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For my brother, Andrew

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Abbreviations List*

DF – Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*. Trans. Harris and Cerf. Albany: SUNY Press, 1977.

EL – Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic*. Ed. Brinkmann and Dahlstrom. Cambridge: CUP, 2010.

EPS – Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*. Ed. Wallace, trans. Miller. Oxford: OUP, 1971.

EPN – Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*. Trans. Miller; analysis by Findlay. Oxford: OUP, 1970.

GW – *Gesammelte Werke*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1968–.

LPS – Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827–8*. Ed. and trans. Williams. Oxford: OUP, 2007.

PR – Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*. Ed. Wood and Nisbet. Cambridge: CUP, 1991.

SL – Hegel, *Science of Logic*. Trans. di Giovanni. Cambridge: CUP, 2010.

VGP I–III – Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Grotsch. Vols. 30.1 (2016), 30.2 (2020), and 30.3 (2023) of *Gesammelte Werke*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

VPG I/II – Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes*, ed. Bauer. Vols. 25.1 (2008) and 25.2 (2012) of *Gesammelte Werke*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag

*** Note:** *Translations will often be modified or rewritten by the author for clarity or precision.*

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage

Introduction

The following work is a study of Hegel's account of self-consciousness, desire, and recognition in the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. That chapter contains the most famous and arguably the most alluring claim in the Hegelian corpus: self-consciousness requires recognition from another. This thesis sets the stage for Hegel's dramatic depiction of a life-and-death 'struggle for recognition' and his famous critique of an ensuing relation of 'mastery and servitude' between the victorious and defeated parties to that conflict. The guiding theme in those discussions is a concept of recognition which involves not only comprehension but also a form of actively treating another as a free and independent subject. And the central thought which Hegel aims to develop through this whole account is that to recognize and to be recognized by others is, in some sense, an essential requirement of one's very consciousness of oneself.

This account has attracted more scholarly literature than any other part of Hegel's work, and it is one of the only parts of his vast system whose currency in cultural and academic discourse extends well beyond the community of Hegel scholars. Its enduring appeal is easy to understand. It purports, in some way, to provide a unifying account of two features which have traditionally been taken to define human life as such: (1) that we are self-conscious and (2) that we are social beings. In doing so, it purports to provide a conceptual basis for connecting the social ideals of reciprocity and mutual recognition to the very nature and inner demands of self-conscious subjectivity itself.

Indeed, since Hegel's account of recognition clearly takes there to be some fundamental connection between self-consciousness and freedom, that account appears to introduce (if, perhaps, indirectly) the foundations of a radical alternative to the classical liberal tradition of

political theory, so that, as Axel Honneth puts it, "public life would have to be regarded not as the result of the mutual restriction of private spheres of liberty, but rather the other way around, namely, as the opportunity for the fulfilment of every single individual's freedom" (1995, 13). Expressed in Hegel's own words, "the community of a person with others must not be regarded as a limitation of the true freedom of the individual but essentially as its enlargement" (DF, 145; GW 4.55).

In spite of the great diversity of competing interpretations of Hegel's account, scholars are generally united in the common aim of articulating its bold and attractive attempt to demonstrate a fundamental, positive connection between self-consciousness, freedom, and human sociality. The many attempts to execute this aim, however, are anything but unified, and there is little consensus regarding the central questions raised by Hegel's account: (1) What kind of 'self-consciousness' does Hegel take to require recognition, and in what sense is this a requirement for self-consciousness? (2) What kind of recognition is Hegel talking about? (3) How are these issues related to human freedom, and what kind of freedom is at issue in this account? These are the central questions to be answered by this work as a whole. The aims of the present introductory chapter are to bring some clarity to the context and project of Hegel's account and to outline my own approach to this controversial part of Hegel's work. To this end, let me start by saying a bit about the *Phenomenology* itself.

1.1 "Self-Consciousness" in the Context of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

1.1.1 The *Phenomenology* Itself

"Under the thunder of the battle of Jena, he completed the Phenomenology of Spirit."[1] So writes Hegel's student Eduard Gans, describing the dramatic circumstances under which Hegel's

[1] Cf. Nicolin (1970, 429), cited in Pinkard (2000, 229).

famous work was completed (or, at least, was nearing completion). Living in Jena, Hegel submitted most of his final manuscript on the eve of the Prussian army's crushing defeat at the hands of Napoleon's forces in October 1806. He famously reports spotting Napoleon himself that very day — a sight which left a great impression on him.[2] During the broader period of the Napoleonic Wars, the *Phenomenology* was brought to completion in some haste — though not because of the pressures of writing in wartime but, rather, those of an increasingly impatient publisher.[3] Indeed, from the time of its initial publication, Hegel acknowledged that the text would have benefited from another draft, which he intended to publish "soon" as a second edition (which never materialized).[4]

The notorious challenges of interpreting the *Phenomenology* are by no means limited to the well-known obscurity of its overwrought and under-edited prose. The stated goal of that work is to determine "the nature of absolute knowledge" (*PhG* ¶89) and to do so by way of examining "the various shapes of spirit as stations on the way through which spirit becomes pure knowledge, that is, absolute spirit."[5] That is, the text proceeds toward its goal by way of a serial progression of numerous 'shapes of spirit' or 'shapes of consciousness' — particular forms of human experience which, for Hegel, represent so many incomplete conceptions of absolute knowledge and its corresponding objects. In this way, Hegel aims to develop the true concept of absolute knowledge from the ground up, as it were, without presupposing its nature and requirements. He begins with the most basic, naive conception of such knowledge (immediate 'sense-certainty'),

[2] In a letter, Hegel writes: "I saw the Emperor - this world-soul - riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it ... this extraordinary man, whom it is impossible not to admire." (*Letters*, 114).

[3] Cf. Pinkard (2018, xvi).

[4] "while reading through the manuscript for printing errors this one last time I truly often wished I could clear the ship here and there of ballast and make it swifter. With a second edition to follow soon — if it pleases the gods! [*si diis placet*?!] — everything shall come out better." *Letter from Hegel to Niethammer, 16 January, 1807* (*Letters*, 119).

[5] Hegel's "Advertisement," in Pinkard (2018, 468)

and he proceeds to develop more complete concepts of knowledge by revealing the internal deficiencies of their predecessors. As Hegel puts it, "the imperfect modes fall into dissolution and pass over into the higher forms which are their proximate truth. They find their final truth at first within religion and then, as the result of the whole, in science."[6]

It probably goes without saying that the task of deciphering the exact nature and aim of the *Phenomenology* is a difficult one. What does Hegel mean by 'absolute knowing'? Does he just mean objective knowledge in general — whether the object be a matter of great philosophical import or something as trivial as whether it is raining outside? Or is he talking about something like *a priori* knowledge, by contrast to mere empirical knowledge? Is his project like that of Kant's Transcendental Analytic — to determine the non-empirical conditions of any empirical knowledge whatsoever? Or is his concept of absolute knowing more closely connected to Kant's notion of pure reason (*Vernunft*) — whose defining goal (unlike perception or the understanding) is to be an unconditioned cognition whose proper object is 'the unconditioned' itself (the Ideas of Reason)?[7]

The language of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* seems to suggest a version of the last of these options, for Hegel characterizes the intended *object* of absolute knowing as "the absolute," "the essence [*Wesen*]" or "the in-itself" (¶¶ 73-6; 84).[8] This would make sense of the text's continual interest in correlative conceptions of true knowing and its ultimate object, for there is a long philosophical tradition of taking more complete kinds of knowing to correspond to more complete (or 'essential') *objects* of knowledge. Famously, Parmenides' 'way of truth' is a grasp of pure being — what *is*, without qualification. Spinoza's 'third kind of knowing' ('intuition')

[6] Hegel's "Advertisement," in Pinkard (2018, 468)
[7] *Critique of Pure Reason* (A307/B364)
[8] In the Preface (¶25), he characterizes the true 'absolute' (namely, spirit itself) as what is both *in* itself and *for* itself: "The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is the essence or being-in-itself, — the self-relating and self-determined, the being-other and being-for-itself — that which in this determinacy or its self-externality remains in itself; — or it is *in and for itself*."

consists in understanding something 'under the eternal perspective.' As such, its proper object is the 'essence' of something, achieved by way an "adequate idea of the absolute essence of certain attributes of God" (*Ethics* II, Pr. 40, n. 2). For Aristotle, the proper objects of scientific understanding (*epistēmē*) and wisdom (*sophia*) are distinct from those of perception (*aesthesis*) and practical deliberation (*bouleusis*). While the latter concern what is 'variable,' the former, higher functions of the soul concern what is "invariable," "necessary," and (in the case of *sophia*) "the best" (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.3, VI.7).[9] Indeed, that Hegel intends some version of this robust concept of absolute knowing is strongly suggested by his claim that the various shapes of spirit "find their final truth at first within religion."

At the same time, there is an essential distinguishing feature of Hegel's conception of absolute knowing and its 'absolute' object. While he claims that this 'final truth' is *first* found within religion, it is found in its most complete form in philosophical science itself. Indeed, it appears that, for Hegel, this 'pure knowing' is not only *of* the absolute but is itself the absolute that is *known*. It is "absolute spirit" — a term whose religious (and therefore heretical) undertones should not go unnoticed. Whatever Hegel means by this, he expresses his view in no modest terms. In the Preface to the *Science of Logic* (of which he claims the *Phenomenology* is the introduction), he approvingly quotes Aristotle's remark in *Metaphysics* **Λ** that first philosophy does not appear to be a human enterprise, but something godlike. It is absolutely free and self-sufficient, for it has no purpose other than itself.[10] Indeed, Hegel concludes his entire *Encyclopedia* system with a discussion of philosophy as the highest form of absolute spirit, which he closes simply with a direct quotation, in the Greek, from Aristotle's account of divine *auto-noeisis* in Metaphysics **Λ** (cf. *EPS* ¶577).

[9] For an excellent treatment of this topic in Aristotle, cf. Mendelsohn (2023)
[10] *SL* 14, GW 12.13; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 982b

Hegel's primary interest, then, does not seem to be limited to the requirements of 'absolutely' (or objectively) knowing any old thing whatsoever. His question is not how to distinguish trivial fact from trivial fiction. The various 'shapes of consciousness' he considers do not just represent forms of merely apparent (but illusory) knowing in general but, rather, merely apparent forms of *absolute* knowing. Indeed, the conclusion he draws from his critiques of these various 'shapes' is not that they are outright false or delusional, but that they are only incomplete, relative, or derivative perspectives on things. They prove to be incoherent only when taken as 'absolute.' In other words, the work does not seem to be epistemological in the contemporary sense, but in a sense more closely connected to Aristotle's notions of *epistēmē* and *sophia*. That is, it concerns the true nature and ultimate objects of philosophical science. But how exactly does Hegel understand this absolute knowing and its relation to lesser forms of knowledge? Should Hegel's account be read as a novel contribution to a well-established philosophical tradition, or rather, as a radical transformation of that tradition? Or is he somehow doing both at once? Probably the latter, but in any case, the question of how to understand Hegel's own notion of 'absolute knowing' is far from simple, and the very nature of the stated method of the text suggests that it cannot be answered except by carefully working through the whole thing.

These remarks, however, raise a number of important questions for any interpretation of the fourth chapter of that work, "Self-Consciousness." To what extent does an interpretation of this chapter depend upon a prior understanding of the concept of 'absolute knowing' in the *Phenomenology*? Should we even read Hegel's account in that chapter as an exposition of his own views on self-consciousness, or is he merely depicting some possible but incomplete conception of 'absolute knowing'? Redding (2009), for instance, argues that Hegel's whole discussion of desire and recognition in that chapter is effectively ventriloquizing a Fichtean conception of self-consciousness and recognition in order to critique it. I think Redding is right that Fichte looms

large in that account, and I agree that it contains (in part) an important critique of Fichte. But is Hegel merely speaking in the problematic mode, depicting an ultimately specious viewpoint as Plato depicts the views of Euthyphro, Meno, or Thrasymachus? Or can we, with due attention to the context and complexity of Hegel's account, take it to contain an exposition of Hegel's own views on the matters under discussion? I think we can, but in order to better address this question, let us examine the more local context of that chapter within the broader work.

1.1.2 The Context of Chapter IV

The first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* (collectively titled 'Consciousness') exhibit various conceptions of theoretical knowing. The first is defined by the idea of the pure, unaltered receptivity of immediate "Sense-Certainty." The second ("Perception") treats the idea of knowledge as perceptual judgment about sensible 'things' and their various properties. The third ("Force and the Understanding") exhibits the model of true knowing as the conceptual grasp of non-sensible objects understood as the grounds of empirical phenomena. But in turning to the treatment of *self*-consciousness in chapter IV, Hegel appears to be turning not only toward a more subject-oriented relation to one's objects, but also a distinctively *practical* one. He begins by considering immediate desire and the kind of 'self-certainty' that a subject validates not by simply understanding its objects in a certain way but by destroying and devouring them. He then introduces the need for recognition from another subject as a solution to some inherent defect in that form of validating one's 'self-certainty.' Following an abstract exposition of the "pure concept of recognition" (¶185), he turns to a discussion of a life-and-death struggle and an ensuing relation of mastery and servitude. There, the defeated party to the 'struggle' is forced (at pain of death) to work upon nature on behalf of his new master.

The particular relations to objects and other subjects discussed in this section appear to be essentially practical, even if they inevitably involve some instrumental use of one's theoretical capacities. Now, even if we bracket the question of Hegel's interest in the particular forms of practical activity discussed in that chapter, why does his turn to self-consciousness coincide with a turn to ostensibly practical actions and attitudes? Is Hegel claiming that all self-consciousness is ultimately practical? Is he claiming that the higher 'truth' of our theoretical relation to objects is ultimately their role in our practical relations to ourselves and others? Or is that perspective itself only an incomplete one that ultimately points to a still more 'absolute' truth?

Some version of this last option appears to be the case, for the fourth chapter of the text is by no means the last. In the subsequent chapter ('Reason'), Hegel begins by returning to theoretical forms of knowing ('Observing Reason'), though that chapter itself concludes with a discussion of different forms of practical action and a kind of self-knowledge/self-actualization achieved by them.[11] The next chapter ('Spirit') almost exclusively treats different forms of ethical, political, and moral action — including a kind of philosophical reconstruction of the conflict between Antigone and Creon in Sophocles' tragedy, a treatment of the Enlightenment and its culmination in the French Revolutionary Terror, and, finally, a discussion of the Kantian 'Moral Worldview' and its further developments in Fichte and the Romantics. That chapter concludes with a return to a new form of mutual recognition. There we see recognition at a moral level — or, rather, a relation of recognition which transcends cold morality.

Again, the underlying theme in all these accounts appears to be different conceptions of the 'absolute' and the subject's appropriate relation to it. For instance, Antigone's and Creon's

[11] The title of the second half of "Reason" is "The Actualization (*Verwirklichung*) of Rational Self-Consciousness through Itself."

conflict concerns the question of the absolute priority of the divine or the human law.[12] That different conceptions of the 'absolute' should correspond to a difference between the subject's own practical or theoretical attitudes toward it is a significant feature of Hegel's project. The underlying question is this: is what is 'absolute' something wholly independent of us and indifferent to our own purposes, so that the only true relation to it is to grasp it theoretically? Or is the absolute something *within us* — for instance, our own unconditioned practical freedom — so that we know this absolute only through our own action and *self*-knowledge? Or is the truth, perhaps, somewhere in between, so that our true relation to the 'absolute' (whatever it is) somehow combines elements of both the practical and the theoretical attitudes? Hegel seems to endorse a version of the last option, for following his 'Spirit' chapter, he turns his focus to forms of spirit which he takes to somehow transcend the opposition between the practical and the theoretical perspectives — namely, art, religion, and philosophy. Indeed, in the *Science of Logic* as well as the *Philosophy of Spirit*, the unification of the practical and the theoretical appears to be central to Hegel's concept of 'the absolute.'[13]

What all of this means is a very difficult question, and the aim of the present work is not to provide a global interpretation of the *Phenomenology* and its concept of absolute knowing. I will note, however, that the fact that Hegel makes the transition to those last, highest forms of spirit by way of a return to recognition is significant. For the relation of reciprocal recognition appears to be itself the most tangible example of what it means to unite the practical and the theoretical attitudes toward one's object. That is, both in its original appearance in chapter IV and in its higher

[12] The issue of the Terror also concerns a particular conception of the "Absolute Freedom" of Reason. Likewise, Hegel's interest in Kant's Moral Worldview appears to lie in Kant's view that pure, unconditioned reason has its authentic and valid use not in its theoretical but in its practical employment. Hegel is particularly interested here in Kant's notion of the practical 'postulates' of God, freedom, and the immortality of the soul (various forms of 'the unconditioned').

[13] The 'Absolute Idea' with which Hegel concludes the *Logic* is, Hegel claims, the unity of the Practical Idea (the idea of the Good) and the Theoretical Idea (the Idea of the True).

development in chapter VI ('Spirit'), the issue of recognition emerges in the context of a practical mode of subjectivity. But in both cases, it is introduced as a resolution to a problem of some 'one-sided' practical relation toward one's objects. In the first case, this takes the form of desire's outright consumption of a given, sensible object. In the latter case, it takes the form of the one-sidedly negative attitude toward sensible nature exhibited in cold morality. But without leaving the relevant domain of action (and resorting to some purely theoretical attitude), the relation of recognition replaces such one-sidedly practical forms of directly subordinating one's objects with a different kind of relation — one which incorporates a characteristic element of the theoretical attitude. Specifically, the concept of the relation of recognition is that there the individual finds his own 'satisfaction' — he fulfills his own purposes and affirms himself — not by simply *subjecting* a passive 'other' to his own ends but, rather, by uniting his purposes with the independent being of his object (another subject).

