# Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit

Few literature materials in the history of philosophical thought are as challenging and yet as interesting as Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Since its publication approximately 210 years ago, the *phenomenology* has had extensive influence on various fields of thought, including literary theory, political science, theology, sociology, and philosophy. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been a source of muse for some individuals and the annoyingly wrong-headed festivity of everything catastrophic in modern thought for others. Yet amidst all these, what remains unchanging is that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* requires and indeed has spurred solicitous conversers who must combine Hegel’s personal qualities – at once philosophically focused and rigorous, as well as comprehensive and imaginative. This paper addresses the most interesting and significant denigrations of 1844 as advanced by Marx in his 1844’s ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’ of the position Hegel takes in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this regard, I will incorporate Chris Arthur’s 1986 analysis of Marx critique on Hegel’s work and take it as conclusive, applying his work to inform and structure my engagement with Marx’s work. Analyzing responses made by various scholars such as Gillian Rose and John Maguire to the work done by Marx has been instrumental in confirming and clarifying personal thoughts regarding the issue.

In his analysis, Chris Arthur detects three ‘errors,’ which Marx identifies in the book *Phenomenology of Spirit* by Hegel.They include:

1. The decline of man to self-cognizance;
2. The acknowledgement of objectivity with schism; and
3. The identification of objectification with alienation.

(II) Has resulted from (I), and vice-versa. From (II), (III) is reasoned. This paper will forego the analysis of the decline of man to self-cognizance and focus on the other two identified mistakes.

## The Acknowledgement of Objectivity with Schism

One of the main challenges adorning Hegel’s interpretation is that ‘cognizance as just cognizance is slighted not by alienated objectivity but by objectivity in itself as such*.* As it is evident, Marx intends to maintain the notion of disillusionment and accord it a more traditionally determinate sense. In this regard, he concurs with Hegel that human beings [cognizance] should be affronted by alienated objectivity and therefore find ways and means of overcoming that disillusionment. Nonetheless, for Marx what qualifies objectivity disillusions in as much as it is alienated is something specific regarding the manner in which the objectivity under discussion is experienced by human beings or has come to be. This ‘strange’ quality is not a product of the nature of objectivity.

Marx’s’ observations are accurate: as such, cognizance is offended by objectivity. It comes upon elements or objects as known or unknown. The advancement of p*henomenology* articulates the removal of such independence. Therefore, in the introductory part, the author writes, “….cognizance will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of the semblance of being fraught with something unfamiliar…” (599-600). If, as it appears rational, we are able to acknowledge that element with which cognizance is fraught as objectivity as such, therefore in this instance, it appears that for Hegel, objectivity is expressed through cognizance as unfamiliar or other, and therefore an element through which it is in itself alienated. The challenge resulting from this observation is that Marx thus makes an inaccurate conclusion from this observation regarding Hegel’s writing. It is not correct to make assumptions that just because objectivity is felt at the outset, as *fremd* does not indicate that removing the impression of being fraught with an object unfamiliar necessitates the removal of objectivity as such.

In his view, Marx does not believe in eliminating the objects from which people are alienated as a proper response. He argues that it is rather to overcome the disillusionment and thus attain a good relationship with the said objects. For instance, earlier in his writings, Marx pinpoints how people have become alienated from the land owing to private ownership; the objective now being restoration of intimate relationships to the land in an objective and rational manner. Therefore, why is it that Hegel avoids treating disillusionment in a similar manner? The only observable dissimilarity between Marx and Hegel is that Marx – at least with regard to the example of the land – makes an assumption that a non-alienated state heralds the disillusionment, such that the normal state of coherence and harmony appears to be the genuine and proper one. Marx would thus consider that as far as Hegel holds cognizance beginning off being overwrought with unfamiliar elements, this translates to Hegel considering this disillusionment to be intrinsically in objectivity as such. Nonetheless, even though Hegel’s introduction may indicate that objectivity is the challenge, it does not show that this is the case.

Nevertheless, it may still be that Hegel prefers an eliminative answer. The argument made in this paper holds that treating disillusionment and objectivity as initially coincident does not automatically suggest that disillusionment and objectivity are certainly conterminous. It is important to address the process through which cognizance negates the impression of being fraught with an unfamiliar element. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* this takes the form of sufficient cognition forms, resulting in the formation of ‘absolute knowledge.’ It appears perfectly understandable: elements will appear unfamiliar specifically to the point that they are not reasonably understood by people. Subsequently, to manage this disillusionment effectively is not to obliterate elements or advocate for withdrawal from engagement. Rather, it is to have better comprehension and understanding of them, and such understanding and knowledge sustains the objectivity of that which is understood and known, cut of its original strangeness.

Analyzed from this perspective, the project of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not warrant the charge and criticism which Marx advanced against it; that of being inimical to objectivity. Therefore, this begs the question, why does Marx harbor a different opinion?

