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IRONIC CONSCIOUSNESS AS "EVIL": A HEGELIAN ANALYSIS CONSIDERING *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT* AND SCHLEGEL'S *LUCINDE*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Hegel's critique of Romantic irony. For Hegel, ironic consciousness, while recognizing the objectivity of the norm, feels free from it, believing itself above all conditions. The article relates irony to 'conscience' and to the concept of the 'beautiful soul' in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It compares Hegel's and Friedrich Schlegel's perspectives on the beautiful soul, noting similarities in their critique of vanity and hypocrisy. However, a fundamental difference stands out: the Hegelian conscience of action can confess its failings and seek reconciliation, while the Schlegelian perspective consists of a perseverance in the one-sidedness of opinion and an inability to recognize or forgive others. Schlegelian irony, according to Hegel, reduces reality to a subjective appearance, and the self isolates itself in an abstract "evil".

Keywords: subjectivity; hypocrisy; irony; beautiful soul; conscience

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LA CONCIENCIA IRÓNICA COMO "MAL": UN ANÁLISIS HEGELIANO A LA LUZ DE LA *FENOMENOLOGÍA DEL ESPÍRITU* Y *LUCINDE* DE SCHLEGEL

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora la crítica de Hegel a la ironía romántica. Para Hegel, la conciencia irónica, aunque reconoce la objetividad de la norma, se siente libre de ella, creyéndose por encima de cualquier condición. El artículo relaciona la ironía con la "buena conciencia" y el concepto de "alma bella" de su *Fenomenología del espíritu.* Compara las perspectivas de Hegel y Friedrich Schlegel sobre el alma bella, señalando coincidencias en la crítica a la vanidad y la hipocresía. Sin embargo, se destaca una diferencia fundamental: la conciencia de la acción hegeliana es capaz de confesar sus fallas y buscar la reconciliación, mientras que la perspectiva schlegeliana consiste en la perseverancia en la unilateralidad de la opinión y la incapacidad de reconocimiento mutuo o perdón. La ironía Schlegeliana, según Hegel, reduce la realidad a una apariencia subjetiva y el yo se aísla en un "mal" abstracto.

Palabras clave: subjetividad; hipocresía; ironía; alma bella; buena conciencia

1. Introduction

In observation (f), Hegel (2008) argues that Romantic irony is the extreme case of a subjectivity that conceives itself as the sole criterion for establishing what is good and bad, just and unjust, true and false. According to the author, the ironic consciousness recognizes the objectivity of a norm, be it a positive law or a moral maxim, but considers itself free from its determination: the ironist perceives that his existence is above any condition. The German thinker then argues that the ironist, although seemingly condemned to enjoy himself in solitude, could be part of a community whose members boast of always acting with good intentions, for they themselves could be hypocrites who reinterpret their objective acts through new justifications. Hegel thus links ironic consciousness with the good conscience and the beautiful soul:

> In my *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 605ff. [Miller trans., pp. 397ff.] I have shown how this absolute self-complacency does not rest in a solitary worship of itself but may form a community whose bond and substance consist in, e.g., mutual assurances of conscientiousness and good intentions, the enjoyment of this mutual purity, but above all the refreshment derived from the glory of this self-knowledge and self-expression, from the glory of fostering and cherishing this experience. I have shown also how what has been called a 'beautiful soul'—that still nobler type of subjectivism which empties the objective of all content and fades away through its lack of actuality—is, like other shapes, a variety [of subjectivism] related to the stage we are considering here. What is said here may be compared with the entire section (C), 'Conscience', in the *Phenomenology*, especially the part dealing with the transition to a higher stage—a stage, however, there different in character (Hegel, 2008, p. 218).

Hegel considers Friedrich Schlegel's work to represent the perspective of Romantic irony in its most complete form. Someone might then think that Schlegel's thought is an exposition of the beautiful soul's position. However, the author of *Lucinde* criticizes beautiful subjectivity in his "Allegory of Impudence" ("*Allegorie der Frechheit*"; Schlegel, 1971) and his analysis is ostensibly similar to that outlined in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The question this article attempts to answer concerns the underlying difference between Hegel's critique of the beautiful soul and Schlegel's analysis of beautiful subjectivity: Why does Hegel

consider ironic consciousness to be included as a moment of the figure of Spirit known as the beautiful soul, if the author of *Lucinde* criticizes beautiful subjectivity in terms that are similar to Hegel's? To achieve this objective, a brief discussion of the chapter in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* entitled "Conscience" (*Das Gewissen*) is necessary. Subsequently, Friedrich Schlegel's perspective on the Beautiful Soul in his novel *Lucinde* will be analysed. Comparing the positions of both thinkers regarding the aforementioned figure of the Spirit will allow us to establish points of convergence and divergence between them. Finally, it will be observed that the discrepancies in their analyses of the beautiful subjectivity lead to the explanation and substantiation of the Hegelian perspective on the profile of the ironist.

2. Analysis of the *Gewissen* chapter from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

According to Hegel (1977, §§ 632-654, pp. 383-397), "Conscience" (*Gewissen*) knows itself freed from the law, since the latter has a particular, conditioned content, while the perspective that conscience has of duty is universal. Duty is only that which the consciousness declares to others as such. Consequently, duty only exists in language. That is to say, an action is only good if its subjects expresses their conviction about the motives that induced them to perform it; the effective reality of duty is only realized in the linguistic manifestation of the intention before others. It is conscience that declares to act with good intentions and upholds the goodness of its actions. Then, conscience presents this immediate truth (the certainty of being the determination of all that is given) as the power to establish what is desirable according to its own judgment. Finally, conscience conceives itself as being above any determination because it deems itself as the absolute negative foundation of what is given; or, what amounts to the same thing, as the divine foundation of all that exists. In this way, conscience itself is the foundation of its own normativity.

