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ABSTRACT

The following essay brings together philosophy and film. On the one hand, it is a short study of Hegel's chapter on morality in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On the other hand, it deals with some of the moral conflicts presented in Ingmar Bergman's 1961 film, *Through a Glass Darkly*. Central to my discussion is the concept of God. I aim to show how God, manifest in absolute Spirit, should not be understood as a transcendental figure located in a beyond, but as a concrete entity found within the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation.

KEYWORDS

Hegel, Bergman, morality, conscience, recognition

Becoming Spirit: Morality in Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly*

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In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel reveals Spirit's true nature in Chapter VI. C., "Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality." Here, he describes how God manifests in the moment of reciprocal recognition that characterises the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation. As Hegel writes,

The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalisation and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge.¹

With this, morality becomes religion. Hegel's determination of Absolute Knowledge is but a step away.

However, why morality stands in need of such transformation is by no means clear. Achieved as it is towards the end of a long section on

“Spirit,” morality represents something of an achievement. Only within the framework of morality can Spirit be said to be “self-certain,” and consciousness truly self-conscious. This is because moral self-consciousness is defined by a universal sense of duty. A moral self-consciousness understands that the law of duty according to which it acts is a product of its own rational nature. No longer is consciousness a kind of awareness characterised by a relation to an object distinct from it. As moral self-consciousness, consciousness can find itself within the world, which is now a place of its own making.

In the following, I will show why consciousness abandons this moral world – why it first turns inwards towards conscience and then later towards another consciousness in the discussion of religion. Central to my argument will be the concept of divinity. Though the appearance of God in the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation is dramatic, it is not the first time in this chapter, or indeed, in the *Phenomenology* as a whole, that Hegel makes reference to divinity. For one, moral self-consciousness posits a God as a kind of divine justification for its actions. Similarly, the person of conscience finds God in its divine and creative power to decide what is “right.” My essay will question the need to refer to divinity here at all. I will show how it hampers the very possibility of lasting happiness.

To make my case, I will refer to Ingmar Bergman’s 1961 film, *Through a Glass Darkly*. This is one of a number of Bergman films that deals with religious themes, and the first in what is generally recognised as a trilogy of work that confronts the concept of God.² What makes it peculiarly appropriate to a study of Hegel is the way it presents moral and religious conflict. Described as a “chamber film,” it follows four characters – husband and wife, father and son – through a single day.³ They begin their day in unity: the four characters emerge from the water together, talking and laughing. But the film ends with the disruption of their lives by the central character’s – Karin, played by Harriet Andersson – rapid descent into schizophrenia. Karin’s father, David (Gunnar Björnstrand), and brother, Minus (Lars Passgård), achieve reconciliation; but Karin and her husband Martin (Max von Sydow) do not.

These conflicts illuminate why Hegel finds that a transition from morality to religion is necessary, in part by clarifying the distinction between divinity and God. Karin and Martin cannot reconcile with one another because theirs is a world in which divinity holds sway. For Martin, this is a moral world, where the divine is associated with the need to say and do the “right thing.” For Karin, this is the imaginary world of voices,

ruled by a God in the shape of a spider, that tell her how to act. Indeed, it is the film's treatment of schizophrenia and morality that elucidates the connection between the inner voice of conscience and madness.

Contrastingly, David and Minus are able to reconcile because their world is one in which such divinity holds no power. They are capable of renouncing divinity, because they understand that it is the act of reconciliation itself which should be seen as Godlike.

• Morality •

Hegel's chapter on morality forms part of the larger section entitled "Spirit," and consists of three parts: A, "The moral view of the world"; B, "Dissemblance or Duplicity"; and C, "Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil and forgiveness." In the first part, Hegel defines the moral worldview (*die moralische Weltanschauung*, with implicit reference to the moral philosophies of Kant and Fichte); in the second part he critiques morality; and in the final part, he demonstrates how the problems of the moral worldview can be overcome through the dialogue of two consciences (*das Gewissen*).

To understand what is at stake at this particular stage of the *Phenomenology*, it is best to refer to the distinction between the individual self and the legal person that Hegel makes when introducing the chapter. He writes,

The ethical world showed its fate and truth to be the Spirit that had merely passed away in it, the individual self. This legal person, however, has its Substance and fulfilment outside of that world. The movement of the world of culture and faith does away with this abstract of the person, and, through the completed alienation, through the ultimate abstraction, Substance becomes for Spirit at first the universal will, and finally Spirit's own possession...

In other words, self-consciousness has gained the mastery over the antithesis within consciousness itself. This antithesis rests on the antithesis of the certainty of self and of the object. Now however, the object is for consciousness itself the certainty of itself...⁴

As in his previous chapter on the ethical order and culture, Hegel's concern here is Spirit.⁵ Though the concept of Spirit is introduced as early as Chapter IV, only in Chapter VI, sections A and B, is it understood as a "form of the world" rather than a "form of consciousness."⁶ What Hegel is describing here is a collective rather than individual subject. He is referring to the spirit of a community or people as a whole.

