ACCSCIENCE PUBLISHING

Beytulhikme An International Journal of Philosophy

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Consciousness and Appearance: Hegel's Reading of Protagoras

Arif Yıldız [1] *

[1] Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, İstinye University, Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract

Hegel's critical reading of Protagoras in his *Lectures on History of Philosophy* marks a turning point in our modern understanding of the Sophistic movement. This paper discusses Hegel's speculative interpretation of Protagoras' principle of man-measure (*Homo-mensura*) and its subjective relativism. My argument is articulated in three stages: (i) in the first place I provide a historical reconstruction of the debate around the true nature of the maxim; (ii) in the second place I argue that in the *Lectures*, Hegel offers a different account of subjectivism and relativism from that of the ancient commentators. I contend that, for Hegel, the various aspects of the relativist reduction of appearances to mere subjective knowledge enables a breakthrough in philosophy by thinking being as a subjective determination, even though it fails to account for nature of appearances due to its one-sided presupposition of the immediacy of the given; (iii) and finally I analyze how Hegel implicitly addresses the challenges of Protagoras' relativism through the dialectic of "Sense-Certainty" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I argue that for Hegel, subjective reductionism is the result of, or made possible by, the implicitly mediated structure of singular appearances. In that respect, the claim that subjective sensation is the only criterion for knowledge is in fact nothing but a moment of the absolute itself.

Keywords: Hegel; Protagoras; relativism; consciousness; reductionism.

*** Corresponding author:**
Arif Yıldız
(arif.yildiz@istinye.edu.tr)

Citation: Yıldız, A. (2026). Consciousness and Appearance: Hegel's Reading of Protagoras. *Beytulhikme An International Journal of Philosophy*, 16(3): 913-924. https://doi.org/10.36922/BIJP94880

Received: June 11, 2026

Revised: June 24, 2026

Accepted: August 14, 2026

Published online: September 30, 2026

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1. Introduction

The image of the Sophists in ancient philosophy is well known: A sophist is a pseudo- philosopher who, rather than seeking the truth, relies heavily on personal opinions; they do not hesitate to use conflicting arguments about the one and the same philosophical problem, and their sole purpose is to prevail in all theoretical and practical debates through their eristic dialectic. But contrary to this well-known portrayal of Sophist as the pseudo-philosopher (to which we owe a great deal, particularly thanks to Plato and Aristotle), Hegel rehabilitates the Sophist movement in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* by presenting it as a genuine philosophical school; and in doing so, he paves the way for contemporary studies of Sophism (Kerferd, 1989, p. 6). According to Hegel, the Sophists, most notably Protagoras and Gorgias, were the first true "teachers" of the Greek world (Hegel, 1988, p. 409). By questioning "religious and legal representations" (which stemmed from the "need for subjective freedom" (Hegel, 1988, p. 420) that emerged within the political context of the time), they undertook the cultural, ethical, and political education of the individual by challenging fixed ideas. In doing so, they replaced the myths and the rhapsodists, fulfilling the need for "recognition" (Hegel, 1988, p. 421). As Hegel puts it, "the Sophists, who are so despised, have been the teachers of the world" (Hegel, 2015, p. 529).[1]

In Hegel's view, the Sophists did not merely teach "reflection" and "reasoning," (Hegel, 2013, p. 357) namely the ability to produce arguments consisting solely of reasons for and against (δύο λόγοι)(Diels, 1960, p. 266) within the framework of "formal education" (Hegel, 1988, p. 425). The Sophists are also "profound philosophers" who reflect on the "fundamental universal concepts" (Hegel, 2006, p. 724), just as much as they seek to "shake the foundations of everything that is fixed" (Hegel, 1988, p. 429). In other words in Hegel's view, the Sophistic movement (unlike the Presocratic schools, such as the Eleatics and the Ionians, who grasp the existence of the external world from a purely objective perspective) placed philosophy within the "perspective" of "thinking", that is, within the "perspective" of the *subjective* and *natural* consciousness (Hegel, 2016, p. 75), and initiated the philosophical transformation that Socrates and Plato would later advance.

Unlike most of the secondary literature that focuses mainly on Hegel's role in the study of sophistry or the very consistency of Hegelian interpretation of Protagoras (Casertano, 2000; Held, 1990; Poulakos, 1990; Romeyer-Dherbey, 2017; Sasso, 1998), I shall analyze in this study Hegel's speculative interpretation of Protagoras' man-measure (*Homo-mensura*) principle in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Beginning in 1819 (Hegel, 2016, pp. 73–76), Hegel devoted an increasingly larger portion of his lectures in 1823–1824 (Hegel, 2020, pp. 555–560), 1825–1826 (Hegel, 2023, pp. 982–996), and 1827–1828 (Hegel, 2024, pp. 1429–1434) to Protagoras. In these lectures, Hegel interprets Protagoras' philosophy through the lens of two fundamental problems, focusing his analysis on the concept of man-measure. The first of these problems is subjectivity, which refers to the reduction of existence to appearance. The second problem is relativity, which refers to the description and determination of these appearances as they appear in subjective consciousness as a result of this very reduction. In this study, drawing initially on the lectures on Protagoras, I will attempt to interpret Hegel's approach to the issues of subjectivity and relativity as a problem of mediation. Secondly, to provide a foundation for the arguments developed by Hegel in these lectures, I will examine the dialectic of opinion (*Meinung*), which is the second moment of the "Sense- certainty" in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as an extension of the interpretation of Protagoras. Drawing on lectures on Protagoras, I will discuss how Hegel addresses the issues of subjective phenomenalism and relativity within the context of his own speculative philosophy. In short, rather than focusing solely on the Protagorean elements in the *Phenomenology* (Hyppolite, 1970; Purpus, 1908; Tinland, 2016) or on Hegel's lectures on Protagoras (Held, 1990; Slama, 2020), this paper will examine the relationship between the absolute and the relative within the framework of Hegel's own speculative philosophy. It will also take into account the ancient sources on which Hegel drew.

