THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEGEL AND SKEPTICISM

ALEX LAMPROS
Fall 2009

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for a baccalaureate degree
in Philosophy
with honors in Philosophy

Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Dr. Brady Bowman
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Thesis Supervisor

Dr. Vincent Colapietro
Liberal Arts Research Professor of Philosophy
Honors Adviser

 * Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

Abstract

In this thesis I explore Hegel's relationship to skepticism. Today this relationship remains largely unexplored, especially in the English-speaking world. I examine this relationship in an original way by turning my attention away from the epistemological issues and exploring how the skeptics' lived experience of freedom (*ataraxia*) finds expression in Hegel's systematic appropriation of skepticism. I show that this moment finds expression in Hegel's thought in a unique way that broadens our conception of Hegel's philosophy.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

The immediate purpose of this thesis is to investigate the question of how Hegel interprets ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism and assess the relative merits of his approach to the original texts. The interest of such an investigation is evident in light of the critical role that skepticism plays in (though not necessarily limited to) Hegel's dialectic, and is therefore fundamental to his philosophical position. Moreover, because no exhaustive account of this relationship has been presented, I expect that this thesis will offer an original contribution to contemporary Hegel scholarship. In this thesis, I examine what Hegel takes to be the key points of ancient skepticism, and question the accuracy, persuasiveness, innovativeness, and fruitfulness of his interpretation. This will provoke an examination of how Hegel productively appropriates ancient skepticism and integrates it into his system. It is unclear whether or not Hegel offers a positive methodological appropriation, or a negative attempt to overcome skepticism (or both). Moreover, it is necessary to examine how successful Hegel is in his endeavor to integrate skeptical modes, and whether or not his interpretation stays consistent over the span of his philosophical development. Apart from his appropriation, I will also examine the how Hegel sheds light on the intrinsic value and significance of skepticism as a philosophical position.

Chapter 2

Hegel

2.1   Introduction

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's thought has had a monumental impact on the history of ideas since his death in 1831. Yet while Hegel as an intellectual figure enjoys wonderful popularity as the champion of the 19th century German idealist movement, still such popularity has contributed little to overcoming classical misconceptions of his thought. These misconceptions and trivial over-simplifications have contributed to the postmodern phobia of complete philosophical systems committed to explaining and articulating scientific, social, and artistic phenomena in terms of a single unifying concept. Nevertheless, one of the central challenges that Hegel's metaphysical apparatus is intended to resolve continues to be of paramount importance to present-day philosophical discourse. The issue is: how we can account for our instinctive conception of ourselves as free, self-determining, and ontologically irreducible agents when faced with the mechanistic laws that govern the phenomenal world as envisioned by natural science; and, to do so in a way that no "why-question" may be left to ask – an explanatory condition coined by Leibniz as the demand of reason. Hegel's rich, rigorous, and ambitious project aims to resolve this issue with a complete and systematic explanation for all reality.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Hegel's relationship to skepticism. Therefore, in this chapter, I will explain some of the most fundamental and crucial concepts in Hegel's system. I will begin with Hegel's concept of the Absolute, and focus on how Hegel formulates this concept in order to meet the demands of solving the problem of free will and determinism. Having done this, I will then

discuss what Hegel means by "the understanding" along with what he means by "reason". Here I will detail how these concepts, or modes of cognition, play a role in what Hegel calls "mediation" and "negation of negation". Finally I will explain the mechanics of Hegel's dialectic, and how reason plays a role in carrying out the dialectic. For the sake of brevity and in order to focus on the immediate concern of this thesis, my dealings with each of the above listed issues will extend only far enough to provide the reader with the necessary background in order to see us through our later discussions of Hegel's relationship to skepticism.

2.2 The Absolute

The primary task of Hegel's philosophical endeavor is to construct a rational, scientific understanding of the highest reality as such – of the Absolute. In Hegel's consideration, the form of truth itself is scientific in character; thus any pursuit of knowledge must be a systematic development that expresses truth in terms of notions and concepts alone. Philosophy must be raised to the standards of science if its knowledge claims are to amount to more than dogmatic assurances. Hegel is convinced that only a monistic philosophical perspective is capable of satisfying the conceptual demands of this philosophical project. He was thus deeply influenced by the substance monism of 17th century rationalist Baruch Spinoza, while sharing the concerns of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi that Spinozism has the conceptually unpalatable consequences of being deterministic and nihilistic. This puts Hegel in the difficult position of trying to account for human freedom and ontological individuality within a monistic framework, "In my view… everything depends on grasping and expressing the ultimate truth not as Substance, but as Subject as well"[1]. Hegel's structural modification to Spinozism consists in changing

---

[1] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Trans. J.B. Baillie. Ed. George Lichtheim. New York: Harper & Row, 1967. p. 80. Henceforth cited as PhG.

the concept of the Absolute from a dead, static substance, to a living, dynamic organism. What distinguishes this new organic concept is that the Absolute is now understood as the result of its own self-positing. The dynamic quality of Hegel's Absolute is that it is simultaneously cause and effect of itself, "It is the process of its own becoming" (PhG 81). That the Absolute, conceived as such, is self-relational gives rise to structural similarities between the organic Absolute and empirical self-consciousness – the Absolute becomes conscious of itself in its own self-mediation[2], and it is through this process of self-mediation that the Absolute comes to posit itself. This self-relational structure also accounts for freedom, so far as being the process of its own becoming is the same as being self-determinant, and that which is self-determinant is free – not merely substance, but subject as well.

The immediate implication of Hegel's new conceptual model is the ability to understand the relations between the attributes of the Absolute in a non-mechanistic, and hence not *strictly* deterministic, way. The Absolute is the process of its own self-determination, thus by extension, all the attributes of the Absolute share this freely self-determining structure[3]. Human beings, as an attribute of the one all-encompassing Absolute, may be understood as free, self-conscious, and self-determining beings. However, the freedom of human beings is not just the sort of naïve freedom one would associate with raising one's arm upon command of the will[4]. Freedom must be understood on two separate levels, as it were. On the one hand, we observe the particular freedom of our actions as they obey the commands of our will – if I wish to drink my coffee, I extend my arm and raise the cup to my lips. However, each instance of particular freedom necessarily extends beyond its particularity, so far as it must *also* be understood in terms of the universal as an event in the self-becoming of the Absolute. The

---

[2] I will explain the concept of mediation later in this section.
[3] Or, to say this another way, the attributes of the Absolute participate in this process of self-determination.
[4] I use "will" in the volitional sense.

part is the whole, and each part must be understood in terms of the whole. When my action, as understood as the action of a particular attribute of the Absolute, is understood in terms of the whole qua universal, we see that my freedom is always bound up with a teleological process of self-becoming that exists beyond me. My free action was *necessarily* free according to the higher self-becoming of the universal subject. My individual naïve freedom, understood speculatively in terms of the Absolute, is always bound up with a necessity that exists beyond me; but that necessity which exists beyond me is itself one of freedom. Put simply, I am condemned to be free, and my particular freedom is not just my own, but is bound up with the universal freedom of the life of the Absolute. Because my freedom is bound up with a freedom that exists beyond my individuality, it *presents* itself as out of my control – as a kind of necessity; though, again, this necessity is only the freedom of the Absolute existing beyond my individuality, thus, when properly understood, it is not necessity but the freedom of the Absolute manifesting itself in me qua individual.

2.3   Hegelian Terminology and Distinctions

This puts us in a position to make an important distinction between reason and the understanding. When I woke up this morning and began brushing my teeth, I did not consider my actions as necessarily free in terms of their being bound up with the universal freedom of the Absolute. On the contrary, I lived according to the naïve freedom that we all instinctively assume. In a certain sense, I did not see the 'complete picture' as I carried out my morning tasks. To use Hegel's language, my knowledge was finite in its one-sidedness. I understood myself in terms of my particular subjectivity without understanding myself in terms of my universal objectivity. In this sense, my understanding was one-sided. This one-sided conception is what Hegel calls the finite understanding. This mode of conception consists in conceiving of things in terms of their finite particularity without realizing their

equal participation in the infinite universality of the Absolute. This finite understanding is not meant to carry strictly negative connotations; Hegel recognizes that it is necessary to conduct our everyday pragmatic lives with this finite understanding. However, when it comes to doing *philosophy*, the finite understanding *does* carry negative connotations. Rational understanding, by contrast, is not one-sided in its understanding, but complete. It seeks to understand things in terms of both their particularity as well as their universality. Only by exercising reason can we conduct the kind of speculative philosophy that Hegel proposes is necessary for grasping truth. Human beings, we assume, are the only beings capable of reason, capable of grasping the world in terms of its particularity as well as its universality – that is, human beings are in the unique position of being able to realize truths about the Absolute through their use of reason. Understood properly, this activity of the speculative philosopher realizing truths about the Absolute would amount to the Absolute coming to realize itself, since the individual is an attribute of the Absolute – he is a part that must always be understood as a part of the larger whole qua Absolute. Our realizations of the Absolute is the Absolute becoming conscious of itself *in and through itself*. The Absolute returns to itself in and through our rational cognition – it *is* our rational cognition. This self-realization in and through itself is what sets the Absolute apart from a Spinozistic substance – it is subject, *spirit*, self-complete within itself.

This process of moving through itself helps to explain what Hegel means by "mediation". To stick with our example of the human being, before the individual exercises reason, the Absolute is considered to be mediated in itself, so far as it has not yet returned to itself in self-recognition. The immediate universal substance is just bare static universality. However this universality also consists in particularity - particulars like all the particular elements of the finite world, for example. The indeterminacy of the immediate substance is said to be mediated by the particularity of the determinate world (i.e., the world of finite determinations); the finite understanding grasps the world one-sidedly in

terms of finite determinations – the pen that I am writing with appears as a concatenation of finite determinations (it is extended in length, breadth, depth, has a particular color, density, etc.). Now, these finite determinations reveal themselves as inter-dependent. For example, the weight of my pen is dependent on its elevation above the earth, for obviously my pen would have a very different weight if measured in, say, the upper thermosphere; this, of course, is because the object is further from the earth's center of gravity. Thus the weight of my pen is nothing *in itself*, but is wholly determined by external factors (distance being one of them). Thus the finite understanding lives its life in terms of finite determinations, but these finite determinations are nothing *in themselves*; rather they reveal themselves as mutually dependent. When Hegel says that these finite mediations are nothing, he surely does not mean that they are nothing *at all*; this would be absurd. He merely means that they are not independent – they are dependent on other external factors that determine their existence, they are not self-determining; in other words, they do not meet the criteria for the Absolute as that which is unconditioned, self-determining, and self-complete in and for itself. When reason shows these determinations as nothing in themselves and that their determination is dependent on something external to its specific determination (like the weight of my pen being determined by its distance from the predominating center of gravity, the earth), the finite mediation is said to be mediated – its true structure is said to be revealed in terms of the Absolute. When we as speculative philosophers exercise reason and realize the 'negative' nature of the finite in its reciprocal relationship to the other which determines it as such, we realize the Absolute nature of that finite object, move beyond its finite particularity, and come to know it in terms of its mutual interdependence with its external determinations. In this absolute realization, again when understood properly, the Absolute makes the transition from static substance to dynamic self-realizing spirit. This moment, when the Absolute returns to itself, has been called mediating the mediation (or, sometimes, negating the negation), because the universal moved in and through its own internal

particularity, back to a state of self-realized universality. The universal returned to itself in and through our realization of its nature.

2.4   The Dialectic

This process of exercising reason by demonstrating that finite determinations are not independent, but reciprocally dependent is the essence of Hegel's dialectic. The purpose of the dialectic is to show that the universal is not, strictly speaking, distinct from its particular contents, that the part is always part of the whole and that each part necessarily implies the whole. The dialectic is the systematic treatment of the contents of the Absolute designed to show that each particular determination of the Absolute does not, in itself, exist for itself, but only exists for itself in the context of the one Absolute. In order to show this, Hegel proceeds by way of a series of *reductio ad absurdum* proofs – that is, he wants to prove that the particular determinations exist for themselves in terms of the Absolute, thus he assumes the negation of this proposition (that particular determinations exist for themselves in themselves) and shows that a contradiction ensues on this assumption; thus, by *reductio ad absurdum*, it is proved that the particular determination exists for itself in terms of the Absolute.

