

The claims of self-sufficient agency: freedom and self-consciousness

1. Self-consciousness and the desire for recognition

Self-consciousness and practice

The claim of the preceding sections was that it was possible for there to be a form of self-sufficient knowledge – that is, some way of knowing things that did not depend on anything outside of some small circle of beliefs that were all either established non-inferentially or were established by making only the most meager of assumptions (such as the assumption that knowers speak a language). The three candidates for such knowledge, however, have been shown to be internally self-defeating; judged on the terms that they set for their own success, they fail to make good on their claims. Moreover, in tracing out the structure of this so-called self-contained knowledge, the proponents of this point of view find that in fact they are only tracing out the structure of “the understanding” itself – that is, they are not tracing out the structure of *things* but instead the structure of our own conceptualizing activities. Thus, the standpoint of “consciousness” is integrated into this new, more reflective conception of what counts as knowledge, which Hegel terms quite generally, “self-consciousness.” It is characterized by a reflection not on the structure of the things about which we are conscious, but on the structure of our conscious attendings and takings themselves.

In this new, reflective view, the goal of showing that what we *take* as authoritative *really* is so seems more readily achievable because the objects of reflection are our reflective activities themselves. Whereas in the original claims to self-sufficient knowledge, it had seemed that we were attending only to the things themselves (the individuals of “sense-certainty,” the unities of particulars and universals in “perception,” and the inner essence of things for “the understanding”), it has turned out that there were *no such things* in the first place – that is, no such things as pure singularities that could be non-inferentially known, no such things as unities of universal “objects” and particular “objects” that could be directly perceived, and no such things as essences lying behind the curtain of appearance. In tracing out the structure of our own way of *taking* these things, however, we are not tracing out the contours of something about which we could decide later that it did not exist; reflection on reflection cannot show that reflection does not exist. (We might find, of course, that we had characterized it wrongly, but not that it did not exist.) Our “certainty” about this thus *seems* to be identical with the “truth”

about it; the object of reflection, as being the structure of the way we take things, is now taken to be fully present to our own reflections.¹

The various determinations of objects as they have been taken in the first three sections are thereby seen not to be ontological features of the world in itself but only features of the way in which we describe, classify, and explain that world.² This new conception does not deny that there are indeed independent objects that we perceive or to which we infer; it does not, that is, replace the earlier kind of realism with some form of subjective idealism. The conception of the independent *existence* of the sensuous objects remains intact in this conception; the object of reflection, however, now is the structure of *our taking* these objects as such and such – that is, the set of inferences (the “social space”) in terms of which we describe, classify, and explain those objects, and not the objects themselves.³ Self-consciousness is this awareness of our taking things *as* such and such; in terms of our original metaphor, it is assuming a position in “social space,” that is, assuming a whole set of inferences that license the agent to move from one position in that space to another. A “move” in a “social space” is an inference licensed by that space. To know oneself in this sense is knowing one’s position in that “social space” – that is, knowing where one stands in terms of what one is licensed to believe. Consciousness requires that we have a position in “social space,” and self-consciousness is the awareness of this position, of what we are and are not licensed to infer.

Self-consciousness thus has two moments: A self-conscious agent is conscious of a world of sensuously perceived objects that exist independently of him, and he is aware of himself as a position in “social space,” as *taking* these things *as* such and such. The form that self-consciousness takes, Hegel says, is a relating of itself to itself. By this he means that although in consciousness there is a relation between a conscious subject and a world of putatively independent objects, in self-consciousness the terms of the relation are not independent of each other. This is constituted, as Hegel puts it, by the “I” relating itself to itself. Self-consciousness is the awareness of one’s conceptual activity, even though this awareness may not be adequate to what is really going on in such activity. (We can, for example, misinterpret our conceptual activity as being a direct acquaintance with pure singularities or universals, as was done in the section, “Consciousness.”) In self-consciousness, the “I” is *taking itself* as occupying a position in a determinate “social space”; this space is constituted by a series of inferential licenses that permit, demand, or prohibit various types of inferential moves (for example, from the characterization of something as a “now” it permits the inference to the claim that we are talking about something temporal). Thus, unless the “I” assumes some set of inferences – unless it comes to occupy a position in some “social space” – it cannot be said to be *knowing* anything at all. There is no pure acquaintance with objects (either pure singularities or universals). All consciousness is therefore self-consciousness in the sense that any awareness of any object is already mediated by the organism’s assuming a position in some normative “social space.”⁴ In more concrete terms, all consciousness involves situating

oneself within a determinate historical community with its standards for what counts as authoritative for belief and action.

In coming to this view, an agent participating in this particular "formation of consciousness" does not abandon the idea that he is conscious of a world of independently existing objects in space and time, but he does forsake the idea that he knows this world in the supposedly self-contained manner of "Consciousness." In its place, he has come to see that his knowledge of this world is mediated by his self-consciousness, by his awareness of himself as taking things as such and such. The oppositions that were encountered earlier in the preceding sections are understood not as the result of some metaphysical "force" dividing itself up into fundamental dualities but simply as the result of the contrastive work of our own cognitive capacities (involving such oppositions as truth versus falsity, appearance versus reality, and so on). The so-called essence of things is not therefore any kind of metaphysical force, as "the understanding" had taken it to be. In fact, it is not a metaphysical essence at all; it is our own conceptualizing activity, contrasting itself as a normative order with the world of independently existing objects.

The subject of these experiences originally understood himself purely as an *apprehending* subject, someone who stood in the relation of acquaintance with the objects of knowledge. The guiding metaphor there is that of a subject *viewing* the object. With the collapse of that idea, however, an alternative picture of the subject has emerged – namely, that of a practical, living subject who deals with objects in terms of his cognitive capacities and for whom his concepts are more like *tools* with which he can deal with his environment. Hegel calls this "life." "Life" is expressed in our various desires. Organic life itself is self-maintaining; the organism deals with its environment so as to regulate itself and to maintain its life, and it does this in a purposive manner, even if its dealings with it are not necessarily cognitively formed. Life itself is a fluid process continuously renewing itself on both the individual and generic level.⁵ But living individuals emerge from the process of life and assert themselves against it, maintaining themselves as individual organisms against their environment and dealing with their environment in terms of what satisfies their desires.⁶ Agents are organisms dealing with their environments, and as an organism, an agent has various desires and attempts to maintain itself as an independent organism by satisfying these desires. The organism thus stands in an implicit self-relation in that its active dealing with the world is always in terms of what is necessary *for it* or its species to survive. The objects of the world count *for it* as having such and such properties only in terms of how they contribute to the satisfaction of the organism's desires.

To see the subject as part of life is to see the object of knowledge not as being like the kind of metaphysically construed objects of "sense-certainty" or "perception" that we can only *apprehend*; it is rather to see how these objects fit into the demands of the life of the subject himself – that is, into his various practical projects. Put in cognitive terms: What counts as a reason for belief for the subject depends on his life's various desires and demands – that is, on what it is that he needs and wants to do. On this model, the agent's

relation to the sensuous objects of the world is therefore primarily practical and not primarily theoretical. Our conceptualizing activities are not to be construed on the model of our *apprehending* objects; knowing something is construed instead as a form of *acting*. The agent has various desires that demand satisfaction, and his conceptualizing activities are *tools* for the satisfaction of those desires. Like all tools, their adequacy is determined by how well they contribute to the task for which they are devised. Given this conception of what is authoritative for the subject, his knowledge of all the other things in the world may thus be said to be mediated by considerations of what is required to satisfy his desires.⁷ As knowing himself as this kind of self-conscious organism, the agent as a knowing subject appears to himself as self-contained – that is, independent of determination by the object. He, not the objects of knowledge, sets the terms on which something is to count as knowledge – that is, he determines what is to count as an authoritative reason for him to believe something or to do something – in terms of how these things satisfy the demands of his personal projects. Conceptual activity results in knowledge if it assists in the satisfaction of the agent's desires and projects.

What we come to take as an authoritative reason for acting therefore depends on what best satisfies these desires and projects. Whatever contrasts we may make in describing the world are sustainable only to the extent that they function to satisfy these desires better than some alternative set of contrasts. There is no "essence" of the world that imposes one set of descriptions on us rather than another; instead, we classify, describe, and explain the world in terms of what best makes sense to us given what it is we want to do and accomplish. But in understanding himself in this way, the agent sets up a new opposition, that between self-consciousness and "life" itself. On the one hand, there is life itself and the world of objects with which the agent must deal if he is to satisfy his desires. On the other hand, there is the self-conscious subject making certain contrasts, setting them up, saving some and discarding others, altering what he earlier took to be true because of the failure of some claim to knowledge to succeed in satisfying desire – that is, in general, electing to *count* something as a reason for him. This view does not deny the independent existence of the objects of the natural world, nor does it deny their independent causal properties. It says that something comes to count as an authoritative reason for acting or believing because the subject himself *comes to count it* as an authoritative reason, and his principle for counting some things as authoritative reasons for belief and action have to do with whether they help to accomplish what it is he wants to do.

Knowledge and practice

The picture that emerges is that of an organism-subject with certain desires, but who is also a self-conscious agent, who understands that the putative objects of knowledge cannot impose upon him what can count for him as an authoritative reason for belief or action. This gives us a new picture of self-

contained knowledge. That he has certain desires is given to the subject by "life." Yet he takes himself to be "self-conscious" – that is, to determine for himself what is to count as an authoritative reason for belief or action. Since what counts as an authoritative reason depends on how that reason helps to satisfy the subject's system of desires, the subject may know things only as they are related to his own plans and projects (that is, his system of desires). The object *exists* independently of the agent, but it cannot be said to have any independent essence (of which we could be directly aware or to which we could infer); the subject's reasons for taking the object to be one way as opposed to the other has to do with how this overall claim-making activity can be seen to fit into his projects and systems of desires. In this way, the agent understands himself as the truly *independent* member of the relation between "subject" and "object."⁸ The object does not *make* our claims true; we *elect* to count certain reasons as good reasons in terms of whether they contribute to the satisfaction of our desires and projects in a certain way. The object, as Hegel calls it, is a "nothingness" for the self-conscious organism; it is something that is known by virtue of standards that the subject himself has come to accept as valid standards for knowing something, not something that imposes itself on us and that we can only apprehend. Which descriptions fit the objects of knowledge (or how we take them when we practically deal with them or when we consume them) has to do with which set of descriptions most efficiently satisfies our system of desires and projects.

