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DECLINE OF MODERN AND HEGEL'S
REINTERPRETATION OF ANCIENT SCEPTICISM

Abstract: For Hegel scepticism is one of the greatest forces in philosophical thought. He makes a sharp distinction between the scepticism of Ancient Greece, and the scepticism of modern thinkers from Descartes to (Hegel's contemporary) Schulze. These two forms of scepticism appear to have a similar foundation, but according to Hegel, their nature is substantially different. Hegel will subsequently attempt to incorporate the fundamentals of ancient scepticism into the dialectics of consciousness, his primary subject in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transforming its role in the process. Hegel reinterprets scepticism as a force of constant, self-affecting movement that is immanent to consciousness itself.

Keywords: Hegel, Ancient Scepticism, Modern Scepticism, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Self-completing Scepticism

REEVALUATION AND REINTERPRETATION OF SCEPTICAL
TRADITION

For Hegel scepticism is one of the greatest forces in philosophical thought. Contrary to what Hegel saw as the habitual treatment of scepticism as an archnemesis of philosophy, for him it is not at all an anti-philosophical

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disposition. Even when a sceptic argues that there is insufficient evidence to make a claim on the possibility of knowledge and abstains from passing any judgment on this subject, it still represents *philosophy* (Hegel 1986a: 358). To understand the reasons behind Hegel's attitude towards scepticism, one must keep in mind that Hegel developed a critical interpretation of scepticism while deciding not to include everything that went by that name in the history of philosophy. In his *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, Hegel opens the chapter on sceptical philosophy as follows: Scepticism fully developed the notion that all knowledge is merely subjective. It gave the expression "appearing" (*Scheinen*) an ontological connotation of the highest level, placing it shoulder to shoulder with terms such as "being" (*Sein*) (Hegel 1986a: 358). This meant that scepticism negated certainty of any definite and limited knowledge, regardless of their being sense perceptions or pure thoughts. In his earlier text *Relation of Skepticism to Philosophy* (1802), Hegel writes about scepticism by analyzing its different historical modifications and comparing them. Hegel recognizes two forms of scepticism: modern and ancient. In this text, Hegel addresses Schulze's scepticism (Gotlob Ernst Schulze, Aenesidemus) as an example of the modern variant. However, sceptical and polemical texts of this author are not the sole example of modern scepticism. This title could be attributed to those philosophers who contributed historically and conceptually to the movement whose most recent expression is Schulze's refutations of theoretical philosophy. This line of contributors includes, as we would later see, philosophers such as Descartes, Hume and even Kant. Most of these authors fall under the ambit of the historical philosophical movement which Hegel, in his Jena years, treated under the title of the philosophy of subjectivism. Many of the modern positive philosophical projects, as Hegel understands it, share almost the same core. Modern scepticism also builds itself upon the same principles, failing to properly question the nature of these common epistemological presuppositions. Those propositions are, in Hegel's view, based on the dogmatic belief in the philosophical superiority of immediate forms of knowledge (for example sense perception or feeling) and analytical powers of understanding (or reflexion).

Schulze published a book that allegedly dealt with question on the limits of theoretical philosophical enquiry, i. e. aforementioned epistemological presuppositions. But it all amounted to, in Hegel's view, the discovery of a "hereditary flaw" of philosophical thinking in general which is manifest in its history, which forces philosophy to stay within the limits of finite and limited forms of knowledge. Hegel proceeds then to accuse Schulze of subjective grounding of scepticism (towards theoretical philosophy). He called this gesture a 'philosophical apragmosyne' (Hegel 1986a: 215) — philosophical

unproductivity which tries to find an excuse or an alibi in a historically “predestination to fail” of all and any philosophical (theoretical) thinking. This accusation could be regarded as a motto that accurately depicts Hegel’s attitude towards modern scepticism in general. Too often, he remarks, scepticism had become a “hiding place and expression for Non-philosophy” (Hegel 1986a: 214). And the idea to turn scepticism, as an autochthone power, against philosophy, betrays a failure to understand what philosophy truly is and could be, and of the true relationship of scepticism to philosophy. However, ancient sceptics, in Hegel’s view, displayed superior understanding of the nature of philosophical thinking and its epistemological suppositions.

