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## **A CRITIQUE OF G.W.F HEGEL ON THE CONCEPT OF THE MIND**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The concept of the mind is central to the enterprise of metaphysics especially philosophy of the mind. The mind is a non-physical phenomenon that represents the mental component of man as a rational being having ontological status. This paper, therefore, examines Hegel's conception of the mind as a non-material aspect of a being. It adopts qualitative research method which is basically descriptive. It anchors and hinges on textual analysis. It further dwells on hermeneutic phenomenology in its exploration and interpretation of Hegelian metaphysics vis-à-vis the inward workings of the human mind. It concludes that Hegel's idea of the mind is indeed an authentic and plausible perspective of the nature and character of the mind. It recommends a reconstruction and adaptation of Hegelian concept of the mind into the general framework of contemporary metaphysics.

**Keywords:** *Critique, Hegel, Concept, Mind*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The main focus of this paper is to attempt a philosophical appraisal of the nature of the mind using the matrix of Hegel's absolute idealism. Suffice it to say that Hegel's account of the mental operations of the mind as an immaterial entity which distinct from the finite body is a salient theme in Cognitive Psychology, Philosophy of the Mind, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Philosophical Anthropology, amongst others. It is, however, germane to stress that Hegel's analysis and understanding of the mind is colored conditioned, and shaped to a large extent by his commitment and firm belief in idealism-a metaphysical orientation or persuasion to which he belongs and professes.

#### **THE NATURE OF THE MIND**

The nature and character of the mind constitutes the heart and soul of Hegel's metaphysical idealism. Recall that idealism gives primacy to the mind over and above matter. Thus, knowledge of sensible objects in the external world depends largely, according to the idealists including Hegel, on the structure of the human mind. Hegel's view of the mind is that it is ultimately real, and of course, spiritual. An in-depth insight into the nature of the mind evokes certain mind-boggling questions that seem quite perplexing. They are: Is mind or matter supreme in the scheme of things or is one the product of the other? Is mind an illusion? Is there any other world outside of this world of sense to which can be attributed a higher degree of reality? (Idowu 2011:73). The totality of nature or complex network of reality is mind-dependent. The mind is a spiritual substance that is an embodiment of both matter and spirit in the Hegelian estimation. Another fundamental question that lurks behind our general understanding of the mind is: Do objects exist only in the minds? (Ilonu 2002:39). The foregoing question revolves around the major assumption of idealism as a philosophical school of thought, in which case, the mind is regarded as a mental or spiritual substance that is ultimately real, and contains ideas. Thus, everything exists in the mind and can be known only through the rational structure of the mind. According to Hegel, like other idealists, sensible objects which are physical phenomena in the external world exist and, or depend the mind as the harbinger of rational thought-a mental faculty that enhances or enables cognition through the power of reason using the intellect as a platform.

Furthermore, another vexing question that begs for an answer is thus: How is the mind related to the body? (Nnadozie 2011:46). Hegel, as a hardcore and staunch idealist, claims that all things exist in the mind as ideas. Nothing exists without the mind noticing or thinking about it. The individual mind is a part of the universal mind which is technically referred to as the Absolute Spirit, Absolute Mind, God, etc., in Hegelian metaphysical idealism.

**Njoku (2016:33-34) adumbrates that:**

(Hegel's) Absolute idealism is the claim that reality is rational, conceptual totality, that reality is an absolute mind, or the mind of God, an integrated and total structure of conceptual truths... For Hegel, reality is absolute mind, consisting of the totality of conceptual truth, which reveals itself in all areas of human experience and knowledge, from logic to physics to biology, from history and politics to art, religion, and philosophy.

In what sense does Hegel believes there is an intimate relationship between mind and nature? (Lawhead 2002:377). For Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Mind*, only the mind exists. For him, mind or spirit and matter are not separate entities. Matter, he says, is nothing but an expression of the spirit (Elechi 2014:157). This presupposes that the body is an expression of the mind.

