

The Unhappy Consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: a Secular Reading

by

Sahand Farivar

**A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph**

**In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Philosophy**

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Sahand Farivar, January, 2018

ABSTRACT

THE UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*: A SECULAR READING

Sahand Farivar
University of Guelph, 2018

Advisor:
Dr. John Russon

In this thesis, I present the unhappy consciousness as it appears in the “Freedom of Self-Consciousness” section of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* in a secular light. The unhappy consciousness is the inward search for some stable, eternal existence, a search typically understood in light of the religious person’s search for God. Whereas Hegel’s presentation of this experience is wrapped up in religious language, I will argue that the significance of his argument is more universal, and I will interpret the unhappy consciousness in a secular fashion. The thesis proceeds exegetically. First, I introduce the unhappy consciousness by discussing the experiences of stoicism and scepticism, highlighting how the unhappy consciousness is a deeper experience implicit in both of these. Then, I trace the unhappy consciousness itself through the development of its first and second forms. And third, I discuss the third form of the unhappy consciousness, suggesting that the human condition, defined as the unending, discontented search for eternity, is fundamentally tragicomic.

Table of Contents

Introducion	1
Chapter 1: Stoicism, Scepticism and the Unhappy Consciousness	7
I. Stoicism.....	7
II. Scepticism.....	12
III. The Unhappy Consciousness.....	17
Chapter 2: The First Two Forms of Hegel’s Unhappy Consciousness	24
I. The Unhappy Consciousness as a Secular Event.....	24
II. The Unhappy Consciousness as a Whole.....	28
III. The Formless Unchangeable.....	40
IV. The Incarnate Unchangeable.....	45
a. Devotion.....	49
b. Desire and Work.....	54
c. Wretchedness.....	63
Chapter 3: The Third Form of the Unhappy Consciousness	76
I. The Third Form of the Unhappy Consciousness.....	76
II. Comedy and Tragedy.....	81
Conclusion	84
Bibliography	88

Introduction

The present work is a thesis on the section of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* entitled "Freedom of Self-Consciousness." In this introduction, I accomplish three tasks in order to frame the current work in Hegel's project. First, I discuss Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a whole and what it means to engage in dialectical phenomenology. Second, I present the theme of the section entitled "Freedom of Self-Consciousness." And third, I present the chapters of the thesis, briefly describing the character of each, finishing with a comment on the distinctive contribution I take myself to be making.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a study beginning with the phenomenon of consciousness, a study that thereafter investigates ways of relating to one's world implicit in consciousness. The event of consciousness is twofold. On the one hand, to try to identify what consciousness is, one could only point to the things, situations, beliefs and other entities that consciousness is conscious of. But on the other hand, though consciousness is itself defined in terms of those objects, it is not reducible to any of them. Consciousness is, therefore, both in the world of its object and nowhere to be found therein, both defined in terms of its essence and not itself reducible to that essence.

Hegel's *Phenomenology* is a study of the stages that a human being may go through given this twofold event of consciousness. On the one hand, human beings define themselves in

terms of particular notions, ends and objects, and any stage of human life will be understood in terms of this objective self-definition. But on the other hand, we repeatedly discover that despite our dedication to a certain project or endeavor, we cannot find ourselves therein, and we move from one stage to the next, defining ourselves in terms of a project and losing our entire self-identity when we find that that project cannot fulfil us, undergoing crises of self-definition and seeking, as if by a compulsion, a new vocation, a new conception of what the world is and of ourselves, entering a new stage of our lives.

The *Phenomenology* is a catalogue of these stages, a series of possible self-definitions implicit in the event of consciousness, in the event of a human being both defined in terms of but irreducible to their world. Because consciousness defines itself in terms of its object, all that a study of consciousness is is an observation of the attempt to relate to this object, an attempt that consciousness naturally undertakes: if consciousness is the certainty that it knows sense-objects, it feels the imperative on its own to try really to know in terms of sensation, or if, at a later stage, self-consciousness is the certainty that self-definition comes from relating to other self-consciousnesses, then self-consciousness is compelled to seek others to find itself in them, to recognize them. The study of consciousness is, then, a twofold study of consciousness testing itself against its own claims about what its essence is and thereby what it itself is by trying as a natural imperative to engage a world defined as this or that kind of object.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is, then, a study of the stages of consciousness. We as phenomenologists observe consciousness test itself against its own claim about what its world and its own self are: we watch consciousness test its certainty against what truly happens when that certainty is taken seriously. Each stage is, then, its own dramatic unfolding of a character, a mask of consciousness, so to speak, driven by its own impulse to relate to itself and its essence.

Each of these unfoldings is a stage, and in each of these dramas consciousness learns something about itself: whether the way it defined itself and its world is adequate to the way the world is when lived in according to that self-definition.

In the chapter on consciousness, Hegel is concerned with how consciousness relates to itself defined in terms of its world or in terms of an object, whereas in the chapter on self-consciousness, the focus of my work, Hegel investigates the self that seeks itself in objectivity and what this self must be. He begins by discussing desire and recognition, two ways of seeking the self that relate to other entities, either objects in the world or other selves in the world. And in the final section, the section entitled “the freedom of self-consciousness,” Hegel investigates the self of consciousness understood as free, that is, not determined by or reducible to any kind of entity in the world. In this thesis, I will study this particular experience Hegel describes as “the freedom of self-consciousness.” Hegel argues that our self-consciousness as free beings develops through three stages, which he calls ‘stoicism,’ ‘scepticism,’ and ‘unhappy consciousness.’ My concern in this work is primarily a description of the lattermost of these experiences, the unhappy consciousness.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with stoicism and scepticism, and how the latter experience is implicitly the unhappy consciousness. Stoicism is self-consciousness’s self-definition as freedom, as that which is not determined by the way the world presents itself to consciousness, but rather determined by the will and attitudinal freedom of self-consciousness itself. This stoical attitude is founded on withdrawal and indifference, on a consciousness that sees itself only as an effect of the force of freedom: that is to say, no matter how the world presents itself to consciousness, consciousness is free to determine its own attitude to this world by its own way of thinking. Scepticism is, then, the actual unfolding of the stoical worldview,

one whereby consciousness, immersed in the world of flux and vanishing, takes a negative attitude to its world, wavering or hovering in vanishing unconvincing truths, certain that they are only effects of a more fundamental, groundless freedom of thought. Yet this self-definition of scepticism, that everything it encounters is really nothing, is a contradictory one: having pronounced that what exists *is*, scepticism must admit that, despite the vanishing of particularity in the universal freedom of thought, the fact of existence or of the unity of experience remains indubitably. And this implicit structure of scepticism leads to the dual-natured unhappy consciousness, whereby consciousness aims to discover something that exists by comporting inwardly to unchangeable being, despite its own immersion in and belonging to a world of dubious particularity and vanishing, changeable becoming.

The second chapter is a description of the unhappy consciousness, the individual who attempts to find his self by turning inward, and the unhappy consciousness does turn inward, because it is aware, out of scepticism, that although the freedom of thought is not part of the world that consciousness belongs to, it is nonetheless integral to consciousness's own experience of the world. At first, this consciousness seeks unchangeable being nowhere in the world to which it belongs, only to find that eternity cannot be found there in pure aloneness away from the world, and that its striving away from itself in the world is really a striving towards self-annihilation. Second, this consciousness seeks eternity in the world, as if that inward, eternal fact of existence could be found in another present body, an incarnate unchangeable. Yet, again, in the threefold progression of devotion, desire and work, and wretchedness, this attempt to escape oneself into another thing to find existence therein ends in impossibility, the impossibility of escaping oneself and the revelation that to try is to seek self-annihilation. Finally, consciousness

awakens to the third form of the unhappy consciousness, the admission that unchangeable being is not alien to the world that consciousness belongs to, but is concomitant with that world.

The third chapter is a comment upon the third form of the unhappy consciousness. First, I describe what it may mean for changeable becoming, the world of time and vanishing particularity to which consciousness belongs, to be concomitant with the eternal, unchanging fact of existence, an attribute located in the very heart of consciousness itself. And second, I make my own contribution to understanding what this third form might be: if the unhappy consciousness itself, this implicitly self-annihilative inward striving for an alien eternity, is an attribute of eternity, then the stories that resound eternally as reflections of these motions of unhappy consciousness, motions we are, are fundamentally comic and tragic.

The distinctive contribution of the current work is my attempt to take on Hegel's discussion of the unhappy consciousness in a secularized language. I consider my analysis valuable for two reasons. First, it is an impulse to take Hegel's method seriously: the *Phenomenology* is a spiritual recollection of consciousness through the stages it has lived through, an organization of these stages into coherent dramatizations. In order to recollect an event, the event must have happened, and if the unhappy consciousness is to be relevant at all in the light of phenomenological recollection, if it is to be a meaningful description of anyone's experience, then it must exceed the religious imagery through which it is described in Hegel's text, especially in an age that is no longer dominated by this imagery. And second, this work is valuable insofar as it answers a demand in the current literature.¹ The unhappy consciousness is a section of the *Phenomenology* only recently being interpreted beyond the context of Medieval

¹ For my discussion of the use of secular language, see chapter 2. For Russon's call to philosophers reading Hegel, see Russon, *Infinite Phenomenology*, 142. For Burbidge's statement regarding the trans-historical repeatability of the experiences of consciousness, particularly Hegel's unhappy consciousness, see John Burbidge, "Unhappy Consciousness in Hegel: An Analysis of Medieval Catholicism?"

Catholicism, and this thesis is an attempt to further explore the section beyond those boundaries, as many of the other sections have been explored already.² More than demonstrating the persistence of the unhappy consciousness as a problem that inhabits every other stage of the phenomenology,³ I have tasked myself with seeing how the section itself, as it is presented in the “freedom of self-consciousness” chapter of the *Phenomenology*, exceeds the phrasing of religious terms and is rather a familiar and repeatable experience.

We now turn to the first chapter, a description of stoicism and scepticism, leading up to an outline of the unhappy consciousness in general.

² For example, Kojève’s analysis of lordship and bondage

³ See Wahl, “Mediation, Separation and Negativity” for a discussion of the unhappy consciousness as a whole and its movement as characteristic of the entire *Phenomenology*, and see Russon’s *Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology*, Chapter 9, “Spirit and Skepticism” for the extension of the problem of the unhappy consciousness to other sections of the *Phenomenology*, particularly culture and morality.

Chapter 1: Stoicism, Scepticism and the Unhappy Consciousness

In this chapter, I observe consciousness test itself in light of self-conscious freedom. I begin with a discussion of the standpoint of stoicism, the self-definition of self-consciousness as the determining agent of its own behavior in the world. Next, I discuss scepticism, a deeper experience of the stoical worldview, the wavering over unsurety and indeterminacy implied by the certainty that what is encountered is only ever the freedom of thought. And finally, I present the unhappy consciousness, the inward search for existence, the theme to be taken up in the second chapter of the present work.

I. Stoicism

Stoicism is a common, everyday feature of human experience. It is the definition of the self as free, that is to say, as not determined by the world and as able to choose its own approach to the world. The human being has choices and these choices are irreducible to the way the world moves the individual in one way or another; rather, the individual is tasked with thinking through how they will behave, act and navigate their world according to their own will. This position is both our common experience and the historical movement of stoicism inasmuch as both assert that the individual according to their own free will – that is, their own thought and decision – must decide how to take themselves up in the world. Moreover, any position that admits some

free choice to the human being is, in a sense, borrowing from the stoical position. Free choice requires that the human being have some sense of themselves that comes from only themselves and is not reducible to some affection in the world; this sense of oneself where a groundless choice can occur is thought. Here, what is being tested is the position that the human being is, by definition, that freedom of thought, a worldview most accurately adequated by the stoic.

Stoicism is self-consciousness defined as the freedom of thought. In this section, I first present the stoical worldview, moving on to describe how the stoical consciousness undergoes its attempt to live according to this worldview, finally to finish with the transition into the actual experience of freedom, scepticism, the theme of the section following this one.

Stoicism is the freedom of thought. Hegel writes, “In thinking, I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me *essential* being, is in undivided unity with my being-for-myself; and my activity in conceptual thinking is a movement within myself” (197). He writes further that, “[Stoicism’s] principle is that consciousness is a being that *thinks*, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such” (198). Stoicism is the certainty that thinking, behavior and attitude are self-determining; it is thereby the certainty that no matter how the world is presented, I have, by the freedom of thought, the self-will to receive it in a way that I choose and to act in it the way that I choose. The event of thinking is, for Hegel, the fact that the human being is not moved to act or behave by something other than itself, as it had been in previous sections culminating in the event of human bondage; rather, the human being relates to a given world according to behaviors they have chosen, that is to say, decisions that emanate from nowhere but their own will and inclination. How the particularities of the world appear to me is how I have received them, how I have decided they will be; that is

to say, the world is given, but only in light of my attitude to it. This self-determining reception results in the view that what is being communed with when objects are encountered is myself; they are revealed only in the light of my own thinking, and so it is my attitude, how I have chosen according to my own self-will to receive the world, that determines how I encounter that world and behave in it.

Hyppolite stresses that stoicism is a twofold unity. He writes, “On the one hand, the I must acquire substance and genuinely become its own object; on the other hand, it must show that the being of life is not valid for it as absolute other, but is itself.”⁴ On the one hand, the ‘I’ is present in the world, and on the other hand, what the world presents to the thinking self cannot determine this self. Stoicism requires both of these sides, since thought determines itself in the world and the world is presented to this self-determination of thought.

Self-consciousness’s self-definition is the founding basis of its subsequent experience of its world and its self. This self-defining freedom is the principle of the stoical character. As John Russon explains, “The stoic finds her own sense of self-determination to be the foundation of meaning, the criterion by reference to which the significance of appearances can be judged.”⁵ The stoical position takes its own act of free thinking to be the only way an object can have meaning for it: all given appearances demand an attitudinal response that the stoical consciousness is free to choose for itself.

The immediately self-determining character of stoicism, however, is founded upon a negative indifference, or a withdrawal. Hegel writes, “The freedom of self-consciousness is *indifferent* to natural existence and has *therefore let this equally go free*: the *reflection* is a

⁴ *Genesis and Structure*, 180.

⁵ *Infinite Phenomenology*, 128.

twofold one” (200). In order to be self-defining, the stoical consciousness must not be related to any object that determines it from without. Stoicism understands the foundation of its experience to be not anything in the world; rather, everything that is received is by a freedom of thinking that chooses how it will react according to its own will. The freedom of thought, then, is founded upon an original indifference to the world, a negation that has let consciousness’s reception of the world and all of its particularity be something determined by self-consciousness’s freedom, which thinks by way of its own self-definition, indifferent to and withdrawn from the world itself. Hyppolite writes, “free thought remains formal here, formal in the sense that having disengaged the essence of pure thought from all the differences within life, it is able to surmount all those differences and rediscover in them the essentiality of thought.”⁶

Stoicism is the freedom of thought not only of immediate self-communion – not only of a reception of the world by self-determining thought – but a negative withdrawal from the world. Hegel writes, “*Withdrawn* from existence only to itself, [stoicism] has not there achieved its consummation as absolute negation of that existence” (201). Stoicism, because of its twofold reflection – the particularity of the world that it receives and the freedom of thought, of self-consciousness’s self-definition that happens indifferently to such a reception – is a worldview that throws consciousness into a kind of dividedness: immersed in the world, receiving it, the stoic knows that the real determining force, thinking, must occur withdrawn from and indifferent to, not to be found anywhere in, the world of particularity received and encountered.

As Harris explains, the stoical indifference of free thinking is always formal, logical and universally the same for everyone insofar as it leaves out the world of finite life. He states, “This self-repulsion is, to begin with, quite universal, i.e. formal. I repel myself as being-for-myself

⁶ *Genesis and Structure*, 183.

from being-in-itself in general, i.e., I distinguish myself as the thinking subject, from the realm of thought as the objective element of truth. I am the logician; truth is the logical.”⁷ Because stoical freedom is founded on withdrawal, the freedom of its thinking is free from the finite life that the stoic participates in: the objective element of truth does not affect the procedures of this thinking, and so this thinking is purely formal and logical. Like any abstract thought, stoical thinking is predicated on principles that emanate from nowhere other than its own axioms, and so remains formal and logical.

Such, then, is the stoical character of self-conscious freedom: from a standpoint indifferent to and withdrawn from the world, stoicism is freedom of thought that has already determined the way that the world to which consciousness belongs and in which consciousness sees itself in terms of has been revealed. This twofold character of thinking, immersion in a world already determined by freedom’s self-definition, the difference between life as a particular consciousness and the unconscious freedom of thought, is the concept of stoicism.

