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Faraway, So Close: Skepticism, subjective Idealism and the Problem of Shine in Hegel's *Science of Logic*

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Abstract

The article discusses the subchapter on Shine from Hegel's *Science of Logic* in relation to Hegel's effort to refute and overcome both, ancient and contemporary forms of skepticism. It is divided into three parts. The first part shows why, according to Hegel's understanding, skepticism and subjective Idealism share the same onto-logical commitments; the second part will focus on the reconstruction of Hegel's concrete account of Essence and Shine. In particular, it will show how the chapter relates to the *Science of Logic* as a whole and how the inconsistency of the logical constellation of Essence and Shine serves as an argument for introducing another, less problematic logical constellation. The third and concluding part will show why skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism can be subordinated under the logic of Shine and, hence, share the same aporias with it. Finally, it discusses why Hegel's argument, as encountered in his account of Essence and Shine, paves the way for the ultimate overcoming of the restrictions that skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism impose on human knowledge and for an objective epistemological account of reality.

At first, the chapter on Essence and Shine in Hegel's *Science of Logic* appears to be just another, or more specifically, the second subchapter of the *Doctrine of Essence*; an intermediate point between the opening of the Doctrine of Essence and one of its core chapters, the one on Reflection. Yet, at a closer look, this seems to be anything but the case. As we will see, Hegel's purpose in this chapter is not merely to give an account of the logical content and the relation between Essence and Shine, but to substantiate the claim that the logical structure he is dealing with here is the fundamental logical structure on the basis of which both, ancient skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism operate.¹ Hence, what we encounter in this specific chapter is not only an account of some isolated and limited set of logical contents, i.e. the logical contents of Essence and Shine, but Hegel's attempt to account for and, ultimately, to refute two of the most significant trends in the history of philosophy,² i.e. skepticism and subjective idealism.

What I will try to do is divided in three parts. First, I will show why, according to

¹ Along with skepticism and transcendental Idealism Hegel adds the philosophies of Leibniz and Fichte, but I will leave this aspect aside.

² For the centrality of the refutation of the skeptical claims throughout Hegel's work see Forster 1989, pp. 99 ff.

Hegel, skepticism and subjective idealism share the same onto-logical commitments; second, I will provide an account of Hegel's critical exposition of the logical content of Essence and Shine, as depicted in the *Science of Logic* and in the recently published volumes of the *Vorlesungen über die Logik* from the critical edition of Hegel's works. Finally, I will show in what sense both skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism are variations, according to Hegel, of one and the same logic, the logic of Shine, and how this logic proves to be aporetic – and replaced by another more consistent and adequate set of concepts.

1. Skepticism and subjective idealism

To begin with, let us start with the core-sentence of the subchapter, the meaning of which I will unravel gradually. Immediately after the introductory account of the categories of Essence and of Shine Hegel makes the following remark:

Shine, the “phenomenon” of skepticism, and also the “appearance” of idealism, is thus this immediacy which is not a something nor a thing – in general, not an indifferent being that would exist apart from its determinateness and connection with the subject. Skepticism did not permit itself to say “It *is*,” and the more recent idealism did not permit itself to regard cognitions as a knowledge of the thing-in-itself. The shine of the former was supposed absolutely not to have the foundation of a being: the thing-in-itself was not supposed to enter into these cognitions. (SL, pp. 342-343)

What we encounter in this passage is, thus, the aforementioned identification between the logical content of Shine, the “phenomenon” of skepticism, and the “appearance” of (subjective) idealism. Skepticism and subjective idealism respectively reject the claim that knowledge can be objective, i.e. that it can grasp or refer to *being* or to *things-in-themselves* as such. This is because both skepticism and subjective idealism share the same assumption, namely that positioning things into a relationship, or, in Hegelese, in “determinateness” is a subjective act, i.e. an act that stems from the subject of knowledge, but that actually is external to the nature of the object of knowledge as such.³

Moreover, it is this act that makes impossible the claim for objective knowledge on the basis of a second premise. According to this second premise, which is intrinsically connected to the claim that human knowledge cannot achieve objectivity in its effort to grasp things (-in-themselves) or beings, is that these things or beings are primordially “indifferent” and