In the latter respect, recognition thus shares something in common with a purely theoretical interest in one's object. The botanist, unlike the lumberjack, is not interested in trees because of some other thing they can be made into. Rather, her interest lies in trees as they are in themselves. Recognition thus combines elements of both a practical and a theoretical attitude towards one's objects. In recognition, this combination is made possible by the fact that, in that relation, one's object is not a mere thing but another subject. That is, in this relation between two subjects, the unification of these attitudes takes the form of reciprocal, mutually purposive action. As Hegel writes in his first outline of the 'pure concept of recognition': "The first [subject] does not have the object [the other subject] before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it" (*PhG* ¶182).

But here we are getting somewhat ahead of ourselves, and these remarks are by no means interpretively neutral or uncontroversial. This, however, brings us back to our earlier question: how must one approach the account of self-consciousness and recognition in *PhG* IV? Can we interpret this chapter only by way of an adequate conception of the whole project and its final result? Does our understanding of this chapter depend upon an ascent to a Hegelian analog of Spinoza's 'eternal perspective,' so that we can only grasp the essence of chapter IV by way of an adequate idea of the essence of certain attributes of the concept of absolute knowing? Or can we, rather, approach this chapter in a more direct way — bracketing, for the most part, these more global aspects of the interpretation and attempting to make sense of the chapter on its own terms? I think we can, and this latter course is the one I pursue in this work.

1.1.3 A Note on Interpretation

Again, my aim in the present work is not to defend a global interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. The interpretation of chapter IV that I defend will not appeal in any load-bearing way to my own interpretation of the broader project of Hegel's text or his concept of absolute knowing. And my primary focus in treating that chapter will be on the meaning and argument of the account of self-consciousness and recognition contained in it, rather than the chapter's role as one incomplete 'station' on the way toward absolute knowing. At the conclusion of this work, I will briefly comment upon the latter aspect of Hegel's account, but I think the question of such broader implications cannot be truly answered before we have correctly understood what is being expressed in that chapter itself.

This approach does not mean that I will (or anyone should) put on blinders in treating chapter IV — as though it were an isolated work of philosophy and not a chapter within a larger text, a broader corpus, and a wider philosophical context. On the contrary, I will make extensive

recourse to this bigger picture wherever it helps to illuminate some aspect of this chapter. But the primary target and measure of the interpretation will be the text of chapter IV itself, not some other conception of what the text ought to be saying (or might have said) given some general view of the aim of the *Phenomenology* and its concept of absolute knowing.

This approach is mainly a pragmatic choice concerning what I believe to be the most illuminating manner of exposition. Speaking from the experience of one who has studied all too many readings of this chapter of the *Phenomenology*, I have rarely found that approaches which proceed *from* a global interpretation of *Phenomenology* end up shedding much light on the specific difficulties of the text of chapter IV. As often as not, such an approach allows interpreters to fill in the uncertainties of Hegel's lofty concept of absolute knowing with their own philosophical views, which then serve as an interpretive key to the rest. With due respect and apologies to McDowell, I think his reading is a case in point.[14] It contains a number of philosophical insights and useful remarks on Hegel's text, but it makes substantial use of a very particular understanding of Hegel's concept of absolute knowing. In short, McDowell understands Hegel's main goal to be one of expanding the insights of Kant's Transcendental Analytic by freeing them from Kant's reliance on subjective, a priori forms of sensibility. Based on that view of the greater project, he argues that (in spite of all appearances to the contrary) Hegel could not possibly be discussing desire, interpersonal recognition, mastery-and-servitude, etc., except as mere allegories meant to illustrate different aspects of individual self-consciousness and their role in theoretical knowledge. Of course, Hegel's 'shapes of consciousness' are always related to broader philosophical issues, but as a rule, I think that wherever one's interpretation of Hegel's 'absolute knowing' stands in direct

[14] "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of "Lordship and Bondage" in *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*. Cambridge; Harvard University Press: 2009. I will return to a discussion of McDowell's reading in section 1.2.1.

conflict with the plain letter of the text, the former (not the latter) should be doubted and altered accordingly.

McDowell's reading, however, raises a broader question that I previewed earlier. To what extent can we even take Hegel's account in chapter IV to represent his *own* views, rather than some other perspective that he temporarily assumes in order to critique it? An essential part of the methodology of the *Phenomenology* is that Hegel continually alternates between different 'voices,' as it were. On the one hand, his purpose is often to characterize the perspective of some 'shape of consciousness' under discussion. On the other, he always returns to 'our' perspective — that is, the perspective the ongoing, underlying philosophical discourse which examines, critiques, and explains these various 'shapes' and their relations to their successors and predecessors. Hegel generally indicates to the reader which 'voice' he is speaking in at any given time, but unfortunately, the relation between these alternating perspectives is not always as evident as, for instance, in a Platonic dialogue. Discerning when and to what extent Hegel is speaking in his own voice or that of another requires great care and attention, but it can be done, and it must be done to make any sense of the text.

In this respect, however, we also have an enormous source of assistance. We have, in the second section of the third volume of Hegel's *Encyclopedia* (the *Philosophy of Spirit*), a section titled "Phenomenology." The name is no accident, for there Hegel gives us an abbreviated version of each of the first four chapters of the earlier *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Although there are differences in the manner of exposition, the content of Hegel's account is (in my judgment) substantively consistent with the first, longer version. In this section of the *Encyclopedia*, however, Hegel is always speaking in his own voice, and his treatment of this content is free from many of the complications of the *Phenomenology*. This is a remarkably underutilized part of Hegel's work,

and while my focus will remain centered on the original *Phenomenology*, I will frequently refer to the *Encyclopedia* "Phenomenology" wherever it clarifies some ambiguity in his earlier work.

So much for general methodological remarks. The validity of my own approach can only be justified by the strength of its results. Let us return to the topic at hand. In addition to the interpretive challenges just discussed, the foregoing considerations of the broader context of the *Phenomenology* also raise many questions about the topic of chapter IV itself. For example, what kind of 'self-consciousness' is Hegel talking about, and what kind of self-consciousness does he claim to require recognition? Is he merely discussing the conditions of the basic forms of self-awareness that distinguish us from literal brutes? Or is he, perhaps, discussing some more robust form of affirming oneself and one's freedom? Is he talking about something like Kant's 'unity of apperception' or something more like Fichte's 'absolute self-positing' or some other alternative? Is he concerned primarily with the practical dimension of self-consciousness, or does his analysis of the more practical activities treated in that chapter extend equally to the more theoretical modes of self-conscious subjectivity?

1.2 The Many Forms and Senses of Self-Consciousness

Hegel is generally (and correctly) understood as viewing 'self-consciousness' not simply as one thing, but as something that admits of a variety of different forms, degrees, and interconnected senses. But if that is so, how does Hegel understand the relation between these different forms and senses of 'self-consciousness'? Are they united simply by the fact that, in various ways, they concern one's awareness of *oneself*? Or, do they all share some other common feature or structure? Or finally, does Hegel take there to be some primary sense of 'self-consciousness' to which the others are related, and if so, what is it, and what is the nature of that priority? Above all, what notion or notions of self-consciousness are at work in *PhG* IV?

1.2.1 Awareness of Myself 'as Subject' and 'as Object'

To address these questions, we may begin by situating some of the existing interpretations of Hegel's account within a broader discourse concerning different forms and senses of self-consciousness. Some philosophers, for instance, insist upon a distinction between two radically different forms of self-awareness. One (sometimes called a 'third-personal' self-awareness) is said to be more-or-less similar in form to my consciousness of any other object or to another person's consciousness of me. Another (sometimes called a 'first-personal' self-awareness) is said to be essentially unlike these other forms of consciousness. It has its own *sui generis* structure and cannot be regarded simply as a case of ordinary object-consciousness, as though it were distinguished only by the fact that, here, the subject and object are the same individual. Kant employs such a distinction in his first *Critique*, arguing that the primary form of self-consciousness ('apperception') is not only unlike one's consciousness of other objects, but it is the enabling condition of any object-consciousness whatsoever — whether that object be something else or my own individual self. In Wittgenstein, Anscombe, and Sartre, we likewise find a variation on this kind of distinction as well as an insistence upon the primacy of a distinctively first-personal form of self-consciousness.[15]

Some interpreters have read Hegel's own chapter on "Self-Consciousness" along these lines. Robert Pippin, for instance, argues that Hegel's concept of self-consciousness is a further development of Kant's notion of apperception. He thus argues that, for Hegel (as for Kant) this self-consciousness should not be understood as any kind of relation to myself qua *object*-of-consciousness, but that it is an entirely different form of relating to myself qua *subject*-of-

[15] Cf. especially Wittgenstein's *Blue Book*, Anscombe's "The First Person" and *Intention*, and Sartre's *Transcendence of the Ego* (and, of course, *Being and Nothingness*). There are, to be sure, many important differences among the views of these thinkers. For insightful treatments of the matter, cf. Longuenesse (2017), Boyle (2024), and Moran (2012).

consciousness (cf. 2010, 44). And he insists that, for Hegel (as for Kant) the conditions of this apperceptive self-awareness coincide with the conditions of our (objective) consciousness of objects in general.

It is in these general terms that Pippin understands the social requirements of self-consciousness in Hegel. That is, just as Kant had claimed that any unified, objective experience depends upon *a priori* concepts of an object in general (the categories), so, Pippin argues, for Hegel, all objective experience depends (at least implicitly) upon certain non-empirical norms or criteria of objectivity as such. But, he claims, for Hegel these norms are not to be understood as originating merely in the 'pure understanding,' and their objective validity is not dependent upon their connection to pure, *a priori* forms of sensible intuition (as in Kant). Rather, such criteria of objectivity are established and validated through social-historical practices. Their validity is ultimately dependent upon their capacity to secure and preserve the reconciliation of different subjects' competing claims about the world, themselves, and their relations to one another.[16]

Others, while acknowledging the important Kantian background, have placed greater emphasis on Hegel's critique of Kant's conception of self-consciousness. McDowell's reading is an illustrative example. He essentially reads Hegel's account as a dramatized version of Strawson's critique of Kant's views on self-consciousness in *The Bounds of Sense*.[17] The details need not detain us here, but the underlying thought (which McDowell attributes to Hegel) may be outlined as follows. While Kant is right in distinguishing the first-personal nature of our self-awareness from mere empirical self-perception, he undermines his own purposes by so sharply detaching that first-personal awareness from our empirical knowledge of ourselves as *objects* in the world — that

[16]These views are expressed, above all, in Pippin (1989), (2000), and (2010). In section 1.4.3, I will discuss Pippin's immensely influential reading in greater detail.

[17] In *Mind and World* (p. 102), McDowell expresses his basic agreement with that Strawsonian critique, which shows clearly in his own reading of Hegel.

is, as corporeal individuals. Rather, the objectivity of our own first-personal perspective *on* the world depends upon the integration of that perspective with a kind of third-personal perspective on ourselves as particular individuals *within* the world. Accordingly, the dependency of these two forms of self-awareness is reciprocal, and the primary form of self-consciousness is not merely the one or the other but, rather, a kind of synthetic unity of the two. McDowell thus reads Hegel's account of desire, a life-and-death struggle, and a relation of mastery-and-servitude as an illustration of different tensions between the spontaneous, non-empirical aspects of apperceptive consciousness and the receptive, empirical aspects of our sensible embodiment.[18]

Setting aside the validity of that allegorical reading of the text,[19] McDowell is by no means the only interpreter to read Hegel as attempting to reconcile these different aspects of one's awareness of oneself (as subject and as object). Sartre also reads Hegel's account in terms of this broader issue, but he takes the social aspect of the account to be crucial in this respect. That is, he takes Hegel to be claiming that one's awareness of the very distinction between these two perspectives on oneself depends upon one's confrontation with other subjects (for whom I am but one object among many, a 'being-for-another'). He thus takes Hegel's account of recognition to concern the attempt to reconcile one's own 'being-for-self' with one's 'being-for-another.'[20]

[18]A similar view is developed by Gareth Evans in his *Varieties of Reference*, chapter 7, and McDowell also states his agreement with Evans's account in *Mind and World* (1994, 102). It is notable that, despite his sharp departure from Pippin's reading of *PhG* IV and the role of recognition in it, McDowell's own view of the general project of the *Phenomenology* is quite similar to (and directly influenced by) Pippin's. Cf. *Mind and World* (111n.).

[19] It is interesting that, despite McDowell's express affinity with Strawson's critique of Kant, he does not pursue the interpersonal dimension of self-consciousness which Strawson himself developed in his earlier "Persons" essay. There Strawson argues that the concept which unites the first- and third-personal aspects of our self-awareness is a certain concept of a 'person,' and he thus claims that self-consciousness essentially depends upon a conception of oneself as a person. Indeed, he argues that this self-conception depends upon our experience of other persons and a generic conception of oneself as one person among others. Cf. Strawson (1959, 87-115).

[20]Cf. *Being and Nothingness* (1956, 318-329). Sartre praises Hegel for connecting this problem concerning two aspects of one's self-relation to a problem concerning one's relation to other subjects. However, he thinks Hegel is overly 'optimistic' in his view that such a problem can be truly resolved (either within the subject or between subjects).

I agree that Hegel's account of self-consciousness in *PhG* IV is, in some sense, concerned with a form of unifying one's awareness of oneself *qua* subject with one's awareness of oneself *qua* object. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel himself criticizes Kant's conception of the relation between these two aspects of self-consciousness. He even suggests that such a view leaves us with a disjointed conception of the subject itself — namely, that it forces us to view the subject either as "a one-sided subject without its objectivity; or else just an object without subjectivity" (SL 692, GW 12.195). It is not obvious, though, how exactly Hegel understands that general problem or the solution it requires. Does Hegel understand relating to myself as 'object' in the sense of a kind of third-personal self-awareness, or as an awareness of myself as one *thing* among others? Does he instead understand the relevant kind of 'self-objectification' in terms of a kind of objective validation of my own *perspective* on the world, perhaps through the acknowledgement of that perspective by others? Or does he understand this, rather, in something like the way the carpenter's handiwork or the painter's art is a kind of outer realization of himself, his abilities, his intentions?

1.2.2 The Unity of Self-Consciousness with Itself and the Concept of Internal Purposiveness

These questions will be recurring themes in this work, and I will develop the basis of my own answer to them in chapter two (on Hegel's account of self-consciousness as desire). For now, I will note that, while various forms of 'self-objectification' have some relevance to Hegel's account, the image of the artisan and his product is the most pertinent starting point. For Hegel, the most important sense of 'making oneself one's own object' is not merely one of attaining a kind of reflective, third-personal perspective on oneself. Rather, it is one which corresponds to a kind of 'self-actualization' in the sense of objectively *realizing* the inner, subjective dimensions of my existence (my abilities, intentions, character, etc.). Thus, in a discussion of self-consciousness in his lectures on fine art, Hegel describes the particular way in which "man brings himself before himself" through his outer actions, stating:

> [H]e has the impulse, in whatever is directly given to him, in what is present to him externally, to produce himself and therein equally to recognize himself. This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he now finds again his own characteristics. Man does this in order, as a free subject, to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself. (31; cf. GW 28.1, 229)

We should note a few things about the notion of 'self-consciousness' here at work in such claims. First, it is a more demanding one than say, one's own internal awareness of one's mind and one's intentions — one which seems to presuppose and build upon the latter form of self-awareness. Specifically, this form of 'presenting oneself before oneself' has more to do with the consciousness of the achieved realization of one's intentions. Indeed, Hegel's discussion of the 'realized purpose' in the *Logic* closely mirrors the language of the passage above: "The realized purpose is thus the *posited unity* of the subjective and the objective" (*EL* ¶210). Clearly, this more demanding form of self-consciousness is closely related to the awareness one's *prospective* (or still unrealized) intentions. In fact, Hegel regards the more robust form of self-consciousness not as a mere addition or an alternative to the latter form of self-awareness but, rather, as its fulfillment or completion.[21]

My position in what follows is that Hegel's chapter on "Self-Consciousness" ultimately concerns this more robust sense of self-consciousness as a kind of fulfillment or completion of self-consciousness understood in a more general, less demanding sense. What exactly this means and why Hegel views self-consciousness in this way will be a continual theme of this work. Here we should note that the notion of a subject's 'positing' itself and its freedom by bringing its objects into conformity with its practical purposes has direct roots in Fichte's concept of self-

[21] For a good contemporary treatment of the perfective mode of knowing one's actions, see Haase (2018).

consciousness.[22] That Fichtean concept has a profound influence on Hegel, though (as we will see) Hegel's own development of it departs from Fichte in important ways. In this context, though, we should also note that the broader notion of knowing oneself by a kind of 'self-actualization' in and through one's intentional objects has important roots in Aristotle as well (about which more below).[23]

Second, as I noted above, the image of the artisan and his product is a useful starting point for illustrating the notion of 'making one's subjectivity objective' that Hegel is most interested in. But it is only a starting point, and as a form of 'self-objectification' or 'self-actualization,' the model of mere *external* purposiveness (as Hegel and Kant call such outer productions) is a limited one. Put simply, in whatever way I may 'objectify' myself in the form of, say, a handcrafted table, there is clearly a great disparity between myself (the subject) and that object — not just individually but also generically (I am not like a table). By contrast, in *internally* purposive activities (where the subject has itself as its end), I realize and reproduce my own self in a related but very different and more complete sense. In fact, Hegel's account of desire in *PhG* IV clearly involves some kind of nutritive model of self-directed activity in which I have *myself* as my end and realize that end by transforming another (a consumable object) into *me*.[24] Indeed, that activity

[22] As Fichte puts the point, "free activity aims at nullifying the objects, insofar as they bind it. Therefore, it is an efficacy directed at objects" (2000, 20).