2. Protagoras and the man-measureprinciple

According to Plato and Sextus Empiricus, who report the principle, albeit with certain nuances from Protagoras'now-lost work *Truth* (Ἀλήθεια) or *Knockdown Arguments* (Καταβάλλουτες -λόγοι) (Diels, 1960, p. 264), the principleof man-measure is as follows:

> Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος (or inPlato, ἄνθρωπον εἶναι), τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ (or in Plato, μὴ) ἔστιν (Diels, 1960, p. 263).

Drawing on these two sources, Hegel translates the fragment into German as follows:

> Von allen Dingen ist das Maß der Mensch; von dem, was ist, daß es ist,- von dem, was nicht ist, daß es nicht ist (Hegel, 1988, p. 429).

In light of Hegel's translation, the fragment can be rendered from the original Ancient Greek as follows:

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

> The human being is the measure of all that is, of what is that is, and of what is not that is not.[2]

Before examining how Hegel understood this idea, it is important to recognize that the principle of man-measure is fundamentally polemical in its opposition to Parmenides. This sophistical argument, presented in an ironic way under the heading *Truth*, posits that being (τὸ εἶναι/ἔστιν) is the truth, whereas non-being (τὸ μὴ εἶναι/οὐκ ἔστιν) is "the opinions of mortals" (βροτῶν δόξα) (Diels, 1960, p. 230). This constructs an absolute ontological distinction between being and the realm of sensory appearances. At its core, it is a provocative argument developed in opposition to Parmenides, aiming to reverse the distinction between absolute truth and contingent, individual opinions. However, Plato, Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus set aside this polemical backdrop of the man-measure principle to develop their own ontological, subjective and empiricist interpretations. These include those that identify perception (αἴσθησῐς) with representation (φαντασὶα) and those that are relativist,[3] making the absolute truth relative to the individual relationships that each man establishes with appearances. These traditional sources form the basis of Hegel's thought and will play a decisive role in shaping his own speculative interpretation. For this reason, the problems inherent in the ancient interpretive tradition must be addressed briefly.

When we examine contemporary studies of Sophism, which began in the 19th century under the influence of Hegel, from the perspective of classical philology, the first fundamental issue is how the concept of ἄνθρωπος should be interpreted: does ἄνθρωπος denote the *individual* or the *universal* human nature? Following in Plato's footsteps, Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus are in complete agreement on this point, noting that Protagoras took the individual human being as his starting point.[4]

The second fundamental issue concerns the nature of the "things" to be measured based on the personal perspectivesof the individuals. Now, in contrast to πράγματα, which defines the "things" that arise as a result of a specific action and the state of those things[5] and ὄντα, which denotes the existence and being of things,[5] χρήματα refers to objects that have use value for humans, that is, the objects thatare useful. Interpreted in this way, the Protagorean man does not evaluate things in an ontological sense, but only considers them according to "the way they are and the way they are not" (Kerferd, 1989, p. 86), i.e., as appearances with use value.

In light of these explanations, it is not difficult to see why the Protagorean principle, beginning with Plato, has been subject to criticism on the grounds of subjectivity and sensualism. Now if knowledge is nothing other than sensation (οὐκ ἄλλο τί ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη ἢ αἴσθησις) (Plato, 1992, Theaet., 151e)—that is, if the sole source of knowledgeis the individual's faculty of perception and this perceptionis *infallible* by its very nature—and if the sole basis for judgment regarding being rests on the manifestation of appearance, then the relativity of phenomena to individual subjects would eliminate any objective foundation of truth itself. That is to say, in this case, there will no longer be "any unity in and of itself (ἓν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ οὐδέν ἐστιν)" (Plato, 1992, Theaet., 152d 2–3). This relativity of the measure, which is reduced to the relationship between sensation and appearance, takes on an even more radical form in Aristotle. He argues that Protagorean relativism paves the way to all sorts of contradictory statements; to the extent that it even becomes possible to say that the oneand the same thing can be "both is and is not, and is both bad and good" (εἶναι καὶ μὴ εἶναι, καὶ κακὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν εἶναι)" (Aristotle, 1997, Metaph., Γ4, 1009a6–7). Therefore,if it is indeed the case that all appearances and phenomenaare true (εἴτε γὰρ τὰ δοκοῦντα πάντα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ καὶ τὰ φαινόμενα)" (Aristotle, 1997, Metaph. I1 1053a31) then the

[2] Here it should be noted that there is no philological consensus on how to interpret ὡς, namely whether it should be understood as a conjunction or an adverb. For more information on this debate, see Meister (2010, p. 47).

[3] See Aristotle (1997, *Metaph*., Γ4, 1007b18–25) and Empiricus (1912, *Pyrrh. Hyp*. 1.216–219). A fragment of Didymus, published in 1968 and therefore not included in the Diels–Kranz edition, serves as a summary of Protagoras' phenomenalism: "All the things that are exist in appearing" (πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἐν τῷ φαίνεσθαι ἔστιν) (Laks & Most, 2016,p. 108).