In the sections having to do with "Consciousness," the knowledge-claims themselves were supposed to be self-contained, to presuppose nothing outside of themselves; now it is the *individual agent himself* who is supposed to be independent, who presupposes nothing outside of his own self-conscious awareness of the world in terms of the needs of his own life – in other words, his awareness of his cognitive activity as a living organism – in order to be able to know the way the world is. The subject is taken to have certain desires and projects independently of his relation to the world; and what counts for him is how things fit into those independently established and known desires and projects. The question is whether this new conception of knowledge can make good on the claims that it makes, or whether it too fails on the terms that it sets for itself.

It is, however, clear that an organic agent is dependent in a quite obvious sense on certain natural conditions in the world. The agent who thinks of himself as independent quickly finds that the putative dependence of the object on his own cognitive dealings with it cannot be complete in any straightforward *natural* sense. Although, as "self-consciousness," he takes himself to determine for himself what can count as a *reason* for him, and thus to be independent, as an organic subject, he finds that his *desires* are often simply given to him, and that he is completely dependent on his organic nature (on "life") to determine what desires he will have and which ones demand satisfaction. Moreover, once a desire is satisfied, it or another springs up again, and there is nothing that the agent can do about this; this is simply a given element in his life, something that is indifferent to all the alternative

arrangements of his cognitive activities and that imposes itself on his conceptualizing activity. However, acting on the principle, "satisfy your desires," will not affirm his independence for the subject, since the nature of organic desire is to spring up again and again. Any full natural independence of the agent with regard to organic desire and the natural world is impossible to achieve; as soon as it seems to be achieved – whenever the agent has satisfied his desires by dealing with the world in whatever way best does this (whether it be knowing the world or consuming parts of it for nutrition) – "life" again makes its claims on the individual in terms of his having new desires which demand satisfaction.⁹

However, the subject as "self-consciousness" takes himself to be independent in that he determines for himself which desires are to *count* for him as authoritative reasons for action, even if he cannot determine *which* desires he will actually have (as "life"). The subject elects those desires to count for him as good reasons for action only in terms of how they fit in with his independently established projects. What is authoritative for him is not the object nor even the desire for the object but his own overall projects and thus his own overall desires about what he wishes to accomplish. In acting on desire, the subject is said to "negate" the object in that he affirms for himself that what is to be done with the object (letting it be or consuming it) is determined by him. That is, he elects for himself whether to let his desire to consume it be a good reason for him to act on the object; the object itself cannot impose any such *reason* on him, although it can pose itself as a "lure" for him. But whatever he does with the object is determined not by the object but by *his projects*, by what he wishes to do.

Thus, the subject finds that he is caught in a peculiarly conflicting self-understanding. On the one hand, he takes himself (as "self-consciousness") to be independent; yet on the other hand, he is dependent on the structure of "life" and its given desires. He determines for himself whether acting on this or that desire is an authoritative reason to act in terms of his more basic desire about what he wants to do, but he finds that the material of his deliberations is simply given to him. He determines for himself on the basis of his own projects what is a good reason for action, but as an organic agent he seems to be acting only on the principle that he is to satisfy desires, and his desires are simply given, thus making his independence only a very abstract notion even for him. Therefore, if he is to be able to integrate for himself his opposed views of himself as "self-consciousness" (as independent, as determining for himself what counts for him) and as "life" (as being dependent on the given structure of organic desire), he must be able to find some desire that is not simply given but is a desire that comes out of his nature as a self-conscious independent agent *per se*. Only the satisfaction of such a desire could affirm for him that his conception of himself as independent is indeed true. For this to be possible, he must be able to encounter an object of desire that affirms for him that he does indeed determine what will count as an authoritative reason (as "the truth") for him in terms of *his own* projects, which themselves are independent of determination by the world.

These requirements are met by the subject's having a *desire for recognition* (*Anerkennung*) as an independent agent by another self-conscious agent.¹⁰ This particular desire is satisfied when another self-conscious agent *recognizes* the former as that *point of view* of the world that determines what counts as an authoritative reason per se for belief or action – as that point of view whose projects are his own and determine for him what counts as a good reason. Why this is the case emerges through the following reflections.¹¹ In encountering another self-conscious agent, the subject encounters a different type of “object” in his world. Natural objects can satisfy desire in a straightforward way: Water quenches thirst, apples quench hunger. If the subject is to achieve satisfaction from an “object,” there must be something that the “object” *does* that *affirms* for the subject that it is indeed *he*, as the desiring subject, and not the object of desire who makes something into an authoritative reason for belief or action. If the subject is to maintain his independence, the object cannot *impose* reasons on the subject; the object cannot make the subject's reasons for belief and action into authoritative reasons. The subject seeks affirmation that this view of himself is indeed the true view, and he finds that *he* cannot do this purely in terms of desiring natural objects and fulfilling those desires, for he cannot determine which objects are to be there *for* him. It is only the “object” itself that *can* affirm this for him, and to do this, the “object” would have to present itself as something *other* than the subject, while at the same time also presenting itself as *dependent* on the subject for its conferral of recognition. That is, its dependence must be such therefore that it *makes itself* dependent on the subject. This “object,” as Hegel puts it, must “perform the negation on itself”: Since the subject cannot fully “negate” the *natural* object – that is, deal with it in such a way that the subject's sense of his own independence is preserved, the “object” must perform its own “negation” of itself for the subject to be able to realize this conception of himself as an independent agent. This “object” must be an “other” to the subject, something that at first appears to him as independent (his “negation”), and it must at the same time present itself as “negating” its own independence, as abdicating any claim it has to independence, presenting itself as fully determinable by the subject.

Thus, this new “object” can *only* be another self-conscious *subject* (1) who presents himself to the first subject as *making himself* dependent on the first subject's demand for recognition from him (that is, as performing the “negation” on himself), and (2) who thereby in this act of making himself dependent on the first subject *affirms* for the first subject his conception of himself as independent.¹² The person who seeks to have his conception of himself affirmed as an independent agent by satisfying his desire for recognition must confront another self-conscious person who *takes himself* to be dependent on the first person, and who, through his act of taking himself to be dependent, thereby affirms that first person's self-understanding. The other person must make himself dependent on the other in that he recognizes the other's projects as authoritative for himself, as determining what for him counts as a good reason for belief or action. It is crucial that the other person do this to

himself; he must *determine himself* as dependent, for only in his coming to understand himself in this way can he offer the first person the kind of recognition that he desires.

The kind of dependence and independence that are in question here have to do with the dependence and independence of *points of view*; the “object” must take its point of view on what *really* counts as an authoritative reason for belief or action to be set by the subject demanding recognition. That is, the “object” (the other person) must understand his own projects as having validity only to the extent that they satisfy the first subject’s projects.

The subject’s self-conception as an independent agent can thus only be truly affirmed by his satisfying his desire for recognition from another subject.¹³ The objects of the world that are not self-conscious have no projects; they cannot certify for the subject that his own projects are indeed authoritative. Only another agent with his own projects can do this. It thus seems that an agent’s self-consciousness as *independent* is only possible – that is, is only sustainable, does not undermine itself – by having his conception of himself mirrored back to him in the acts of recognition from another agent.¹⁴

2. Masters, slaves, and the subjective point of view

Independence and recognition

The upshot of this is that the agent takes himself to be an independent agent only in taking himself to be *recognized* by another *as* independent. In being recognized as independent, his self-understanding (his being-for-self) is *affirmed for him* as being true, as being in line with what he really is (his being-in-itself).¹⁵ The subject’s seeking recognition from another agent is thus an instance of the more general way in which agents seek reassurances that what they take to be authoritative *really* is authoritative, and much of the dialectic of master and slave will turn on what is required for this kind of reassurance to be possible. Out of the dialectic of recognition between master and slave, Hegel will develop his conception of the *social* nature of knowledge – that is, his idea that the standards for what counts as authoritative reasons should be seen as the outcome of a process of a community’s collectively coming to take certain types of claims as counting *for them* as authoritative, a process best understood in historical and institutional terms – that is, in terms of participation in social practices, not in terms of its being anchored in any kind of metaphysical relation between “subjects” and “objects” at all.

Taking this standpoint allows us (the readers assisted by our commentator, Hegel), to redescribe the picture of the agent that was earlier presented in the dialectic of “Consciousness” as that of the agent looking only within his own subjectively apprehended cognitive activities for affirmation that what he counts as authoritative really is so. The collapse of that attempt has led to the more practically oriented criterion that the agent now has, which itself has come to require not an inquiry into his own subjective experiences or a reliance only upon his cognitive skills, but a reliance on another subject for

the recognition that would affirm that what he takes to be authoritative – namely, his *own* projects – *really are* authoritative not just for him but per se. In coming to understand that in holding a view of himself as independent he can only be satisfied by another agent's conferring recognition on him, the first agent seeking affirmation of his viewpoint "goes out of himself," as Hegel puts it, in that he comes to understand that the desired affirmation of his self-understanding can only come from another, not from himself.¹⁶ This kind of *dependence* on the other for recognition is a matter of conceptual necessity; it is not the kind of contingent dependence on others that is, for example, constituted by the dependence on others to produce certain goods. We may depend on others for a variety of things because we cannot, for fully contingent reasons, produce them ourselves; I may not have the skills or time to produce my own shoes or produce my own wine, and thus I depend on others to produce those things for me (for which I can exchange something in return). But it is not a contingent fact about this agent that he alone cannot affirm his conception of himself for himself; it is part of the concept of what it means to be an agent, at least insofar as Hegel has developed that concept thus far, that the agent requires others to reassure him that what he *takes* as authoritative *really* is so.