There has been a great deal of confusion about the nature of contradictions in Hegel's thought, so let's be clear. When Hegel says that a determination is self-contradictory, he means that it is nothing in itself, just like weight of my pen is nothing in itself because it is determined by external factors. He is not committing a logical blunder in making the claim that an object is self-contradictory, he is following up on a *reductio ad absurdum* proof in showing that if we assume that this determination exists in and for itself, then a contradiction ensues, since one can always find another external object on which our original determination depended on for its existence as such. This is the dialectical method: we start with a particular determination, assume it to exist in and for itself, and then show that it is reciprocally

dependent on an object external to it (just as weight is reciprocally dependent on distance from the dominate center of gravity); in this reciprocal relationship, we see that the particular determination does *not* exist in and for itself, so far as it is dependent on that which is other to it. These two reciprocal determinations then become sublated in their mutual dependence, and become part of one new concept. This new concept expresses the union of the two reciprocally interdependent determinations, which means that both determinations are *preserved* in this new concept, yet these two determinations are also destroyed individually, so far as they can be apprehended *only* in terms of their reciprocal determinate relationship[5]. Thus, in sublation, the two reciprocal determinations are both destroyed and preserved at the same time. This new concept is then supposed to exist in and for itself, and the dialectical process starts over and builds on itself. This concludes our discussion of Hegel and puts us in a position to discuss his relationship to skepticism.

---

[5] I believe a useful analogy for understanding the *concept* of sublation can be found in physics. Acceleration is the rate of change of velocity with respect to time. The *union of* velocity and time are preserved in the concept of acceleration. Still, acceleration cannot be reduced to time alone in complete exclusion from velocity, nor vice versa. In this sense, individually speaking, velocity and time are 'destroyed' within acceleration, though at the same time, they are both preserved in acceleration, but only in their union. However, this is only an analogy and carries all the limitations of analogies in general. Thus it should be taken lightly, as a way to grasp the general concept without placing too much emphasis on the details.

Chapter 3

Skepticism

3.1   Introduction

Skepticism is one of the most widely known but least understood streams of thought in philosophy. This is due not to its complexity as a philosophical attitude, but to the fact that skepticism comes in so many varieties that the word "skepticism" becomes almost indecipherably ambiguous. In other words, "skepticism" could mean Cartesian skepticism, Humean skepticism, Academic skepticism, Pyrrhonian skepticism, or Vedantic skepticism (if we wish to extend our scope beyond the western canon). Each of these forms of skepticism exhibits different (sometimes radically different) features from the others, and lumping them all together leads to hopeless confusion. Moreover, we have a natural tendency to associate any mention of skepticism with its modern forms, such as Cartesian skepticism. Thus it is in the spirit of responsible inquiry to explicate the nature of the ancient form of skepticism – that is, Pyrrhonian skepticism[6] – and juxtapose it with its modern variations for the sake of clarity. Also, I think that it is a good idea to hold a discussion of ancient skepticism alone before conducting an inquiry on Hegel's rich and no less complex discussion of Pyrrhonian skepticism.

Accordingly, this chapter will unfold in two parts. First I will explicate the main features of ancient skepticism, and consider the differences between ancient and modern skepticism in order that the reader may not confuse the two. Second, I will engage Hegel's discussion of skepticism: Why does

---

[6] I will use ancient skepticism and Pyrrhonian skepticism interchangeably, and will always address Academic skepticism as "Academic skepticism".

Hegel think ancient skepticism is superior to modern skepticism? What is Hegel's critique of ancient skepticism? And finally, how does Hegel adopt and adapt ancient skepticism to meet his own systematic needs?

3.2   Ancient Skepticism

3.2.1   The Ancient Skeptic

What is ancient skepticism? Before we answer this, lets get clear on what is meant by the skeptic in the Pyrrhonian sense. A skeptic is simply an inquirer or investigator who challenges the assumptions of Greek philosophy at the time; assumptions like truth exists, or knowledge is possible. The idea that an ancient skeptic is merely a doubter or a disbeliever is fundamentally misleading. It is because the skeptic, as an inquirer, happens to arrive at an epistemological deadlock that we lump him[7] under the familiar connotation of a disbeliever. However, to naively call a skeptic a disbeliever is a mistake and leads to misinterpretations, for Sextus Empiricus, in his authoritative work *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* writes, "[while] Cleitomachus and Carneades and other Academics treat it [truth] as inapprehensible: the skeptics keep on searching"[8]. The Pyrrhonian skeptic is constantly searching for truth, rather than forever seeking to debunk all truth as terms like "disbeliever" or "doubter" might lead one to believe. The skeptic does not claim to have found truth, nor does he claim that it cannot be found, he just continues in his search. More importantly, to consider a skeptic a doubter or disbeliever presents a one-sided view of the discipline. The fact of the matter is that the skeptic school is characterized as *zetetic* for its activity of investigation, *ephetic* for its suspensive state of mind, and *aporetic* for its habit of

---

[7] By "him" I always mean him or her.
[8] Empiricus., Sextus. *Sextus Empiricus Outlines of Pyrrhonism (Loeb Classical Library No. 273)*. New York: Loeb Classical Library, 1933. p. 3. Henceforth cited as Sx.

doubting (Sx. 5-7)[9]. Hence to call an ancient skeptic a doubter is to associate it with the aporetic aspect

of the school alone, while denying the other two aspects of the school. This detail about the skeptic

allows us to make a transition into a discussion of skepticism by drawing an important inference from

the previous discussion: skepticism is not a *terminating* discipline. It does not reach an *end* or the

conclusion that it has found truth (like the dogmatists), nor does it reach the end conclusion that truth is

inapprehensible (like the Academics). Inquiry serves as both the means and the end of the discipline.

3.2.2   Ancient Skepticism

That said, Sextus offers a wonderfully terse definition of skepticism, which we will now take the

time to unpack, "Skepticism is an ability (*dynamis*), or mental attitude, which opposes appearances to

judgments *in any way whatsoever*; the resulting equipollence of objections and reasons opposed brings

us to a mental suspense (*epoché*) and next a state of unperturbedness or quietude (*ataraxia*)" (Sx. 7).

The first point to notice is that skepticism is a mental attitude. Merely applying skeptical *methods* at

times when it is epistemologically expedient to do so does not make one a skeptic. To be a skeptic is to

maintain a certain way of addressing life itself – that is, with a mental attitude that follows a certain line

of reasoning. The skeptic lives his life by constantly participating in this ability.

This mental attitude consists in opposing appearances to judgments in such a way that every

proposition is opposed with an *equally* strong proposition, such that one may neither affirm, nor deny

the proposition in question. This method of producing equal arguments for and against a proposition is

called equipollence. The skeptics have a wide arsenal of techniques for arousing this state of equipoise,

ranging from the ten tropes of Aenesidemus, to the five tropes of Agrippa, to the eight tropes against the

---

[9] I have omitted the fourth characteristic of skepticism as "Pyrrhonian", since Pyrrho was the most
thorough skeptic, simply because it is a trivial and unnecessary detail.

aetiologists; and while these tropes are of great epistemological interest, any sufficient discussion would extend beyond the scope of this inquiry; thus I will simply mention them here. However, let me say that the point of these skeptical tropes was to combat non-evident propositions. This, of course, is not meant to be taken as an *absolute* formula (for that would be dogmatism); rather it is the intention of the skeptic to address the propositions that appear to him by using a certain method. Yet the skeptic does not wish to dogmatically commit himself to that method. The skeptic uses his method in much the same way a physician might prescribe a remedy to a set of symptoms. Obviously a physician does not propose that for all symptoms 'x' there applies one and only one *absolute* remedy 'y'. Instead the physician lives by the appearances and observes that remedy 'y' *seems* to have worked for *apparent* symptoms 'x', therefore he will prescribe remedy 'y' and observe the appearance of the symptoms in hopes that they will change for the better. The physician understands that the apparent symptoms could be (and often are) deceiving, and that no remedy is absolutely certain to aid with any apparent set of symptoms. Likewise, the skeptic does not apply the method of equipollence in the absolute sense, as if on principle, but does so in the same non-committal way as the physician, in accordance with the appearances. Moreover, keep in mind that the skeptic does not doubt the appearance itself, but only the account (or judgment) given of that appearance. To the skeptic, it is dogmatic to positively affirm anything, instead the skeptic leads a non-committal life in accordance with the way things *appear* to be, while refraining from dogmatizing about whether or not this is how something *really* is. I mention this because it is important to understand that the method of equipollence is intended to demonstrate that the same object *appears* to be the subject of opposite appearances, and is *not* the same as *affirming* that the same object *really is* the subject of opposite appearances[10].

---

[10] This is taken in contradistinction to the Heraclitean philosophy, which differs in that they maintain that the same object is the subject of opposite realities, which is dogmatism. (Sx. 127).

When the skeptic reaches this state of equipoise, he is naturally lead to a state of mental suspense of judgment (*epoché*). At this point the skeptic is incapable of positively or negatively affirming that a given proposition is true or false, precisely because equal arguments can be given for both sides of the dichotomy. It is in this sense that the skeptic *must* suspend judgment. The skeptic does not suspend judgment out of commitment to any doctrinal rule, but simply because his mental attitude *leads* him to do so. To suspend judgment is another way of saying that one is *unable* to state which propositions one should and should not believe, and therefore must suspend judgment on the matter. Moreover, "suspense" of judgment is meant to be taken quite literally, "And the term 'suspension' is derived from the fact of the mind being held up or "suspended" so that it neither affirms nor denies anything owing to the equipollence of the matters in question" (Sx. 115).

Once the skeptic arrives at this state of suspense, it is held that a state of quietude (*ataraxia*) follows like the shadow follows the body. To illustrate the *spontaneous* onset of this state of *ataraxia*, Sextus cites the painter Apelles, who is trying to paint the horses foam and, after many failed attempts, hurls the sponge used to wipe the paintbrush at the picture and the mark of the sponge produced the effect of the foam (Sx. 21). Likewise, the skeptic in his inquiries hoped to gain quietude by means of a positive decision, but being unable to effect this, he suspends judgment and quietude, as if by chance, followed his suspense. The end (*telos*) of skepticism is indeed quietude, but the skeptic does not trivially stampede to a state of equipoise in order to attain the quietude that he *knows* will be waiting for him once he reaches this state, for that would be dogmatism. The skeptic is searching for quietude, but only *accidently* stumbles upon it.

This last point carries important implications that should be noticed. The end of ancient skepticism is not epistemological, instead it is ethical or practical in its motivation and functioned as a way to live rather than a crude mechanism of inquiry. This is perhaps what is most fundamentally

differing between ancient and modern forms of skepticism (or modern theory in general), for rarely is a modern theory meant to serve as a way to live; instead most modern theories take aim at solving particular problems of truth, knowledge, reality, for instance, whereas skepticism was a philosophy to live by. In ancient Greece, by contrast, it was not at all uncommon for a philosophy to serve as a guide to life, rather than an answer to a specific set of problems. What sets skepticism apart from most other Greek philosophies at the time, is that the skeptics view of happiness was not a positive form of pleasure, but a *negative state of painlessness* – that is, a complete absence of unsatisfied desire. In this state the skeptics were *free* from mental distress, *free* from care and worry. To illustrate the "worry" that the skeptic supposed himself to be free of, let's suppose that a man believes that something is by nature good or bad, that person, according to the skeptic, will be forever disquieted because when he is without that which he deems to be good, then he believes himself to be tormented by that which he deems to be bad. Moreover, when he believes himself to have attained what he considers good, then he will still be troubled in his attempts to avoid losing what he deems to be good (Sx. 19-21).