[4] See Aristotle (1997, *Metaph*. K6, 1062b13–19), Empiricus (1912, *Pyrrh. Hyp*. 1. 216), and Plato (1992, *Theaet*. 152a6– 8). However, from the 19th century onwards, the concept of ἄνθρωπος has been interpreted in various ways in the field of Classical Philology. Theodor Gomperz seems to interpret human being in both a singular and a universal sense (Gomperz, 1973, p. 375); Paul Natorp, on the other hand, points out that Protagoras speaks of the universal human being, not the individual (Natorp, 1989, p. 3). While Kerferd,taking the Plato's Theaetetus as his primary reference, leansmore toward the idea that what is at issue is the individual human being (Kerferd, 1989, p. 86), Mario Untersteiner, onthe other hand, argues that there is a dialectical process that links the individual human being with the universal humanbeing (Untersteiner, 1954, p. 42). For a comprehensive overview, see Flashar & Kerferd (1998, p. 32). And finally, according to Gilbert Romeyer-Dherbey, it was Hegel himselfwho first raised the problem of the singularity or universality of the concept of ἄνθρωπος (Romeyer-Dherbey, 2017, p. 32).

[5] For an excellent study of the different meanings arising from the singular (πράγμα) and plural (πράγματα) usesof the concept in ancient philosophy, see Hadot (1980,pp. 309–319).

sophist's logos can be seen as a kind of *anti*-logos, for it contradicts itself, and "actually says nothing" (Aristotle, 1997, Metaph. I1 1053a31). And finally, Sextus Empiricus, who argues that the nature of appearances (τὰ φαινόμενα) is something relative (πρός τι), notes that a "common element (κοινωνία)" can be found between Protagoras and Pyrrhonian skepticism (Empiricus, 1912, Pyrrh. Hyp. 1. 216).

It is not difficult to see that these critiques of subjectivity (namely the reduction of being to that which is sensed) aim to interpret the Protagorean principle as an extension of Heraclitus' doctrine of universal flux. Since equating knowledge and science with perception leads to the reduction of being to appearance, the sphere of being—which has no fixed, objective foundation—will also be implicitly reduced to a process of constant change (ἀλλοίωσις). Therefore, the aim of Plato's strategy,[6] which is also evident in Aristotle's approach,[7] is to refute Protagoras' theory of relativity and demonstrate its complete absurdity.

Hegel's interpretation of Protagoras is, broadly speaking, grounded in this ancient tradition. Like those of Plato, Aristotle, and Sextus Empiricus, Hegel's interpretation revolves around two fundamental elements: the nature of subjectivity and the relativity of appearances.

3. Hegel's lectures on Protagoras: The emergence of subjectivity

An ambivalent tendency can be seen in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. From the perspective of the current stage of philosophical development, important figures from the past appear to have anticipated the initial manifestations of more recent issues. However, Hegel argues that these anticipatory insights were inadequately and incompletely presented due to their limited consciousness. This is why the phrase *noch nicht* (not yet) frequently appears in Hegel's interpretations. For example, although Hegel finds the earliest manifestations of his speculative logic in Heraclitus' concept of becoming, he also emphasizes that the reflexive movement of negativity is "not yet" fully present in the famous idea of the unity of opposites (Hegel, 1988, p. 337). The same is true of his interpretation of Protagoras. Although the man-measure principle is a significant and positive development (*Fortgang*) in the history of philosophy, its purely subjective point of view falls short of accounting for objectivity.

For Hegel, the fact that human being is the measure of all things (*Dingen*)[8] is a "great principle" in that it encapsulates the two functions that arise when subjective consciousness experiences external appearances. On the one hand,it makes it possible "to grasp thought as something determinate." That is to say, rather than merely reproducing sensory content in a passive way, consciousness elevates the content to a more conceptual level. Thus, consciousness is "the determining factor" (*das Bestimmende*) in external objects in giving them their content, and it becomes the active side in the relationship between consciousness and appearance (Hegel, 1988, pp. 429–430). In this sense, the "measure" is not only a subjective activity, but it is also implicitly "the universal determination" or "the criterion of value (*der Maßstab des Werts*) for everything" (Hegel, 1988, p. 430). To put it another way, the consciousness in Protagoras enjoys a form of "self-conscious reason" (Hegel, 2020, p. 559).

However, for Hegel, the decisive aspect of the subject's twofold function is not its activity of perceiving appearances, but rather the second activity of consciousnessthrough which objective reality is determined as subjectiveobjectivity. Hegel now defines this constitutive activity of the subject in terms of two dimensions: one that opens upa new direction for philosophical thought, and the other whose significance remains limited from the standpoint ofmodern thought. Given that the man-measure principle implicitly presupposes that "reason is the aim of all things," Hegel argues that it brought about a "conversion"from the object-oriented Presocratic philosophies ofnature that preceded it, to a subject-oriented philosophy. The emergence of this kind of subject-oriented thinking enables us to grasp "all content, everything that is objective" as existing "only in relation to consciousness." Hegel argues that this will be the principle on which all subsequent philosophical progress is based, namely that the absolute now takes the form of the thinking subject as it is the "essential moment" in the determination of the external reality: "what is merely existent (*Seiende*) is not alone, rather it is for my knowing" (Hegel, 1988, pp. 430, 431). But as for the reduction of appearances to subjective perception of each individual, Hegel seems to simply follow Plato's Theaetetus, who argues that they are just simple points of view "τὰ φαινόμενα

[6] Plato draws a parallel between the Protagorean notion that phenomena are relative and the Heraclitean notion of universal change: "ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτ' οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίγνεται," (Plato, 1992, *Theaet*., 152e).

