

Hegel: Zodiac Robot

J.D. Casten – 1993

www.jd.casten.info

TWO “GENEALOGICAL” STRANDS OF *THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND*

Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind* presents a rather imposing, yet profoundly enticing way of thinking; and beginning to read it may seem like diving into the deep end of a pool, with Hegel offering no lessons in treading water. I must admit that I have as yet to adequately fathom its depths, but I have done a bit of dog-paddling here and there. Indeed, I have found some of the ideas presented in this work to have resonances with other thinkers, ways of thinking, and personal experiences; and to that extent, even though I do not feel completely at home in the work, I have not found myself completely alienated.

Two angles, from which I have approached this work in a struggling effort to “make it my own” as it were, are angles which I believe may have influenced Hegel himself in the outlaying of this book. Most critically would be Hegel’s important predecessor Kant. Indeed, many of Hegel’s notions seem to be reactions against, extensions of, and outgrowths of Kant’s work. Such is especially evident in Hegel’s almost overly technical vocabulary— a vocabulary that often echoes Kant’s. One can also see Kant’s influence, in that Hegel’s writing often seem to take for granted his reader’s familiarity with the work of the former— it seems that Hegel saw Kant as breaking much ground which did not need to be re-worked in its entirety, but rather needed to be refined and re-situated within a larger framework.

The second angle, from which I hope to view *The Phenomenology of Mind*, is associated with astrology. This may

sound a bit weird at first, as astrology has gained a reputation among many as being a charlatan endeavor. And indeed, Hegel mentions it in the *Phenomenology* only in connection with palm reading (342), and his questioning of physiognomy and phrenology. He finds the claims made by the “science” of astrology troubling, for he sees the motions of the planets, etc, as having a completely exterior relation to the interiority of the psyche— and there seems to be no middle term to connect exterior astronomical events to the interior psychological attitudes. My purpose of including astrology here, though, is not to propose a defense of its validity— it should be noted however, that this “science” is indeed much more complex and intricate than most people assume, and has a long history. However, I do think that the structure of the Zodiac has strong reverberations with the cyclical progressive structure of the *Phenomenology*; the parallels found seem so deep that anyone having a familiarity with the two would be bound to recognize them. And it is my hope that, by elucidating some of these parallels, some of Hegel’s insights and possible inspirations will become clearer.

I should note here that I will obviously not be covering the entire *Phenomenology* in depth, or even attempting to summarize it. In reference to Kant’s work, I hope to focus mostly upon the first three of the *Phenomenology*’s eight chapters— those concerned with Consciousness. Yet, even limiting one’s self to these first moments, one can see the embryonic aspects of the work’s progression; and hopefully I will be able to explain how the later parts of the text expand some of these initial aspects (the whole being partially present in its initial parts), and also show how the work’s progression parallels the movement through the cycle of the Zodiac.

INSIDE KANT'S "ROBOT"

Kant's arguments in his *Critique of Pure Reason* undoubtedly constitute one of the most monumental advances in the logical analysis of the human mind. Indeed, it would seem that he thought he had truly found the foundational requirements for logical judgments to be made about the world. And in this inquiry into our ability to make sense of the world around us, he established a thorough explication of a (or *the*) logical structure of thinking. In his quest for discovering the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments, and through his Copernican revolution of de-centering one's mode of perceiving from perception itself, Kant unified the two distinct traditions of empiricism and rationalism in such a way as to clear the ground for new ways of thinking and questioning.

Kant did not answer each and every possible question concerning the mind though. And this is especially evident in one of the most slippery and instigating moves in philosophy—his choice to investigate what is necessary, rather than what would be sufficient for thought. (This latter objective, far from being achieved, has occupied many cognitive scientists, especially those interested in artificial intelligence.) Through his discussion of various necessary faculties, such as the imagination, the understanding, and apperception, Kant did formulate a “workable” sketch (as opposed to, say, a full sculpture) of the logical operations of an individual mind. Kant's project was thus, in a way, an exposition of the form of an individual's mind.

Now, given Kant's thorough discussion of the mind's formal aspects, one might see much of Hegel's philosophy as being concerned with its content. Kant seems to have developed an empty shell, able to work with the world, but he rarely discusses what passes through that framework, besides classical philosophical problems. And indeed, Kant's discussion of what

drives, and directs the mind, Reason, is quite limited, and focuses mostly on the needs of a logical progression (e.g. syllogisms).