The difference between consciousness of abstract duty and self-consciousness is dissolved into conscience's certainty of itself, in such a way that a man acts according to his convictions and relies on his good intentions to explain the goal which motivates him to act. The motive, the means, and the objective of an action are reduced to the individual who performs it. But any action

contains a series of particularities with which self-consciousness must deal. The essential is to perceive oneself as good and to express it; therefore, the only important activity of self-consciousness is the discourse about good intentions. Then, Hegel (1977) states that "here [...] we see self-consciousness withdrawn into its innermost being, for which all externality as such has vanished—withdrawn into the contemplation of the 'I' = 'I', in which this 'I' is the whole essentiality and existence" (§ 657, p. 398). The individual's action is reduced to discourses about good intentions, because its essence is perceiving itself as a conscience and expressing it before the others.

Conscience does not go beyond the immediate unity of itself. It is the *beautiful soul*, which cannot objectify itself in a determined work. On the one hand, conscience is pure knowing of itself, lacking content and determination. On the other hand, the self is a determined individual. When it is stated that conscience posits itself as content of duty, it is established firstly that, in the enunciation of motives which drive it to act, it presents itself as this abstract, empty, and universal knowing of self. But secondly, when the individual is ready to act, the true content of one's purpose is the knowledge of oneself as a concrete singularity, affected by passions and inclinations that have nothing to do with the motives stated above. Man thus faces the opposition between the abstract universality of duty and the singular "self", which is for itself. As an individual, man faces the opposition between that which he is for itself and the image that the others have of him.

2.1 Consciousness that judges and consciousness of the action

The conflict unleashed within the beautiful soul externalizes itself in the link sustained between the consciousness of duty and the concrete singularity of the individual. The singular "for itself" establishes that duty is an instance sublated by the individual's self-affirmation in the action. The fulfilment of duty implies that the individual negates duty itself as an abstraction to materially concretize it, admitting that there are differences between the abstract universality and the particular concretion. On the contrary, consciousness of duty states the essentiality of duty before the knowing of the self. Thus, the concrete determinations of the individual are irrelevant contingencies vis-à-vis the universality of duty. On one hand, consciousness of duty considers that

individual consciousness is the incarnation of evil, because it is an individuality that acknowledges the existence of a norm, but choses not to respect it in order to follow its own impulses. On the other hand, the individual consciousness considers that the consciousness of duty is hypocritical, as it evades action to avoid the conflict between the particularities of a singular existence and the abstract universality of duty. However, the negative to the fulfilment of duty entails the non-compliance of a norm; then, the consciousness of duty accuses the others of the very same infraction committed by it.

The first movement seeks to reveal the "evil" inherent in the consciousness that knows only itself. The latter states that what is called *evil* by the consciousness of duty is praxis, according to its inner law. It means that the consciousness that knows itself acts according to what it considers duty. But the supposed respect for the personal interpretation of duty is not recognized by the other members of the community; therefore, it is unequal to "conscience," since the latter is the "in-itself" of well-intentioned discourse acknowledged by members of the community (that is, "being-for-others"). Then, evil consciousness assumes that its inner law is not universally recognized and confesses its "evil" character. Hegel points out that true conscience does not persist in its opposition to the universal, but it assumes its subsumption within itself. Therefore, real conscience seeks harmony between action and universally acknowledged duty: "But *actual* conscience is not this persistence in a knowing and willing that opposes itself to the universal; on the contrary, the universal is the element of its existence, and its language declares its action to be an *acknowledged* duty" (Hegel, 1977, § 662, p. 402).

But the unmasking of hypocrisy cannot be achieved solely through criticism of evil consciousness. The only concern of evil consciousness is maintaining coherence between the universal and the particular. Instead of considering the applicability of the norm, the particular determinations of an action are regarded in relation to the abstract universality of duty. This stance prevents the consciousness of duty from performing any action other than judging the actions of others. For when it comes to acting, it fails to make its representation of the action align with the concrete determinations imposed by actual reality. The hypocrisy of the consciousness of duty is thus revealed. It boasts of maintaining its purity, but this purity is achieved through inaction. It merely declares its good

intentions and conceives of this declaration as if it were an action in itself. Its respect for duty is confined exclusively to the discursive realm.

A concrete action can be divided into two aspects: a universal aspect, which refers to duty as the foundation that legitimizes it; and a particular aspect, constituted by the interest of the individual performing it. Hegel, aware of this situation, focuses on the personal motives that encourage the performance of an action. Action has a concrete existence limited in space and time. The act, particularized in a specific time and place, is a reflection of an individual interiority. Its existence is a particularity established by the individual's specific negation. From the individual's perspective, the particular form refers to the intentions that motivate the concrete subject of the action. In the specific case of the judging consciousness (*das beurteilende Bewußtsein*), its act is the judgment it makes about the actions of the consciousness that acts. Therefore, this action is not motivated by duty as an end in itself, but by determinations consistent with the individual form of the judging consciousness, that is to say, by the vanity of one who thinks they know the right course of action in every situation. The judging consciousness is "vile" because it perpetuates the imbalance between the abstract universality of duty and the particularities of its own individuality. It is also hypocritical, for it has maintained in front of the acting consciousness that one must only act in accordance with duty. However, its pronouncements about right action conceal, in their background, a particular intention that does not pertain to respect for the inner law, but rather to affections attributable to its own individual determination.

2.2 The hard heart, forgiveness, and reconciliation

The consciousness of action observes that it is like the judging consciousness. It hopes that the latter will acknowledge they are both in the same situation: "Perceiving this identity and giving utterance to it, he confesses this to the other, and equally expects that the other, having in fact put himself on the same level, will also respond in words in which he will give utterance to this identity with him, and expects that this mutual recognition will now exist in fact" (Hegel, 1977, §666, p. 405). However, Hegel states that the confession of the consciousness of action is not followed by the confession of the judging

consciousness. The judging consciousness refuses to be called hypocritical and vile; it considers itself different from the consciousness of action. It maintains its position and its equality with itself, like a beautiful soul.