The relation to the other is thus double-edged in that the other both *affirms* and *undermines* the subject's sense of himself, and it is this double-edged quality that leads to the dialectic of dependence and independence that structures the discussion of mastery and servitude. On the one hand, the subject (at this point in the development of Hegel's argument) would find his self-conception affirmed through the other agent's recognition of him, and thus he would find "only himself" in the other; he would find not the other's projects but *his* own projects affirmed in the other. On the other hand, he finds that his sense of himself as independent is *dependent* on the recognition conferred by the other agent, which seems to undermine any affirmation of himself as *independent*. If he is therefore to maintain this sense of himself as independent, he must integrate this kind of dependency on the other into a conception of himself that can preserve his sense of his independence while at the same time allowing for an acknowledgment of his dependence on the other for recognition. He must therefore give some more content (that is, more determinateness) to the conception of independence that he claims for himself.¹⁷ This is complicated by the fact that in doing so, he must be also able to preserve the conception of the *other* as dependent on him, in the sense that the other must *take himself to be* dependent on him.

The dialectical complexities of this are luxuriant: The subject must secure his independence by becoming dependent on the recognition by an "other" such that the subject finds his independence affirmed by virtue of being dependent on an "other" who confers this recognition by virtue of affirming his own dependence on the subject. This complexity is intensified by the fact that the other would necessarily hold the same conception and would be involved in the same complexities.¹⁸

Could the agents resolve this complexity by simply *mutually* recognizing

each other as independent – that is, each recognizing that the other's projects determine what will count as authoritative, what will count as being of value and so on? Part of the force of Hegel's argument will be that this is not possible for *these* agents (whom we are imagining as abstracted out of all developed social relationships, since they each take their projects to be identifiable independently of their social relations).¹⁹ Hegel describes the mutual demands for recognition that the two agents make on each other as an encounter between people who each hold an *abstract* idea of themselves. Each conceives of himself as a "simple being-for-self." That is, the agent is aware of himself as having a *subjective point of view* on the world. This emerged from the dialectic of "Consciousness," in which the subject went from an understanding of himself as simply *apprehending* objects (pure singularities or perceptual objects) to an understanding of himself as knowing objects only by being engaged in conceptualizing *activity*. In taking himself as an essentially self-conscious agent, the subject developed a view of knowledge as being primarily an elaboration of more practical endeavors – namely, the satisfaction of desire. The subject thus takes his subjective point of view as his own perspective on the world – that is, how he sees things from within his own set of beliefs, expectations, and the like, and how he experiences things as being. The subjective point of view, taken abstractly (that is, taken out of the full context of all the mediating factors in it) appears to the agent therefore simply as his own *individual* point of view on the world, as something that *he* has, in distinction from the viewpoint that had characterized "consciousness," in which the objects were supposedly apprehended from no point of view at all – they were supposedly apprehended simply as they were in themselves. He also takes this subjective point of view to be self-sufficient; he, as an individual, can identify what this point of view is and what desires and projects he sets for himself without having to know anything else.²⁰

Independence and subjective points of view

To be a *subject* is not only to be aware of things in the world but also to be aware of oneself as having a *point of view* on that world. If we imagine that the subject's basic point of view on the world is practical, such that what he counts as an authoritative reason has to do with what is necessary for the satisfaction of his desires and projects, then he confronts that world, as we might call it, as a "practical field." To *know* something is to be able to integrate it into this practical field, to see it as fitting in with the reasons that are generated out of what is necessary to fulfill his desires and projects and to fit them together with each other. Each subject therefore encounters the other first as an "object" in this practical field, as a "thing" to be integrated into the first subject's plans and projects. Each is "certain of himself" as being the kind of practical-knowing subject that he is, for whom the world is known as a practical field to be integrated into *his* own concerns and projects.

However, to see the other agent simply as an "object" in the practical field cannot be satisfying for the subject (it can have no "truth" for him), since in

order to see the other as capable of bestowing *recognition*, he must see the other not simply as an "object" in the world like other things but as a self-conscious *subject*, who also has *his own* subjective point of view on the world. Each therefore presents himself to the other in the encounter as this type of practical-knowing agent who takes himself to *know* things when he knows them in terms of how well they fit into his own projects and desires – that is, into his subjective point of view.²¹ In Hegel's terms, each presents himself to the other as a "pure abstraction of being-for-self."²² The subject understands himself as a point of view on the world, specifically, as an independent agent whose knowledge of things consists in fitting them into his practical field; although he can neither determine which desires he might have nor what might satisfy those desires, he nonetheless understands his *independence* to lie in his *subjectively taking* certain things to count or not to count as authoritative for him, with the standards for his doing so being whether they fit into his desires and projects. Since each wishes to affirm for himself that his view of himself as independent is indeed true, each demands that the other recognize him as this kind of independent agent. Each agent from his own subjective point of view therefore encounters the other as an agent also having a subjective point of view and seeks to incorporate that fact – that the other has his own subjective point of view – into his own point of view. Each agent therefore comes to have a subjective, personal point of view that has as a component the idea of the other as also having a subjective, personal point of view.

From the standpoint of these agents, however, there is no way to reconcile these two subjective points of view into a third, more objective point of view, for at this stage, no such impersonal (or "objective" or what Hegel often simply calls, "universal") point of view could exist. Or, as we might put it, there can be no common, social project for these agents that could count as something into which they must reconcile their own projects. At this stage in the argument, neither of the agents could correlate his own point of view and that of the other with that of such an objective point of view. Instead each has his own subjective point of view, and incorporates the idea of the "other as *having* a subjective point of view" into his own point of view. Each takes his own subjective point of view as being the truth, and he simply maps the other's point of view into his own, denying the validity of the other's point of view when it conflicts with his own. Neither is in a position to assume an impersonal point of view that would incorporate within itself the subjective points of view of each agent, for the possibility of that impersonal point of view has not, at this point in the argument, been developed.²³ The encounter between the two agents is thus an encounter between two agents who cannot have any grounds to admit that any other point of view other than their own subjective point of view has any validity (or could take priority over their own point of view), even though each is supposed to recognize that the other has a point of view.

Each therefore demands that the other recognize him as an agent who is more than an organism *in* the world; he is also a subject having a point of view

on that world and whose point of view is authoritative. For each to affirm this for himself, each must demonstrate *to himself* that he is more than just an organism by being recognized as such by the *other agent*. Risking his life by engaging in some isolated, dangerous action will not suffice; this could only show that he is willing to run certain risks for certain ends and would only affirm for him at best that he is a practical agent. It could not affirm for him the primacy of his subjective point of view; only recognition by another of the primacy of his subjective point of view could do that. (Simply wrestling a lion will not therefore suffice.) Recognition can only come from an “other” whom one takes to be a self-conscious agent (an agent who has a point of view on the world and therefore his own practical projects), and who *confers* that recognition on one. Each therefore makes a conflicting demand on the other. Each knows the other as a “thing” in the practical field, who is known only in terms of his integration into the former’s own projects and desires. Yet each also demands that the other recognize him as independent – that is, as an agent for whom the other is known only in terms of his being integrated into his own projects. That is, each denies to the other that he is a “thing” and instead demands affirmation that *his* subjective point of view on the world is correct and the other’s point of view is false to the extent that it conflicts with the former.

The result of this would at first be a struggle to the death. Hegel’s argument for this is quite ingeniously couched in terms of a problem in the theory of knowledge. Both have a point of view on the world on the basis of which they make judgments as to what counts as true or false, as appearance or reality and so on. The general principle of the point of view of these agents (as it has been developed up to this point) is a very generally pragmatic principle: The activities of making knowledge-claims is a part of our overall practice of dealing with the world so as to satisfy the system of desires that make up our various projects; and we know things by integrating our conceptions of what counts as an authoritative reason for believing or acting into these overall projects and desires. Since two points of view can clash, there will be problems with conciliating one individual’s claims with the conflicting claims of others. But a genuine conciliation could come about only if the parties could assume an objective, impersonal point of view from which they could then judge the conflicting claims made by themselves – that is, only if they could judge their own claims not completely *internally* to their own points of view and experience but could judge them in terms of something that would *transcend* that subjective experience. However, this objective point of view is not something which the agents themselves can simply acquire by dispassionately looking at the world and then simply reading off the determinateness of the objects in that world; the dialectic of “Consciousness” has shown that not to be possible. Since the objective, impersonal point of view cannot therefore be *discovered*, it must be itself *constructed* out of social practice; the agents themselves must construct a *social* point of view on the basis of which they will be able to reconcile the various conflicting judgments and beliefs generated out of their personal points of view. Moreover,

for this social, impersonal point of view to play the role it is supposed to play, the agents must be able to learn to map their own personal points of view on to that objective point of view, and thus the objective, impersonal point of view must itself so constructed that it permits such a mapping. (To the extent that they cannot do this, there must remain a gulf, if not an outright contradiction, between the two points of view.) At this point in the *Phenomenology*, however, no such universal, objective point of view is available for these agents, and the "movement of self-consciousness" is the movement of what is involved in constructing an objective point of view that would integrate within itself the conflicting subjective points of view.

Given that there is no objective point of view for these agents, and no objective point of view could be simply "discovered" by them, each must attempt to redescribe the other in terms of his own subjective point of view. Each must assert that everything outside of his own subjective point of view is for him, as Hegel puts it, only a "negative" – that is, something that he claims to know only as it fits into his own personal point of view and that itself cannot impose any conditions of knowledge upon him.²⁴ Each therefore has a subjective point of view into which he integrates the idea of the other *as having* a subjective point of view. But each takes his own subjective point of view to be the *objective* point of view, to be the "truth," that to which the other's point of view must accommodate itself whenever there are conflicts.