³ For the proximity of skepticism and subjective Idealism in Hegel's Jena period see Vieweg 1999, pp. 171-177.

external to any given relation.⁴ In short, according to Hegel, both skepticism and transcendental/subjective Idealism discard the claim for objectivity on the basis of the assumption that things exist before entering any relations and that true knowledge should be able to grasp things *as such*, before any relation to each other (cf. GW 26,1, p. 127). Because discursive knowledge can only know things through their relation, it cannot be considered as objective. In a word, *relatedness* in ontology means *relativism* in epistemology.⁵

Thus, Hegel's account of skepticism in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* appears to be in complete accordance to the connection between Shine and skepticism in the *Science of Logic*. In the *Lectures* we read:

Skepticism consummated the assumption regarding the subjectivity of all knowledge. Furthermore, it replaced the term *being* by the term *shine* in all knowledge. Skepticism is the ultimate peak [of the philosophical stance that takes all knowledge to be relative – A.K.]: the form of being and the knowledge of being are destroyed completely. Skepticism is philosophy, but a philosophy that either is able or willing to become a system. (TW 19, p. 358, my translation)

The same applies to the critical philosophy of subjective idealism which declares only immediateness as the measure for ultimately objective knowledge, and on the basis of this assumption it declares knowledge of entities that belong to a relation, and, thus, all knowledge as untrue and the knowable entities themselves as appearances.

Hence, there would only be two things that could claim to achieve objective truth. First, the mere, and thus, immediate, identity of the transcendental I, as the subject of knowledge:

The acquaintances with things, gathered from experience, do not measure up to this identity utterly *devoid of determinateness*, since they are in any case findings of a *determinate* content. Insofar as such an unconditioned object is taken to be the absolute and the true object of reason (as the *idea*), acquaintances with things gathered from experience are as a result declared to be the untrue, to be *appearances*. (EPS, p. 89, § 45)

⁴ For this controversy see also Horstmann 1984.

⁵ As Richard D. Winfield puts it: „Although the sphere of being may have relinquished its own form of immediacy, it still retains determinacy, whose content is simply given to the process that mediates it. The residual givenness of content of what is posited is exhibited in how being gets treated when relegated to a realm of “appearance” or mere “phenomena” by ancient skepticism or Kantian transcendental idealism. Although being now counts as merely relative to our experience or to some concealed ground, it does not lose any of its manifold character but simply forfeits its independent being“ (Winfield 2014, pp. 38-39; see also p. 44). For the way that epistemological relativism fits to the overall agenda of the skeptic see Vieweg 2007, pp. 28 ff.

And, secondly, the equally unmediated and immediate object of knowledge, which rests beyond all relations, i.e. beyond all discursivity:

The *thing-in-itself* (and under *thing*, spirit, God are also included) expresses the object insofar as one *abstracts* from everything that it is for consciousness, i.e. from all determinations of sensation as well as from all determinate thoughts of it. (EPS, p. 89, § 44)

In a word, Hegel's ultimate account of skepticism and subjective idealism is that they take as measure of truth entities that *per definitionem* cannot be truly grasped.⁶

2. Essence and Shine

Now I would like to move from Hegel's account and identification of skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism to the concrete reconstruction of the subchapter on Essence and Shine in the *Science of Logic*. The aim is not only the clarification of this part of the book, but at the same time the depiction of the common logical structure of skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism and, to a greater degree, the means through which Hegel thinks he can refute the claims and the epistemological limitations encountered in these philosophical trends.

We must keep in mind that according to Hegel's account both skepticism's and transcendental/subjective idealism's claim regarding the subjectivity or relativity of all knowledge is based on the assumption that objective knowledge should refer to – ontologically possible or/and actual – immediate objects, i.e. to objects that can and should be conceived independently of any relation. In other words, in objects which are identical with or related *only* to themselves.