In addition, the skeptic attains quietude from the perturbation that comes with the need to decide which proposition he ought to accept. This is interesting, so far as the *process of* producing equipollence (that is, *before* one actually reaches the state of equipoise) would be considered a *struggle*. Every moment the skeptic spends working through the method of equipollence, *searching for* equal arguments for both sides of a proposition, is a moment that the skeptic is perturbed. I say the skeptics' use of the method of equipollence is a struggle, because during the whole time he is conducting this method he is perturbed, up until the very last moment when he finally reaches the final state of equipoise and is forced to suspend judgment, he is disquieted. Only after he struggles with, and, eventually, overcomes the dogmatic proposition is he finally free from perturbation. Freedom is not merely given to the skeptic. The skeptic undergoes an intense struggle before reaching this free state of quietude. Being a skeptic,

therefore, was not considered to be an *easy* thing. This idea of skepticism as a struggle for freedom, for

quietude, is an important one because without this struggle skepticism would be quite trivial, indeed, it

would amount to the crudest form of intellectual apathy, whereby the practitioner would simply avoid

intellectual matters, refusing to engage them by hiding behind the bushes of ignorance, and naively

calling such ignorance 'suspending judgment'. The skeptic, however, does not avoid intellectual matters,

quite the contrary, he engages and struggles through the subjects, he does not stop at doubt, but passes

through doubt and pushes the subjects to their most extreme boundaries until the skeptic reaches a state

of equipoise and *cannot* go any further, he is then *forced* to suspend judgment on the matter.[11][12]

As one might expect, the skeptic is not wholly untroubled, and makes no claim to be. There are

things, like feelings and appearances, that are unavoidable. The skeptic makes no claim to be

unperturbed by things unavoidable (this would be absurd), the skeptic is only committed to the claim

that he avoids perturbation by those things which are *avoidable*. In other words, the skeptic assents to

the fact that appearances appear to him because he cannot avoid this fact. This is reasonable enough. For

to commit oneself to avoiding that which is by its very nature unavoidable would be futile and pointless.

Of course, the skeptic is not *eo ipso* committed to affirming appearances absolutely. Instead the skeptic

non-dogmatically grants that appearances appear. The skeptic would, no doubt offer the following line

of argument: Feelings, for example, are involuntary and are not open to question, hence it cannot be

considered dogmatism to adhere to that which one has no choice but to adhere to. Moreover, the skeptic

is not thereby reduced to quietism, but lives undogmatically in accordance with the natural customs of

---

[11] An example of this very mistake is to be found in contemporary literature. Bertrand Russell in his widely read *History of Western Philosophy* writes, "Skepticism was a lazy man's consolation, since it showed the ignorant to be as wise as the reputed men of learning". A failure to understand that *ancient* skepticism was about engagement and intellectual struggle for freedom, reduces this noble school to the trivial laziness and intellectual apathy described by Russell.

[12] Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Twelfth Paperback Printing, 1966, p. 234. Henceforth cited as HWP.

society, rules of nature, and natural passions. The skeptic simply engages these activities with the non-committal attitude that only grants the appearances so far as they appear to him, but extends his claim no further and does not dogmatize about the reality or unreality of those appearances.

3.3   Hegel and Skepticism

3.3.1   Ancient and Modern Skepticism

By now we have already begun to introduce some of the difference between ancient and modern skepticism. Let's now take a moment to meet this issue head on. Following this brief discussion, I would like to move to a discussion of Hegel's views on these two variations and clarify why Hegel esteems Pyrrhonian skepticism as philosophically superior to its modern cousin. Allow me to begin with my own observations. First, in the modern variation, it is *easy* to become a skeptic. All that is required of anyone wishing to participate in modern skeptical methods is that one say "I doubt that it is such". Though I criticize Russell's characterization of skepticism, so far as he intended his description to apply to the ancient Pyrrhonist, I endorse this description so long as it is applied to the modern variation of skepticism. Modern skepticism is a lazy man's consolation, so far as it makes little effort to struggle with the ideas that it doubts. To satisfy the skeptical demands of Cartesian skepticism, for example, one need not bother oneself to put forth the effort to struggle with the objects of doubt, instead it is sufficient to address them as *doubtable* (that is, so long as one finds a *possible* way in which the ideas could potentially be doubted) and, in doing so, cast the object of doubt aside without further consideration. This, of course, would not be sufficient to meet the ancient skeptics' standards. The ancient skeptic would not stop at doubtability, but would continue to produce equal arguments both for and against the object of doubt. This is a more thoroughgoing skepticism, so far as once one has produced a true

equipollence, he cannot go back and *undo* the skeptical doubt in the way Descartes does in his *Meditations*.

The key difference between ancient and modern skepticism is that modern variations lack the ancient method of *equipollence*. First, as I have previously shown, it is this method of equipollence that drives the ancient skeptic in his struggle for quietude. Second, the Cartesian skeptic is not concerned with producing equally convincing arguments for both sides of a particular issue, instead he devotes his efforts to erecting a *possible* scenario in which one could potentially find an issue doubtable. The immediate implications of stripping off this method of equipollence is that modern forms of skepticism can no longer be concerned with the *zetetic* or *ephetic* aspects in the same way the ancient skeptics were. The modern skeptic has restricted himself solely to *aporetic* means of arousing doubt. Thus the modern skeptic can rightly, without risk of caricature, be reduced to a doubter or disbeliever. The modern skeptic can no longer be considered an inquirer in the same sense as the ancient skeptic, because the method of equipollence was the method with which the ancient skeptic conduced his *search* for truth. The modern skeptic has no interest in finding truth, rather he is wholly concerned with doubting it. In addition, the modern skeptic no longer maintains ephetic characteristics once the method of equipollence has been removed, because the state of equipoise, which resulted from the method of equipollence, is what lead the ancient skeptic to the ephetic suspensive state of mind (*epoché*). Nor can modern skepticism be considered a guide to life as ancient skepticism was, since the state of equipoise is what lead the ancient skeptic to a suspensive state of mind whereby quietude (*ataraxia*) followed immediately thereafter. The method of equipollence was so integral to ancient skepticism that to remove it disfigures the skeptical tradition so dramatically that three of its cardinal principles (inquiry, suspensive state of mind, and teleology) are thus removed. Suffice it to say that the removal of this method is no small modification on the part of the modern skeptic, and carries far reaching implications.

Furthermore, the modern skeptic does not live by his skepticism like the ancient skeptic does; instead the modern skeptic only applies skeptical methods when he is, say, sequestered by the fire, conducting his meditations. This is because the ancient skeptics participated in this mental state in order to achieve their end goal (*telos*) – quietude. Modern skeptics, by contrast, merely used skeptical method in order to solve a specific problem, like finding an indubitable foundation for first philosophy, in the case of Descartes. That said, we are now in a position to move to the second portion of this section and discuss Hegel's reception of ancient skepticism. Let's set the stage with an exposition of his 1802 essay *On the Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy*[13], before moving to a more focused discussion of particular aspects of Hegel's thoughts on skepticism.

3.3.2   Hegel's discussion of Schulze's Skepticism

In this early 1802 essay, Hegel's immediate purpose is to critique the new skepticism offered by G.E. Schulze. In doing so, Hegel not only articulates his own distinct view of skepticism and its relation to "true philosophy," but also makes substantive points regarding the limits and value of ancient skepticism. Hegel claims that Schulze's common sense view of skepticism is stuck in the negative causal web of necessity, which ancient skepticism is intended to (and actually does) overcome. Thus, according to Hegel, Schulze cannot help but maintain a dogmatic position by trying to express the Absolute in finite terms. On the other hand, Hegel will critique the ancient skeptics for merely maintaining a neutral position to the negative causal web of necessity that they overcome.

---

[13] Hegel, G.W.F. "The Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One." Trans. H. S. Harris. *Between Kant and Hegel: texts in the development of post-Kantian idealism*. Indianapolis: Hackett CO, 2000. 311-62. Henceforth cited as RSP.

Hegel begins by identifying, and explicating problems with Schulze's discovery of "the original sin" of previous speculative philosophies. The original sin lies in thinking that our perception is a representation. While some thinkers might have supposed that my perception of, say, the lamp on my desk is a mediated representation of that lamp, Schulze will disagree and claim that my perception of the lamp is immediate and certain. Following this insight, Schulze limits philosophy to consciousness. To be sure, Schulze makes a point of limiting philosophy to theoretical philosophy, which is "'the science of the *highest and most unconditioned causes of all conditioned things whose actuality we are otherwise certain of*'" (RSP 317). In other words, Schulze considers facts of consciousness, like my awareness of the lamp on my desk, to be immediate and certain. He then limits the scope of philosophy to consciousness, so that philosophy is restricted to dealing only with those things that we can be certain of, as opposed to contaminating philosophical inquiry with objects that we do not know with certainty – that is, objects that exist outside of consciousness. These facts of consciousness are finite. Thus, in limiting philosophy to facts of consciousness, Schulze limits philosophy to the finite understanding, which restricts knowledge claims to experience.

Schulze's skepticism has both positive and negative aspects. The positive side of skepticism is the view that limits philosophy to consciousness. First, consciousness is naturally implied by facts of consciousness, and we are unable to doubt consciousness without that doubt destroying itself – that is, as soon as one attempts to doubt one's own consciousness, consciousness immediately affirms itself in one's attempts to doubt it. Second, because consciousness is certain, so too are the facts of consciousness, so far as consciousness would not be consciousness without facts of consciousness. Thus, Schulze argues that facts of consciousness are just as undeniably certain as consciousness itself. Having found the source of immediate certainty, Schulze takes himself to be in a position to 'conduct the science of the highest and most unconditioned cause of all things'. Since immediate certainty is to be

20

found in consciousness, philosophy is to be limited to cognizing only the immediate facts of consciousness. The positive aspect of the new form of skepticism that Schulze is offering, then, is that philosophy should be limited to consciousness. The negative aspect of skepticism is the view that maintains a negative stance towards all that lies outside of consciousness, or is not a fact of consciousness. Thus the negative side of Schulze's skepticism "is concerned with the destruction of the brain-children of the dogmatists, and their attempts to achieve the cognition of the *existence of hyperphysical* things." (RSP 318).

Hegel will launch an attack on Schulze's search for the unconditioned. As we have seen, the positive side of Schulze's skepticism demonstrates that the facts of consciousness have immediate certainty, so far as they are necessarily unavoidable. Hegel is attacking the idea that the immediate certainty of consciousness can seek the unconditioned ground for everything, given that the source of immediate certainty is a conditioned and finite object when he writes, "But if every fact of consciousness has immediate certainty, then this insight that something exists only in a conditioned way is impossible; for 'to exist only in a conditioned way' is synonymous with 'not being certain on its own account'" (RSP 319). Hegel takes it as a blatant contradiction to search for the "unconditioned" when one restricts oneself entirely to the *conditioned* facts of consciousness.

3.3.3   Hegel's Speculative View of Skepticism

Opposed to Schulze's new skepticism, Hegel turns towards his own (more speculative) view of skepticism. Skepticism, for Hegel, is at one with (which is to say that it is a part of) every true philosophy "and hence there is a philosophy which is neither skepticism nor dogmatism, and is thus both at once" (RSP 323). While the presentation might seem confusing, a few definitions and distinctions should clear things up. In the first place, by "true philosophy" Hegel means that which cognizes the

21

Absolute. This true philosophy has both positive and negative aspects. Hegel writes, "This skepticism does not constitute a particular thing in a [philosophical] system, but is itself the negative side of the cognition of the Absolute, and directly presupposes Reason as the positive side" (RSP 323). Thus Hegel has a conception of a philosophical system which is neither positive nor negative, but is both positive and negative at once – they are two sides of the same coin, so to speak. Harkening back to our original 'confusing' quotation, we see that skepticism fulfills the negative aspect, which leaves reason and systematic philosophy (which Hegel will sometimes refer to as dogmatism, but due to the negative connotations of the this word, I shall use the language of systematic philosophy in its place) to satisfy the positive aspect.