[7] According to Aristotle, the arguments of Protagoras and Heraclitus both stem from the same "thought" (διάνοια) (Aristotle, 1997, Metaph., Γ4 1010a16).

[8] It is noteworthy that Hegel understands the term "χρήματα"not in an ontological sense (*Seiendes*) but in the broadest sense mentioned above (namely as sensible qualities, values, etc.), bringing it into alignment with *Dingen*. However, in the *Lectures on Logic* from 1825 and 1826, we encounter a more ontological interpretation of the term: "Die Sophistensagten, der Mensch ist μέτρον τῶν ὄντων" (1825); "Der Mensch ist das Maß aller (ἄνθρωπος μέτρον ἐστι τοῦ ὄντος) war ihr Hauptsatz" (1826) (Hegel, 2013, pp. 345; 432).

ἑκάστῳ"(Plato, 1992,Theaet., 158a). Here, it is easy to see that Hegel reinterpretsthe fifth-century B.C. debate on the opposition between νόμος (law, convention) and φύσις (nature) within the context of the relationship between consciousness and appearances.[9] In this regard, Protagoras's originalityfor Hegel lies not in his "empty thinking about objects (*Gegenstände*)"(Hegel, 2024, p. 1430) but in his "reflectionon consciousness"(Hegel, 2023, p. 994).

However, this retrospective reinterpretation of subjectivity as a development in the history of philosophy is balanced by a reading from the standpoint of philosophy in Hegel's time. For Hegel, Kant's transcendental philosophy represents a modern and well-founded extension of Protagoras' discovery of subjectivity. However, linking Protagoras with Kantian idealism, which, in "contemporary philosophy," asserts that "we know only appearances (*Erscheinungen*), that is, what appears (*erscheint*) to us as objective reality" (Hegel, 1988, p. 431), can be regarded as an "anachronism" (Held, 1990, pp. 137–141).

Given that, in his *Science of Logic*, Hegel interprets particular determinations of thought through figures in the history of philosophy, for instance, Parmenides in relation to the concept of *pure being* and Heraclitus in relation to becoming (Hegel, 1985, p. 70;81) it may be argued that such an approach involves a certain degree of anachronism.Indeed, as Planty-Bonjour observes, "Hegel has a tendencyto attribute to his predecessors things not explicitly found in them"(Planty-Bonjour, 1982, p. 18). However, just as Hegel does not interpret Protagoras's conception of man as that of a transcendental subject (Slama, 2020) neither doeshe attribute to Protagoras the doctrine of phenomenalismassociated with Kant. When read in conjunction with "the subject in general (*das Subjekt überhaupt*)"(Hegel, 1988, p. 430)—that is, the modern conception of the rational subject in its broadest sense— the parallel between thetwo historical moments, the archaic and the modern, represented respectively by Protagoras and Kant, is drawn solely in terms of the historical development and progressive unfolding of thought. As Hegel puts it in the introduction to his lectures on Ancient Greek philosophy, Ancient Greek "spiritual individuality is (...) still in a contingent determination," that is, it is only an "abstract individuality" (Hegel, 1988, p. 177). That is to say, according to Hegel's speculative interpretation, it is only with Kant's transcendental philosophy that one encountersa systematic "explanation" (*Erläuterung*)(Hegel, 1988,

p. 430) of Protagorean principle of subjectivity which reduces being (τὸ εἶναι) to appearance (φαίνεσθαι) and appearances to individual consciousness. Therefore, the issue here is not just a simple anachronism, but rather the historical development of subjectivity and phenomenalismin the history of philosophy.

Furthermore, the most compelling evidence that Hegel does not interpret subjectivity in an anachronistic manner is found, once again, in his lectures on Protagoras. Although Hegel traces the historical development of the "subject in general," he ultimately does not regard Protagoras' conception of man as embodying a universal subject. Rather, for Hegel, the Protagorean subject remainsconfined to his finitude, that is to "his own singularityand contingency." Unlike the infinite modern subject, Protagoras' finite subject ultimately interprets the externalworld contingently within the limits of its own perspective:"Infinite reflection, infinite form, without content, withoutsubstance, simple, abstract interiority, this is boundless, unlimited finitude. This is the reality of Greek Sophists, man is the measure of all things, i.e., man in his immediatewill and immediate desire" (Hegel, 1987, p. 201). Thus, according to Hegel, we move from the positive aspect of the discovery of subjectivity in Protagoras to its deficient aspect, which is determined by historical conditions. The fact that the subject apprehends objective reality solely from its own perspective, without yet transcending its finitude and contingency, ultimately constitutes the limit ofProtagoras's originality: Protagorean subjectivity emergesas a kind of "selfishness (*Selbstsucht*)," implying a formof solipsism, and as a kind of "distortion (*Verkehrtheit*)" (Hegel, 1988, p. 430).

In short, Hegel finds in Protagoras's principle the signs of philosophical progress insofar as it discovers the perspective of subjectivity. Yet he argues that this subjectivity, confined within the limits of singularity and finitude, inevitably gives rise to a theory of absolute relativism, much as it did in the ancient commentators' interpretations.

4. Relativity and mediation

According to Hegel, two fundamental approaches can be identified in Protagoras's thought, both of which lead toward a relativistic conception of subjectivity. On the one hand, Protagoras reduces being to the realm of sensory appearances. And on the other hand, he reduces these sensory appearances to appearances for individual consciousnesses.[10] The relativity of appearances to the

[9] For an excellent study that examines the teachings of the Sophists as a form of "sociological conventionalism" that challenges social values, see Dupréel (1948, pp. 13–58); see also Kerferd (1989, pp. 111–130) and Flashar & Kerferd (1998, pp. 11–16).