**Attempting to paint a vivid picture of the human mind within the domain of Hegel's Absolute Idealism, Mordi (2009:46) writes thus:**

...life, mentality, subjectivity, spirit, or consciousness is intrinsic to the nature of reality as a whole. Rather than objects having their existence within individual minds (subjective idealism), Hegel's absolute idealism claims that Mind is inherent in the objects of the world.

Hegel explains that there is an intimacy between the mind and reality-in-itself. To him, "who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back" (Hegel *Reason in History* 1953:13). For Hegel (1967:398):

(There) is no corresponding between the mind and something external to it. Instead, it is a perfect harmony between (1) the object as it is present to the mind (2) the way the mind conceptualizes it. This view is based on the conviction that reality in itself is rational thought, and that its rationality is one in which our minds participate. When reason has completed its historical task, no incomprehensible mysteries will remain, for everything can be penetrated by the power of reason.

Here, it is interesting to note the affinity, interplay or nexus between two interrelated streams of consciousness or philosophical currents namely, idealism and rationalism. While the former emphasizes the primacy or supremacy of the mind in the cognitive process of knowing, the latter stresses the unrestrained power of reason to acquiring, obtaining and apprehending genuine knowledge of the natural world. It is also important to note that it is reason that enable finite individual minds to participate in the cosmic consciousness of infinite universal mind. Thus, it is the said participation in the divine mind that provides direction in the form of beam light or searchlight to human reason to enable it penetrate the window of reality or to discover the secrets and mysteries, which are enigmatic, enveloping nature. This underscores the role of the mind vis-à-vis reason in the Hegelian structure of rational thought which finds expression in his Absolute Idealism. In Hegel's parlance:

The self must learn that the true absolute is not a personal God but is absolute mind, the totality of truth, which manifests itself dialectically in finite minds in human history. The self must also learn that a free human being should be a slave to no one, not even to God....The finite human spirit will then become conscious of its union with the absolute, and despite its limitations in time and (space) it will recognize itself as participating in the ongoing movement of absolute spirit as it reveals itself in human history (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 2018:114).

There is indeed a symbiotic relationship between the Absolute Spirit or universal mind and the human spirit or individual minds. This occurs in the form of participation or mystical union where the self tends to be in union or harmony with the cosmic i.e. the orderly cosmos by way of attunement with the divine or infinite. The Absolute mind, which is the universal mind, is the totality of truth which manifests or unfolds itself in the dialectical and progressive movement of human history whose goal is to achieve fulfillment or realization of the Absolute Spirit. Hence, the mind is the basis of ultimate reality having self-consciousness.

### **HEGEL ON OBJECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS**

Another key theme that characterizes Hegel's metaphysical idealism is objective consciousness. Recall that other idealists such as Berkeley, Fichte, Schelling, etc., present a subjectivist picture of idealism. Hence, subjective idealism. Against this backdrop Hegel develops and presents an objectivist orientation to idealism and christened it *Absolute Idealism*. This variant of idealism holds that it is the Absolute Spirit, or Absolute Mind, or Universal Mind that determines the course of world history. In this regard, historical events are moments in the dialectical process of history. The striking question that sets the stage and serves as our point of departure for our discussion of objective consciousness in Hegel's idealism consists in: How does the Absolute, working in and through human history, bring human beings to consciousness of their freedom as spiritual beings (Okoh 1998:86). Hegel's response in his own formulation is that, "two elements enter into history" (*Spirit* 2018:461). The first is reason, the rational concept of freedom which is the Absolute, the totality of rational truth, is seeking to unfold, reveal, externalize, manifest, and express to finite spirit (Okereke and Iloanya 2011:97). The second is human passion. The Absolute has therefore primarily only one human element to work with in bringing about in finite minds a consciousness of their freedom: This element is human desire and passion (Ajodo 2014:61-62). The desires of human beings, their drive to gain satisfaction of their selfish wants, their passions, their private personal aims – these and many others are the most effective springs of human action, says Hegel (Maduabuchi 2014:52). Hegel expresses his deep commitment to the indispensability or centrality of objective consciousness thus:

The spirit of revealed religion has not yet overcome its consciousness as such, or, what amounts to the same thing, its actual self-consciousness is not the object of its consciousness. Spirit itself and the moments differentiated in it generally belong to representational thinking and the form of objectivity. The *content* of the representational thinking is absolute spirit, and the sole remaining issue is that of subletting this mere form, or instead, because the form belongs to *consciousness as such*, its truth must have already resulted from the shapes consciousness has assumed (*Spirit* 2018:454).

