⁷ Indeed, when rationality is no longer conceived of as an impersonal and individual activity, but rather as an actual mode of institutionalized reflective social practice, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* has entered the realm of Spirit.

Conclusion

Since Alexandre Kojève’s lectures on Hegel in the 1930s, followed by the work of Jean Hyppolite and Jean-Paul Sartre, it has been common for Marxists, seeking to solve the riddle of the dialectic under Hegel’s “mystified shell,” to focus attention almost irresistibly on the “Lordship and Bondage” section of the *Phenomenology*. Any Hegelian clues for

³⁵ Lauer, *Reading*, p. 196.

³⁶ Lukács, *Young Hegel*, p. 481.

³⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §417.

grasping the forms of domination within the capitalist mode of production, specifically that form of domination embodied in estranged labor, were thought to be found within the master-servant relation and the variant of alienation contained therein. However, if the Marxian turn towards Hegel is less concerned with extracting sociological archetypes of conflicting class interests than it is with unearthing the historically specific ontology of social being constitutive of the production and exchange relationships of capitalism, as well as the necessary forms of reified consciousness associated with this ontology, then less tattered sections of the *Phenomenology* offer hitherto neglected conceptual resources and insight that have not received the attention they deserve. It has been the aim of the present work to approach such sections, specifically “Sense-Certainty” and “The Spiritual Realm of Animals and Deception,” with the intention of demonstrating that the structures laid out in the *Phenomenology* offer conceptual groundwork for the critique of reified consciousness. This was accomplished by first explicating the phenomenon of reification from both an objectivist and subjectivist perspective. It was shown that the truth of reified social existence consists in the oscillation between the two perspectives, the former as a “personification of things” wherein an ahistorical objective and alien world imposes its structures upon the latter’s alternatively subjectivist individual, riddled with anxiety over the world’s intrusion into its own egoism. Such pathological modes of existence become expressive of reified consciousness grounded in an immediacy that is structurally prohibited from grasping its own mediated composition of itself and its object, and in the diminution of social activity into an aggregate of competitive self-interests.

To interpret the *Phenomenology* as a critique of reification admittedly poses numerous problems. Most glaring is the suggestion that the conditions of reification themselves are capable of being extracted out of logical dynamics independent from the historical specificities of a society dominated by commodity production. The practical overcoming of reification cannot take place within the abstract categories of its theoretical apprehension, but within the concrete movement of class struggle and in the self-abolition of the proletariat as the class of capital.³⁸ Reification is not merely a mistaken choice of philosophic commitment. Merely coming to comprehend any calcified epistemological

³⁸ Perhaps here it should be noted that it would be highly questionable to rely too heavily on the *path* of consciousness through the *Phenomenology* as an instructive model that points beyond capitalism. Of course, the general Hegelian lessons of determinate negation and the immanence of the dialectical method are decisive insofar as they methodologically illustrate the fact that it is only the contradictory conditions of the capital-labor relation itself are addressed by taking this path, while the relation’s abolition is not guaranteed in the production of communism. Nevertheless, the present thesis holds that the different *moments* of the *Phenomenology* instantiate historically specific conditions of reified social life. This, by itself, does not necessitate that the *transitions* between those moments of the *Phenomenology* in similar fashion offer exemplary elucidation of how to overcome reification. The latter line of thought would admittedly require a substantial amount of political economy that is largely absent from both the present paper and, in a sense, from Hegel’s philosophy. This does not however prevent us from grasping Hegel’s thought as giving apt philosophical expression to real historical problems.

standpoint as erroneous does not mean the practical dissolution of reification, but consists at best only in a speculative formulation of the extent to which reified consciousness has its origins not just in the concrete developments of the commodity social form, but also in the foundations of modern philosophical thought, which have enabled bourgeois thought to gain abstract universal ascendancy.³⁹ The experience traversed within the *Phenomenology* offers philosophical representation of the reification constitutive of the capitalist mode of production. Hegelian philosophy thus stands as a prescient critique of the reified consciousness necessary to the capitalist mode of production, a form of consciousness structurally seized and repetitively compelled to remain within the categories of immediate experience, apprehending only the most abstract forms of objective and subjective being. Hegel philosophically reconciles thought to its own present while simultaneously, through an immanently critical methodology, pointing beyond that present.⁴⁰ It is in this manner that Hegel considered philosophy's systematic character to be emblematic of its own historical moment, while at the same time cultivating the germ of its own overcoming.

It can be argued that each moment of the *Phenomenology* demonstrates a methodological homology to the pathologies of reification. Within the successive failures of consciousness one finds the different aspects of reified consciousness, which appear as a chronic disorder of experience. In this way, the book can be seen as a catalogue of deception.⁴¹ Lukács will go so far as to state that “if we look a little deeper, we see that [Hegel's] true subject is the phenomenological dialectic of the commodity-relation, and that he is investigating both its objective nature and its subjective implications in its relation to the consciousness of man in capitalist society.”⁴² Insofar as capitalism formalizes empty abstractions and fossilizes analytic oppositions as a *modus operandi* of consciousness, Hegel's philosophy continues to anticipate the critique of political economy. In the words of Terry Pinkard, “the questions those ‘German’ philosophers asked themselves during this period remain our own questions.”⁴³

³⁹ Is it for this reason that Lukács has been most apt in illustrating the extent to which Hegel can be grasped as a critic of reification, and that “it becomes plain, in short, how Hegelian dialectics were able to serve as the immediate prototype of materialist dialectics.” (Lukács, *Young Hegel*, p. 553)

⁴⁰ Lukács describes modern philosophy, culminating in the work of Hegel, as unable “to do more than provide a complete intellectual copy and the *a priori* deduction of bourgeois society. It is only the *manner* of this deduction, namely the dialectical method that points beyond bourgeois society.” (Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 148)

⁴¹ “In reviewing these failures, we notice the reoccurring dualisms that block experience by separating the subjects from their objectives. At each level, mind reaches a state where it cannot know its objects or interact with others.” (Jeanne Schuler, *Logics of Theoretical and Practical Reason in G. W. F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* [Doctoral dissertation, Washington University, 1983], p. 5)

⁴² Lukács, *Young Hegel*, p. 500.

⁴³ Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 2.