The beautiful soul opposes the universal to hold its equality with itself, for it has resigned to the communication with the other. The beautiful subjectivity, as a judging consciousness, particularizes itself, turns to its interiority and denies that it is evil and hypocrite like the consciousness of action. In this way, it fails to recognize that it is equal to others. It is an individual who rejects community with the other, in order to preserve himself as a singularity. The judging consciousness falls into a contradiction when it rejects the confession of the consciousness of action, for it repudiates the latter's discursive justification of its actions. But, at the same time, it ignores that its own certainty does not come from the actions performed, but from the good intentions expressed in its own discourse. At the same time, the absence of equality between both instances prevents the consciousness of action from being able to discursively account for its actions and thus access community with the other.

The judging consciousness can avoid a sterile and inactive life if it accepts the confession of the consciousness of action and forgives it. For the judging consciousness to be conscious of its identity with the consciousness of action, it is necessary that it put aside its unilateral judgment. As already established above, the judging consciousness criticizes the hypocrisy and evilness of the consciousness of action. The judging consciousness holds this criticism from the position of who considers that every action must be done in conformity with the universality of duty. This position excludes the side of the singularity referred to the doing of the consciousness of action. When the judging consciousness renounces the unilaterality of its judgments, it intuits itself into the judged consciousness. It observes that the consciousness of action is the concrete singularity in which the universal conscious is manifested.

The judging consciousness forgives the consciousness of action because it renounces to the abstract identity with itself. The reconciliation between both entails the mutual recognition of individual determination. The two moments of consciousness—the judging consciousness and the consciousness of action—, perceive that they are participants of the spiritual universality. The mutual acknowledgement of the participation in this totality is the absolute Spirit:

> The word of reconciliation is the *objectively* existent Spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself *qua universal* essence, in its opposite, in the pure knowledge of itself *qua* absolutely self-contained and exclusive *individuality—a reciprocal* recognition which is *absolute* Spirit (Hegel, 1977, § 670, p. 408).

Thus, sublation of one-sided points of view only happens with reconciliation (*Versöhnung*), because then it reaches the synthesis between the universal duty and the concrete subject of agency.

3. The critical perspective of the beautiful soul in *Lucinde*

The novel *Lucinde*, by Friedrich Schlegel (1971) describes the love story between Julius and Lucinde. The reflections of the two lovers about their emotional relationship transcend the limits of their singularity, to enter the realm of speculation regarding the human condition in general, and love in particular. The author rejects the distinction between flesh and spirit, in a way that establishes that love is the harmony between the two moments. Thus, Julius declares that, in his relationship with Lucinde, he has found a happiness that he had considered only possible in friendship. He continues to affirm that it is a relationship that goes beyond the most exuberant sensibility, and reaches to the most sublime spirituality. For love implies carnal desire as a first and necessary step, but only the one who finds pleasure in satisfying the other's appetite, while satisfying their owns, can consider a life as a couple.

Schlegel adds a section called "Allegory of Impudence", which stages a conversation about the nature of love, in which the characters discussing the matter are allegorical representations of different human qualities: Morality (*Sittlichkeit*), Modesty (*Bescheidenheit*), Decency (*Dezenz*), Public Opinion (*öffentliche Meinung*), Delicacy (*Delikatesse*), Impudence (*Frechheit*), and the Beautiful Soul (*schöne Seele*). A young gentleman, accompanied by Wit (*Witz*), approaches the group of young ladies gathered around a distinguished lady:

> The girls were quite active in the vicinity of the most distinguished lady of the group and were chattering a great deal among themselves. "I *do* have more feeling than you do, my dear Morality!" said one. "But then my name happens to be Soul—in fact, Beautiful Soul." Morality grew rather pale at

> this and seemed ready to break into tears. "But I was so virtuous yesterday," she said, "and I'm always making progress in my efforts to be more so. I get enough reproaches from myself. Why do I have to listen to more from you?" Another girl, Modesty, was jealous of the girl who called herself Beautiful Soul and said, "I'm mad at you; you just want to use me." (Schlegel, 1971, p. 55).

The Beautiful Soul is depicted as a distinguished lady who attracts the attention of the others in the congregation. When she says to Morality that she has more disposition (*Gemüt*), it signifies that she seeks virtue with more tenacity; but also, because *Gemüt* can be understood as 'temperament', 'disposition', and even 'soul', it means that the beautiful subjectivity reminds Morality that they share the same attribute; namely, a soul. But the first one has a more virtuous soul than her interlocutor. The superiority that the Beautiful Soul boasts of over Morality refers to the nature of the latter, which is limited to doing what is right, while the beauty of the soul consists in the natural inclination to be virtuous, even beyond the demands of morality. Morality's response confirms the above statement, because she asserts that she has been virtuous at some point ("yesterday"), thereby acknowledging that she has not always been so. She attempts to defend herself against any accusation of immorality, arguing that she has made great strides, referring to indefinite moral progress. However, Morality assumes that she is not essentially virtuous, as the Beautiful Soul claims to be, and considers herself immoral; for this reason, she asks the beautiful subjectivity to cease its accusations, as she has enough with her own self-criticism.

The phrase of Modesty is very revealing, as it accuses the Beautiful Soul of using her. The reduction of Modesty to a simple instrument of the soul implies that the beautiful subjectivity pretends to be virtuous in front of the others. That is exactly what Impudence thinks, because she approaches the Beautiful Soul and, taking her face in his hands, tells her that it is only a mask; then she adds: "You're not the Beautiful Soul, but at best Daintiness, and sometimes Coquetry as well" (Schlegel, 1971, p. 56). Beautiful subjectivity only appears to behave ethically, impeccably, and modestly; it makes others believe it has a natural inclination toward virtue through graceful movements and pompous speeches. But her true aim is to seduce spectators out of vanity: it is the mask of coquetry, which is exhausted in that intention.