The fundamental error that presents itself as presupposition of Schulze’s sceptical attack on theoretical philosophy is, in Hegel’s view, “division of rational (*Vernünftig*), which is a unity of thinking and being, into opposing factors and absolutely holding on to this opposition” (Hegel 1986a: 251). This division, or dualism, represents something that is a common characteristic of modern philosophy, and this is precisely the reason why it should be put in question (Hegel 1986a: 21). For Hegel, the subject of Schulze’s sceptical refutation is a form of knowledge that Hegel calls “understanding” (*Verstand*). So far, it would seem, Schulze was about to provide much-needed sceptical investigation of modern theoretical philosophy. However, understanding may be a prime subject of this investigation, but it is nevertheless determined in advance that it is the only instance of certainty and by inference of truth. Therefore, it is a subject of refutations, criteria of evaluation and an instance that does the evaluating and refuting. It is almost as if the project of Kant’s critique of pure reason (where it is reason that investigates itself using itself as a criteria) is canonical for Schulze’s scepticism. And this is not so farfetched when we consider that he did understand and described his own standing point in Kantian terms. However, Schulze’s scepticism follows a line of understanding of Kant’s philosophical project which is not fully in accord with that which is most progressive in it. In this early text Hegel will state that there is a “two-sided spirit of Kant’s philosophy”, and it is quite clear that discerning and choosing between the two is not so straightforward. One side displays many very important tendencies towards speculative philosophy, but the other one, as Hegel puts it, “kills the idea of reason” (Hegel 1986a: 269). Simply put, for Schulze, proper interpretation and further development of Kantian philosophical insights advances by keeping close to the letter, i. e. that which was explicitly stated. This is, however, in Hegel’s view, the worst treatment of Kant: one which would not be able to preserve his truly progressive results. Schulze is holding onto “spiritless letter of spiritless spirit of [Kantian]

philosophy” (Hegel 1986a: 269). From this manner of investigation into the limits of the theoretical capacity of human reason came several important consequences. Schulze mobilizes sceptical arguments regarding specific and partial problems, holding some statements under suspicion and setting aside others. Compared to the universality of ancient scepticism, this selective approach could not be justified. Being that the principle of selection could not be justified in its necessity, it could be said that it depends on the mere caprice of thought. In the background of this argument rests Hegel’s very bold claim that history exhibits a gradual deterioration of sceptical tradition (Forster 1989: 17). From Hegel’s point of view the Kantian division of noumenon and phenomenon, the opposition of appearances and the thing in itself, simply rests beyond any doubt or questioning. Schulze completely dogmatically holds that there are appearances and things themselves that hide behind them, as if they are “wild animals” behind the “bush of appearance“ (Hegel 1986a: 269). Furthermore, Schulze maintains that this thing in itself stands as a final guarantor of the objectivity of knowledge. This was solidified through formulating so-called facts of consciousness as a foundation on which lies any and every achievable certainty. Schulze asserts how a sceptic never doubts in “representations and that which immediately comes into consciousness and is given by itself” (Schulze 1911: 18). According to Hegel, however, there is no essential difference between sceptical and critical (Kantian) procedure. They both “limit every cognition of reason to formal unity which should be brought to those facts” (Hegel 1986a: 220 – 221)². Therefore, one could not be sure what Schulze’s tribute to further development of philosophy could be besides forbidding any creative reading of *Critique of Pure Reason* that could bring Kant’s epochal idea of constitutive and autonomous subject to its ultimate philosophical consequences. This will not be achieved if one arbitrarily excludes

² It would be useful here to point towards one of the most influential of Hegel’s predecessors, namely Fichte. He proposed, as a response to Schulze’s skeptical refutations, an argument that further development of the Kantian philosophical standpoint should consider not fact (that occupies the realm of finitude) but act and action (which could take the investigation of subjectivity to that which is infinite and unconditioned) as its starting point (Fichte 1845: 15). And Hegel agrees with this idea that subjectivity, with its knowledge and its epistemological suppositions, should be explained by and grounded on itself. This will be very important to remember when we talk about Hegel’s own appropriation of sceptical procedure in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

one form of finite limited subjectivity from questioning and claiming it as a base for explaining all other forms.