Stoicism, however, is in a way disingenuous. The deeper experience of stoicism is scepticism: if the world can only have meaning in light of free, undetermined thinking, then there are no fixed or immutable truths, and the world is never present as it is in-itself. For the stoic, consciousness is indifferent to and withdrawn from the world, and the stoic takes thinking to be primarily this withdrawn self-determination. Yet, for the stoic, because the world can only appear in light of thinking, thinking is active in the world as well. Because the stoic is aware that the only way for the world to have meaning for it is if the world is framed in the freedom of thought, the world cannot be presented to it without already appearing within the context of thinking. The world is only present in the context of thinking, not only demanding responses by

⁷ *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 384.

the stoical consciousness withdrawn from the world, but in the very way the world appears at all. Put otherwise, if the world is a reflection of my will, then my will is something deeper than just my conscious choices; rather, it must be there in the way that things appear to me. Things, therefore, are unknown as they are, since they are revealed only in the light of thinking. We must, then, investigate a deeper experience of the freedom of thought, scepticism, whereby consciousness is aware that the freedom of thought is the fundamental basis of the experience of the world, wherein thinking is regarded as the activity whereby nothing in the world can be absolutely – that is, unchangeably and eternally – true in experience.

II. Scepticism

Scepticism, Hegel argues, is what happens when consciousness is truly rigorous in its attempt to live out the certainty of its freedom of thought.⁸ Hegel writes, “*Scepticism* is the realization of that of which Stoicism was only the Notion, and is the actual experience of what the freedom of thought is” (202). In this section, I first present the experience of scepticism; that is, I present the kind of self-consciousness that defines itself and its world sceptically. And second I show how the internal contradiction of sceptical thinking can reveal consciousness in light of a new stage, that of the unhappy consciousness.

Stoicism is the freedom of thought withdrawn from the world and determining the self that consciousness, as a particular being in the world, projects itself in the world in terms of.

Stoicism is the thinking that projects itself freely in the world: scepticism is the comprehension

⁸ It is wrong to assert, as Kojeve does, that “Hegel says that Man abandons Stoicism because, as a Stoic, he is *bored*” (53). Rather, the relationship between stoicism and scepticism is between the concept of freedom, what freedom says it is, stoical self-determination, and the actual experience of freedom, the groundlessness of all fixed truth and morality. Scepticism is, as Russon puts it, the “deeper experience of freedom” (*Infinite Phenomenology*, 128). For a more expansive discussion, see Russon’s *Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology*, chapter 7, footnote 19.

that if all thinking is self-determining, then those given objects, too, are revealed only in the light of the freedom of thought, thereby negating any sense of how they might be in themselves. The sceptic is doubtful of the ground of things, and so the world of the sceptic is one unknown in its origins. Immersed in the world, consciousness is a particular body in a strange dream,⁹ a dream that is free thinking but has already revealed the world prior to consciousness's particular immersion: for the sceptic, the freedom of thought is the unconscious force that is nowhere in the world, yet gives the world to the particular consciousness who accepts and understands itself therein. Consequently, the distinction between an external world and a free, withdrawn realm of thought can no longer be upheld for the sceptic. As Hyppolite puts it, scepticism "penetrates all the determinations of experience and of life; it shows their nothingness, dissolving them in self-consciousness."¹⁰ Truth, for the sceptic, is nothing in itself because it is only the self-conscious freedom of thought; in this sense, the real force and experience of the freedom of thought is the negation of any particular truth.

Scepticism is, then, characterized as the vanishing of the truth as something that determines consciousness, a vanishing that occurs because the origin of truth itself is the freedom of thought. Hegel writes, "What vanishes is the determinate element, or the moment of difference, which, whatever its mode of being and whatever its source, sets itself up as something fixed and immutable" (204). Everything, for the sceptic, the very way that the world and consciousness are, is only what it is by way of a free, groundless adoption of whatever essential principles happen to be adopted: the truth, then, as something definitive, something that

⁹ Since the freedom of thought is the unity of both the self and the world, consciousness's self in the world is a particular vanishing entity, a body, and the world is not the thinking of its own body, but is rather the thinking of a self that is somehow other than this body, a dream that seems to be somebody else's.

¹⁰ *Genesis and Structure*, 184.

could provide any ground for life, vanishes;¹¹ all determinate origins vanish in the world of the sceptic, who themselves remains immersed in a vanishing world, a world determined not by anything in particular but by the universal, groundless force of the freedom of thought, a force that was once, as in stoicism, self-willed, but now is the way that the world itself cannot be declared to have any fixed origin.

For the sceptic, every truth that is present is a truth that equally not be present, and so the world loses its potential to have a fixed essence. Instead, everything wavers in groundlessness. The negative principle for the sceptic is a claim about any and all truths presented to it: that we cannot claim that these are unchanging or eternal, because their origin is unavailable to us, because they are revealed in the context of our own thinking. What things are *in themselves* vanishes, and scepticism is the position that posits both this vanishing of all things stable and our hovering over the unknown origins of the very truths that guide our lives.

As Russon puts it, “In scepticism... freedom is recognized not as the source of meaning, but as the source of meaninglessness.”¹² (*Infinite Phenomenology*, 128). Rather than, like the stoic, seeing freedom as the self-determination of thought that communes with itself through the world, the sceptic sees in the freedom of thought the vanishing groundlessness of any recourse to fixed and immutable truth: the concept of freedom is self-determining meaning, but the deeper experience of it is a confounding world with no proper basis for any truth or morality. Or, as Harris explains, it is this point, the point at which the freedom of thought acts in the world by negating all particularity, by showing sense-experience not to be grounded by anything but

¹¹ On the one hand, this vanishing is passive: it is the vanishing caused by the freedom of thought. But on the other hand, it is active: the freedom of thought that can think away all particular distinctions is not consciousness own particular will, but a sense of self that exceeds all particularity.

¹² *Infinite Phenomenology*, 128.

thought, that the freedom of thought is realized and the position of stoicism inverted as scepticism. Harris writes,

But in setting thought free from finite experience, the Sceptics inverted the Stoic position directly. They showed that in identifying the standard of “absolute knowledge” the Stoics had proved that we can know *nothing* absolutely....

“Perfected thinking” simply annihilates the “manifoldly determinate” world of sense-experience, and “in this manifold shaping of life” freedom of thought becomes just the shape of “the real negative.”¹³

If everything is thought, as the stoics say, then the world cannot present us with any absolute truths, and as the sceptics uphold, the freedom of thought becomes negative and real.

But this fundamental dubiousness of all truth is not a lack of a worldview; all truth is vanishing because of the governance of the unconscious, unworldly determining force of the groundless – or self-grounding – freedom of thought. Hegel writes, “The sceptical self-consciousness thus experiences in the flux of all that would stand secure before it its own freedom as given and preserved by itself” (205). All truth is vanishing and holds no sway, but what remains as a result is the certitude of the originative force of thought. It seems as if nothing can be convincing for the sceptic, but this cynicism about particular truths is in fact more than simply relativistic or cynical negativity: the sceptical worldview holds a more fundamental awareness of the groundless freedom that determines for itself the principles and truths adopted by the consciousness that understands itself in terms of the world to which it belongs.

Scepticism is thus a shifting between the certitude of the freedom of thought and the immersion in unconvincing truths. Hegel writes, “It pronounces an absolute vanishing, but the

¹³ *Hegel's Ladder: Volume 1*, 389-390.

pronouncement *is*, and this consciousness is the vanishing that is pronounced” (205). On the one hand, the sceptic claims that the truths that govern its life are nothing in themselves, hold no legislative sway for it, because what underlies all truth is the groundless freedom of thought.¹⁴ Scepticism loses any sense of an external world that exists in itself. On the other hand, the sceptic must admit the existence of those vanishing, unreal particularities as features of its own experience. By pronouncing the vanishing of some feature of the world, the sceptic denies the truth of what he assumes to exist for the sceptic himself: “[Scepticism] affirms the nullity of seeing, hearing, etc., yet it is itself seeing, hearing, etc. It affirms the nullity of ethical principles, and lets its conduct be governed by these very principles” (205). Scepticism oscillates between these two contradictory claims: the vanishing of all existence and the fact that those vanishing realities exist for the sceptic, that they must be pronounced to exist by the sceptic in order to be denied. It is the sceptical position to say about any truth that this truth cannot be called a fixed or immutable truth because it is revealed in the context of our own thinking, yet even this position, the position of the most radical doubt, already must admit the existence of what it doubts, making the fact of existence a feature of the sceptic’s experience that is unchanging, undoubtable and eternal.

Throughout this thesis, I use the term “existence” to refer to something that is in itself, that is to say, something that *is* on its own terms, indubitably and without dependence on something else: because existence *is* without doubt and in every case, it is associated with such

¹⁴ The way are typically acquainted with scepticism is through its argumentative approach. Harris stresses the manner in which sceptical argumentation achieves this supposed nullification of real differences. He states that “the philosophical technique by which we stay on the sidelines, and do not get involved, is the establishment of perfect antinomies, equally weighty and seemingly compelling arguments on opposite sides” (393-4). One may find, even, the modern realization of the sceptical experience of the world in the culture of thought experiments and disagreements on the basis hypotheticals, as if the fact that something else could be the case in a hypothetical universe nullifies what one must admit has already occurred to argue for its nullity at all.

terms as eternity, unchangeableness and stability. On the one hand, according to the sceptic, existence is doubtable and cannot be said to belong to any particular truth: everything that *is* is unknown in its origins, and so nothing exists with certainty and there is no guaranteed or stable locus for truth. On the other hand, the sceptic implicitly has a sense of existence, the very fact that whatever is doubted must be presumed in the first place as an element in the experience of the sceptic who doubts: there is a sense of eternal, unchanging existence implicit even in scepticism. Later I will describe how this implicit sense of existence, for the unhappy consciousness, is made explicit and revealed to be the inward, stable and unchangeable being that the unhappy consciousness seeks to forge a connection with. And finally, in the third chapter of my work, existence is attributed to the unhappy consciousness itself.

In sum, scepticism is the worldview that posits that, because an external reality cannot be supposed to exist, because all truth is mediated by the freedom of thought of the individual, the world is only a vanishing, ethereal nothingness. This claim that the sceptic makes about himself, however, insufficiently captures what is going on for the sceptic. Though there is no external guarantee of the existence of things, as the stoic had still supposed there was, there is still the claim that those particularities exist: they do not exist entirely in themselves, but the sceptic must admit that they do exist for the sceptic in order to thereafter deny them. Existence moves inward, to a region not outside the sceptic in some external reality, in truth for consciousness and in other modes of experience for the previous forms of self-consciousness, but rather in the sceptic's own immersion in those realities. Scepticism cannot remain indifferent to a world of vanishing realities because, *for the sceptic*, the world indubitably exists.

III. The Unhappy Consciousness

These two sides of scepticism, the freedom of thought at the origin of the identities of all particularities and the consciousness who is immersed in this vanishing and unconvincing world, are, when seen to be the two sides of a single consciousness, the contradiction that is the unhappy consciousness. Hegel writes, “Scepticism’s lack of thought about itself must vanish, because it is in fact *one* consciousness which contains within itself these modes” (206). In this section I outline briefly the character of the unhappy consciousness, highlighting the manner in which it is the sceptical consciousness seen as one internally contradictory consciousness.

The unhappy consciousness is the discontent that turns away from its self and its world into itself in order to find some sense of existence that is pure, unchanging and eternal. It is the disposition that wants inward and worldless peace and repose despite its own attachment to the world; it is the disposition that tries to find meaning in its life somewhere other than this life itself, for life itself, an immersion in vanishing, changeable, temporal particularity, cannot on its own exist, yet in the unhappy consciousness’s very searching for something other than the world to which it belongs, this consciousness is stalked by the shadow of that world, tied to the changeable becoming it strives to negate. The task of this section is to investigate how the unhappy consciousness, this negating of the world to which consciousness belongs for the sake of an inward, worldless, unchanging peace is the deeper experience of scepticism, and how the unhappy consciousness is the condition that more fully captures the real significance of the sceptic’s condition.

The insufficiency of scepticism results in the experience of a deeper stage of consciousness, the unhappy consciousness. Scepticism understands itself as the negation of all worldly existence, that is to say, whatever can be said to exist is doubtable and cannot be made certain in any regard, cannot be guaranteed to exist absolutely. Scepticism is an insufficient

description of its own experience because it must pronounce the existence of those things *for it* that it thereafter denies as existing externally or in themselves; the fact of existence as an unchanging feature of the sceptic's own experience of the world must exist. Implicit in the sceptic's own claim that there is no stable, unchanging existence is the assertion that the fact of the sceptic's own experience of the world is stable, unchanging and extant. Emerging out of scepticism, the unhappy consciousness reveals for himself the features of the sceptic's experience that the sceptic fails to make about his own worldview. The world of particularity, the world to which the individual belongs, is only a vanishing reality: it is changeable becoming. The sceptic's only recourse is to a world of changeable becoming, a world that is only vanishing particularities. But because the sceptic must admit that their experience of the world exists indubitably in order to be in a dubious world, the fact of the sceptic's experience is not reducible to any of those vanishing particularities. There is a unity, now the unity of the sceptic's own experience, that exists in an unchanging way, even for the sceptic himself: this is unchangeable being, the fact of existence, implicit in the sceptical worldview, that is explicit in the self-conception of the unhappy consciousness.

Because any particular experience of the world is dubious, the worldly terms of consciousness's life cannot provide any meaning, any unchanging locus for truth. Rather, existence must lie somewhere within the very power of the sceptic to name the vanishing realities it is bound to: the sceptic doubts the existence of any external, worldly reality, but implicitly the sceptic must admit that internal to its very capacity to pronounce things, its own experience, is the unchanging unity of the fact of existence. The unhappy consciousness admits, then, this feature of the sceptic's experience that the sceptic does not see about himself: vanishing reality must exist and it must exist, not externally, but in reference to something

inward, some kind of power found in the very heart of the unhappy consciousness. This inward power is eternal, unchangeable being, an indivisible unity that must be posited alongside any particularity that is proclaimed to exist.¹⁵

The unhappy consciousness is, therefore, as Hegel describes, “one which knows that it is the dual consciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable, and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself.” (126). On the one hand, the unhappy consciousness is the sceptical pronouncement of the vanishing of existence in itself, of the meaninglessness of a reality that has no worldly or external guarantee. The unhappy consciousness is bound to and inextricably tied to this vanishing reality of changeable becoming because this reality exists for it, because vanishing reality cannot be claimed to be vanishing without first admitting it exists for the one who doubts that external existence. But on the other hand, insofar as that vanishing worldhood must exist for the sceptical consciousness, the unhappy consciousness is also the admission that existence lies somewhere inward, at once beyond those vanishing realities and the very fact of their existence, in unchangeable being. There is in the unhappy consciousness, explicitly, an internal contradiction, a duality in its own self-definition: unchangeable being or what things undoubtably are is located somewhere in consciousness’s own experience, but it is somewhere beyond consciousness’s immersion in a world of vanishing, changeable becoming.

¹⁵ Hegel describes this inward turn in several ways. First, in his critique of scepticism, he notes that the sceptic himself must pronounce the truths he thereafter doubts, meaning the fact of existence is undoubtable as a feature of the sceptic’s own capacity to pronounce (see paragraph 205 of the *Phenomenology* for Hegel’s discussion, or page 14 of this chapter for mine). And secondly, in the following paragraph, Hegel describes that the movement in scepticism between vanishing truths and the existence of those truths that are thereafter proclaimed as vanishing occurs, as unhappy consciousness, in *one* consciousness, that is, as a single consciousness that contains within itself both changeable becoming and unchangeable being (see paragraph 206 of the *Phenomenology*).

The unhappy consciousness is, therefore, the inward search for unchangeable being, for something that truly exists, a search that takes it away from the world of time and away from trying to find a ground in the external world, though it is this very world that it still tries to find the existence of. This locus of existence, this self-causing power that is the source of vanishing becoming, is somewhere inward, but it is also somewhere beyond the meaninglessness of particularity and worldhood. The unhappy consciousness is divided: it is sure that somewhere in its own self lies this source, the fact of existence or unchangeable being, but it is also cleft away from that existence, immersed in vanishing particularity and affection. It strives to turn away from the world, for it cannot be indifferent to existence, for it must admit, emerging out of the insufficiencies of scepticism, some sense of existence beyond changeable becoming, yet it cannot escape the world insofar as it knows that its very self belongs to the world: the unhappy consciousness is the experience of this internal contradiction between these two sides, the changeable becoming to which it belongs and the unchangeable being it feels the imperative to seek.

In sum, the implicit structure of scepticism is the unhappy consciousness. Any sceptic, any individual for whom the world is vanishing because there are no certain fixed, immutable realities, may claim to be himself a sceptic, but is really caught up in a deeper experience of himself: this deeper experience is the unhappy consciousness. The sceptic is more fundamentally caught up in the experience of trying to turn away from the world of changeable becoming, a world of given circumstances to which that individual belongs, and turn towards eternal existence and unchangeable being, unable to remove himself from his world but nonetheless impelled to strive inward to seek unchanging existence. In other words, the sceptical worldview, the one that claims that all worldly existence is doubtful because it is changing and becoming,

undergoes a deeper experience captured more sufficiently by unhappy consciousness: the sceptic doubts all worldly existence but does not see that it must seek existence in its own inwardness in order to effect this doubt, whereas the unhappy consciousness captures exactly this search for eternity outside of the world yet inward to consciousness itself. To say that nothing exists for sure is to initiate the search for how these dubious things exist for me anyways, and this wonder must look away from the things as they appear, for these are already deemed dubious: the doubt that anything can be known or engaged with as it is in-itself is, in a more fundamental way, the inward search, away from the world, for some eternity.