Note that Impudence is presented as a woman who exposes the lies of the others. The narrator states that the first time he saw her, she seemed distant from the other ladies:

> To the left I saw a group of beautiful women and girls, to the right a single imposing woman standing alone, but as I tried to look at that mighty shape her eyes met mine so sharply and fearlessly that I looked away (Schlegel, 1971, p. 54).

She herself doesn't feign her intentions or simulate a certain behaviour. Her gaze is direct, and so are her statements. For this reason, a young man who approaches the gathering confesses:

> Now I noticed that these women who at first had seemed beautiful were really only young and well behaved, but otherwise unremarkable. If one looked closely, one could even discern certain vulgar features and signs of depravity. Now Impudence seemed less harsh to me. I could look at her boldly, and with astonishment had to admit to myself that her figure was tall and noble (Schlegel, 1971, p. 56).

The young man's physical approach is a metaphor for a more precise analysis of Impudence's character. If at first glance she seemed harsh-featured, direct-looking, and lacking in grace, he now understands that she is cultured and noble; he only demands from Wit the courage to get to know her. Simultaneously, the young man observes that the other women are not as graceful as they appeared from a distance. The unattractive features perceived up close refer to a certain trace of meanness that can be found in Beautiful Soul, Modesty, Decency, Morality, and Delicacy. The unmasking of the characters in the allegory follows the same movement; namely, the display of the vice inherent in the virtue that each character embodies. Morality's dissatisfaction with her life shows that she perceives her immorality, since her reproaches refer to her lack of virtue. Modesty acknowledges that she envies Beautiful Soul, and this acknowledgement implicitly hints at her vanity, for she considers herself worthier for her virtuous existence. Finally, Impudence's assertion regarding the Beautiful Soul shows that the latter is a vain person who does not seek the well-being of others but rather wants them to believe so, in order to be celebrated for this reason. The reader can thus observe the contradictions that arise between the different positions, although they

do not reach an objective truth that transcends these contradictory perspectives (Colebrook, 2005, pp. 52, 55 y 57)[1]. These contradictions are at the core of the analysis of irony. In fact, the ironist never establishes norms, since, for him, the *poiesis* (creative force) of life cannot be reflected in a totalizing perspective. Irony does not simply point to its opposite, but is the expression of both sides or perspectives, simultaneously and in the form of a contradiction or paradox. It is not simply the enunciation of an opposition, but an assertion that validates its opposite.

4. Similarities between Hegel's and Schlegel's perspectives

Numerous commentators maintain that the so-called "evil consciousness" or "Evil" can be identified with Romantic irony as theorized by Friedrich Schlegel. Alfred Rush's rigorous explanation in his work *Irony and Idealism* stands out. Rush (2016, pp. 132-133) affirms that the designation of "Evil" does not represent a neutral verdict, but rather expresses a reproach that the contemplative Beautiful Soul directs toward its active version. The social context against which Evil positions itself is constituted by other beautiful souls, so the social condemnation that emerges from the accusation of wickedness is a judgment that the Beautiful Soul, in its inactive mode, formulates about its own active mode (Rush, 2016, pp. 132-133)[2]. It is important to note that we are not dealing with three distinct entities, but rather with a single fundamental configuration of conscience that unfolds first as the beautiful soul and subsequently, as a variant of this, as Evil. There are two modalities of the Beautiful Soul in mutual conflict: (A) the contemplative or non-ironic beautiful soul, and (B) the ironic beautiful soul, which is Evil (Rush, 2016, p. 129, n. 35). The contemplative beautiful soul rejects action because all external action is subject to being

1 The ironist never establishes norms, since the *poiesis* (creative force) of life cannot be reflected in a totalizing perspective. Irony does not simply point to its opposite, but is the expression of both sides or perspectives, simultaneously and in the form of a contradiction or paradox. It is not simply the enunciation of an opposition, but an assertion that validates its opposite.

2 According to Behler (1988), Hegel has in mind Schlegel's conception of irony when referring to the acting consciousness. The latter is the "evil" that places its own content as the content of duty.

thwarted by factors beyond the agent's control. This figure embodies Romanticism in its most typical form: the creator isolated in his garret, condemned to social incomprehension.

Evil emerges when the beautiful soul becomes aware that ethical thought devoid of action, and more crucially, without the capacity to respond to other concrete subjects, does not constitute genuine ethical thought (Rush, 2016, pp. 130-132)[3]. For this reason, Evil exposes its actions to the community. According to Rush, this is the crux of the matter: Evil is not simply the beautiful soul in its original purity; rather, it is the Beautiful Soul with an additional element, and that element is precisely irony (pp. 130-132)[4]. The main thesis maintains that the social action of Evil represents an advance over the purely internal configuration of the beautiful soul (pp. 130-132). This progress consists in the fact that Evil at least admits the need to externalize its moral position. Irony becomes necessary because a beautiful soul that attempted to act while upholding its convictions would enter into a persistent confrontation with everyone else, regardless of whether they were also beautiful souls (Rush, 2016, pp. 123-125). Irony transcends the simple external manifestation of intentional purity; it avoids permanent conflict precisely because it has relinquished commitment to the specific content of its assertions. In this respect, it demonstrates greater sensitivity toward the social.

The social manifestation of the ironist is structured through the combination of two components: The first component is a public display of particular perspectives, where the ironist makes their position in the social sphere visible. The degree of argumentative engagement is limited, but this responds to the requirement of public visibility that every given opinion must satisfy (Rush, 2016, pp. 130-132).

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3 That is, the notion of "duty" necessarily implies its fulfilment. An ethical perspective that refers to duty without taking into account its concreteness is, in fact, immoral (Hegel, 1977, § 602, pp. 366-367).