[10] Oliver Tinland adds a third reduction to the two reductions

individual consciousness is, in fact, a consequence of this twofold reduction: The attribution of the determination of objectivity solely to the subject transforms the objectivity into a subjective objectivity that varies from one individual to another. Thus, everything that manifests itself in consciousness's encounter with what is external to it is ultimately reduced to the claim that "everything is merely relative", for appearances exist only "in relation to consciousness" (Hegel, 1988, p. 431). Thus, Hegel shifts his focus from subjectivity to consciousness and, more specifically, to the problem of relativity that emerges in consciousness's experience of appearances.

However, it is precisely at this point that we should address the view of certain commentators, such as Held, who regard Hegel's interpretation of relativity in his lectures on Protagoras as lacking originality and as merely a repetition of the interpretations offered by Plato and Sextus Empiricus (Held, 1990). Although this assessment may initially appear justified, given Hegel's reliance on these doxographical sources in his interpretation of relativity, I argue that Hegel departs from the ancient commentators by transforming Protagorean relativity into a problem of mediation. According to Hegel, appearances appear to be relative to the particular experiences of individual consciousnesses in Protagoras because the reciprocal relation of determination and mediation between consciousness and appearances is grasped by consciousness only in a "one-sided" (*einseitig*) manner, that is, solely from the perspective of the subject. Yet for Hegel, grasping the role of the "moment of being-in- itself " (*Ansichsein*) in the determination of consciousness is "equally necessary" (Hegel, 1988, p. 434). In other words, relativity consists in the fact that appearances present themselves to consciousness as though they were immediate, independently of what they are in themselves, and thus represents a one-sided mode of knowing the phenomenal world based on this supposed immediacy. Now in order to understand why the problem of relativity is ultimately a problem of mediation, we must briefly consider Hegel's account of the structure of appearance (*Erscheinung*) in the *Science of Logic*.

From the standpoint of speculative logic, the appearance entails an existence (*Existenz*) that manifests itself as a "mediated immediacy" (Hegel, 1978, p. 321). However, according to Hegel, the existence of the appearance is at the same time an essential existence: "The appearanceis the existence in the form of essential existence (*dieExistenz als wesentliche Existenz ist Erscheinung*)"(Hegel, 1978, p. 341). This is because the appearance signifies the re-externalization, as an essential existence, of all the determinations of thought belonging to the sphere of being, insofar as they have been internalized and mediatedby the sphere of essence.[11] As it manifests itself as a mediated immediacy, the appearance rests upon a twofold reflexive structure. Insofar as the appearance is constituted by a mediated inner structure, it possesses a "reflection- into-self " (*Reflexion-in-sich*), whereby all determinations of being and essence are reflected into the content of the appearance. Thus, reflection-into-self is nothing other thanthe mediated relation that essence establishes with itself. However, in terms of its immediate external and sensuousstructure, the appearance assumes the form of "reflection-into-another" (*Reflexion-in-Anderes*). That is to say, it is the mediated immediacy through which essence manifestsitself as being-for-another and enters into relation with whatis other than itself. Thus, as Hegel emphasizes, "existence isthe immediate unity of reflection-into-self and reflection- into-another," "but existence's reflection-into-another is not separate (*ungetrennt*) from its reflection-into-self " (Hegel,1992, p. 153). Precisely for this reason, "the essence is thusnot behind or beyond the appearance", but rather "the existence is the appearance" of the essence (Hegel, 1992, p. 157). The essence on which appearances are grounded, together with the conditioning of the appearances by this essence, comes into being in an immediate form that, at first glance, conceals this mediation. Here, it is important to note Hegel's emphasis on the etymological derivation of*Existenz* from the Latin verb *ex*-sistere, according to whichexistence signifies a movement of coming out of oneself, externalization, and emergence (*ein Hervorgegangensein*) (Hegel, 1995, p. 253).

This, then, is precisely the logical structure of the appearance that every form of theory of relativity overlooks: The appearance is nothing other than the unity of an essential, mediated inner structure and an external structure

identified by Hegel. According to Tinland (2016, p. 88), Hegel's Protagoras also reduces the mental content to the sensory ("la reduction de l'intellectuel au sensible"). This interpretation is problematic in my opinion insofar as it construes the function of sensation, as one of pure passivity.For Hegel, what takes place in sensation is not simply the passive reception of sensory objects, but also the elevation of the sensory content into mental content, namely the act of idealization (*Idealisierung*): "The relationship of the object to the I constitutes the aspect of the object's ideality: the I's turning inward into itself, for the object is, at the same time,ideal for the I"(Hegel, 2008, p. 106).

[11] The section on appearance in the *Science of Logic* can be articulated in terms of the two transformations that emerge within the *Logic of Essence*. At the beginning of the *Logic of Essence*, "the truth of being is essence"; however, the moments of existence and appearance constitute the re-emergence of being, mediated and filled by essence, as an essential existence: "The existence is the absolute externalization (*Entäusserung*)" of the essence (Hegel, 1978,p. 326).

of immediate existence. The error of the relativistaccount lies precisely in disregarding the unity of these two reflections within the appearance, thereby separating the appearance into the thing-in-itself and the appearance for consciousness, and ultimately reducing the appearance to its merely immediate mode of manifestation.