Neither can therefore accept the other's description of him as a "thing" in the other's practical field, nor can either accept that the other exclusively sets the terms of what can be known and what can be permitted to be done. Since for these agents there can be no objective point of view in terms of which they could conciliate their desires – they cannot appeal, for example, to some general abstraction such as "a system of desires" that would incorporate both points of view – they cannot thereby reconcile their competing desires for recognition. Each subject claims primacy for his own point of view; in Hegel's terms, the "being-for-self" and the "being-for-other" of the two agents conflict. To the extent, then, that each understands himself in this way – that is, understands that in holding such a view he is not just an object *in* the world but a subject who has a point of view *on* the world, and he holds that point of view to be the "true" point of view (that something counts as knowledge only in terms of its being integrated into his projects) – each stakes his life in the struggle for affirmation of his being a "subject" and not an "object" (for being an independent point of view on the world and not simply an organism in the world). Moreover, to succeed in having one's view of oneself affirmed would also affirm for the agent that he is *free* in the sense that he is able to "do what he wants" and in the sense that he determines what he is to do.²⁵

Although each stakes his life in the struggle for recognition, the death of one of the participants in the struggle cannot resolve this problem. If both stake their lives and struggle to the death, with the result that one survives and the other dies, then although the survivor has indeed demonstrated that he values independence above life itself, his victory will be nonetheless emp-

ty. The encounter between the two self-conscious agents is the attempt on the part of each to impose his own subjective point of view on the other and to claim for his own *subjective* point of view the status of being the “true,” the *objective*, impersonal point of view. The struggle is therefore not just over the satisfaction of desire but over what is to count as the objective point of view and thus what is to count as the truth. The death of one of the participants implies that this point of view cannot then be achieved.²⁶ (This argument, as it plays itself out in the *Phenomenology*, ultimately aims at establishing that rational self-consciousness is only possible when one subject can fully integrate the *objective* point of view into his own *subjective* point of view. But that is only the aim; it is not achieved here.)

Mastery, servitude and an “objective” point of view

Therefore, the life of the participants must be preserved in order for the desired resolution to come about. Moreover, for this resolution to come about, the two must construct some kind of shared point of view that could serve to mediate their conflict. But, as we have seen, there are no conceptual resources at hand for either of these agents to construct a truly impersonal point of view. The encounter is therefore between two agents, each understanding himself as “being-for-self” (as having a subjective point of view on the world), and it can have a resolution only when the lives of each are preserved in the struggle for recognition. The only possible resolution therefore is for one to opt for life over recognition and simply to accept the other’s point of view as the truth. The one who opts for life becomes the slave, the other becomes the master. The master is the agent whose subjective point of view, whose own projects, are accepted by the slave as the truth, and the slave therefore becomes a “being-for-another” in that he accepts that his own subjectivity – that what for him is an authoritative reason for belief or action – counts only in terms of how well it contributes to satisfying the master’s desires and projects.²⁷

The master therefore achieves what he desires, recognition from the other, his slave. The master thus thinks that he has successfully integrated the two opposing demands on him – namely, that he affirm for himself that he is independent while at the same time being dependent on the recognition by another. The question is whether this resolution can be satisfactory for the master on the terms that he has himself accepted. For him, what counts as a good reason has to do with its fit with his own projects and desires (which are for him authoritative), and he can affirm this conception of what counts as a good reason only by being given recognition by the slave. The master therefore knows who he is, and he knows what things are only by having his self-conception affirmed by the slave. What he claims to know about himself and the world is therefore mediated by the slave. The slave further supposedly affirms the master’s self-conception by working for the master on the things of the world. The master is thus able to enjoy these things as the satisfaction of his desires, for they affirm for him that indeed what counts as a good

reason has to do with what fits into what is authoritative for him – namely, *his* own system of desires and projects.²⁸ The slave, on the other hand, understands that his desires count as good reasons to act only to the extent that their satisfaction can be integrated into a scheme of satisfying the master's desires (for example, that it is appropriate to pursue his own desires only to the extent that they fit in with the master's projects and desires), and he understands that the things of the world can count for him as values or as things to be appropriated by him only insofar as such valuings and appropriations can be integrated into the master's projects and desires. The slave thus understands his own subjective life completely in terms of the master's projects; as we might put it, he maps his own point of view completely on to that of the master's. The master's subjective point of view thus comes to function as the impersonal point of view for the slave, the standpoint that he can assume in order to evaluate the correctness of his own personal point of view.²⁹

The slave works on things for the master, and thereby affirms for him that what counts in the world is what satisfies the master's desires. But most importantly, the slave *recognizes* the master as the master and adjusts his own subjective point of view to fit the master's point of view; he thus affirms for the master that his viewpoint on the world is true and that his self-conception as an independent agent is valid. But this has another side to it. The master's point of view – understanding that what counts as an authoritative reason has to do with what satisfies *his* desires and projects – has come to be *the* point of view in terms of which any conflicts (either epistemic or practical) between the two agents are to be adjudicated. It is this acceptance of *his* point of view as *the* point of view that affirms for him that he is indeed an independent agent. However, this point of view can play that role only to the extent that the slave, as a self-conscious agent, *has come to accept* that point of view as authoritative. The dominance of the master's point of view is thus dependent on the slave's *having come to accept it* as dominant – that is, the dominance of the master's point of view is fully dependent on the slave's *contingently* coming to accept it and on his *continuing* to accept it.

The master's point of view thus proves to have no metaphysical or epistemic priority over the slave's point of view; its dominance turns out to be a *social fact*, something completely constituted out of the one-sided type of social recognition that makes up the relationship of master and slave, by the slave's coming to accept that point of view as his own.³⁰ To the extent that the master comes to realize this, he realizes that on his own terms he has failed. He has not established his own subjective point of view as the truth; he has merely managed for contingent reasons to have the slave *accept* it as the truth, with there being no further ground for the acceptance than the *contingent* fact that out of fear for his life, the slave opted to submit to the master.

Likewise, the slave's self-consciousness turns out to be different than it first appeared. The slave's self-consciousness is determined by the master's; what counts as a reason for the slave is a function of what he takes to count as a reason for the master. The slave identified his own projects as having

validity only in terms of fitting in with the master's projects.³¹ But if the slave comes to an awareness that this is the case – that he takes the master's point of view as his own only because of *contingencies* in the past relationship between the two – then that awareness itself will transform the slave's own self-consciousness, since it shows him that what he takes as authoritative for himself is only contingently authoritative. The contingency that made the slave into a slave was his fear for his life and his willingness to submit to the other rather than to die – for him to take the other to be the master and to *take himself* as the dependent person, the slave – in other words, to *make himself* dependent. This experience, Hegel suggests, had thrown everything into question for him; everything that had appeared as stable and true had been thrown into question by the fact that he faced death and chose to live by submitting to the other agent.³² He thus faces the contingency of everything, including his own deepest beliefs as to what he regarded as true. But this experience of the full contingency of everything is implicitly what puts him into the position to see the contingency of the master's dominance over him. In submitting to the master and becoming the slave, he beholds in the master that “pure being-for-self” that he had also sought – namely, the master's subjective point of view in terms of which the master takes something to count as an authoritative reason for him only to the extent that it fits into *his* overall projects and desires; and the master's taking his own personal point of view to be *the* point of view, seeing things as counting *per se* only to the extent that *he* has come to accept them as counting. The slave comes to be in the position, however, to understand that this acceptance on his part of the master's point of view is not based on any metaphysical difference between him and the master but only on the fact that, out of fear, he accepted the status of slave in relation to the other, who became the master.

The master has appeared to satisfy his desires in having the slave work over the things of the world for him. The slave, however, in his working on things in order to satisfy the desires of the master, comes to see his own point of view embodied in the artifacts of his work. Whereas the master can only find his satisfactions in the contingent social facts of his dominance – quite literally in the *objects* which the slave prepares for him because of the slave's continuing *recognition* of him – the slave can find his satisfactions in working over and forming the objects of the natural world. Purely natural objects cannot, as we have seen, count for the master as affirming his sense of himself as an independent agent, since natural desire is something that simply *imposes* itself on him, that he has these desires whether he elects to have them or not; natural objects can affirm the master's sense of himself only if they have been worked over and formed *for him by* the slave (by someone who recognizes him as master and, out of this recognition, works on the objects for him in order to satisfy the master's projects).

Because the slave has internalized the master's *subjective* point of view on things as the “true,” as the *objective* point of view in terms of which he must judge his own subjective point of view, he understands that these objects count as something of value only to the extent that *he*, the slave, works on

them; without *his* working on them, they count for nothing for the master and hence count for nothing *per se*. However, this gives the slave an unintended form of independence, for the slave is now in a position to reflect on his own activity and to see that the natural objects of the world count as things of value only to the extent that *he*, the slave, integrates them into *a* scheme of satisfying desire (even if that scheme of desires is not his own).³³ To the extent that the slave comes to understand this – that he is a slave by contingency only and that his own activity is also constitutive of something's counting as a thing of value – he sheds the complete hold that the master had over his self-consciousness. In doing so, the slave will have thus turned out to have achieved the more nearly “objective” point of view of the two agents; the slave thus succeeds in doing that at which the master failed, namely, to construct a social, quasi-objective point of view out of his subjective point of view through his encounter with the other. The master must thus come to acknowledge this in the slave and learn to map his own point of view on to that of the slave who is emerging as independent.³⁴ Instead of having his own point of view as clearly dominant, as being the “true” view, the master must now learn to coordinate his own views with those of the slave and understand that his mastery over the slave is only a contingency, and not a function of the “intrinsic superiority” of his own point of view, or a mirror of some metaphysical truth supposedly “out there.” Thus, neither the master nor the slave ends up where he had intended. The dialectic of master and slave was initiated by each identifying his own projects as authoritative for what counted as good reasons for belief and action, but each has now found that he cannot identify what is *his own* without reference to the other's point of view – without, that is, reference to the *sociality* common to both. What counts as *his own* projects for the master cannot be unambiguously identified without incorporating some reference to the slave's projects and vice versa.