For Kant, however, the philosophical figure of sceptic has a transcendental justification. Given the transcendental structure and ahistorical nature of reason itself (Kant 1868: 524), for Kant, scepticism was a necessary reaction to reason's own dogmatical disposition (Kant 1868: 581). We should consider that reason's request for reality to be a systematically structured and meaningful whole, i. e. a request for a system of principles of possible knowledge was completely legitimate. To keep the eventually dogmatic effect of reason's uncritically retaining any of its own alleged subjective structure as the structure of objective reality, this dialectic of pure reason should be critically investigated. It seems that Kant follows to the letter sceptical procedure when he articulates antinomies of reason in the part dedicated to antinomy of pure reason, which is a section of the Transcendental dialectic of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. This antinomy shows that for each opposing assertion (thesis and antithesis) one could offer compelling arguments of equal strength and validity (Kant 1867: 292 – 330). The resolution of this sceptical standstill, from Kant's point of view, could come only from the superior standpoint of philosophy. Kant maintained that critical philosophy could withstand skeptical refutations,. Kant's transcendental idealism arose from tackling Hume-influenced problems regarding the notion of causality, maintaining that the world of phenomena is distinct from the world of things in themselves. Any "unavoidable contradictions" in metaphysics, such as uncertainty or a possibility of stalemate and the abandonment of any reasonable claim for certainty would also be resolved on the grounds of transcendental idealism. As we know, critical metaphysics as a science represents in an "architectonic" manner the system of a priori sources and principles of knowledge in its entirety (Kant 1867: 21). It is Kant's intention to exclude any sceptical problem that arises from supposing any principle or source that is not included in the sketch of the whole system. If one accepts the fundamental premise of transcendental idealism, that it is formulated as an answer to Hume's scepticism, it could be said that the remainder of sceptical refutations, those originating in Pyrronism or "dogmatic skepticism" (Kant 1868: 587), remain outside of the field of metaphysics (Forster 2008: 49).

There is a painfully obvious difference between Kant's and Schulze's understanding of the relation of scepticism to philosophy. First, it should be said that both started with their own interpretation of sceptical tradition and the essence of sceptical attitude. However, as a part of an effort to resolve past and future sceptical objections towards philosophy, Kant devised an original

philosophical standpoint. Schulze, regrettably, failed to subject Kant's own solution to properly universal sceptical investigation, and intended to devise sceptical procedure that would simply and dogmatically presuppose Kant's standpoint. This repetition also meant that Schulze dogmatically held beyond any doubt those limits of philosophical knowledge prescribed by Kant.

Investigating furthermore the intellectual tradition of modern skepticism, we come to Hume. We should turn to §39 passage in Hegel's *Encyclopedia* (Hegel 1989b: 111 – 112) because it is very informative regarding the topic – even if not completely exhaustive. Hegel repeats succinctly the need to distinguish Hume's variant from ancient scepticism. For Hegel, Hume's scepticism maintains that the empirical sphere (empirical being and evidence of empirical consciousness) is the only basis upon which we could make claims with any certainty and therefore exclusively represents the field of truth. The truth here is understood as a probability as Hume distinguishes himself from so called “total scepticism” which maintains that nothing is certain (Hume 1828: 240). “Belief, being a lively conception, can never be entire, where it is not founded on something natural and easy” (Hume 1828: 243). In his opinion, sense perception (*impression*) or a feeling has more certainty than any general determination or law. Contrary to this, Hegel claims, older scepticism was very aware that this decision does not logically proceed from sceptical reflection. It does not help claiming that this argument may be based upon the alleged “nature” of men or “the narrow capacity of human understanding” (Hume 2007: 118). Ancient scepticism was very far from granting sense perceptions or feelings the status of philosophical principles or criteria of truth (Hegel 1989b: 112). It is very interesting to see how Hume, while forestalling any accusation of “total scepticism” in his case, points accusatively towards Descartes and his “universality of doubt”:

“There is a species of skepticism, *antecedent* to all study and philosophy, which is much inculcated by Des Cartes and others, as a sovereign preservative against error and precipitate judgment. It recommends a universal doubt, not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties; of whose veracity, say they, we must assure ourselves, by a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original principle, which cannot possibly be fallacious or

deceitful. But neither is there any such original principle, which has a prerogative above others, that are self-evident and convincing: Or if there were, could we advance a step beyond it, but by the use of those very faculties, of which we are supposed to be already diffident. The Cartesian doubt, therefore, were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable; and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and conviction upon any subject" (Hume 2007: 109).