For natural consciousness, everything appears to be relative because, in the phenomenal world, everything is given as an "indeterminate multiplicity of existents," both conditioned by the other and conditioning the other, and thus without any fixed ground (Hegel, 1995, p. 253). This indeterminacy drives consciousness toward relativism, which amounts to the "subjective interpretation (*subjektiven Sinn*)" of the appearance (Hegel, 1995, p. 264). Indeed, according to Hegel, it is precisely here that we encounter the "first beginnings of reflective thought (*ersten Anfängen des reflektierenden Denkens*)" (Hegel, 1988, p. 431) which, throughout the history of philosophy, abstracts one-sidedly from the mediation between appearances and consciousness, and between existence and essence, thereby grasping them as immediate.

Now in light of this logical structure of the appearance, we can see that, in the ancient sources to which Hegel appeals in his interpretation of Protagorean anthropological relativism, he in fact emphasizes this relation of immediacy and one-sidedness precisely. In contrast to the reading of Plato and Sextus Empiricus that turns relativism into a form of nihilism and skepticism, Hegel clearly interprets the relative character of the appearance without reducing it to seeming, or illusion (*Schein*), that is, to being without an essence (Hegel, 1978, p. 244). According to Hegel, whereas seeming is, in contrast to the appearance, "nothing initself (*das an sich nichtige*)" (Hegel, 1978, p. 247), the appearance, as noted above, is the external existence of the essence itself. There is no doubt that this logical distinction between seeming and appearance led Hegel to distinguish between the implicit "twofold meaning (*Zweideutigkeit*)" of sophistic relativism (Hegel, 1988, p. 430). When we understand relativism in terms of the proposition "the appearance is the truth," we may arrive either at the conclusion that "nothing is in itself as it appears," or at the conclusion that the appearance is "true as it appears" (Hegel, 1988, p. 434). Hegel's interpretation of Protagoras is closer to the second of these two ontological assumptions. As Plato reports, the "objective relativity" of singular knowledge arising from the experience of the sensible qualities of appearance such as wind and colors (Hegel, 1988, p. 433) does not, for Hegel, lead to the nothingness of these appearances in themselves; rather, it leads to the experience of the relation established with the immediate existence of the mediated essence of these appearances. For this reason, according to Hegel, the appearances in Protagoras are "our determinations," "relations established with us" (Hegel, 2023, p. 995), that is, "objects of consciousness" (Hegel, 2020, p. 559), and "everything exists only in relation to consciousness" (Hegel, 2020, p. 559). Thus, contrary to the ancient interpretive tradition, Hegel holds that Protagorean relativism does not abolish the absolute nature of truth. In determining the appearances one-sidedly and singularly, apart from the universal moment of being-in-itself, Protagoras reconstructs the absolute as a "relative truth" (Hegel, 2020, p. 560). In other words, Protagorean relativism does not amount to an absolute rejection of truth; rather, it consists in the one-sided determination of the reciprocal relation between the essential and immediate existence of appearance, whereby this relation is reduced to sensuous existence through the abstracting activity of the understanding.

The limited content of the lectures on Protagoras goes no further than identifying the sophistic subjectivity we have examined thus far and the immediacy of relativism as a product of subjectivity's singular perspective. The following question therefore naturally arises: Is it possibleto discern, within Hegel's own philosophical system, tracesof Protagorean relativism? In my view, the dialectic of the opinion of the natural consciousness (*Meinung*), as described in "Sense-Certainty" figure in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, offers, so to speak, a phenomenological interpretation of Protagoras. Here, without explicitly stating so, Hegel seemsto follow Protagoras by situating the relation between appearance and natural consciousness within a dialectical process: on the one hand, as a relation of opposition between the singular subjective consciousness and the singular appearance, given in space and time; and on the other, by transforming the knowledge of the object intoa claim to immediate knowing grounded in the subject's sensory awareness.[12] In short, from the standpoint of speculative philosophy, in order to fully grasp the radical implications of one- sided subjectivity and relativism, we must turn, after the lectures on Protagoras, to what we might call Protagoras's"phenomenology."

5. "Phenomenology" of Protagoras

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Protagorean subjectivity and

[12] Wilhelm Purpus, who was the first to draw attention tothe relation between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and ancient philosophy, identifies traces of Protagoras' man- measure principle in the sense-certainty; yet, this relation remains limited insofar as it fails to recognize the problem of mediation underlying relativism (Purpus, 1908, p. 49). Ina similar vein, Jean Hyppolite limits himself to identifying the traces of Protagoreanism in the dialectic of *Meinung*as early forms of "subjective idealism" or "subjective phenomenalism" (Hyppolite, 1970, pp. 91–92).

 https://doi.org/10.36922/BIJP94880

relativism are addressed within the framework of the subjective opinion and intention[13] of sense-certainty, which characterizes an attitude that apprehends knowledge of the object one-sidedly and exclusively from the subject's perspective and in an immediate manner. Here, the "I as consciousness" (Hegel, 1980, p. 63), in its singularity, directs its attention not to the phenomenal object-world as a whole, nor to the manifestation of the relations among its objects, but solely to its relation to a singular object[14] that manifests itself within its own personal experience. Yet it is the singular subject itself that confers its determination upon the object given in this relation as though it were immediate. In short, as in Protagoras, sense-certainty is the conception of the givenness of appearances to natural consciousness through sensation.