This particular community is marked by its "self-certainty." As Hegel writes, "the object is for consciousness itself the certainty of itself."⁷ For Hegel, the "object" of consciousness includes everything in the external world, including the communities with which single consciousnesses interact. By saying that the object of Spirit is now the certainty of Spirit itself, he suggests that the collective consciousness characterising the spirit of the moral community is different from ordinary consciousness in that it no longer stands in antithesis to its object. As such it represents an altogether different kind of awareness. Instead of being an awareness characterised by a relation to a distinct object, moral consciousness can be said to be "self-aware."

In order to understand more of Hegel's definition of self-certain Spirit, it is useful to sketch something of the theoretical community he had in mind. This is an idea of community that arose in Germany after the political turmoil of the French Revolution and found its clearest expression in the moral philosophy of Kant. Within this community each individual acts morally, according to a sense of duty (*die Pflicht*). The community is defined through the morally acting individuals that comprise it.

As such, it does not seem that different from the communities found in the "ethical world" described in earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*. As in the city-states of ancient Greece, citizens of the ethical world are aware of their roles in society and are happy fulfilling these roles: the ethical consciousness knows its duty and does it. However, there is a crucial distinction to be made between ethical and moral consciousnesses. Moral consciousness is characterised by a sense of universality that the ethical consciousness cannot claim. The moral individual acts according to a sense of duty precisely because he understands that this is the right thing to do; indeed, he understands it is a reasonable and rational thing to do. Whereas the inhabitants of what Hegel calls the ethical world are compelled to act according to principles that they may not fully understand, the members of the moral community act with full knowledge that their principles are rational. Unlike the

inhabitant of the ethical world, who simply accepts duty as part of his way of life, the moral individual is aware of the principle's rational nature.

The awareness that Hegel attributes to the moral individual places him in a relation to the community that is very different from the ethical individual's social relationships. Because the inhabitants of the ethical world do not fully understand the principles according to which they act, they cannot be fully aware of the role they have in the community that these principles shape. For them, the social life of the community is effectively foreign. On the other hand, the moral individual knows that the principle of duty, which binds him to the community, is part of the same rationality that he practices on a personal level. In this sense, the antithesis between the individual and social reality is overcome. This is what Hegel means when he describes Spirit as "self-certain," in other words, self-aware.

As a consequence, the moral individual can enjoy a new level of freedom. Unlike the previously described ethical individual or indeed the individual of culture, the moral individual understands that the universal law of duty is of his own rational making. He is, as Hegel describes in a later paragraph, an "active agent."⁸ He does not need to question the law or demand freedom from constraint because he "sees freedom as living and acting according to law."⁹ Within the "moral world view," consciousness finds hitherto unprecedented "peace and satisfaction."¹⁰

The question for Hegel is whether this is indeed the case – whether freedom and satisfaction in fact reside in morality, and whether Spirit's goal of possessing Substance can be fulfilled. In the first two parts of the chapter he tests these claims of moral self-consciousness. Following the method established throughout the *Phenomenology*, he takes what moral self-consciousness considers as true, and shows how this truth might be construed as inadequate. To summarise Hegel's argument would require a detailed and systematic analysis of Kant's and Fichte's moral philosophies; which has been done elsewhere.¹¹ Instead I would like to refer to Bergman and *Through a Glass Darkly*, to examine one aspect of Hegel's critique: the discrepancy between moral theory and its practice.

The scene that best illustrates this discrepancy occurs approximately a third of the way into the film, and consists of a conversation between the two central characters, Karin and her husband Martin. Karin has recently suffered from a prolonged spell of mental illness and, as her doctor, Martin has tried to be supportive throughout.

The scene begins with Karin walking into the bedroom and waking up her husband. She chides him for sleeping late, but when he realises that it is only five a.m., he suspects that there is something wrong. Karin confesses that, during the night, she read her father's diary, in which he wrote that her illness is incurable. Martin puts on his glasses and reassures her that this is not the case. He is lying – he was the one who initially described her illness in this way. He then starts to kiss her but she rejects his advances. At that point he gets out of bed and the camerawork changes. Whereas previously both characters were included in a single frame, now the camera cuts between Martin brushing his teeth and Karin standing in front of an open window. Visible behind Martin is a mirror with Karin's reflection. The following conversation takes place.

Karin: Imagine having a placid, rosy woman to give you children and coffee in bed. Someone big and soft and beautiful. Wouldn't you like that?

Martin: It's you I love.

Karin: I know but still...

Martin: I don't want anyone else.

Karin: You always say and do the right things and yet it is always wrong.

Martin: If I do the wrong thing it's from love.

Karin: Those who really love do right by those who they love.

Martin: Then you do not love me.¹²

On the one hand, Martin can be identified with moral self-consciousness. As Karin describes it, he always tries to do the "right" thing. He does what can be reasonably and rationally assumed as "right." Karin, on the other hand, can be seen as voicing Hegel's critique of moral self-consciousness. Martin says and does the right thing, but it is always wrong. He might make a moral case for his action, yet in actuality, this is not how his action is perceived. The two facets of his behaviour, theoretical and practical, stand in contradiction.