Marx maintains his criticism against Hegel by taking into consideration the first paragraph of the last chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* writings. Marx transliterates nearly all bar the initial two sentences of the said paragraph, repeating them, at times more than once in his analysis. The primary challenge with the approach used by Marx is that he assumes Hegel here to be giving people a general explanation of how cognizance results in a close relationship with objectivity. In the actual sense, however, Hegel is making a consideration of how cognizance relates to theistic objectivity, which was the main focal point in the chapter before the last, which dealt with religion. Therefore, when Hegel explains about the overcoming of the object of cognizance, he precisely denotes the element of religious cognizance – for instance, God. The attempt by Marx to evaluate what Hegel writes here as exemplifying his final position regarding objectivity itself is ill advised. Chris Arthur takes after Marx in this: he asserts that it summarizes the conclusions of Hegel’s entire writing, translating to the conclusions of the whole *Phenomenology of Spirit,* when in the real sense all Hegel is writing about is a summary of the conclusions of the previous chapter.

Overall, there is evidently something in Hegel’s semantics here, which appears to have a close relationship with his measured position regarding objectivity. Particularly, Hegel’s doggedness that, as rightfully outlined by Marx, ‘the object of cognizance is nothing else but self-cognizance should be applicable in many different spheres and not only in matters to do with religion. Marx palpably takes Hegel’s insistence on the significance of the character of absolute knowledge as self-cognizance, self-knowledge to uncover a hidden solipsism. Cognizance, affronted by ‘objectivity as such,’ would normally prefer taking refuge within its personal interiority. However, taking such a position is to misinterpret Hegel’s idealism. With regard to the matter concerning knowledge of objects, his assertions regarding self-cognizance need be construed as his vow to abide by the Kantian principle, which states “reason has insight only into that which it produces in accordance with a plan of its own” In understanding an element, cognizance is self-conscious, for it understands clearly, what it has constructed of the element.

## The Relationship between Objectification and Alienation

This argument follows from the previous analysis although the correlation is not without an extra principle. If objectivity is intrinsically unfamiliar to cognizance, then it follows that any objectification, which the spirit/cognizance partakes in, will essentially lead to objects that are not accustomed to it. It is mandatory that the spirit/cognizance objectify itself for purposes of having itself as an object for itself. Therefore, cognizance/spirit is inescapably unfamiliarized.

### Unfamiliaration

There are numerous reasons why Marx bolts on so strongly against arguments fronted by Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. One of the reasons is his use of the phrase *Entäusserung* to denote what is supposed to be cognizance-unfamiliarating self-objectification. It appears that Marx is without a doubt certain that the *Entäusserung* process leads to a reality through which cognizance – which produced it – is alienated. Subsequently, a majority of the commentators and translators of Marx’s work do not have doubts regarding the translations of the German phrase *Entäusserung* to mean ‘unfamiliaration. Upon following them in this context, the appropriateness of criticisms fronted by Marx here becomes difficult to overlook. However, when going through Hegel’s’ work written in English, there is a different emergent expression. Numerous experts in translations who have looked into *Phenomenology of Spirit* are inclined towards preferring a more neutral phrase ‘externalization’ and looking into what the author of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is explicating in this way significantly reduces the force of the charge made by Marx.

One of the numerous benefits of Chris Arthur’s argument is his awareness to this issue regarding the translation. He contends that the term *Entäusserung* need be interpreted as unfamiliaration and not ‘externalization’ as proposed by many other scholars, thus neutralizing the critique advanced by Marx. However, is he justified to do so? The following two reasons will prove that he is not.

First, the phrase ‘unfamiliaration’ has the root term ‘unfamiliar’ which when translated to German reads *fremd* and it resonates well with the core of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as aforementioned. The *fremd* phrase may additionally be extracted through related and ‘strange’ phrases, similar to the German phrase *Entfremdung,* which translates to disillusionment. With the apparent similarity between strange/unfamiliar’ family and *fremd* together with its close associates, it appears obstructive, if not confusing to advocate for ‘unfamiliaration’ as the preferred translation for the German term *Entäusserung.*

Second, Chris Arthur’s decisions regarding this issue are mainly led by the desire to give meaning to Marx’s phrase. Marx uses the term *Entäusserung* in an obviously bad sense, therefore assisting to validate its conversion through unfamiliaration. Nonetheless, this unfavorable application is enabled through Marx’s use of the phrase *Vergegenständlichung* to denote a positive ‘externalization.’ Contrastingly, Hegel only applies *Entäusserung.* Therefore, through the insistence on the use of a similar translation for the two writers, what Chris Arthur is doing is finagling onto Hegel an unfavorable and biased reading of *Entäusserung.* This biased construal makes sense regarding Marx’s views since he can differentiate between *Entäusserung –* bad and *Vergegenständlichung –* good. My argument is that it is not accurate to give to Hegel’s application of the term *Entäusserung* the meanings the phrase has for Marx. It is important to note that by establishing so, it is not to intentionally refute that *Entäusserung* contains negative meanings – the act of renunciation and relinquishment which Chris Arthur uses – but merely to stress that is additionally has more favorable meanings and therefore for Hegel might be more ambivalent or neutral term as opposed to Marx.