Here we are nevertheless confronted with the question: How are these two aspects related? To this Hegel answers that the principle of skepticism, as that which maintains an equipollence of opposition, expresses propositions of reason. Reason, as opposed to the finite understanding, demands that these opposites be united in their contradicting themselves – that is, "the one is only definable as long as there is an opposition to the other; let both be posited bound together as one, and their bonding contains a contradiction, so that both are negated together" (RSP 324)[14]. Reason, if it is to express the infinite (unconditioned) Absolute, must allow for the resolution of contradictory terms – it must overcome the principle of non-contradiction, which limits itself to the finite understanding. To sum this up, the negative skeptical side of true philosophy must overcome the finite principle of non-contradiction – as the principle of the finite understanding – in order to free reason (the positive side of true philosophy) from the finite, so that it may systematically express the infinite and unconditioned Absolute. Setting contradictions together (equipollence) and overcoming that contradiction (*epoché*) is

---

[14] This seems to reflect an ontological interpretation of skepticism. If this be the case, it invites the question: what arguments has Hegel given for this ontological interpretation of skepticism?

the speculative work that the negative aspect of skepticism is doing for true philosophy. It is important to realize that, in Hegel's view, *some* contradictions are not the fault of people, but are the fault of the things themselves – that is, sometimes the contradictions that agents encounter in thought, are expressive of objective contradictions inherent in the finite nature of the things themselves. So, when we encounter an objective contradiction, we do not cancel the thought, but the thing itself – this is why the principle of skepticism frees reason from the finite, because it generates insight into the infinite nothing of objective finite existence.

But what does this overcoming of the finite principle of understanding have to do with reason? When skepticism overcomes the finite principle of the understanding, reason, according to Hegel, is no longer bounded to the finite understanding, but is liberated from it. This is to say that reason is no longer forced to cognize itself through the mediation of the understanding, but is liberated to be self-cognizant, so far as it freely cognizes itself through itself. Here we see that genuinely true philosophy parts from ancient skepticism in a crucial way. Ancient skepticism, according to Hegel, maintains a strictly negative relation to knowledge without a positive side (RSP 330). Once the skeptics launched the ten tropes against the dogmatists, produced an equipollence, and suspended judgment, a state of mental quietude naturally followed "as the shadow follows the body" (RSP 331). While Hegel acknowledges that this state of mental rest that the skeptic attains is secured by reason, he nevertheless maintains that, "this skepticism had its positive side wholly and only in character, and in complete neutrality toward the necessity of nature" (RSP 331).

This is a bold critique of the Pyrrhonian skeptics. The Pyrrhonian skeptics maintain that they are, among other things, a *zetetic* school for their activity of investigation. To say that the Pyrrhonian skeptic maintained complete neutrality towards the necessity of nature, is to say that they overcame the finite principles of the understanding and put reason in a position to cognize itself (which would be the zetetic

move), but instead they entirely rejected the search for knowledge that they claimed they were pursuing. To say this another way, reason was *freed from* the necessity of nature and the finite understanding, but did not *freely* cognize itself[15]. This distinction between *freedom from*, and *freely acting towards* is what is embodied in the claim "only in character". Only, in character means merely *freedom from*, but not *freely acting towards*[16].

To bring things back to Schulze, Hegel argues that skepticism does show that facts of consciousness are certain, however, skepticism also shows that certainty is nothing (RSP 332). Schulze's common sense view holds skepticism and dogmatism to be side-by-side. However, on Hegel's view, this side-by-side positioning of skepticism and dogmatism is really only the negative aspect of philosophy. For Hegel's true philosophy, skepticism and dogmatism are not side-by-side, rather the systematic philosophy of reason is sublated by skepticism – that is, skepticism raises systematic philosophy above the 'threads of the causal web,' whereas common sense dogmatism remains a slave to that causal web. Hegel writes, "Skepticism elevates the *freedom of Reason* above the necessity of nature, in that it cognizes this necessity as nothing; but at the same time honors necessity supremely" (RSP 333, my emphasis). In order for Hegel's systematic philosophy to be free from the causal web of necessity, it *must honor that necessity by passing through it and overcoming it*. Systematic philosophy needs the web of necessity, if it is to overcome that necessity and *return* to itself (reason cognizing itself through itself). Schulze's search for the *unconditioned truth of all things* with the immediacy of cognitions, will only express natural necessity in its universality. Schulze is not expressing the *unconditioned* as he thinks he is, but only the *universally conditioned*. Only when skepticism frees reason from the causal

---

[15] The skeptics, in their neutrality, were free to be free, but did not *actualize* this state.

[16] Interestingly, the character of *freedom from* manifests itself in the empirical form of Pyrrho's Pig. As the story goes, "Pyrrho once showed to his companions abroad [a] ship, when they were frightened in the raging storm; he pointed calmly to a pig, that was feeding in the ship, with the remark that the wise man must be undisturbed like that" (RSP 331).

web, can reason express the *unconditioned truth of all things* in systematic philosophy. Furthermore, the

ancient skeptics, according to Hegel, did not *realize* what they had, "and his [Pyrrho's] philosophy was

nothing but *freedom of character*" (RSP 334, my emphasis)[17]. They only maintained the negative aspect

of philosophy, but did not cognize themselves as the negative aspect to a positive Rational aspect that

expresses the Absolute – that is, expresses the Absolute, not as a finite dogmatism in the web of causal

necessity, but as the infinite and unconditioned that is lifted above and freed from the causal nexus by

skepticism. It is systematic philosophy that is capable of expressing "the identity of the universal and

particular, or of what is posited in the form of thought and being" (RSP 339-340). What is ultimately

unacceptable about Schulze's dogmatism is that it attempts to express the infinite Absolute in a finite

way.

3.3.4   Critical Analysis of Hegel's Appropriation of Ancient Skepticism

With an overview of Hegel's views on skepticism on the table, we now have the proper

contextual background to give more focused attention to some of the particular aspects of Hegel's

thoughts on skepticism. I would also like to advance the discussion by dealing with some of the

penetrating insights offered by Michael Forster in his book *Hegel and Skepticism*[18]. Let's start with the

earlier mentioned question: why does Hegel think that ancient skepticism is superior to modern

skepticism? Before we address this question allow me to digress with a brief observation that will aid us

in our answer to this question. Perhaps the most important aspect that Hegel adopts from the ancient

---

[17] Here Hegel seems to indicating something beyond a mere empirical freedom of character, but a 'higher' intellectual freedom, or freedom of the intellect. Note the distinction I have italicized and underlined in the two quotations between *freedom of Reason* and *freedom of character*. It seems clear that Hegel is advocating a higher freedom of Reason over a lesser freedom of character, but what exactly is the relationship between the two?

[18] Forster, Michael N. *Hegel and Skepticism*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1989. Henceforth cited as F.

skeptics is their method of equipollence. Later we will focus on how Hegel also *adapts* this method, but for now it is only important that we recognize that, not only is Hegel adopting this method, but also that this method of equipollence is not shared between the ancient and modern skeptics – a difference that will prove itself to be an integral part of Hegel's critique of modern skepticism. To return from this digression, in the *History of Philosophy*[19] Hegel reveals what he esteems to be the great merit of ancient skepticism, "We must now consider further the method in which the Skeptics proceed, and it consists in this, that they have brought the universal principle that each definite assertion has to be set over and against its 'other' into certain forms, not propositions" (HP. 345). Hegel, as I have shown, uses this method to overcome the finite understanding by showing that oppositions must be united in there contradicting themselves "so that they are negated together" (RSP. 324).

However, as Forster observes, this is not all that is going on when Hegel adopts this method. "Equipollence" Forster writes, "is a method in the sense of being a procedure for introducing a suspension of belief which does not require the retention of *other* beliefs"(F. 11). Modern skeptics, who by contrast do not use the method of equipollence, are forced to rely on other beliefs in order to pose doubt, which makes them dogmatic. According to Forster, the assumed (or unproblematic) content for a modern skeptic might be his own mental contents, whereas the doubtable (or problematic) content would be the external world (F. 11). His point is that in order for the modern skeptic to pose doubt on whether or not the external world *really* is the way his mental contents reveal it to be, he must assume the certainty of his own mental contents. For my part, I think one can easily attach Hegel to this line of critique by examining his criticism of Schulzian skepticism. For Schulze, facts of consciousness are considered to be immediate and certain, and *on that assumption*, Schulze proceeds to doubt all that lies

---

[19] Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Trans. E. S. Haldane. Vol. 1. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1995. Henceforth cited as HP.

outside of consciousness – that is, "hyperphysical things" like a Kantian thing-in-itself, or a Hegelian Absolute Idea. Apart from criticizing Schulze's crude understanding of the thing-in-itself to be some sort of tangible substance like a mountain lying under a snowcap, Hegel is more importantly criticizing an important break between Schulzian skepticism and ancient skepticism. Schulze makes the dogmatic claim that appearances *really are* how they appear to be, which would be abhorrent to the ancient skeptic, who non-dogmatically grants that appearances appear without committing himself to any claims about the reality or unreality of those appearances. Schulze does not adopt the method of equipollence, for if he did, he would be forced to apply that method to his own dogmatic claim about the immediate certainty of facts of consciousness, and, in doing so, would be forced to produce an equipollence and suspend judgment on the matter. Instead, Schulze takes a much more Cartesian approach and assumes the certainty of his own mental contents. Thus Hegel's esteem for the method of equipollence is also tightly linked with his critique of modern skepticism, since it is *because* modern skepticism lacks this method of equipollence that they fall into dogmatism by presupposing beliefs as a basis for raising doubts.

That said, it is also important to see that Hegel does not simply *adopt* ancient skepticism, but that he also *adapts* it in order to meet his own systematic needs. We will now take the time to critically examine how Hegel does this. First, let's look at how Hegel's vision of equipollence differs from that of ancient skepticism. During the exposition of Hegel's 1802 essay, we saw that Hegel understood skepticism as setting contradictions together in order to generate insight into the infinite nothing of objective existence, in order to overcome the causal web of necessity and free reason to cognize itself. Ancient skepticism made no claim to be showing the absolute nothing of finite existence, first, because this is a positive assertion (hence dogmatic), and second, because the method of equipollence used by

the skeptics was used to combat *judgments* by setting up equally opposed *propositions*; whereas Hegel is clearly combating objective finite existence by setting *objects* together in their self-contradictoriness[20].

Hegel, I think, is making a very similar assumption to the one made by Heraclitean philosophy. Sextus writes, "the skeptic decries all the dogmatic statements of Heraclitus as rash utterances, contradicting his 'Ecopyrosis' and contradicting his view that the same thing is the subject of opposite realities" (Sx. 127). Hegel seems to make this same assumption by asserting that the same thing is the subject of opposite realities – that is, he holds that the contradictions that he juxtaposes are real *in an objective sense* and, from the assumption that these contradictions are actual properties of the finite nature of things, Hegel assumes to prove the nothing of finite existence. The difficulty with this, is that on the one hand Hegel makes the assumption that contradictions *actually are* properties of finite things (which would seem dogmatic), yet, in doing so, he shows that these finite things are *nothing*, which would seem to cancel out the apparently dogmatic assumption about the actual properties of finite things, since, when properly understood, Hegel would be making a dogmatic claim about *nothing* instead of claims about *reality*. Nevertheless, I think a skeptic might say that he is still making a positive assertion, and is therefore committed to dogmatism, regardless as to whether that positive assertion concerns the reality or *unreality* of it's subject matter. Still, Hegel makes an important break from the ancient skeptics method of equipollence by using it to show the actual properties of finitude in its infinite nothing, rather than restricting oneself to judgments and propositions as do the skeptics.

3.3.5   Hegel's First Critique of Ancient Skepticism

---

[20] Interesting that equipollence (*isosthesis)* is meant to express an equality of judgments (*logos*) with respect to probability. Logos is ambiguous, so far as it could mean words, or, as some later thinkers have pointed out, being.

Michael Forster offers a penetrating insight into this distinction between Hegelian and Pyrrhonian variations of equipollence. Forster holds that Hegel's break with the ancient skeptics method of equipollence is really part of a larger Hegelian critique of skepticism. Part of Hegel's metaphysical project, of course, is to overcome subject/object distinctions with a unifying principle (the Absolute Idea). Accordingly, Hegel accuses the ancient (and modern) skeptics of something Forster calls concept-instantiation, which is "the assumption of a general distinctness of concepts from the things in the world in which they depict of a kind making possible the existence of any concept in the absence of instantiation" (F. 117). One of Hegel's projects is to show that this assumption is false – that is, to show that is a mistake to assume that there is any distinction between concepts and their instances in the world. Allow me to paraphrase Forster's account of how the argument between Hegel and a Pyrrhonian skeptic might take place on this issue, and then offer my own contributions to that argument.