The *necessity* of a common, “objective” point of view is thus established out of the dialectic of master and slave, although that common point of view has not yet been fully achieved. What has been created instead are two subjective points of view, each coordinating itself with the other, each as it were mapping itself on to the other's point of view. This result does not imply any change in the social relations of dominance between the master and the slave, for the slave may contingently lack the necessary practical means to free himself from the master, and the master may not relinquish his political or practical hold on the slave. What has unalterably changed between them, however, is that the master's point of view can no longer be the dominant point of view to which the slave immediately adapts his own point of view. A new, more nearly common point of view, has emerged; this new point of view will make new claims, and, so Hegel will further argue, these new claims – those involved with stoicism, skepticism and what he calls the “unhappy consciousness” – will also fail to make good on the aims that they set for themselves. But their failures make possible the point of view of modern life, which is the goal in which Hegel thinks the phenomenology of the European

community can find itself completed, even if it has never actually aimed at that goal.

3. Stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness

Freedom of thought

The dialectic of master and slave has created the possibility for the slave to understand that his status as a slave is the result of his contingently having come to accept the subjective point of view of the master as normative for *his own* point of view. The master's point of view becomes dominant because the slave *comes to count it* as dominant, and the reason for the slave's coming to do that has to do with the fear and anxiety he felt for his life in the initial struggle for recognition. The slave thus comes to be in the position to understand that it is his bestowal of mastery on the master (and his potential withdrawal of it) that sustains that relationship; the slave, as Hegel puts it, comes to understand that he has a certain type of freedom within himself. This freedom consists of his acknowledgement that what counts as knowledge has to do with how certain standards have come to be accepted by the community as defining what kinds of things can count as warrants for belief. (In this case, the "community" in question was only two people, the master and the slave.) The "truth" of the dialectic of master and slave was that what had come to count as authoritative was the result of contingent circumstances governing the social acceptance of certain standards of warranted belief; these standards had to do with what worked for the agents in question: What had "worked" for the slave was his having valued life as higher than recognition, and what had "worked" for the master was his willingness to die for the recognition he desired. However, with the understanding that the basis for what counts as warranted is the kind of contingency at work in the dialectic of master and slave, a new possibility of self-consciousness is created. The agents are now in a position to see that what counts has to do with their having *contingently come to count* it, and that outside of the historical contingencies of life (of, for example, one person having more fear than another), there is nothing that compels us to accept one standard over another. The sense of everything fixed being thrown into question, which the slave had experienced when he feared for his life, is now taken as defining the relation between subjects and their world.³⁵ Nothing is fixed, and the only stable point in the world is the agent's *freedom* to think about that world, to assume for himself what is to count *for him* as true. Not his practical projects, which can be thwarted by others, but his ability to freely elect for himself the standards for what is to count for him as authoritative in determining what is a warrant for belief.

This freedom is therefore at first understood as freedom in *thinking* about things, in the way we take them. One may not be free in the sense that one is not able to "do what one wants" (the slave cannot free himself, the master

cannot *compel* the slave to believe what the master believes), but one is free in the sense that nothing can count as authoritative for oneself unless one has freely elected it for oneself. The master had sought to have his subjective viewpoint affirmed for himself by having the slave affirm it for him in the slave's act of recognition. However, that point of view, which had failed on the terms it had set for itself, is now redescribed in different terms: The master found that he could not determine the slave to accept his point of view (he could only naturally compel him), and the slave now sees that nobody can determine *him* to accept the other's point of view. He himself has to come to accept it. We thus still do not have a fully objective point of view; we have various individuals recognizing others as having their own subjective points of view but affirming for themselves that they are independent in having their own subjective point of view and in affirming that it is up to them as *thinking* beings to accept or deny other points of view. To *know* something is to *affirm for oneself* that such and such are the standards by which the truth is to be determined. The independence which the master had sought is now transformed into the "independence of thinking."³⁶ Once again, the issue is whether this conception of knowledge can satisfy itself on the terms that it sets for itself.

Stoicism

Hegel identifies classical stoicism in the *Phenomenology* with this conception of freedom as independence in thought. The move from the struggles over mastership and slavery to the considerations of stoicism (and then to skepticism and the "unhappy consciousness") has struck more than a few readers as puzzling. It seems to move quite abruptly and without much explanation from very abstract arguments about what a hypothetical encounter between two self-conscious agents in something like a state of nature would look like to a quite obviously historical discussion about some issues in late antiquity. The reason for this otherwise odd move from conceptual argument to history has to do with the connection between self-consciousness and history itself. History (or at least the history with which a "dialectical history" is concerned) becomes possible only when later stages can be seen as completions of earlier stages, such that the later stages may be seen to be teleological progressions from earlier stages.

This teleology itself is possible only in the following sort of way. Forms of life become *reflective* forms of life (become, that is, "spirit") when they develop practices for reassuring themselves and affirming (or failing to affirm) that what that form of life has come to count as an authoritative reason for belief or action *really* is an authoritative reason. (In late modernity – the time in which we, the readers of the *Phenomenology*, are living – this overall reflective practice is differentiated into the distinct practices of art, religion, and philosophy.) However, these reflective accounts develop within the terms they set for themselves skeptical doubts about themselves; reflection on what has been affirmed as an authoritative reason shows that it is possible – given

the kinds of accounts that have been offered of why those reasons really count as authoritative reasons – to doubt that these reasons really are authoritative reasons. These reflective forms of life produce, in Hegel's terms, their own "negatives" – that is, their own skepticism about themselves. It is out of the failures of attempts to construct an affirmative account of why certain reasons are authoritative reasons that a new set of reasons – and thus a new form of collective self-identity – emerges. Unless a form of life can develop such a reflection on itself, it cannot be completed by later stages, for the idea of a later stage completing an earlier stage is possible only if the later stage can be seen to resolve some kind of problem in the earlier stage.

It was in coming to see that his slavery rests on the contingency of his having chosen life over recognition – in fearing for his life and coming to see that nothing was fixed – that the slave acquired the possibility of becoming a stoic or a skeptic. That is, only when the practice of offering an affirmative account of what counts as an authoritative reason was set up and skepticism about it was engendered out by the very account that was given – a "negation" of the "affirmation" – were the slave and the master, as it were, ready to move on to another stage. (It should be emphasized that in speaking that way, Hegel does not mean that any two identifiable individuals, such as the "master" and "slave," are now themselves ready to become stoics; it is "formations of consciousness" that Hegel has in mind.) Hegel holds that this possibility was first fully realized in classical Greek culture (although adumbrated by Egyptian religion) in which "spirit" as such a *reflective* form of life first emerged. The structure of the argument that Hegel develops in the move from mastery and slavery has to do with his claim that the classical Greek form of life first realized in an institutional form the *possibility* present in self-consciousness – namely, that of offering reflective accounts of whether what we have come to count as authoritative reasons really are authoritative reasons. Previous forms of life, so Hegel thought, had certainly possessed activities of reason-giving and the like; but they did not develop a self-consciousness about it in the form of social practices that evaluated whether what they had come to accept as authoritative for themselves was in fact justified. The possibility of the kind of history that is the subject of a dialectical account depends on these reflective practices having been developed. For that reason, a social history of slavery in the ancient world, for example, would not satisfy Hegel's project; it is only when there is a reflection on the institution of mastership and servitude as insufficient forms of independence that history in the sense in which the dialectical philosopher is interested can begin. Thus, since Greece first developed the reflective practices in this sense, in Hegel's view it would be completely appropriate to jump from the rather abstract speculations about mastership and slavery to an examination of the historical practices of stoicism and skepticism, for it is in those accounts of the issues involved in the Greek institutions of mastership and slavery that history can truly begin. Hegel is thus ready to move from the abstract considerations of the encounter between two self-conscious agents seeking independence to the way in which the kind of reflections engendered out of that encounter would produce a

historical movement of progressively more complex "affirmations" answering to progressively more complex "negations." Stoicism is historically and conceptually the first of these attempted affirmations that emerge out of the kinds of reflections on mastership and slavery.³⁷

The doctrines of stoicism are the kinds of accounts that seem to satisfy the skepticism that both the master and the slave would arrive at as the result of their encounter. Nothing counts for the stoic as true or good unless he can affirm it within his own thought as true and good. The stoic does this by retreating from the concerns of everyday life – that is, the objects of desire and work. The rationale for the stoic's doing this can be described in terms of the insufficiencies revealed in the dialectic of master and slave. Seeking the satisfaction of desire had led neither the master nor the slave to establish their independence. In everyday life, one is ruled by others in society and by desire in one's own life, and it is impossible to identify what is genuinely a desire of one's own outside of social life. The stoic's solution is to become indifferent to whether he is a master or slave, for if true independence lies in the freedom of thought, then one's independence cannot be a matter of either mastery or servitude, for such things cannot affect one's real independence. For the stoic, the master can be truly free only to the extent that he can affirm for himself that such and such counts as an authoritative reason for him because *he* counts it, and the slave can be truly free only when he can do the same thing. Who is the master and who is the slave is a matter of contingency and is not in the agent's control; however, whether one retains one's independence of thought is completely up to the agent himself.