However, in a more "moderate" version, Hume admits, this scepticism could be quite reasonable: "To begin with clear and self-evident principles, to advance by timorous and sure steps, to review frequently our conclusions, and examine accurately all their consequences; though by these means we shall make both a slow and a short progress in our systems; are the only methods, by which we can ever hope to reach truth, and attain a proper stability and certainty in our determinations" (Hume 2007: 109 – 110). This "mitigated" or more moderate scepticism (which does not doubt in "those perceptions which are immediately present to our consciousness" (Hume 1826: 336)), strangely was not to be found, according to Hume, practiced by Descartes in *Meditations on First Philosophy*. It was nevertheless picked up *mutatis mutandis* by subsequent developments in the history of modern philosophy. In a belief that Descartes was a highpoint of two millennia-long tradition of Pyrrhonism (Popkin 2003: 158), Hume certainly was not alone, as was evidenced by the numerous attacks and accusation following the publishing of *Meditations*.

The underlying argument of this belief is that Descartes' methodological doubt could be understood as similarly motivated as the *skepsis* of ancient Pyrrhonists. Hegel did not share the belief by default, because, as it was said repeatedly, he draws a strict line between the two historical modifications of scepticism. As Descartes claims: "Certainly in this first knowledge there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state, which would not indeed suffice to assure me that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that a thing which I conceived so clearly and distinctly could be false; and accordingly it seems to me that already I can establish as a general rule that all things which I perceive very clearly

and very distinctly are true” (Descartes 2003: 59). Descartes’ *cogito* represents an instance of such clarity and distinctness, which equals to self-evidence, that it cannot be subjected to further doubt. In Hegel’s opinion it is inconceivable that ancient scepticism would have ever resulted in such a claim. Furthermore, it seems that Hegel did not consider Descartes to be a sceptic in any way. In his *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, he asserts, while referring interestingly enough to one of Spinoza’s works, that doubt is always the result of sceptical investigation (Hegel 1986c: 127). It is never employed merely at the beginning of an investigation up to the point when certainty is achieved. Rather it is the result of such investigations which are followed, due to the nature of that result, by the suspension of judgment. Regardless of the ways in which Descartes may have methodologically used the sceptical procedure, in Hegel’s view, he is not a sceptic in general nor a Pyrrhonist particularly. This probably accords more closely with Descartes’ self-understanding than leaguings him with self-professed sceptics would. In his *History of Scepticism from Savanarola to Bayle*, Popkin gives a very precise description of Descartes’ methodological employment of doubt in his *Meditations*: “By moving from the partial Pyrrhonism of doubting the reliability of our senses to the metaphysical Pyrrhonism of the dream hypothesis, doubting the reality of our knowledge, to the total Pyrrhonism of the demon hypothesis, doubting the reliability of our rational faculties, we finally discover the *cogito*, a truth so subjectively certain that we are incapable of doubting it at all. This is the first aspect of the illumination—there is truth” (Popkin 2003: 156-157). For Hegel, by the principle of his own philosophy Descartes should have never been mistaken for a Pyrrhonist. Descartes sought to devise a way to infer without a doubt and in self-evident manner objective truth from subjective certainty.

This short review supports the central and pervasive argument of Hegel’s critical interpretative decision in favor of ancient scepticism. It forgoes grounding in any absolutized subjective instance. Scepticism of Ancient Greece is superior by the virtue of the universality of its approach. Like many other accounts, Popkin describes it as “an ability or mental attitude” bent on finding and expressing pro and contra

arguments (*isostheneia*) for any claim regarding that which is not evident, so to achieve suspension of judgment (Popkin 2003: xix). Achieving the *epochē* meant not deciding in favor of any epistemological presupposition that privileges one subjective instance over another as a criterion of evidence and validity of cognition. It is evident from Popkin's account of the history of scepticism, that this was almost exclusively characteristic of Pyrrhonism in its original form, as preserved in the work of Sextus Empiricus. For example, he claims that the subsequent history of scepticism is a history of some of these sceptical arguments being used with specific and narrower aims in latter epochs. The manner of this usage and the nature of its aims depended on the nature and source of intellectual crisis with which the investigated epoch was presented (Popkin 2003: xix-xx).