4 In the same line of thought, Harris (1997, p. 490) understands that there is a certain similarity between Schlegel's critique of the beautiful soul and Hegel's conception of it. He argues that the ironic consciousness, represented by the characters Julius and Lucinde, is considered by the German philosopher to be a variation of the beautiful soul. The ironist is the conscience that chooses to act at the cost of maintaining the disharmony between its consciousness of itself as a singularity and its intuition of universal duty.

The second component is a distancing from all positions, including one's own. This is the aspect that most attracts Hegel's attention because it represents an adaptation on the part of the beautiful soul, regarding the degree of conviction with which it maintains its perspective (Rush, 2016, pp. 130-132).

This adaptation presents two dimensions: (A) Evil develops a minimal receptivity to social demands by distancing itself from the different positions at play (the "distancing requirement"), and (B) this requirement applies universally to all positions, including Evil's own (the "universality requirement"). The central thesis of these passages establishes that there is a relationship of reciprocal dependence between (1) Evil as an imperfect and self-centered configuration of sociability, which considers itself socially active even when it relegates certain social norms to insignificance (even disregarding its own self-imposed norms), and (2) the beautiful soul as an even more deficient configuration of sociability, practically disconnected from these norms.

Given this reciprocity, the accusation levelled against Evil is simultaneously just and unjust (Rush, 2016, pp. 132-133). It is just because Evil presents itself as socially active while dismissing any permanent normative impact on its beliefs, thus preserving the distrust of the inactive beautiful soul toward ethical authority (Rush, 2016, pp. 135-136)[5]. It is unjust because the non-ironic beautiful soul attempts to judge from a universal perspective when it can only consider particular aspects (Rush, 2016, pp. 138-139). Evil assumes that ironic judgment is inadequate as a form of self-constitution because it lacks the necessary social dimension: it wears itself out, becomes dissatisfied, and perhaps even anxious, because its form of judgment values nothing except the mere capacity, devoid of content, to deny all imposed limits; it is the form of melancholy characteristic

5 For the ironic beautiful soul, the most characteristic feature of its thoughts is that, in principle, they can alienate it; that they define it neither by their content nor by the degree of conviction in them. By questioning the concept of conviction or authenticity that underlies the non-ironic beautiful soul, irony threatens the already meager understanding of common sense, which is the only social achievement of the pure beautiful soul. Hirsch (1973, pp. 246-2518) considers Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde* a good example of the perspective of the acting consciousness in the face of criticism from the judging consciousness. For this reason, Hirsch finds an analogy between the figure of the Spirit called *Gewissen* and the figure of conscience called "skepticism." The scholar believes that *Gewissen* reduces ethical reality to a mere thought-object of its "self," just as the skeptic does.

of Romanticism, as understood by Hegel (Rush, 2016, p. 137)[6]. According to Hegel's conception, irony transforms the negative force of subjectivity into an absolute. That is, Romantic irony abstractly conceives the capacity for subjective determination as the act of negating everything given. Negation—conceived in its abstract form, without reference to any specific content—is presented as an action of unlimited scope and unconditioned nature: it is an absolute. On the other hand, the ironist transfers subjectivity to the individual determination of ironic consciousness. That is, he considers the subject not to be the transcendental self, but a psychophysical individuality. Ironic consciousness is a subjectivity that denies the essence of everything presented to it. This is the same position occupied by the consciousness that acts, or Evil (Pöggeler, 1956, pp. 72-72).

Consequently, Evil sets itself the task of conceptually unifying the ironic and non-ironic dimensions of the beautiful soul. In this way, it seeks to overcome the accusation of perversity, since it presents what it has in common with the non-ironic beautiful soul in a more advanced configuration of thought (Rush, 2016, pp 138-139). The modality that this reconciliation adopts is forgiveness (*Verzeihung*).

Evil, which has been interpreted by the non-ironic beautiful soul as demonically egocentric and hypocritical, admits to this accusation and the truth it contains. But since Evil possesses cognitive resources developed through its experience with irony, it must proceed with caution so as not to present reconciliation arrogantly, in a way that the beautiful soul would interpret as yet another ironic and presumptuous stance (Rush, 2016, pp 138-139). For this reason, Evil must present itself to the non-ironic beautiful soul in a way that unequivocally eliminates any claim to superiority. Hegel (1977, §§ 665-668, pp. 404-407)

6 Pöggeler (1956, pp. 72-72) argues that, according to Hegel's conception, irony transforms the negative force of subjectivity into an absolute. That is, Romantic irony abstractly conceives the capacity for subjective determination as the act of negating everything given. Negation—conceived in its abstract form, without reference to any specific content—is presented as an action of unlimited scope and unconditioned nature: it is an absolute. On the other hand, the ironist transfers subjectivity to the individual determination of ironic consciousness. That is, he considers the subject not to be the transcendental self, but a psychophysical individuality. The commentator asserts that ironic consciousness is a subjectivity that denies the essence of everything presented to it. Pöggeler considers this to be the same position occupied by the consciousness that acts, or Evil.

characterizes this action as a "confession": Evil acknowledges that it, too, depends on social structures to give meaning to its judgments. Initially, the beautiful soul interprets Evil's humility as merely apparent. This causes the non-ironic beautiful soul to further harden its response to Evil and transform into the "Hard Heart." The non-ironic beautiful soul acts as the servant of morality, judging from a limited but moralizing perspective (Rush, 2016, pp. 138-139).

However, with the passage of time, the Hard Heart becomes capable of granting credence to humility and recognizing itself in Evil. When this occurs, Evil ceases to be perverse; forgiveness is sought and granted reciprocally. The resolution lies in the fact that Evil has led the dormant beautiful soul out of its impossible self and into the light of the social space of judgment, and the beautiful soul acknowledges this. Consequently, this also constitutes the Hard Heart's renunciation, and conscience reaches its conclusion Rush, 2016, pp 138-139). The process culminates when the ironist, recognizing its own inadequacy, confesses its social dependence and seeks forgiveness, while the judging beautiful soul acknowledges its own limitation as a servant of morality. Both aspects of conscience are reconciled through mutual recognition, thus overcoming the internal division that characterized them.

