

Is Imagination Fundamental? on the Issue of the Genesis of Subjectivity



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Abstract: *Based on the issue of the genesis of subjectivity, the authors of the article turn to the Hegelian model, which captures the two-sided and fundamentally changeable nature of the relationship between subject and object. The article substantiates the idea that imagination, being considered outside of the context of psychologization or reduction of it only to the reproductive aspect, is a source of binary differences fundamental to philosophical thought. Following Hegel's dialectical method, the authors note that the presence of the image already indicates the difference between the two dimensions of consciousness and knowledge. The image expresses the primary truth of substance and, at the same time, the way it is subjectively given. There is a differentiation of the subjective moment of Being with the realization of fantasy. All formations of Spirit are interpretations of the figurative series, primal scenes, the analog of which was studied by classical psychoanalysis. From this perspective, the genesis of such subjective modes as consciousness, self-consciousness and mind inevitably includes symbolization, interpretation of the "Self" images, cognizing, willing and acting in various situations and contexts. The study of the concepts developed by Hegel, Kennouche, Verene and Merleau-Ponty allows concluding about two arguments in favor of the fundamentality of imagination. This refers, on the one hand, to subjective imagination that generates meanings and the need for their interpretation and, on the other hand, to the initial form of synthesis, on the basis of which, the subject and object of cognition, formations of consciousness and types of knowledge characteristic of them are further distinguished. The image, being the first meeting of the concrete and universal, is capable of setting the plot of one or another form of subjectivity.*

Keywords: *subject, subjectivity, imagination, Spirit, object, phenomenology.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Before answering the question concerning the fundamental nature of imagination, posed in the title of the article, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual context, for which it will matter. Certainly, we must not look for such conditions in the tradition, which has subordinated imagination to reason, making it one of the faculties at the disposal of consciousness. Following D.F. Verene, we will call such a tradition reflective [1]. The task of reflection and, in

principle, of the critical method is to establish a correspondence between knowledge and ability. The former in this case is questioned and the latter becomes the criterion for resolving this issue. The positive solution will give one the right to assert the presence of their knowledge and the negative one will require re-registration of the object: the original state of things after examination will be the object of one's faith, the desired state of things, but not the actual one.

Such a strict division into true and false requires a certain stable criterion, guarantee from the subject – they must be able to achieve this truth by virtue of the constructive features of their cognitive apparatus. However, the subject alone would not have any need to be distinguished as such. In this case, they would be a divine subject who observes itself at once in its perfection or a substance, in relation to which everything else is only its modes. For them, there would be nothing fundamentally different, alien, anything on the other side. It is the emergence of the alien, the discernment of the objective sense, that gives the situation its acuteness: both subject and object can fail equally – they can be sources both of the truth and lie. In a changing reality, in a reality that can turn out to be just a combination of ideas held on by specific illusions, a certain alliance of the subject and object, their forever substantiated connection, ensuring the correspondence of knowledge and subject, cognitive abilities and contents of cognition, is necessary. Reflective thought, conducting a critical assessment of this connection, requires peace and stability. It can find them by resorting to the self-identical and timeless self cogito, recognizing the limitations of knowledge (because things-in-themselves or knowledge equal to the divine (Leibniz's intuitive knowledge) are not available) and, at the same time, declaring that there is an example of knowledge to be looked up to, the way to which is associated with the right method.

As D.F. Verene notes, reflective philosophy operates on a clear distinction between the internal and external to thought, on isolated self and opposing reality¹. The authors, whose positions we refer to in this article, resist this trend each in their own way, coinciding in the way of overcoming it. For instance, Merleau-Ponty polemicalizes with science, seeking to fit the world into a categorical grid, but in fact – only distancing itself from the world. Verene considers modern philosophy as a whole burdened by the reflective way of thinking, coming back from Kant [1]. Verene, in turn, relies on Hegel. Hegel – is the title of author adequate for the one, attaining Absolute Knowledge? – considering his special

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¹ Verene emphasizes the reflective approach to philosophy in opposition to the speculative one [1]



understanding of the very meaning of subjectivity and the essence of genuine philosophical knowledge devotes an entire chapter of his "Phenomenology" to overcoming the reflective position.