In this way, the film highlights the central problem of a moral worldview. Hegel describes moral self-consciousness as "self-certain." It fully identifies itself with the life of the moral community. However, moral

self-consciousness also needs to act. When it acts, it stands in a relation to something other than itself. Thus moral self-consciousness makes a distinction between morality and nature, duty and reality. For moral self-consciousness, it is duty that is of the essence.¹³ Reality – what Hegel generally refers to as nature – is both independent and morally meaningless. Hegel argues that such an unequal distinction leads to profound contradiction, which ultimately affects moral self-consciousness's ability to act.

The contradiction is threefold. First arises the problem of happiness.¹⁴ Moral individuals act out of a universal sense of duty. Martin, for example, tries to do what is "right." But these actions do not guarantee happiness. Throughout the film, Martin's actions only bring him suffering. Second, morality may contradict one's "natural" inclinations. Martin tries to do what is "right" but this means suppressing his desire for Karin. When she asks him not to kiss her, he stops immediately. He tries to understand when she explains that her illness has affected her desire for him. And finally, there is the difficulty of knowing what to do in a specific situation. As a husband and a doctor, Martin wishes to do what is "right." But such a wish does not stop him from hurting people with his kindness and professionalism. He subjects Karin to the electric shock therapy that affects her hearing. He also continually lies to her, attempting to conceal from her the true nature of her illness. And when she finally succumbs to psychosis, he can only stand by helplessly.

For Hegel, these contradictions are significant. Duty may be of essence for moral self-consciousness, yet much more is required to support a moral worldview. First of all, the moral worldview requires the possibility of happiness. There would be little point in acting morally if there was not the hope and promise of achieving happiness. This means that nature, seemingly independent of moral concerns, must provide the necessary ground for happiness to take place. Such is the demand of reason, what Hegel refers to as the first postulate, the harmony of nature and morality. Secondly, the moral worldview requires the possibility of achieving happiness. Happiness and the harmony of nature and morality must be in our power to achieve, if not now, then at a later, more distant stage. This is the postulate of the immortal soul. And finally, the moral worldview requires the possibility of achieving happiness through particular action. Presiding over this is the figure of God, the third postulate, who makes duty plural, connecting it with happiness. As a regulative concept, God ensures that particular action does not come into conflict with the demands of pure duty. God sanctifies particular action so

that it is as effective as pure duty in bringing about happiness. Once again, the concepts of God and immortality provide recourse to something other than duty to complete the moral worldview.

It is worth interrupting the argument briefly here in order to appreciate the difference between the figure of God introduced here and the God that appears later in the *Phenomenology*, in the section entitled "Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil and its forgiveness." In the section on "The moral view of the world," the concept of God is introduced in response to the difficulty of specific action. Faced with multiple duties, moral self-consciousness finds the concept of duty to be a poor guide. For example, Martin generally tries to do the "right thing," but struggles to do so when faced with the demands of a particular situation. Hegel resolves the difficulty of multiple duties in the figure of God or "sacred lawgiver" (*der heilige Gesetzgeber*) whose task is twofold.¹⁵ He sanctifies specific duties, and he does so by ensuring that specific duties are as effective a means of achieving happiness as pure duty. Once again Martin's behaviour can serve as an example. For why does he subject Karin to electric shock therapy? Why does he lie to her and try to hide from her the true nature of her illness? He does so in the hope that these specific actions will bring about happiness. These actions might be flawed and may very well not result in happiness; but how is the moral individual to act if there is not the possibility – or rather faith – that his actions are justified?

The problem is that this positing of postulates fails to resolve any of the contradictions inherent in the moral worldview. Indeed, it makes contradictions all the more apparent, as moral self-consciousness first insists that it is duty which is of the essence, then admits that in actual fact, happiness, immortality or God are more important. Hegel accuses moral self-consciousness of "duplicity."¹⁶ For him, it consists of "insincere shuffling."¹⁷

In the section "Dissemblance and Duplicity," Hegel examines the extent of the insincerity in great detail. Once again, a thorough analysis of Hegel's critique is beyond the scope of this study. Instead I would like to return to the film and show how Martin's behaviour embodies elements of Hegel's much more complex argument. For why does Martin do the right thing? Why does he insist on being a good husband and a good doctor? The answer seems to be happiness. He loves Karin and wants her to be happy. But is this position sincere? Not according to Hegel's argument. The kind of happiness that Martin hopes for and that is implied in the first postulate must remain an ideal. In other words, the promise of happiness

inspires him to act morally – but it is a promise that cannot be realised, for with realisation it would lose its ideal and inspirational status.¹⁸

A similar argument can be made against the second postulate, based on the assumption of an immortal soul. Why does Martin try to do the right thing? Because he hopes that happiness might be his reward, if not now, then at least in Heaven. But once again, the position of moral self-consciousness is “not serious.”¹⁹ For what would happen if inner nature were to be overcome and morality established? Morality once again would lose its ideal status. Paradoxically, morality is in need of continual strife. Happiness cannot really be achieved: were it to be attained, it would cease to function as an effective motivation for further moral action.