5. Differences between Hegel's and Schlegel's perspectives

Schlegel (1971) develops his concept of irony by reflecting on poetry and language. He argues that poetry is precisely the most suitable medium for addressing the absolute. This is because the inherent indeterminacy of poetry reflects the structural incapacity to represent the absolute exhaustively:

> Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. [...] It can also—more than any other form—hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it as if in an endless series of mirrors. [...] It alone can become a mirror of the entire surrounding world, an image of the age. And it can also, more than any other form, hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic

> reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it as if in an endless series of mirrors (p. 175)

However, Schlegel introduces a crucial distinction here: although all poetry possesses this indeterminacy that reflects our inability to capture the absolute, not every poetic work does so in a self-conscious and explicit way. That is, not all artistic or philosophical creations reflect on their own unfinished nature and their potential for endless interpretation. For this reason, Schlegel usually defines the term "irony" strictly to refer specifically to those works that are self-aware: works that are not only ironic but are precisely about being ironic. These consciously ironic works exemplify and make visible the infinite structure of poetry and, by extension, of human experience in general.

But for Schlegel, irony is not simply a formal structural feature of poetic works. It is also, and fundamentally, the explanation of the dialectical structure that constitutes lived subjectivity. Irony describes how reflective consciousness actually functions when it takes itself and the world seriously. It begins with a certain degree of assertion of one's own point of view on things. This is the "natural" stance before deep reflection. Then another perspective is taken seriously. This encounter requires genuinely entering into the other's point of view to understand how and why it would be binding for that other subject. This is the properly ironic experience: the tension between the initial assertion and the understanding of its contingency and limitation. One might end up reaffirming one's pre-ironic point of view, but that reaffirmation would only be as good—as "critical"—as the seriousness with which one entered into the other point of view. Post-ironic reaffirmation is not the same as pre-ironic assertion: it is mediated by the understanding of its provisional nature. This point deserves special emphasis: the two elements of irony—affirmation and distancing—are dialectically related. Both moments mutually condition each other, so that affirmation itself incorporates its own relativization; and critical distancing does not negate, but rather enriches, the capacity for affirmation.

On the other hand, contradiction in Hegel's logic is the driving force of conceptual development precisely because it is not tolerated as a final state: it propels the movement toward more comprehensive forms that integrate and transcend the original contradictory terms, determining them more fully in the process. But indeterminate elements cannot be in a relationship of true logical

contradiction. For genuine logical contradiction to exist, the terms must be sufficiently determined. The Hegelian system does not tolerate contradiction as a permanent state: it uses it as a springboard to higher forms. In the Romantic case, no such conversion exists, since irony only functions insofar as it does not translate into a mere univocal statement. Instead of reconciling apparent contradictions into higher-order and more comprehensive forms of consciousness (whose existence depends on the dissolution of the appearance of contradiction), Schlegel only explains how to reconcile oneself with such contradictions, not to resolve them, but to learn to inhabit them.

This fundamental divergence between the two thinkers is particularly evident in their respective conceptions of intersubjective recognition. According to Rush (2016, p. 173), a fundamental Hegelian precept is that the more one understands another person, the greater the reconciliation with them. Greater understanding should, over time, generate a reciprocity of beliefs, even if the path to that end sometimes involves a greater initial perception of difference. This premise has profound political and ethical consequences: it suggests that disagreement and conflict are fundamentally products of misunderstanding, and that a sufficiently deep, mutual understanding would necessarily lead to harmony and agreement. Schlegel's position is the recognition that deep understanding can reveal irreducible differences without invalidating either understanding itself or the possibility of community. And this, because community does not require total convergence, but rather the capacity to productively sustain tensions and differences through continuous ironic exchange[7].

But this Hegelian precept mentioned by Rush is founded on a specific ontological determination that the commentator has overlooked: the ultimate identity between the opposing consciousnesses. This underlying identity is what makes convergence toward mutual agreement possible. The ironic consciousness postulated by Schlegel, on the other hand, links itself to another subjectivity by acknowledging its unknowability beforehand. While Hegel posits a relationship

7 According to Knowles (2002, p. 219), the ironic consciousness accepts conventional moral rules but insists that they lack objectivity. It considers that the foundation of any norm is bestowed by the will of the one who adopts it. Consequently, obedience to it depends on the whim of the ironic consciousness itself.

founded on the identity determination of both moments, Schlegel maintains the irreducibility of otherness. To better understand how this underlying identity operates in Hegelian thought, it is illuminating to examine his analysis of the beautiful soul. The most relevant characteristic of this figure of Spirit is the immediate identification of the self with itself. To an impartial observer, the beautiful soul is withdrawn into its inner life. However, it does not recognize its situation and conceives of its interiority as all of reality. In principle, it presents itself as a being-in-itself that opposes the rest of society. Others are its negation. The beautiful soul does not connect with others, and consequently, it remains indifferent to them.

If one were to describe and explain the development of this figure of the Spirit based on a determination of the *Science of Logic*, it would be possible to interpret it in light of the logical movement exhibited by the determinate being, or *Dasein*. As previously noted, the beautiful soul has its identity with itself as its entire reality. This reality presents itself in the same way as in the development of the determinate being, mediated by nothingness. That is, as the simple affirmative quality, which is opposed to negation (Hegel, 1990, pp. 106-109). Both—reality and negation—are mutually implicated: one cannot exist without the other. Negation negates the affirmation imposed by reality. But reality negates negation. That is, reality is the negation of negation. The identity of the beautiful soul with itself presents itself as this reality opposed to others. The individual who embodies beautiful subjectivity feels that the society in which they live represents the negation of their inner being. The beautiful soul takes refuge in their own contemplations, withdrawing from others. At first glance, it presents itself as a being-in-itself. That is, it is the immediate relation of itself to itself. Its constitution is similar to the determination known as "something" (*Etwas*) (Hegel, 1990, pp. 109-111).