In particular, the two first sets of conceptual contents that we encounter in the chapter of the *Doctrine of Essence* entitled Shine (SL, pp. 341-353) are: a) the Essential and the Unessential and b) Essence and Shine (cf. SL, p. 342). Since the second set is only a contentual development of the first set, I shall begin with the first.⁷ In what exactly does the logical content of its concepts consist? Let us begin from the logical content of the Essential:

⁶ For Hegel's critical account of the Kantian – but not exclusively Kantian – conception of truth see SL, pp. 507-525.

⁷ In concrete, Essence is a developed form of the Essential and Shine constitutes a developed form of the Unessential.

If, therefore, the absolute was at first determined as being, now it is determined as essence. Cognition cannot in general stop at the manifold of existence; but neither can it stop at being, pure being; immediately one is forced to the reflection that this pure being, this negation of everything finite, presupposes a recollection and a movement which has distilled immediate existence into pure being. Being thus comes to be determined as essence, as a being in which everything determined and finite is negated. So it is simple unity, void of determination [...] (SL, pp. 337-338)

Essence or the Essential is, thus, clearly defined as the “simple unity”, or identity, that is “void of determination”.

On the other hand, Shine, we read, is the exact opposite of Essence. It is the development of the logical content of the “Unessential” (SL, p. 314). It is “an independent side vis-à-vis essence” (SL, pp. 343). Or more specifically, since Essence refers to a mere unity, identity or negativity – the terms in this context mean the same for Hegel – Shine refers to what is conceptually excluded from Essence. Shine refers to being or to immediacy *as such*.

Furthermore, since the whole *Doctrine of Being* was the negative proof for the ontological impossibility of any immediate content or entity, the conceptual content of Shine has the peculiar status of being part of the logical discourse, but as something non-existent – as *Shine*:

Since the unessential no longer has a being, what is left to it of otherness is only the pure moment of non-existence; shine is this immediate non-existence, a non-existence in the determinateness of being, so that it has existence only with reference to another, in its non-existence; it is the non-self-subsistent which exists only in its negation. (SL, pp. 342)⁸

From these two definitions we learn three things, which mark the shift from the *Doctrine of Being* to the *Doctrine of Essence*, i.e. the shift from a whole set of problems – and of logical contents – to another⁹. What we first learn is that on every level of the logical climax of the *Doctrine of Essence* we will encounter couples of logical contents, where one of them will be a variation of identity, mediation or unity – in our case represented from the logical content of Essence – whereas the other one will stand for difference, immediacy or disunity – in our case the logical content of Shine.¹⁰ Furthermore, we learn that because of the radical critique of all

⁸ See also Hackenesch 1987, pp. 213-214.

⁹ For the three different accounts of concepts and the three different models of dialectic (“passing over into other”, “shining in the opposite” and “development”) that correspond to the three books of the *Science of Logic* see EPS, p. 302, § 240 and Kalatzis (forthcoming) - a.

¹⁰ Cf. „Vom Wesen unterscheiden wir das Unwesentliche. Das Seyende überhaupt, aber 2tens hält der Verstand

sorts of logical immediacy, which took place in the *Doctrine of Being*, any immediate logical content has to be considered as non-being, whereas all logical contents referring to unity, mediation and/or identity as being. This is the reason why Essence is here considered as being, whereas Shine as a mere phenomenon or as illusory being or as *shine*.

Still, given the radical critique of all sorts of immediacy, and their demonstration as non-being, Hegel's insistence to re-introduce or to maintain a logical content that stands for immediacy begs the question. In other words, it is anything but clear that in the beginning of the *Doctrine of Essence* we continue to encounter logical contents, such as the Unessential or Shine that are characterized as "Leftovers of Being" (SL, p. 345; see also p. 342). These logical contents, even if declared as non-being or as aporetic persist in the logical discourse of the *Doctrine of Essence*.¹¹ Why is Hegel actually re-introducing logical contents that have proven to be aporetic in the preceding *Doctrine of Being* and, even more puzzling, in the ambivalent status of non-being?