Hegel, by presupposing the absolute identity of concept and object in the Absolute, would argue that it is metaphysically impossible for a concept to be in any way distinct from its instantiation in the world. Thus the contradictions that Hegel is juxtaposing *actually are* properties of the finite objects, because there can be no difference. Responding to this claim, the skeptic would simply apply his method to Hegel's concept of the Absolute theory and suspend judgment. Hegel, in turn, would respond that it is impossible for the skeptic to derive an equipollence from the concept of the Absolute, since it is impossible to have a genuine grasp of the Absolute without recognizing the truth of the doctrine – that is, in the same way one cannot conceive of a Euclidian triangle without affirming that its interior angles equals the sum of two right angles, or, just as Spinoza defines God as that which cannot be conceived without being. Responding to this, the skeptic might argue that Hegel's "Absolute" violates the very principles of acceptable epistemological discourse, since it is part of the very concept of a proposition to have a negation. This is why we don't evaluate sentences like "what time is it?", precisely because they

don't have any *truth value*. In order for a proposition to be evaluated it *must* have the potential to be true or false, hence the concept of the "Absolute" is epistemologically incoherent. Forster envisions Hegel's response to be that he is justified in changing the idea of what constitutes acceptable epistemological discourse, because the old idea proved to be incoherent, and his new concept unlike the old one is self-consistent (F. 121 – 126).

For my part, I would like to advance on the above string of arguments submitted by Forster. I think that the skeptic might respond that it is not the epistemological concepts that proved inconsistent, but Hegel's own concept of the Absolute. That it is simply wrong to develop a new set of "self-consistent" concepts to replace the old ones. I also think that the skeptic would force us to suspend judgment on the issue, since we possess no criterion (nor proof for that criterion, and so on *ad infinitum*) for deciding whether or not a person possesses a valid new concept or whether or not that concept is incoherent without begging the question, since our only way of addressing this dichotomy necessarily presupposes the very content of the dichotomy. In other words, we cannot assert a knowledge claim about the nature and scope of what constitutes an acceptable knowledge claim, without presupposing some form of epistemological framework; and since the nature of epistemology is precisely what is under question, *any* positive assertion (for or against) Hegel's claim that we should revise the standard for epistemology with a new set of "self-consistent" concepts, would *necessarily* presuppose an epistemological framework in order to make a knowledge claim about the nature and scope of epistemology, which is clearly question begging[21]. In succeeding at arriving at this epistemological deadlock regarding Hegel's concept of the Absolute and suspending judgment on the issue, it cannot be said that Hegel *fails* in his attempt to critique the ancient skeptics for their concept-instantiation

---

[21] I recognize the importance of, and benefit that reliablist epistemological arguments could bring to bear on this debate, but this is not the place to address this issue.

assumption. The fact of the matter is that one can supply equal arguments to both sides of the proposition. I, therefore, do not think that Hegel is either correct or incorrect in his concept-instantiation critique.

3.3.6   Hegel's Second Critique of Ancient Skepticism

Moving on, there is a second critique that Hegel makes of the ancient skeptics. According to Hegel, the ancient skeptics are one-sided. The skeptics did not realize that they had overcome the necessity of nature – that they overcame the finite principles of the understanding. One can easily see that this critique presupposes the success of the argument against the skeptics concept-instantiation assumption, again, since the ancient skeptics did not see themselves as overcoming the finite understanding by showing the infinite nothing of finitude. Nevertheless, Hegel maintains that the skeptics overcame the finite understanding and hence freed reason from the understanding so that reason could pursue positive philosophy and freely cognize itself. Skepticism is one-sided because it merely overcame the understanding and stopped at liberation, yet the positive side to systematic philosophy allows reason to freely speculate once it has overcome the finite understanding.

3.3.7   Hegel's Modification of Ancient Skepticism

We have seen how Hegel *adopts* skepticism, now we are in a position to see how Hegel *adapts* skepticism to meet his own systematic agenda. Hegel, I think, sees himself as completing skepticism. I think that Hegel would say that the ancient skeptics did something awesome, in the full sense of the word, but that they did not realize what they had done; moreover, that it is *because* the skeptics did not understand the true merit of their thought that they consequently left it incomplete and one-sided. Skepticism is sublated in systematic philosophy. That is, skepticism, as the negative aspect of systematic

31

philosophy, and reason, as the positive aspect, are together sublated, together preserved but individually destroyed. Reason *needs* skepticism to free it from the understanding so that it may express the Absolute; likewise, skepticism alone is not sufficient to express the Absolute, and hence it equally *needs* reason. Reason and skepticism are equally in debt to each other. Taken individually, both are self-contradictory, so far as *individually* neither can express the unconditioned truth of all things. However, when they are sublated together, they complete each other in the essential ways that allows them, in their unity, to express the Absolute. This unity of these two opposites is systematic philosophy.

There is an important point regarding the sublation of skepticism and reason that I would like to deal with. Allow me to re-quote, "Skepticism elevates the freedom of Reason above the necessity of nature, in that it cognizes this necessity as nothing; but at the same time it *honors* necessity supremely" (RSP. 333 my emphasis). I believe that the point of overcoming necessity but at the same time *honoring it* supremely is of paramount importance for Hegel scholarship in general, as well as this thesis in particular. I think that Hegel's use of the word "honor" here is saying that systematic philosophy not only *does* pass through necessity, but *needs* necessity in order to pass through it. Remember that when Hegel claims that skepticism shows the infinite nothing of the finite, he is not claiming that the finite is wholly *annihilated*, he is saying that it is nothing *in-itself*, that it is not the Absolute Idea. Moreover, the Absolute Idea is not diametrically *opposed to* the nothingness of the finite, rather the nothingness of the finite is necessarily sublated in the Absolute Idea. The Absolute Idea overcomes the nothingness of the finite causal web of necessity, yet that nothingness is *necessarily* both preserved and destroyed in the Absolute Idea. This is why systematic philosophy *needs* the finite causal web of necessity, because finitude is sublated in the Absolute idea, which means that systematic philosophy needs to pass *through* the causal web of necessity in order to express the Absolute Idea, since, by definition of the Absolute Idea, the finite causal web of necessity is and must be sublated in the Absolute Idea.

This shows us an important similarity between skepticism and systematic philosophy: both are characterized by *struggle*. Systematic philosophy struggles through necessity in the same way that skepticism struggled through dogmatic propositions in order to suspend judgment. Moreover, systematic philosophy and ancient skepticism are both struggling for *freedom*. Skepticism is struggling for freedom from perturbation, and systematic philosophy is struggling in order to free reason from the finite understanding.

Earlier in this section we saw that once the modern skepticism removed the method of equipollence that all the aspects of ancient skepticism were thus removed, save for the aporetic habit of doubting. Here we see that Hegel keeps the method of equipollence, but changes the media that it is applied to – that is, the skeptics juxtaposed judgments and propositions, whereas Hegel brings together properties or aspects of finite objects. From this we can clearly see that the aporetic habit of doubting carries over in systematic philosophy, since systematic philosophy is always doubting whether or not a finite object is sufficient to meet the standard to the Absolute. We also see that the zetetic quality of investigation too carries over, in fact it does so in a more thoroughgoing way than it did in ancient skepticism, so far as the positive aspect of systematic philosophy continues to search for a positive expression of the Absolute. However, whether or not the *ephetic* aspect survives Hegel's modification of ancient skepticism is not immediately clear. At first glance, one might be lead to the conclusion that it does not, given that there seems to be no moment of suspense in Hegel's system. Though the skeptic resolves an equipollence and suspends judgment, Hegel's dialectic resolves an equipollence and uses the resulting sublation as an object of inquiry for his next dialectical engagement. As part of my next section, I will show that this is a misconception, and that there *is* a moment of suspense in Hegel's system, thus demonstrating that all three essential elements of skepticism (zetetic, ephetic, and aporetic) are likewise preserved in Hegel's systematic adaptation of skepticism.

Chapter 4

Tragedy

4.1   Introduction

Perhaps what is most important about Pyrrhonian skepticism is its emphasis on the *subjective* feeling of the state of equipoise that results from the resolution of a given equipollence – the feeling of *ataraxia*. As we saw in the previous section, skepticism is sublated in systematic philosophy as the negative moment along with reason as the positive moment. It is thus reasonable to ask: where is this subjective feeling of freedom that was so integral to skepticism to be found in Hegel's system? Of course it should be recognized that Hegel is not an emotive thinker – in the preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel discusses his dissatisfaction with men who "long for the mere pitiful feeling of the divine in the abstract" (PhG 73). These individuals, according to Hegel, only seek edification, as opposed to a systematic treatment of the Absolute Idea. That said, I think that Hegel would agree that to reduce a systematic treatment to a crude objective repetition of the same formula in various aspects of reality is unacceptably one-sided (PhG 78). In other words, Hegel's critique of these men of edification hinges on the fact that they take this abstract feeling of the Absolute to be a *sufficient* expression of the Absolute. On this point, I think that Hegel is quite justified in criticizing this position; however, I do not think that any satisfactory critique of this position would serve to wholly annihilate *any* and *all* subjective expression of the Absolute from the scope of systematic philosophy. For this would reduce systematic philosophy to one-sided objective expression of a structure that repeats itself in various forms of reality. Instead I think that a much more reasonable and consistent critique would account for a

subjective feeling of 'insight' into the Absolute, without recognizing that subjective expression as absolute *in itself*. I say "consistent," because skepticism, as the negative moment of skeptical philosophy, was criticized by Hegel for not moving beyond subjectivity and expressing the Absolute objectively in terms of reason; systematic philosophy, then, amounts to a union of subjectivity and objectivity with respect to its positive and negative elements. Thus, in light of Hegel's appropriation of ancient skepticism and his *complete* (as opposed to one-sided) systematic agenda, I will examine where and how this subjective feeling of insight into the Absolute finds expression in Hegel's thought.

I would like to conduct this inquiry by examining Hegel's treatment of dramatic poetry, specifically the tragic genre. I consider dramatic poetry to be the most appropriate area of Hegel's thought for the purpose of this inquiry, first, because ancient tragedy and ancient skepticism are both Greek sources written roughly around the same time period[22]. Second, necessity is a central concept in the Greek intellectual world, and both skepticism and tragedy are considered by Hegel under the context of liberation from necessity. A further advantage that dramatic poetry affords this inquiry, lies in its structure. The structure of dramatic poetry consists in the union of epic and lyric forms of poetry. Epic poetry focuses on the objective form of the characters and their deeds, whereas lyric poetry expresses the subjective inner-life of the characters. Thus we see that a harmonious unity of subjectivity and objectivity expresses itself in dramatic poetry, and it is in this dimension of Hegel's thought that we will search for both objective and subjective expressions of the Absolute.

In this chapter I argue that there are two ways of comprehending the tragic condition in *Antigone*[23]: (1) as only being guilty (Antigone), and (2) as being both innocent and guilty (Creon). I further analyze these two conditions under my own stipulations of "the equipollence of feeling" and "the

---

[22] 4th and 5th centuries BCE.