Finally, objections need to be made against the third postulate: the figure of God, understood as the “sacred lawgiver,” who pluralizes duty and oversees the distribution of happiness. Recourse to a transcendent being by a moral self-consciousness that is only seemingly autonomous offers little for either the concept of God or indeed, moral self-consciousness. As a consequence of the third postulate, neither moral self-consciousness nor God have any real moral agency. Moral self-consciousness has no moral agency, because it has to refer to God to sanctify its particular, moral actions. God has no agency because, once again, he is only a postulate, posited as part of an argument. For what is this God that the moral worldview refers to? Nothing more than a “thought thing” above the “struggles of nature.”²⁰

• Conscience •

In order to be able to act, the moral individual finds that he must refer to a beyond, and posit a divine being in the concept of God. Without the figure of a sacred lawgiver there would be no guarantee that a harmony of morality and nature would take place. God is therefore posited to resolve the unequal and contradictory distinction inherent in the moral worldview between morality and nature, duty and reality. But this positing of God led to contradiction and duplicity, and ultimately failure to achieve freedom and satisfaction. Another kind of justification seems to be required, which we can see personified in Karin. When Karin rebukes Martin, she says, “Those who really love do right by those who they love.” She makes a

distinction between his love and “real love,” a love that is implicitly claimed as her own. Glimpsed in her distinction is the concept of “conscience” (*das Gewissen*). This is the capacity to do the right thing, not through some sense of moral obligation, but out of personal conviction.

To better understand what Hegel means by “conscience,” it is again useful to examine the distinction with which he begins this particular section, entitled “Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil and its forgiveness.” This is the distinction between the self of the ethical world, the self of morality and the self of conscience. Again it is important to understand this “self” in general as located within a community, and the differing conceptions of universality harbored by ethical, moral, and conscience-driven “selves.” The ethical self – exemplified by the citizen of the Greek city-state – lives the universal unknowingly. The inhabitant of the ethical community knows his duty, but is unaware that the principles involved are rational in nature. The moral self locates a universal sense of duty within a set of laws and principles that take shape beyond reality. The self of conscience does something else entirely. Here duty and principle are internal. Or as Hegel writes, “duty is no longer the universal that stands over against the self...It is now the law that exists for the sake of the self, not the self that exists for the sake of the law.”²¹ I find it useful to compare this kind of conviction with the way in which rational self-consciousness is actualised in the “law of the heart” in Chapter V. Here there is the following of conviction but without the claim of universality. Whereas in Chapter VI it is the personal conviction associated with conscience that expresses a universal principle, here the conviction of conscience determines whether an action is moral.

It is easy to see how such a definition of conscience resolves the problems that plague moral self-consciousness. Certainly it resolves the difficulties resulting from its many distinctions. Action is no longer separate from duty or moral principle; rather, as long as that action arises out of conviction, moral principle is enacted. Specific actions no longer risk contradicting general principles, because all actions of conscience enact the general principle that personal conviction expresses. Hence there is no need for conscience-driven consciousness to refer to a “sacred lawgiver” or God. It would therefore seem that freedom and satisfaction finally become achievable. Yet, Hegel finds this not to be the case, when he tests the claims made by conscience. He discovers that the very reasons for the successes of conscience are also the reasons for its failings.

Once again, I would like to refer to Bergman to make Hegel's analysis clear. Central to understanding Hegel's argument is the character of Karin. Granted, Karin is schizophrenic. The film makes repeated mentions of her illness and treatment; there is suggestion of a genetic disorder when it is revealed that Karin's mother suffered the same disease; Karin hears voices whispering and believes that God is about to appear to her. But providing that the figure of God is analysed further, as I will do below, Karin's character can also be understood as a personification of the self of conscience. I would like to focus on one particular scene that takes place a short while after the previously cited conversation between Martin and Karin.

Martin and David have left, and Karin is supposed to be supervising Minus's Latin grammar. Instead, she takes him up to the upstairs room in which she had been the previous night. She confesses to Minus that she has been hearing voices.

Karin: I go through the wall, you see? Early in the morning I'm woken up by a stern voice calling me. I get up and come here. One day someone called me from behind the wallpaper. I looked in the cupboard but it was empty. But a voice kept calling me...so I pressed against the wall and it parted like leaves; I was inside. You think I am making it up?

[Minus shakes his head]

Karin: I enter a large room. Very bright and quiet. People are moving about. Some speak to me and I can understand them. It feels so nice and safe. Some of the faces radiate a shining light. They are all waiting for him to come but no one is anxious. They say I am to be there when it happens.²²

In the empty room upstairs, behind the wallpaper, others "speak to [Karin]" and she "understands them." And she derives some comfort from this knowledge. As she explains to Minus, "It feels so nice and safe." It would seem that Karin finds some kind of fulfilment in this strange world – enough to reject the real world and her husband. She also does what the voices tell her to do. In this sense, she can be seen as following the voice of "conscience." And yet these same voices tell her to do terrible things. When questioned by David towards the end of the film, she admits that she has read his diary and told Martin about it because the voices told her to do so. Worse, the voices make her commit an act of incest. The film's

most harrowing scene is Karin seducing her brother Minus in a wrecked fishing boat. No wonder Martin ends the previous conversation by gently mocking Karin – “then you do not love me.” Karin seems incapable of “doing right” by anyone.