In this chapter, three stages of the life of consciousness have been discussed. First, we discussed stoicism, its worldview and its insufficiency: stoicism is the freedom to self-define withdrawn from and indifferent to the world, yet it does not see about itself that if it were always self-defining, then the very world cannot be anything in itself. Thus, stoicism is more sufficiently captured by scepticism. The sceptic understands the world as vanishing reality, as nothing in itself, and thereby doubts any claim to absolute existence. However, scepticism, too, insufficiently captures its own experience, for the world, in order to be doubted, must exist for the sceptic himself. The sceptic is the divided reality: at once negating the world of vanishing becoming, the sceptic must admit a sense of unchanging being, the fact of existence, a fact that is present somewhere in the sceptic's own experience of a meaningless world. Scepticism is, therefore, more adequately described by the unhappy consciousness's self-understanding. The unhappy consciousness is the inward search for unchangeable being, the search that turns away from the world of vanishing becoming to which consciousness is inextricably linked and turns inward, towards a worldless, eternal sense of being wherein the fact of existence, a fact

consciousness cannot be indifferent to but must strive for, may be found. As Hyppolite puts it, “Henceforth it will no longer be the case that an I will confront another I in the midst of universal life, or a master oppose a slave from outside; with stoicism and scepticism the two consciousnesses have become the split of self-consciousness within itself. Every self-consciousness is double for itself: it is God and man at the heart of a single consciousness.”¹⁶ We now turn to the more detailed description and observation of the unhappy consciousness.

¹⁶ *Genesis and Structure*, 189.

Chapter 2: The First Two Forms of Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness

This chapter is an exploration of the unhappy consciousness as found in the 'Freedom of Self-Consciousness' section of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. First, I comment on the projected contribution of my interpretation of the unhappy consciousness. Next, I present the unhappy consciousness, describing the sides of its divided self and prefacing how the unhappy consciousness develops. Third, I observe the first form of the unhappy consciousness, the unhappy consciousness that searches for existence at a remove from the world. And finally, I observe the second form of the unhappy consciousness, the attempt to find existence incarnated or in the world.

I. The Unhappy Consciousness as a Secular Event

In his section on the unhappy consciousness, Hegel makes constant allusion to experiences of religious life, specifically Medieval Catholicism, and the literature on the unhappy consciousness has interpreted the section in light of these allusions and references.¹ My current work, however, is an attempt to account for Hegel's unhappy consciousness in a secular language. The impulse to do so is born twofold from the fact that Hegel's account does exceed

¹ See, for example, Harris's or Hyppolite's account of the unhappy consciousness. Though they each admit that significance of the unhappy consciousness stretches beyond its religious expression, their interpretation of the section, alongside Hegel's, remains within this language.

its religious terminology, a terminology employed as an example, and that the unhappy consciousness is, therefore, a phenomenon that human beings experience both in and out of religious contexts. My contribution to the literature, then, is to expand the way we think about the unhappy consciousness by including secular examples alongside the religious examples, revealing how all of these belong to the broader experience of unhappy consciousness.

The prerogative to begin to interpret the unhappy consciousness secularly has already existed in Hegel literature. For John Burbidge, we must comprehend the unhappy consciousness in particular, but also Hegel's text as a whole, not in terms reducible to any historical stage in particular, even if Hegel makes allusions to a particular stage in history, but in the abstract language of dialectical phenomenology. Burbidge states, "[Hegel] uses an abstract vocabulary and analyzes the individual self-consciousness, isolated from its historical context, because the experience of the unhappy consciousness is universal."² The unhappy consciousness is a universal and repeatable experience – Burbidge cites Buddhism and Marxism as more examples of the historical event of unhappy consciousness – and so it is not reducible to a single happening, in this case Medieval Catholicism. Or, as Jean Wahl puts it, "Unhappy consciousness undoubtedly is manifested more clearly in a particular epoch, but it renews itself under one form or another in all epochs of the life of humanity."³ Likewise, according to Robert Solomon, the chapter on the unhappy consciousness is "first of all a study of self-consciousness's attempt to do away with one's worldly self and thus "freeing" oneself from worldly dependency and coming to

² John Burbidge, "Unhappy Consciousness in Hegel: An Analysis of Medieval Catholicism?" p. 80

³ Jean Wahl, "Mediation, Negativity, and Separation," trans. Christopher Fox and Leonard Lawlor in *Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, 4.

recognize oneself as at one with the whole of eternity,” meaning it is not “primarily about the nature of God or religion or immortality.”⁴

My current work will attempt, in response to this demand, to interpret and present the unhappy consciousness in such a way that exceeds but also includes this religious terminology. It will differ from previous literature by the inclusion of secular examples: it will extend beyond the literature that claims the unhappy consciousness exceeds religious expression but remains interpretatively within this language, and it will answer the prerogative of the literature that states that the unhappy consciousness must be read as an event that occurs in other human experiences. Religious terms that sufficiently capture the unhappy consciousness as a whole will be employed, but I will also adopt terms that stretch beyond religious application and into a more broad sense of unhappy consciousness, one that is not relegated to a single age of humanity but historically repeatable. Nonetheless, these terms will be defended as they appear.

In brief, the unhappy consciousness is the inward search for some stable, unchanging existence. It occurs when an individual human being feels the demand to discover who he is, yet finds in the world to which he belongs no trace of this underlying security. As a result, the draw that someone feels as the unhappy consciousness is to leave their world – to become solitary or free, whatever this may mean in its particular manifestation.⁵ This impulse persists both in the

⁴ Robert Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, 469. See also Findlay’s “Analysis” in Miller’s *Phenomenology*, p. 527, for a comment on the application of the unhappy consciousness beyond its religious terms. For an analysis of the unhappy consciousness that stresses its religious elements, see Quentin Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 140-148. But even Lauer is clear regarding the unhappy consciousness’s broader implications: “the point is not to describe medieval religion at all; it is to draw a picture of a sort of complete emptying of individual consciousness preparatory to moving to a level where consciousness can be aware of itself as regaining everything, provided it make the transition to *reason*” (*Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 147).

⁵ Throughout this essay, I have designated the term solitude to refer to that place, inward and outside the world, that consciousness feels the call to retreat into. The term “solitude,” I believe, sufficiently accents the fact that this place is outside the world of changeable material belonging but is also the true, genuine station of consciousness’s existence, where substance or an absolute locus of meaning might be found. Throughout, I will describe the unhappy consciousness in terms of this drive to be alone, taken in the negative, hermetic sense of leaving the world of one’s belonging.

Christian context, to draw near to God, a relation that can only occur by one's own decision of faith in one's own inward heart, and it also exists more broadly, as the impulse in general to discover what truly exists despite being confronted by a world that presents no trace of anything that remains impervious to time. This turning away from one's world in order to enter, by oneself, an eternal repose eventually reveals the inescapability of the world to which one belongs, that the sense of existence we seek is inextricably bound to the one we leave in order to engage the search.

In religious terms, the unhappy consciousness is the inward search for God, the human being called by his soul to drive away from his earthly body into a pure relation with God himself: there, in this pure relation, a decision of faith is made, a decision that only the individual himself can make. In the terms of this essay, the unhappy consciousness is the inward search for unchangeable being, the human being called by the natural imperative of consciousness to strive away from subjective changeableness into a pure relation with substantive unchangeableness; the unhappy consciousness is consciousness striving away from its unessential self, a self defined only in relation to another, and towards essential existence, towards what exists in itself. Rather than God, terms such as "unchangeable being," "stable existence," or "eternity" are adopted; rather than the typical Christian language of soul, I will refer to the call of the beyond or the drive or striving of consciousness towards something that might exist; and rather than body, including natural bodies and my own body, changeable becoming is adopted. Throughout the essay, these religious terms, though they will be highlighted at certain points where they appear in the literature, will be elided in favor of Hegel's more abstract, philosophical terminology.

II. The Unhappy Consciousness as a Whole

The unhappy consciousness is the inward search for stable existence. Unhappy consciousness begins when, out of scepticism, the self comes to the awareness that in its own aloneness – that is, in an inward region away from the world – is the original driving force of all of its particular, worldly projects. This is the same certitude learned by the stoic, yet after scepticism consciousness can no longer identify with the freedom of thought; rather, the unhappy consciousness identifies with its immersion in particularity and seeks the freedom of thought it is certain of as if this freedom were an alien eternity. This inescapable immersion in the world, developed in scepticism, is what keeps the unhappy consciousness from genuinely identifying with the freedom of thought, as the stoic had thought he could do. Unable anymore to hold any certitude about those particular projects, the unhappy consciousness turns away from itself and them into a solitary unworldliness where it may find what it is.

The self of the unhappy consciousness is the divided self: the unhappy consciousness is divided between unchangeable being and its changeable self. Hegel writes, “This new form is, therefore, one which *knows* that it is the dual consciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable, and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself” (206). Unchangeable being is the substance of the unhappy consciousness: it is that original impulse, that original drive that is present in all of the unhappy consciousness’s particular projects as their self-caused (or groundless) ground, what allows them to exist at all, but it is concealed in those projects. The unchangeable is what the unhappy consciousness retreats into inwardness to find: it is unchangeable because it is the indubitable, indivisible fact of existence; it is self-caused, both nothing in particular and the origin of the world – that is, what the world must make reference if we are to say that it exists at

all – and it is what the unhappy consciousness strives inwardly to find. The changeable self, on the other hand, is the self still immersed in particular worldly projects. The unhappy consciousness is aware that it believes none of these projects, that it is not sure why it pursues any of them, and that it will not be sure until it discovers the unchangeable drive that undergirds and unifies them all. This worldly self is changeable, because its projects are particular, can change, can alter; it is the wanton and unreliable self of projects not believed in. This struggle between these two sides, unchangeable being and changeable becoming, is the struggle of unhappy consciousness.⁶

The unhappy consciousness is both sides, but identifies only with the changeable self. Hegel writes, “The two [selves] are, for the Unhappy Consciousness, alien to one another; and because it is itself the consciousness of this contradiction, it identifies itself with the changeable consciousness, and takes itself to be the unessential Being” (208). Consciousness cannot find the universal driving force of its life, its own existence, in the particular projects it engages in, and likewise, that driving force of its self demands that it seeks aloneness, away from the world of confounding endeavors: the two sides of itself are contradictory, they demand from consciousness two opposite ways of participating in its life. And because they are contradictory, consciousness cannot participate in both: the unhappy consciousness participates in the changeable consciousness, in its particular projects, because it is aware that as both sides of itself, unchangeable being is opaque to it; as consciousness belonging to the world of particularity it is immersed in negated reality. Out of scepticism, consciousness is immersed in a world of changing realities, but must suppose an eternal fact of existence in order to proclaim the

⁶ Robert Solomon writes, “The unhappy consciousness sees itself torn between two forms of existence – a “natural” existence, in which relationships with other people and the desires of the body play an essential part, and a divine, other-worldly, eternal existence, which presupposes the rejection of the first” (*In the Spirit of Hegel*, 467).

dubiousness of its world at all; therefore, the experience of the sceptic as one consciousness, the unhappy consciousness, consists of both consciousness's immersion in changeable becoming and the imperative for it to seek unchangeable being, a fact of existence not otherwise found in a changing, time-bound world. As Russon writes, "The unhappy consciousness... relates to its own true self as to an alien."⁷

The unhappy consciousness hears the call, then, to strive away from its changeable self and into the solitude of its communion with unchanging existence, which persists both beyond consciousness's changeable self and somewhere in consciousness's own inwardness.⁸ Hegel writes, "But as consciousness of unchangeableness, or of simple essential Being, it must at the same time set about freeing itself from the unessential, i.e. from itself" (208). Confounded by its own particular changeable projects, none of which it takes upon itself with certitude, the unhappy consciousness feels the call to retreat into solitude, to seek the sense of existence that may reveal all these projects in their guiding light: the unhappy consciousness's worldly life is meaningless, and it strives towards something that is, that can be, outside of this world, to an essential, eternal, unchanging existence outside of passing time. The unhappy consciousness believes that it can only save itself from disillusionment and confusion about itself if it seeks this solitude, if it turns away from the self of its worldly projects. Confused, it feels the call of solitude; unsure, it aims towards where it may find a surety about itself, there in the aloneness near unchanging existence. Moreover, this unchangeable existence is, albeit opaque, the driving force of the projects of the changeable self. The unhappy consciousness cannot escape this call into solitude; it finds even in its confounding material life that somewhere in its definite projects must be that source which

⁷ *Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel's Science of Experience*, chapter 7, 130.

⁸ This "call" to unchanging existence is the imperative that the unhappy consciousness suffers to seek being beyond its immersion in changeable becoming.

calls consciousness into solitude even as consciousness occupies these projects; insofar as particularity bespeaks any constant meaning or proclamation of existence, it is already negated by and makes reference to an unchanging eternity outside of its mere, changing character. And because, by this monopoly on what is, unchangeable being is consciousness's essential being, consciousness must attempt by an imperative to set aside its changeable self. Incapable of indifference, needing somehow to be, the unhappy consciousness divided between its changeable self and inward unchanging existence dwells discontentedly in the changeable self of its particular projects, feeling the call to exist entreating it to seek the shelter of solitude where it may find and come to an awareness of the eternity consciousness at bottom carries within it.

Russon discusses the call of the beyond in terms of the human imperative to find meaning in our lives, lives otherwise lost in the particularity and flux of the world. This imperative drives us, by necessity, to forge some kind of relationship to the eternal, or the unchangeable. He states, "The stance of unhappy consciousness is that of the individual who recognizes that the compellingly authoritative meaning and significance of its own reality is found in its answerability to a beyond, and that the call of that beyond is already constitutively present within itself."⁹ We experience our lives in the changeable flux of the world, but in order for our lives to have meaning, they must make reference to something beyond that flux, an eternal; the unhappy consciousness is the experience of ourselves as the locus for that eternity to which our immersion in the world must make reference, and, therefore, our answerability to and our call towards that inward eternal unchangeable.¹⁰

⁹ *Infinite Phenomenology*, 130.

¹⁰ In religious language, this "call" is the soul, that which is both within us and guides us towards our more essential unity, beyond our worldly bodies, with a deity.

We may preface our investigations of the unhappy consciousness with a comment on the way that its struggle with itself will unfold. This divided consciousness is restlessly trapped between two contradictory ways of life. Hegel writes, “Consciousness of life, of its existence and activity, is only an agonizing over this existence and activity, for therein it is conscious only of its own nothingness” (209). Bound to particular projects, the unhappy consciousness remains agonized and burdened by the call to solitude. But this solitude, too, invokes the agony of consciousness. According to Hegel, “Raising itself out of this consciousness [of life, of its existence and activity,] it goes over into the Unchangeable; but this elevation is itself this same consciousness. It is, therefore, directly consciousness of the opposite, viz. of itself as a particular individual” (209). In the solitary communion with the unchangeable, consciousness fails to identify with the eternal, because it knows already that it is the inadequate changeable consciousness of and in a confounding world. Thrown back into itself, the unhappy consciousness laments its inability to escape the world, to escape its changeable immersion in a life that it cannot discover with surety, and it is left to itself, again, as a consciousness that agonizes in a world calling it to solitary existence. As a particular who seeks the universal unchangeable, consciousness cannot commune with this universal without contaminating it, thereby falling back to itself and its own inadequacy as the opposite of its essential unchangeable being. Jean Hyppolite describes this restlessness within the unhappy consciousness as follows: “at times it rises above the contingency of life and reaches authentic and immutable self-certainty; at other times it lowers itself to determinate being and sees itself as a consciousness caught up in Dasein.”¹¹ The circles of the unhappy consciousness are these agonies and failures,

¹¹ *Genesis and Structure*, 194.

this sickness with its material life, and this sickness that realizes its inability to be more than this material life but strives nonetheless towards an abstract beyond.¹²

Both the illness that strives to be outside of the particular projects that make up what consciousness is and the illness that strives towards an abstract eternity away from all material projects draw for consciousness an internal horizon, the destiny of this stage of consciousness. Unceasingly striving towards an impossible communion with eternity, the unhappy consciousness strives away from its own life into solitude.¹³ What is sought, then, is a kind of self-destruction, not as a choice the unhappy consciousness makes for itself, not as a detour off the path it is on, but as the very end of its romantic striving into solitude away from itself, the cure for life.¹⁴ The unhappy consciousness carries in itself the hidden or implicit trepidation that the end to which it unceasingly strives may be its self-annihilation; compelled to strive nonetheless, it aims to realize this goal. Driven towards the abstraction of solitude, the unhappy consciousness aims internally to cure itself of its own life. Or, as H.S. Harris puts it, “the Changeable now faces the appalling task of self-abolition.... It looks forward to emerging from its self-annihilation in this life, into another life in which it will enjoy “union” with the Unchangeable.”¹⁵

¹² Consciousness is unable to commune with pure, unchangeable being because it is immersed in changeable becoming. It regards its own worldly immersion, therefore, as sickness, sinfulness or pain. For the unhappy consciousness as sinfulness, see Harris, *Hegel's Ladder, Volume 1*, 401-402, and for the unhappy consciousness emphasized as pain, see Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 190. Throughout this chapter, I will adopt the language of contamination, perversion, illness and life-sickness to refer to consciousness's self-regard of its own relegation to its changeable self.