Hegel's understanding of objective consciousness is that self-consciousness is meaningful to the extent that it promotes the pursuit of objective and absolute freedom on the part of the individual. In point of fact, objective consciousness is synonymous with self-consciousness. What is more, Hegel further avers that:

This is the movement of *consciousness*, and in that movement, consciousness is the totality of its moments. – consciousness must likewise conduct itself towards the object according to the totality of its determinations and have come to grips with the object according to each of those determinations. This totality of its determinations makes the *object in itself* into a spiritual essence, and for consciousness, it becomes this in truth through the grasping of each of its singular determinations as a determination of the self, or through the spiritual conduct (*Spirit* 2018:454:455). Consciousness is the sum total of the moments in the dialectical process. It is the conformity between thought and reality. Thus, objective consciousness, for Hegel, is the realization of perfect freedom which is the overall goal of the Absolute Spirit – as the terminal point in the dialectical movement of world history having the universal mind as its driving force or springboard. In his *Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel (1967:684) opines that:

The Absolute, then, in its own self-complete reality appears as the constitutive principle of experience. The experience here is the self-consciousness of Absolute Spirit; it appears to itself in all its objects. Since all the modes of finitude hitherto considered (consciousness, self-consciousness, etc) are embraced in its single totality, it may use each and all of these various modes as the media through and in which to appear. When it appears in and

through these modes of finitude we have the attitude of Religion. Since these modes, as we saw, differ, the religious attitude differs; and accordingly we have various types of forms of religion.... A form of appearance or self-manifestation of the Absolute is therefore demanded which will reveal Absolute Spirit adequately to itself as it essentially is in itself.

The logical interpretation of the above passage is that objective self-consciousness is the product of the appearance or self-manifestation of the Absolute Spirit or Absolute Mind. An individual mind becomes self-conscious when it attains the state of self—awareness, thereby, achieving absolute freedom from mental slavery. He further posits that:

The appearance of Absolute Spirit as a principle constituting on its own account a distinctive stage of experience is at once a demand of the preceding development and a condition of making experience self-complete. Finite or socialized spiritual existence is at its best incapable of establishing the truth that “Spirit is the only reality”, for the more finite spirit approximates to the state of claiming to be self-contained the more it is dependent on universal self-consciousness. A trans-finite or Absolute Spiritual Being as such is thus necessary to realize and sustain the fullness of meaning which finite spirit possesses (Hegel *Mind* 1967:683).

Hegel being an uncompromising and unrepentant idealist of the Absolute idealist persuasion or orientation believes that mind, ideas or spirit exist and are objectively real. Finite beings or spirits appropriate or approximate to a higher reality—an objective reality—Absolute Spirit, Absolute Mind, Universal Mind, or God. His understanding of an objective mind or consciousness rests on the assumption that only minds or spirit exist as objective realities. In sum, objective consciousness is the movement of the dialectical process towards absolute freedom.

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## 2. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined Hegel’s conceptualization of the mind. Thus, as an idealist, he argues that the totality of reality which finds expression in sensible objects that inhere in the external world can be subsumed in, and is an embodiment of, the mind. Hence, reality exists only in the mind. Hegel is an absolute idealist of a sort.

In conclusion, a case is made that Hegel’s notion of the mind represents his creative ingenuity, novelty, and originality as one of history’s greatest thinkers whose life and ideas have had profound influence on the intellectual dispositions of contemporary thinkers. His idea of the mind, no doubt, is authentic and plausible.

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