[23] Sophocles. *Antigone*. New York: Dover Publications, 1993. Henceforth cited as Sop.

equipollence of reason". I maintain that the resolution of the equipollence of feeling depends on the resolution of the equipollence of reason. I then show that the resolution of reason takes place in Creon and not in Antigone; moreover, that this resolution comprises of two distinct moments: a moment of realization, and a moment of resignation. In my analysis, I deal with the epic and lyric dimensions of dramatic poetry separately. In the epic aspect, I show that the objective deeds of the characters expresses the Absolute as a subjective feeling within the reader, and draw the conclusion that this represents a union of subject and object. Likewise, in the lyric aspect I show that the subjective dynamic within the tragic figures (Creon, specifically) expresses the Absolute objectively in terms of reason for the reader to cognize, and conclude that this aspect of dramatic poetry, too, expresses a union of subject and object. I maintain that the way in which Creon arrives at his imperturbable rational insight offers a valuable insight for understanding Hegel's thought, so far as it shows that there is more to Hegelian philosophy than just *Hegel's* insights in to the Absolute. Finally, I examine certain important connections between Hegel's critical interpretation of skepticism as it relates to his interpretation of tragedy. Here my primary focus is showing that the skeptical experience of liberation (*ataraxia*) finds expression in Hegel's thought. I argue that what the skeptics called *ataraxia* expresses itself in the resolution of the positive, rational, aspect of Hegel's systematic philosophy. While demonstrating this conclusion is my primary concern, I also make secondary observations concerning the relationship between Hegel, skepticism, and tragedy.

I will begin my exposition of Hegel's views of tragedy by carving out the general skeleton of Hegel's views; here I will focus on the speculative structure of the tragedy itself. Having done this, I will then turn my attention to more particular issues within this general framework.

4.2 General Overview of Hegel's Speculative View of Tragedy

According to Hegel, the theme of dramatic poetry is to express the divine as it actualizes itself in the world. We begin with the harmonious unity of the gods. These gods come to express themselves in the spatio-temporal world. Thus we begin with a transition from ideality to reality. In this transition, the gods become subject to particularization once they are actualized in the spatio-temporal world. This particularization disrupts the pre-existing "undisturbed" unity of the gods. In tragedy, the gods become particularized as the fundamental powers that govern the will of the individual character. Because the nature of the gods is ethical, this fundamental power that governs the will of the characters comes to be known as that character's "pathos". This, of course, means that the character of the tragic figure is not a potpourri of qualities, but *is* this one dominating pathos. For example, one tragic hero (Antigone) might represent familial love as her pathos, whereas another tragic figure (Creon) might represent patriotism as his. The pathos, then, is the character's essence – it is quite simply what they represent, and they act solely in accordance with their pathos; obviously they cannot contradict their pathos with their actions, because their pathos is what they *are*. Understood in terms of the gods, one tragic figure's pathos might be dominated by the gods of the underworld, and the other's pathos by a separate god, like Zeus. Once these gods become actualized in the spatio-temporal world, they now stand in *one-sided opposition* to one another, within the respective tragic figures. This duality of one-sided oppositions will seek to resolve itself in order to return to its original state of harmonious unity. This need for resolution manifests itself as a tragic collision between two tragic figures. The collision resolves itself by stripping off the one-sided dimensions of each individual pathos, while preserving the positive elements of each pathos in their eternal unity. In this movement, the eternal unity of the gods will have been restored. Again, to bring this back to the tragic figures, the destruction of the one-sidedness of their individual

pathos usually means the tragic demise of the character(s), yet the ethical elements that each tragic figure stood for is preserved in peaceful unity.

4.3 Specific Issues in Hegel's Speculative View of Tragedy

4.3.1 Justice

Having laid out the general structure of Hegel's views of tragedy, we are now in a position to focus on some of the more particular issues. The first point I would like to deal with concerns justice. Each of the divine pathos stands in *equal* opposition to the other, which means that each tragic figure is equally justified in his endeavors. Antigone is justified in her ethical motivation to give her brother Polynices a proper burial, for this effort would appease the gods of the underworld. Creon's pathos of maintaining social order is equally justified according to his devotion to Zeus. However, there is an inevitable clash between these two characters in their respective one-sided justification. In order for Antigone to pursue her pathos, she *must* infringe on the law set down by Creon (that no one should bury Polynices). Equally, Creon must serve his pathos of maintaining social order by enforcing obedience to his decrees; obviously social order will not ensue if the members of society do not obey the orders of their king. Nevertheless, it is important to see that in this necessary conflict, both tragic figures are *equally* justified in their respective ethical motivation.

4.3.2 Necessity

Necessity plays a critical role in this dynamic. Each tragic figure must *necessarily* obey his call to justice, because that pathos *is* his character. Moreover, because each tragic figure is the actualization of a one-sided pathos, they therefore must *necessarily* pursue the justice of their pathos *one-sidedly*, which is to say that the two tragic figures *necessarily* must conflict with each other. This necessary

conflict *condemns* the tragic hero to destruction. The fact that each tragic figure is necessarily

condemned is the *tragic* aspect of a tragedy. It is not the miseries that the tragic figure must endure, for

misfortune befalls scoundrels every day without exciting our tragic pity. The *tragedy* is that the tragic

figure is driven by the necessity of his internal pathos, and that his pathos condemns him to destruction

even before he is forced to endure the miseries of that destruction.

However, the tragic figures themselves do not know that they are determined by their own

pathos; as far as the character is concerned, he is acting entirely of his own free will. The result is that

the tragic hero is both *innocent* and *guilty* at the same time. The tragic hero is innocent because he is not

acting out of choice, but his wholly obedient to the ethical power that drives him. Still, from the

character's subjective standpoint, he is acting according to his own free will, which makes him guilty.

Hegel makes the interesting observation that this guilt that the tragic hero feels is also his glory, "But

they do not claim to be innocent of these [guilty acts] at all. On the contrary, what they did and actually

had to do, is their glory"[24]. Antigone feels glory in her guilt because her guilt shows that she remained

firm in character, firm in her devotion to justice, even if that justice comes at the cost of her life, "I shall

meet nothing more grievous, at worst, than death, with honor" (Sop. 4).

4.3.3   Antigone

Nevertheless, despite the glory that Antigone feels in sacrificing herself to uphold justice and

honor the gods, her guilty acts *also* causes her to experience *misery*. Here we see a duality of feeling in

Antigone. On the one hand, she has and feels the highest right of glory for the justification of her

---

[24] Hegel, G.W.F. *Aesthetics Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T. M. Knox. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975. p. 1215. Henceforth cited as Aes.

actions, yet at the same time she suffers the highest grievance of not being married. It is also important to notice that Antigone does not see herself as innocent, she only sees herself as guilty of her offenses. To be sure, she thinks that she was justified in those offenses, but she does not see the innocence of the fact that the nature of her pathos necessarily condemns her to destruction – that is, she does not see that she is condemned to pursue her justice by burying Polynices in a one-sided way, and that that one-sidedness condemns her to destruction; she only sees herself as *freely* choosing her destruction, while remaining ignorant to the fact that her freedom is also bound up with a necessity that is beyond her control.

4.3.4   Creon

Creon's situation is slightly different. Originally Creon sees justice in his condemning Antigone to death in accordance with his pathos. Moreover, Creon initially acts under the notion that his actions are of his own free will. He too is unaware of the necessity of his being condemned to destruction. However, Antigone knew her fate _before_ she acted – she knew that she would face the honor of death to satisfy her call to justice. But Creon's destiny is only revealed to him by the seer Tiresias _after_ he has committed his acts against Antigone. When the seer reveals to Creon, "For as to that, with no great wear of time, men's, women's wails to thine own house shall answer" (Sop. 40). Unlike Antigone, who maintained strength of character in the face of her own fate, Creon falters and succumbs in order to avoid the sting of retribution, "I know it too; and I am ill at ease; 'Tis bitter to submit; but alas Aetés [goddess of retribution] smites bitterly on the spirit that abides her… O god 'tis quite hard! But I quit heart, and yield; I cannot fight at odds with destiny" (Sop. 41).

Creon feels no honor, no glory for his actions in the face of his own destiny. Once he recognizes his destiny, he resigns his pathos. He then accepts his destiny, yet tries to change his fate by undoing the

bindings of Antigone. This attempt to change his fate implies that Creon is still acting on the assumption that his actions are of his own free will, and that he does not realize that he is necessarily condemned to destruction. This, of course, is the *tragedy* of the tragedy – the fact that he is trying to change his fate, yet even before he does, he is already condemned to destruction *by his previous free actions*. As we know, Creon fails at changing his fate when he learns that Haemon, Antigone, and Creon's wife Eurydice all commit suicide. However, the *important* point to see is that Creon, unlike Antigone, watched himself be helpless to change his fate. Once his destiny was revealed to him, he accepted it and tried to change his fate, as any free man should be able to do, yet he failed, which called into question the *freedom* of his "free will". At first glance, it might seem as though we are operating under two different modes of necessity: (1) the necessity of being condemned to obey one's pathos, and (2) the necessity of being condemned by the freedom of one's own actions. However, this is a mistake. Being condemned by the freedom of one's own actions is the same as being condemned by one's pathos, because the freedom of one's actions *is* the *expression* of one's pathos.

Creon, unlike Antigone, has a moment where he realizes that his free actions are bound up with a necessity that exists beyond him, "Lead me forth, cast me out, no other than a man undone, who did slay, unwittingly, thy mother and thee, my son" (Sop. 51). In this moment, Creon *recognizes* that he is both *innocent* and *guilty*. Innocent, so far as his actions were "unwitting," yet guilty because they resulted of his own free actions. The recognition that his actions were unwitting represents a limitation on freedom, since he would have liked to act otherwise, but did not. Moreover, having realized that he is no longer in complete control of his fate, Creon resigns himself to his fate, "Come, thou most welcome fate" (Sop. 51). In this moment, Creon (1) <u>realizes</u> that his free actions are bound up with a necessity that is beyond him, and (2) <u>resigns</u> himself to "the authority of higher world-governor, whether Providence or fate" (Aes. 1208).

In the final moments of tragedy, eternal justice strips away the false one-sidedness of each individual pathos (Aes. 1198). Antigone's *body* was destroyed, and the *particular* worldly *expression* of her pathos was destroyed with her body. However, though the particular expression of her pathos was destroyed, her *pathos* itself was not, since dirt has been placed on the body of Polynices, thus honoring the gods of the underworld. Creon's attempt to change his fate when he learned of his destiny served to strip Creon of his pathos, yet in a way that he does not compromise his rule over the state – that is, without compromising his devotion to Zeus. In this moment, equal honor has been assigned to both of the gods, and with the conclusion of the conflict, harmony is restored. Nevertheless, Hegel recognizes two different modes of reconciliation, "in contrast to this objective reconciliation, the assuaging of conflict may be of a subjective kind when the individual gives up the one-sidedness of his aim" (Aes. 1218). We will now take the time to deal with these two modes of reconciliation and analyze them individually in light of both Hegel's systematic agenda, as well as the skeptical connections. As I have said before, dramatic poetry consists in the union of epic and lyric forms, such that the epic accounts for objective deeds and the lyric accounts for subjective aims, thus I will associate what Hegel calls "objective reconciliation" with the epic mode of expression in dramatic poetry, and "subjective reconciliation" with the lyric mode.

4.3.5   The Epic Dimension of Tragedy

Beginning with the epic dimension, a Hegelian structure is clearly noticeable. First we begin with an original unity – the ideal eternal tranquility of the gods. However, because the ideal cannot exist in one-sided opposition to the spatio-temporal world, the gods must also find expression in reality. This is the starting point for a Hegelian dialectic – a unity cannot maintain its unity, and therefore undergoes a diremption. In this case the diremption is the particularization of the gods in the spatio-temporal world.

42

We are then left with two antinomies, each of which proves itself to be self-contradictory in its reciprocal relationship to its other. These two one-sided antinomies become sublated in their reciprocal opposition – that is, the one-sidedness of each opposition is destroyed while the positive aspects remain in preserved in unity – both Antigone and Creon are destroyed; yet equal honor has been given to both gods. If we examine the epic structure of *Antigone* through the lens of skepticism's influence on Hegel's thought, we see that each character is *equally* justified in following his/her pathos. The structure of equality reflects the state of equipollence found in ancient skepticism. However, as we saw in the previous section and as we see now, there is a difference between a state of equipollence and a state of equipoise. The skeptic, we recall, is forced to *struggle* through the state of equipollence, since each moment that the skeptic spends countering propositions with equally plausible arguments, is a moment that the skeptic is perturbed. Likewise, in *Antigone*, though we have an equipollence of justification between Antogone and Creon, we nevertheless witness a painful *struggle* between these two characters. During this struggle, each figure is, like the skeptic, perturbed by the miseries of their struggle.