[23] This issue in Aristotle is a complex and controversial one. In *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.7, Aristotle writes "what [the producer] is in potentiality, his handiwork [*ergon*] manifests in activity [*energeia*]" (1168a5-9). Indeed, Aristotle's broader conception of self-knowledge is closely connected to this point — namely, that one knows oneself in and through knowing one's objects. For he holds that the capacities of the soul, when *actualized* or exercised, become in some sense the same as their objects. For instance, there is a certain kind of identity between the actual sight/understanding of X and X qua actually seen/understood (cf. *De Anima* III.2 425a27 and III.8 431b24-30). For useful treatments of this complex issue in Aristotle, cf. Menn (2002), Kelsey (2022).

[24] As I will discuss in chapter two, I do not, however, agree with a common view that Hegel is merely talking about animal nutritive activities in general here. Moreover, as we will see in chapter three, the assimilative model of self-purposiveness exhibited by consumption is, for Hegel, an internally incomplete form of relating to myself as an end.

clearly incorporates elements of the productive model of 'self-actualization,' for here I quite literally transform a given, external object into myself.

Throughout this work, I will argue that Hegel's account of self-consciousness does concern a kind of unity of myself 'as subject' and 'as object' and that the essential form of this 'self-unification' has to do with the structure of internal teleology. And, for Hegel (as for Aristotle and Kant), that teleological structure is by no means confined to mere biological life as such. Indeed, the role of internal teleology in Hegel's account of self-consciousness does not primarily concern mere natural life but a still higher form of internal purposiveness — freedom.

Finally, we should note here that Hegel does not take the paradigm case of internal teleology to be mere individual self-directness (of which things like eating are the most basic example). Even the rats have a higher purpose than that. Rather, for Hegel, the inner aim of existing *for* oneself (as an end) is only adequately realized through a relation of reciprocal inner purposiveness between different subjects — that is, in a shared life, a "*Zusammenleben*" (*EPS* ¶433), which both preserves and fulfills the individual freedom and 'being-for-self' of its members. This idea, I will argue, is the core of Hegel's account of recognition.[25]

Of course, all of these claims will have to be explained and justified in the work that follows. But the central theme in this work will be that Hegel's understanding of self-conscious subjectivity (and its relation to the social) fundamentally revolves around different forms and aspects of internal teleology. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel uses the language of "living substance" (¶18) to characterize subjectivity as such, and in his famous passage about the 'I that is We,' he describes the concept of Spirit as "this absolute substance" (¶177). If all this

[25] As we will see, in the concept of reciprocal, *internal* purposiveness, there is, for Hegel, a very particular unification of the concepts of external production and mere individual self-reproduction (through mere assimilation of another).

sounds broadly Aristotelian, it should. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel describes the structure of the self in terms of internal teleology and explicitly refers to Aristotle (¶22). Following his critique of Kant in the section of the *Logic* cited above, Hegel writes that Kant's account "appears all the more lame and empty when compared with the profounder ideas of ancient philosophy concerning the concept of the soul or of thinking, as for instance the truly speculative ideas of Aristotle" (12.195/692). And in his Introduction to the *Philosophy of Spirit*, he writes:

> The books of Aristotle on the Soul, along with his discussions on its special aspects and states, are for this reason still by far the most admirable or even the sole work of speculative interest on this topic. The essential aim of a philosophy of spirit can only be to reintroduce the concept [den *Begriff*] in the knowledge of spirit, and so to unlock once again the meaning of those Aristotelian books. (¶378)

That Aristotle is one of Hegel's greatest philosophical influences is not especially controversial, and he will make as strong an appearance in this work as Kant and Fichte. But we should not ignore the fact that, while Hegel picked a plot beside Fichte as the final resting place for his earthly body, he chose a passage from Aristotle as the conclusion of his philosophical system.

This being said, the role of Fichte in *PhG* IV is essential, and in order to understand the broader context of Hegel's account in that chapter, we must say a bit more about Fichte.

1.3 The Fichtean Background

In his *Foundations of Natural Right*, Fichte argues that a certain mutually recognitive engagement with another rational subject is a necessary condition of first becoming a self-aware, rational subject oneself. Indeed, it is a necessary condition for developing one's very capacity to say 'I.' Fichte takes this self-consciousness to inherently involve an awareness of my own self-determining agency in the world. He argues that I can only become thus aware of myself by being unavoidably confronted by my own freedom through a 'summons' (*Aufforderung*) by another

subject — that is, by another subject's bidding me to freely choose to perform or abstain from some particular course of action (2000, 31). This, to borrow a phrase, is an offer I cannot refuse, since both acceptance and refusal of the proposed action would equally fulfill the summons to choose freely. Thus, whatever I choose, my own free subjectivity is presented before me as a kind of objective reality with which I am confronted — a 'fact' that is just as much my own free 'act,' a *Tat-handlung* (2000, 25). Accordingly, for Fichte, I can only become conscious of myself and my freedom (at least, my freedom to determine my own ends) through being recognized and treated as a free subject by another whom I thus recognize in turn.

Fichte's account of the necessity of this summons and the requisite conditions of receiving and answering it is complex. It involves a nuanced discussion of the essential role of the body in two subjects' apprehension of one another as (actually or potentially) rational beings, as well as an account of the interdependence of theoretical and practical consciousness in one's awareness of oneself and the external world.[26] A detailed summary of that account would take us too far afield,[27] but for now I want to emphasize two points.

The first is that Fichte's account of this necessary *Aufforderung* from another is a *genetic* account of self-consciousness. That is, it is an account of the individual's original development of its consciousness both of itself and of an independent external world as such. In other words, he is consciously attempting to deduce the social-practical origins of Kantian apperception. And although Fichte originally presents this genetic story as a kind of all-at-once dawning of self-

[26] Although these two forms of consciousness are interdependent, practical self-consciousness, for Fichte, is the ultimate foundation of this relationship. In Fichte's own words: "What is being claimed is that the practical I is the I of original self-consciousness; that a rational being perceives itself immediately only in willing, and would not perceive itself and thus would also not perceive the world (and therefore would not even be an intelligence), if it were not a practical being" (2000, 21).

[27] For a useful account of this 'deduction' in Fichte, cf. McNulty 2016.

consciousness through a dramatic encounter with another, he clarifies that the kind of relation at issue is, in reality, the formative process of one's childhood upbringing [*Erziehung*].[28]

At the same time, for Fichte, this genesis of self-consciousness also has implications for the nature and persisting requirements of self-conscious subjectivity. In the *Foundations*, the most salient of these is that, for Fichte, the requisite intersubjective relation in this original *Aufforderung* is a relation of mutually recognized rights between subjects — specifically, the reciprocal self-limitation of the arbitrary will of each vis-à-vis the other (2000, 39). But, as its place in the beginning of that work suggests, Fichte also takes the requirements of that relationship to form the foundations of the doctrine of right. He takes the general, normative requirements of engaging with one another in accordance with mutually recognized rights to lie in the very conditions of self-consciousness itself. Naturally, this approach raises the question of whether there is some kind of genetic fallacy going on here. In other words, how can Fichte derive such persisting, normative requirements of our social interactions from an account of the genetic requirements for first becoming self-consciousness? For a mature, appropriately-raised subject who has thus become self-consciousness, the need to treat others in a certain way clearly cannot be explained merely by appeal to the necessary conditions of first *becoming* self-conscious.[29]

In any case, our task here is not to settle these difficult questions of Fichte exegesis, but only to introduce his account as a partial window into Hegel's account of self-consciousness in *PhG* IV. That Fichte looms large in Hegel's account is well-acknowledged. Indeed, his role appears to extend beyond the obvious fact that Hegel is taking up Fichte's interest in the relation between self-consciousness and social recognition. The very language with which chapter IV first outlines the concept of self-consciousness *in abstracto* is unmistakably Fichtean. Redding (2009)

[28] "The summons to engage in free self-activity is what we call upbringing [*Erziehung*]" Fichte (2000, 38).
[29] Neuhouser raises a worry of this kind in his introduction to Fichte's *Foundations* (2000, xvii).

draws an insightful connection between Hegel's treatment of desire (*Begierde*) here and Fichte's own concept of *Begehrung* as the subject's determinate drive to 'posit itself' and overcome outer limitations through its action on an externally given object.[30]

Nonetheless, the exact nature of Hegel's engagement with Fichte in this chapter is a difficult and controversial matter. Neuhouser (1986) reads *PhG* IV as having virtually the same purpose as the opening sections of Fichte's *Foundations* — namely, a 'deduction' of the social-practical foundations of any consciousness or self-consciousness whatsoever. Redding places particular emphasis on the role of Fichte's thought in this account, though not as a position Hegel is positively appropriating but as the direct target of his critique. I think the issue is far more complicated than either of these approaches.

First, the fact that Hegel returns to these topics in the *Philosophy of Spirit* (where he is speaking purely in his own voice) suggests that even if Hegel's account contains a critique of Fichte (I think it does), that critique remains only a part of Hegel's own story. Indeed, we should not underestimate the profound (if only partial) influence of Fichte on Hegel's own conception of self-consciousness. Even in his discussion of spirit as 'living substance' in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel employs overtly Fichtean language, writing that the subject "is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself" (¶18). At the same time, Hegel's account of self-consciousness and recognition in *PhG* IV departs from Fichte's *Foundations* substantially — both in its aims and its content. Accordingly, I think the right approach to *PhG* IV is to view it neither as a straightforward appropriation of Fichtean projects nor as a straightforward critique of them, but as a more complex engagement with Fichtean themes.

[30] Cf. Fichte's *System of Ethics* (2005, 121), as well as his discussion of 'longing' (*Versöhnung*) and its drive for satisfaction (*Befriedigung*) in the *Wissenschaftslehre* (2022, 372-5).

In any case, the present work is not a comparative study of Hegel's and Fichte's conceptions of self-consciousness, desire, and recognition. Fichte's approach to these topics is its own kettle of fish, and in the remainder of this work, I will address his views only insofar as they help to illuminate what Hegel is or is not doing in his own account. My interest at present, however, lies in the following questions. Is Hegel himself giving an account of a social genesis of self-awareness — a development from the condition of an infant or a thoughtless brute to one in which I am capable of saying 'I,' 'I think,' 'I want,' 'I am,' etc.? Is he giving an account of certain normative requirements for mature self-conscious subjects as such? Is he, like Fichte, somehow doing both at once? Does 'recognition' in Hegel's account, signify the kind of relationship developed in Fichte's *Foundations* — namely, a kind of mutual self-limitation in accordance with the concept of negative rights (i.e. rights not to be directly coerced, dispossessed, etc.)? Does it, rather, signify a broader form of mutually acknowledged normative relations?

Most readings of Hegel's account adopt a version of one or more of these options. For my own part, I think that Hegel's account, while indebted to Fichte in many ways, departs from his project more radically and takes its themes in a much more Aristotelian direction. To see how, let me begin by outlining what I will call the 'standard approach' to Hegel's account.

1.4 The Standard Approach

1.4.1 Nature and Reason

At the heart of both the genetic and the normative aspects of Fichte's account in the *Foundations* lies a central distinction. It is the distinction between mere natural sensibility (mere animality) and self-conscious rationality. The genetic aspect of Fichte's account concerns a literal transition from a subject who, like an infant, is a self-conscious being only *in potentia* to one who is actually a rational subject. The normative aspect pertains to the basic requirements of treating

others and being treated not as mere natural beings (who may be subjected to direct coercion) but as rational ones (who may not). Of course, in Fichte, as in Kant, this distinction directly corresponds to the distinction between the absolute heteronomy of sensible nature and the inner autonomy of self-legislating reason.

It is well known that Hegel objects in some way to Kant's and Fichte's conceptions of the radical opposition between nature and freedom. Nonetheless, he certainly maintains important elements of their views, and some version of these themes clearly plays a major role in Hegel's own account in *PhG* IV. Following a brief, abstract discussion of the concept of self-consciousness, Hegel quickly transitions to a treatment of immediate desire — specifically the kind that is satisfied by destroying and consuming its object (*PhG* ¶174; *EPS* ¶428). Some commentators take Hegel to be literally discussing animal life and hunger in general. Most take Hegel to be at least discussing an aspect of human subjectivity in which we are, for all intents and purposes, no different from mere animals. While I will argue in the following chapter that neither of those views is right, there is no question that Hegel sees immediate desire as a deeply 'natural' side of our subjectivity, by contrast to higher forms of intentionality.

Hegel introduces the need for recognition as a necessary solution to some inherent defect in the kind of self-consciousness exhibited by immediate desire-satisfaction (or, as many commentators maintain, the mere proto-self-consciousness exhibited by it). In the account of a life-and-death struggle that follows his initial argument, Hegel places central emphasis on the role of risking one's own natural life as a demonstration of one's freedom (¶187). And in his subsequent 'master-slave' dialectic,[31] he highlights the manner in which the slave is compelled,

[31] Note, throughout this work, I will translate Hegel's 'Knecht' as 'slave.' Miller translates the term as 'bondsman,' (in keeping with his translation of *Knechtschaft* as 'bondage.') But bondsman is a virtually meaningless term in English. Pinkard renders it as 'servant,' which is, in a way, more faithful (the normal German term for 'slave' is *Sklav*). But while 'servitude' (like *Knechtschaft*) has clear connotations of bondage, the connotations of

through his work and his 'fear of the lord,' to 'hold desire in check,' to control his immediate desires through "the discipline of service and obedience" (¶¶195-6). In short, various aspects and senses of 'transcending nature' through our relation to others are undoubtedly important in this chapter of Hegel's work.

The standard view is that this is what Hegel's account is really all about, in one way or another.[32] More specifically, since the need for recognition is introduced by way of Hegel's critique of desire, the standard way of framing that need corresponds to a certain view of desire and its deficiency. The standard approaches understand the central significance of 'desire' in Hegel's account to be a representation of the human being in its essentially natural aspect, its animal life and natural 'immediacy.' Its main function in Hegel's account of self-consciousness (on this view) is that it introduces both a natural basis of, and direct counterpoint to, the distinctively rational, human form of self-relation to be achieved through recognition. Thus, in the standard framing, the problem which directly motivates the need for recognition is one of overcoming the animal immediacy represented by mere 'desire.'

In that vein, Heikki Ikäheimo describes Hegel's account as "centrally about how humans overcome or sublate mere animality, or a merely animal form of life through recognition" (2022, 69). As Axel Honneth puts it, "Hegel thus seeks to do no less than explain the transition from a natural to a spiritual being, from the human animal to the rational subject." (2008, 77). Brandom writes that the transition from desire to recognition "corresponds to a shift from consideration of

'servant' are (for better or worse) far more neutral. In any case, regardless of the term, the *Knecht* in Hegel's story is one who is forced to labor for the *Herr* at pain of death. That is slavery. Finally, I will forego the sometimes preferred term 'enslaved person,' which is used to emphasize that slavery is a role that a person has been forced into, not the person herself. But Hegel is precisely talking about the role as such, not the complex individuality of the one who is forced into the role.

[32] Here, again, Redding's reading marks a major departure. His basic claim is that, in fact, the whole point of that account is a direct *critique* of the Fichtean opposition between freedom and nature. While, again, I do not think the whole account should be read in that way, I completely agree that Hegel's critique of desire is basically a thinly-veiled critique of Fichte, directed against his conception of the inherent opposition between freedom and nature. This will be a major theme in chapter three.

particular merely *biological* creatures impelled wholly by *natural impulses*, in relation to their species, on the one hand, to consideration of genuinely *social* self-conscious individuals motivated by normative relations of *authority* and *responsibility* within their communities, on the other." (2019, 246).

While this broad interpretive framework encompasses a variety of different readings, its understanding of the general *problem* naturally lends itself to one (or both) of two ways of expressing Hegel's conception of its corresponding social solution. One approach understands this requirement in a genetic or developmental sense: recognition is needed in order to *become* self-conscious in a manner that distinguishes us from mere brutes. I call this the 'anthropogenesis reading,' borrowing Kojève's term (1980, 40). Another approach (sometimes combined with the first) takes recognition to be a constitutive, *normative* requirement of self-conscious subjectivity as such. This view, represented by Robert Pippin and others, maintains that Hegel is not merely giving a genetic or developmental account but is making the more general claim that what distinguishes us from non-rational animals — namely, reason itself — is essentially social.[33] On this view, I distinguish myself from mere natural life and realize my *freedom* from immediate natural determination by acting according to reason, where this requires participation as a recognized member within a kind of social space of reasons defined by mutually acknowledged norms of thought and action. I call this the 'normativity reading.'

One of the main claims of the following study is that this standard framing of the central issue in Hegel's account is mistaken. Hegel is not, in my view, giving a genetic account of originally achieving self-consciousness out of a prior state of literal unselfconscious animality (or human infancy). And while the broader theme of transcending the more 'natural' aspects of self-

[33] Pinkard's 1996 *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* is also one of the classic expositions of this approach.

conscious subjectivity itself does play an important role in Hegel's account, it is not the main theme or the basis of the need for recognition. It is a secondary, subordinate theme. The primary significance of 'desire' in Hegel's account is not that it represents our mere animality, but that it represents a very basic (if highly limited) form of human freedom and self-consciousness. And Hegel's critique of desire does not focus on its merely natural or impulsive aspect but on a different feature entirely. Indeed, I will argue, the standard way of framing Hegel's account not only coheres poorly with the text, but it also fails to capture the distinctiveness of Hegel's views on freedom, self-consciousness and human sociality, as well as the nature and depth of his philosophical departure from Kant and Fichte. Naturally, the meaning and justification of these rather sweeping claims can only be shown through the whole work to follow. But, to conclude this introductory chapter, let me say a bit about the more standard approaches and why I think the alternative approach I advocate marks such a substantial departure from the predominant readings.