¹³ Although Hyppolite tells the story of the contradiction of the unhappy consciousness in terms of a reunion with a religious unity, God or the figure of Christ, rather than a solitary unity as I have done, the contradiction within the unhappy consciousness remains the same: “Man humbles himself and poses himself as nonessence, and then seeks to rise indefinitely toward a transcendent essence” (*Genesis and Structure*, 198).

¹⁴ Romanticism is just this: the worldview that the individual who turns inward may find in themselves their irreducible unity with God, eternity or the all-of-nature.

¹⁵ H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder Volume 1*, 400.

This self-destructive tendency in consciousness, however, is for the most part merely implicit. Explicitly, the unhappy consciousness aims to realize its internal end: it strives to come into contact with worldless existence, an unchangeable inwardness that is essentially what consciousness itself is. Only when consciousness discovers that it can never come into contact with the eternity that it takes to be its own essence and the essence of the world does it simultaneously lose this sense of eternity; only when the eternal is shown, as an impossible end, to be nothing, is the project of the unhappy consciousness revealed to be self-annihilation. Consciousness finds that what it thought to be the locus of existence is a nothing, and it despairs over the loss of its hope for absolute meaning.¹⁶ Yet, until this revelation, self-annihilation is merely an implicit worry, an undiscovered fact about the self of consciousness looming within.

The self-destructive impulse of the unhappy consciousness is consciousness's implicit tendency to seek itself solely in what is other than it, outside of its own life. Hegel proposes that "Whatever is confined within the limits of a natural life cannot by its own efforts go beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven beyond it by something else, and this uprooting entails its death" (80). Death, for Hegel, is when a natural existence, a determinate particular life, is called or driven by force by something other than it to uproot itself, to move into a state not its own; upon this loss of this unity, conscious life ends.¹⁷ In the case of the unhappy consciousness, the changeable self that consciousness identifies with is called inwardly towards what is beyond itself, towards the unchangeable that consciousness cannot come into communion with. This

¹⁶ The point about nothingness is not that the unchangeable does not exist; rather, the point is that existence is a nothingness through which anything at all can exist. The search for unchangeable being results in a confrontation with this nothingness in solitude, but it also reveals that this nothingness is in a sense "there" alongside anything that is purported to be. The unhappy consciousness is the human being who, searching for eternity by going inward, finds that existence is nothing, simultaneously finding that its search for nothingness is self-destructive and revealing that nothingness exists alongside things in the world. For a discussion regarding how this revelation of the existence of nothingness is fundamental to Hegel's method, see footnote 13.

¹⁷ For example, in the previous section, 'Lordship and Bondage,' the horizon of death is drawn for the bondsman after their attempt to find themselves in another self-consciousness, the lord.

inward beyond effects a call that occurs in the very inwardness of consciousness. It is consciousness's own essence, then, that is calling consciousness, implicitly, towards its own death. Divided within itself, consciousness is called by its own inward essence to death: that is, its own inward sense of existence, as if from a region beyond consciousness itself, entreats consciousness to uproot itself, to go beyond its immediacy, to die according to a will that is simultaneously beyond it and its own heart, to annihilate itself in order to be itself. It is this call in the solitude of consciousness, a call that lures consciousness to cross a bourn that would uproot it, that is the temptation towards death and self-destruction internal to unhappy consciousness. In religious terms, this is the claim that the human being reaches a harmony with the strivings of its soul only after death, after we are freed from the toils of life, thereafter able to rest peacefully, eternally, in heavenly repose, but, as I am suggesting, this hopefulness and compulsion towards death is a feature of any experience of unhappy consciousness.

At each impasse, however, the unhappy consciousness may, if it makes explicit this implicit call to self-annihilation, discover about itself the possibility of a different trajectory. Hegel writes, "In this movement, however, consciousness experiences just this emergence of individuality in the Unchangeable, and of the Unchangeable in individuality... for the truth of this movement is just the *oneness* of this dual consciousness" (210). Once the impossibility of a communion with the eternal is revealed, once this implicit drive to self-annihilation becomes explicit, the unchangeable is shown to be an impossible end; it is shown to never have been an extant something that consciousness can dwell alongside solitarily, away from its world, for that alien eternity calls from the other side of self-annihilation. Faced with the thought that its search for existence in solitude is an instinct towards its own death, it becomes apparent that existence cannot be this impossibility at a remove from the world, that if the search for existence takes

consciousness away from the self it knows itself to be, then the being that it seeks is not really the essence of the world it belongs to and the self that it is. The unhappy consciousness, therefore, will undergo transitions through successively more concrete ideas of the unchangeable, at each impasse losing the unchangeable as an alien reality in order to gain it as there, though nowhere in particular, alongside the particularities of the world consciousness is immersed in.

In his section, Hegel analyzes the unhappy consciousness in light of the inherent contradictions it faces, seeking unchangeable being as an alien reality, but he does not offer a description or an account of the psychological events that transpire as the individual unhappy consciousness passes through these contradictions. This compulsion to self-destruction is, as I understand the argument, essential to the way consciousness moves from one stage to another; self-consciousness moves only insofar as it comes face to face with this destructive tendency. At each impasse, then, before each transition, consciousness reveals this tendency to itself, thereby attempting a new idea of the unchangeable despite its destructive drive. The revelation of consciousness's own drive to self-annihilation is concomitant with consciousness's capacity to reveal to itself new ideas of the eternal. In other words, self-consciousness must realize that its object is an impossibility, and that it has been striving towards nothing, in order for a "determinate nothing," a new stage, to unfold.¹⁸ The task is to show how, at each transition, one of these confrontations does occur, and how, from the revelation that it provides, the new stage

¹⁸ In his Introduction, Hegel explains that "the exposition of the untrue consciousness in its untruth is not merely a *negative* procedure" (50). He goes on to say that "it is only when [nothingness] is taken as the result of that which emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a *determinate* nothingness, one which has a *content*" (51). The unchangeable is discovered to be a nothingness, but it is not only a nothingness; because this nothingness is a result of that which came before, because it is the indubitable existence implicit in the sceptic's thought and explicit in the unhappy consciousness's, nothingness exists, or is what existence has been revealed to be. This determinate nothing is the basis for the next emergent stage of consciousness.

of the unhappy consciousness follows: first consciousness doubts and loses its object, then it despairs over its self, and finally a new stage emerges from the determinate character of the last; first the unhappy consciousness loses the alien existence of the unchangeable, discovering unchangeable being to be nothing, then it loses its self, discovering that it has been the drive to self-annihilation, and finally it reveals a new way of taking up its self, one in which changeable becoming and unchangeable being are more intertwined than they were previously thought to be.

Broadly put, the stages of the unhappy consciousness together form the period of human life whereby the individual continues to seek his existence in solitude, stalked by the implicit potential that what he seeks might be his own self-annihilation. At each revelation of the sickness of the drive to self-annihilation, however, another pathway will open, the path to life, whereby existence is revealed to be nothing other than the particular projects that this consciousness already undertakes. At each stage of the unhappy consciousness, then, consciousness comes nearer and nearer to bearing the life that it is, to seeking its inward existence in the particular projects it is and nowhere else, and it draws nearer to this full turn towards life at each revelation of its own life-sickness. Each stage of the unhappy consciousness progresses as follows: the human being at first strives towards unchangeable being nowhere in the world, second discovers that such striving has been implicitly a sickness, revealing that sickness which is its own for the first time explicitly and despairing over the loss of a possible peaceful repose in unchangeable being, and third, consciousness uncovers the potential for another way of life wherein it can bear itself for what it is.

While each stage consists of a tripartite progression, the unhappy consciousness as a whole consists of three stages.¹⁹ According to Harris, the first unchangeable that consciousness strives towards is an absolute otherness or the Father, the second is an incarnate otherness or the Son, and the third is the reconciliation of the particular consciousness with its universal significance or the Holy Spirit.²⁰ Harris goes on to make clear that Hegel's text is predominantly focussed on the second incarnate otherness, the event of Christian consciousness. For my own purposes and in the interest of preserving the experiential repeatability of the form of consciousness Hegel is outlining, I do not adopt the terms of Christianity as exemplary of this condition. Instead, I aim to keep intact Hegel's insistence upon what Harris calls his "secular language,"²¹ concerned more with a stage of conscious human life than with a single historical event in human history.

The three stages that the unhappy consciousness traverses, then, will have to be shown in a manner more far-reaching than their Christian expression to be a progression that occurs in this period of human being as such. After the first stage, the unhappy consciousness will discover that the unchangeable could never have been something absolutely other than its world, that the unchangeable existence of its essential inwardness must somehow be present in the world. The second stage is, then, a reckoning with this revelation, another search for the unchangeable, yet now with the belief that it is present somewhere in the world, that the drive that undergirds all human projects is in fact present in one or more of these particular projects. And finally,

¹⁹ See H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder Volume 1*, 402. See also Howard P. Kainz, *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part I: Analysis and Commentary*, p. 95-98, for an interpretation of the unhappy consciousness in terms of these three stages – the transcendent unchangeable, the incarnate unchangeable, and reason as the abstract category.

²⁰ For an interpretation that stresses the passage of the unhappy consciousness through, first, the Judaic separation between man and God, second, the Christian Incarnation of God in Christ, and third, the Hegelian reunion of the human being and the eternal in reason, see Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 199-202.

²¹ See Harris, *Hegel's Ladder Volume 1*, 409.

consciousness will awaken to the third of these stages, the one that no longer considers the inward beyond to be completely other than consciousness itself, neither, as in the first stage, a worldless unchangeable beyond nor, as in the second, an unchangeable simultaneously in the world and beyond it; consciousness will awaken to the third form of the unhappy consciousness, the revelation that existence includes consciousness's own life and history, and that consciousness's own life is the unfolding of the unchanging fact of existence.

Religiously, the transitions from each stage of the unhappy consciousness to the next are interpreted as the movement from the Father to the Son and from the Son to Holy Spirit; however, this progression occurs even beyond its religious-historical manifestation. In the first progression, from the first to the second of its stages, the unhappy consciousness must reckon with the incarnate unchangeable after discovering that the unchangeable could never have been entirely unworldly or disembodied, for it is now tasked with attempting to relate to inward unchangeableness as if it were a particularity in the world. And this second reckoning passes into the revelation of the third stage, since consciousness discovers, along with the necessity that the universal – in this case the unchangeable – be somehow particular, that the inward and eternal locus of meaning must be in a unity with the world and consciousness's own particularity. As the unchangeable is revealed more concretely it is revealed to be more and more intertwined with changeable becoming, and the unhappy consciousness passes through these stages of the heightening concretization of existence.

In this section I have presented the unhappy consciousness in brief. The unhappy consciousness is the inward search for eternity burdened by the implicit horizon of life-sick self-destruction, but that nonetheless has dormant within it the potential to discover the unity of the mysterious origin of all human life and the particular life that the individual lives, a discovery

that may deliver consciousness to the acceptance of what it is. We turn, now, to the observation of the unhappy consciousness, first as the aloneness that drives implicitly towards self-annihilation, then as the stages that begin to deal with this thought of life-sickness which successively raise consciousness into higher forms of concreteness, finally culminating in the revelation of the third form of the unhappy consciousness.

III. The Formless Unchangeable

In this section, I develop how the unhappy consciousness unfolds in general, simultaneously showing the way through the first of its stages. This is the stage that, in Harris's account, makes up the encounter with God the Father, and in Hyppolite's account, is comparable to the Judaic concept of God. I am treating this stage in detail because it is "the element in which the whole relation subsists," (210) but most of Hegel's chapter is dedicated to the incarnate unchangeable, which for Harris and Hyppolite corresponds to the Christian concept of the Son.

Agonized, the unhappy consciousness seeks aloneness. But this loneliness is equally agonizing and confounding. Nowhere in the world, this loneliness is only a darkness, a negative. Explicitly, consciousness takes its dwelling in loneliness to be possible for it, but once it attempts to carry out this dwelling, consciousness discovers that it can never find itself therein, in solitude, for it has turned away from all that it is to approach that solitude. All consciousness can find there, in this solitude, is its own turn away from life. Called into aloneness, the unhappy consciousness is the sufferance of its own sickness, and unable to discover the unchangeable that has called it into its loneliness, away from its world, the unhappy consciousness discovers only that it is sick and it is driven to strive deeper into this sickness.

But this discovery opens a new pathway for consciousness, a possibility that has always been dormant in the unhappy consciousness. For the first time, the unchangeable is experienced in the form of individuality. That is to say, the abyss of unchangeable existence cannot be absolutely other than the self of the unhappy consciousness; unchangeable being conceived as alien being is nothing, a negative, at a remove from the worldly particularities that it guarantees the existence of. If the unchangeable *is*, it must somehow be there in the changeable, in the world of consciousness's projects. The unhappy consciousness, then, having traversed the drive to the lonely abyss of the unchangeable and uncovered the thought of its self-destructive life-sickness, is thereby alerted of the need for an alternate path of convalescence: it need not drive towards alien existence because the unchangeable it seeks is indeed something in the world. This self-annihilative tendency does not only reveal consciousness's life-sickness, but implied by this revelation is an alteration in the way eternity is conceived. The pursuit into loneliness that amounts to the project of self-annihilation, that considers the necessity of the end of self-annihilation, equally opens a new way that consciousness may embrace the idea of unchangeable being.

The movement can be summarized as follows:

Consciousness of life, of its existence and activity, is only an agonizing over this existence and activity, for therein it is conscious that its essence is only its opposite, is conscious only of its own nothingness. Raising itself out of this consciousness it goes over into the Unchangeable; but this elevation is itself this same consciousness. It is, therefore, directly consciousness of the opposite, viz. of itself as a particular individual. (209)

Consciousness is first agonized in the world of its particularity, striving out of it, for it is nothing in itself, to find its meaning grounded in unchangeable being. But leaving the world to find the unchangeable, which is nowhere therein, brings consciousness to a confrontation only with an impossibility, that the unchangeable be beyond consciousness itself. Consciousness is thus forced to accept that the unchangeable is somehow there in the world of particularity to which consciousness already belongs.

Harris outlines the movement here as follows: “when the Changeable consciousness achieves unity with the Unchangeable, the universality of the Unchangeable Consciousness is marred by the singularity of the Changeable, so that the achieved unity necessarily falls back into opposition.”²² The singularity of the changeable worldliness makes it such that consciousness cannot exist in pure universality – that is, existence conceived as unchangeable being that at once includes everything found in changeable becoming but is exclusive of or irreducible to anything in particular – and each attempt by consciousness to commune with the unchangeable only reminds consciousness of its relegation to worldly becoming. As Franco Chiereghin puts it, “every attempt [by consciousness to raise itself to the divine and unchangeable] will be the non-attempt of a nullity that will be thrown back into its proper singularity, separated from and opposed to the unchangeable consciousness.”²³ A revelation takes place here. According to Harris, “by striving to be united with the Unchangeable, the changeable singular can only bring this opposite singularity to light.”²⁴ Consciousness, by being unable to commune with the unchangeable, an unchangeable that must be the case, can only move forward if it recognizes simultaneously that the unchangeable is there in changeable becoming and that the changeable,

²² *Hegel's Ladder: Volume 1*, 401.

²³ “Freedom of Thought: Stoicism, Skepticism, and Unhappy Consciousness” in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Kenneth R. Westphal, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 401.

though it is becoming and unessential non-being, *is*: consciousness reveals, by its failure to be purely eternal, the communion of its changeable self and unchangeable being.²⁵

This first form of the unhappy consciousness, religiously, is the search for the unchangeable as a sublime God, as the Father that the individual relates to inwardly, for he is entirely remote from anything in the world. Secularly, this first form is any way of searching for stable existence outside of the world: that is, seeking eternity in something like complete solitude, an inward retreat from all worldly relations. Seeking the quietude of nature, leaving one's home to find oneself, or withdrawing into one's own room and thinking might all be manifestations of this first form. This turning away from one's world, however, has nowhere to go, for it has turned away from everything that it can relate to in order to effect its relationship to eternity. And so the eternity one seeks is only a darkness, a nothingness that cannot be related to, and consciousness's searching is the frustration of a consciousness relegated to the world yet wanting something outside and beyond that world: pure quietude, pure unhomeliness or pure withdrawn thought never comes. Once it is revealed that the inward striving towards pure solitude makes any relation to eternity impossible, the individual must concede, on the one hand, that their striving into solitude was only a turn away from their world and into a darkness, that they sought their own unworldliness and self-annihilation, and on the other hand, if the individual is to relate to eternity, eternal existence must be, in some way, in the world, incarnate.