In this way, the stoic constructs something closer to a genuinely impersonal point of view than was possible for the "formation of consciousness" delineated in the dialectic of master and slave. The stoic comes to believe that the independence of thought for which he strives is not the imposition of his own *subjective* point of view on things but rather an attempt to become indifferent to all particular things and to assume the point of view of a "rational being in general."³⁸ Unlike the master, the stoic does not attempt to make his own subjective point of view normative for others; rather, he seeks to detach himself from his subjective point of view and take a detached, universalistic point of view. Unlike the agents at the conclusion of the dialectic of master and the slave, who *coordinate* their two points of view, the stoic is not interested in coordinating his point of view with another at all but with abstracting from all that is personal in his point of view. The stoic thus seeks to do in thought what the master and slave failed to do in practice. What counts as an authoritative reason is not a matter of its being integrated into our projects and desires, for those are too personal; rather, what counts as an authoritative reason is what can be integrated into our system of thought. The stoic is thus not dominated by any "other": neither by another person imposing his point of view on him nor by his desires, which are too personal and too determined by chance.

For the stoic, therefore, nothing counts for him unless he can bring it into some scheme of rational thought. However, this turns out for the stoic to be

only a very *abstractly* impersonal point of view. By defining itself in opposition to the particularities of everyday life (which it sees as a realm of non-freedom and dependence), the stoic puts himself in a position of not being able to give any content to the impersonal point of view except to claim that it is “rational.” To adopt a truly impersonal point of view according to the terms in which he has framed the issue, the stoic must abstract from all the particularities of everyday life but even from particular thoughts, for these too may have been given to him by others. Because of this, stoicism buys its independence at the cost of excessive abstractness and formality.³⁹ Because of its formality, the stoic point of view cannot give any account of what the *individual* stoic is actually to take as counting as knowledge or as being valuable. The stoic point of view was supposed to make good on the idea that true independence was to be found in freedom of thought, in deciding for oneself what was to count for one as true by virtue of counting as knowledge only that which meets the impersonal criteria of rationality; and the stoics claimed to have found this independence in their conception of a “criterion” of rationality by which they could decide for themselves what was true or valuable. However, the formalism of their principles cannot provide this criterion, since a purely formal criterion can only rule out the internally self-contradictory claims; it cannot decide between any claims that contradict each other but that are not themselves self-contradictory.

Skepticism

If followed out, the stoical point of view would lead to skepticism; or, as Hegel puts it, the “truth” of stoicism is skepticism. In his fear for his life, the slave had experienced the contingency of his own point of view; the skeptic transforms this into the contingency of *all* points of view, including his own. Anything that looks fixed and true can be shown, so the skeptic argues, to be only relative to a particular *subjective* point of view, including even that subjective point of view’s view of itself.⁴⁰ The independence of reflective thought that had animated the stoic is made into a true independence of thought by the skeptic, for the skeptic applies the kind of reflections which for the stoic constituted independence of thought to thought itself, showing that what was taken as fixed and known by the stoics is in fact relative and open to question. We cannot know the things of the world with certainty, but we also cannot know our own thoughts with certainty. The skeptic’s point is that when applied to itself, the impersonal point of view assumed by the stoic turns out to be self-undermining. Assuming the stoical impersonal point of view drives to the conclusion that any point of view is always the point of view of an individual person, and that any individual person’s point of view is always subject to all kinds of relativizing doubts. Thus, the attempts at fulfilling the general aim to take the impersonal point of view lead to the view that there really is *no* impersonal point of view at all and that there are only subjective and relative points of view.⁴¹ True independence of thought thus requires one to be a skeptic.⁴²

Skepticism is thus the self-conscious expression of what was demonstrated in the earlier dialectical moves that have gone from the breakdown of the claims of sense-certainty to the failure of the relation between master and slave and its replacement by stoicism. By being skeptical about all these claims to knowledge, the skeptic thereby seemingly achieves a true freedom of self-consciousness. Nothing can count for him unless he *takes* it as counting, and the skeptic understands that nothing *can* count as knowledge for him, since he subjects all putative claims to knowledge to a series of dialectical moves (or "tropes") that shows them to be relative to the person making the claim, to the circumstances under which the claim is made, or even to be in themselves relative to other claims, which in themselves are relative to other claims and so on.⁴³ The skeptic thus focuses on his own activity of "taking things to be such and such". Skepticism is thus, as Hegel characterizes it, the "negative," a subjective point of view taking itself and itself alone to be that which sets the standards for what is to count as a claim to knowledge, taking itself to have shown that all putatively universal points of view are really only subjective points of view, and then arguing that no subjective point of view can succeed on its own terms.⁴⁴

Nothing can therefore count as stable and independent for this type of skeptic except the skeptic's own *consciousness* of the relativity of everything else. Stoicism had sought independence in assuming the universal point of view, in seeing things from the standpoint of "rational thought"; skepticism claims that the rigorous application of the supposedly universal point of view to itself in fact shows that there was no such thing as *the* universal point of view. Viewed dispassionately, all claims to knowledge will come to be seen as relative to the subjective point of view of the individual person making the claim.⁴⁵ In taking this position, the skeptic thus seems himself to have achieved the adequate form of rational independence at which the stoic aimed.⁴⁶

It is evident to the skeptic that this point of view has a tension within itself: the skeptic claims that *all* claims to knowledge are relative to the subjective point of view of *one* contingent individual, and his assertion of the primacy of the subjective point of view is based on his taking the universal point of view to be self-defeating. Yet in order to make the claims he does, it would seem that the skeptic himself must assume the detached universal point of view to see that all claims to knowledge are themselves relative to a subjective point of view. The true skeptic thus finds himself in what *seems* to be an elementary contradiction from which he cannot extricate himself; he assumes that all his claims to knowledge are contingent, are the result of whatever accidental factors have made him have the beliefs that he has. On the other hand, by seeing everything as contingent, he distances himself from them, seeing them as relative to some point of view or the other, and thus he implicitly assumes the detached, impersonal point of view. Ancient skepticism is not just a theoretical understanding of the world but a way of living. Thus, the skeptic finds that he can preserve his independence not by affirming any particular claim to knowledge but only by affirming only his own *reflective activity*

itself. The skeptic is thus a divided form of consciousness, caught between the two points of view that he finds within himself: the contingent, purely personal point of view, and the detached, impersonal point of view. The skeptic thus does not give up his central beliefs about himself or the world; he continues to hold certain views quite strongly. He simply reflectively distances himself from them, knowing that however strongly he may believe something, it is not “objectively” true, not something that has any validity outside of him or his community *having made it valid* on the basis of a contingently formed point of view. His independence, the one non-contingent feature of his life, is his skeptical activity itself. Yet a true skeptic knows that even though he presupposes this view of himself as independent, he cannot justify it within the terms that skepticism sets for itself.

The “unhappy consciousness”

When the skeptic owns up to this division within himself, he ceases to be a skeptic, for now he owns up to the centrality of certain views for himself, owns up to the idea that there are certain things that he claims to know and certain values that he accepts that he cannot willingly change nor would want to change; he simply admits that he has no way of justifying those beliefs outside of his own contingently held point of view. Hegel calls this the *unhappy consciousness*.

The “unhappy consciousness” is the way in which the skeptic must live his life. The skeptic holds that only his own *activity* of evaluating all claims to knowledge is authoritative; he thus holds that he achieves independence in taking that detached attitude to every kind of claim-making activity. Yet he also holds that there is nothing that *can be* affirmed, including this affirmation of his own independence, because any such affirmation would require a non-contingent, universal point of view that is itself impossible to attain. Yet in making that claim, the skeptic seems to be assuming some kind of impersonal view on knowledge itself and on his own claim-making activity. The “unhappy consciousness” is distinguished from the skeptic in that the skeptic wishes to assert the supreme validity of *no* point of view and thus finds himself wavering between both the subjective and the objective points of view, whereas the “unhappy consciousness” takes that wavering to be an essential feature of itself and the world.⁴⁷ The participants in the “unhappy consciousness” are thus not *skeptical* about their claims to knowledge; they believe things, but they do not see how those beliefs can be justified, given the standards that they accept for justification.

The way in which a participant in the “unhappy consciousness” is divided within himself is not simply that of a person who finds that he holds some kind of particular self-reflexive contradiction that might be resolved simply by dropping one side of the contradiction or by tweaking his philosophical system so that the contradiction can be avoided. It is rather the self-conception of an agent who finds (1) that he *must* hold both sides of the contradiction, (2) that there is no way out of the contradiction, and (3) that

he must therefore live with it rather than merely avoid it in his philosophical theories. The "unhappy consciousness" is thus not in the position of the self-refuting lying Cretan who announces that everything he says is false, for (presumably) the lying Cretan can view this as not really touching anything else he believes. The lying Cretan can continue to hold that all his beliefs are in order, with the exception of this particular, peculiar self-refuting statement, and it is only a matter of fine-tuning some philosophical theory to see how that particular paradox might be resolved. The "unhappy consciousness" however finds that his own conception of *everything* that he claims to know and to be is burdened with that kind of apparent contradiction. The "unhappy consciousness" thus finds that he cannot affirm within his own terms those things that he finds that he *must* believe. The "unhappy consciousness" *takes* certain things as authoritative but cannot quite *believe* in their authoritative-ness. He embodies what Kierkegaard simply later called "despair."

The "unhappy consciousness" thus describes a particular form of life in which people's conception of themselves and of what they claim to know exists in an enduring state of crisis. The basic principles of that form of life have their hold on people and define who they are, yet there exists within that form of life a great skepticism about the viability of these principles or their ultimate justification. Thus, the participants in the "unhappy consciousness" find that they have a certain self-conception rooted in a set of social practices that for them is authoritative, but for which they can neither see any justification nor envision any concrete alternative. Hegel uses the idea of the "unhappy consciousness" to describe both medieval Christianity and the Hellenic and pre-Christian worlds in which the older Greek gods were gone with nothing yet having arisen to take their place. In the Hellenic world, for example, the "unhappy consciousness" appears as a longing for the lost Greek divinities, since the beliefs surrounding the Greek gods were central to the Greek form of life, but the belief in them had ceased to have any real hold on the participants of that form of life.