The way in which Hegel explains conscience bears on Bergman’s depiction of the schizophrenic. The person of conscience, in a way similar to the moral person, struggles to act according to his principles. This is because conscience is as poor a guide to action as duty. Or, as Hegel writes, “This pure conviction is, as such, as empty as pure duty, is pure in the sense that there is nothing in it.”²³ When action needs to be taken it is ultimately left to the individual to decide which way his conviction swings. And of course, the individual is fallible: his knowledge of specific circumstances is incomplete and he is driven by various impulses. And yet, it is this fallible individual that is important. Decisive in defining an action as moral is how the acting individual perceives the action, not the external impact of the action. Thus, for the self of conscience, duty consists of nothing more than conscience’s own self-assurance – what Hegel describes as an “absolute autarky.”²⁴

From absolute autarky it is but a small step to delusions of grandeur and ultimately madness. An altogether different reference to God is made here. No longer is God a requirement of thought – rather, the face of God belongs to the person of conscience. As Hegel writes,

It is the moral genius which knows the inner voice of what it immediately knows to be a divine voice; and since knowing this, it has an equally immediate knowledge of existence, it is the divine creative power...²⁵

For conscience it is the “inner voice” that is binding. Personal conviction defines an action as moral. But this means that any action, so long as it is accompanied by this sense of conviction, can arguably be presented as conscientious. In other words, personal conviction is the divine and creative power to sanctify any specific action as “right.”

Karin believes that her inner voices offer a kind of divine salvation. She finds them “nice and safe” because they announce a very specific kind of appearance. The “him” that they are waiting for – the “him” who comes when Karin is in their presence – this is what Karin later describes as God. And I would like to argue here that it is precisely because the voices have

this link to divinity that they carry such power of conviction. This is why Karin's voices feel so real to her and why she does not hesitate to obey their orders.

But it is at its seemingly highest power that conscience is also at its most vulnerable. It is when Karin believes to be in sight of God that her suffering is most acute. Believing that he himself possesses divine powers, the person of conscience is utterly alone. Indeed, there is no need to do anything, if all conscientious acts are "right." There is no need to sully such a power with action – no need to relate to the world and others. The person of conscience withdraws into a kind of contemplation of self. Or as Hegel phrases it, becomes a "beautiful soul" (*die schöne Seele*). As he writes,

The hollow object which it [conscience] has produced for itself now fills it, therefore, with a sense of emptiness. Its activity is a yearning which merely loses itself as conscience becomes an object devoid of substance, and rising above this loss, and falling back on itself, finds itself only as a lost soul. In this transparent purity of its moments, an unhappy, so-called "beautiful soul," its light dies away within it, and it vanishes like a shapeless vapour that dissolves into thin air.²⁶

Again *Through a Glass Darkly* illustrates Hegel's point well. Karin consistently fails to "do right by" others. She certainly does not "do right by" Martin, and her actions actually hurt both Minus and David. The consequences of her seduction of Minus is something with which both he and David will have to struggle. In a way, she is concerned only with herself – at least the self that hears voices and has visions. This is the path to madness, but it also constitutes a kind of withdrawal from the world and its problems. Throughout the film, Karin refers to a choice between worlds: the real world and the hallucinated world in which her voices live. She can live either in one or the other. Eventually she chooses neither, for when she "crosses over" to the world of her acoustic hallucinations and finally "sees" the God she so yearned for, this God reveals itself as a spider. This God she then rejects, most violently. The film ends with her putting on a pair of dark sunglasses and going back to hospital.

• Evil and its Forgiveness •

The moral worldview is flawed, its claims largely unsubstantiated. Conscience, which replaced the moral worldview, seems similarly inadequate. No peace and satisfaction were found in the one; madness lay ahead of the other. Religious consciousness is something else entirely. Its first glimpse, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, occurs towards the end of the chapter on "Spirit," in the paragraphs on evil and its forgiveness.

The religious consciousness that Hegel introduces here should not be confused with the previous references to God. As we might recall, the moral individual posited a Godlike "sacred lawgiver" to resolve some of the conflicts inherent in the moral worldview. Similarly, the person of conscience found divine creative power in personal conviction. Central to religious consciousness is a concept that so far I have mentioned only in passing. If there is a Godlike figure in religious consciousness, it can be found in the concept of "recognition" (*anerkennen, die Anerkennung*).

As Hegel argues towards the end of Chapter VI, another dimension of conscience needs to be considered: "conscience has to be considered as acting."²⁷ While it might seem that action, whether of conscience or of moral self-consciousness, has been Hegel's central concern throughout this chapter, so far we have only discussed the struggle of consciousness to act. Following Hegel's method, we have examined some of the claims made by both moral self-consciousness and conscience, and shown them to be flawed. In the last few paragraphs of the section concerning the beautiful soul, evil and forgiveness, Hegel changes tack and confronts the problem of action itself. The question is no longer the type of claim that conscience makes for its activity, but how others perceive it. Specifically, the question is how others perceive this activity as a product of a fallible individual. Hegel's overarching concern here, then, is to compare the claims made for action (for instance that it is moral, or that it arises from personal conviction) with how action actually manifests.