SELF-COMPLETING SCEPTICISM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

For Hegel, ancient scepticism, with its universal method, did not represent an "anti-philosophy", but in its highest form "is to its innermost core one with all true philosophies" (Hegel 1986a: 227). Hegel's critique of modern scepticism intended to expose its underlying dogmatism. Its faults stem from the false structures of subjectivity that lie at its foundation. On this argument he builds the most important difference between the two and argues in favor of the preeminence of ancient scepticism. Now it is time to investigate in particular the way Hegel understood it. The traditional understanding and self-understanding of this form of skepticism and its purpose is not entirely aligned with Hegel's. We do agree with the assessment that Hegel devised his own "negative discipline" to criticize categories of understanding. Often this discipline had "a strong influence on his interpretation of historical skepticism" (Forster 1989: 37). His analysis of the historical form of ancient scepticism (*ex datis*) is mainly interested in showing how scepticism (*ex principiis*) is immanent to his own

philosophical methodology³. For scepticism itself could be defined by the notion of dialectics, by being only a mere negation, a negative result of dialectical thinking (Hegel 1989b: 174 – 175). There are many references in Hegel to this manner of explaining one mode of thinking via another, acknowledging their similarities while underlining their differences. However, this is not the place to review them all. Here we could only sketch the main reason why Hegel thought that his notion of dialectics incorporates scepticism as an important if only inaugural act of philosophical thinking.

In his opinion, ancient scepticism was very aware of the kind of epistemological field in which it operated and of its procedure for dealing with antinomies of that knowledge, based on the critical insight into the same right to validity of each contradictory statement. This was understood as their method of equipollence. In *The Relation of Scepticism to Philosophy*, Hegel proposed that sceptical procedure was aimed or “turned, like every philosophy in general, against dogmatism of ordinary consciousness” (Hegel 1986a: 238). By virtue of this aim of scepticism, Hegel thought that it could be regarded as a “first stage towards philosophy” (Hegel 1986a: 240). In Hegel’s opinion, the ten famous tropes of ancient skepticism are turned against ordinary consciousness and show the uncertainty and fluctuation of all that is finite. Amidst that fluctuation the ancient sceptic had one subjective goal: to achieve *ataraxia*, which, according to Hegel, is grounded in the type of thinking that surpasses the limitations and epistemological field of common or natural consciousness (Hegel 1986a: 238). He repeats more or less the same assessment later in his *Lectures on the History of*

³ This is a well established belief among Hegel interpreters. For example, see: Forster’s *Hegel and Skepticism*, Düsing’s *Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik* or Henrich’s article “Absoluter Geist und Logik des Endlichen” in *Hegel in Jena*. According to it, Hegel’s early text on scepticism should be regarded within the context of his early development of logic (1804). Relevant passages from the *Phenomenology* and his *Lectures on History of Philosophy* should be read against the background of his maturing notion of dialectics and science of logic.

Philosophy (1825 - 1826): “The general aim of Skepticism is that, with the vanishing of all [finite] being, of everything determinate, everything affirmative, self-consciousness should attain Within itself this inner Stability, a perfect ataraxia, indifference, imperturbability” (Hegel 2006: 306). This particular side of historical ancient scepticism, including suspension of judgment and of philosophical expression, indifference, and ataraxia is for Hegel the only “positive aspect” of skepticism: “perfect indifference towards necessity of nature” (Hegel 1986a: 239). It is safe to say that this trait belongs to the certain historical conditions of ancient philosophy in general. In *Lectures* he will even suggest that, considering this positive side, ancient scepticism should not be identified as a “doctrine of doubt”. “Late skepticism does not doubt, it is certain of the untruth” (Hegel 2006: 362) Due to this historical form of ancient skepticism, doubt represents the opposite of ataraxia: “Doubt' [*Zweifel*] derives from *zwei* [two]; it is a vacillation between two or more points; a person settles upon neither the one nor the other and yet should settle upon one or the other, even though each is doubted. An example is doubt concerning the immortality of the soul or concerning the existence of God. Forty years ago, a great deal was written about this, portraying — as in the ‘Messias’ — the misery of doubt. This standpoint of doubt is the opposite of Scepticism. Doubt is restless because it wants to find rest in something set in opposition to rest, and can find it nowhere. Scepticism, however, is equally indifferent to the one and to the other and does not wish to find security in one of the opposed elements. This is Skepticism's standpoint of ataraxia” (Hegel 2006: 308).

The realms of ordinary consciousness, opinion and categories of understanding are some things about which scepticism demonstrates profound knowledge. This is quite clear from the contents of sceptical tropes, since most of them were concerned with undermining common beliefs and notions (such as the quite mundane meanings of causation, movement, time) from everyday life.