If we direct our attention to the content of our minds, we can see that much of what is “in” it comes from what we learn and experience from “without.” Our lives progress from infancy towards old age, and along that journey we mature and develop— the “content” of our minds increase, and our perspectives become broader. And, in a similar way, humanity itself advances through history: history itself seems to be the content of humanity’s mind. However compelling a study of this alone might be— the content of the mind, and the “logic” of its progressive expansion— Hegel goes beyond even this and re-situates Kant’s separation of the workings of the mind from the world it perceives within this “logic” of progression.

It is the first three chapters of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* which most closely correlate with the thought of Kant— it is here that Hegel discusses sensation, perception, and the understanding— key elements of a description of the individual mind’s form— and aspects touched on by Kant. In the following I hope to show how Hegel’s perspective on these issues seems to be an outgrowth of seeds sown by Kant, and how Hegel’s differences from Kant demonstrate a logic (dialectical) which recurs throughout the *Phenomenology*.

HEGEL’S OPENING: PURE EGO

In Kant’s discussion of the various faculties of the mind, he devoted much attention to apperception, which he praised as the most important of all mental faculties. Roughly, this faculty of apperception designated the unity of a subject perceiving— the “I”, or ego which was the logical and empirical subject of all perception. Kant also found this apperception to be that which

provided for the unity of an object or thing— an object is understood as one thing as it is confronted by the unity of a person’s mind.

Now, for Hegel, the opening moment of experience— the primal given from which one departs— precedes this singularity of sensation, as found with Kant’s unitary mind confronting a unitary object. One begins with immediacy, that which simply is: consciousness / sense-experience. This experience is not yet understood, it simply appears; one is this appearance:

“Consciousness, on its part, in the case of this form of certainty, takes the shape merely of pure Ego.”
(149)

However, we find that:

“there is a good deal more implied in that bare pure being”
(150)

And here we have the beginning of a dialectic driven by contradiction. A central contradiction which is played out through the entire *Phenomenology* is the play between the one and the many, the whole and the parts, the same and the different. The contradiction here being that for Hegel, the one is many, the whole is its parts, the same is different; or rather, each is striving to become its opposite. And, with our given singularity of the experience of pure ego, pure being in itself, we find already that:

“pure being at once breaks up into two ‘thises’”
(150)

The “this I”, and the “this object”— pure immediacy turns out to be a mediated relation between the subject and the object,

each of which is dependent on the other. For this “I” is distinct from pure being only with its distinction from “what” is experienced, the object: the mere surface of pure sense-experience splits an interior in opposition to an exterior, where one without the other might be a mere surface without an individual perspective, or recognized object. With the breaking apart of the subject and the object, a host of other aspects of pure being fall into contradiction—the “Now”, “Here”, and “This” which all point towards the immediately experienced become their opposites: Now becomes not Now, Here becomes not Here, This becomes not This.

And it is in this way that Hegel distinguishes one’s universal modality from the entirety of sense certainty. The Now, it would seem, is always Now— I am always in the present— indeed, I existed before, but that is not Now; and my experience always occurs within the Now. I am always where I am, Here, when I am here— Now; whatever time it is, I experience it only Now; where ever I go, when I am experiencing, I am Here. And whatever I direct my attention to, it is This. The I is always accompanied by a Now, a Here, and a This. Yet, what is Now, is also not Now as it passes; what was Now then is not Now now; what was Here before me then may not be before me now; and in that way, the Now becomes not Now, but then; the Here becomes not Here, but there. So there is what seems an endless string of Nows, and Heres, which are not the Here and Now which I presently experience. And it is the distinction between all the Nows and Heres, and the fact that my experience is always Here and Now which distinguishes my *modality* (my term, not Hegel’s) from the entirety of sense-certainty (being):

“This pure immediacy, then, has nothing more to do with the fact of otherness, with Here in the form of a tree passing into a Here that is not a tree, with Now in the sense of day-time changing into a Now that is night-time, or with there being an other I to which something

else is object. Its truth stands fast as a self-identical relation making no distinction which is essential and non-essential, between I and object, and into which, therefore, in general, no distinction can find its way.”
(155)

In other words, there simply is the complete presence of everything to itself, all the Nows, in one Now, all the Heres in one Here; and our simple modality of I-Now-Here-This is always limited to a singularity letting the Now pass into the not Now, which distinguishes the modality, or universal medium of all egos from the complete presence of immediacy to itself.