1.4.2 The 'Anthropogenesis' Reading

The claim that Hegel's account is about a coming-to-be of rational subjectivity out of a merely animal form of life may be understood in many ways. Its meaning depends, above all, on how literally we understand mere animality and how much we mean by rational subjectivity. When we accuse someone of acting like an animal, a brute, of course we do not mean this literally (for we do not blame animals for being animals). To use a Kantian example, we might say that one who bears false testimony against an innocent person to save his own skin proves himself to be like a mere animal, for he has prioritized the drive for self-preservation over duty and reason (cf. *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:30). Of course, as Kant himself insists, such a person is culpable precisely because he is not a mere animal.

For now, I am concerned only with the idea that Hegel's account of recognition in *PhG* IV concerns an original genesis of human self-awareness out of literal state of unselfconscious animality or human infancy. This approach is also closely connected to (if perhaps not identical with) the claim that, for Hegel, our very awareness of ourselves is *ab initio* dependent upon various forms of internalizing the perspective of others. Pinkard expresses a version of this view in his introductory summary of *PhG* IV: "I am conscious of myself only in a kind of second-person form, that of my consciousness of being known by another embodied consciousness and by my awareness of that other's knowing me while knowing that I am aware of their knowing me. Right at the outset, self-consciousness is already a two-in-one" (2018, xxiii).

There are various motivations for these readings of *PhG* IV. In any case, such views depend, first of all, on a particular reading of Hegel's account of desire. Specifically, they requires the claim that, notwithstanding Hegel's description of the desire under discussion as a form of *self-consciousness*, Hegel is talking about mere animal desire as such, together with the basic feeling of life that any animal experiences in pursuing and satisfying its wants and needs. Brandom's account thus takes Hegel's starting point to be a discussion of "merely *biological* creatures" in this strong sense. In the following chapter, I will argue that this reading is mistaken. Instead, Hegel's account concerns such natural desires and activities as they appear in and for a distinctively human, self-aware subject. This (as we will see) makes an important difference for understanding the purpose of his account of desire.

But the strong genetic reading of *PhG* IV faces a much greater interpretive problem: how to explain why Hegel's initial introduction of the concept of recognition is immediately followed by an account of a life-and-death for recognition which results in a relation of mastery-and-servitude between the two parties. We can perhaps make sense of all this if, instead of such a genetic reading, we understand the kind of self-consciousness and recognition to be gained through

that struggle along the lines of the more robust form I discussed in section 1.2.2 — namely, a self-aware subject's attempt to actively affirm his own agency by bringing an external object (here, another subject) into conformity with himself and his purposes. How exactly we should understand the self-affirmation at stake in that struggle remains a difficult matter, and I will treat that issue in chapter four. But if, instead, we take the kind of recognition to be won through that struggle to be a condition of one's first *becoming* self-aware at all, then Hegel's account does not seem to make any sense whatsoever.

It is one thing to demonstrate a certain kind of freedom and independence through risking one's life in combat with another. It is quite another for such an encounter to also bring about the dawning of basic self-awareness, the ability to say 'I.' If the subjects entering such mortal combat were literally thoughtless brutes, then it is unclear how the form or product of that struggle could be any different than in the case of two rams butting heads over a mate. Viewed from another angle, the 'slave' in Hegel's account (the defeated party who does *not* gain recognition) is not Aristotle's "poor man's slave," an unselfconscious beast of burden (*Politics* 1252b12). He is a thinking, speaking, order-understanding and order-following subject — i.e. 'a self-consciousness.'

Perhaps there are ways of defending a strong genetic reading against these objections. One option might be to view Hegel's 'struggle' and his account of mastery and servitude as only a very loose and extended metaphor for a completely different form of social encounter. In my view, the better course is to leave behind that genetic reading, and I will defend that position in the chapters to follow. This is not to deny that, for Hegel, we develop our basic forms of self-awareness through the more loving context of our childhood upbringing, our acquisition of natural language, etc. It is only to deny that such a development is the topic of *PhG* IV. But this means that, while Hegel is certainly playing on some of the general themes of Fichte's social-genetic account of self-

consciousness, his own aim is not to give an alternative rendition of such a genetic theory. He is doing something quite different.

1.4.3 The Normativity Reading

Robert Pippin, for his part, insists that "the theory of recognition is not primarily to be understood (as it often is in post-war Hegel scholarship) as a comprehensive transcendental theory about self-awareness, as if about the possibility of any self-relation (as if the contents of any such self-relation are and must be internalisations of ways of being-regarded by others), [and] is not primarily a genetic theory about the formation of ego or social identity" (2000, 155-6). Instead, he takes Hegel's account to primarily concern the conditions for objectively realizing or expressing one's freedom through one's own acts and one's relation to others. I think that general approach is the right one. But how, for Pippin, should we understand this connection between freedom, self-consciousness, and sociality?

For Pippin, the operative sense of self-consciousness (and freedom) is one in which I 'find myself' in my own acts, where finding *myself* is to be understood as recognizing my reason in my actions and judgments. He writes: "Hegel treats the highest or ultimate satisfaction of the freedom condition noted above – being able to 'find' myself, identify with, my deeds – in very much a Kantian way" (2000, 159). That is, my actions are truly 'mine' when they are "the product of reason and not a matter of being pushed and pulled by contingent desires or external pressure, or of merely strategically responding to such pushes and pulls" (2000, 157). More specifically, the 'very much Kantian' conception of freedom which Pippin attributes to Hegel is one in which the rationality of my actions consists in the extent to which they are determined, not by my "individual immediacy," but rather by a certain 'universal' point of view from which I act as "one among many" (cf. 2000, 159, 162).

Pippin's central term for this kind of freedom and self-consciousness is "normative self-determination" (2010, 19). At times (as in his "What is the Question?" essay quoted above), Pippin expresses this idea of rational self-consciousness in a specifically practical register, where the abstract notion of expressing a 'universal' point of view corresponds closely to Kant's 'universality' formulation of the categorical imperative. But elsewhere, Pippin insists that Hegel's central point is not specific to action and practical reason but instead concerns the broader idea that successfully expressing one's rationality (whether practical or theoretical) means acting and judging according to norms that are (and are taken to be) binding both for myself and others (cf. 1989, 155). Specifically, what links the theoretical and practical dimensions of this idea in Pippin is the connection between universal principles of rationality and the issue of *objectivity* more generally.

Here is where the role of the social becomes central. Outlining his reading of *Phenomenology* IV, Pippin describes this connection as follows:

> We now assume, at least provisionally, that any claim-making activity can count as a possibly objective judgment only within the "practice" or "institution" governing such judging, and that there is such a practice only insofar as a community of participants take themselves to be participating in it, within constraints that define it as that and no other practice. [...] And, as we shall see in detail, given this reconstrual, assessing the rationality of such practices will ultimately involve considering such self-consciously held criteria as, in effect, social norms, possible bases for what Hegel will call "mutual recognition." [...] So, the pursuit of knowledge will, as a result of this chapter's claims, be reconceived as participation in a social practice or institution. (1989, 147)

To better understand Pippin's view of the link between rationality/objectivity and sociality, it will help to note its connection to Kant's claim (first introduced in the *Prolegomena*) that "objective validity" and "universal validity (validity for all)" are convertible concepts (*Prol.* ¶¶18-19; 4:298-9). In the *Prolegomena*, this claim is introduced in a theoretical register, and Kant makes the point in order to motivate the idealist form of objectivity that pertains to the categories, to our a priori

forms of intuition, and to the synthetic a priori judgments they make possible. But, for Kant, this broader connection between 'objective validity' and 'universal subjective validity (validity for all)' also extends to *practical* reason and defines the relation between a subjective and an objective principle of action (a maxim and a law). In the *Groundwork*, he writes:

> A maxim is the subjective principle of acting, and must be distinguished from the objective principle, namely the practical law. The former contains the practical rule determined by reason conformably with the conditions of the subject (often his ignorance or also his inclinations), and is therefore the principle in accordance with which the subject acts; but the law is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle in accordance with which he ought to act, i.e., an imperative. (*Groundwork* 4:422)

In other words, maxims in general are rules which enjoy an *intra*-subjective universality — i.e. they govern what *I* always do in such-and-such circumstances (e.g. lie whenever it benefits me). An 'objective principle' (a law) enjoys not merely intra-subjective validity but also inter-subjective validity. It concerns what 'any rational being' should do in such-and-such circumstances.

Accordingly, the broadly Kantian starting points from which Pippin derives the need for recognition are the claims that (1) acting freely (transcending natural immediacy) means expressing my rationality in my actions and judgments, and (2) this means expressing a kind of intersubjectively universal (or universally valid) point of view in my actions and judgments — i.e. an objective perspective. But for Kant, the ultimate principles of objective thought and action derive from certain a priori functions of the faculties common to all finite, rational subjects as such — the pure forms of intuition, the pure concepts of the understanding, the pure principle of practical reason (the categorical imperative). Their validity for *all* finite rational subjects is a consequence of that origin. For Pippin, Hegel's theory of recognition turns that Kantian consequence into a *condition*.

In place of Kant's appeal to these a priori forms, Pippin's Hegel takes the origin and validity of our norms of objective thought and action to lie in a form of mutual, intersubjective

validation within a determinate social-historical community. Specifically, as I noted in section 1.2.1, the objectivity/rationality of such norms depends upon the strength of their ability to mediate and reconcile different subjects' competing claims about the world, themselves, and their relations to one another. Accordingly, to live and act in a way which expresses one's freedom (i.e. one's objective rationality) *is*, on this reading, to do so in a manner that is recognized by myself and others as expressive of such norms. As Pippin writes:

> [W]ithout an appeal to a formal criterion of genuinely rational self-determination, this turns out to be the only criterion left: one is an agent in being recognized as, responded to as, an agent; one can be so recognized if the justifying norms appealed to in the practice of treating each other as agents can actually function within that community as justifying, can be offered and accepted (recognized as) justifying" (2000, 163).

Pippin's interpretation of Hegel's theory of recognition stands at the heart of his post-Kantian, non-metaphysical reading of Hegel's system that has been so influential over the past several decades. The appeal of this approach is clear. It centers on Kantian notions of self-consciousness and rational autonomy whose influence on Hegel is undeniable. But it reframes these notions in a way that emphasizes Hegel's distinctive interest in the realization of reason in concrete social-historical communities. It further provides (among other things) an explanation of the central role of concrete, institution-based 'Ethical Life' in Hegel's account of practical freedom.

This normativity-centered approach to Hegel's concepts of self-consciousness, freedom, and social relations will be a recurring theme in this work. These concepts, of course, extend well beyond Hegel's account of self-consciousness and recognition in *PhG* IV. And while my own reading of that text draws extensively upon Hegel's wider work, the focus will always return to explaining this particular chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Likewise, my engagement with the

'normativity reading' of Hegel's concept of recognition will focus primarily on whether it correctly explains Hegel's account in chapter IV specifically.

The 'normativity reading' is defined by two features above all. Its primary feature is that it takes Hegel to ground the need for recognition in *PhG* IV on the need to overcome one's 'natural immediacy' by acting according to universal norms or principles rather than immediate impulse. The other is that, while acknowledging that the immediate context of 'recognition' in *PhG* IV concerns more practical dimensions of human agency and sociality, this reading takes the underlying point of that account to concern that which is common to both the practical and the theoretical. It concerns the general need to act and judge in an objective and thus intersubjectively normative manner. Here, the role of social recognition concerns, above all, the establishment of mutually acknowledged, collectively binding norms which serve as a higher, mediating basis for our engagement with the world and with one another as rational beings.

My argument in this work is that this is not what Hegel's account of recognition is about. As noted, I agree with Pippin's view that, for Hegel, self-consciousness and human freedom are not restricted to the practical. Nor do I think that Hegel, like Fichte, maintains the absolute priority of the practical. But Hegel's account of self-consciousness, desire and recognition in *PhG* IV *does* focus on the practical dimension of human subjectivity, and the need for social recognition in that account is not, I will argue, based upon that which is common to the practical and the theoretical. Rather, Hegel's account of the need for social recognition emerges from considerations of the internal teleological structure of self-conscious subjectivity as it pertains to one's practical relations to one's objects. It centers on the need to realize and preserve oneself as a free subject by acting on one's objects and bringing them into conformity with oneself and one's ends.

1.5 Reciprocal Action and Freedom through Shared Purpose

Here I will make a few final remarks on the view I defend in what follows. The need for "another self-consciousness" (¶175) in Hegel's account is not, I will argue, rooted in the need to act rationally in the sense of acting on the basis of norms and principles rather than immediate impulse. It does not merely concern the need for a different *form* of action but, more specifically, the need for a particular kind of *object* acted upon (or, rather, with) — one that is not, as in immediate desire, a mere object, but rather another subject: "A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much 'I' as 'object.'" (¶177).

In chapter IV, the crucial distinction is whether I achieve my ends by unilaterally imposing them on a passive other or whether I achieve them through reciprocal action. To return to a passage quoted above, Hegel explains the essential distinction at issue as follows: "The first [subject] does not have the object [the other subject] before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it. [...] Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both" (*PhG* ¶182). [34]

But the distinction between unilateral purposive action on a mere object and reciprocally purposive action with another subject is not the same as the distinction between rational, principled action and mere natural, impulsive action. A sculptor working on marble or a carpenter working on maple wood may exercise their arts with the greatest skill, forethought, and expertise. They may undertake their projects for the best reasons, and they may fulfill the highest recognized

[34] This passage is found in Hegel's initial, highly abstract outline of what he calls the "pure concept of recognition" (¶185) — presumably the most general concept of recognition (precisely because of its abstractness).

standards of their practices. But the objects on which they act in no way 'do of their own accord what they do to it.' Rather, they realize their designs by imposing them on passive, material things.

My central claim in this work is that the need for recognition is not about the need to act according to common principles rather than immediate impulse or natural drive. That is the primary interest for Kant and Fichte, not Hegel. Hegel's focus is on a different, more fundamental condition of realizing one's freedom: reciprocal action through shared *purpose*. His central claim here is that one can truly exist *for oneself*, fulfill one's own internal purposes, only through the unification of one's internal purposes with another's. "Self-consciousness achieves its *satisfaction* only in another self-consciousness" (¶175). This can be achieved only through a relation of free reciprocity in which each is a necessary *means* for one another, and each also recognizes the other as an *end in itself*. At issue, in other words, is the individual freedom and fulfillment that can only be achieved in the shared life of human beings, the "*Zusammenleben des Menschen*" (*EPS* ¶433).

Indeed, as I will argue, the freedom attained through a shared life of reciprocal purposiveness is the true shape of practical freedom for Hegel. Within this relation, the need to overcome immediate sensibility through common norms, principles (duties, commitments and the like) functions as a mere subordinate part, an enabling condition. This is the basis of Hegel's essential departure from Kant's and Fichte's practical philosophy and his turn to a kind of modernized Aristotelianism — his view of the doctrines of right and morality as derivative, dependent aspects of freedom, whose inner substance is the living whole, a unified inner purpose. In short, what is essential in Hegel's account of recognition is not common principles of objectivity, but rather a particular shape of the 'absolute' which appears here as 'Spirit': "this absolute substance," the self-sufficing, self-standing whole that exists as the unity of the "complete freedom and independence" of its members: "I that is We and We that is I" (*PhG* ¶177).

In the following four chapters, I divide my account of *PhG* IV in a simple manner. **Chapter two** concerns Hegel's initial account of desire. I examine why, and in what sense, Hegel treats this as the most basic form of self-consciousness, and what kind of self-consciousness it exhibits. **Chapter three** concerns Hegel's transition from desire to recognition. I examine the nature of that critique to determine what, exactly, Hegel identifies as the main problem with desire, and why a relation to "another self-consciousness" (¶175) is uniquely capable of overcoming it. **Chapter four** addresses Hegel's account of a life-and-death struggle for recognition. I examine why Hegel's initial, abstract concept of pure reciprocity and mutuality recognition turns suddenly to the antagonism of a life-and-death struggle followed by a relation of mastery and servitude. I explore what is at stake in that struggle and why it ends in the master-slave relation. **Chapter five** examines Hegel's famous 'master-slave dialectic.' I explore why this arrangement is a problem not only for the slave but also, as Hegel claims, for the master himself. I also examine Hegel's important notion that, despite his servitude, the slave nonetheless exhibits a certain germ of a higher freedom that the master himself lacks. These are the main issues to be treated in what follows. I conclude, in **chapter six,** by considering the wider role of chapter IV in the *Phenomenology* and what this chapter tells us about Hegel's concept of 'absolute knowing.'

Chapter 2: What Kind of Self-Consciousness Is 'Desire *Überhaupt*'?

Introduction

The *Phenomenology*'s "Self-Consciousness" chapter begins with an argument that the most basic form of self-consciousness is the satisfaction of one's immediate desires — specifically, the kind of desires whose satisfaction involves the destruction and consumption of their objects (ostensibly, desires like hunger). This is a surprising start to a chapter on self-consciousness, since such immediate desires are, taken by themselves, common to all animals — not just rational or self-conscious ones. Moreover, in those texts where Hegel is explicitly treating animal life and nutrition as such, what he says is much like what he says in his account of desire as a form of self-consciousness. Why, then, does Hegel identify immediate desire-satisfaction as the most basic form of *self-consciousness*? And what is the operative concept of self-consciousness in that claim?