The subsequent forms of the unhappy consciousness will be, then, struggles to come to terms with the communion of the changeable and the unchangeable: consciousness will continue

²⁵ This resultant communion takes on different forms depending on which stage comes before it. After the traversal of the first stage, consciousness will become aware of the communion of unchangeable being and changeable becoming by revealing that the unchangeable must appear somehow in the world. And after this second form of unhappy consciousness, the communion of the unchangeable and the changeable will be consciousness's admission that its own individuality in the world is eternal existence.

to try to conceive of how essential being might be there in the world, but each of these attempts to wrestle with the contradictory unity of unchangeable existence and the changeable self will be themselves a form of the unhappy consciousness, and so will, again, lead consciousness to the horizon of self-annihilation and open for consciousness a new way it may traverse, a way into an even more concretised idea of eternity. Consciousness's new imperative is "[to come] into contact only with the Unchangeable in its embodied or incarnate form" (213). It aims now to find eternity in the world, in the incarnate unchangeable. We turn now to the observation of the unhappy consciousness's call to this incarnate unchangeable, to its founding inward drive conceived as present in the world. Or, as Hyppolite puts it, "the immediate has taken sensuous shape for consciousness; it is thus no longer the entity beyond being, but the entity conjoined to being."²⁶

In this section we have seen the initial drive of the unhappy consciousness. The inward turn of aloneness turns consciousness towards the abyss of eternal existence and drives it into life-sickness, a drive that has as its horizon consciousness's self-annihilation. But because the unchangeable is nothing at all, consciousness has open to it the possibility of revealing that the unchangeable must be present somehow in the world. The following is the unhappy consciousness struggling with this contradiction: unchangeable existence, which is nothing in particular, is present in the world as a particular. The unhappy consciousness tries to find unchangeable being, which is beyond all of its particular projects, in these projects, a drive that, like this initial form of the unhappy consciousness, leads consciousness back into agony, the thought of self-annihilation and the possibility of a higher realization.

²⁶ *Genesis and Structure*, 202.

IV. The Incarnate Unchangeable

In the following section I accomplish two tasks. First, I describe the nature of the initial revelation of the impossibility of alien unchangeable being, and how that revelation, if had by consciousness, leads consciousness into a long struggle with the contradiction of unchangeable being in the world, a struggle that leads consciousness to more and higher – that is, more concrete – realizations of the unhappy consciousness. Next, I navigate each of these progressive stages – devotion, desire and work, and wretchedness – finally opening for consciousness the possibility of revealing the third form of the unhappy consciousness, the potential discovery that both changeable becoming and unchangeable being are the self of consciousness. In other words, this section begins with what is comparable to the transition from the first stage of the unhappy consciousness – God the Father or the Judaic concept of God – to the second stage of the unhappy consciousness – the Son or the Christian concept of Jesus Christ. Then, after highlighting this transition, I go on to develop each form of what Hegel calls the incarnate unchangeable, arriving eventually at the third form of unhappy consciousness.

A way out of self-annihilation has been shown to consciousness insofar as consciousness has discovered something about the nature of existence, that if eternity were in the oasis of pure aloneness it would be a nothing, and so must somehow be present in the world. Consciousness in the moment of revelation does not draw this necessity; it merely happens that the fact of existence is present as an incarnate object and that in this object is where consciousness must seek its essence: insofar as existence is revealed to consciousness to be incarnate, an agency beyond the world still persists. It is this contingent agency of transcendent existence, the fact that the revelation of the incarnate unchangeable is a “*contingent* happening” (212) as if the eternal could reveal to consciousness according to its own capacities something consciousness does not

itself apprehend as coming from its own self, that keeps the unchangeable, though it may be present to consciousness and inwardly conceived by consciousness, as something that consciousness must seek beyond its usual immersion in the world of its projects. Because the unchangeable reveals itself to consciousness, consciousness is at another stage of the unhappy consciousness, now a stage that presents eternity as not a nothing in the heart of aloneness, but present in a thing in the world, in incarnate form.

The unchangeable that has presented itself as a sacred thing or individual in the world is the incarnate unchangeable.²⁷ Consciousness's aim now is to find the inward existence that calls from all projects in the world as the incarnate unchangeable, that is, to find that the world is made meaningful by reference not to a transcendent or alien being, but to a being in the world. The incarnate unchangeable is still beyond what consciousness is; it is another object that holds and comes from something nowhere to be found. Consciousness now seeks inward existence here, in this instantiation of a transcendent being that still lies beyond consciousness's grasp.

Consciousness's aim, now, is to find in another thing or individual in the world eternal existence. The call towards its inward essence now directs consciousness's efforts "to coming into relation only with the Unchangeable in its embodied or incarnate form" (213). Believing that the inward drive to exist which is at work in all particular projects is somewhere in the world, consciousness aims to rid itself of its immersion in a manifold of projects and in projects that strive to worldless aloneness in order to forge a contact and receive a oneness with another particular thing or individual, the particularity that conceals this inward unchangeable existence.

According to both Harris and Hyppolite, this new stage of the unhappy consciousness is consciousness's attempt to be near to Christ: "Before the event of incarnation, the Unhappy

²⁷ By "sacred" I mean an incarnation representative of unchangeable being.

Consciousness strove to live by the Law ('become the Unchangeable'); since that event it strives to come to Christ, to 'live in Him'²⁸; or, "the object of unhappy consciousness – what, for it, is essence – is no longer the formless immutable but, on the contrary, the unity of the immutable and the unique. 'Who sees me, has seen the Father.'²⁹ Whereas in the first stage, consciousness strove to come into communion with the unchangeable itself, in this second stage, now sure that it is relegated to changeable becoming, consciousness will attempt to act in the world in such a way that it will forge a communion with the unchangeable, now represented in the world. And historically, the representative of the unchangeable in the world is the presence of Christ, God in the world as a particular.

But this aim is another manifestation of the unhappy consciousness, and consciousness will suffer the same agony that it has already, now with regards to its inability to find its essential self in another particular. Hegel writes, "The hope of becoming one with [the incarnate unchangeable] must remain a hope, i.e. without fulfilment and present fruition, for between the hope and its fulfilment there stands precisely the absolute contingency or inflexible indifference which lies in the very assumption of definite form, which was the ground of hope" (212). Concealed in an actual, particular thing or individual, the eternal fact of existence is still beyond any of consciousness's particular projects. Consciousness seeks this eternity in a particular, and it is precisely the fact that the unchangeable, a universal that is irreducible to anything in the world, is in world in this particular that is consciousness's inability to find what is eternal therein, because this eternal unchangeableness is an inwardness beyond definite form. In religious terms, because Christ was born as a representative of God, his essence is by nature remote from us: he came to us to die for our natural fallenness and sin. Harris writes, "But now,

²⁸ Harris, *Hegel's Ladder: Volume 1*, 408.

²⁹ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, 206.

precisely because he [Christ] came to *die* for us, he is necessarily long gone. And since he came to a people far away, speaking a language none of us know, his memory abides now far away in the Holy Land where his holy places are.”³⁰ Because of the remoteness of the unchangeable, even its representative, the object to which we can devote ourselves, remains utterly remote, and we are relegated to an unbridgeable divide between our lives and a harmony with unchanging existence. And as this is true of the Christian story, it is true of any story of dedication to an incarnate eternity: to selflessly dedicate oneself to something else as if that something else had in it one’s own inward, unworldly essence is to give oneself to something that, insofar as it is in the world, must pass away from its worldliness to truly come into contact with its eternal significance, and thus it is to give oneself to and renounce oneself for something only realized when it leaves or stands truly remote from one’s own life.

Secularly, the stages in which consciousness deals with an incarnate unchangeable are the ways that consciousness seeks, by exercising itself in the world, to the unchangeable as something both beyond the world and in it, to the unchangeable realized somehow in an object, an object charged with eternal significance: first as an individual or thing that consciousness can devote itself to in order to relate to unchangeable being, then as a world given by the unchangeable, and then as a mediator who is themselves enlightened and before whom consciousness can surrender its wretchedness. As a whole, these are ways we attach or relate to something that appears or a way of being in the world, a thing, an individual, or a task, that we hope will justify us and give us some standing significance beyond our time-bound selves. After we learn that we cannot find ourselves somewhere outside of our lives, we turn towards our lives

³⁰ *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 408.

and towards the individuals, things and tasks we find make up our lives, and we turn to them for the justification and guarantee of existence that we seek.

As unhappy consciousness, the drive to find the incarnate unchangeable will pass through succeeding stages, all of which are attempts to deal with essential existence that must be present in the world, attempts that lead to agony, the drive towards self-annihilation and the potential for a higher attempt. We will traverse three forms of this kind of the unhappy consciousness – devotion, desire and work, and wretchedness³¹ – on our way to uncovering the potential for the third form of the unhappy consciousness. We turn now to the analysis of the second form unhappy consciousness that seeks to find its inward sense of eternity present in the world.

a. Devotion

What consciousness seeks is unchanging existence, and it seeks this eternal existence in the presence of another particular individual or object. The disposition of trying to find one's own inward existence in another particular thing or individual, a thing or individual entrusted with granting meaning and eternal significance to a life of otherwise changing uncertainty, is devotion. To be devoted means to seek one's inward existence in another sanctified particular. We turn now to an investigation of the consciousness that is overtaken by devotion.

In devotion, consciousness, in the world of its particular projects none of which it understands, attempts to find the originary drive of all its projects, unchangeable being, in a particular: from a world that changes, a world it cannot comprehend, consciousness relates

³¹ For Harris, "The "way to Christ" has three parts: hearing the Gospel, carrying one's Cross, and knowing one is saved" (*Hegel's Ladder: Volume 1*, 409). For Hyppolite they are the unhappy consciousness as "in-itself, as for-itself, as in-and-for-itself." (*Genesis and Structure*, 207). Devotion is unhappy consciousness seeking itself in another particular, desire and work consists of the unhappy consciousness trying to establish its unity with itself by its own activity, and wretchedness corresponds to consciousness's attempt to resign itself before an entity, the mediator, who in himself is both a particular and in a harmony with God.

unthinkingly to a particular that possesses these secrets of consciousness's own self. Hegel writes,

In this first mode... [consciousness] does not *relate* itself as a *thinking* consciousness to its object, but, though it is indeed *in itself*, or implicitly, a pure thinking individuality, and its object is just this pure thinking (although the *relation of one to the other is not itself pure thinking*), it is only a movement *towards* thinking, and so is devotion. (217)

What makes this first form of the unhappy consciousness, the form that considers its essence to be the incarnate unchangeable, devotion is the fact that eternal existence is an object other than consciousness, in the world, to which consciousness strives. The object of devotion is the eternal existence, the in-itself, that consciousness is aware is found in its own inwardness, but nonetheless this object appears as separate from consciousness itself. Therefore, consciousness is not in a condition of self-determining thinking, like the stoical consciousness who could remain inward; rather, consciousness relates to an object that is both in the world and given the significance of that inward, unchanging beyond.

Consciousness does feel itself in devotion, because the particular individual it takes to be absolute does have concealed in it a sense of existence that is simultaneously located in consciousness's inwardness, but consciousness in this contact likewise undergoes agony, because that inward existence remains unreachable, held yonder in the unfathomable recesses of the particular sanctified individual or thing. On the one hand, there is a feeling of self-fulfilment in the object of devotion: because the eternal existence of devotion's object is an existence located in consciousness's own inwardness, consciousness must be in a unity with the object of devotion, for both are particular individuals with inward contact to eternity. However, on the other hand,

the devoted consciousness reels back from the eternal existence it seeks, because that existence is there in an object other than consciousness itself. Hegel writes,

What we have here, then, is the inward movement of the pure heart which *feels* itself, but itself as agonizingly self-divided, the movement of an infinite yearning which is certain that its essence is such a pure heart, a pure *thinking* which *thinks* of itself as a *particular individuality*, certain of being known and recognized by this object, precisely because the latter thinks of itself as an individuality. (217)

But despite the feeling of ecstatic self-fulfilment, consciousness also undergoes the agony of relating itself to another particular that conceals consciousness's own inward essence; in feeling itself in another, consciousness is hopelessly divided and excluded from the essence it yearns to find in the other individual. Hegel writes, "At the same time, however, this essence is the unattainable *beyond* which, in being laid hold of, flees, or rather has already flown" (217). In religious contexts, this quotation refers to the fact that Christ has already died. But as a part of the development of devotion as such, this "already having flown" is due to the fact that despite eternity's presence in changeable worldliness, unchangeable existence remains, when conceived as belonging to something other than consciousness, remote and removed. Consciousness feels itself in devotion because this incarnate unchangeable holds in it the fact of existence, a sensibility located in consciousness's own inwardness, but because consciousness feels itself in another worldly, changing particular, that existence remains remote, removed from and unattainable for the devoted consciousness. Or, in religious terminology, Hyppolite writes, "[Christian consciousness] fails to transcend the stage of immediate contact between pure thought and specificity: Christ is indeed God for it, but it itself is not Christ, it has not

internalized the truth that is revealed to it from outside.”³² Christ is God incarnate, but Christ always belonged first and foremost to eternity, a region that remains, concealed in him, absolutely remote from us.

Devotion ends in the abandonment of consciousness unable to find inward existence present in another particular. Hegel writes, “Where that ‘other’ [the Unchangeable] is sought, it cannot be found, for it is supposed to be just a *beyond*, something that can *not* be found” (217). Immersed in particular projects, consciousness seeks existence beyond any particular projects in a particular project by devoting itself to it; consciousness is wont to discover the agonizing inability to succeed its own immersion in particular projects to find unchangeable being, which retreats again into a fathomless recess.

Devoted, however, consciousness strives to find this absent unchangeableness in a particular. Hegel writes, “consciousness, therefore, can only find as a present reality the *grave* of its life” (217). Seeking oneself in a particular beyond one’s own particularity amounts to seeking for the ghost of one’s own self in the grave, because ultimately the existence one seeks is beyond life, both one’s own life and the worldly life of the object of devotion. But, “the presence of that grave, too, is merely the struggle of an enterprise doomed to failure” (217). Again, no particular is sufficient to present to consciousness its own eternal self, the driving force that calls in and from all particular projects. In Harris’s account, one devotes themselves to those beyond this life, to a God that is already dead to this world and has already achieved salvation. The communion to be achieved can, then, only be felt, for the gap between life and death, a gap that must be crossed for consciousness to commune with the pure thinking of its self in a holy otherness, cannot be bridged. Therefore, consciousness comes as close as it can to the dead as they appear in this

³² *Genesis and Structure*, 208.

world and devotes itself to them: consciousness feels its communion to Christ to devoting itself to the grave, and therein feels its salvation.³³ According to Hyppolite, this presence of the tomb to which devotion strives is a result of consciousness reaching “only the feeling of [its] own misfortune, only a consciousness of the disappearance of what for [it] is essence.”³⁴ The devoted consciousness ends in circles of life-sickness and self-divided agony. Immersed in its particular projects, it is called to the particular to which it is devoted. But in devotion, it suffers the fathomless unattainability of an essential existence that forever lies outside its grasp, and consciousness is thrown back into its unshakeable immersion in its own particular projects. It seeks its inwardness, as Hegel suggests, first in the grave, and then beyond the grave. Compelled to seek stable existence where its self cannot be, consciousness is left by an essence that disappears, or rather, has already disappeared from life.

Secularly, devotion is the way we seek in another particular individual or thing a justification for our lives: we become devoted to other human beings we love and to things imbued with sanctity – photographs, shrines, or material possessions like houses or trophies – believing that the very presence of these individuals or objects protects us from our waywardness in time. The presence alone of the objects of devotion seem to give our life purpose and significance. However, these objects, supposed to justify us, remain both other than us and, like us, subject to time: what in them provides us justification is their recourse to something beyond their presence with us and we cannot participate with them in a sacred aspect that belongs distinctly to them. The unchangeable they are in reference to remains infinitely remote, and our attempt to find eternal justification through devotion remains unconsummated, despite our greatest hopes for these time-bound individuals and things other than ourselves.

³³ Harris, *Hegel's Ladder: Volume 1*, 412-413.

³⁴ *Genesis and Structure*, 208.