The answer to this question is actually the third fundamental element that we get to know about the whole *Doctrine of Essence* and about the status of all logical contents that it entails. By the same token, it is as well the solution, as we are about to see, to the problematic relation between Essence and Shine and to the shift to the next, less aporetic logical constellation of Reflection. – We must not forget, the reappearance of immediate being as shine or as non-being is a part of the argument for the explication of the logical inconsistency of the logical set of Essence and Shine and of the need for the introduction of a new, less problematic set of conceptual contents. Along with this, we should bear in mind that in Hegel's understanding Essence and Shine do not exemplify just an individual onto-logical problem, but that the eventual demonstration of their aporetic logical character amounts to the explication of the common aporias and of the implicit fallacious premise, on the basis of which skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism operate and declare all knowledge as relative.

This third element, now, consists in the broadening of the way that immediacy is understood by Hegel. In other words, the logical breakthrough of the *Doctrine of Being*,

fest das Wesen, und das Unwesentliche ist auf der andern Seite, es ist auch, es bezieht sich auf sich: es *gibt* freilich Unwesentliches aber es ist um das wahrhafte Seyn zu thun, nicht um solches schlechtes Seyn: Das Wesen ist Insichseyn, Identität mit sich, durch Negation der Negation überhaupt, das Wesen ist also Bewegung, Prozeß, es ist das Scheinen in sich selbst, der Schein ist Unterschiedenes, zunächst Seyendes aber herabgesetzt zu einem Ideellen.“ (GW 23,2, p. 747).

¹¹ As Michael Theunissen puts it: „An die Stelle des Scheins der Vorgegebenheit tritt, kurz und abkürzend gesagt, die Vorgegebenheit des Scheins.“ (Theunissen 1980, p. 337).

which conditions all further logical development, and, thus, the *Doctrine of Essence* as a whole, is that immediacy does not just refer to logical contents that explicitly stand for immediacy, difference, and independence. “Immediacy” refers to all logical contents that are *in fact* immediate insofar they do not refer explicitly to their opposite logical content. This means that logical contents that stand for identity, unity, and/or mediation are also immediate if their logical content does not explicitly entail its logical counterpart. In one word, mediation isolated from immediacy is immediate as well.

In the case of the logical set of Essence and Shine this means that the logical content of Essence would be itself something immediate and, thus, a non-being, if it would not refer explicitly to its opposite, to Shine. So it is only now that we can understand why Hegel speaks about and operates with “Leftovers of Being”, i.e. with logical contents that stand for immediacy, even if immediacy along with all its variations has been shown to be aporetic, or non-being. In other words, the logical content of Essence refers necessarily in an explicit – even if still problematic (see Kalatzis (forthcoming) - b) – way to its opposite, and this is the reason why immediacy or Shine cannot be abandoned once and for all. The logical content of Essence, which consists in identity, mediation and/or unity makes *sense*, according to Hegel, only in reference to its opposite, i.e. to Shine which stands for difference, immediacy and disunity.

An Essence without its Shine, to put it bluntly, would not be an Essence at all; and *conversely* we cannot speak about Shine or about phenomena without operating with a concept of *being*, i.e. without the concept of an actually existing Essence. Furthermore, the critique of immediacy and of self-subsisting difference in the *Doctrine of Being* did not aim at the dismissal of *all* difference, immediacy and/or disunity, but only at the ones that are articulated independently of any identity, mediation and/or unity. In a word: Essence *is* Shine and Shine is *Essence*, because they belong necessarily in one logical context, outside of which they would be deprived of meaning – and of being.

Moreover, if we would actually try to think Essence independently of Shine and *vice versa*, then we would arrive at Hegel’s dialectical paradox (see EPS, pp. 128-133, §§ 81-82): both of them would show themselves to be the opposite of what their original logical content was. Essence – deprived of its reference to something immediate or different – would show *itself* to be immediate and *different* to the conceptual content that stands explicitly for difference itself.