Hegel begins this final part of his argument by making yet another distinction. In considering perception, there are two consciousnesses to deal with: there is the consciousness of the person who acts (what Hegel terms the "first consciousness") and the collective consciousness of those who perceive the actions ("universal consciousness"). Universal consciousness judges the activities of the first by holding them up to a

universal standard, expressed in the personal conviction of the inner voice of conscience.

But the universal consciousness can only pronounce one kind of judgement. For universal consciousness, the first consciousness always seems "evil" – more than that, hypocritical. This is because universal consciousness sees what the first consciousness does not: Hegel describes this as the great disparity between the "inner being and the universal."²⁸ The first consciousness might pronounce its deeds as conscientious, but the universal consciousness of others easily finds them not to be so. By looking at the actions of the first consciousness, universal consciousness can see how they might arise from selfish motives such as the desire for fame, ambition or the need to secure happiness.²⁹ Hence, for universal consciousness, following one's personal convictions is not enough to constitute morality. This sense of conviction must be understood in more universal terms, as "right." If others fail to recognise and acknowledge this sense of conviction, then they will be unable to understand actions based on said convictions as "right." A drama unfolds in which universal consciousness attempts to unmask the hypocrisy of the first consciousness, by illuminating the fact that the first consciousness' apparent respect for duty is only for show.³⁰

Soon, however, an impasse is reached. Universal consciousness finds that it cannot easily demonstrate the hypocrisy of the first consciousness without seriously damaging its own position. For to dismiss the claims of the first consciousness, universal consciousness must refer to itself and insist on its own law. By opposing the first consciousness, universal consciousness finds that it too struggles with universal acknowledgement. Certainly, its laws are not acknowledged by the first evil consciousness. Indeed, the effect is the opposite of what universal consciousness intended: such opposition, far from dismissing the same activity on behalf of the first consciousness, constitutes its legitimization.

It is here that I once again appeal to Bergman's film, this time to the relationship between father and son, David and Minus. David acts like a person of conscience. Throughout the film he struggles with his sense of guilt. This is particularly apparent in an early scene, when he bursts into tears after breaking a promise to his children. Out of all the characters, Minus has the least developed personality – a fact that Bergman admits in a later interview.³¹ Nevertheless he acts as a person who judges. Minus judges David both as a man (he does not like David's choice of girlfriend), and as a writer (David is a novelist suffering from writer's block). This is

apparent in the scene in which Minus stages a play that he has written for his father. It is clear to the audience that, in this play, Minus demonstrates David's inferiority as a writer.

Yet theirs is not an impasse. Indeed, the film ends with their reconciliation. I would like to argue that there are grounds for such harmony laid out in an earlier scene. This is the moment in which David steps into the wreck and learns of Karin's incestuous act. Then, instead of putting forward accusations, he does something unexpected. He reflects on his own behaviour and sees the need for action. Once again I transcribe the scene at length.

David: I want to ask you for your forgiveness. I've had a bad conscience about you; I've hardened my heart and turned away. It nauseates me to think of the life I have sacrificed for my so-called art. My bid for success came just when your mother died; success meant more to me. I rejoiced in secret, yet loved her in my confused and selfish way.

Karin: And when I became ill you went to Switzerland?

David: I couldn't bear to see you had your mother's illness. And the novel...

Karin: Is it a good one?

David: You see, Karin, we draw a magic circle about us and exclude all that disagrees with our secret games. When life breaks the circle, our games become small and grey and ridiculous. We draw a new circle and a new defence.

Karin: Poor little Daddy.

David: Poor little Daddy who is forced to live in reality.³²

I have described David as a person of conscience. Yet as a person of conscience he was largely ineffectual. He admits as much when he talks of leaving Karin and her mother and drawing defensive circles. Only in this scene does he begin to "live in reality." Only now can he function as a first (acting) consciousness.

Keeping this reference to "reality" in mind, it is worth comparing the above dialogue with the film's final scene. Karin has been taken to

hospital. Minus, who had previously hidden in shame, makes an appeal to David.

Minus: I'm afraid. When I clung to Karin in the wreck, reality burst. You know what I mean?

David: I know.

Minus: Reality burst and I tumbled out. It's like a dream. Anything can happen. Anything.

David: I know.

Minus: I can't live in this new world.

David: You can but you must have something to hold on to.

Minus: What would that be? A God? Give me proof of God.

David: I can but you must listen to what I say.

Minus: I need to listen, Daddy.

David: I can only give you a faint idea of my own hopes. It's the knowledge that love exists as something real in the world of men.³³

Within this scene Minus too refers to reality – he admits that he too is forced to confront reality with Karin in the wreck. Reality burst and he tumbled out. There is an undeniable link between the two scenes. What I would like to argue is that the second scene only occurs because of the first. Minus can describe his experience in this way only because David did so first.

Here lies the strength of Hegel's argument. What occurs within this final dialogue is precisely the moment of recognition that announces the arrival of Spirit. Hegel explains this breakthrough in the following way. Returning to the moment of impasse in the drama between the first (evil) consciousness and universal consciousness, Hegel detects a moment for resolution. Universal consciousness judges the activity of the first consciousness, which in its eyes is evil. It attempts to unmask its hypocrisy but fails. Yet there is another way to interpret the perspective of universal consciousness. Universal consciousness that judges is not a consciousness that acts. It tends to shy away from action, refusing the complications that all action inevitably brings. Nevertheless, universal

consciousness wants its judgements to be taken seriously. Thus it too behaves in a hypocritical manner.