“Thus the aim of Scepticism is to do away with all of the unconscious bias in which the natural self-consciousness is held captive and, insofar as thought latches onto a content, to cure it of any such content fixed in thought. Out of the fluctuation of all things there

emerges the liberation of self-consciousness – this ataraxia, the simple, inner selfsameness that can be acquired only through reason, through thought. Thought is what brings to consciousness whatever in the way of inclinations, habits, and the like there is in a human being, what one is; but at the same time this is made to fluctuate, so that we will not take it to be true, because it implicitly contradicts itself and supersedes itself. Thought brings this to consciousness and so gives rise to ataraxia. This ataraxia follows upon [recognition of] the fluctuation of everything finite just as the shadow follows the body” (Hegel 2006: 307).

Within this reinterpretation of scepticism in general, the aim of scepticism is understood as liberation of consciousness from domination of one type of experience. The realm of everyday experience of natural/ordinary consciousness is not the only one in which we could and should be active as intellectual beings. Ordinary consciousness is unable to resolve and overcome its own contradictory nature which, in Hegel’s view, is evident in the everyday linguistic expressions. The need to expose this inability and to open the possibility of different ways of thinking makes skeptical attitude towards it necessary:

“We speak of each thing in opposite ways. We acknowledge something to be determinate, to be subsistent, enduring, and we also say the contrary about it. Something is so and yet it is not so. All things are changeable. It is possible, we think, for them to change, but also for them not to change. But [it is] not only possible, for they are inherently changeable; in other words, they must change. Only 'now' are they thus and so, for in a different time they are otherwise, and this time, the 'now', itself ceases to be in the course of my speaking about them. The time itself is nothing fixed and serves to fix nothing else. This negative aspect of all things is the principle of Skepticism, which is thus of great antiquity” (Hegel 2006: 303).

The whole range of intellectual activities of natural/ordinary consciousness, which means both the inward process of sense-certainty, perception and discursive thought, but also the outer process of its expression, as well as the possibility of their incongruence, were subjected to the same skeptical treatment to demonstrate their epistemic liability. “People who hold beliefs posit as real the things they hold

beliefs about, while Sceptics utter their own phrases in such a way that they are implicitly cancelled by” (S. Empiricus 2000: 6). Suspension of judgment was the decision not to prescribe any truth value to matters of opinion, or to the evidence of natural consciousness in general, and to navigate through everyday life by the “non-epistemic acceptance of appearance” (Forster 1989: 202). Almost the same analysis of simple everyday linguistic experience could be found at the opening passages of the first chapter on consciousness in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that is dealing with sense-certainty. The subtitle of this chapter is “oder das Diese und das Meinen” — “or this and the opinion” (Hegel 1989a: 82). Suggestive analysis of immanent dialectics of the simplest phrases used to name the most immediate realities, that we take for granted in our day-to-day lives, go to show that we all had experiences which should entice us to doubt what we are experiencing. It is my opinion that Hegel believes that the ordinary consciousness is not in itself dogmatic and impervious to radical changes of belief or opinion. Phenomenologically speaking, sceptical reactions of consciousness when confronted with the fluctuation of everything it previously held solid are almost necessary and “instinctive”. Hegel argues that scepticism is a form of self-consciousness which begins to enact the dialectical movement by itself and explicitly, albeit only with regard to its merely negative moment:

“Dialectic as a negative movement, just as it immediately is, at first appears to consciousness as something which has it at its mercy, and which does not have its source in consciousness itself. As Scepticism, on the other hand, it is a moment of self-consciousness, to which it does not happen that its truth and reality vanish without its knowing how, but which, in the certainty of its freedom, makes this 'other' which claims to be real, vanish. What Scepticism causes to vanish is not only objective reality as such, but its own relationship to it” (Hegel 2004: 124).

Later in *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel will point out the pedagogical value of scepticism, as it articulated clearly something that belongs to the very nature of consciousness itself. It self-consciously presented ordinary consciousness’ immanent skepsis.

“It [Scepticism] lets the unessential content in its thinking vanish; but just in doing so it is the consciousness of something unessential. It pronounces an absolute vanishing, but the pronouncement is, and this consciousness is the vanishing that is pronounced. It affirms the nullity of seeing, hearing, etc., yet it is itself seeing, hearing, etc. It affirms the nullity of ethical principles, and lets its conduct be governed by these very principles. Its deeds and its words always belie one another and equally it has itself the doubly contradictory consciousness of unchangeableness and sameness, and of utter contingency and non-identity with itself. But it keeps the poles of this its self-contradiction apart, and adopts the same attitude to it as it does in its purely negative activity in general. Point out likeness or identity to it, and it will point out unlikeness or non-identity; and when it is now confronted with what it has just asserted, it turns round points out likeness or identity (...) In skepticism consciousness truly experiences itself as contradictory” (Hegel 2004: 126).