It is not so important whether we follow Hegel or Merleau-Ponty in our thinking – one general question of what constitutes this indestructible alliance of truth between subject and object will be the key one. In our opinion, their strategy can be described as follows, paraphrasing one well-known motto: "Back to the very sources of the genesis of the subject and object!", which means here – "Back to the imagination!"

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The article discusses the logic of substantiating the image as a necessary connecting link between the subject and substance. "The Phenomenology of Spirit" [2] was the basic supporting text for our consideration, as well as a comprehensive study of it presented by Heidegger's lectures, in which the philosopher in detail studied the role of mediating middle [3]. The works of D.F. Verene [1, 4, 5], which develop a unique vision of the development of speculative philosophy, were of exceptional importance to us. Based on its principles, Verene demonstrates how the memory and imagination of Spirit allow comprehending the very process of individuation, the formation of subjectivity. As A. Kennouche [6], whose argument is studied in the article, notes, imagination is fundamentalized by Hegel from the very beginning of the phenomenological process. To clarify the connection between the symbolic and the imaginary, we used the model of the sign by C.S. Peirce [7] and also established the need for the introduction of an intermediate, connecting and active link between consciousness and the world based on the material of the later concept of vision by Merleau-Ponty [8]. Vision in the concept of the latter begins to play the same role as imagination (or representation) in Hegel's dialectical model in Verene's interpretation.

III. RESULT ANALYSIS

A. Imagination between substance and the subject

The first step that one should pay attention to is that Hegel understands the subject in the context of movement and distances himself from the classical logic of assigning any predicates to the subject [6]. It is pure negativity, the ability to set in motion. "Phenomenology" narrates that the subject is what awaits one at the end of the path, that it makes sense to talk about it only in the vein of a detailed attempt (or practice) of its self-justification, recognition and self-establishing in the other. This is abundantly evidenced by many passages from the beginning of "Phenomenology".

The general idea of "Phenomenology" is to understand substance and subject in an inextricable way and its purpose is to find the form of the whole for them. It is referred to as "form of simplicity which knows its object as itself"; both moments of substance of Being (in-itself and for-itself) "no longer fall apart into the antithesis of being and knowing, but remain in the simple oneness of knowing; they are the True in the form of the True, and their difference is only the difference of content" [2].

The substance itself, taken in isolation from the subject, represents empty positivity, a silent world devoid of meaning. Only because it is the subject, it can discover its truths². It is in this sense that Heidegger characterizes the phenomenology of Spirit as "the self-exposition of reason", self-referencing process, self-discovery of the truth [3].

From the very beginning, Hegel speaks about the lack of self-identity of the subject, of restored equality, which captures itself in otherness [9]. In other words, the subject-object relationship arises in the original difference introduced by the subject but, paradoxically as it may sound, in an independent way. "Self-formation" as a formulation of the subject principle presupposes the presence of a certain force preceding a particular mode of consciousness or self-consciousness and, if not power, the preceding process. This process must be located on the pre-subjective level and to grasp its essence, we must adhere to the main formula of "Phenomenology" – "substance as the subject".

Arab Kennouche notes that "The power of self-differentiation is where Hegel unconsciously places the first moments of imagination" [6]. The initial perspective, from which the phenomenological process begins, is precisely the indistinguishability of consciousness and its subject. In order for "self-formation" to begin, the substance must be animated, the principle of change must be introduced into it, life must begin.

Hegel is often interpreted as a philosopher of the Concept and in the framework of this interpretation, the principle of reflection, which in fact is the first action of the subject, would look self-sufficient. In confirmation of this, it is worth noting that Hegel really speaks of reflection-into-self when he tries to determine the subjective moment of Being. However, we will be attentive to the place, in which Hegel's reasoning is located: the starting levels of phenomenology refer to the experience when consciousness is unformed and there is no background of abilities (Searle), on which there is a meta-ability – consciousness uniting and controlling them. Nor it is an issue of later forms as self-consciousness, reason and Absolute subject. The certainty of consciousness for oneself (self-consciousness) is a project for Hegel that can begin in the sphere of the supersensual – as a result of the grandiose discovery of the lack of self-sufficiency of a rational attitude (inherent to Understanding) to the world.