The most common approach to this unusual beginning addresses this difficult question — or, perhaps, avoids it — by taking the opening subject of that chapter not to be self-consciousness in the proper sense (unique to subjects capable of saying 'I') but rather a more basic form of self-awareness connected to the general animal drive for self-preservation (what Hegel elsewhere calls animal 'self-feeling').[35] I will call this the 'desire-as-animality' reading.[36]

This reading of 'desire' plays an important role in the standard readings of Hegel's account of self-consciousness through social *recognition*, which immediately follows his treatment of desire. His claim that self-consciousness requires recognition emerges directly out of a diagnosis of some inherent limitation in the kind of self-awareness represented by desire-satisfaction. Since

[35] Cf. *Science of Logic* 684,GW 12.187, *SL* 686, GW 12.189; *Philosophy of Nature* ¶¶357, 368, 373

[36] Proponents of this view include Butler (1982, 33), Kojève (1980, 39), Ng (2020, 101), Pippin (2010, 19), Pinkard (1996, 48), Brandom (2007, 130), Gadamer (1976, 61), just to cite a few. Brownlee (2023, 54-5), by contrast, argues that we should not simply identify 'desire' (qua form of 'self-consciousness') with mere animality and thus read it as something less than self-consciousness.

that form of self-awareness is generally identified with the standpoint of mere animal life (or the human being *qua* mere animal), Hegel's argument is generally taken to be that social recognition in some way defines the essential distinction between human self-consciousness proper and mere animal instinct and drive.

However natural this reading of Hegel's account of desire may appear, it requires biting a rather large interpretive bullet at the very foundation of one's interpretation of that chapter. Since no one takes Hegel to be making the extraordinary claim that animal life in general is *self-conscious* (and rightly so), the desire-as-animality reading requires that we deny that Hegel is really talking about self-consciousness proper in this opening discussion of desire. In other words, it requires the outright denial of the plain letter of the text, for in *Phenomenology* chapter IV, in Hegel's later version of this same account in his *Philosophy of Spirit*, and in his lectures on the topic, Hegel repeatedly identifies the kind of desire under discussion as a form of *self-consciousness.*

Is there a way of understanding this puzzling beginning of *PhG* IV without having to sacrifice the plain letter of the text at the alter? Otherwise put, is there a way not only of taking Hegel to mean what he says in claiming that desire is form of self-consciousness, but also of understanding *why* his account of self-consciousness would begin by discussing appetites and activities which are, at the very least, deeply similar to those of unselfconscious animal hunger-satisfaction? My argument in this chapter is that we not only can (and must) adopt this alternative approach, but that doing so also reveals the deeper and far more interesting conceptual connection that Hegel in fact draws between life and self-consciousness.

I begin, in section 2.1, by arguing that, as an interpretive matter, we must deny the desire-as-animality reading. Hegel means what he says when he identifies the desire treated in chapter IV as a form of self-*consciousness*, and this is because, first of all, his topic is not merely immediate

desire-satisfaction *tout court*, but rather immediate desire-satisfaction as it occurs by and for a distinctively human, thinking subject — one capable of saying 'I.'

In section 2.2, I argue that the common failure to see *why* Hegel's account of self-consciousness begins with desire is connected to a deeper misconception of his concept of self-consciousness — namely, that it is essentially a variant of Kant's concept of apperception. Instead, I argue, Hegel means something stronger by 'self-consciousness.' He means having myself, as subject, for the *object* of my consciousness. Specifically, he is speaking of a kind of self-knowledge attained through self-*realization* — one which involves an objective experience of *what sort of being I am*.

In section 2.3, I examine more closely Hegel's conception of the relation between apperceptive self-awareness and his more robust sense of self-consciousness. I argue that, for Hegel, this stronger sense of self-consciousness is not merely something distinct from apperception, but a certain kind of fulfillment or completion of it. Specifically, it should be understood as an objective realization of a merely subjective form of self-identity which is implicit in apperceptive self-awareness. Desire-satisfaction (for an apperceptively aware subject) is the most basic example of this structure for Hegel.

This structure of Hegel's 'self-consciousness,' I argue, bears an essential conceptual relation to animal life and 'self-feeling.' Namely, it is the structure of a self-subsisting identity defined by an internal teleological activity — i.e. being a purpose unto oneself and fulfilling that internal purposiveness in one's external actions. But the internal purposiveness of *self-consciousness* (of which desire is the 'first and lowest level') is, for Hegel, not that of mere life but of human *freedom*. For Hegel, the generic structure of self-consciousness is one and the same with that of objective freedom.

2.1 Desire as Animality?

2.1.1 Self-Consciousness as Desire

The *Phenomenology's* chapter on "Self-Consciousness" opens with a brief discussion of the abstract concept of self-consciousness and its relation to the various 'forms of knowing' discussed in the previous chapters. But Hegel quickly gives a short argument whose conclusion is an apparent *identification* of the self-relation expressed by that abstract concept with the very self-relation exhibited by desire: "Self-consciousness is desire as such [*überhaupt*]" (*PhG* ¶167). This initial outright identification of self-consciousness with desire is a position which Hegel will shortly subject to critique. So, in his lectures on the topic, Hegel describes desire as only the "first and lowest level of self-consciousness"[37] and, in his *Encyclopedia*'s version of this discussion, as only "self-consciousness, in its immediacy" (*EPS* ¶426). But what kind of self-relation is involved in this "first and lowest level of self-consciousness"?

Hegel explains this self-relation as one which is mediated by a negative relation to an externally-given sensible object, writing:

> Consciousness, as self-consciousness, henceforth has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however *for self-consciousness* has the character of a *negative*; and the second, viz. *itself*, which is the true essence and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object [*im Gegensatz des ersten*]. In this sphere, self-consciousness exhibits itself as the movement in which this antithesis [*Gegensatz*] is removed, and the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit for it. (*PhG* ¶167)

Hegel describes this initial, negative attitude toward the external object of desire (the 'first object') as one of being "certain of the nothingness of this other" (¶174), or as one which views its object as "an enduring existence [*ein Bestehen*] which, however, is only *appearance*, or a difference

[37] *LPS* 186, *VPG II*, 783

which, *in itself*, is no difference" (¶167). Hegel's claim is not that, from the perspective of desire, the object is viewed as a mere illusion or a mere subjective representation. What, from this perspective, is a mere 'appearance' is only that the object is something absolutely enduring, absolutely 'self-standing' (*selbständig*), and absolutely 'other' to me, like an immutable reality and external limit. The subject of desire views its object, rather, as something inherently (*an sich*) destructible and conformable to itself.

Thus Hegel claims that "self-consciousness exhibits itself as the movement in which this antithesis [*Gegensatz*] is removed" — i.e. it exhibits itself as the *satisfaction* of desire, in the which the object's original otherness or opposition to the subject is removed (*aufgehoben*), and in which the desiring subject's original certainty of itself and of the 'nullity' of its object is confirmed. Hegel identifies this *Aufhebung* with the literal destruction and consumption of the object (*EPS* ¶428). Thus, the desiring subject "destroys the independent [*selbständigen*] object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a *true* certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself *in an objective manner*" (¶174).

This account of self-consciousness-as-desire contains two especially striking features whose explanation will guide the rest of this essay. In one respect, the kind of self-relation Hegel is discussing appears to involve *more* than what one might expect under the heading of 'self-consciousness' — for instance, a reflexive awareness of one's own mind, or the ability to say 'I.' Rather, he seems to be treating a more robust form of self-*validation*: the objective verification of the 'certainty' of my own self-sufficiency or 'self-standingness' (*Selbständigkeit*) and the corresponding *Unselbständigkeit* of the external, sensible objects of my desire. In satisfying my

desire by destroying and consuming my object, I prove *myself* to be the persisting and determining element in that relation — das *Selbständige*.[38]

In another respect, however, this self-relation may appear to be something *less* than what one might otherwise expect in a discourse about self-consciousness, for the particular content of this form of desire appears to be *hunger*. But this naturally raises the difficult interpretive question with which I introduced this paper: Why would Hegel begin his account of self-consciousness — something typically attributed only to rational animals — by discussing an activity (hunger-satisfaction) which is common to all animal life, rational or not? In short, what is the conception of 'self-consciousness' which Hegel takes to be exhibited by desire-satisfaction? Let us begin with this second question.

2.1.2 The Standard Reading of 'Desire'

The simplest way of answering this difficult question is that, in spite of Hegel's talk of desire as a form of self-consciousness, he is in fact *not* talking about the kind of self-relation unique to rational subjects (subjects capable of saying 'I'). Rather, he is talking about the kind of self-relation common to animal life in general. Indeed, Hegel will soon give a critique of the kind of self-awareness exhibited by desire satisfaction and, from that critique, he will argue that true self-consciousness requires recognition. Since self-consciousness seems to be what distinguishes us from other animals; since immediate desire-satisfaction does *not* seem to distinguish us from other animals; and since Hegel will shortly claim that (in some sense) true self-consciousness requires

[38] The term *Selbständigkeit*, which is central not only to Hegel's account of self-consciousness but to the *Phenomenology* as a whole, is often translated as 'independence,' 'self-sufficiency,' or 'self-subsistence,' and I too will use these terms to translate it. I will also sometimes use the neologism 'self-standingness.' The reason is that the notion of being 'self-standing' in Hegel also has a deeper and essential connotation of that which is truly *substantial* and thus that which persists through its own self – a point I return to below. Indeed, in his lectures on Spinoza, Hegel summarizes Spinoza's definition of substance as: "Die Substanz aber ist das schlechthin Selbstständige auf sich beruhende" (Substance, however, is the purely self-standing which rests on itself) (VPG II, 715).

recognition, it appears quite natural to read Hegel's account of desire as an account of mere animal life generally and the more basic forms of self-awareness which humans share in common with other animals.

As seen in the foregoing chapter, some version of that kind of view is the predominant one in the literature. Thus, Heikki Ikäheimo describes Hegel's account of desire and recognition as "centrally about how humans overcome or sublate mere animality, or a merely animal form of life through recognition" (2022, 69). Brandom states that the transition from desire to recognition "corresponds to a shift from consideration of particular merely *biological* creatures impelled wholly by *natural impulses*, in relation to their species, on the one hand, to consideration of genuinely *social* self-conscious individuals motivated by normative relations of *authority* and *responsibility* within their communities, on the other." (2019, 246). Axel Honneth expresses a similar sentiment: "Hegel thus seeks to do no less than explain the transition from a natural to a spiritual being, from the human animal to the rational subject" (2008, 77).

In these accounts, it is often somewhat ambiguous just how literally we are to take 'desire' in Hegel's account to represent the standpoint of mere animality. Is that account really just about something all animals have in common? Like Brandom, Butler appears to take Hegel's introduction of the concept of desire to be truly about animal life as such:

> Introduced at this juncture in the text, the term [desire] clearly acquires the meaning of animal hunger; the sensuous and perceptual world is desired in the sense that it is required for consumption and is the means for the reproduction of life. (1982, 33)

Pippin's account likewise appears to take the kind of self-awareness represented by desire to be something that is common to animals more generally:

> In a way that is typical of his procedure, [Hegel] tries to begin with the most theoretically thin or simple form of the required self-relation and so first considers the mere sentiment of self that a living being has in keeping itself alive, where keeping itself alive reflects this minimal reflective attentiveness to self. (2010, 19)

Admittedly, Pippin's description of this kind of self-relation is a bit less straightforward than Butler's. The language of 'minimal reflective attentiveness' seems, perhaps, to mean something not merely animalistic, but this phrase is meant to elaborate a kind of self-awareness which, it seems, is supposed to pertain to the living (or animal) being as such: "the mere sentiment of self that a living being has in keeping itself alive."

In any case, the interpretive motivation to take 'desire' in Hegel's account to represent, for all intents and purposes, a merely animal form of self-relatedness lies not only in the fact that what Hegel is discussing here is, at the very least, something deeply similar to animal nutritive life generally. In addition, such a reading of desire is an essential part of the standard readings of the need for recognition — namely, the view that this need is in some way grounded in the need to overcome a merely animal form of life. The somewhat ambiguous formulations of the view that desire represents mere animality appear to be reflections of a sensitivity to the fact that, such interpretive commitments notwithstanding, Hegel does, after all, describe the desire under discussion as a form of self-consciousness.

But the real question is this. Is the purpose of Hegel's treatment of desire merely to illustrate the aspects of our subjectivity which are *not* distinct from the animals — the basic feeling of its own life that an animal attains by pursuing and satisfying its desires? Or is it meant to illustrate the distinctive structure of self-consciousness itself and not merely the natural basis of self-consciousness? The more common view is some version of the former. And given the outsized importance of the standard reading of Hegel's account of 'desire' to the standard framing of his overall project, it is worth considering whether that reading is, in fact, correct. To this end, let us begin by considering the view that Hegel's account of desire really is just about something we share in common with animals more generally.

The primary advantage of that reading is that it is the simplest way to make sense of the clear similarity between the self-relation described in Hegel's account of desire and the self-relation involved in animal feeding in general. There is no doubt that, at the very least, Hegel thinks these self-relations share something essential in common. For instance, the *Science of Logic*'s discussion of animal nutritive life (what Hegel calls the 'Outer Process' of life) repeats nearly verbatim what Hegel says about desire in *PhG* IV:

> The subject [the living individual] is a purpose unto itself, the concept that has its means and subjective reality in the objectivity subjugated to it. As such, it is constituted as the idea existing in and for itself and as an essentially self-subsistent being [*das wesentliche Selbständige*], as against which the presupposed external world has the value only of something negative and without self-subsistence [*Unselbständigen*]. In its self-feeling [*Selbstgefühl*] the living being has the certainty of the intrinsic nullity of the otherness confronting it. Its impulse is the need to sublate this otherness and to give itself the truth of this certainty. (*SL* 684/ GW 12.187)

Indeed, when discussing desire as a form of self-consciousness in his lectures, Hegel states this commonality with animal feeding quite explicitly:

> The other [the consumed object of desire] loses its independence, it must subject itself and coincide with us. This is what occurs even in animal desire; the animal has the feeling that it can become master over external things. It does not believe in the being and independence of external things, rather it believes that they have their being relative to it.[39]

Passages like these, together with the fact that Hegel inserts a rather lengthy discussion of natural life in general in the middle of his discussion of desire, certainly lend credence to the idea that the standpoint of animal life (or, at least, the human being *qua* animal) is the central topic of his account of desire.

[39] *LPS,* 185; *VPG II,* 782.

In spite of all this, there appears to be a rather glaring problem in the standard reading. In *PhG* IV, in the *Encyclopedia* version of this section, and in Hegel's lectures on that section, he repeatedly and consistently identifies desire as a form of self-*consciousness*. But ostensibly, self-consciousness is *not* something common to all animal life. Indeed, in all of those texts, Hegel discusses the subject of desire as "the I" — the self-conscious subject as such (cf. *EPS* ¶¶427-429; *PhG* ¶¶173-4).

This alone suggests a possible alternative reading — namely, that Hegel is not merely talking about hunger-satisfaction *tout court*, but rather, a distinctive self-relation (self-consciousness) which is exhibited by hunger-satisfaction as it occurs by and for a distinctively human, thinking subject — a subject capable of saying 'I.' This suggestion might appear to be the slightest modification of the standard reading — perhaps only an insistence upon the bare proviso that, although the self-relating activity under discussion is essentially animalistic in both form and content, it is not literally undertaken by a mere brute. In fact, I will argue that the implications of this alternative reading are far more substantial than this and require a significant reexamination of the very concept of self-consciousness under discussion in that text. To bring this into focus, I want to begin by showing that, in spite of the seeming identity between Hegel's 'desire' and mere animal appetite in general, it becomes clear on closer examination that the identification of the two is interpretively untenable.

2.1.3 Self-Consciousness and Self-Feeling

In order to accommodate the fact that Hegel speaks of desire as a form of self-consciousness, the desire-as-animality reading is forced to take Hegel to be employing the term 'self-consciousness' in a very loose, extended sense. Rather than indicating an (or *the*) essential specific difference between rational animals and mere brutes (as one would expect), this reading

requires that we take Hegel to be using it to express their generic identity — the feeling which every animal has for its own life. This would be an extraordinarily loose usage of 'self-consciousness,' akin to employing the term 'thinking' in a wide sense that would include mere animal sensibility in general. Moreover, it would be unparalleled in the Hegelian corpus, for in every text in which Hegel is explicitly treating animal life in general (including elsewhere in the *Phenomenology*), he never employs the term self-consciousness. Rather, in those contexts, Hegel makes use of the more generic term '*self-feeling'* (*Selbstgefühl*).[40]

Some scholars in fact employ this terminological distinction in order to identify the standpoint of desire with the mere animal feeling of one's own life. Kojève writes:

> The Animal raises itself above the Nature that is negated in its animal Desire only to fall back into it immediately by the satisfaction of this Desire. Accordingly, the Animal attains only *Selbst-gefühl*, Sentiment of self [*sentiment de soi*], but not *Selbst-bewußtsein*, self-consciousness — that is, it cannot speak of itself, it cannot say "I"... (1980, 39)

This is Kojève's reconstruction of Hegel's basic critique of desire. Accordingly, he takes the advance from desire to recognition to correspond to an advance from mere *Selbst-gefühl* to *Selbst-bewußtsein*. Pippin makes a similar move. His characterization of the form of self-awareness present in Hegel's 'desire' — "the mere sentiment of self that a living being has in keeping itself alive" (2010,19) — simply employs the standard English translation of Kojève's French translation ('*sentiment de soi*') of Hegel's *Selbstgefühl* (self-feeling). Gadamer likewise follows Kojève closely in this respect, taking the kind of 'self-consciousness' involved in Hegel's 'desire' to be really nothing more than the subject's animal self-feeling: "For in fact, in its immediacy it is the vital certainty of being alive" (1976, 60). "But," he writes, "for just that reason this sensuous feeling of self [*Selbstgefühl*] is not true self-consciousness [*Selbstbewußtsein*]" (1976, 61). Despite

[40] Cf. *PhG* ¶258; *Science of Logic* 684, GW 12.187, *SL* 686, GW 12.189; *Philosophy of Nature* ¶¶357, 368, 373

the other differences in their accounts, they all take the transition from desire to recognition to correspond in some way to a distinction between mere animal *Selbstgefühl* and proper human *Selbstbewußtsein*.