Dizzy with this self-division between the need for an incarnate eternity and the hysterical agony that strives for impossible devotion, a new way emerges. Before the threat of the self-relinquishing attempt to unite with what is unattainably beyond the grave, consciousness may discover that inward existence never could have been this unattainable beyond; the unchangeable never could have been concealed in a particular, because if it were, as consciousness has now envisaged, it would be infinitely beyond consciousness, not its own essence and the essence of the world. The agony and desperation of devotion makes possible the revelation that the fact of existence never could have been concealed in a particular: consciousness, upon this revelation, must seek unchangeable being otherwise.

Devotion can reveal to consciousness that inward existence cannot be conceived as remote from consciousness in another particular. Consciousness feels itself in the object of devotion, and it is this self-feeling that provides the potential for revelation: implicitly, the devoted consciousness is related to something that is not remote, but is there in its own inwardness. Consciousness is in contact with the unchangeable in its own particularity, and by its own activity it communes with eternal existence; that is, unlike in devotion where another individual is relegated as the bearer of eternal existence, consciousness itself now must take upon its own life and its own activity the relation to the unchangeable which exists in consciousness's own inwardness. We now turn to this direct communion, desire and work.

b. Desire and Work

From the follow-through of the impulse of devotion the revelation of desire and work becomes possible. Devotion wound consciousness into the agony of the impossibility of finding the eternal existence it is called towards in a particular individual or thing. The revelation of this

impulse towards an impossible communion with eternity in a particular may disclose to consciousness that existence never could have been reduced to a particularity remote from consciousness's own self. Rather, the feeling that the devoted consciousness undergoes indicates that eternal existence belongs to the inwardness of consciousness itself: in order to feel the ecstasy of self-communion in the presence of the individual thing that consciousness has devoted itself to, existence must be present, somehow, in consciousness's own inward heart. Hegel writes, "[the pure heart] has felt the object of its pure feeling and this object is itself. Thus it comes forward here as self-feeling, or as an actual consciousness existing on its own account" (218). Implicit in self-feeling has been the presence of the unchangeable, the essential locus of meaning in the world: consciousness's inwardness is neither in its loneliness beyond any of its projects nor in a sanctified particular beyond consciousness itself, but there in the world of its own engagements.

It would seem that here consciousness has overcome the second form of unhappy consciousness altogether, that this new stage is direct self-communion in a world that is the unchangeable self. But, as Hegel writes, "the Unhappy Consciousness merely *finds* itself *desiring* and *working*; it is not aware that it is in fact certain of itself, and that its feeling of the alien existence is this self-feeling" (218). The nature of the possible revelation at the bottom of the agony of devotion is indeed, on the one hand, such that consciousness discovers the unchangeable in its own self, but, on the other hand, this new sense of the unchangeable is revealed *to* consciousness; consciousness does not see this revelation as an event of its own activity, but instead merely commences a change as if something essential to its character were shown *to it*. There is still a part of the actual unchangeable that is not consciousness's own self or consciousness's own activity; there is yet an agency of the unchangeable beyond consciousness's

own active life. We now turn to this new relation of the unhappy consciousness, desire and work, wherein consciousness relates directly to eternal existence in its worldly projects, but this existence is yet a power, responsible for the givenness of what is, beyond consciousness's own particular activities.

As Harris explains, desire and work are consciousness's turn, having realized its relegation to this world, back to itself: it must act in this world in order to relate to the beyond. Because its action is directed towards the beyond, it "desire[s] not to desire, and labor[s] only for the glory of God."³⁵ The transition from devotion to desire and work is, according to Harris, this turn from forging a relation to the beyond reduced to a particular in the world, devotion, to realizing the fact that one must by oneself act to forge this relation, having revealed to oneself, by trying to relate to something beyond life in death, that one's relation to unchangeable being is something within that one must enact oneself. Devotion's failure was its attempt to forge a unity with an unchangeable that was outside consciousness itself in another particular. The subsequent stage is the correction of the devoted consciousness: now consciousness by its own activity in the world must forge a relation to an unchangeable that remains beyond it as the power that gives to consciousness itself and its world.

Desire and work are the activities of consciousness for the unchangeable, which is now the power that gives itself to consciousness by giving consciousness the world. In desire and work, consciousness sees its own life as part of and contributing to a history and a power greater than itself: it is called to engage particular projects only insofar as they are contributions to this greater unfolding, and, conversely, this great power is the eternal essence of consciousness, the original drive that gives to consciousness the actual life it may enjoy for itself. Since it is a power

³⁵ Harris, *Hegel's Ladder: Volume 1*, 418.

beyond consciousness itself that is consciousness's own essence and that gives to consciousness its very life, this great power is still transcendent, unchangeable being. And since consciousness is still a particular that must act in a particular way to receive and work in the gifts of this power, compelled to act for the sake of this power beyond its own particularity because there, by this power, consciousness receives all that it is, its own essence, since consciousness is still impelled to act to commune with its own universal essence that is beyond its particularity, consciousness is still on the side of the unessential changeable. Consciousness's work is a universal work because it works for the universal, and its desires enjoy the satisfaction of belonging to this universal unfolding – that is to say, consciousness in its particular work works for an unchangeable that is everywhere in the world but, as a granting power that gives the world to consciousness, remains both beyond consciousness's mere particularity and irreducible to any of consciousness's particular activities. Following the survival of devotion, consciousness, having had the actuality of the unchangeable revealed to it, is called to contribute to and find enjoyment in the great unfolding of the universal. In other words, desire and work are consciousness in a sense giving back to the universal power that gives it its life; in its work consciousness gives back to the world and in its desire consciousness enjoys the satisfaction of being given itself by this power.

In desire and work, the world is divided on two fronts: the universal power that gives itself form is divided and the particular consciousness that is called to activity is divided. On the one hand, for the world to be a given world, it must be given by a power that is at once the source of anything that appears and that power must be there incarnate in the world. The unchangeable is divided because, though it is a greater power than what it gives consciousness of itself in actual form, it does give itself the particular, worldly form that consciousness enjoys and

manipulates in its particular projects. Hegel writes, “since [consciousness] does succeed in setting [actuality] at nought and enjoying it, this comes about through the Unchangeable’s itself having *surrendered* its embodied form, and having *relinquished* it for the enjoyment of consciousness” (220). A giving power is the force behind the actuality of consciousness’s world, and because consciousness reaps this world for itself, it must be the case that we are dealing with a giving power that is, at once, beyond the capacities of consciousness, given to consciousness as the actuality consciousness engages in and, having been given to consciousness, relinquished as a giving power, now belonging to the particular consciousness it gives itself to. The unchangeable power as the source of the given world is divided as this great universal power and a world that is given to the particular consciousness to be consummated therein. In religious terms, Harris writes, “The world is not just there for my use and enjoyment. It also is *broken* in two. It is merely God’s instrument, and will pass away; but also it is holy and the order of Nature is God’s temporal shape.”³⁶ The given world is both the unchangeable as a beyond and the unchangeable apparent in changeable worldliness to be worked on by consciousness; it is given by God and God himself given to human beings who perform pious deeds.

Just as the unchangeableness of the great power is divided, the consciousness that desires and works is divided. Immersed in particular projects, consciousness is aware that it is only able to have particular, worldly projects because the unchangeable power gives itself over to consciousness as actuality. Behind all of consciousness’s projects of desire and work is this power, and so consciousness, called to activity, is always dependent upon this power to grant it its life in the world. Hegel writes, “Consciousness, on its part, *likewise* makes its appearance as an actuality, but also as divided within itself, and in its work and enjoyment this dividedness

³⁶ Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 419.

displays itself as breaking up into a *relation* to the world of *actuality*” (220). Like the unchangeable power, consciousness is in the world, there in the actuality of its projects. But this actuality retains some side of it that is always greater than consciousness itself, because consciousness is dependent on a greater power to give itself to consciousness in the form of actuality. Consciousness is, in the way of desiring and working, a relation to an actuality that, granted by a giving power, retains an essence beyond consciousness’s particular strivings: the actuality consciousness enjoys and manipulates is a gift from the universal origin of all particular projects. Consciousness, like the unchangeable power, is divided between itself and its actuality: it is a relation to what is given to it by a greater power. In religious language, Hyppolite writes, “On all sides, action is reflected toward a transcendental goal. Active consciousness merely appears to act. Inside and outside it, God acts, just as the master was the true subject of the slave’s action.”³⁷ The world on which this consciousness works and through which this consciousness desires is a given by a transcendent source, and so when consciousness is called to action, it is called to action in a given world that is not its own, but which defines the very self of this active consciousness, gives it meaning and purpose.

Consciousness is called to participate in the universal unfolding of the unchangeable insofar as consciousness acts in the world at all. The unchangeable is the power that gives to consciousness all the particular projects it may engage. Consciousness’s participation in the world, then, is not for its own sake: it is a participation for the given world. Because the unchangeable is the power that gives to consciousness the world of particular projects that consciousness can undertake, all of consciousness’s activities are for the sake of, contributions to and receptions from this unchangeable power. Consciousness is called to and by the beyond in

³⁷ *Genesis and Structure*, 211.

all of its activities; it acts not for itself, but for this beyond. In other words, because the action of desire and work is for something greater than consciousness itself, desire and work are self-abnegation, what Hyppolite phrases as “the negation of the here-below”³⁸; that is, the negation of consciousness’s desire for itself in order to work in and for the unchangeable.

By acting in the world for the sake of the universal that makes all of consciousness’s particular projects possible, consciousness does feel the satisfaction of engaging directly in the unchangeable; by acting at all, consciousness feels at home in its own self, this great power.

Hegel writes,

The fact that the unchangeable consciousness *renounces* and *surrenders* its embodied form, while, on the other hand, the particular individual consciousness *gives thanks* [for the gift], i.e. *denies* itself the satisfaction of being conscious of its *independence*, and assigns the essence of its action not to itself but to the beyond, through these two moments of *reciprocal self-surrender* of both parts, consciousness does, of course, gain a sense of its *unity* with the Unchangeable.

(222)

Eternal existence is actual: it gives itself form so that consciousness can enjoy and manipulate it. Consciousness, then, directly engages in its inward eternity, for this is in the actuality of its particular projects. In its activity, consciousness does not act for the changeable self, but for unchangeable being, where all its particular projects originate, and therein has successfully renounced itself and been directly in a reunion with this actual, eternal unchangeableness.

But this unity is itself disingenuous and consciousness is, again, ridden with the agony of its division from its essence. Consciousness is called to its activity to renounce itself for the sake

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

of the great power wherefrom all actuality originates. But because consciousness acts and receives its own identity from this action, it cannot accomplish the ends of its service.

Consciousness is called to act for the sake of the great power, but consciousness cannot help but act for itself. Hegel writes, “Consciousness feels itself [in desiring, working, enjoying and giving thanks] as this particular individual, and does not let itself be deceived by its own seeming renunciation, for the truth of the matter is that it has *not* renounced itself” (222). The effort to act wholly for the great power has given consciousness only its inability to both act and renounce itself, for in acting it receives its own identity and has not acted for the universal. As Harris puts it, in order to truly fulfil the demands of work and desire, “pious desire and labor must not produce any finite satisfaction” and “one must take no personal pleasure in being the one who *does* something.”³⁹ Yet, “Reflection of everything into the other, is equally reflection into self. In all my thanksgiving I have not really renounced myself.”⁴⁰ Such is the contradiction of desire and work: to renounce oneself entirely and labor in the world for God while not receiving oneself therein, despite the fact that it is one’s own work being done.

But called in its activity to act for the unchangeable, this consciousness suffers the agonizing circles of impossible self-renunciation. It must act for the universal power, for to have particular projects in the world at all is to act in a world undergirded by the purpose of this power. But it cannot act for this power, because in acting at all consciousness acts for itself. Consciousness attempts to act in an entirely selfless manner, but by acting at all it receives its own definition and gratification in this action, and so must, in some sense, act for itself. Bent to deeper self-renunciation, then, consciousness must strive to erase itself entirely. Again the thought of self-erasure emerges as the end to which this consciousness, implicitly, has always

³⁹ *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 418.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 422.

been striving, an end that if accomplished would annihilate the very capacity for action this consciousness needs to perform its service, thanks and deeper self-abnegation.

Religiously, desire and work are the way that God's will acts through our own, and we prove ourselves to be in His favor through our worldly deeds on a world that He has entrusted to us, but secularly, desire and work refer to any of the conceptions whereby a greater power works through us and we prove our significance in a greater scheme only through our deeds for the sake of this power. Many of these conceptions persist: the conception of the individual as the cog of economic progress, whether through the ways they contribute to the economic expansion and technological evolution of humanity or through a revolutionary attitude of awakening to the inevitable progression of class contradictions, the conception of the human being as belonging to a spirit of the whole that both determines their actions and is spurred on to its inevitable resolution in some harmonious, eternal respite (a worldview commonly attributed to Hegel himself), or the human being as nature's action upon itself for the sake of its own flourishing, all of these conceptions of human being are expressions of desire and work. Each of these ways of conceiving of oneself end in the impossibility of the attempted self-abnegation of the individual: unable to give oneself entirely to one's cause, the individual is relegated to the endless incompleteness of their cause, an incompleteness that stems, firstly, from their own inability to entirely relinquish themselves for the sake of something greater than themselves. The individual of desire and work is, then, perpetually striving to rid themselves of the parts of themselves that are not committed to the actions that contribute to the cause that justifies them: the individual's own consumptive behavior keeps them from fully and purely realizing the ends of their cause. The individual own life is the sickness that must be erased so that their justifying, essential work can occur.

But consciousness's submersion in the implicit life-sickness of desire and work has given it the potential to reveal more about the nature of the contradiction between changeable becoming and unchangeable being. When consciousness strives to act for the sake of the unchangeable as this great power that gives itself to consciousness in incarnate form, consciousness discovers in the life-sickness of its imperative to self-renunciation that it cannot be itself this power, that it is always repelled back into its own activity. Here, consciousness reveals the impossibility of the ends of its service, and it reveals to itself that the cause of its inability to truly reach a harmony with existence is its own inescapable particularity. Consciousness becomes wretched.

In this section, we have considered the relation of desire and work. We have seen the transition from devotion to desire and work, a revelation of the actual self revealed to consciousness, as prefiguring a comportment that involves consciousness called to renounce itself in its activity for the great power of the given world. And therefrom, we have seen the agony of consciousness called to act selflessly, an impossible task that drives consciousness only deeper into the life-sickness of its will to self-renounce. We now turn to the final relation of the second form of the unhappy consciousness, wretchedness, wherein consciousness aware that its disposition is life-sickness is called to renounce all its sickly aims, its entire self, so it can reach, in the world, peace with unchangeable being.

c. Wretchedness

Having discovered its own history of errancy, consciousness enters the final stage of the second form of the unhappy consciousness, wretchedness. In this stage, the unhappy consciousness is aware that existence is there in the world of its particular projects as nothing

other than these projects, but it is likewise aware that it is born to an impulse of errancy regarding this changeable becoming and unchangeable being. Hegel writes, “here, now, is where the enemy is met with in its most characteristic form” (223). Elsewhere, he writes of this section as a whole that “What is set forth here as the mode and relationship of the Unchangeable has appeared as the *experience* through which the divided self-consciousness passes in its wretchedness” (211). Aware of the nature of the world and the self, the unhappy consciousness now deals with its self, its own impulse to turn away from this unity into life-sickness and abstraction, the tendency of life-sickness that has burdened it through all of its previous stages, through its entire life: in this final struggle the unhappy consciousness deals with the impulse of life-sickness as such.

As Harris puts it, out of desire and work the unhappy consciousness discovers that “It cannot escape from the finite pleasure of the self in being alive, or from his finite self-realization in labor.”⁴¹ What has occurred to consciousness in this realization is that its self cannot be overcome, that it is decidedly sick and contaminating: desire and work “has brought consciousness to the awful discovery of the enemy in the shape that is authentically *his*, the self that cannot be exorcised.”⁴² This final section, for Harris, pertains to consciousness trying to exorcise its own sinfulness by wiping itself out entirely by way of absolute penitence, a “demonstration of our *nothingness*.” And according to Hyppolite, this new stage of consciousness is the ascetic consciousness, “the truth of unhappy consciousness will be the *ascetic consciousness* of the saint which intends to annihilate its own specificity in order thereby to become a more profound self-consciousness.”⁴³ The unhappy consciousness’s most

⁴¹ *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 423.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 424.

⁴³ *Genesis and Structure*, 212.

characteristic form is its confinement to its own wretchedness and the self-annihilation of this wretched state in order to commune with the purity of God.

Wretchedness is consciousness convinced of its own nothingness, aware that its entire history has been only the history of its own brooding. The world exists as it is, and it is consciousness itself who has been fearful, afraid to accept the world's indubitable existence. Everything consciousness does takes itself out of an acceptance of what is; consciousness's own activity, and this activity alone, draws consciousness away, further away from the life it is aware that it is, that what exists is there in the given world already. We now turn to the unhappy consciousness characterised in this way, as wretchedness.

The wretched consciousness is aware that whatever it does is an act of life-sickness. Consciousness's activity only draws the universal unchangeable into what it is not, into the nothingness of consciousness's own illness, into particularity and changeable becoming. All activities are contaminations, for consciousness is the pure life-contaminating agent.