Conversely, the conceptual content of the Unessential or of Shine, even if examined independently from its opposite, Essence, refers explicitly to its opposite; to something that is not Shine, but Being; to something, whose conceptual content consists in identity, mediation and unity: to Essence. Hence, even if the original conceptual content of Shine appeared to be solely the conceptual content of difference, immediacy and disunity, when we try to actually think of it as an isolated and self-standing logical content, it shows itself, by means of its negative reference to its opposite, to function as a conceptual unifier,¹² which brings *unity* to logical contents. But this would mean that it would no longer correspond to its original logical content, but to the logical content that *only* Essence was supposed to have in the first place.¹³ Thus, in order to avoid this paradox of logical instability, we will have to think Essence and Shine not as independent conceptual contents, but as mutually constitutive parts of a broader logical content, of Reflection. Consequently, Essence and Shine show themselves to be – in this specific sense – one and the same logical content, i.e. they are parts of one and the same unity of meaning:

The determinateness that shine is in essence is, therefore, infinite determinateness; it is only the negative which coincides with itself and hence a determinateness that, as determinateness, is self-subsistence and not determined. – Contrariwise, the self-subsistence, as self-referring immediacy, equally is just determinateness and moment, negativity solely referring to itself. – This negativity which is identical with immediacy, and thus the immediacy which is identical with negativity, is essence. Shine is, therefore, essence itself, but essence in a determinateness, in such a way, however, that the determinateness is only a moment, and the essence is the shining of itself within itself. (SL, p. 345)¹⁴

3. The speculative solution

Now, the proof that Essence and Shine (or Identity and Difference, Mediation and Immediacy and/or Unity and Disunity) can only be conceived in their explicit, immanent and primordial

¹² By conceptual unifier I mean a concept, the content of which refers to another conceptual content in a necessary way and, consequently, unifies itself with it. In this context unification does not mean identification but necessary reference.

¹³ Cf. “Das Mittelbare ist ein Gesetztes” (GW 23,1, p. 92) and “Die momente des reinen Scheinens sind die der allgemeinen abstracten Denkbestimmungen, die isoliert genommen werden vom Verstande, und so sind die gedanken Cathegorien des abstracten verstandes. In so fern sie momente des wesens sind, gelten sie als die allgemeinen wesentlichen Denkbestimmungen, und grund gesetze des Denkens, die aber das Gegentheil und falsch sind, weil sie nur die Momente des Scheinens ausser ihrer Wahrheit nehmen, welche sie sind unwahr durch die Isolirung” (GW 23,2, p. 612).

¹⁴ Cf. “Man scheidet das Wesentliche vom Unwesentlichen, das Wesen bezieht sich auf das Sein überhaupt, das unwesentliche ist das äußerliche, das wohl ist, aber das nicht wesentlich ist. Dem Wesen ist das Unwesentliche nicht unwesentlich es ist nur durch seine negative Beziehung auf das Sein. Es ist in sich, also ist es gegen ein anderes. Dem Wesen ist der Schein wesentlich” (GW 23,2, p. 498).

unity¹⁵ has some far-reaching implications: it uncovers the common false premise upon which both skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism operated, and based their rejection of the possibility of objective knowledge.¹⁶

As we have seen, both skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism postulated that true knowledge should only be knowledge of immediate things, i.e. of things cognized independently of any relation. Thus, since all discursive knowledge is knowledge of things in and/or through relations, they thought themselves justified to discard all knowledge as relative or as subjective knowledge.

The unfounded presupposition of this claim, though, consists in the assumption that unity and self-subsistence (or mediation and immediacy) are onto-logically possible as separated. But the impossibility of this claim is what we have just encountered in the dialectic of Shine. Essence and Shine cannot be thought as independent of each other. Unity or Identity or Mediation cannot be isolated from Disunity, Difference and Immediacy.

Thus, the claim of skepticism and of transcendental/subjective idealism regarding the relativism and subjectivity of all knowledge is based on a premise that shows itself to be aporetic. Most importantly, the explication of the falsity of this premise opens the ground for a knowledge that is objective: it is not only that discursive knowledge is a knowledge through relations, but that the eventual object of knowledge is as well an object that can exist *only* within relations.¹⁷

Hegel's solution consists, hence, in the shift of our understanding regarding the manifoldness of reality and the alleged subjective cognitive act of its unification. For Hegel, this unification of the manifold is not an external and, thus, a subjective act, but rather what exists from the very beginning. *Being as such* has to be grasped as the unity of the Essence and its Shine, as an implicit unity that is waiting¹⁸ to be grasped and made explicit¹⁹.