RECOGNITION OF THE OBJECT

With Hegel’s discussion of perception, what was already implicit in an experience of the universal medium becomes explicit in the complex object, as the dialectic struggling between the Now and not Now, the Here and not Here, the This and not This is superseded into a higher sphere of the perception of the complex object. For an object can be both This object Here before me Now, and also the object that was before me then and there. I see This tree, here before me Now— but then later, that same tree is not This before me Now and Here— the tree can be both This Here and Now, and not This Here, not This Now:

“The This, then, is established as not This, or as superseded, and yet not nothing (*simpliciter*), but as determinate nothing, a nothing with a certain content, *vis.* the This. The sense-element is in this way itself still present, but not in the form of some particular that is ‘meant’— as had to be the case in immediate certainty— but as a universal, as that which will have the character of a property. Canceling, superseding,

brings out and lays bare its true twofold meaning which we found contained in the negative: to supersede (aufheben) is at once to negate and preserve.”
(163-164)

One withdraws from the contradiction between the present moving into the non-present with the object which remains through both.

However, no sooner is this contradiction superseded, than another contradiction appears within the perceived object, this being that it has many properties, yet is one thing. For with perception, we actually only experience individual properties— a sugar cube is white, cubical, sweet; but we simply see a white color, feel a cubical shape, taste a sweetness. Our perception itself is not of a thing, but of a multiplicity of properties which we may experience side by side, and not singularly. Sweetness is distinct from whiteness, each of which is distinct from a cubical shape— each of these properties is distinctly different from the others. However, we do find that, despite the plurality of properties that we encounter, we can distinguish one object from another by a special property:

“It is through the determinate characteristic that the thing excludes other things. Things themselves are thus determinate and in and for themselves; they have properties by which they distinguish themselves from one another.”
(170)

However, our ability to distinguish one thing from another no longer belongs to the realm of perception, which is always directed to a specific cluster of properties. And here, we find that it is the understanding which provides the unity of a cluster of properties by distinguishing one object from others.

Again, the disparity between the This Here Now and the not This Here Now was superseded by the This (thing) which can be both Here and Now, and not Here and Now. And the resulting conflict of recognizing a This as something rather than a plurality of properties is superseded by the understanding's ability to distinguish one object from another. Perception of a specific This provides a bridge between the Now-Here and the not Now-Here; distinguishing a This thing from other things through the understanding offers a bridge between the plurality of properties and a single thing. Pure-being is broken into a distinction between the Now and not Now, which is superseded by the This which is Here Now and not Here Now; the This is broken into a distinction between its properties and its singularity, which is superseded by its being distinguished in the understanding as an one object with properties among many objects. In each case, there is a breaking apart into differences which are overcome (yet still remaining) within a new, more subtle perspective. The contradictions of sense-certainty are superseded by perception; and in turn the new contradictions of perception are superseded in the understanding. Each realm is framed by a new one— sensation remains within perception, perception remains within the understanding; each new level maintains the prior one, yet re-situates it in a larger more comprehensive context. Yet, these new circumscriptions are found to already be implicit within what they enclose, just as a square and a circle (may) have always been geometric shapes before, being grouped as such by geometry.

THE UNDERSTANDING'S SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Now, what occurs at the next stage within Hegel's discussion of the understanding becomes quite complex, and my brief summary will most surely not do it justice. The new principle which came with the understanding was the differentiating between objects. However, this differentiating is itself the

dialectical process which has heretofore been described. But with the understanding, the dialectical process of breaking apart into contradiction itself becomes understood, and this occurs through yet more breaking asunder into contradiction. The understanding of the understanding's differentiating will be understood through its sundered distinction between force and law:

“the elements set up as independent pass directly over to their unity, and their unity directly into its explicit diversity, and the latter back once again into the reduction to unity. This process is what is called Force. One of its moments, where force takes the form of dispersion of the independent elements each with a being of its own, is the Expression of Force; when, however, force takes the form of that wherein they disappear and vanish, it is Force proper, force withdrawn from expressing itself and driven back into itself.”
(183)