The call that this ailment undergoes is the call to the cessation of its activity. Aware that it is this illness and that its self is really the unity of the worldly unchangeable, consciousness's actions are all reviling offences against its own life. Consciousness's aim, then, is not to revel in these activities, but to reduce them to nothingness, to find a way to cease any of its own strivings, for these strivings are only revilements of the peace of worldly existence. As wretchedness, consciousness is called to reduce itself to nothingness, for its activity is its inability to come to peace with what unchangeably is.

But this self-awareness of life-sickness is no overcoming of it. Hegel writes, "This enemy, however, renews himself in his defeat, and consciousness, in fixing its attention on him, far from fleeing itself from him, really remains for ever in contact with him, and forever sees

itself as defiled” (225). In seeing its own activity as the contamination that ails life, consciousness does not overcome this ailment; rather, defined as ailment and called to nothingness, consciousness is bound to its own impulse to defile what is. Aware of its own life-sickness, consciousness is simply this, life-sickness. Harris illustrates this obsession with one’s own wretchedness through the image of Martin Luther: “In finding the symbol of his own sinfulness in his body’s lethargy in the expulsion of its own waste (an everyday struggle) he offered the perfect image of the nothingness of human consciousness, the wretchedness of human existence, and the trivial insignificance of human effort.”⁴⁴

Consciousness is, therefore, wretchedness. Hegel writes, “since at the same time this object of its efforts, instead of being something essential, is of the meanest character, instead of being a universal, is the merest particular, we have here only a personality confined to its own self and its own petty actions, a personality brooding over itself, as wretched as it is impoverished” (225). Called by the self-awareness of life-sickness to reduce all of its own activities to nothingness, consciousness recoils into a condition of brooding over itself, unable to succeed its life-sickness because it is defined as such, ever renewing its own contaminations with more activities, renouncing and brooding ever deeper, evermore self-obsessed. Consciousness progresses in self-obsessed wretchedness, defined as life-sickness and ceaselessly trying to reduce its own activity, to self-annihilation.

Hyppolite explains that this self-obsessed wretchedness is the truth of – that is, what was always implicit in – both devotion and desire and work. In devotion consciousness attempted to reach a particular that was not itself, and so dealt only with something that was disappearing. Relegated back to itself, consciousness attempted in desire and work to actively self-abnegate for

⁴⁴ *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 426.

the sake of the universal. In both cases, the unhappy consciousness is the attempt to rid itself of its own particularity in order to be itself in the universal: the unhappy consciousness both feels its own misfortune apart from the unchangeable, and it is aware of its vanity as the active contamination of the unchangeable. These two sides – first unhappy consciousness in itself as devotion and second unhappy consciousness for itself as desire and work – together are the characteristic wretchedness of the unhappy consciousness, what drives the unhappy consciousness into ascetic self-annihilation.⁴⁵

This wretched asceticism persists through all of the previous forms of the unhappy consciousness, in each of their religious realizations and also in each of their secular variants. The individual seeking solitude away from anything in their world, the individual devoted to something or somebody else, the individual who measures themselves by their contribution to a cause greater than themselves, all of these find their completion in the individual who sees themselves and their boundedness to time and worldliness as the contamination that they must cure themselves of. All of these forms of hope in an eternal, unchanging harmony that will justify one's own otherwise meaningless relegation to time find their truth, albeit an unconscious truth, in a kind of underground man, a self obsessed with his only remaining surety which is the surety of his own wretchedness and dividedness from all forms of rationality, happiness and harmony. The wretched individual is the ascetic convinced all of their hopes are doomed to failure for no other reason than their own wretchedness, and this individual is the one that expresses the truth of all previous forms of the unhappy consciousness, the individual who, by being an individual of worldhood and time, cannot escape themselves into the eternity they seek.

⁴⁵ *Genesis and Structure*, 213.

This wretchedness, however, has an aim: consciousness is aware that it belongs to worldly existence and its self-abnegation is its attempt to reach a peace with worldly existence, to cease its activity and the defilement of what exists. Hegel writes, “the attempted direct destruction of what it actually is is *mediated* by the thought of the Unchangeable, and takes place in this *relation* to it” (226). Consciousness only aims to annihilate itself because it is the defilement of what exists eternally, the given world. Consciousness can, then, strive towards this peace, strive towards this implicit end rather than annihilate itself. Implicitly, consciousness’s aim of self-annihilation has been the aim to come into a harmony with what its life is, and, driven to self-annihilation, it can turn towards the revelation of worldly existence. Harris writes, “It is because I yearn to be with God, that I am led to regard my life here in the body as a flowing sewer, and in this way to reduce its effective significance to *nothing*.”⁴⁶ (*Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 428). Consciousness strives to annihilate itself only because it already defines itself in relation to and acts in the favor of God. Or, as Hyppolite writes, “the self-negation of the ascetic is effected through the mediation of the idea of the immutable, and negative relation finally acquires positive signification.”⁴⁷

However, this turn towards self-annihilation for the sake of the preservation of worldly existence is at first mediated. Consciousness is not unchangeable being; it is the activity that defiles unchangeable being. Consciousness seeks some way to remove itself and its own will, its own activity as a particular, since it is this particular activity that is the defilement of what is. It seeks a mediator, someone who on behalf of the unchangeable can, by telling consciousness what to do, remove consciousness’s will entirely from itself.

⁴⁶ *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 428.

⁴⁷ *Genesis and Structure*, 214.

Striving to erase itself as the activity that defiles the given world, consciousness seeks a mediator who himself is the contact between these two sides, consciousness's particularity and the extant world beyond this consciousness. Hegel writes,

Through this middle term the one extreme, the Unchangeable, is brought into relation with the unessential consciousness, which equally is brought into relation with the Unchangeable only through this middle term; thus this middle term is one which presents the two extremes to one another, and ministers to each in its dealings with the other. (227)

The mediator is the one whom consciousness seeks in order to renounce itself; he is himself the unity of the unchangeable, now the extant given world, and the wretched consciousness.

The action of the mediator is, then, to bring consciousness to peace with the world by being the individual before whom consciousness renounces its own wretchedness. Hegel writes, "This middle term is itself a conscious Being [the mediator] for it is an action which mediates consciousness as such; the content of this action is the extinction of its particular individuality which consciousness is undertaking" (227). In order for the mediator to be the contact between both consciousness and the unchangeable, he must himself be conscious, but conscious by way of standing as a perfectly self-renounced exemplar, for the mediator is the one whom consciousness seeks the presence of to renounce itself for the sake of achieving this peace with the unchangeable. Wretchedness seeks the mediator before whom it can renounce itself and, instead of annihilating itself, rise into a peace with the unchangeable. Hyppolite describes the imperative of the ascetic as follows: "Unhappy consciousness must develop to the point of complete self-negation in order that through that negation it may discover its universality."⁴⁸ The

⁴⁸ *Genesis and Structure*, 214.

mediator is he before whom this complete self-negation can take place, the unchangeable as both a particularity in the world and outside the contaminating changeableness of consciousness.

Before the mediator, consciousness gives up all the elements of its own activity: consciousness is called in wretchedness to come to peace with the worldly unchangeable by ridding itself of all activity, because its activity has been shown to be the effect of all drives of life-sickness and self-annihilation, and it rids itself before another perfectly renounced entity, an entity that is himself a present conscious being attuned to worldly existence. Hegel writes, “In the mediator, then, this consciousness frees itself from action and enjoyment so far as they are regarded as its own” (228). The mediator tells consciousness what is right, and thereby consciousness’s will is not its own, and consciousness gives away all that it has and all that it can enjoy, for these, too, are wrought by life-sick activity.

Consciousness, aware that all it does is bring falsehood to its self, fully surrenders. Hegel writes, “It has the certainty of having truly divested itself of its ‘I’, and of having turned its immediate self-consciousness into a *Thing*, into an *objective* existence” (229). Consciousness does nothing for itself, and herein, with the aid of the mediator, it no longer pollutes its self, but rather reduces itself to an entity no longer conscious, a thing.

The surrender of consciousness once again leads it to its self-annihilation, in this case to the reduction of consciousness to a thing, but this absolute self-surrender before the mediator gives way to the potential revelation that consciousness is not doomed to the contamination of the given world, but can be at peace with it. Hegel writes, “the surrender of one’s own will is only from one aspect negative; in principle, however, or in itself, it is at the same time positive, viz. the positing of will as the will of an ‘other,’ and specifically of will, not as particular, but as universal will” (230). Consciousness gives its will entirely over to the mediator, the entity that is

both a consciousness immersed in changeable becoming and in harmony with the unchangeable, in this case the indubitably extant given world. Although consciousness does not posit itself as the same as the mediator, by positing the mediator at all consciousness posits the possibility of a will that is not particular, against existence and contaminating it, but rather is itself a will through which the universal, the unchangeable, acts and works.

But in order to mark this revelation, consciousness must give itself up. As long as it is a particular will, a consciousness that strives or projects towards alien unchangeableness, it cannot see itself as that universal will, for its activity remains at a remove from unchangeable being. Hegel writes, “This *unity* of objectivity and being-for-self, which lies in the Notion of action, and which therefore becomes for consciousness essence and *object* – this unity is not the principle of its action, and so it too does not become an object *for consciousness*, directly and through itself” (230). If consciousness viewed the revelation of the universal will as its own, it would view it as an end for its own particular will to strive towards, an object. This new notion, the one revealed in the presence of the mediator, is one in which both the changeable becoming of which consciousness is a part and unchangeable being, existence itself, are conceived of as interwoven: consciousness exists, and it is through consciousness that eternal existence acts upon itself.

Consciousness’s revelation of its unity with the universal will must come not by an act of its particular will, but by a full surrender. Hegel writes, “[consciousness] lets the mediating minister express this certainty, a certainty which is itself still incomplete, that its misery is only *in principle* the reverse” (230). As long as consciousness still projects towards alien existence, it cannot see itself as the universal will, for it is merely related to this will as a particular. Aware of the contrary, consciousness allows what it projects towards, the mediator, to express its unity with the unchangeable. This revelation is a bourn that consciousness, stuck in the projects of the

particular will, cannot cross. Hyppolite writes that consciousness's "self-alienation realizes a universal will – in-itself, not for it. For it cannot yet rediscover itself in its alienated will. Only we are able to see the emergence of universal will in the negation of specific will."⁴⁹ (215). Consciousness is a particular relation to the universal, and taken as such it remains unhappy consciousness, that is, taking unchanging existence to be alienated from consciousness's own self, despite the fact that, as is revealed by the presence of the mediator, the universal acts through consciousness's particularity and acts upon itself; or put otherwise, consciousness exists just as much as any other given aspect of reality.

Religiously, the mediator is the priest, he who has a connection both to worldly time and to God; only through the priest can an individual without this direct spiritual connection find in the world some way to God, and so by disburdening oneself of oneself before the priest, the individual is supposed to achieve some kind of consolation from their wretched state. But this dynamic occurs secularly as well. The mediator is any individual who, by their authority alone, gives us a feeling of guarantee that may not be wretched and time-bound as long as we follow what they proscribe: they are political authorities through whom we gain a sense of what is right and in whose instruction we may believe our actions are not our own, they are teachers that we hope, if we follow their instruction properly, we can learn lessons of inspiration and enlightenment from, and they are those guides in whose written word we find an understanding and a way of being that may redeem our own lives. The mediator is the individual whose instruction is supposed to give us the guarantee and justification of our own actions insofar as we can say that these are not our own, insofar as they do not originate from our own relegation to wretchedness but are proscribed by a higher directive. For the sake of an eternal cause for peace

⁴⁹ *Genesis and Structure*, 215.

we relinquish our will, our own wretched individuality, before one of these mediators. However, the individual relinquishing his will never comes to see his own connection to eternity, since he feels that he must, before the mediator, relinquish himself entirely before such a connection can be established. The individual committed to the actions of the mediator can only, then, come closer and closer to thinghood, trying at every impasse to remove himself and his own will.

But it is here, at the limits of consciousness's self-surrender, that the third form of the unhappy consciousness becomes possible in the expression of the mediator to whom consciousness surrenders. Hegel writes, "In grasping the thought that the *single* individual consciousness is *in itself* Absolute Essence, consciousness has returned into itself" (231). In grasping the thought that one individual consciousness has working through it the action not of a particular will at a remove from unchanging being, but rather is in itself also unchanging being and exists indubitably, the single consciousness can now conceive of itself and its own way as part of existence, not contaminating, but another agent in which unchangeable being moves and acts. Or put otherwise, consciousness no longer sees itself as non-existence, but rather takes its own way as existence alongside all the other facts of the given world: thus consciousness itself is no longer contaminating, but another feature of nature or God or the indubitable, unchangeable fact of existence. The very existence of the mediator at all is consciousness's proof that an individual can be both relegated to time and have in themselves a direct relation to eternity.⁵⁰

According to Harris, the mediator is only a middle term who shows consciousness what is really going on. Although consciousness relinquishes itself before the mediator, what is revealed above all is that the penitent consciousness and God's will are the same: The mediator "force[s] us to see what is happening" and the priest "is the mediating term through whom God's

⁵⁰ For what this direct relation means secularly, see the following chapter of the present work.

will is united with that of the penitent.”⁵¹ The existence of the mediator at all, though he is surrendered to by consciousness, is the proof that consciousness and God are in an essentially connection already, a connection that only need be revealed: the mediator is just this revealing agent. It is the presence of the mediator, then, that implies the potential revelation that consciousness’s own self exists, or consciousness’s own self is given, indubitably extant and eternal. And the same applies to any mediator secularly conceived: for example, if a teacher is capable of human enlightenment, then such a condition is not unavailable to human beings as such and consciousness is not necessarily relegated to wretchedness.

In this section, we have considered the wretchedness of consciousness aware that all of its activities are nothing. We saw, given this awareness, consciousness relieve itself of all its particular satisfactions before an entity that is both a particular consciousness and the universal unchangeable in the world, the mediator. And in this self-annihilative surrender to the mediator, consciousness makes possible the revelation in the mediator that it itself exists, or that unchangeable being works through it just as much as any other given fact of existence., The actions of life-sickness and surrender have been actions of unchangeable being coming to awareness of itself in the history of consciousness, a history of life-sickness that is given and eternal.

Now we have completed our journey through this second stage of the unhappy consciousness, one that consists of devotion, desire and work, and wretchedness. We have seen consciousness devote itself to a particular that conceals the inward self, and the failure therein of a particular that relegates the self to a fathomless realm. We have seen consciousness desire and work for the great universal power that gives itself to consciousness, and the self-renunciation of

⁵¹ *Hegel’s Ladder: Volume 1*, 435.

conscious activity that cannot rid itself of itself to participate fully in this great power. And we have seen the wretchedness of consciousness, the effort of consciousness to annihilate itself to relieve the misery of activity, an attempt that drives consciousness to self-annihilation yet opens the way for the revelation of the third form of the unhappy consciousness, to which we will turn in the subsequent chapter.

In this chapter, four tasks have been accomplished. First, I presented the unhappy consciousness, the withdrawal into aloneness and inwardness in search for eternal existence. Then, I outlined the unhappy consciousness as a whole, prefacing the development each of its forms will undergo. Third, I outlined each of these forms, an initial progression followed by a second progression, the latter consisting of three forms – devotion, desire and work, and wretchedness. And finally, I presented consciousness in the light of the third form of the unhappy consciousness, consciousness that is itself the unfolding of eternal existence into higher possibilities. We now move on to discuss the event of the third form of the unhappy consciousness.

Chapter 3: The Third Form of the Unhappy Consciousness

In this chapter, I accomplish two tasks. First, I comment upon the third form of the unhappy consciousness, elaborating what it means for this third form to be the intertwining of the single individual with eternal, indubitable essence. And second, I discuss as my own contribution the kinds of stories that it is possible for this third form to tell about itself, stories of comedy and tragedy.

I. The Third Form of the Unhappy Consciousness

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel spends little time describing the third form of the unhappy consciousness. He discusses for a paragraph at the start of the chapter on reason that consciousness does learn that it itself is absolute, and later in the *Phenomenology* he continues speaking in this manner, as in the chapter on “Absolute Knowing.”¹ In the progress of the *Phenomenology*, however, after the section on the unhappy consciousness, Hegel moves on to discuss the event of reason as categorical, logical thinking. What I take to be my distinctive contribution in this chapter, then, is my emphasis on this transition at the centre of Hegel’s text,

¹ For example, Hegel’s discussion of time pertains to this third form of unhappy consciousness: “Time is the Notion itself that is there and which presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, Spirit necessarily appears in Time, and it appears in Time just so long as it has not grasped its pure Notion, i.e. has not annulled Time” (801).

between his chapters on “Self-Consciousness” and “Reason,” a transition that I suggest marks the passage from the second form of the unhappy consciousness to the third.