The "something" is constituted, in the first instance, as an existent without any relation to the "other." The latter bears no difference from the "something": it is merely other, distinct from the "something" to which we are referring. That is to say, the "other" is also a "something." If the "other" is a "something," then the "something" is an "other." It is the "other" of the "other." Otherness is, then, inherent in the "something." But the "other" is in itself. That is, its existence is not relative to the existence of the "something," but rather it exists by itself.

Therefore, the "other" is identical with itself. The "something" is necessarily related to the "other," since it excludes it. But this exclusion negates the supposed indifference with respect to the "other" that was established at the beginning: the "something" is for the "other." Or, as Hegel states, it is a "being-for-another." In this way, both "being-in-itself" and "being-for-another" are the constitutive determinations of the "something" (Hegel, 1990, pp. 111-118).

The "something" has a dual nature, for it is both the negation of the other and the affirmation of itself through the negation of otherness as such. The "something" is necessarily related to otherness because it negates it: the "something" is necessarily a being-for-other (*Sein für anderes*). Every "something" not only refers to itself but necessarily refers to another. Not being other means being-in-itself (*Ansichsein*): the identity of the thing. Being-in-itself is the quality that the "something" has of not being the "other": it is the non-being of otherness. But since being-in-itself means the negation of the other, it is necessarily for other: being-for-other is necessarily linked to being-in-itself. Every quality of being-in-itself is a quality of being-for-other, for they are two moments of the same "something." The proposition that the "being-in-itself" of something is for the "other" represents Hegel's "anti-romanticism," since it implies that the German thinker rejects the existence of an instance that can escape determination (Houlgate, 2006, pp. 321-338)[8].

This logical structure of the "something" and the "other" is concretely manifested in the dynamic between the judging consciousness and the acting consciousness. The instance in which the beautiful soul presents itself as the judging consciousness can be interpreted precisely in light of the relationship between "something" and "other." In principle, self-consciousness as consciousness of the universal presents itself as the being-in-itself of the judging consciousness. It is indifferent to other individual consciousnesses, just as "something" is indifferent to "other." The immediate identity of itself with itself is manifested in its criticisms of the acting consciousness. The judging consciousness interprets the

8 For Kierkegaard (2000, p. 95), irony is absolute and infinite negativity, which calls for silence. That is to say, it refers us to the ineffable. From a similar stance, for Hackenesch (1987, pp. 131, 192, 238), the individual has no meaning for Hegel, since it is indeterminate. The ineffable is not mystical, but the untrue (*das Unwahres*): it is not even a mistake, but nonsense, insignificant, contingent.

acting consciousness as being completely distinct from itself. The former maintains that it intuits the universality of duty, and that the latter does not act in accordance with it.

However, the discourse through which the acting consciousness justifies its actions shows us that the notion of duty held by the judging consciousness is a particular interpretation of it. Thus, we observe that both the judging consciousness and the acting consciousness follow the dictates of their own inner law. The acting consciousness is distinguished from the judging consciousness only by its distinct interpretation of universal duty. But this distinction with respect to the content of the inner law shows that they are formally equal, since both respect their respective norms. That is to say, the acting consciousness is also a judging consciousness. Therefore, the judging consciousness is the same as the acting consciousness. This means that the former also acts. Its praxis is reduced to discursive pronouncements that extol its good intentions. But the absence of concrete actions that go beyond personal vanity indicates that the judging consciousness is as immoral as the acting consciousness it criticizes. The judging consciousness turns out to be this "other" that it denounces as "evil." "Evil", as well as otherness, is inherent to it.

Here, the previously analyzed logical structure is fully revealed: just as we discovered that the "other" is inherent in the constitution of the "something," the judging consciousness discovers that it is identical to that which it criticizes. The intentionality of its discourse is not based on the explication of universal duty, but on the desire to demonstrate its moral superiority over the acting consciousness. In the same way that the exclusion of the "other" supposes that the "something" is a being-for-other, the critique of the acting consciousness demonstrates that the judging consciousness seeks the recognition of the former. That is, the critique of the acting consciousness aims at the reaffirmation of the judging consciousness. For this reason, its discourses are the result of its relationship with the acting consciousness. Duty, as the "being-in-itself" of which the judging consciousness is aware, would not be possible without the mediation of the critique of the acting consciousness.

The demonstration that the acting consciousness is also identical to the judging consciousness follows the same logical structure of the "something" and the "other," but in reverse. When the acting consciousness justifies its actions

through discourse, it does not merely defend its own interpretation of universal duty but implicitly judges the position of the judging consciousness as inadequate or incomplete. By pointing out that the notion of duty held by the judging consciousness is merely a particular interpretation, the acting consciousness assumes the position of judge and reveals the hypocrisy or moral emptiness of one who only speaks without acting. In this way, the acting consciousness is also a judging consciousness, and both are formally identical in their structure.

This identity is fully revealed when we recognize that the action of the acting consciousness is not simply action in itself, but action that responds to the critical gaze of the other and seeks to justify itself before it. Just as the judging consciousness needs the acting consciousness to reaffirm its moral superiority (thus demonstrating that its being-in-itself is possible only through its being-for-other), the acting consciousness needs the recognition of the one who judges it to constitute its moral identity. Its concrete action only acquires meaning in relation to the judgment of the other before which it must justify itself. Therefore, applying the Hegelian logical structure, the "something" that is the acting consciousness excludes the "other" that is the judging consciousness, but precisely this exclusion reveals its necessary dependence: the acting consciousness is a being-for-other that seeks the recognition of that which it apparently opposes. The formal identity between both consciousnesses is thus established from both perspectives: they both judge, they both act (one through concrete actions, the other through moral discourse), and they both depend on mutual recognition to constitute their being-in-itself.