If we consider the connection between the struggle in both tragedy of *Antigone* and skepticism in terms of *Hegel's adapted version* of skepticism, we see that necessity also makes a crucial overlap. Remember, the Pyrrhonian skeptics did not see themselves as overcoming the causal web of necessity (the finite understanding). The Pyrrhonian skeptics were just dealing with propositions. Hegel, however, with his critique of the skeptics' assumption of concept instantiation, claims that these contradictions *actually* are properties of the finite things themselves. Thus, in the mutual destruction of these contradictions, Hegel sees the skeptics as overcoming the finite causal web of necessity; moreover, these finite objects must *necessarily* reveal themselves to be nothing *in themselves*. A similar pattern can be discerned in tragedy. Just as Hegel maintains that skepticism demonstrates the one-sidedness of finite oppositions, and that these finite oppositions are condemned to destruction (sublation) because they are

nothing in themselves, so too does tragedy mirror this structure by demonstrating the one-sidedness of each tragic figure, and showing that these two one-sided characters' one-sided pursuit of justice likewise condemns them to destruction. The one-sidedness of the tragic figure's justification also parallels the finite understanding in Hegel's skeptical analysis so far as, in their mutual one-sided justification, each character only understands him/herself as free – they have finite understanding of their situation because they only see their freedom, and not their freedom as it is bound up with necessity.

Next we recall that part of Hegel's praise of the ancient skeptic, as opposed to the modern skeptic, is that the ancient skeptic arrives at <u>one</u> absolute point, one concrete state of equipoise, which mirrors the final objective unity of the gods in the resolution of the tragedy. Moreover, once the skeptic reaches that singular point, that state of equipoise, a state of tranquility (*ataraxia*) followed. Likewise, in tragedy we end with a return to an original state of unity, and thus reach a state of a "satisfaction of spirit" (Aes. 1215). This moment when equal honor has been given to both of the gods mirrors the movement from the skeptical state of equipollence to the state of equipoise. In equipollence, the propositions do not yet have *equal* arguments, and in tragedy, before eternal justice, each character pursues their justice one-sidedly; it is only when the one-sidedness is stripped away and *equal* justice is given to the gods that we see a movement from conflict to resolution in the tragedy. Just like tragic resolution comes with *equal honor* to both gods, skeptical resolution comes with *equal arguments* to both propositions.

There is, however, an interesting twist to how the satisfaction of spirit is expressed in the epic 'objective' dimension of the tragedy. Hegel follows Aristotle in the conclusion that, "the true effect of tragedy should be to arouse pity and fear and accomplish a catharsis of emotions" (Aes. 1197). Hegel then makes an important clarification that this "pity" is not the same as the sympathy that one feels for someone else's misfortune, precisely because misfortune alone has no *tragic* element. However, the

44

important point that Hegel makes is that, "the tragic hero has inspired *in us* a fear of the power of the ethical order he has violated" (Aes. 1198 emphasis added). The point I would like to emphasize is that the objective deeds and demise of the tragic hero arouses *in us,* the reader, a feeling that is more than just a trivial fear, like being scared. The objective deeds of the tragic hero inspires *in us* a *feeling* of tragedy and gives us, the reader, a subjective feeling of the *eternal justice* that was exercised in the tragic reconciliation. We, as readers, feel something that extends beyond mere emotion; we subjectively feel the *absolute justice* that the tragedy has expressed. We, as readers, *feel* the speculative 'insight' that freedom is bound up with necessity when we feel *tragic pity* of the tragic hero, who was necessarily condemned to destruction by his own free actions. This, however, should not be confusedly connected with the feeling of *ataraxia* in skepticism, since *ataraxia* was a negative state of painlessness, whereas this is a positive subjective *feeling* of the Absolute as it is expressed in the tragedy. Nevertheless, this does seem to be a positive expression of the Absolute in terms of feeling. Finally, it is also significant that the epic *objective* expression of tragic deeds should result in a *subjective* feeling within the reader, so far as the *objective* expression reveals itself to be a subjective expression at the same time – as a harmonious unity of subject and object within the epic dimension of dramatic poetry.

4.3.6   The Lyric Dimension of Tragedy

We are now ready to move to the lyrical dimension of dramatic poetry as it expresses itself in the tragic genre. Here we will address what Hegel calls the subjective reconciliation within each tragic figure. Let's deal with these two tragic figures one at a time, beginning with Antigone. Aside from the external antinomy between Antigone's pathos and Creon's pathos, there is also a contradiction building up subjectively within Antigone, between (1) the justification for her actions and (2) the grievance that these actions cause her to endure – between *honor* and *misery*. However, Antigone never reaches a state

of unperturbedness. Only in death is she free from the violence of her inner contradiction – from her finite miseries. In order to understand *why* Antigone's inner contradiction never resolves itself during her life, we must uncover a second level of understanding present in the current dynamic. Antigone only sees herself as *guilty*, because she only recognizes the freedom of her actions – her finite understanding restricts her to only seeing herself as free, and hence as only seeing herself as guilty. In this respect Antigone is one-sided. She never comes to realize that she is both *innocent* and *guilty*. Realizing one's innocence, as we shall see when we deal with Creon, is necessary to resolve the inner contradiction of guilt between justification and misery.

For the sake of simplicity, allow me to define the antinomy of guilt between honor and misery as the *equipollence of feeling*. I use the language of "feeling" in my definition because both qualities seem to be felt qualities. In addition, allow me to define the antinomy between guilt and innocence as the *equipollence of reason*. Again, I use the language of "reason" because both qualities of being guilty and being innocent seem to be ways of cognizing one's situation – when I say that I am guilty, I *think* that I am guilty, and likewise, when I say that I am innocent, I *think* that I am so. Thus with these definitions in place, we see that Antigone is one-sided with respect to the *equipollence of reason*, and this one-sidedness, as we shall see later, prevents the *equipollence of feeling* from being resolved to a state of equipoise. But for now suffice it to say that Antigone never overcomes the suffering of the equipollence of feeling and remains perturbed to the point of death.

Let's now consider Creon's subjective situation. In Creon, we also see an *equipollence of feeling*: he feels as though his actions are justified according to his devotion to Zeus and the state, yet he also suffers the misery of watching Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice all take their own lives. However, we recall that the crucial difference between Creon's situation and Antigone's was that Creon only later learned of his destiny from the seer, and thus is put in a position to watch himself try to change his own

fate. Antigone knew her fate from the outset, and never became <u>conscious</u> of her relationship to her own fate, of the necessity of her fate. She only sees herself as freely choosing her fate, but never consciously realizes that she was condemned to freely choose that fate. Creon's situation affords him the unique opportunity to <u>consciously</u> realize that he is powerless to change his own fate. In this *moment of realization*, Creon sees himself as part of something that is beyond his individuality, and realizes his *innocence*.

The *equipollence of reason*, however, remains unresolved, because, though Creon sees his innocence in that he was unable to change his fate, he still is troubled by the guilt of knowing that it was by his own free actions that these miseries befell him in the first place. In order to resolve the *equipollence of reason*, Creon must <u>*resign*</u>. He must *accept* that his freedom is bound up with a necessity that exists beyond his individuality, that he is condemned to be free. This realization and acceptance of his own <u>*tragic freedom*</u> is itself a kind of higher-order freedom, "The freedom of the tragic hero comes down to saying 'it is so, and because it is so we accept it'"[25]. The *true* freedom of the tragic hero is the realization and acceptance that one's freedom is bound up with necessity – a kind of self-consciousness where the individual becomes conscious of his freedom as bound up with necessity[26]. We see Creon accept his situation when he says, "Come, thou most welcome fate" (Sop. 51). Instead of fighting against the *necessity* of his fate, which, "appears as a violence [and] a loss of freedom", Creon resigns and freely welcomes the necessity of his free actions, of his fate (Log. 163). In welcoming his fate, Creon is thus saying, "it is so, and because it is so I accept it". Concerning this resignation Hegel writes, "But when a human being says 'it is so,' he has withdrawn into simple equality with himself, and into imperturbable freedom. So long as I harbor claims of any sort, so long as I hold fixedly to some

---

[25] Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on Logic Berlin, 1831 (Studies in Continental Thought)*. Trans. Clark Butler. New York: Indiana UP, 2008. p. 163. Henceforth cited as Log.
[26] A necessity which itself is one of freedom.

end, I remain sunken in such a contradiction. But if I give up all determinate interests, all ends, all bonds, the contradiction is lifted and I ensconce myself in the simple expression 'it is so'" (Log. 164).

Creon comes into simple equality with himself, because he is no longer trying to *fight* the necessity of his own fate. As soon as he learns of his destiny, changing his fate becomes his "fixed end". But once he *succumbs* to the necessity of his fate and gives up his determinate interests, then he is no longer perturbed by the violence of his passion by being involved in the struggle against this necessity. The *equipollence of reason*, the collision between the *guilt* of his free actions, and the *innocence* of his being necessarily fated to suffer the guilt of his free acts is thus resolved, since, in his resignation, Creon no longer struggles against the necessity of being fated to suffer the guilt of his free acts. Only when the *equipollence of reason* has been resolved can the *equipollence of feeling* be resolved, because *Creon no longer sees his justification and his misery in contradiction with one another*; instead, he freely accepts the fact that his justification is necessarily bound up with a misery that is beyond his control – he freely accepts it for what it *is*, and thus a state of imperturbable equipoise ensues.

Having examined both tragic figures in terms of their lyrical subjective aims, let's now examine the structure of the lyrical expression, just as we did the epic. As we saw, the epic objective expression of tragic deeds expressed itself as a subjective feeling occurring within the reader. Similarly, we see the inverse structure in the lyrical dimension of dramatic poetry. The lyric dimension of the tragedy expresses the subjectivity of the characters *objectively* – that is, unlike the epic dimension, readers do not *feel* any sort of fear or pity; rather we objectively view the moment of reason occur within the character – we cognize his realization that tragic freedom is the freedom to realize and accept that one's freedom is always bound up with necessity. This is an interesting distinction. In the epic dimension, objective deeds express themselves *subjectively* in the reader as tragic fear or tragic pity, whereas in the lyrical dimension, subjective aims express themselves *objectively* in the reader as a cognitive realization

of what tragic freedom really is. Both, however, express a union of the subjective and the objective with their expression of insight into the Absolute. The epic dimension does so *negatively* in terms of a feeling of tragic fear or pity within the reader, and the lyric dimension expresses the insight into the Absolute *positively* in terms of reason. We as readers cognitively realize what Creon realizes – the absolute insight into one's freedom is always bound up with a necessity.

4.3.7 Dramatic Poetry, Systematic Philosophy, and Ancient Skepticism

This twofold expression in dramatic poetry mirrors the structure of systematic philosophy. Systematic philosophy is the sublation of two moments: the negative moment of skepticism, and the positive moment of reason. Skepticism overcomes the necessity of the finite, according to Hegel, *only in character*, but skepticism, we recall, remained in the *subjective*. Likewise, the epic dimension of dramatic poetry only expressed itself subjectively in terms of tragic pity, an expression which is 'only in character' so far as it does not express the Absolute in terms of reason, but in terms of feeling. Moreover, the resulting satisfaction of spirit does not express the absolute insight of freedom as bound up with necessity; it only shows a structural return to original unity. Whereas the positive moment of systematic philosophy also shares important similarities with the lyrical dimension of dramatic poetry; the positive moment of systematic philosophy expressed the Absolute positively and objectively in terms of reason. Likewise, the lyric dimension of dramatic poetry expresses the insight into the Absolute positively in terms of Creon's rational insight into the nature of freedom as necessity. Thus, the moment of realizing one's own innocence occurs within the lyrical dimension, which serves to resolve the *equipollence of reason.* Creon arrives at a positive rational insight into the absolute nature of his own freedom, and this rational insight is followed by a state of unperturbedness – a state of *ataraxia*. Creon has yielded to his own fate, and resigned his own subjective interests – he frees himself from his

49

bondage to passion when he frees himself from his finite ends and interests, and "withdraws into a simple equality with himself, and into imperturbable freedom"; by giving up (resignation) finite freedom, he gains a higher eternal freedom accompanied by inner-peace (Log. 164). Thus we see that *ataraxia does* carry over in Hegel's system, however in a modified fashion. *Ataraxia* is not the result of the skeptical moment in systematic philosophy, since skepticism has been sublated in its one-sidedness. Once skepticism was sublated, *ataraxia* moved from being the result of skeptical equipoise, to being the result of the equipoise of positive reason, and hence being the end result of systematic philosophy, since positive reason is the final moment of systematic philosophy.