The "unhappy consciousness" is thus divided *within itself*, for it necessarily assumes both points of view. Assuming the universal point of view is necessary for it to justify its claims to knowledge. It still takes itself as incapable of assuming that point of view, since it takes itself to be capable only of achieving a relative and limited subjective point of view. The "unhappy consciousness" must therefore take the two points of view as fully *opposing* points of view: What is justified from one point of view is unjustified from the other point of view. That is, the impersonal point of view is understood to be the point of view that if it *could* be attained would manifest a non-contingent viewpoint on the world, whereas the "unhappy consciousness" itself can only live within its own subjective point of view. At first, therefore, the "unhappy consciousness" takes the impersonal point of view to be that which is essential to justifying the claims that it makes, and takes its own individual point of view to be fully contingent and to play no role in justifying things. In Hegel's terms, the "unhappy consciousness" takes the impersonal point of view to represent the *unchangeable* view on things (to be that point of view on the

unchanging “essence” of things), whereas it takes its own subjective point of view to be the contingent, *changeable* (inessential) point of view.⁴⁸ The “unchangeable” is that which is both authoritative and unobtainable for the “unhappy consciousness.” The “unhappy consciousness” embodies, of course, both points of view at once: It is “unhappy” because it cannot take those two points of view to be indifferent to each other; each is essential, and each contradicts the other. Any attempt to reduce the one to the other is bound to fail, for both are essential to the self-understanding of the “unhappy consciousness.”⁴⁹ What is thus important about the two points of view for the “unhappy consciousness” is not only that they are *his* two points of view but that they seem to be *irreconcilable* with each other.⁵⁰

The task for the “unhappy consciousness” is thus the attempt to conciliate or integrate the competing claims of the two points of view. The impersonal, detached, objective point of view is the true view for the participant in the “unhappy consciousness.” His own subjective, personal point of view is too determined by contingencies for it to be able to affirm that what appears to him or what he takes to be true and valuable really is true and valuable. The only possible affirmation of his views would have to come from the objective point of view itself (the “unchangeable,” as Hegel refers to it), and this point of view is impossible for him to attain. Thus, he must represent this objective, authoritative point of view to himself as something *beyond* his capacities, which he only knows well enough to know that he cannot attain it. That “beyond” is hypostatized as “the truth” and is interpreted as being “out there,” external to human desires or wishes.

Having this view of the objective, impersonal point of view as something he cannot attain, the “unhappy consciousness” represents that point of view to himself as something like a “God’s eye” view, which, if one could attain it, would be able to affirm for him what is indeed true and valuable and what is not. The historical transition involved in the transformation of the abstract ideas of the neo-Platonists – of the “unhappy consciousness” of late Hellenism – into the ideas of early Christianity clearly forms the basis of much of Hegel’s discussion here.⁵¹ This “God’s eye” view can be represented as itself an abstract individual entity of sorts, as the neo-Platonists did. Even more so, it can be represented as the appearance of Christianity with the person of Jesus assuming the “God’s eye” point of view from within the human (subjective) point of view itself.⁵² But even this appearance of “the truth” in human form can only appear at first to these agents as something that has simply *happened* to them, something that the “unchangeable” (represented as a force or an entity) has done *for* them; it puts them in the passive position of not being able to do anything on their own to justify their subjective points of view but as having only to accept that something has simply befallen them. Although this appears to them at first as a reconciliation of the two points of view – of the deity’s revealing the “truth” to fallible, one-sided people – it cannot serve as anything but a short-term affirmation for these people, for the appearance of “the truth” in the form of an individual person makes that affirmation as contingent as the people for whom it is supposed to serve as an

affirmation. Jesus dies, and the Christian community begins to await his return, which more and more recedes into an indeterminate future.⁵³

Since having the truth appear for them in the form of a person who promises to return proves to be only a short-term solution, the object of striving to integrate the apparent incompatibilities of the two points of view takes on the form of a kind of *practice* of trying to *fuse* one's own point of view into that of the impersonal point of view itself, of lifting oneself up to the heights of the "unchangeable." The "unchangeable" itself (the world seen from the impersonal point of view as a timeless set of essences) cannot do that for the agents; they must do it for themselves.⁵⁴ They must strive to bring their own view of the world in line with the "true view" by elevating themselves in thought to the divine point of view. They must alienate their own subjective points of view in order to attain to the mystical objective point of view (for example, through the contemplation of the eternal truths coupled with a metaphoric rise to the level of the absolute, as the neo-Platonists attempted.) The kind of unclarity and wooliness of the various attempts at resolving the dilemmas of the "unhappy consciousness" are, Hegel argues, a necessary feature of what is required to effect such a resolution, since the ideas under consideration by these agents are to them so riddled with tensions and contradictions. In such a time of transition, the ideas involved are bound to be themselves unclear.⁵⁵

The stoic radicalized the standpoint of the master and the slave by seeking true independence in thought, in electing to count nothing as knowledge that he himself could not affirm *for himself* from the detached, universal standpoint; the skeptic consummated the stoic's project by applying the detached, dispassionate standpoint to the detached standpoint itself and showing that, dispassionately viewed, there are no detached, universal standpoints available to finite, contingent humans. The skeptic thus displays the full "freedom of self-consciousness" in that he is free to refuse to accept anything that he cannot affirm for himself, and, by the application of the various skeptical tropes, he finds that there is nothing that he in fact can affirm as being true except his own independent activity of accepting and rejecting things. The "unhappy consciousness" accepts that skeptical result but realizes that it cannot abandon the universal point of view, since it is the paradoxical application of the universal point of view to itself that makes skepticism possible in the first place.⁵⁶ It is therefore faced with two alternatives for reconciling its contradiction. First, it can accept that the universal point of view (the "truth") simply comes to it by some action not its own (through some doctrine such as Plotinian "emanations" from the eternal or, more concretely, by some form of Christian revelation). This tactic necessarily fails, so it must therefore return to the original guiding idea of skepticism, that it is its own thinking activity that allows things to count for it. The "unhappy consciousness" thus moves from a conception of itself as passive and as simply receiving the "truth" to that of being active, of preparing itself so that it can "receive the truth."⁵⁷ This is crucial, for it means that the "unhappy consciousness" assumes that there is a detached point of view to be achieved, but that its own

activity is required for it to work itself up to that point of view. The move from a somewhat passive skepticism to an active attempt at working up to a fusion of the objective and subjective points of view amounts to a *social project* of transforming humanity (which Hegel sees as the crucial transition from the “ancients” to the “moderns”).

The first stage of this attempt at transforming humanity so that it is ready to “receive” the truth is through devotional activity.⁵⁸ The agents wish to achieve the objective standpoint, and they believe that they must do this through their own activity. That is, they try to learn to put their own individuality (the subjective point of view) aside and remake themselves into agents capable of assuming the proper, authoritative standpoint. The various practices involving devotional activity and reflection are the first means for achieving this self-elevation. Hegel’s point is that this kind of devotional activity makes more sense for *these types* of agents with *this type* of self-consciousness than merely thinking or reflecting on things in a more purely “philosophical” mode would do; the goal is to affirm that what they take as true really is true through some practice that will achieve the goal of fusing their subjective points of view with the objective (“true”) point of view. (This is part of Hegel’s overall view that apparently different things like devotional activity and philosophy are to be understood as different forms of social practice in which subjects reflect on themselves and seek reassurance and affirmation for what they take to be true and real.) This kind of devotional activity is composed of rites, of chants, of the smell of incense, and all the other trappings of the early Christian church. Through it, people get a vague understanding (Hegel calls it a “feeling”) of what it means to distance themselves from their own limited, contingent points of view, and see things from an objective perspective that is nonetheless fused with their point of view; devotional activity leads them to conceive of the “truth” (the objective view of things, the “God’s eye” view of the world) not as something that is foreign to their own subjective point of view but as essentially linked to it.⁵⁹ The idea that God is personal, and that He recognizes individual agents forms the basis for believing that it is also possible for humanity to elevate itself at least partially to that standpoint. By attending to the revelations in the proper attitude and engaging in the practice that constitutes “devotion,” one prepares oneself for reception of that “truth.” But, of course, it is impossible *actually* to assume the “God’s eye” standpoint, for that would require that one be more than one can possibly be. Agents are finite, contingent people, and if the true standpoint on the world is only available to an infinite deity, then it is impossible to ever actually achieve that standpoint. The “God’s eye” view must remain something always beyond us.

Hegel notes two failed attempts at overcoming the gulf between the subjective and objective points of view and uniting them. First, there is the mystic’s idea that one can only achieve the integration of one’s own view with that of the “true” view through some sort of mystical, ineffable experience that fuses one’s own point of view with that of the divine point of view. But the mystic’s idea – that one beholds in a pure experience the oneness of the divine within

one's own experience – is really just a repetition of the dialectic of “sense-certainty,” the idea that one can have an immediate experience of pure singularities.⁶⁰ Second, there is the search for the reality of the divine in the here and now, something evidenced in the Crusaders' attempt at conquering the Holy Land, as if anything further could be gained by conquering the lands on which Jesus once walked or by finding the grave from which he had supposedly arisen (as if one could gain authority in reason-giving activities or in devotional practices by seizing some ground on which Jesus had been). Success in taking these lands is not success in the intended sense; one is no closer to the “truth” by having done so than one was when one started out.

The attempt to bring oneself closer to the divine point of view by virtue of conquering the Holy Land (or, more generally, by virtue of trying to find any *place* that is supposedly closer to the divine) necessarily fails at what it is really trying to do. Reacquiring the land on which Jesus's supposed grave was located could not *affirm* for these agents that what they count as true and valuable is in fact what is true and valuable; it could get them no closer to the putatively authoritative divine point of view. In order to achieve the affirmation that they seek, they are thus driven back into reliance on their own activities, which must take a different form from that of gaining some kind of closer physical proximity to the divine point of view.⁶¹ They must, that is, engage in some form of activity through which they feel they are brought out of their contingent, individual lives more into proximity with the divine point of view.