The only consciousness that exists here is the consciousness of the reader, the one who decided to follow the path of "Phenomenology". However, even they need to obtain this experience in themselves: start with the complete indistinguishability of consciousness and its object. Such an experiment would not be possible in the element of thinking alone, because any definition would take into account the distinction already made between the subject and object. However, we have at our disposal the memory of those cases when consciousness is lost or is not yet available as such.

Perhaps, other material will come in handy to clarify this

² Which partly resembles the Heidegger's move: man comprehends what Being is able to reveal to him. This ancient Greek attitude was replaced by a technical attitude, in which man forces Being to be only the realization of his/her own plans, ambitions and designs.

point, this elusive but present observer. The mirror stage, as Lacan describes it, does not imply a present subject; a child sees the reflection in the mirror that they make their own – their body has yet to be assembled and the image is yet to be possessed.

From a philosophical point of view, we are talking about being-in-itself, whose indistinguishability was poetically described by Sartre as flabby mass. Since Hegel begins with the axiom "substance – subject", he must find a way to

distinguish between both of them, some argument. According to A. Kennouche, such an argument becomes a significant image.

"Imagination becomes a necessary tool to disrupt the tyranny of the object: the projection of life into the thing makes it move within itself and by the same token, the form is executed as if it were its own" [6], he writes, noting the liberating role of imagination. It is possible to think of the variability of substance, to open a spiritual dimension that is not limited only to matter, that is, to leave the boundaries of matter (dissolving matters) only through "imagined projection of life" [6]³. In other words, imagination itself is the ability that animates the substance. The latter becomes detectable only through the essential form and the first activity of the subject is its awareness.

On the side of consciousness, which itself is still blind concerning its capabilities and premises, there is only an image that carries a certain meaning in itself. This image is that separating film, membrane, which serves as a checkpoint between the subject and substance. However, what is this imaginary subject, if we do not take into account the psychoanalytic interpretation proposed in the aforementioned example?

Throughout the entire division "Consciousness", one is dealing with the definition of Thing and only Thing. However, each time it is given to one not by itself, but in the tension of two moments: in-itself and for-itself. The connection between them is established through a significant image and the difference between the moments, the shaping of consciousness is the difference in the ways of working with this image. Even at the very first stage, in sensual certainty, the simplest certainty – "this" – is an image, weakly dissected and vague, in which only general definitions of space and time are comprehensible. Only one thing is essential: the image makes one meditate and the projection of life, about which Kennouche writes, is nothing more than the first guess about the essence of things. The status itself – a hunch, an assumption – indicates the difference between two dimensions: signifying consciousness and signified subject, the inequality of knowledge and its subject.

Here, the attempt is obvious to set, to prescribe the imagination where previously, for example, in Heidegger's interpretation of "Phenomenology", the mediating forces of sense certainty, perception and understanding were located⁴. Imagination is revealed to be a great ability, a passive process preceding the active genesis of meaning. Thus, the "Self" arising at the end of the division "Consciousness" is not just a hypothesis or providence of Spirit (inherent in its

development by a necessary moment), but a fantasy about the "Self". The task of each stage is the interpretation of this fantasy, it's understanding. The intuition of the absolute – a single object of perception, conscious of the "Self" – was originally given symbolically, through universal representations [9]. If this is an advantage of this move – reading the division "Consciousness" through the original concept of imagination – then its weakness is its redundancy, since one always teeters on the brink, explaining obscure transitions in phenomenological development through the introduction of imaginary figures or the power of imagination.

Kennouche's words stating that "consciousness becomes imagined itself for the sake of projection" [6] make sense in the light of the late Hegel's statement that for the first time, one is faced with the universal in their imagination.