There are several interesting observations I would like to make concerning the similarities between Creon and the skeptic. First, both are driven by *one* animating passion. For Creon this passion is his pathos; likewise, the skeptic is dominated by one force of will – his skepticism. Remember that skepticism is a *way of life*, merely applying skeptical methods when it is expedient to do so does not make one a skeptic. Just like Creon is lead by his pathos, so too, the skeptic is lead by the mental attitude of skepticism. Second, this animating passion leads both figures to pursue finite ends. For the skeptic, the finite end is his zetetic search for truth; for Creon, it is the attempt to change his fate. Finally, in both cases the pursuit of finite ends leads to a liberation from those finite ends. *Epoché* is the liberating result of the skeptics' zetetic pursuit of the finite end of truth, and results in imperturbable freedom (*ataraxia*). Resignation, similarly, is the result of Creon's moment of realization as he pursues his finite end of changing his fate, and also results in freedom (*ataraxia*).

It is important to understand that though the reader *cognizes* this state of imperturbable freedom that Creon has entered, still the reader him/herself does not experience what Creon experiences. We, as readers, cognize the moment of reason taking place, but we have not <u>*lived*</u> through that moment; though we feel tragic pity, we are not unperturbed like Creon is. This, I believe, lends a valuable insight into

that nature of Hegel's systematic philosophy – that it is not sufficient to merely cognize the moment of reason in thought; rather, much like the ancient skeptics, the moment of reason must be lived as well as cognized. "Philosophy" Hegel writes, "is properly to be commenced where the Absolute is no more in the form of ordinary conception, and free thought not merely thinks the Absolute but grasps its Idea"[27]. Here Hegel makes an important distinction between *thinking* the Absolute and *grasping* the Idea. At the end of *Antigone* the reader cognizes the absolute expression of tragic freedom, however, this is not enough, for we as readers do not share the same imperturbable freedom as Creon. Creon has *grasped* the absolute expression of freedom because he cognized it, and lived through it. This shows that there is more to Hegel's philosophy than just *Hegel's insights* into the Absolute. First, because Hegel is not grasping the Absolute, Creon is. Second, merely understanding Hegel's insights into the Absolute is not necessarily sufficient to *grasp* the Absolute idea. In order to grasp systematic philosophy, one must move *beyond Hegel* – that is, thought it is necessary to move through Hegel by cognizing his insights into the Absolute, in order to truly grasp these insights, one must live through the experience of actually *doing* systematic philosophy for oneself, as opposed to merely reading it and understanding it.

During the closing remarks of my section on skepticism, I showed that it was unclear whether the ephetic dimension of ancient skepticism was preserved in Hegel's system. We are now in a position to address this issue. If the ephetic aspect survives Hegel's systematic modification of skepticism, then one would expect to find a suspensive moment in Hegel's system. Before my tragedy section, no such suspensive moment was immediately apparent. However, we now see that there *is* a suspensive moment in Hegel's system – *Creon*. Creon *suspends* himself (his finite ends) in order to come into equality with himself, whereupon imperturbable freedom and tranquility thus ensues. Still, this suspense, as we saw, is

---

[27] Hegel, G.W.F. *On Art, Religion, Philosophy: introductory lectures to the realm of absolute spirit*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. p. 297. Henceforth cited as ARP.

not a moment that occurs within the reader, but a moment that occurs within the systematic philosopher

as he conducts his inquiry – that is, within the individual who *grasps* the insight into the Absolute. This

further demonstrates that there is more to Hegel's philosophy that merely Hegel's insights. Again we see

that *doing* systematic philosophy plays an important role in understanding Hegel's philosophy, for if one

abstains from doing systematic philosophy, he will miss out on the ephetic dimension of Hegel's

thought, because this aspect only occurs in the individual who *does* systematic philosophy and has a

moment where he grasps he particular insight into the Absolute.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The conclusion of this thesis, I believe, has been sufficiently dealt with, and I think it would be redundant and unnecessary to re-consider what has already been considered. I set out to examine Hegel's relationship to skepticism with a specific concern for the issue of if and how the skeptic's notion of *ataraxia* finds expression in Hegel's system. My conclusion is a straightforward one: a felt experience of freedom does find expression in Hegel's system. It occurs within the systematic philosopher as he conducts his inquiry and experiences the positive moment involved in exercising reason. That said, I would like to take the time to advance scholarly interest in the topics that I believe this thesis has given us reason to consider.

First, this *experience* of freedom needs to be articulated in a more thoroughgoing way. In this thesis my project was to show that this experience does find expression in Hegel's thought. If we accept my conclusion, then the next step is to ask questions about this experience and the expression thereof. Questions like: just what exactly is the nature of this feeling? Consider how we have distinguished pity from *tragic* pity; likewise, a distinction needs to be made between corporeal feeling, impassioned feeling, and this new concept of intellectual feeling. How is this intellectual feeling different from the other two types of feeling? How is it similar? Can we give a phenomenological account of this felt experience from a subjective standpoint, especially given Hegel's seemingly uncompromising commitment to expressing knowledge scientifically and objectively in terms of notions and concepts alone?

I also think that there is room for questioning the relationship of this intellectual feeling to Hegel's system. Does this lived experience express yet another unity of subjectivity and objectivity in Hegel's philosophy, so far as, in doing systematic philosophy, the philosopher is objectively realizing the nature of the Absolute, as well as subjectively experiencing the nature of the Absolute? Does the philosopher experience the Absolute at all, or merely the insight into the Absolute? Is there a difference? Moreover, how should we understand this intellectual feeling when we consider it speculatively – that is, with the understanding that our realization of the Absolute is really the Absolute realizing itself in and through us?

Along this line of thought, Spinoza maintains that "God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love… the mind's intellectual love towards God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself"[28]. The influence that Spinoza had on Hegel's thought is as considerable as the profound similarities of their systems. Thus I believe that is it is both reasonable and thought provoking to ask: when we experience this intellectual feeling in Hegel's system, are we experiencing something like the love with which God loves himself as expressed by Spinoza? If so, where (if at all) do the similarities begin to break down, and how can we understand this divergence with respect to Hegel's modification of Spinoza's substance monism to his own concept of self-conscious, self-realizing Spirit?

Finally, I also think that it is worthwhile to consider the impact of this intellectual feeling on our perspective of philosophy *itself*. In this thesis I have indicated that the standpoint (or tendency) of philosophy has changed throughout the course of its history. For ancient philosophers, philosophy was seen as a way to live – the pursuit of knowledge (as was famously held by Plato and Aristotle) was considered to be the best way to live. Modern philosophy, however (arguably beginning in the 17th

---

[28] Spinoza, Baruch. "The Ethics." <u>Modern Philosophy: an Anthology of Primary Sources</u>. Ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Company, 1998. pp. 176.

century with Descartes), turns away from the practical Greek perspective of philosophy and tends toward a more theoretical agenda that concerns itself largely with problems and solutions. Hegel's system, however, seems to embody both of these traditions (at least in part). His skeptical appropriation, it could be argued, links him to the ancient perspective of viewing philosophy as a way of life. Indeed, part of what I have stressed in this thesis *is* that there is more to Hegel's philosophy than just the theoretical aspect. That living through this experience of doing systematic philosophy is essential to what it means to be a philosopher, that merely reading Hegel but abstaining from conducting one's own speculative inquiries is philosophically incomplete in subtle but important ways. In addition to this, Hegel also shares the modern commitment of raising philosophy to the rigorous standards of science. This invites the question: must the ancient and modern perspectives of philosophy necessarily remain opposed to one another? Moreover, can we understand Hegel's philosophy as offering a fusion of these two tendencies? Just as Hegel maintains that systematic philosophy is neither skepticism nor dogmatism but both at once, can it be similarly maintained that his philosophical perspective is neither Greek nor modern, but both at once? This question seems to have intrinsic appeal to contemporary Hegel scholarship, as well as to philosophers in general.

Bibliography

Empiricus., Sextus. *Sextus Empiricus Outlines of Pyrrhonism (Loeb Classical Library No. 273)*. New

      York: Loeb Classical Library, 1933. Print.

Forster, Michael N. *Hegel and Skepticism*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1989. Print.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Aesthetics Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T. M. Knox. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975.

      Print.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Trans. E. S. Haldane. Vol. 1. Lincoln: University

      of Nebraska, 1995. Print.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on Logic Berlin, 1831 (Studies in Continental Thought)*. Trans. Clark Butler.

      New York: Indiana UP, 2008. Print.

Hegel, G.W.F. *On Art, Religion, Philosophy: introductory lectures to the realm of absolute spirit*. New

      York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print.

Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Trans. J.B. Baillie. Ed. George Lichtheim. New York:

      Harper & Row, 1967. Print.

Hegel, G.W.F. "The Relationship of Skepticism to Philosophy, Exposition of its Different Modifications

      and Comparison of the Latest Form with the Ancient One." Trans. H. S. Harris. *Between Kant*

      and Hegel: texts in the development of post-Kantian idealism. Indianapolis: Hackett CO, 2000.

      311-62. Print.

Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy: and its connection with political and social*

      circumstances from the earliest times to the present day. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966.

      Print.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. New York: Dover Publications, 1993. Print.

Spinoza, Baruch. "The Ethics." <u>Modern Philosophy: an Anthology of Primary Sources</u>. Ed. Roger Ariew

and Eric Watkins. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Cambridge: Hackett Company, 1998.

Academic Vita

Alex Lampros
005 Eastview Terrace
State College, PA 16801
atl5043@psu.edu

Education: Bachelor of Arts Degree in Philosophy, Penn State University, Spring 2009
Honors in Philosophy
Thesis Title: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEGEL AND SKEPTICISM
Thesis Supervisor: Brady Lee Bowman

Related Experience:
Internship with Reger Rizzo & Darnall LLP.
   Supervisor: Thomas K. Schindler, Esq.
   Summer 2009
Teaching Assistant. Sociology 001 – Introduction to Sociology.
   Supervisor: Dr. John Fulton
   Spring 2009

Awards:
Dean's List
Golden Key
Phi Kappa Phi
Donor Travel Scholarship
Dotterer Scholarship for excellence in Philosophy
First Prize for best paper presented at the Washington and Jefferson University
   Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (April 2009)

Presentations/Activities:
Presented Commentary at The Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium (February
   2007)
Poem published in Penn State Brandywine Literary magazine (2007). Title: "Despair"
Paper accepted and presented at the 10th Annual Southern Appalachian Undergraduate
   Philosophy Conference (November 2007). Title: "Connecting the Dots: Questioning,
   Fighting, and Authenticity in Heidegger"
Paper accepted [unable to present due to time conflict] at the West Chester University
   Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (November 2007). Title: "Connecting the Dots:
   Questioning, Fighting, and Authenticity in Heidegger"
Penn State Philosophy club
Penn State Tennis club
Paper accepted and presented at the Pacific University Undergraduate Philosophy

Conference (April 2008). Title: "A Discussion of the Ethical Foundation of Happiness with regard to the Metaphysical Locality between Aristotle and Schopenhauer"

Commentary presented at the Pacific University Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (April 2008). Commented on: Karolin Mirzakhan "The Role of Forgiveness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*"

Paper accepted and presented at the Third Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at SIUE (October 2008). Title: "A Discussion of Schelling's Concept of Identity in Relation to Spinoza's Substance Monism."

Chair Moderator for the Third Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference at SIUE (October 2008).

Paper accepted and presented at the Washington and Jefferson Undergraduate Philosophy Conference (April 4th 2009). Title: "A Discussion of Schelling's Concept of Identity in Relation to Spinoza's Substance Monism"