The early text revisited meaning and goals of ancient skepticism in order to directly intervene in the contemporary condition of philosophical debate: forcing modern scepticism to face all its “barbarity”, while at the same time suggesting that true philosophy has nothing to fear from sceptical procedures. However, Hegel further developed this latter theme from the phenomenological standpoint and treated scepticism as a phase of the process of philosophy’s self-development. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he claimed educational and emancipatory value of scepticism for the education (*Bildung*) of individual empirical consciousness towards the standpoint of absolute knowledge. Scepticism and “common understanding” complement each other and only through their opposition could “limited subjectivity rise to philosophy” (Varnier, G. 1986: 136). Later, in his *Lectures on History of Philosophy*, he assessed its contribution to the development of philosophy within the historical process.

In this very important passage from the *Lectures* Hegel is addressing scepticism as a phenomenon that is universal:

“Skepticism is the dialectic of everything determinate, and the universal, the indeterminate, or the infinite is not exalted above the dialectic, since the universal, the indeterminate, the infinite – which

stand over against the particular, the determinate, and the finite respectively – are themselves only something determinate too; they are only the one side, and as such they are determinate. Only indeterminate and determinate together constitute the whole of determinacy. Skepticism is dialectic. The philosophical concept likewise is itself this dialectic, for genuine knowledge of the idea is the same negativity that is inherent in Skepticism. The only difference is that Skepticism stands pat with the negative as a result. It sticks with the result as a negative, saying that this or that has an internal contradiction; therefore it dissolves itself and so it is not. Thus this result is the negative, but this negative is itself just another one-sided determinateness over against the positive. That is to say, Skepticism functions solely as understanding. It fails to recognize that the negative is also affirmative, that it has positive determination within itself, for it is negation of negation. Infinite affirmation is self-relating negativity” (Hegel 2006: 302).

In Hegel’s reinterpretation of skepticism, it is not exclusively tied to the problematic of consciousness, but it is also related to absolute idea and its development. This is also why Hegel thought scepticism is powerless against the speculative concept or idea, for it lacks the conceptual apparatus to achieve the synthetic overview of the antinomies it makes obvious. It is not able to attack the logical and epistemological structure of speculative thinking in its proper form. It is not unheard-of though, that there were instances when it turned itself against rational forms of knowledge. So effective against the inner contradiction of categories of understanding, turned against reason, sceptical procedure remains within domains of reflection incapable of escaping it and its very own antinomical nature. Even though it is guided by its own dialectical movement, and through it scepticism is an integral part of the speculative method, it does not progress towards the clear, methodological consciousness of that dialectic. “Against the concept [*Begriff*] as concept, the absolute concept, skepticism does not turn. What is more, the concept is its weapon, but it is not conscious about it” (Hegel 1986b: 372). Even in his early text, Hegel claimed that scepticism lacked much power when turned against true philosophy and rational (*vernünftig*) forms of knowledge (Hegel 1986a: 240). This assessment goes hand in hand with Hegel’s description of Plato’s *Parmenides* as “the document and system of true skepticism” (Hegel 1986a: 228). In its highest form, as Hegel puts it, “in its pure *explicit* form” skepticism is at work in Plato’s *Parmenides*. It is a well-known fact that Hegel held this dialogue in very high

regard as an example of negative dialectics. However, here it is taken as an example of “pure” scepticism, which is, furthermore, (implicitly) present in every correctly developed system of philosophy. Simply put, it represents the “free side of every philosophy” (Hegel 1986a: 229).

Hegel’s strategy is to appropriate sceptical attitude, based upon his own understanding of ancient variant, into his methodology while claiming it is refutable from the standpoint of his philosophy. Therefore, he reinterprets the high point of ancient scepticism, against the grain of modern scepticism, acknowledging high philosophical value of experience of doubt. In Introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel said that the process of education of natural/ordinary consciousness to the scientific standpoint was a “road of doubt or more precisely road of despair” (Hegel 1989a: 72). This phrase suggests that educational voyage has the character of negative and traumatic experience to the very subject of this history, that is natural/ordinary consciousness itself.