This revealed identity between the judging consciousness and the acting consciousness constitutes the ontological foundation of the Hegelian precept that profound understanding necessarily leads to reconciliation. The apparent otherness between these two consciousnesses dissolves when their underlying formal identity is recognized. It is this identity that makes it possible for the conflict to be resolved in a higher form of consciousness that integrates and overcomes the initial contradiction. Schlegel's position, on the contrary, rejects precisely this premise: profound understanding of the other does not reveal an underlying identity, but rather an irreducible difference that must be inhabited, not overcome.

Schlegel denounces the hypocrisy of the Beautiful Soul in his "Allegory of Impudence". The Beautiful Soul asserts its modesty before others, refusing to intervene in society. It maintains that social intervention would imply the manipulation of others. That is, others would be treated as means to an end and not as ends in themselves. But behind this mask of supposed virtue lies an egocentric, narcissistic temperament that identifies itself with the voice of the divine. The critique of the immorality of the acting subject reflects the demand for harmony between finite activity and the infinite ethical background of which consciousness is supposedly aware. However, such harmony is impossible for an acting individual consciousness to achieve. The Beautiful Soul is aware of the impossibility of coordinating a singular action with its own intuition of universal duty. For this reason, it renounces action and dedicates itself to judging those who act. But criticism of others presupposes that the latter has attained an intuition of the infinite and occupies the position of divine knowledge. According to Schlegel, such presumption is a clear sign of vanity. Schlegel's objections to the figure of the Beautiful Soul are not balanced with a critique of the behaviour of the acting consciousness. That is, there is no attempt at mutual acknowledgment of faults. The absence of a confessional moment signifies the impossibility of forgiveness. The ironist presents himself as the acting consciousness that denounces the hypocrisy of the Beautiful Soul. But the ironic conscience does not assume that the disharmony between action and the consciousness of duty is a fault: the ironist's refusal to assert himself as the consciousness of universal duty allows him to elide this inconsistency.

From a Hegelian perspective, Schlegel's critique of the Beautiful Soul is reduced to a series of diatribes. The motivation for this mockery is the rejection of the possibility of elucidating a universal duty of which one is conscious. The psychophysical self of the ironist becomes the ultimate foundation of all activity (Hegel, 1835, pp. 84-87)[9]. Ironic consciousness then positions itself as the sole basis for the critique of the Beautiful Soul's stance. The ironist conceives of himself as the absolute, the unconditioned, even if he does not explicitly acknowledge this. Ironic consciousness is capable of observing that the beautiful

9 In this regard, see also Werle, 2015, and Casas Dupuy, 1999.

soul also acts when it judges. But this very achievement positions the ironist as the new judging consciousness. The failure of Schlegel's ironic critique of the human type known as the "beautiful soul" is linked to the absence of a judging consciousness that uses a universal criterion as the determining normativity of confessional language. The lack of such a norm supposes the absence of a parameter that imposes a limit on the arbitrariness of the judging consciousness. The absence of a normative framework that encompasses both instances—the judging consciousness and the acting consciousness—purports that the judging consciousness is not judged by the same criteria as the acting consciousness. For this reason, it does not assume that the criticisms it makes of the acting consciousness should also be applied to itself (Speight, 2004, pp. 108-111). According to Hegel, both consciousnesses share the form of the norm because they are identical formal determinations.

The characters of the allegory in *Lucinde* are subjectivities with unilateral perspectives. They do not possess a common criterion that mediates between them to communicate with each other. Language does not play the role of mediator between self-consciousnesses here; it is reduced to the instrumental function of exposing the image that self-consciousness has of itself (Harris, 1997, p. 480). Both the Beautiful Soul and the Impudence perceive themselves as possessors of an absolute truth; consistent with this stance, they do not recognize any redeemable quality in the other (Pinkard, 2008). From Hegel's perspective, this situation cannot lead to sublation of the antagonisms; for, to do that, each must intuit itself in the other, recognizing its infringement in the infringement confessed by the other (Hegel, 1977, §§ 670-671, pp. 407-408).

6. Conclusion

For Hegel, Schlegel's ironic consciousness remains a moment of the beautiful soul because, despite its apparent progress in recognizing the need for social action, it maintains the fundamental structure of the problem: the absence of a shared universal normativity that enables genuine mutual recognition and reconciliation. The ironist substitutes the contemplative purity of the beautiful soul with ironic detachment, but both positions refuse to commit to a normative content that transcends individual arbitrariness.

The crucial difference lies not in identifying the hypocrisy of the beautiful soul—both thinkers recognize it—, but in what is done with that recognition. Hegel demands that it leads to confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation through the recognition of an underlying formal identity. Schlegel proposes inhabiting the irreducible tension between perspectives that do not converge in a higher synthesis. From a Hegelian perspective, this makes the ironist a variant of the beautiful soul: a consciousness that, beneath a veneer of sophistication and critical self-awareness, continues to retreat into its interiority, refusing the genuine social mediation that is only possible when a shared universal normativity is recognized. The Schlegelian ironist has uncovered the hypocrisy of the beautiful soul, but by rejecting the structure of forgiveness and reconciliation, remains trapped in the same fundamental configuration: a subjectivity that refuses to genuinely transcend itself by recognizing the other as a moment of itself.

The Hegelian *sublation* of the beautiful soul requires not only the recognition of the contradiction, but its resolution through a reconciliation that integrates and transcends the original contradictory terms. Schlegel offers only an explanation of how to reconcile oneself with such contradictions; not to resolve them, but to learn to inhabit them. Therefore, for Hegel, Romantic irony fails to sublate the instance of the beautiful soul: it merely perpetuates it in a more conscious but equally sterile form.

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