The third form of the unhappy consciousness emerges when consciousness understands itself to exist absolutely.² Hegel writes, “In grasping the thought that the *single* individual consciousness is *in itself* Absolute Essence, consciousness has returned into itself” (231).

Whereas the second form of the unhappy consciousness took consciousness to be an immersion in changeable becoming that has as its essence and ultimate meaning alien, unchangeable being, this third form of the unhappy consciousness is such that it understands itself as indubitably extant; that is to say, consciousness now takes its own journey through its changing stages to be a fact of existence that cannot be denied. Consciousness’s own unfolding is as much extant as any other feature of existence, and so the particular or single individual is not at a remove from the locus of meaning and eternal fact of existence, but rather is itself an indubitable fact. The unhappy consciousness is no longer, as in the second form, the non-existent search for existence in an inward, alien realm of being, but rather the self-unfolding of existence itself, as much an attribute of existence and unchangeable eternity as any other.

Conceptually the indubitable existence of the unhappy consciousness is implicit in the very event of scepticism. Scepticism is the standpoint whereby consciousness doubts the alien existence of anything that is proclaimed to be: everything is a vanishing essence, that is to say, everything can be doubted. But scepticism’s contradiction is this: that it must proclaim the

² The term ‘absolute’ appears here in Hegel’s text after two demonstrations: first, that consciousness is self-consciousness, and second, that self-consciousness is, as the experience of both scepticism and the unhappy consciousness, the eternal fact of unhappy consciousness. The scope of my thesis does not cover the former claim, and so the fact that, for Hegel, self-consciousness underlies all truth-taking behavior is one I have not earned. For Hegel, the third form of the unhappy consciousness is absolute because it is both the experience at the ground of any conscious truth-taking and the experience of the unhappy consciousness as an eternal feature of human self-consciousness. In this chapter, I will only defend the latter claim, and so will not follow Hegel into the postulation that this third form in absolute, the totalizing ground of any and all truths.

existence of what it doubts, and so the fact of existence, that something does exist, cannot be doubted. This indubitable fact of existence, a unity of experience that even the sceptic carries in them as an implicit assumption, is the eternal unchanging one, and this eternity exists in the heart of consciousness itself, in consciousness's own capacity to proclaim the existence of something, even if this existence is thereafter doubted.

The second form of the unhappy consciousness, as we have seen, follows directly from the event of scepticism: consciousness understands itself only in terms of its reference outside of the doubtable changing becoming it participates in and towards this unchanging fact of existence that lies in an inward realm, distinct and alien from the world to which consciousness belongs. The unhappy consciousness is, then, this divided consciousness: it is the search inward for an eternity that is nowhere in the world, but is nonetheless the only possibly guarantee of existence, a guarantee that exists indubitably in the inwardness of consciousness.

Now, because the unhappy consciousness is the experience implied but not admitted by the event of scepticism, the unhappy consciousness as a movement cannot be doubted. To doubt the unhappy consciousness is to doubt the very experience of doubt, an experience that must be conceded if there is to be doubt at all. Therefore, the unhappy consciousness cannot be doubted: it exists indubitably, or put otherwise, the single individual undergoing the movements of the unhappy consciousness is an indubitable fact of existence.

To exist as a single individual, then, is to feel separate from existence, searching for it, holding out for its possibility, and this search is eternal. Both the single individual who conceives themselves as separate from the fact of existence that persists in their own inwardness and the search for this existence into inwardness are together an unchangeable attribute of existence. The admission of the unhappy consciousness as itself unchangeable, or rather, as itself eternal

essence, is the third form of the unhappy consciousness, one that sees only the fact of existence striving to find itself through the false divisiveness of the unhappy consciousness, a divisiveness that is false but nonetheless must exist insofar as the unhappy consciousness takes itself and its relegation to changeable becoming not to exist, trapped in reference to its inward, unchangeable being as if this were alien to it.

In Hegel's account, the third form of the unhappy consciousness makes possible human reason. He writes that when consciousness's "own action and being, as being that of this *particular* consciousness, are being and action *in themselves*, there has arisen for consciousness the idea of *Reason*, of the certainty that, in its particular individuality, it has being absolutely *in itself*, or is all reality" (230). Reason is the human capacity to deduce from the standpoint of absolute truth, to take a standpoint that is entirely eternal and devoid of the changeableness of history and contingency.³ This capacity is one that belongs to the third form of the unhappy consciousness, insofar as only with this third form does consciousness discover that its own journey through the stages of unhappy consciousness are indubitable attributes of eternity. Reason is a feature of conscious life insofar as we can speak on behalf of the absolute, something that neither scepticism nor the first two forms of the unhappy consciousness could claim to do since they took themselves to be at a remove from eternal truth, either because, for the sceptic, eternal truths are doubtable in themselves or because, for the unhappy consciousness, that eternity exists inwardly as an alien reality.⁴

³ As Russon writes, it, reason is "the experience of oneself as actually speaking on behalf of the universal." Reason, then, is our capacity for purely logical and mathematical thinking, thinking that is absolutely true and necessary, though devoid of reference to particularity, history and contingency.

⁴ That is not to say that sceptics doubt reason, but it is to say that scepticism alone, in its most radical form, would not be able to acknowledge reason, its capacity to take an absolute standpoint, though it does contain this capacity implicitly.

According to Jean Wahl, this process of the unhappy consciousness as eternity's separation in order to discover its own eternal nature is the theme of Hegel's text. Wahl writes, "the *Phenomenology* is essentially a theory of separation insofar as it destroys itself in order to attain reason."⁵ The movement whereby the human being traverses the conception of their own non-existence, searching inwardly for something that does exist, a search that takes them to self-annihilation in the attempt to eliminate their own wretched contaminating action from the given world is, for Wahl, the subject of the *Phenomenology*, and the way whereby consciousness learns that it can take itself to be an eternal fact of existence. Wahl writes, "Happiness is a bird of storms; it is born from unhappiness; it lives in unhappiness; it is the anti-halcyon; it is the storm itself, becoming conscious of itself at the most violent center and likewise in all the twists of its whirlwind."⁶ It is an eternal fact that consciousness, the bird, and the condition of consciousness passing through the unhappy consciousness discovers itself as eternal, the universal storm itself. Or again, "Unhappy consciousness is cancelled and conserved. It appears close to the faraway shore that forms the horizon, as an island, which, burning in the sun, seems to become a happy cloud."⁷ The unhappy consciousness never makes to the shore of its happiness, but rather is agonizingly burned by the sun, an agony that evaporates it in the revelation of its indubitable existence, the particular island become a happy cloud through its agony in the universal sun. This movement of eternity's self-discovery through human beings, and the human being defined as the indubitably extant movement of the unhappy consciousness's search for existence, are the features that make up the third form of the unhappy consciousness, the unhappy consciousness regarded not as separate from eternity, but rather as itself an attribute of eternity.

⁵ Jean Wahl, "Mediation, Negativity, and Separation", trans. Christopher Fox and Leonard Lawlor, in Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy, Ed. Dennis King Keenan (Albany: State University of New York Press), 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

II. Comedy and Tragedy

In this section, I suggest that the third form of the unhappy consciousness is essentially tragicomic. In other words, the human being is eternally the unhappy consciousness, and the kinds of stories we can tell about ourselves, stories that are reflections of the absolute and eternal within ourselves, are comic and tragic in character. Given that the third form of the unhappy consciousness is the indubitable existence of the story of itself, we may now comment on the kinds of stories that human beings can tell about themselves, stories that will resound as human statements about eternal features of existence.

The unhappy consciousness is, by nature, comedic. It is self-justifying, without origin, groundless, yet it exists with undeniable certitude. It is revel for the sake of itself, a past that continues to unfold into the future with no apparent aim and no apparent end but for the fact that this is what it does. It is revel; it is mere play within itself, never leaving itself, or rather, leaving itself, becoming mixed up in false realities, only to discover that in fact these falsehoods were never the case and everything had always only ever been existence itself. The joy of comedy is the manner in which a false reality is traversed in order to reveal, in the falsity of the way, the harmony and reunion of what is. Comedy may be the revelation of a political state gone awry, a satire of this errancy that reveals what is right, or it may be the journey of lovers caught up in disguise, mix-up and deception to eventually reveal these mix-ups and the ever-present truth of the harmony of lovers therein, or it may be the description of bodies that are different from each other but nonetheless exist together in state of erotic revel that passes through all of them. It is those emotions of dread in misunderstanding and the relief of a denouement in which all disguises and misunderstandings are unveiled to reinstate order that comedy is designed to stir, emotions that resound in our eternal nature.

But alongside the eternal revel of comedy is the equally eternal tragic drama. The third form of the unhappy consciousness is the revelation of the eternal condition of a humanity that ineluctably pummels towards its own self-annihilation for the sake of finding its own origin, unaware that the very concepts that drove it so were never the case; wrapped up in illusions about a possible discovery of this origin, humanity continues to suffer, striving agonized against the confounds of the world for the sake of impossible repose. Tragedy is predicated on the human being's insatiable impulse to strive and to cross further limits, an impulse of unrest, discontent and disquiet, an impulse for disorder, or rather, the eternal impulse to seek unreason in order to find itself. The traversal against the confounding world and towards self-destruction, seeking an impossible repose, is first for human beings: tragedy invokes in us emotions of dread over lovers who never consummate their destined betrothal, or emotions of horror regarding the search for our origins gone awry and the discovery that such truths cannot be seen with finite, human eyes, or the aloneness and unworldly strangeness we experience in our confusion about what we might be.

According to Hyppolite, this is the most original feature of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, that the revelation of eternal truths must always include the history of the discovery of these truths, that philosophy is essentially the story of the self-discovery of humanity. Hyppolite writes, "This is what is most original in Hegel's philosophy, the reconciliation of the history of thought with thought itself."⁸ Or, as Harris stresses, the eternal is not an object but a process, "the definition of a thought whose very being is its *self-realization* in human thinking."⁹ Comedy and tragedy are these eternal facts told as human stories, as journeys through unhappy consciousness.

⁸ *Genesis and Structure*, 228.

⁹ *Hegel's Ladder: Volume 1*, 451.

In this chapter, I have accomplished two tasks. First, I highlighted the third form of the unhappy consciousness, the admission of the eternal nature of the strivings of unhappy consciousness itself. And second, I suggested that the way we as human beings participate in the eternal truths that make up who we are is through the telling of comic and tragic stories.

Conclusion

This thesis began with stoicism, the certainty that self-consciousness is free thinking, that self-consciousness determines itself by determining how it will receive the world, and in belonging to this world, understands itself in the way it has determined itself. The free thinking of stoicism is self-will or self-determination. But this free thinking, as the ground or cause of how the natural world is received, is withdrawn from that world; it is indifferent to particularity, for it cannot be affected by the particular currents of life. This twofold reflection of freedom, self-determination and withdrawal, is the concept of stoicism, which is lived more actually by the sceptic.

The actual experience of stoical free thinking results in scepticism. The sceptic is the particular consciousness for whom particular truths are given already, but, with the awareness that these truths have no basis other than the groundless free thinking of self-consciousness, the sceptic is convinced by none of them and instead wavers in a world without fixed or immutable significance, a world of vanishing, unconvincing dealings. The sceptic, however, suffers an internal contradiction: in order to deem the nullity of the world to which he belongs, the sceptic must concede that the doubtable world does exist for the sceptic and that in the sceptic's own experience is the unity of experience that all doubtable circumstances are a part of. The sceptic

maintains implicitly both that he belongs to a vanishing world and that the indubitable existence of this world is proclaimed in the sceptic's own, inward experience of the vanishing world.

The contradiction of the sceptic internalized, the unhappy consciousness is the divided self: it acknowledges that it belongs to a changeable world of vanishing, unconvincing particularity, and it believes that this world only has a ground or a meaning with recourse to an inward, unchanging fact of existence. The unhappy consciousness is internally divided between these two sides: in the world it is lost in changeable, vanishing particulars, but it knows that what guarantees the meaning of this world is unchangeable being, a fact of existence and a unity of experience inwardly conceived but, insofar as consciousness belongs to the world of vanishing particulars, this unchanging unity is alien and withdrawn from consciousness itself.

The experience of unhappy consciousness is, then, on the one hand the disillusionment with a confounding world, and on the other the call towards solitude, the inward search for something that exists unchangeably. This experience is threefold: first it is the attempt to reach outside itself to a worldless eternity, second it is the grappling with an eternity that must be somewhere in the world, and third it is the admission of the eternal nature of the unhappy consciousness itself.

The first experience of unhappy consciousness is its attempt to leave the world it belongs to to find its inward eternity. This attempt fails, for the unhappy consciousness cannot leave itself to dwell in this perfect repose. Therein, the unhappy consciousness learns that if it cannot dwell with unchangeable being, then pure eternity never could have been that inwardness of the unhappy consciousness: the unhappy consciousness learns at once that it has the whole time been striving towards self-annihilation, to nothing, and that the unchangeable being of its own inwardness must be somewhere in the world.

The second experience of the unhappy consciousness is the attempt to find the eternal locus of meaning in the world. It passes through three different attempts: devotion, desire and work, and wretchedness. But each attempt here, too, is a failure, since the unchangeable in incarnate form only makes the unchangeable, though embodied in another entity, remote and different than what consciousness, this particular body in the world, has access to. In devotion, consciousness tries to find its self in a thing that it devotes itself to, but finds that due to the remoteness of the unchangeable, it is aiming for a relation to what it is on the other side of its own life from within its own life: it aims to relate to a grave. In desire and work, consciousness finds that unchangeable being must be a universal power that gives to consciousness its own embodied form as the given world: consciousness enjoys existence because this power gives itself form by way of the world, and whatever consciousness does is work for the sake of this world-giving power of the unchangeable. Yet desire and work, too, fail to bring consciousness to dwelling with its essence, because consciousness must renounce its own particularity to engage this work of universal significance; consciousness never comes to rest, but pummels deeper into self-renunciation. The unhappy consciousness becomes wretched: it discovers that it itself is the contaminating particularity that keeps it from the peaceful repose of eternity, and it broods over itself and its wretched fallenness. Yet this brooding is only the need to surrender particularity altogether, to reduce all conscious activity to nothing, and consciousness finds a priest, a representative of unchangeable being, before whom it can engage this self-surrender. But this attempt results in the reduction of consciousness to a thing, to complete self-erasure, and consciousness is bent to the discovery that essential, unchangeable being cannot be anything but the existence that consciousness is already, thereby awakening to the third form of the unhappy consciousness.

In the third chapter, I considered the third form of the unhappy consciousness. First I demonstrated that this third form is consciousness's awareness that the unhappy consciousness is eternal: that is, the inward search for existence is not, as the second form stipulates, a non-existent consciousness searching for an unity of experience it and its world do not belong to, but rather the unhappy consciousness and this search in the world for something that exists is an eternal, unchanging attribute of existence. The third form is the unhappy consciousness as absolute essence: the search for existence is what it means to exist, and consciousness is eternal existence searching for itself. And second, I made my own contribution to our understanding of our absolute essence: the stories of unhappy consciousness that resound in our eternal nature are those stories of comic and tragic character. The human being's search for eternity is comic insofar as it is a supposition of the non-existence of the human being who searches for its own origin or its own true harmony as if at a remove from this, yet this very searching is the existence consciousness seeks: comedy evokes the feeling of disunity, disguise and misunderstanding returned to truth, a feeling that resounds in us eternally. And tragedy is the reverse: supposing the unity of our experience, we are doomed to discover that we must undergo this search for existence, that it is our condition to do so, and that we must, therefore, pummel towards our own self-annihilation. The human being is this tragic compulsion towards self-annihilation searching for something that exists, for itself and its own inward essence: tragedy evokes feelings of harmony and worldliness that drives towards strangeness and a cleft in our very being, to self-destruction in the search for what we are.

The thesis, then, is this: self-conscious freedom is the traversal through the tragedy of self-annihilative unhappy consciousness, a way that can awaken to a third form of the unhappy consciousness, wherein we can revel in our natural folly or tell the story of our tragic humanity.

Bibliography

- Burbidge, J. "Unhappy Consciousness in Hegel: An Analysis of Medieval Catholicism?" In *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Canadian Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 67-80, 1978.
- Chiereghin, F. "Freedom of Thought: Stoicism, Skepticism and Unhappy Consciousness." In *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 55-71, 2009
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977
- Harris, H. S. *Hegel's Ladder. Volume I: The Pilgrimage of Reason*. Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997
- Hyppolite, J. *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974
- Kainz, H. P. *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part I: Analysis and Commentary*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1976
- Kojeve, A. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by James H. Nichols Jr. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969
- Lauer, Q. *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1993
- Russon, J. *Reading Hegel's Phenomenology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004
- Russon, J. *Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel's Science of Experience*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016
- Solomon, R. C. *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983

Wahl, J. "Mediation, Negativity and Separation," translated by Christopher Fox and Leonard Lawlor in *Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, p. 1-21, 2004