In keeping with Hegel's own distinction between these two forms of self-awareness, these authors are certainly correct that *if* we are talking about the kind of self-awareness involved in mere animal hunger-satisfaction in general, then we are *not* talking about self-consciousness (properly speaking), but only self-feeling. But, to borrow a phrase from James Conant, one man's *modus ponens* is another's *modus tollens*. That is, since Hegel repeatedly describes the desire under discussion as a form of self-consciousness, we should, it seems, take Hegel at his word and draw the appropriate modus tollens conclusion that he is not simply talking about animal nutrition *tout court*.

Such a view would also make far more sense of the place of this discussion as a topic in the *Phenomenology*. In his introduction to the text, Hegel defines phenomenology as the "science of the experience of consciousness" (*PhG* ¶88). Likewise, in both the *Science of Logic* and the *Philosophy of Spirit*, he identifies the topic of 'phenomenology' as *consciousness* [*Bewußtsein*].[41] The 'Phenomenology' section of the *Philosophy of Spirit* repeats a version of Hegel's discussion of desire under the subheading of 'self-consciousness.' But 'consciousness' for Hegel does not denote 'awareness' in such a general sense that would include mere animal sentience. Rather, it denotes a specific kind of thought-informed intentionality which he explicitly denies to mere animals: "Animals also have souls [i.e. sentience] but not consciousness."[42] Specifically, 'consciousness' denotes the kind of intentionality which is informed by a general (if by no means clear, distinct, or adequate) awareness of the distinction between objectivity as such and my own

[41] Cf. *SL* 10, GW. 21.9; *SL* 698, GW. 12.197, *EPS* ¶¶387, 413, 473Z.
[42] *LPS* 163, VPG II, 746

subjective relation to it (*PhG* ¶82) — a distinction which is completely absent from the mind (or rather, the 'soul') of the mere animal. For Hegel (as for Fichte), this awareness of a relation and distinction between one's subjective perspective and the object considered independently of it is a necessary component of being able to say 'I.' For this reason, Hegel also sometimes identifies the subject-matter of 'phenomenology' simply as "the I" (*EPS* ¶413, *SL* 686, GW 12.189), which he glosses as "the subject of consciousness" (*EPS* ¶415).

Expressed in Kantian terms, for Hegel, consciousness as such (in contrast to mere animal sentience), is inherently *apperceptive*. The kind of subject under consideration in Hegel's treatment of various 'shapes of consciousness' is, from the first chapter onward, an apperceptively self-aware subject. (As I will argue in the following section, the kind of 'self-consciousness' specifically at issue in *PhG* IV means something more, for Hegel, than this apperceptive self-awareness, although it includes that apperceptive awareness as an essential component.)

Accordingly, given the stated subject matter of 'phenomenology' as such ('consciousness'); given that Hegel treats desire as a topic of phenomenology; given that he repeatedly characterizes it as a form of consciousness and self-consciousness; and given that, in these texts, he consistently refers to the subject of desire as 'the I,' it seems that there is a far more compelling alternative to the standard interpretation of the beginning of Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness. Namely, as in the text's earlier treatments of 'sense-certainty' (Chap. 1) and 'perception' (Chap. 2), the topic of his discussion of desire is not a mere form of sensibility *tout court*, but rather a mode of sensible awareness as it appears distinctively in a thinking animal, a subject of consciousness (an 'I'). Hegel, in other words, is talking about the *conscious* satisfaction of desire, just as, throughout his text, he is talking about different 'shapes of consciousness' — forms of conscious intentionality.

But what of the lengthy discussion of life in the middle of chapter IV? That discussion has been one of the central prima facie motivations for interpreting the type of desire at issue as representing the standpoint of mere animal life and not, as Hegel claims, a genuine form of self-consciousness. In fact, that discussion both begins and ends with a *contrastive* characterization of the relation between self-consciousness-as-desire and mere natural life, which I will now briefly discuss.

2.1.4 Life as the Object of Desire

Hegel's discussion of life in *PhG* IV begins with the claim that life (and specifically, 'a living thing' [*ein Lebenidiges*]) is the 'object' of immediate desire (¶ 168). Some have read this as meaning that the desiring subject's *own natural life* is its 'object' in the sense that it is the subject's constitutive *end* and thus defines the lens, as it were, through which it views its external objects.[43] In that way, 'life' is taken as a characterization of the *subject* of desire, not of the given, external object of desire. This reading is demonstrably false.

The claim that life is the object of desire immediately follows Hegel's description of the 'double object' of self-consciousness as desire: "one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however *for self-consciousness* has the character of a *negative*; and the second, viz. *itself*, which is the true essence and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object" (¶167). But, in the discussion of life which immediately follows this passage, Hegel identifies 'life' and '*ein Lebendiges*,' not with the *second object* (the subject itself) but rather, with the first, external object:

[43] Cf. Pippin (2010, 46), Pinkard (1996, 48)

> But *for us*, or *in itself*, the object which for self-consciousness is *the negative element* [my emphasis] has, on its side, returned into itself, just as on the other side consciousness has done. Through this reflection into itself the object has become Life. What self-consciousness distinguishes from itself as having *being*, also has in it, insofar as it is posited as being, not merely the character of sense-certainty and perception, but it is being that is reflected into itself, and the object of immediate desire is a *living thing* [*ein Lebendiges*]. (¶ 168)

That is, Hegel's characterization of life as "the object which for self-consciousness is the negative element" is a clear and direct reference to what Hegel had just two sentences prior described as the "immediate object, that [...] has the character of a *negative*" — the given, external object of consciousness toward which desire is a negative, destructive attitude.[44]

In fact, Hegel both opens and closes his discussion of life by contrasting self-consciousness and mere natural life, and, in both places, he immediately discusses desire insofar as it exemplifies the former and insofar as it assumes a negative, destructive relation to merely natural life (¶¶168; 173-4). Far from providing evidence for the 'desire-as-animality' reading, a closer examination of Hegel's discussion of life in that section supports the opposite view — that Hegel is contrasting desire-as-self-consciousness from the standpoint of mere life.

The standard readings take Hegel's subsequent transition from desire to recognition to concern a shift from the perspective of mere life (supposedly represented by the former) to the perspective of self-conscious life. But Hegel clearly and repeatedly characterizes the kind of desire at issue as *already* a part of self-conscious life. This, I think, helps to account for the immense diversity of scholarly attempts to explain how exactly Hegel's subsequent and very brief transition from desire to recognition is supposed to constitute a social account of the essential difference between mere animality and self-conscious subjectivity in general. The reason is that readings of

[44] Hegel repeats this point immediately following his discussion of life. He writes: "[...] self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by *superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life: self-consciousness is Desire* [my emphasis]. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is for it the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a true certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself in an objective manner. "(¶ 174)

this type are consistently trying to locate and reconstruct an argument which simply is not there. Hegel's transition from desire to recognition is not about identifying the limitations of mere animal life and the need for recognition in order to overcome them. Mere animal life simply is not the *topic* of Hegel's treatment of the kind of self-consciousness represented by desire. The view that social recognition is needed *because* it in some way defines the general distinction between rational animals and mere brutes is an interesting philosophical idea. But it is not Hegel's claim.

The exact nature of that transition is the topic of the following chapter. The question which remains in the present chapter is this: Having established that Hegel *does* regard desire-satisfaction as a form of self-consciousness (if only its 'first and lowest' form), what kind of self-consciousness is Hegel talking about here? This is the question to which I now turn.

2.2 Desire and the Concept of Self-Consciousness

As I noted at the end of section 2.1.1, Hegel's account of self-consciousness as desire raises a difficult question concerning the kind of 'self-consciousness' which is supposed to be exemplified (in its most basic form) in desire-satisfaction. That difficulty emerges from the fact that the kind of self-relation Hegel is discussing appears, in different respects, to involve both more and less than one would expect in an account of self-consciousness — for instance, the ability to say 'I' and to be aware of one's own intentions.

It appears to involve *less* than this insofar as Hegel may seem to be discussing a form of self-relation common to animals in general — mere 'self-feeling.' I have argued that, upon closer examination, this appearance proves to be superficial only. Hegel is talking about immediate desire-satisfaction as it occurs by and for an apperceptively self-aware subject — a subject of *consciousness*. This on its own might appear to answer the question of the kind of self-consciousness Hegel is discussing here. That is, we may say that, for a subject of consciousness,

even the simplest experience of its most basic animal needs (like hunger) involves a form of self-awareness that is nonetheless distinct from that of the mere animal. At a minimum, such a subject can do something a brute cannot — it can say "I want to eat" or "I'm going to have that apple." Desires of this type, however immediate they may be in terms of origin and content, are nonetheless self-conscious desires.

Be that as it may, this distinction on its own does not suffice to explain that respect in which the self-relation under discussion involves something *more* than mere reflexive self-awareness in general. That is, as discussed in section 2.1.1, the self-relation involved in Hegel's account of desire involves a form of objective, outward validation of the certainty of my own *Selbständigkeit* vis-à-vis external things. In other words, it is true that one's reflexive self-awareness distinguishes, in the first instance, conscious desire-satisfaction from mere animal appetite-satisfaction more generally. It is what makes it, for Hegel, a mode of consciousness and not *mere* feeling (even if feeling and 'self-feeling' are certainly involved). But, in both forms of desire-satisfaction, Hegel clearly takes the *self*-relation denoted by 'self-consciousness' and 'self-feeling' to involve a more robust form of self-validation.

If, as I have argued, the self-validation in (conscious) desire-satisfaction is not to be simply identified with the positive feeling of one's animal life, then understanding Hegel's account of desire will require an explanation of three things: (1) why Hegel apparently regards self-consciousness itself as a particular form of objective self-validation; (2) what kind of self-validation he is talking about; and (3) what the relation is between this self-validation and the kind of self-awareness which, for Hegel, characterizes consciousness in general. At issue, in other words, is the broader question: What is the general conception of self-consciousness that defines the topic of *PhG* IV and of which Hegel regards desire-satisfaction as the most basic form? Perhaps

unsurprisingly, the answer to these questions has much to do with the relation and distinction between Hegel's conception of self-consciousness and Kant's concept of apperception.

2.2.1 Self-Consciousness beyond Apperception

On a common reading of *Phenomenology* chapter IV, the operative concept of self-consciousness in that chapter is a version of Kant's concept of apperception. On such views, Hegel's account of self-consciousness differs from Kant's by, for instance, emphasizing the roles of embodiment, practical purposiveness, and sociality as essential features of that apperceptive self-awareness. This approach, I suggest, misconceives the primary topic of *PhG* IV and, in so doing, mislocates the central point of Hegel's divergence from Kant's view of self-consciousness. To see this, it helps to make the following distinctions.

First, Hegel, like Kant, maintains that all consciousness (whatever its particular object) inherently involves a form of self-awareness which is expressed by 'I.' And Hegel, like Kant, takes this self-awareness to involve an awareness of a certain kind of self-identity — my identity as *one* subject of consciousness in relation to (and in distinction from) the diverse and ever-changing contents of my immediate awareness. I will return to these points below. Following Kant, let's call this *apperception*.

Secondly, Hegel, like Kant, also draws a distinction between this general apperceptive awareness and the *particular* consciousness in which I am not merely aware of myself as the knowing subject but am also the *object* of my knowledge. Kant calls this 'self-cognition,' in contrast with self-consciousness (*KrV* B158). As I will discuss below, Hegel's conception of *this* form of self-relation (and its relation to apperception) nonetheless differs quite substantially from Kant's.

Robert Pippin takes the topic of *PhG* IV to be apperception — a kind of self-awareness characteristic of all consciousness (whatever its object) and therefore one which is not a matter of having *myself* as the particular object of my consciousness: "The self-relation in relation to an object that has emerged as a topic from the first three chapters is not a relation to an object of any kind, and so involves no grasp of anything. (The subject of the world is not, that is, any kind of object in the world)" (2010, 44).

In fact, the concept of 'self-consciousness' with which Hegel introduces *PhG* IV is *precisely* the particular kind of consciousness in which I, the subject of consciousness, am *myself* the object of consciousness. Hegel writes that "Self-consciousness [...] has itself as pure 'I' for object." (*PhG* ¶173); and again, "Self-consciousness is, to begin with, simple being-for-self, self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else. For it, its essence and absolute object is 'I'" (*PhG* ¶186). In the *Encyclopaedia* version of this section, Hegel explicitly distinguishes 'Consciousness' from 'Self-Consciousness' in terms of the object: "(a) consciousness in general, with an object set against it; (b) self-consciousness, for which *I* is the object" (¶417). And again, in the *Encyclopedia* transition from 'Consciousness' to 'Self-Consciousness,' he writes: "The I in its judgment has an object which is not distinct from it— it has itself. Consciousness has passed into self-consciousness" (¶423).

Again, this is not to deny that, for Hegel, all consciousness involves apperceptive self-awareness — even when the object of my awareness is something other than myself. But this self-aware relation to another is not what Hegel calls 'self-consciousness' but simply 'consciousness.' Thus, already in the Introduction to the text, Hegel writes: "Consciousness simultaneously *distinguishes* itself from something, and at the same time *relates* itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists *for* consciousness; and the determinate aspect of this *relating*, or of the *being* of

something for a consciousness, is *knowing*" (*PhG* ¶82). This twofold activity of relating to an object, while also distinguishing my consciousness from what I am aware of, is, for Hegel, a necessary condition of saying 'I' at all. Again, this is why Hegel sometimes identifies the subject matter of 'phenomenology' (consciousness) simply as "the I" (*EPS* ¶413, *SL* 686, GW 12.189).

The subject's awareness of its own consciousness in relation to and in distinction from its objects forms the basis of the entire discourse, from the very first chapter. Indeed, in chapter one ('Sense-Certainty'), the subject's reflections on itself as the knowing 'I' — the *subject* of that sense-certainty — forms one of the central parts of the dialectic of that section (¶¶90-93; 100-105).[45] The idea that all consciousness is apperceptive, then, is not a result of the previous three chapters which thus introduces the fourth. That idea was present and explicitly at work all along. But in the beginning of chapter IV, Hegel introduces self-consciousness as a "new shape of knowing [*Wissen*], the knowing of itself [*Wissen von sich selbst*]" distinguished from "that which preceded, viz. the knowing of another" (*PhG* ¶167). If all that Hegel meant by self-consciousness were the awareness of my own knowing *in* knowing another, then this would simply be the same "shape of knowing" which had been under discussion from the very outset under the name 'consciousness.' The new shape of knowing in chapter IV is one in which the subject of consciousness has *itself* as the *object* of its knowledge.

Accordingly, for Hegel, the term 'self-consciousness' denotes a form of self-knowledge — knowing *what I am*. This knowledge of what I am — of my objective identity — is the theme which unites Hegel's treatments of desire and recognition. The *topic* of *PhG* IV thus corresponds,

[45] Moreover, as Timothy Brownlee notes in this connection (2023, 46), the transition from chapter one to chapter two ('Perception') is already defined by the subject's recognition of the *positive* role of its active conceptualizing activities in uniting the manifold in its experience and knowing the object truly. This view of knowledge as an 'active taking' is precisely what defines the topic of that second chapter: "I take it [the object] up then as it is in truth, and instead of knowing something immediate I take the truth of it, or *perceive* it [*nehme ich wahr*]." (*PhG* ¶66). I recommend Brownlee's whole critique of apperception-based readings of Hegel's 'self-consciousness'.

in a sense, more closely to what Kant calls 'self-cognition' (in which I have myself as my *object*) than to what Kant calls 'self-consciousness' (i.e. apperception). In fact, Hegel's dispute with Kant's view of self-consciousness has less to do with Kant's notion of apperception *per se* and far more to do with (a) Kant's conception of self-cognition, and (b) Kant's conception of the relation between apperception and self-cognition. Hegel views these two forms of self-relation (properly conceived) as far more intimately connected than they are for Kant.

For Hegel, *if* self-cognition is understood in terms of relating to myself essentially as I would to any given object of inquiry, then this form of 'having myself as my object' would indeed be altogether distinct from the kind of self-awareness involved in apperception (as it is for Kant). But, for Hegel, this conception of self-cognition presupposes a loaded (and deeply mistaken) conception of its object — namely, that it is (or, *I am*) something whose nature and identity is simply *there*, independently of my awareness, like some strange bug that I might investigate (the unknown "I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks" (*KrV* A346/B404)). Indeed, Kant's ambivalent use of first-personal, third-personal, and impersonal pronouns to refer to such an object expresses what, for Hegel, is the central problem with such a view — namely, that the identity of myself (as a self-aware subject) with such an object is entirely ambiguous and seemingly unintelligible. For Hegel, this conception of self-knowledge is the result of treating 'I' as a "mere representation" — that is, as a kind of ordinary referring term (like a name) which indicates something independent of my awareness. In the *Science of Logic*, he writes:

> Of course, if the "I" is not grasped conceptually but is taken as a mere representation, in the way we talk about it in everyday consciousness, then it is an abstract determination, and not the self-reference that has itself for its object [*Gegenstand*]. Then it is only one of the extremes, a one-sided subject without its objectivity; or else just an object without subjectivity, which it would be were it not for the awkwardness just touched upon, namely that the thinking subject will not be left out of the "I" as object." (SL 692, GW 12.195)

Herein, I think, lies the deeper oversight of a reading like Pippin's, which claims that Hegel's 'self-consciousness' "is not a relation to an object of any kind, and so involves no grasp of anything. (The subject of the world is not, that is, any kind of object in the world)" (2010, 44). What Pippin seems to be denying here (and rightly so) is that Hegel understands self-consciousness to be a *mere* relation to an object like any other (but which happens to be me). But Pippin apparently treats the only alternative to *that* sense of being my own object as something like Kantian apperception, in which I am aware of myself only as knowing *subject*, not the object known. In effect, Pippin is repeating (and attributing to Hegel) precisely the kind of Kantian dichotomy which Hegel rejects and describes as "*barbarische*" (GW 12.194). It is a dichotomy which leaves us with a picture of the *self* as either a mere 'one-sided subject without objectivity' (a 'subject of the world that is not any kind of object in it') or else a 'one-sided object without subjectivity' — either a mere consciousness or a mere thing.