And the primary law that accompanies force is difference:

“What is found in this flux of thoroughgoing change is merely difference as universal difference, or difference into which the various opposites have been resolved. This difference as universal, consequently, is what constitutes the ultimate simple element in the play of forces, and is the resultant truth of that process. It is the Law of Force.”
(195)

Now, once this distinction between force and law is established, (and indeed, one can (and Hegel does) discuss the variety of manifestations of force, and of different types of laws) it is then superseded:

“They are no doubt distinct, but their distinction is at the same time explicitly stated to be not a distinction of the fact itself [that “law is bare and simple force”], and consequently is itself again straightway canceled and transcended. This process is called Explanation. A law is expressed; from this its inherently universal element or ground is distinguished as force; but regarding this distinction, it is asserted that it is no distinction.”

(200)

Moreover:

“The world of appearance, or the play of forces, already shows its operation; but it is in the first instance as Explanation that it comes openly forward. And since it is at length an object for consciousness, and consciousness is aware of it as what it is, consciousness is in this way Self-consciousness. Understanding’s function of explaining furnishes in the first instance merely the description of what self-consciousness is.”

(210)

The operations of force and law have thus always existed implicitly. Yet, it is with this superseding of these two into explanation that they become explicit—implicitly and explicitly distinct, they lose this distinction in passing from the implicit to the explicit. However, this dialectical force, differentiating into contradiction, and superseding into higher unity is itself understood to be merely a mediated play of the understanding:

“understanding merely experiences itself”

(212)

The understanding therefore raises consciousness beyond sensible perception only to erase itself:

“the vision of the undistinguished selfsame reality, which repels itself from itself, affirms itself as divided...; what we have here is Self-consciousness.”

(212)

We thus have consciousness raised to the level beyond mere subjective experiencing on into intellection, where it is ready to engage in a dialectical relation with other consciousnesses (as is discussed in chapter four (e.g. the master slave relation)) and is well on its way to further self-knowledge and a more comprehensive understanding of itself. Again, I will not be summarizing this grand journey, but will rather soon examine its character.

Before doing such, the differences between Kant’s and Hegel’s projects should be clearly noted. Most clearly evident is that Kant was quite cautious when speculating as to what was beyond the understanding. No doubt, Kant’s and Hegel’s conception of the understanding differ to a great extent. Yet Kant embraced its certainty, while Hegel sees it as a ladder to be nearly discarded once climbed.

Moreover, Kant takes more seriously the particular workings of the understanding, where Hegel seems to be narrating its progress. Most importantly though, is the fact that Hegel sees the understanding as a crucial factor in forcefully mediating a differentiation into the undifferentiated being of pure ego. It is in this way that Hegel (along with others) inflated Kant’s transcendental necessity for apperception (the “I”) into an immanently transcendent ego.

Whereas Kant forged the path of analytic logic towards the unity of consciousness, Hegel claims to begin with this consciousness being interrupted by the logic of dialectics. And in this way, Kant may have provided the ladder which Hegel claims to have reconstructed from the other side.

THE UNFOLDING OF THE ZODIAC

What has been discussed so far has been limited to the very first stages of the unfolding of consciousness in its progressive journey of maturation. Yet we have already seen some of the ways in which Hegel sees the process of this progression: his dialectic of unity breaking asunder into contradiction with diversity, and the contradiction striving for a higher unity where the implicit is externalized into an explicit framework which re-situates the prior contradictions. What we have here is not a simple resolution of opposites, as with Kant who in his dialectics tried to resolve antinomies into unknowable, yet probable unities. Hegel's dialectic seems more like a fountain, or a flower whose inner petals burst forth, pushing the outer petals aside in a new comprehension. Inversely, this unfolding provides a progressively wider and broader scope with which to access the prior stages however, as each new stage re-frames the prior within a new context. Ultimately this context extends beyond the individual that Kant was so often preoccupied with, showing the individual to be part of whole social realm, and a part of the whole of absolute Being as well (at which point the part again becomes whole).