It is among the striking parallels that reveal how the Hegelian interpretation, which in the lectures on Protagoras transforms relativism into a problem of immediacy, becomes even more pronounced here. In reducing the truth of the existence of objects to the truth of his own opinion, Protagoras's subject takes as its point of reference the manifestation of appearance to the subject, that is, their visibility and invisibility to the senses.[15] In other words, the ground upon which the Sophist stands is the individual "opinion" (δόξα) and "it seems to me" (δοκεῖ μοι).[16] Similarly, after experiencing the initial movement of singular appearances in space and time, whereby they prove not to be fixed and immediate but instead negate themselves and pass over into their opposite (Hegel, 1980, p. 65), sense-consciousness abandons the object's mediated otherness and turns toward the determination that it finds as *its own* within the object: "The power of its truth now lies in the I in the immediacy of my seeing, hearing, and so forth" (Hegel, 1980, p. 66), that is, in the sensory apprehension of consciousness. Thus, both in Protagoras and in phenomenological consciousness, knowledge of the external world is located in the immediate singularity of sensation, which is presumed to be infallible, because in sensation "everything sensed" appears to have "the form of something singular (*eines Vereinzelten*)" (Hegel, 2000, p. 99). According to this certainty, the object in consciousnessis that which is "other" than me; yet this otherness is nevertheless an otherness that is "mine" (Hegel, 2008, p. 104), an otherness that I myself determine. Thus, sense-certainty involves the experience of the "relativity of the object (*Relativität des Gegenstandes*)" (Hegel, 2008, p. 105) which I am aware of as something other than myself,existing outside and independently of me.

However, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that in this phenomenological description Hegel implicitly brings together elements that his philosophical system examines at different moments. The experienceof sense-certainty, in terms of its content, concerns the sensation that is the subject matter of *Anthropology*. Its form, however, corresponds, in terms of the object, to space and time as the subject matter of the *Philosophy of Nature*, while, in terms of the subject, it corresponds to the moment of intuition in *Psychology*, which concerns the projection of space and time onto the external world. The logic of appearance that consciousness is to experience, which we examined above, is also implicitly containedin sense-certainty. However, since phenomenology is neither logic, psychology, nor anthropology, but rather the"science of the experience of consciousness (*Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewußtseins*)" (Hegel, 1980, p. 61) the determination of all these distinct moments is grasped from the perspective of consciousness, that is, as they are experienced by consciousness. Thus, in Hegel's interpretation of Protagorean relativism, the dialectical structure of phenomenological experience can besummarized as follows. The Appearance manifests itself in an immediacy that conceals the identity of appearance andessence (*Logic*), and in singular space and time (*Philosophyof Nature*);[17] from the standpoint of the subject, this immediacy, however, consists in the experience of a sensory object by consciousness (*Phenomenology*)[18] within the subjective forms of singular sensation (*Anthropology*)[19]and as determined through the intuition of space andtime (*Psychology*).[20] Now the common

[13] "Das Meinen" and "Meinung" are the exact equivalentsof the Greek concept δόξα, and here Hegel's emphasis is that opinion and intention, unlike the truth, are always mine (*mein*), that is, *subjective*: "An opinion is a subjective representation (…), an opinion is what is *mine* (eine Meinung ist *mein*)" (Hegel, 1988, p. 30).

[14] Hegel uses *das Diese* to emphasize the radical singularity ofthe singularity in question (Hegel, 1980, p. 64).

[15] As Gérard Lebrun rightly emphasizes, in "pre-subjective" thought, "visibility was the model upon which all manifestations were grounded" (Lebrun, 2002, p. 51). Accordingly, the second part of the man-measure principle, emphasizes the subject's determination not only of what is visible but also of what remains invisible.

[16] "Δοκεῖ μοι" can be translated as "according to me" or "in my opinion," but also as "as far as I can see" or simply "I think" (Chantraine, 2009, p. 290).

[17] "The Idea, as nature, has (...) the infinite individuation (*Vereinzelung*)" (Hegel, 1992, p. 241); and nature as infinite individuation first appears as "space and time"(Hegel, 1992,p. 243).

[18] "To consciousness, the object appears not as somethingposited by the I, but as something immediate, existing, and given" (Hegel, 2000, §414, p. 201).

[19] "The content of sensation is thereby limited and transient, because it belongs to natural, immediate being, and hence tothe qualitative and finite" (Hegel, 1992, p. 397).

[20] "The intelligence thus determines the content of sensation as

feature of these elements underlying the phenomenological experience of sense-certainty is that the mediated content of each is given to consciousness in its immediacy. This is precisely why, in Hegel's phenomenology, relativism is presentedas the reduction of the relationship between what appears and consciousness's awareness of it to a one-sided form of knowing, in which this supposedly immediate relation is taken to be the only possible basis of knowledge.

The redefinition of the problem in this way also establishes how phenomenological consciousness can overcome relativism. According to Hegel, in order to discover universality within the singularity of subject and object, and mediation within immediacy, it is sufficient to examine closely how consciousness's assumption is reversed—that is, how the being of the appearance presumed to be singular and immediate passes over into mediation and universality. All the thought experiments employed to show that the origin of determination lies not in the object's effect upon the subject, but in consciousness's awareness of the singular appearance (such as attempts by a singular subject to determine a singular phenomenon through writing, language, and ultimately a bodily gesture) ultimately reveal the following result. On the one hand, since space and time, upon which the manifestation of sensory singular appearances rests, have an inherently contradictory structure that refers to their opposite,[21] a singular appearance that manifests itself immediately as a *here* and *now* is at the same time "something negative in general" (Hegel, 1980, p. 65). When I attempt to determine a singular appearance that I find immediately before me, whether through a linguistic sign (writing or speech) or through a non-linguistic bodily gesture, as I experience it, I can in fact express it only as a universal appearance (e.g., not this particular tree, but trees in general) (Hegel, 1980, p. 67). According to Hegel, consciousness's assumption that it is grounded in the singularity of the here and now is in fact the fleeting, punctual existence of a "simple plurality (*einfache Vielheit*)" (Hegel, 1980, p. 68) that negates itself—that is, of universal space and time, which are mediated always already in themselves.