For Hegel, the way out of this disjointed picture of the self is not to deny any distinction between mere apperception and objective self-knowledge. Instead, the true course is an alternative account of objective self-knowledge — one in which the concept of the object known (myself) properly corresponds to the concept of the knowing subject (the 'I' of apperception). On such an account (as I will argue in what follows), apperception no longer appears to be a radically disparate form of self-relation altogether, but rather, an essential (but by itself incomplete) component or 'moment' of self-knowledge. Thus, rather than identifying apperception with self-consciousness and distinguishing this from self-knowledge (as Kant does), Hegel himself reserves the term 'self-consciousness' for the concept of the whole (self-knowledge) of which apperception is essentially an incomplete *part*.

2.2.2 Desire and the Problem of Self-Objectification

But how exactly are we to understand Hegel's alternative conception of 'making myself an object' and its relation to apperception? For the purposes of this chapter, I must mainly limit my analysis of the question to the topic at hand — desire. To answer it, we need further develop three points, previously introduced:

(1) For Hegel, as for Kant, all consciousness is apperceptive and contains an awareness of myself as one consciousness in relation to the various contents and objects of my awareness. This apperceptive self-awareness in general is expressed by 'I.'

(2) Hegel defines *self*-consciousness as a consciousness in which I am not only (as in all consciousness) aware of myself as subject, but also have myself, *the subject*, as the *object* of my knowledge.

(3) In self-consciousness as desire-satisfaction, this 'self-objectification' takes the specific form of objectively validating my subjective 'self-certainty' — the certainty of my own *Selbständigkeit* vis-à-vis the given, sensible objects of my desire. Indeed, this is precisely how Hegel describes 'desire' in the *Encyclopaedia* 'Phenomenology': "As this certitude of self against the object, it is the impulse to realize its implicit nature [*was es an sich ist*], by giving its abstract self-knowledge content and objectivity" (¶425).[46]

[46] These observations show the error in McDowell's metaphorical reading of *PhG* IV which takes 'desire' to be a 'figure' for pure apperception (cf. 2009, 155). The problem with that reading is not simply that it treats the account figuratively, but rather, that what it takes desire to be a figure *of* is, in fact, a form of self-consciousness to which Hegel *contrasts* desire.

Thus, the central question is this: In what sense does the objective validation of my *Selbständigkeit* (through the destruction of my object) amount to making myself, *qua* subject-of-consciousness, into my own *object*?

The key to answering this question involves Hegel's conception of the relation between the forms of 'self-identity' which correspond to apperception and objective self-knowledge, respectively — namely, (1) my identity as a unified subject-of-consciousness in relation to the manifold contents and objects of my awareness; and (2) my objective, substantial identity as a determinate being. Like Kant, Hegel regards the former as a mere "formal identity" and something, in itself, quite empty (*EPS* ¶ 315). But Hegel takes this 'formal identity' to be closely connected, conceptually, to my corresponding *real* or substantial identity. Specifically, he takes this 'formal identity' to be *itself* already a kind of 'ideal' and implicit (*an sich*) independence vis-à-vis the manifold contents and objects of my immediate awareness — a product of, as it were, extricating myself as a subject from the "whole expanse of the sensuous world" (*PhG* ¶167) and viewing it as though from without, as a mere other, a 'not-I.'[47]

Accordingly, Hegel understands the relation between this merely formal identity and a corresponding objective identity in terms of making the merely 'ideal,' or *an sich,* independence of the former something, *für sich*, by objectively realizing that independence through one's own activity. This is how I make myself, my own subjectivity, into my object. In the case of desire-satisfaction, what is thus realized, however, is the purely negative aspect of this independence as a subject.

[47] Thus, in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel characterizes 'consciousness' in the following way: "In this form the free concept, as the "I" existing for itself, is withdrawn from objectivity, but it refers to the latter as its other, a subject matter [*Gegenstand*] that confronts it" (SL 695, GW 12.198).

To see what all this means, we need to first examine Hegel's reinterpretation of Kant's notion of the 'emptiness' of the 'I' of apperception and its connection to the destructiveness of desire. Specifically, we need to see why, for Hegel, this emptiness should not be understood as a mere absence of information about myself (a vacuous self-representation), but rather as a kind of "abstract freedom" (*EPS* ¶413) inherently connected to my self-identity as *one* subject of consciousness. This, as we will see, is the very 'abstract' or wholly negative freedom which, in desire, takes the form of a real, objective identity.

2.3 Independence and Self-Consciousness

2.3.1. Hegel, Kant, and the Empty 'I'

In order to see how and why Hegel reinterprets the emptiness of apperceptive self-awareness not as a mere self-ignorance but a kind of 'abstract freedom,' let me briefly return to an earlier topic — Hegel's objection to Kant's treatment of 'the I' as a 'mere representation' (and an empty one at that).

This objection is principally directed toward one aspect of Kant's view of self-consciousness, which I will discuss in a moment. In another important respect (of which Hegel generally approves), Kant does *not* view the 'I' of apperception as 'representational' in the sense which Hegel disparages. For Kant, 'I' expresses one's consciousness of "the thoroughgoing identity of ourselves with regard to all representations that can ever belong to our cognition" (A116).[48] This 'self-identity' denotes the identity of my one consciousness in relation to the

[48] Kant consistently defines apperception in terms of self-identity (and my awareness of it): "I am therefore conscious of the identical self in regard to the manifold of the representations that are given to me in an intuition because I call them all together my representations, which constitute one" (B158); and "[the principle of apperception] "says nothing more than that all my representations in any given intuition must stand under the condition under which alone I can ascribe [*rechnen*] them to the identical self as my representation" (B138).

diverse and fluctuating contents of my awareness. But Kant emphatically distinguishes this self-identity (and my awareness of it) from that of something *given*, like the kind of object of inner sense that Hume searched for in vain, only finding a series of perceptions.[49] Rather, it is *produced* by an activity in which I synthetically grasp (in one consciousness) the objective connection of the various contents of my awareness. My awareness of this unified consciousness is not, then, a kind of *perception* of something (myself) which is independent of that consciousness. It is, rather, an awareness of a unity-of-consciousness which is achieved by combining the 'manifold' in an objective way. This is why Kant writes: "this consciousness [of myself] is not even a representation distinguishing a particular object, but rather a form of representation in general, insofar as it is to be called cognition" (A346/B404).

At the same time, however, for Kant, 'I' *does* function as a kind of representation, and indeed what he calls "an indeterminate empirical intuition, i.e., a perception" (B422). He writes: "In the transcendental synthesis of the manifold of representations in general, on the contrary, hence in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am" (B157). Kant describes such existential self-awareness as an "indeterminate perception [which] here signifies only something real, which was given, and indeed only to thinking in general, thus not as appearance, and also not as a thing in itself (a noumenon), but rather as something that in fact exists and is indicated as an existing thing in the proposition 'I think'" (B423). 'I' in this sense is very much a 'mere representation,' and one which is "wholly empty" (A346/B404). It is in this respect that Kant writes, "Through this I, or

[49] Cf. *Treatise of Human Nature,* Book I, Part IV. With respect to the self-awareness that Kant calls 'inner sense,' he is in complete agreement with Hume (cf. *KrV* A107).

He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = x" (A346/B404).[50]

Hegel regards this aspect of Kant's view of self-consciousness — as a kind of empty representation of a 'something = x' — as fundamentally inconsistent with the great insights in Kant's account of apperception. However, Hegel agrees with Kant that the self-awareness involved in consciousness in general (the 'I' of apperception) is, taken by itself, something *empty*. As Hegel puts it, "The 'I' [of consciousness] is still perfectly empty, a quite abstract subjectivity which posits the whole content of immediate mind outside of it and relates itself to it as to a world already in existence" (*EPS* ¶387Z). But, for Hegel, this emptiness is not a mere absence — a vacuous self-representation like a name or an indeterminate self-perception — but an inherent product of the kind of subject-object distinction that makes both apperceptive self-awareness and objective consciousness possible.

Hegel is taking up an essential feature of Kant's notion of the objective unity of apperception. For Kant, the identity of my consciousness in relation to its various and fluctuating contents requires that I not merely be severally (or serially) aware of these contents (now smoke, now fire, now red, now blue), but that I be *at once* synthetically conscious of the manifold together (by combining them *with one another* and being aware of that combination (cf. B133)). For Kant, if I were merely severally aware of the manifold (and did not 'comprehend them in one consciousness') then "I would have as multicolored, diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious" (B134). This distinction between a mere serial consciousness of the manifold and a synthetic consciousness of their connection corresponds to Kant's distinction

[50] Strawson thus writes (with some justice):"What Kant intends to express by the "I think" of apperception is not simply that connectedness of experiences, ensured by means of concepts of the objective, which is the fundamental condition of the possibility of empirical self-consciousness. For him the "I think" of apperception represents also the tangential point of contact between the field of noumena and the world of appearances." (*Bounds of Sense* , 176).

between the merely 'subjective unity of apperception' and the 'objective unity of apperception' (B139). For, in short, the latter amounts to synthetically grasping the connection among the various phenomena themselves (thus their objective unity) and not merely their connection *to me*. It is the difference between, on the one hand, now perceiving smoke, now perceiving fire and, on the other, being at once aware of the objective connection between the two (e.g. that the fire caused the smoke).[51]

Accordingly, for Kant, the unity of apperception coincides with the activity whereby what would otherwise be a flux of subjective mental contents is referred to an independent objective reality. That is, in combining these contents in accordance with a concept of their objective unity, they cease to be mere determinations *of* myself (mere affections or sensations) but become something *for me.* I recognize these same contents as sensibly given determinations of the object. To paraphrase Kant, *I* am not a multicolored, diverse self, but I am conscious *of* the multicolored diversity in the objects around me, from which I distinguish my own consciousness. In this way, the 'identical self' of apperception is essentially the unity of an *outward-looking* perspective in which all the *contents* of my consciousness are referred to something else, to the objects.[52]

For Hegel, this connection between apperceptive self-awareness and the inherent (if typically quite imperfect) objectivity of consciousness as such is the true ground of the emptiness of that self-awareness. Thus, in describing the 'I' of mere 'other-consciousness,' Hegel writes: "The object is only characterized as *its*; in other words, in the object it is only as an abstract I that the mind is reflected in itself: hence its existence there has still a content, which is not as its own" (*EPS* ¶416). That is, these contents (the redness of the flower, the shape of the rock) are 'mine' in

[51] This is, of course, a quite condensed and somewhat oversimplified summary of Kant's account.

[52] In Kant, this remains true, in an important sense, even if I attend to my own mind as object of inner sense: in making my mind my object, I still relate to it as though from without. Such an idea, for instance, plays an important role in Kant's insistence that my unified consciousness *of* a temporal succession of mental states is not to be conflated with a temporal persistence of that one consciousness itself across successive times and changes. (cf. *KrV* A362-6)

a purely formal sense (they are included in my awareness), but they are not determinations of *me,* and I do not see myself reflected in these contents, but only in the bare fact that I am aware of them. So, for Hegel, as for Kant, mere apperception does not on its own amount to a contentful knowledge of what *I* am, for it is merely an awareness of my unified perspective *on something else*, the objects.

But for this reason, this emptiness is not a mere absence (as it appears to be when 'I' is taken as 'mere representation'), but rather, the achieved product of objective consciousness as such. Without that objectivity, my 'self' would by no means be empty, but it would — as Kant vividly puts it — be as diverse and multicolored as the representations of which I am aware. That is, of course, a hyperbolic image, but for Hegel there is a more serious sense in which the empty 'self' as subject-of-consciousness is a kind of self-unity which consists in a form of liberation from the flux of merely subjective experience. The relevant contrast for Hegel is not a kind of kaleidoscopic consciousness,[53] but rather what he calls the 'soul' or 'natural mind' — that is, a form of subjectivity which, with respect to the contents of its sensible experience, draws no distinction between subjective significance and objective truth, between the object *for it* and the object considered independently of its relation to it. Simply put, it is a relation to the world purely in the medium of *feeling*, in which the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer, are, as it were, immediately one without any sharp distinction.

Hegel describes this mode of awareness as "the soul which is entrapped, so to speak, in a childlike unity with the world" (*EPS* ¶413Z). It is a form of subjectivity which, precisely because it does not distinguish between the objective and the subjective, remains entirely immersed in and

[53] Hegel sometimes caricatures Kant's view of the synthetic unity of apperception as a frantic assembly of an otherwise humpty-dumpty sense-experience. Thus, in *Faith and Knowledge*, he writes: "The manifold of sensibility, empirical consciousness as intuition and sensation, is in itself something unintegrated, that the world is in itself falling to pieces, and only gets objective coherence and support, substantiality, multiplicity, even actuality and possibility, through the good offices of the human self-consciousness and intellect." (76; GW 4.332)

bound up with the ever-changing contents its outer experience. For the sheep, the fearsomeness of the wolf is just as much an objective quality as its grey fur, and, conversely, its grey fur is not merely an objective quality but something immediately fearsome. That is, for the sheep, there is no sharp distinction between objective perception and subjective affection — the two are inseparably intermixed. This is why Hegel describes the 'soul' in terms of a kind of experience whose contents are just as much presentations of an external world as they are qualitative determinations of the subject itself.

Hegel does not regard consciousness, by contrast, as a purely cold, dispassionate attitude toward the world. But it is a mode of awareness defined by its awareness of the distinction between the objective and the subjective. In this respect, the fluctuating sensuous contents of consciousness do not have the significance of determinations *of myself* but only as given determinations of the objective reality *of which* I am aware. Consciousness (and its corresponding apperceptive self-awareness) thus has the value of a kind of cognitive liberation from my 'entrapment in a childlike unity with the world.' As Hegel puts it:

> The immediate identity of the natural soul has been raised to this pure 'ideal' self-identity; and what the former *contained* is for this self-subsistent reflection set forth as an *object.* The pure abstract freedom of mind lets go from it its specific qualities — the soul's natural life — to an equal freedom as an independent object. It is of this latter, as external to it, that the I is in the first instance aware (conscious), and as such it is consciousness. (*EPS* ¶413)

This, however, is why Hegel regards it as 'barbarous' to view 'I' as an empty *representation* — a mere self-ignorance which lacks the content and objective reality of a manifold of sensuous determinations. About this Hegel writes: "Now if external intuition as determined in time and space is required for objectivity, and it is this objectivity that is missed, it is then clear that by objectivity is meant only sensuous reality. But to have risen above such a reality is precisely the condition of thinking and of truth" (*SL* 692, GW 12.195). The standpoint of consciousness, for

Hegel, expressed by 'I,' is the result of distinguishing my subjectivity from the manifold of sense-determinations by referring them to an independent objective reality. Thus, in the *Science of Logic*, Hegel characterizes 'consciousness' in the following way: "In this form the free concept, as the "I" existing for itself, is withdrawn from objectivity, but it refers to the latter as its other, an object [*Gegenstand*] that confronts it" (*SL* 695, GW 12.198).

Nonetheless, Hegel, like Kant, is acutely aware that a mere unity of consciousness in relation to (and in distinction from) the fluctuating manifold of experience does not, on its own, constitute a substantial self-identity or self-knowledge. Much like Kant, Hegel writes that "the I is by itself only a formal identity" (*EPS* ¶415). It is a self-identity (and an awareness of it) which does indeed lack a content and objectivity of its own. However, the appropriate understanding of the nature of that emptiness also determines what kind of content and objectivity could be *my own* — determinations of myself qua subject of consciousness. For Hegel, what is lacking is not the kind of content and objectivity which mere sensible things possess — saltiness, color, etc. The problem of an empty coffer is not remedied by filling it with dirt. Rather, the kind of 'content' that belongs to the subject-of-consciousness as such (the 'I') is precisely its specific difference — or, better put, its specific self-distinguishing — from the "whole expanse of the sensible world." Its defining content is its independence or 'self-standingness' vis-à-vis the various contents and objects of immediate sense-experience. The subject gives itself content and objectivity — it determines itself — by objectively realizing that otherwise merely 'ideal' or *an sich* independence.

2.3.2. Desire-Satisfaction as a Form of Self-Objectification

For Hegel, the bluntest and most rudimentary form of this self-realization is the conscious satisfaction of destructive desire. Why? Because it is the most elementary way in which the two basic desiderata of self-consciousness can be reconciled. One of these, as we've seen, is a kind of

negative freedom which defines the conscious self, the 'I,' and distinguishes it from the mere soul. That freedom consists in a feature of apperception — namely, that I distinguish myself, *qua* subject, from the immediate contents of my experience. Here, my subjectivity is not, as at the level of the soul, immediately bound up with and undistinguished from the 'manifold' of my outer experience. In this respect, the apperceptive 'I' retains a certain kind of impassivity vis-à-vis whatever is thus given to me externally: I remain one with myself in my relation to my outer objects by, as it were, extricating myself qua subject from the objective reality that is given to me.

