

Unlike Kant who described human consciousness in a universal and formal way, Hegel demonstrated consciousness as a movement that consists of different stages, with each particular stage resulting from the process of negating a previous stage of consciousness itself. In searching for the concrete truth, or the certainty of our knowledge of the world, we tend to start out thinking the certainty of the object lies in the object in sense-certainty, in the immediacy of the object. This is then proven to be false, since our consciousness relates to the object as the negation of our consciousness, which is mediation between consciousness and its negation. Hegel argues that any given moment of consciousness is negated in the subsequent moments of consciousness. Thus, the truth cannot be captured in one moment of consciousness, but it lies in the whole movement of consciousness through negation. In this paper, we will focus on examining how consciousness first relates to the object in sense-certainty, and how the nature of this relationship is then negated, which contributes to the truth of next stage of consciousness.

Sense-certainty is the initial stage of consciousness, in which we apprehend the world through our senses as how it is present to us without any conceptualization or comprehension of the object, in other words, our knowledge of the object “cannot be anything else but immediate”¹. As we want to know the object as it is i.e. the essence of the object, our consciousness attributes the certainty to the object, as it is presented to us. Thus, when our consciousness first encounter an object, for example a table, we only apprehend it, or know it as “this”, not “table”,

¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1977), p. 58

“brown” or “hard”, because any perceptions of “this” based on our senses or any attempt to comprehend “this” may deceive us or lead to the distortion of the immediacy. Our consciousness initially believes that if we abstract from the object any assumptions or judgments about the object and simplify it to its most basic form of pure immediacy, then we would be certain of it. This makes sense-certainty seem to be “the richest kind of knowledge” or “the truest knowledge” (58).

On the other hand, according to Hegel, consciousness “knows objects in their antithesis to itself, and itself in antithesis to them” (15). When consciousness wants to know something, that something is an object and thus a “complete otherness” (23) to consciousness. This is especially in sense-certainty that consciousness C1, in the beginning, encounters an object O1 which we call “this”, as the other, something different and external from consciousness C1, the “I”. As we, or our consciousness knows “this” as distinct from the “I” i.e. know the object through the negation of “I”, neither “this” nor “I” is immediate in sense-certainty, but mediated through each other. “I” have certainty through “this”, and “this” is certain through “I”. Thus, in sense-certainty, we would never know the actual pure immediacy, but only “an instance of it” (59). The “pure immediacy” we claim, or desire to know is an abstraction of an already mediated relationship of our consciousness with the object, of which is the negation of consciousness itself. Therefore, sense-certainty also turns out to be the “most abstract and poorest truth” (58), as the immediacy of the world that it tries to know and thinks to be concrete is only an abstract immediacy, “the immediacy which barely is”, or the mediation itself (29).

Hegel explains more specifically the mediation of consciousness with its negation in sense-certainty, starting with the separation of object “This” as “Here” and “Now”, the most basic, immediate and abstract determination of “This”. For example, we might say “Now is Night”, but when we sleep and wake up to see that “Now” is Day and no longer Night, “Now” is already negated. Every moment in time can be a “Now”, yet each moment of “Now” is different from one another by virtue of negation of the previous moment of “Now”. In other words, “Now” is a universal, yet each “Now” negates the universal. Thus, the universality consists of its negation, and the universal, to Hegel is nothing but a movement of negation of particular moments of consciousness. The object which has become the universal is “no longer what the object was supposed essentially to be for sense-certainty” (61), but something that negates our consciousness or that we do not know at C1. This means that the object “Now” do not have the unity in itself, but it is my consciousness, the subject “I” that holds all the different moments of “Now” together. This makes our consciousness think that certainty no longer lies in the object, but in the “I”. However, the “I” at any given moment of consciousness is not the same “I” in the next moment, even though we still call ourselves “I” at all moments of consciousness. For example, at a moment of “Now” we say “I am Turkish”, but at another moment of “Now” we can say “I am a student”. All these “Is” are all “I” at different moments of “Now”, yet are all different and the “I” at any moment of consciousness negates the “I” at the previous moment. The “I” is then also a universal, which consists of its own negation. With this, consciousness in turn attributes to the object that holds all the “Is” in different moments of consciousness together. Therefore, the unity of “I” lies in the relationship or mediation between the “I” and the object by the negation of “I” through the object’s presence, and the unity of the object also lies in the relationship or mediation between the “I” and the object by the negation of the object through

“I”. The truth of sense-certainty, lies “neither in the object nor the I” (62), but in the mediation of consciousness and the object as the former’s negation. Therefore, we cannot know the object in a pure and immediate way, but we can only know the object through the mediation of our consciousness with its negation. The relationship of C1 with the object O1 as the negation of C1 and the universal that emerges from this mediation then becomes the object of the next moment of consciousness, C2. At C2, we know the object as something we cannot know in C1 i.e. the negation of C1. This dialectical movement applies for all moments of consciousness, meaning that mediation between each moment of consciousness and its negation become the object of the next moment of consciousness.

Through the dialectic movement, Hegel showed that in searching for the concrete truth by framing it as an end result or something fixed in one moment, our consciousness only finds an abstraction of universality, and is negated by itself in the next moment of consciousness. However, the fact that the knowledge of the object at one moment of consciousness are always negated in the next moment does not mean we can simply dismiss them as wrong and thus has nothing to do with the truth, because dismissing the negative in the previous moment means disregarding its contribution to the positive, more concrete knowledge in the next moment. Thus, the truth, for Hegel, is “the whole” (11), or the very process of mediation through negation of consciousness from one moment to another. The positive knowledge and negative knowledge, though opposite to each other, mutually construct each other and the whole movement of traversing moments of consciousness constitutes its truth.