¹⁵ On Hegel's dialectical argument, which I call the argument of logical instability, which should lead the acceptance that contradictory logical contents are not self standing but only parts of a broader logical content, which consists in their explicit unity see EPS, p. 286, § 214.

¹⁶ See also Winfield 2012, pp. 159-160.

¹⁷ Of course, this argument stands if one, as Hegel does, presupposes the identity of thought and reality.

¹⁸ The term "waiting" is not to be understood in a metaphorical way. Hegel's understanding of reality consists in a double teleological scheme, epistemological and ontological. According to this scheme reality is predetermined to be grasped, and the human intellect predetermined to grasp it.

¹⁹ For a critical reading of Hegel's argument see Theunissen 1980, pp. 377-382. Despite its thoroughness and subtlety, it seems that Theunissen fails to discern and account for Hegel's systematic use of the scheme of implicit and explicit logical relations. Furthermore, it appears that Theunissen does not distinguish in his reading between negation as privation and negation as differentiation.

Manifoldness is not an external given, but just the other, necessary side of unity²⁰. To put it differently, relations are not states independent to beings that determine them in an external way, as skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism believe to be the case. On the contrary, beings (or “things”) can only be beings within a relation.²¹ Hence, the shift that allows the overcoming of skepticism and the shift from the transcendental/subjective to the objective idealism is to think the relation of beings as self-relation, or as one, primordially unified object of knowledge. In Hegel’s words:

But at the same time skepticism allowed a manifold of determinations for its shine, or rather the latter turned out to have the full richness of the world for its content. Likewise for the appearance of idealism: it encompassed the full range of these manifold determinacies. So, the shine of skepticism and the appearance of idealism do immediately have a manifold of determination. This content, therefore, might well have no being as foundation, no thing or thing-in-itself; for itself, it remains as it is; it is simply transposed from being into shine, so that the latter has within itself those manifold determinacies that exist immediately, each an other to the other. The shine is thus itself something immediately determined. It can have this or that content; but whatever content it has, it has not posited it but possesses it immediately. Idealism, whether Leibnizian, Kantian, Fichtean, or in any other form, has not gone further than skepticism in this: it has not advanced beyond being as determinateness. (SL, p. 343)²²

Seen from this perspective, skepticism with its skeptical method (see TW 19, pp. 359-360), and transcendental/ subjective idealism (see GW 21, p. 40), with its re-discovery of the antinomies of pure reason are to be positioned in the pre-history of speculative philosophy; as philosophies that pointed to the elements that should be overcome, so that objective knowledge can be attained.

Of course, when inspected more closely, both skepticism and transcendental/subjective idealism could object that they are being measured on a philosophical measure external to them, and from a philosophical standpoint that they would never adopt. Furthermore, they could claim that it is not them that operate with unfounded assumptions, but speculative philosophy itself. Both of these topics, though, would equally require not one, but a series of

²⁰ Cf. “der *Schein* ist dem Wesen wesentlich”, quoted in Theunissen 1980, p. 352. Michael Theunissen is also right when he writes: “Aber die Auflösung des Scheins des daseinsmäßigen Unmittelbarkeit welche die Idealisten und Skeptizisten, damit ihren geheimen Positivismus verratend, dem Schein andichten, soll die »wahre« Unmittelbarkeit *dieses Scheins* zutage fördern. Was ist daran »wahr«? Daß er *ist*.” (Theunissen 1980, p. 346)

²¹ As Richard D. Winfield puts it: „Essence is in virtue of reflecting itself, being through what it posits.“ (Winfield 2012, p. 161)

²² For a concise account of Hegel’s argumentative strategy against skepticism (and, ultimately, subjective idealism) see Forster 1989, pp. 171-180.

different articles.

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GW: Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1968 ff.): *Gesammelte Werke*. In Verbindung mit der Deutschen Forschungs-gemeinschaft. Ed. by the Nordrhein-Westfälischen (1968-1995: Rheinisch-Westfälischen) Akademie der Wissenschaft. Hamburg: Meiner.

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