It is precisely this aspect of universal consciousness that the first consciousness perceives. It sees the universal consciousness for what it is, hypocritical. And then something very strange occurs. Rather than attempting to unmask the other's hypocrisy, it identifies with it. It *recognises* something of itself in the universal. When this occurs, the first consciousness confesses, admitting its fallibility. This is the point that the film makes so well. Minus confesses to David only when he sees that his father too struggled with the challenges that life brings – when he too is forced to live in reality.

The film makes one further point. It is not David, the person of conscience, who makes the final confession. He had done so earlier, to Karin. The final confession is by Minus, the character who, in my interpretation, represents judging consciousness. For the drama that Hegel describes does not end here. The confession of the first consciousness is only the first step towards reconciliation. It is not enough that the first consciousness perceives itself in the other; judging universal consciousness must recognise itself in the first.

This second confession is far more difficult, as universal consciousness occupies a position that is apparently closer to actual universality. It judges the activities of the first consciousness by holding them up to a universal standard implied in the personal conviction of conscience. Likewise, in the film, Minus judges David by holding him up to his ideas of what a father and writer should be. Hegel ascribes to universal consciousness a sense of superiority: universal consciousness does not see itself as hypocritical. Little wonder then that universal consciousness finds its position difficult to relinquish, and that Minus leaves this task until the very end of the film. At least initially, universal consciousness cannot but repel the confession of the first. Hegel describes the behaviour of the universal consciousness as "hard hearted," an "extreme form of rebellion of Spirit that is certain of itself."³⁴ From this point onward there are two options open to universal consciousness. Either it continues to repulse the confession of the first consciousness, thereby withdrawing from the world to occupy the position of a "beautiful soul," or it renounces its superiority.

Needless to say, resolution comes about when this superiority is renounced. Minus does indeed confess – or at least, he stops judging his father and turns towards him for advice. Again, recognition is central to

this process. When the first consciousness confesses to its inadequacy, its position shifts. It is no longer in the wrong. In fact, the two respective positions have reversed and it is universal consciousness that could now be seen as wicked. By confessing and acknowledging its fallibility, the first consciousness acknowledges its particularity and, in this way, achieves a degree of universality. Remember how David comforts his son: with the knowledge that love exists as something real in the world. He refers to the real, but in terms of a standard, as knowledge.

This shift in position does not go unnoticed: it marks the final turning point of the dialogue of the two consciences. The confession of the first consciousness, with its movement towards universality, allows for a transformation. It allows for universal consciousness to identify itself with the first acting consciousness. It too recognises an aspect of itself in the other. Minus clings to the hopeful words his father offered. When this happens, universal consciousness loses its sense of superiority, the "hard heart" breaks and forgiveness occurs. To explain what he means by "love existing in the world of men," David says: "I don't know if love proves God exists or if love is God himself." With this, David implies that when we love, we are surrounded by God. In *Through a Glass Darkly*, God exists in the love shown when father and son forgive each other. For absolute Spirit is nothing other than this "reciprocal recognition."³⁵

It is this reciprocal recognition that Hegel likens to God – the God that appears, as pure knowledge, in the midst of those who know themselves. Such a divine figure is very different from the one that appeared in previous sections of the *Phenomenology*. Within the moral worldview, God was nothing more than a postulate, posited by thought; in the discussion of conscience, he was no more than a part of a particularly stubborn personality. Here, in what Hegel calls religious consciousness, God is found within the relation of two individuals that is marked by a distinct kind of understanding, thanks to which individuals can forgive by recognising each other's failings.

Such an understanding of God represents significant advantages over the concepts previously introduced. To recall, the central difficulty both of moral self-consciousness and of conscience lay in action. Neither the moral individual with his universal sense of duty, nor the person of conscience with the strength of their personal sense of conviction, could act without hypocrisy. In both cases, because of its abstract nature, duty – whether it is expressed as the self-imposed duty of conscience or the externally-imposed duty of moral self-consciousness – proved inadequate

as a guide. The religious consciousness apparent in the dialogue of two consciences has no need for such guidance. It finds God within the activity of forgiveness itself. Little wonder then that the feeling of freedom and satisfaction, so elusive in previous discussions, can be sensed here.

I would like to turn once more to Bergman's film. Hegel's words are very beautiful – the way in which he announces the arrival of Spirit is very memorable. In terms of literary beauty, it cannot be compared to the resolution offered in the film, where David explains to Minus, "I don't know if love proves God exists or if love is God himself." Yet in one way the film does illustrate the moment of reconciliation with even greater eloquence than Hegel. When Karin discusses love with Martin, the two characters occupy separate spaces. Karin only appears within the same frame as Martin as a partly hidden reflection in the mirror. Thus, the scene emphasises the distance between the two characters. The final scene between Minus and David is filmed very differently. When Minus first speaks, only David is in the frame, facing towards the camera, his back to the open window. Minus then moves into the frame and for most of the scene only his profile is visible. However, at the moment of reconciliation, when David speaks and Minus understands, they face each other. Between their profiles, we see the sun setting.