Now, this sort of progression, which composes a narrative journey of consciousness, can be seen in numerous myths which reflect the maturation of a character. But one of the most ancient formulations of this journey—one of the most concise and coherent, expositions—came from a time before science and myth had been severed: astrology's Zodiac. The Zodiac presents one of the most detailed and coherent systems of myth and mythological progression. It constitutes a system of interpretation that applies to the body, character, society, and more, and integrates them all. And, against disregarding it as being outdated and refuted by science, it might behoove us to realize that the genealogy of our sciences indeed trace back through/to astrology: astrology lies at the roots of the very

sciences which have sought to deny this ancestor. The whole has been broken apart, and one piece has claimed authority; society at large has to a great extent granted science mastery over myth.

Now, the structure of the Zodiac should be somewhat familiar to most. As we have twelve months (twelve tribes, twelve apostles, etc.) we have twelve signs of the Zodiac. There has been speculation that at one time there were six signs, and that these had been sundered into twelve. This seems interesting in that many of the signs could be paired together; the signs oscillate between active and passive (classically— and problematically— between masculine and feminine) and such a prior Zodiac might designate one without this active/passive scission. Nevertheless, the current Zodiac's twelve signs form a progression which loops back into itself, much as the seasons perpetually recur. To facilitate discussion it may be helpful to list the signs of the Zodiac in order, with brief key aspects of each sign given, (and also with its symbol, associated planet(s), body part, element, mode, and polarity listed in parenthesis):

1. ARIES - I AM: ego, will, being, initiative, aggression, (the ram, Mars, the head, fire, cardinal, active).
2. TAURUS - I HAVE: property, substance, stability, determination, attachment, (the bull, Venus, the neck, earth, fixed, passive).
3. GEMINI - I THINK: communication, intellect, the mercurial, flexibility, connectivity, nervousness, (the twins, Mercury, the hands, air, mutable, active).
4. CANCER - I FEEL: nurturing, growth, domesticity, sensitivity, binding, (the crab, the Moon, the breast, water, cardinal, passive).
5. LEO - I ACT: power, pride, love, leadership, expression, (the lion, the Sun, the heart, fire, fixed, active).

6. VIRGO - I JUDGE: analysis, improvement, hygiene, study, precision, modesty, (the virgin, Mercury, the stomach, earth, mutable, passive).
7. LIBRA - WE BALANCE: partnership, idealism, harmony, dependence, the social, high art, (the scales, Venus, the pelvis, air, cardinal, active).
8. SCORPIO - I CREATE: passion, sex, death, secrecy, suspicion, transcendence, (the snake, scorpion and eagle, Mars and Pluto, the genitals, water, fixed, passive).
9. SAGITTARIUS - I ABSTRACT: exploration, honesty, athletics, philosophy, enthusiasm, broad perspective, (the centaur, Jupiter, the thighs, fire, mutable, active).
10. CAPRICORN - I USE: responsibility, efficiency, practicality, status, strength, realism, (the sea-goat, Saturn, the knees, earth, cardinal, passive).
11. AQUARIUS - I KNOW: social expression, humanity, science, observation, insecurity, eccentricity, (the water bearer, Uranus and Saturn, the calves and ankles, air, fixed, active).
12. PISCES - I BELIEVE: unconsciousness, self-sacrifice, compassion, imagination, worry, indecision, (the tethered fish, Neptune and Jupiter, the feet, water, mutable, passive).

As to the planets, one may get some sense of their significance if one thinks of the character of the roman gods they represent. With the elements, fire is dynamic, earth is “down to earth,” air is ethereal, and water is emotional. And, with the modes, the cardinal is initiatory, the fixed carries through, and the mutable harvests. Here, one should easily be able to discern a sort of progression through the signs. This progression is additionally evident in that the first six signs are more self-oriented; while the last six are more social (a child may become more socially conscious with age). Moreover, the signs become more “refined”, yet less focused throughout the Zodiac

progression. Such is not to suggest, however that any sign is better than another— each sign has its positive and negative traits, and is simply different than the others. (Moreover, one's personal astrological chart always relates to many signs, not just one!)

A correlation with the progress of Hegel's *Phenomenology* may now also be evident. Each sign in the zodiac builds upon the previous one; conflicts are resolved, and new problems begin. For example, the pride which is inherent in Leo is resolved with the modesty of Virgo; yet this too can become a problem, as with over fastidiousness. Also, the even split between the individual and the social signs in the Zodiac is evidently paralleled with the distinctly individual and social part of the *Phenomenology*.