### Unfamiliriation

The main passage that Marx depends on in confirming his attacks that Hegel has identified unfamiliaration and objectification in the sentence provided as the sixth extract in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The importance of the passage for Marx is seen both by the numerous the passage has been transcribed and his assertions, which follow the sentences contained in pages 388. 11-14; 391. 26-28; and 392. 19-22. He notes that it is a compilation of all delusions of speculation (392). The translations in early writing of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* read differently. It reads, “Consequently, this other period is additionally present in the process…and taken back into itself this objectivity and unfamiliaration, and is thus comfortable in its other being as such”

In this passage, the message that Hegel transmits is that God – the religious object – is what it has done, such that it can regain its element as itself. In this context, Marx’s other is not familiar; being comfortable in the other denotes being comfortable in objects that are not familiar; therefore cognizance, in this regard remains unfamiliarated – and understands it. Through understanding and coming to terms with it, cognizance overcomes its unfamiliaration.

Therefore Marx argues, a self-conscious individual, having already superseded and acknowledged the religious/spiritual world as *Selbstentäußerung –* self unfamiliaration proceeds on to regurgitate it in this *entäußerten* – unfamiliarated form and offers it as his actual existence, re-establishes it and claims to be comfortable in his dual being as such. The main source of Hegel’s mere apparent criticism or his false positivism is contained within this statement…so reason is at ease [comfortable] in unreason as unreason. According to Chris Arthur, Hegel, thus, has no answer or solution to give other than just the virtual-movement, which conserves the sphere of disillusionment as a period. As he rightfully asserts, cognizance is at ease with itself in its difference given as such. At the same time, cognizance reigns over its disillusionment from the world by understanding and owning its work, while at the same time conserving that ‘world’ of disillusionment in its entire propinquity of its difference.

The criticisms fronted by Marx here are based on an implied equation of ‘unfamiliar’ with ‘other.’ Chris Arthur additionally seems to treat the two phrases to mean the same thing, which begs the question, is it appropriate? In my own assessment, it does not mean the same thing. To derive a better understanding, it is of paramount importance to review Hegel’s writing from the introductory section to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as exemplified in the following quote: “In pressing forward to its true existence, cognizance will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of the semblance of being fraught with something unfamiliar, with what is some sort of ‘other’ (89). Therefore, from the quote above, there is logic in the two terms being used to mean the same thing, which therefore appears to support the interpretation of Arthur and Marx. Despite acknowledging this, it is important to note the following important observations regarding the highlighted texts. First, the argument presented by Hegel clearly states that what are unfamiliar are other, and not the reverse – other being unfamiliar. Second, what is not familiar can be said to be other, or objects, which are some sorts of other, and not the other being as such.

Given that this is the case as presented in the previous paragraphs, a person may propose that the passage quoted above from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* gives an allowance for the likelihood of non-unfamiliar object forms of otherness. This dint is ascertained by looking at other passages of equal significance. First, Hegel has many times used the term *Entfremdung –* which he appends in the preface of the book while trying to assert that unfamiliaration and otherness, and the capacity to overcome unfamiliaration are matters to be taken with utmost seriousness. *Anderssein und der Entfremdung* denotes unfamiliaration and otherness while he uses the German phrase *Anderssein und der Entfremdung to* denoteovercoming of unfamiliaration. As applied in other sections of the book, unfamiliaration and otherness are used jointly, although it is important to note that human beings are only able to overcome unfamiliaration. The two principles are not co-extensive.

### History

The other main point that informs my contestation of the alleged identification of unfamiliaration and objectification is that the criticisms have not factored in the historical perspective of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit.* In his analysis, Marx has totally overlooked the aspect of addressing the methods in which spirit/cognizance gradually manages the non-familiar character of its numerous external effects. Chris Arthur replicates the same neglect in his remodeling of Marx’s assessment, and while giving a better-expressed version of the position of Marx, it will assist in part if his assertions are put into consideration.

Chris Arthur explains that for knowing itself as what it is, cognizance must express itself in a form different from itself, and thus it must present itself in a different form –the form of otherness. This repudiation of itself is consequently annulled in return, when cognizance identifies itself within the main shapes. The expression of spirit/cognizance need be, it appears, might adopt many forms. People may additionally indicate that it would require more time – historical time – for cognizance and spirit to go on through the sequence of externalizations enough for its, nevertheless, in the long run, substandard self-expression. Nevertheless, what this analogy fails to say is that any indication that the sequences of externalizations is any way developing. It is exactly this character of cognizance’ journey, which Chris Arthur’s presentation overlooks. For purposes of surety and proof, Chris Arthur further observes that at the heart of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* masses of existing historical elements, including real alienated circles of existence are delivered within the author’s framework.

A critical review of both Marx and Arthur indicates that both writers are compelled to overlook historicism based on their existence that Hegel’s objectification is unfamiliarization. On the other hand, given that Hegel seems to stress that cognizance attains ever more sufficient expressions of itself in historical events counts against the assertions that he has to view objectification in the same light as unfamiliaration.

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