Later, in the "Encyclopedia", Hegel openly calls imagination cogitative and ascribes to it an important role in the generalization and creation of universal ideas⁵. Sensual data remain single, concrete and acquire universal significance only in images. Hegel gives similar definitions to imagination and fantasy, considering the latter an integral element of the former. In fantasy, the question of truth has not yet been raised, but it does suggest the context in which the question will be raised. In other words, it sets the plot.

B. Symbolic significance of the primal scene in the genesis of the subject

D.F. Verene develops this consideration on a completely different level. In his opinion, an image that assumes two aspects of the substance of Being (in-itself and for-itself) has different meanings at all stages of phenomenological development [5]. If we gave the mirror stage as an example to illustrate the work of the imagination, then another psychoanalytic concept is suitable here for an example. It is the first fantasy, a certain dream promising the fulfillment of a desire or hiding it behind a series of obstacles and fears.

C.G. Jung characterizes spiritual activity through "firstly, the principle of spontaneous movement and activity; secondly, the spontaneous capacity to produce images independently of sense perception; and thirdly, the autonomous and sovereign manipulation of these images" [10]. This combination of definitions is not accidental: we find the cup foaming forth at the end of "Phenomenology". This image is given here to indicate the many sources of Spirit and, therefore, attempts to reconcile substance and subject [5]. "Phenomenology" itself is the journey of Spirit through a gallery, in the portraits of which it recognizes itself. Each of its stops is an attempt to recall itself anew, to identify its spiritual essence in the midst of new circumstances.

The plot of each new dream has a regulatory significance: there is a certain fantasy that concentrates spiritual forces (Verene uses the term "primal scene" here) [5]). Recollection, according to Hegel, helps to regain oneself, to comprehend the model of Self hidden in the image (that is, to become an unhappy consciousness, a representative of Tierreich, etc.), a special arrangement of the subject in relation to the object. In

⁵ And vice versa, the literate is essentially a symbolizing fantasy – [9]

³ Jung [1996, 203-204] tells us how important the principle of life and mental activity is for establishing the meaning of Spiritual.

⁴ See Heidegger's detailed discussion of "mediating middle": [3]

other words, every dream and fantasy should be interpreted by consciousness.

At the end of the journey, deliverance from the nightmare will be granted, as for Spirit was the story of its oblivion. Spirit recalls itself (recollection). Recollection is not a reproduction of an image, but necessarily its rethinking, "internalizing of the image" [1]. This is the process of the self-formation of Spirit, the organization of images into a system – a certain totality.

These thoughts, of course, are incomplete without a discussion of the further rationalization of the image

production. "The Phenomenology of Spirit" in this perspective is just an example of the painstaking work of restoring a single consciousness, its detailed attempt to achieve the universal; it would be equally impossible both without the power of imagination and without conceiving all interconnections, relations between consciousness and its object, self-consciousness and consciousness, etc.

The scene demonstrating this relationship has a symbolic meaning. The series of images itself only makes a hint, sets a discussion plot, a problematic background. This, in turn, shows its dependence on the order of interpretation. What does recognition of the symbolism of a single image mean, for example, the famous images of the servant and the master?

Based on the definition of symbol proposed by C.S. Peirce, we can state that there is a connection between the two signs, which seems certain but, at the same time, not clarified [7]. The servant can be interpreted as a sign or rather a symbol of unfree self-consciousness, a symbolization of the position of an ancient slave (in the interpretation of Kojève). This immediately raises the question of the criterion for the correlation of two elements within the framework of any of the proposed interpretations.

Slave and self-consciousness are two elements of the sign, representamen and object, signified and signifier, the relationship between which is neither obvious nor binding in itself. Without the third element – interpretant – these phenomena have no connection with each other and, nevertheless, are always given in experience as inextricably linked. Their interconnectedness is due to the special experience that an interpreter possesses simply because of their cultural background. The tradition of recreating the symbolic relationship between two things is deeply imprinted in them. The work of the imagination here is not to fill one with images necessary for the contemplation of objectivity, but to extend the very physicality ("servant") to the disembodied ("self-consciousness"), to draw the world of things into the world of meanings.