On the other hand, the supposed singularity of the object is likewise proves to be true of consciousness itself: The activity of determining an appearance on the basis of the "this" I's own particular sensation is merely an "empty intention (*bloß Gemeynte*)" (Hegel, 1980, p. 70) that, by sublating its own subjective singularity, refers beyond itself to "all I's (*Alle Ich*)" (Hegel, 1980, p. 66). For what makes it possible for my subjective judgment concerning an object that I take to be given only for me by virtue of its being a here and now also makes it possible for another consciousness to form its own judgment of the same object from its ownhere and now is an inherently universal subjectivity that sublates the presumed singularity of both judgments. It is impossible to determine consciousness and the appearanceone-sidedly, as separate from one another, because the relation between consciousness and the appearance is not an "immediate relation (*unmittelbare Beziehung*)" (Hegel,1980, p. 67). The experience of the dialectical transitionof the supposed pure immediacy on both sides of therelation into what is other than itself shows that the originof mediation lies neither in the subject nor in the givennessof the object in sensory form, for the origin of mediation lies rather in a reciprocal relation of determination that constitutes the unity of the spheres of subjectivity and objectivity as a whole. Thus, in the *Phenomenology*, the relativism of sense-certainty, which takes singularity and sensation to be the sole basis for attaining truth, is resolved, giving way to the figure of perception, which represents a new mode of knowing governed by a universal perspective on both subject and object.

In short, Hegel deepens the Protagorean relativism that he redefines in his lectures on Protagoras as a problem of mediation, carrying it to its furthest consequences in the *Phenomenology* through the dialectic of consciousness's opinion. The lesson that consciousness must draw from this experience regarding relativism is clear: One-sided relativism, which reduces being to singular appearance and subjectivity to the limited personal experience of individual consciousness, is not a starting point of the experience but its dialectical result. For what makes it possible for consciousness to claim that it can know both the appearances and itself on the basis of its own self- awareness is precisely the universality implicitly contained in singularity, and the mediation implicitly contained in and presupposed by immediacy.

Conclusion

In Hegel's view, Protagoras's sophistry constitutes a historical moment that made possible the transition from a conception of being to a conception of subjectivity. In this study, I have examined the speculative elements that Hegel finds in Protagoras's man-measure principle, focusing on his interpretation of the Sophists in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, through which he seeks to revise the traditional understanding of Sophistry. We have seen thatin light of the ancient sources, the Protagorean principle rests on two forms of reduction, which also provide the basis for Hegel's interpretation: The man-measure principle

being outside itself and casts it forth into space and time, which are the forms in which it intuits"(Hegel, 1992, p. 444).

[21] See Hegel (1992, p. 244).

reduces being to appearance on the one hand and appearance to appearance for the individual subject on the other. In Hegel's lectures, these reductions represent, from the perspective of the development of the history of philosophy, both forms of development and limited moments. The reduction of objectivity to appearances to be determined by subjectivity constitutes a moment of rational progress when compared with the Presocratics; yet when this determination remains confined to the singularity of subjectivity, it results in the absolutization of finitude in the modern sense.

According to Hegel, Protagorean finitude leads to a radical form of relativism in which appearances are determined as singular entities from the perspectiveof individual consciousness. In this sense, it gives rise to absolute relativism. However, as I have tried to show above,Hegel interprets relativism—the problem of how subjective determination relates to the phenomenal world—as the assumption that consciousness stands in an immediate and one-sided relation to appearances. Nevertheless,in his lectures on Protagoras, Hegel only touches uponthe relationship between relativism and mediation to a limited extent. For this reason, in order to examine how Hegel addresses the Protagorean principle within his own speculative philosophy, I have focused on the figure of "Sense-Certainty" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and on the experience of natural consciousness, which assumes that it can know the sphere of objectivity immediately. This phenomenological experience consists in consciousness itself coming to experience that the relative determinations arising from natural consciousness's relation to its phenomenal object, through opinions grounded in its own particular sensations, are in fact the result of an assumption of singularity that merely appears to be immediate. The experience of universality and mediation by consciousness constitutes the self-refutation of sensationalism and relativism that shape sense-certainty's perspective on objectivity. In other words, Hegel's phenomenology completes the speculative interpretation developed in his lectures on Protagoras by demonstrating that what makes relativism possible in Protagoras's principle is not the absolute reality of immediacy and singularity, but rather the mediation and universality underlying that apparent reality.

The Hegelian interpretation of Protagoras examined in this study inevitably calls for a reconsideration of the relationship between absolutism and relativism in philosophy. In conclusion, it suffices to note that, for Hegel, relativism is neither the opposite of the absolute nor a perspective that stands in contradiction to it. Onthe contrary, relativism is itself a necessary moment of the Absolute that emerges in the historical development of thought. Indeed, if "the history of philosophy is the historyof the discovery of thoughts about the Absolute" (Hegel, 1992, p. 12) then the relativist perspective articulated in Protagoras' principle should be understood as a necessary moment in the historical development of thought, through which the Absolute is rearticulated in terms of subjectivity and phenomenalism. However, Protagorean relativism is not thereby a moment of the Absolute that has simply been left behind or sublated. According to Hegel, relativism will reappear in the "bad idealisms of the modern age" (Hegel, 1988, p. 405) insofar as they fail to question the in-itself being of appearances.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

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