The reciprocal recognition that Hegel defines as Spirit forms the starting point for the discussion of religion in the subsequent chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Here, Hegel identifies religion as a new form of consciousness – the consciousness of the Absolute. Or rather, it is no longer a question of consciousness of something. Within this new form of consciousness, absolute Spirit is conscious of itself as absolute. In reciprocal recognition we reach a standpoint of complete self-consciousness that foreshadows Hegel's subsequent discussion of the way in which God is revealed within the religious community.

Consciousness could not have arrived at this position without the struggle described in the chapter "Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality." Moral self-consciousness, so sure of itself in acting out of duty, had to be shown as flawed, its position unstable. Conscience, to which this position withdrew, similarly had to be shown as incapable of action. Only by considering the activity of conscience, the dialogue of one conscience with the other, could Hegel demonstrate how consciousness overcomes the instability, duplicity, and powerlessness of morality and conscience: a resolution achieved in the form of mutual recognition. In a historical sense, the paradise-like state of ancient Greece had to be lost and found

again in the progress of Enlightenment. Hegel summarises this in the following way:

The self-knowing Spirit is, in religion, immediately its own pure self-consciousness. Those forms of it which have been considered, viz. the true Spirit, the self-alienated Spirit, and the Spirit that is certain of itself, together constitute Spirit in its consciousness which, confronting its world, does not recognize itself therein. But in conscience it brings itself, as well as its objective world in general into subjection...and is now a self-consciousness that communes with its own self.³⁶

Hegel's emphasis here is on conscience and recognition. In previous forms of consciousness, try as it might, Spirit did not recognise itself in the world. The world was other, foreign. Only within the conscience that grew out of morality, can recognition take place.

It is with this emphasis on conscience and recognition that I would like to end. The aim of this essay was to show why morality had to be abandoned, in other words, to demonstrate why Hegel sought to transform a moral outlook into a religious one. The answer can be found here, in the reciprocal recognition of conscience. Hegel describes conscience as both divine and creative. Inner conviction of duty is the power to decide what is right. But if the self of conscience is not to end as a "beautiful soul," lost to the world, it needs to learn how to renounce its creativity and divinity, precisely so it can find it in another. Divinity must be exposed for what it is – essentially hypocritical. This is only possible through another, equally hypocritical conscience. With the other, conscience comes face to face with its own failings. It acknowledges them through self-recognition. And when such acknowledgement occurs, then truly it comes within sight of the divine.

This essay also aimed to show how, for Hegel, divinity and religion are distinct. The answer can once again be found in the concept of recognition. By identifying God with the reciprocal recognition characterising the act of forgiveness, Hegel locates religion within an activity that takes place within the world. Divinity no longer belongs to some distant beyond, whether inner or outer. But this is not to say that within the *Phenomenology*, divinity is rejected, even though it is productively transformed. Hegel consistently shows how divinity is a necessary concept: how it underpins moral philosophy and how it is central to the definition of conscience.

• Notes •

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 409. Emphasis original.

² Ingmar Bergman, *Images, My Life in Film*, trans. M. Ruuth (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2007), 244-45.

³ Stig Bjorkman, Torsten Mams and Jonas Simia, *Bergman on Bergman*, trans. Paul Pritten (Austin: A Touchstone Book, Simon and Schuster, 1973), 168.

⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 364.

⁵ Hegel's concept of "Spirit" is far too grand for me to adequately summarise here. Though Spirit is a central concept of Hegel's phenomenology (and his philosophy as a whole) its discussion is surprisingly limited, a fact noted by Tom Rockmore in *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 111-112.

⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 265. My definition of "Spirit" is largely taken from Frederick C. Beiser's very clear account "'Morality' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Kenneth R. Westphal (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 210.

⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 364.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁹ Beiser, "Morality," 221.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 374.

¹¹ For more detailed accounts of Hegel's critique of Kant see R.Z. Friedman, "Hypocrisy and the Highest Good: Hegel on Kant's Transition from Morality to Religion," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24 (1986): 503-22, and Kenneth R. Westphal, "Hegel's Critique of Kant's Moral World View," *Philosophical Topics* 19 (1991): 133-76.

¹² *Through a Glass Darkly*. DVD. Produced by Allan Ekelund. Directed and Written by Ingmar Bergman. (Sweden: Janus Films, 1961).

¹³ In more Kantian terms, this is the autonomous nature of practical reason. The moral principle of the categorical imperative is *a priori*.

¹⁴ Commentators agree that Hegel uses the term "happiness" to refer to two distinct Kantian concepts: "happiness" and the "supreme good." Again see Friedman's "Hegel on Kant" and Westphal's "Hegel's Critique of Kant."

¹⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 371.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Hegel also has a second objection to the first postulate. Is there really an action that can be described as right? An action is particular; "rightness" is an ideal. How is an ideal rightness to be achieved through a particular action?

¹⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 377.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 382.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 387.

²² Bergman, *Through a Glass Darkly*.

²³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 390.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 393.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 400.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 401-02.

³¹ Bergman, *Images: My life in film*, 254.

³² Bergman, *Through a Glass Darkly*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 406.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 408.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 411.

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