Most relevant to this paper might be a parallel between the progress of the first three signs of the zodiac and of the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*. One might recall that in those chapters, the unity of pure ego was split up into an opposition with things which were then grasped by the understanding. This movement is also evident in the progress of the Zodiac in the shift from the emphasis on the ego in Aries, to the identification with things (property) in Taurus, and its stratification through the intellect in (thinking) Gemini. Again, in both cases there is a movement from a pure ego, to things, and to thinking about them. And in this progression we can see, in both cases, a splitting up of the primal into more subtle relations. (By the way, the next sign is Cancer, which may suggest a Freudian emphasis on mothers as the primary inter-subjective relationship, rather than a Hegelian master and slave).

Trying to draw a parallel between the Zodiac and the entirety of the *Phenomenology* would no doubt be problematic, although a rough comparison probably does remain throughout. A parallel is especially evident with the closing parts of the *Phenomenology*

though, where the individual gives way to the social spirit and dissolves through religion into the absolute. In the Zodiac, as well, with the closing signs of Aquarius and Pisces, one respectively loses one's self in the social and the religiously unknowable. Thus, just as the Zodiac culminates in the reconciling self-abandonment of Pisces, the *Phenomenology* ends where:

“Spirit is engulfed in the night of its own self-consciousness; its vanished existence is, however, conserved therein; and this superseded existence—the previous state, but born anew from the womb of knowledge—is the new stage of existence, a new world, and a new embodiment or mode of Spirit.”
(807)

With these last claims, we have a parallel to the Zodiac's re-feeding into itself, and beginning its cycle anew.

It may be noted that astrology does not simply use the Zodiac for personal character evaluation. The same structure of signs is also used to make social predictions, and at a very large scale, it assesses the character of an age. No doubt, you have heard that we have passed into the “dawning of the age of Aquarius.” An astrological age lasts for about 2000 years, and the ages go through the Zodiac in reverse. The last transition was that from Aries to Pisces—approximately at the time of Christ, which has determined the base of our calendar year. Symbolically, this is quite profound, as the transition from Aries to Pisces would be one of the grand Ego's self-sacrifice—the absolute will of the Aries ego gives way to the unknowable, redemptive, self-loss of Pisces. To further add to this symbolic age interpretation, Moses appeared at the transition from Taurus to Aries—from the iconic this-ness of the golden calf (Taurus is the bull) to the absolute will of the Aries ego (“I am that I am”). No doubt, the transition from Aries to Pisces may be accounted

as a more crucial cusp, for it is the actual re-feeding of the Zodiac back into itself. To this extent, I would predict the “Second Coming” as occurring at around 24000 A.D. Of course, this brings a question as to what our recent transition from Pisces to Aquarius might be understood as bringing— a self-sacrifice at the social level, or a resolution of sacrifice through the social? A science of the unknowable? I am not sure, but I find the astrological schema for interpretation quite intriguing. At any rate, with both astrology and Hegel’s dialectic, we can see the application of a similar interpretational scheme to both the individual and the social.

Such brings me to my criticism of Hegel. It would seem that he has drawn upon many sources for his work— maybe astrology, most likely also Taoism’s principle of the yin-yang inter-dependence, and obviously Kant. If he did indeed draw upon these sources, why did he not say so? As an artist, such might not be necessary; but as a philosopher who’s works have gone on to help shape the destiny of millions (e.g. with Marx and communism) this sort of twisting around and deviousness is quite questionable. Did Hegel take the original elegance of the Zodiac and twist it around to his own purpose: did he appropriate what may have been some divine revelation only to reshape and sell it in a disfigured form? Most likely, Hegel’s intentions were more sincere— his insights stray far from previous doctrines, and he brings them together in fascinating ways (not many things could seem farther apart than Kant and astrology!). It is the comprehensiveness, and audacious aim of the *Phenomenology* which makes it such an amazing piece of writing— maybe a more appropriate title, used for a book by Douglas Adams, would be *Life, the Universe, and Everything*. However, it also seems quite different than an answer to everything: it inspires and opens up a fountain of possibilities— which is quite evident in Hegel’s subsequent influence.