The vague feelings of unity with the divine point of view expressed in the social practices of devotion and the practices of the cults are only vague intimations of what is in actuality only an aspect of the true form of self-consciousness itself as a unity of the personal and the detached point of view, something that only completely occurs in late modernity. This unity is, however, only “for us,” the readers, not for the participants in the “unhappy consciousness” themselves; we, as enlightened by our commentator (Hegel), see that what is going on is the gradual construction of the idea that the universal point of view is a *socially constructed* point of view, something to which we, the participants in modern life, must eventually own up, even if these pre-modern agents themselves *could not* have understood it in that fashion.⁶² But the idea that it is *up to them*, to their own activities to achieve the union of the objective, universal point of view and the subjective, individual point of view within themselves is for us, the readers, a step on the way to the fully modern conception of “spirit” in which the two ideas are put in a comprehensible unity with each other.

The agents come to rely on their own activities to accomplish their union with the divine point of view; they thus come to see the possibility of this union as arising not simply from pure devotion (as something wholly within their own consciousness) nor by their coming into some kind of physical proximity with divine places (as in the Crusades) but as something that can only come about through their own activities. But if their own everyday activities are for them to count as being in any way authoritative, it must be

because in such everyday activities (of “work” and “desire,” as Hegel puts it) a proximity to the universal divine point of view is achieved. This, however, is possible only if these everyday activities themselves can be seen as somehow being connected with the divine, such that participation in them *counts* for something authoritative. The *world* itself for these people thereby becomes divided within itself just as their own form of self-consciousness is divided within itself. They had earlier taken the divine point of view to have revealed itself to them in their own individual consciousness in the mystical practices and reflections of devotional activity, but that revelation turned out to be insufficient in accomplishing the aims they had set for it. These agents therefore attempt to find that union of the universal and the individual points of view (that affirmation of their claims to knowledge and valuation) within the activities of everyday life. The world thus comes to be seen as a *redeemed* world in which their longings are in principle satisfied, as a world in which the ordinary happenings of everyday life are mirrored in a divine world.⁶³

This reliance on their own labors within their ordinary activities to reassure them that what they take to be authoritative is in fact so is nonetheless not a true self-reliance, nor could it be so for these agents. For them, the universal, objective point of view is something that must be always just beyond their reach. Thus, they cannot see their own experienced enjoyments as being something for which they themselves can be fully responsible, for they view themselves and everything in the world as a set of fully contingent events. Therefore, they must view whatever satisfactions there are in everyday life as somehow being contingently bestowed on them by this “higher power,” the “unchangeable.” Even their own abilities must be seen as a gift from God, not something for which they themselves could have been fully responsible. Since they see themselves and the world around them as dependent on the “unchangeable” for whatever limited authority that world and activities have for them, they cannot see the authority of these activities as being really up to them – that is, they cannot see themselves as independent.⁶⁴ What occurs in the world as the result of human labor must be seen as something that essentially is a result of the power of the divine realm. In this way, the “unhappy consciousness” maintains a self-conception as a divided self: on the one hand, as contingent and incapable of affirming for himself that what he takes to be true really is true; and on the other hand, as having some access to the truth by virtue of his interaction with the realm of the divine.

The proper attitude, given these presuppositions about the world, can only be that of giving thanks to the divine for whatever satisfactions and whatever glimpses of the truth have been bestowed on one.⁶⁵ Such a viewpoint makes possible the affirmation for these agents that they are indeed in touch with the universal point of view (the “truth”). On the one hand, they see the divine as getting in touch with them through its bestowal of worldly gifts and humanity’s talents; on the other hand, they see their giving thanks as that contribution on their part that makes possible the attainment for them of some small portion of the “truth.”⁶⁶ The activity of giving thanks is the

affirming activity for these agents that they do indeed know something of the "truth."

The social practices of thanks-giving offer those agents a context and a means in which they are able to reflect on their essential self-identities, on what it is that they are doing. (Again, Hegel's thesis that there are many different social practices in which such reflection can take place – not merely the more modern social practice of academic philosophy – is apparent here.) But such reflection can only underscore for them their own lack of affirmative power; they can *only* give thanks. The "truth" is beyond their contingent, finite reach, and whatever grasp they have on it cannot be due to them. They are thus without intrinsic worth themselves, and have worth only insofar as it is bestowed upon them. What looked like an affirmation of their claims to knowledge becomes the opposite, a *disavowal* of their own selves and their basic individuality.⁶⁷ What they as contingent individuals count as valuable can turn out not to be so, and everything they believe to be true can turn out not to be true, unless they are reassured by the divine. Their independence completely vanishes, for they take everything that can count for them as authoritative to come from outside their own activities.

The issue for these agents, therefore, has to do with how they can reassure themselves that skepticism is not the answer and affirm for themselves that what they count as true is indeed true. They have the belief that the standpoint of the "truth" is possible, is "out there" beyond their own consciousness and contingent lives, and the participants in the "unhappy consciousness" have come to count those claims to knowledge and value that they have constructed out of their own contingent perspectives to be "untrue." Their disavowal of their own lives as giving them any access to this "truth" indeed makes sense only in terms of their belief that this "God's eye" point of view is the *only* point of view that could be said to be "true" – that is, that only someone assuming the universal point of view *could* be in a position to affirm that such and such can legitimately count as knowledge and as goodness.⁶⁸

For them to be able to affirm any contact between their limited, contingent lives and the divine point of view, they must therefore *represent* something as *mediating* between them as contingent individuals and the universal, divine point of view. This is represented as a priest, someone who has been given certain powers by the divine, but who is a contingent individual like themselves. The function of the mediator-priest is to affirm for these agents that what they have come to count as authoritative (the "God's eye" point of view) and what they come to disavow (their own finite claims to knowledge) are the ways that the "true" point of view would describe them.⁶⁹ The acceptance of such priest-mediators means for the participants in the "unhappy consciousness" that they alienate themselves from their own subjective point of view and its activities in favor of the putatively objective, "God's eye" point of view; but by virtue of such priest-mediators, the participants in the "unhappy consciousness" find themselves reassured that they are indeed at least partially in touch with the "truth." What seemed to them to be something that they had to disavow is thus brought into congruence with what they took to

be the only possibilities for affirming what they believed. (Hegel also notes how this allows them to throw off their guilt, thereby affirming for them that each in his individuality counts as something valuable.)

In coming to understand the affirmation from their point of view of who they are and what they count as authoritative as dependent on a mediator-priest, the participants in the “unhappy consciousness” disavow their individuality, their subjective points of view, as having any intrinsic authoritative-ness but as capable of being “in contact” with that which is authoritative. As the successors to skepticism, the participants in the “unhappy consciousness” find that the logical development of their form of life has led them to the opposite of the skeptical point of view. The skeptic affirmed the validity of the subjective point of view by applying the stoic’s universal point of view to itself; the result was that the skeptic could only affirm the subjective point of view, which meant paradoxically that the skeptic then had to deny that the subjective point of view *could* make any valid claims to knowledge at all. The skeptic’s independence consisted in the affirmation of his own reflective (skeptical) activity, but once the skeptic comes to realize that paradox, he becomes the “unhappy consciousness.” The participants in the “unhappy consciousness,” on the other hand, find that they must abandon the subjective point of view altogether, not in order to get out of skepticism by returning to the stoical standpoint, but to attain a more concrete understanding of themselves and the world from within the universal point of view. Thus, the result of the “unhappy consciousness” is to disavow the pretensions to affirmation and reassurance that come from within the subjective point of view and to replace it with the idea that individuals can only attain the “true,” impersonal point of view by somehow *reconciling* their own individual points of view with the objective, universal point of view. The reconciliation that the “unhappy consciousness” finds is, of course, incomplete and unstable, for it depends on the idea that the detached, universal point of view is forever out of reach and is only partially attainable through the mediator-priest. Indeed, the participants in the “unhappy consciousness” implicitly come to that same conclusion in their realization that it is *their* decision to elevate themselves to that point of view and that *they* determine the value that they shall place on the words of the mediator-priest.⁷⁰

The participants in the “unhappy consciousness” thus find that they have constructed out of the results of stoicism and skepticism the concept of a “universal will” – that is, a conception of a *shared* point of view that is affirmed not by passive contemplation but by human activity.⁷¹ The pursuit of independence now takes the form not of trying to bend other subjects to one’s own projects, nor in completely disavowing one’s own subjective point of view in favor of a forever distant, “God’s eye” objective point of view, but in fusing the two points of view into a unity. This transforms that form of life that is the “unhappy consciousness” into a different project than it originally was. It is not the project of *waiting* to be redeemed by some distant, divine point of view (when “all shall be revealed”) but of actively *bringing* their subjective points of view into line with the impersonal God’s eye view. The

"faculty" that allows them to do this is *reason*. In acquiring the idea that even the truths of nature can be known by human agents provided that they bring their subjective points of view into line with what the impersonal point of view requires, the "unhappy consciousness" in the form of late medieval European culture arrives at a different understanding of itself than that with which it began: the idea that by appealing to impersonal reason alone human agents can discover what truly counts for them as knowledge, and that they have the means to affirm for themselves that what counts *for them* really is what counts *in itself*, and that *reason* – not pure faith or reliance on mediator-priests – can give an account of itself that, unlike its predecessors, does not undermine itself. Not only can these agents bring their subjective points of view into line with what the impersonal point of view requires, when this impersonal point of view is understood as that of *reason*, it is capable of reassuring these agents of its authoritativeness that the older view of the "unchangeable" could not. The participants of the "unhappy consciousness" had to simply *accept* the teachings of the mediator-priest; the participants of the culture of reason, however, can expect an account by reason that reassures those agents of its authoritativeness. This is the project of modern life, a reliance on reason to replace an insufficient, dogmatic theological foundation for life and culture; modern life sheds its old faith in favor of new trust in reason, a conviction that it can succeed where the past reliance on dogmatic faith had failed.