Peirce developed a ternary sign scheme, which he considered universally applicable to the analytics of a wide variety of processes and phenomena [11]. His most famous classification of signs includes signals, indexes and symbols. In contrast to signals and indexes, in symbols, the distance between the sign and the object signified by it is preserved. The law, by which this connection is effected, which at the same time brings together and distances, is not expressed in the symbol itself. One assimilates it in the process of using, communicating, growing into the culture. The interpreter's position, which seems to be self-sufficient, is a derivative. Here, when the symbol is powerless to tell its story, imagination in alliance with memory comes to the rescue. A symbolic link is entirely dependent on the primal scene.

As applied to the purpose of this work, Merleau-Ponty's hypothesis set forth in "Eye and Mind" can be understood as follows. The symbolic community is woven on the basis of once "seen together". Through vision, the connection between the man and the world is restored. Merleau-Ponty, of course, writes not about imagination, but about vision. Nevertheless, the work of vision within the framework of his concept is close to what was said earlier about the work of imagination. The following passage quite fully expresses that: "Seeing <...> is the means given me for being absent from myself, for being present from within at the fission of Being only at the end of which do I close up into myself" [8]. Next, Hegel's idea about self-developing substance comprehending itself is repeated: "There is no break at all in this circuit; it is impossible to say that here nature ends and the human being or expression begins. It is, then, silent Being that itself comes to show forth its own meaning" [8]. Merleau-Ponty does not start with the formula "substance – subject"; the starting position is different: a connection has yet to be created and it is a vision (or rather, a body that both sees and is seen) that makes the world an extension of one's physicality. The primal scene, which serves as the basis for the imaginative representation in the memory, is based precisely on such a vision, "which knows everything and which we do not make, for it makes itself in us" [8].

IV. CONCLUSION

The discussion about the subject, arising in philosophical works in the 20th and at the turn of the 21st century, has its roots in the philosophy of consciousness. From Descartes to Hegel, an incredible leap was made by the new European thought – a leap of faith. From ego cogito to the Absolute Spirit, consciousness and subject not only maintained their connection but expanded and deepened it. This connection persisted even in the most extreme versions of its interpretation when one of the poles was sacrificed to the other. From the emphasis on the divine substance (with which the subject is associated and the thesis of individual consciousness plays a minimal role) to the complete annihilation of the subject in simplified materialistic interpretations of consciousness. Today, in the light of what one knows (or recognizes as knowledge) about the formation of personality and about consciousness as a function of the brain, the conceptual and debatable productivity of understanding self-conscious subjectivity as a construct is becoming apparent. Interestingly, the key to this process is presented by the person who, on the contrary, is considered to have established an identical, "stable" Subject as a certain initial condition. Our arguments were directed against this established point of view – Hegel writes about the restoration of the whole and about the subject as a negative moment in the dialectical process, thereby offering a dynamic scheme of how subjectivity is built and collapsed, how it goes through different stages, without possessing objective unity.

We have found that the process of imagination is crucial for understanding how subjectivity is constructed. The essential idea is that imagination, unlike the will of the 19th-century concepts (which also explained the source of subjectivity), is not so much inherently subjective as it is situated between the

subject and substance, consciousness and world, belonging equally to both. Moreover, it has not received (at least not yet) an equally one-sided understanding, which mainly comes down to the question of whether the will is free and whether it exists as such. Our research contributes to the problematization of the sources of consciousness and subjectivity, focusing on the original and heuristically significant direction of the search.

The initial statement about the world, which seeks to explain what the subject is and what is in front of it (objectum – "what is in front of me") – this is how the role of imagination presented in these concepts should be defined. How much does this voice say? Isn't it, by necessity, indistinct or only prompting to hear certain words and see what one wants to see? The third and final mention of psychoanalysis in our work will be connected with the issue of the relationship between the image and desire, the clarification of which requires further research also touching on the issues of interpretation and symbolic being.

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