“The scepticism that is directed against the whole range of phenomenal consciousness, on the other hand, renders the Spirit for the first time competent to examine what truth is. For it brings about a state of despair about all the so-called natural ideas, thoughts, and opinions, regardless of whether they are called one’s own or someone else’s, ideas with which the consciousness that sets about the examination [of truth] straight away is still filled and hampered, so that it is, in fact, incapable of carrying out what it wants to undertake” (Hegel 2004: 50).

Hegel used the phrase “self-completing scepticism” (*sich vollbringende Skeptizismus*) synonymously with the phrase “road of doubt” or “despair”, and used both of them to describe the whole of the investigation undertaken in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As we have already suggested, to doubt, according to Hegel, is not simply to doubt that there is no truth whatsoever, but exactly the opposite: to doubt that there is a “higher truth” (Hegel 1986a: 240). However unconscious and involuntary it may seem this doubt is a self-induced state. It may seem, at the level of simple straightforward narrative, that it is something that happens to subject, that this subject has this kind of luck or fate. However, looking at it in the light of Hegel’s claim that scepticism represents a “free side” of philosophical thinking, this process in

principle is not guided by *fatum* but by freedom. Therefore, Hegel's notion of self-completing scepticism must be regarded as a process of permanent self-affection.

On one occasion Hegel described his own philosophical venture in these exact words addressing the anxious state of a friend:

“Consider yourself convinced that the frame of mind you describe to me is partly due to this present work of yours, to this descent into dark regions where nothing is revealed as fixed, definite and certain; where glimmerings of light flash everywhere but, flanked by abysses, are rather darkened in their brightness and led astray by the environment casting false reflections far more than illumination. Each onset of a new path breaks off again and ends in the indeterminable, losing itself, wresting us away from our purpose and direction. From my own experience I know this mood of the soul, or rather of reason, which arises when it has finally made its way with interest and hunches into a chaos of phenomena but, though inwardly certain of the goal, has not yet worked through them to clarity and to a detailed account of the whole” (Hegel 1984: 17).

It is not completely clear to which period of his own philosophical development Hegel refers. Commentators on the English translation of the letter believe that Hegel is talking about his state of mind during or due to the research prior to Jena, since during his Jena years he will work intensely on developing and presenting his own philosophical system (“clear and detailed account of the whole”). Therefore, they believe he refers to his Bern and / or Frankfurt years (Hegel 1984: 560). It is plausible that the phrase “chaos of phenomena” is used to describe Hegel's empirical-historical research from that period, when he studied predominantly classical history and the history of Catholic church equipped only with “interest and hunches”. Hegel calls this state of perturbation and inquietude, of the agony of uncertainty building up to the experience of the certainty of uncertainty, as brought about by reason. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Hegel did not regard this mood as an anxiety or sickness in the psychological sense. It is an epistemic affection which is very valuable in terms of reflections and it seem that he believes it must be endured. Just as the opposite state, that of indifference and unaffectedness, is induced by thought, by reason, so

is the state of doubt. The vessel of dialectical and speculative thinking finds itself abandoned, grasping on unyielding straws and slippery surfaces, of every possible subject or thought or venue of knowledge, failing to find a sure footing or a handle. It experiences how every reliable and substantial foundation dissipates, and then the certainty of uncertainty arrives: it must stop relying not just on “facts” nor “facts of consciousness”, but even on eternal truths. This self-affecting scepticism, according to Hegel’s philosophy, is a prerequisite for fulfilling the epistemological goal of absolute knowledge.

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NEVENA JEVTIĆ

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OPADANJE MODERNOG I HEGELOVA
INTERPRETACIJA
ANTIČKOG SKEPTICIZMA

Sažetak: Skepticizam za Hegela predstavlja jednu od najznačajnijih snaga filozofskog mišljenja. On povlači jasnu liniju razlikovanja između skepticizma antičke Grčke i skepticizma modernih mislilaca od Dekarta do (Hegelovog savremenika) Šulcea. Čini se kako ove dve forme skepticizma imaju sličan osnov, međutim, prema Hegelu, njihova je priroda suštinski drugačija. Na osnovu ovog razlikovanja, on će zatim nastojati da inkorporira osnove antičkog skepticizma, menjajući mu ulogu, u svoje učenje o dijalektici svesti, koja predstavlja predmet *Fenomenologije duha*. Hegel reinterpretira skepticizam kao moć stalnog, samo-aficirajućeg kretanja koje je imanentno svesti samoj.

Ključne reči: Hegel, antički skepticizam, moderni skepticizam, *Fenomenologija duha*, samo-dovršujući skepticizam

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