But, on its own, that purely 'abstract freedom' of consciousness simply consists in attaining a perspective on reality as of an onlooker, observing it from without. That is the emptiness of the mere 'I' of consciousness, and this 'abstract freedom' is one in which reality itself is, so to speak, the outer limit of my subjectivity. The second thing that is needed is a truly substantial self-identity which corresponds to and actually realizes the negative freedom which defines this form of subjectivity. The question is, how can this kind of oneness with oneself, one's freedom vis-à-vis the externally given contents and objects of one's experience, take the form of an objective self-identity in its own right? In other words, how can I both distinguish myself, as subject, from the empirical reality that is given to me, while *also* realizing that distinctive self-identity *in the world*, rather than preserving it through a mere inner withdrawal from reality?

For Hegel, the most rudimentary way in which I accomplish this is by opposing myself to some given object and making that object absolutely conform to *myself* — that is, by doing the kind of thing whose most basic illustration is immediate desire-satisfaction. In destroying and consuming my object, I 'make myself my object,' by literally making the object myself. Indeed, desire-satisfaction represents the most basic illustration of a notion of self-consciousness which Hegel retains throughout his work. To return to a quotation discussed in the previous chapter, in

his lectures on fine art, for example, he describes the way in which "man brings himself before himself" through his outer actions, as follows:

> [H]e has the impulse, in whatever is directly given to him, in what is present to him externally, to produce himself and therein equally to recognize himself. This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he now finds again his own characteristics. Man does this in order, as a free subject, to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself. (31; cf. GW 28.1, 229)

Of course, immediate desire-satisfaction is not an externally productive endeavor, much less an artistic one. It is, however, the bluntest, simplest form of 'stripping my object of its foreignness' and fashioning it after my own image – literally rendering it into myself. By doing this, desire is a matter of breaking free, so to speak, from the mere 'abstract freedom' of consciousness. It is a matter of showing that the immediately given things from which I distinguish myself are no true limit to my subjectivity. In desire, I relate to my object not as an outer limit, a fixed, standing reality — a mere otherness — but rather, I see myself in the object insofar as I regard it essentially in its potential to become one with myself. I *actually* achieve that unity with the object by satisfying my desire — completely eliminating its otherness. In this way, I show that my self-identity, my oneness with myself, is not merely that of a unified, outward-looking, and *impotent* perspective on the world. Rather, I preserve and affirm my self-standing self-identity *in and through* the world by making what is other to myself conform to me and by realizing and preserving myself in the process.

Desire, in Hegel's account, contains the 'moment of consciousness.' That is, in desire, I distinguish myself from the "whole expanse of the sensuous world," and I am aware of it precisely as a mere 'otherness,' as "a content, which is not as [my] own" (*EPS* ¶416). In this respect, it could appear as though all determinate content and substantial *being* lies on the side of the objects, and

that the subject is merely 'a subject of the world.' But my 'self-certainty' as a desiring subject is that, on the contrary, *I*, in my very distinction from these things, am what is truly substantial.

As I noted above, Hegel describes this self-certainty as "the impulse [*Trieb*] to realize its implicit nature [*was es an sich ist*], by giving its abstract self-knowledge content and objectivity" (¶425). This statement may evoke the image of an empty stomach compared to one filled with a variety of food and drink, as though the 'content' which I gave myself were simply a direct importing of the object's content — the weight, color, shape of the apple, etc. On the contrary, the 'content' which the subject gives its otherwise empty, abstract self-awareness is its real, specific difference from the sensible object, i.e. its being, as a subject, a particular *kind of object* — one which is truly *selbständig* — distinct from the other, which is not. And the *objectivity* which it gives to itself consists in realizing this self-certainty by destroying the object and persisting in the process. Thus, Hegel writes, "while the given object is rendered subjective, the subjectivity divests itself of its one-sidedness and becomes objective to itself" (*EPS* ¶427).

With these remarks, however, our account comes full circle. The original question was why Hegel begins his account of self-consciousness by describing activities which seem to be characteristic of animal life in general. We have seen that the concept of self-consciousness exhibited by the conscious, apperceptively self-aware desire-satisfaction that Hegel is discussing is not *merely* the basic feeling of life which brutes also enjoy. Rather, what interests him is the manner in which I, qua conscious subject, become an object for myself. I do this by giving objective reality to the otherwise merely implicit independence which defines the conscious subject as such. And I do *that* by (a) not only distinguishing myself from what is immediately given to me but also opposing myself to it; and by (b) realizing my own substantial self-identity by overcoming the otherness of the object and bringing it into conformity with myself.

But the kind of substantial self-identity which exists for itself by bringing its objects into conformity with its own inner form of being is what is called 'life' — and not merely in the sense of natural life, but of any form of being which is an end unto itself and realizes that end in and through the external world. Indeed, in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel describes spirit in precisely this way, as "living substance." He writes: "the living substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself" (¶18). What we have seen in our discussion of desire is the most basic form of 'self-positing' (affirming, realizing *oneself*) through a kind of 'self-othering' (making oneself one's object, by making the object oneself).

It thus becomes clear that Hegel begins his account in *PhG* IV with 'desire' not from a mere interest in examining natural life as the common denominator between mere animality and self-conscious subjectivity, but for the far subtler, albeit far more significant, reason that self-consciousness has the structure of life in its own right. It is its own form of living substance, and, indeed, it is life in an even fuller sense than mere natural life: pure, unrestricted internal teleology, "pure being-for-self," as Hegel puts it (*PhG* ¶ 187). This concept of self-conscious subjectivity as a higher form of internal purposiveness will remain the guiding theme throughout *PhG* IV.

2.3.3 Internal Teleology as Life and as Freedom

In section 2.1.1, I quoted a passage from the *Science of Logic*'s chapter on 'Life' where Hegel discusses the 'self-feeling' that an animal attains in its nutritive activity in a way which very closely resembles his account of desire in *PhG* IV. He describes that self-feeling in terms of the objective validation (through eating) of the animal's certainty of its own '*Selbständigkeit*' and its object's '*Unselbständigkeit*.' What the animal *feels* is its own life — its own existence as "a purpose unto itself (*Selbstzweck*)." This life that the animal feels is its own substance, its very

identity, its 'self.' It is aware of this life (it *feels* itself) not through some kind of self-observation but by successfully *performing* the kind of self-directed activity that comprises its substantial identity, its *Selbständigkeit*. Such a self-relation, then, clearly exhibits something analogous to what Hegel says about the 'I' — that it is "the content of this connection [its self-relation] and the connecting itself" (*PhG* ¶166). The animal's life is both the *content* of its self-feeling and the very self-preserving activity by which it feels itself.

The standard reading, of course, takes the self-relation in Hegel's account of desire to simply be the very same. Therefore, it takes the '*Selbständigkeit*' which is affirmed in desire-satisfaction to simply be the self-subsistence of natural life itself. This view, as I've argued at length, is incorrect. Yet Hegel clearly takes desire (as a form of self-consciousness) to have something essential in common with the self-feeling of the animal's nutritive activity. The 'self' that I am conscious of is (a) a substantial, persisting identity (my *Selbständigkeit*); and (b) one which is not independent of the activity by which I am conscious of it but which is *realized* or *actual* through such activity. In other words, it is a self-subsistence which has the form of internal purposiveness — a form of life. Hegel makes this point quite explicitly later in the *Phenomenology* when discussing the animal organism as "something that has its own self for its end" (¶257). "Therefore," he writes:

> what it arrives at through the process of its action is itself; and in arriving only at itself, it obtains its feeling of self [*Selbstgefühl*]. We have here, it is true, the distinction between what it *is* and what it *seeks*, but this is merely the show of a distinction, and consequently it is in its own self a Concept. But this is precisely how *self-consciousness* is constituted (¶¶257-8)

Hegel likewise calls the subject of self-consciousness a 'Selbstzweck' (*EPS* ¶427Z), and he describes the self-consciousness of desire-satisfaction as an end-realization which is simply a self-actualization. Thus, he writes: "The product of this process is the fast conjunction of the I with

itself, its satisfaction realized, and itself made actual" (*EPS* ¶428). Here, however, Hegel claims that the 'self' that is 'made actual,' the self that is the 'content of the connection and the connecting itself,' is 'the I' — it is myself not merely qua living being but qua 'subject-of-consciousness.' It is *this* self whose identity consists in existing in the world as a purpose unto itself. The 'actualization' of this self consists in giving reality to my 'ideal' independence as self-aware subject of consciousness.

This is why, for Hegel, the generic structure of self-consciousness is the same as the generic structure of actual *freedom*. This freedom is itself to be understood in internal teleological terms. That which determines my existence is myself, as my effectively motivating end. In this sense, freedom shares something in common with animal life. As Hegel writes: "The organic process is only *implicitly* free [*frei an sich*], but is not *explicitly* free *for itself* [*ist es aber nicht* für sich selbst]" (*PhG* ¶341) — which is to say, not *actually* free. Unlike the animal, the 'self' which is my end is something *for me*, something of which I am aware, and this radically alters the kind of 'self' that I am and the form in which I am an end for myself (for instance, it involves the capacity to relate to my own natural life as *other* or as a mere means). Conscious self-purposiveness contains, on the one hand, the purely 'ideal,' negative aspect of distinguishing myself from everything else. As Hegel writes, "Self-consciousness is, to begin with, simple being-for-self, self-equal through the exclusion from itself of everything else" (*PhG* ¶186). But it also contains the 'real' aspect of giving substance and actuality to that distinction in and through the very 'otherness' from which I distinguish myself. Again, the form of this actuality is internal purposiveness — making my own self-identity into my *end* and realizing that end, so that 'what I am' and 'what I seek' are one and the same.

Desire-satisfaction, for a subject-of-consciousness, is the most basic (and most deficient) form of experiencing one's own freedom, its 'first and lowest level.' Its defect, as shown more fully in the next chapter, does not stem merely from its failure to live up to some entirely different, higher standard of freedom. Instead, its defect (and the *need* for a higher standard) is internal. Its destructive, individualistic form of existing for itself is ultimately self-undermining. Nonetheless, its structure exhibits in the most rudimentary way a point which Hegel makes early in the *Philosophy of Spirit*:

> The substance of mind is freedom, i.e. the absence of dependence on an other, the relating of self to self. Mind is the actualized Notion which is for itself and has itself for object. [...] But the freedom of mind or spirit is not merely an absence of dependence on another won outside of the other, but won in it; it attains actuality not by fleeing from the other but by overcoming it. (*EPS* ¶382Z)

Accordingly, although Hegel views the self-consciousness of desire-satisfaction as importantly distinct from mere animal nutrition and self-feeling, the very proximity of these two self-relations helps illustrate an essential structural point about selfhood. Namely, the 'I,' the 'self,' is not a mere one-sided subject without objectivity, nor a mere object without subjectivity, nor some incomprehensible identity of a mere subject and a mere object. It is an objective subjectivity whose substantial being consists in making its own implicitly free selfhood into its own end and in realizing that end in its outer existence.

Conclusion

Two points warrant particular emphasis in conclusion. First, as I've argued in this chapter, Hegel's concept of self-consciousness should not be identified with a version of Kantian apperception but should be understood as a particular form of self-knowledge. Nonetheless, it is wrong to view Hegel's 'self-consciousness' as denoting simply a different *topic* than Kant's concept of apperception. For, as I noted above, an essential part of Hegel's criticism of Kant's

conception of self-consciousness is that, for Hegel, such a conception introduces a disjointed concept of the *self*. The consequence is that, on that picture, the apperceptive awareness of myself as a unified consciousness — the 'identical self' of all consciousness — becomes something quite disconnected from any objective awareness of *myself* qua real being. It is the form of cognition *in general* and has nothing to do with the form of self-knowledge in particular.

For Hegel, once we have an appropriate concept of the *self* itself (the 'I'), we can understand how even apperceptive self-awareness, as an awareness of my 'ideal self-identity,' is itself an essential component or 'moment' of objective self-knowledge. It is, as it were, the ungerminated seed of self-knowledge, the acorn of which self-knowledge is the oak. Indeed, for Hegel, the relation between apperception and self-knowledge takes the form of a particular kind of *modal* relation — making actual and thus bringing to consciousness an otherwise merely 'inner' and potential freedom. Accordingly, only by having a concept of the whole, of which apperception is a part, do we properly understand the part itself (and understand *that* it is a part). In that sense, Hegel's topic *is* the same as Kant's, only viewed more comprehensively.

Second, while Hegel's account of desire brings into view important structural features of his broader concept of self-consciousness, its specific (and purely negative, assimilative) relation to its object should by no means be regarded as a general or paradigmatic example of Hegel's concept of self-consciousness. It is, and remains, only the 'first and lowest level of self-consciousness.' The general feature of self-consciousness which desire exemplifies is, as I've argued, the objective realization of my 'ideal self-identity' as a subject — the realization of one's freedom *from* the given things of the world *through* the given things of the world. In desire, this ideal self-identity has an objective reality only through destruction and consumption. But, for precisely this reason, the way in which I thus realize my own subjective purposes is quite fleeting and transient —what it lacks is substantiality. As we all know, the satisfaction attained by

gratifying one's immediate desires goes as quickly as it comes. The effort to appropriate one's objects and achieve such satisfaction must therefore be repeated over and over, and the mere pursuit of such gratification is an endless task which achieves no lasting result or fulfillment. As we will see in the following chapter, Hegel's analysis of this structure of immediate, consumptive desire will lead to an important result: a truly substantial realization of one's own purposive subjectivity requires a very different form of purposiveness with a different corresponding object — namely, an enduring, *reciprocal* relation with another subject.

Chapter 3. The 'Bad Infinity' of Desire and the Need for Recognition

Introduction

Hegel has argued that immediate desire-satisfaction (for a self-aware subject) is the most basic form of objectively realizing the self-relating agency and independence demanded by conscious subjectivity as such. It is, for that reason, the most basic form of 'self-consciousness' in the more robust sense of the term which denotes 'making my subjectivity objective.'[54] But Hegel quickly argues that the kind of self-relating agency exhibited by mere desire-satisfaction is inherently defective, even self-undermining. He argues that the central defect in immediate desire can only be overcome through a certain reciprocal relation to another self-conscious subject. Thus, from his critique of desire, Hegel derives his famous thesis that true self-consciousness requires a relation of reciprocity and recognition with another subject.

The questions to be addressed in this chapter are: (1) what exactly is Hegel's critique of desire; and (2) on what grounds does Hegel claim that the problem with desire can only be overcome through "another self-consciousness" (¶ 175)? I will focus on Hegel's critique of desire and his original argument for the need for recognition, leaving for the following chapters Hegel's subsequent account of the trying conditions of first *attaining* the requisite recognition where none yet exists (the 'life-and-death struggle') and the most basic and defective form of recognition which emerges from that struggle (the relation of mastery and servitude). What needs to be established first is Hegel's philosophical understanding of the nature and grounds of the need for recognition itself. His first argument for that need is given prior to and independently of his famous discussion of a life-and-death struggle and the relation of mastery and servitude (which I treat in the two chapters to follow).

[54]Cf. *PhG* ¶¶173, 186; *EPS* ¶¶417, 423; *SL* 692, GW. 12.195

As we will see, Hegel's critique of desire centers on the notion that the kind of agency exhibited by merely satisfying one's immediate desires is just as specious and insubstantial as the fleeting gratification one thereby achieves. Of course, the idea that immediate desire-gratification is an inherently superficial and even self-undermining form of agency has been the predominant philosophical position since antiquity, even if the many proponents of this common view have offered different analyses of this deficiency. But this raises the central question to be answered in this chapter. How does Hegel's own analysis of this all-too-familiar problem lead him to the highly novel solution that he introduces: the need for a relation of reciprocity and recognition with another subject?

To answer this question, I begin, in section 3.1, by examining a common analysis of the matter – namely, that the basic problem with desire is its lack of a kind of rational self-governance or, as Pippin puts it, "normative self-determination" (2010, 19). In other words, desire lacks the sort of autonomy that consists in determining, on the basis of reasons, which desires one pursues and why. This, of course, would be a quite traditional analysis of the problem with immediate desire. On that reading, what is truly distinctive about Hegel's account is the idea that the need to determine my actions on the basis of reasons and the need for social recognition are ultimately one and the same need. That conception of the need for recognition in Hegel is the central idea in what I've called the 'normativity reading' of Hegel's account.

In chapter one, I critiqued that approach on more general grounds. In this chapter, I substantiate the more general critique by showing how a closer examination of Hegel's text reveals a very different analysis of the problem with desire and of the corresponding need to realize one's agency socially. As we will see, Hegel's critique of desire focuses not on its impulsive character but, in the first instance, on the manner in which the structure of immediate desire-satisfaction inherently gives rise to a kind of endless, futile repetitiveness that can never truly achieve its own

goal – what Hegel calls a 'bad infinity.' And, most importantly, Hegel does *not* identify the underlying source of that defective structure in desire's mere natural impulsiveness but, rather, in a very different feature – namely, that in the mere pursuit of consumptive desire-satisfaction, the subject's essential self-relating activity (the realization of its 'being-for-self') has the form of a purely one-sided action on a merely passive object.[55]

Specifically, Hegel pinpoints the source of the problem in the desiring subject's enduring need to realize its agency (and fulfill its own ends) at the expense of the independent nature and existence of its objects – that is, the persisting need to achieve its 'satisfaction' and 'self-certainty' through a "negative relation to the object" (¶175). In fact, for Hegel, the kind of problem that emerges from this one-sided form of 'being-for-oneself' is by no means limited to mere immediate desire but also extends to conceptions of the inner aims of rational, moral autonomy as essentially defined by a one-sidedly negative relation to sensible nature.[56] This is why the solution Hegel proposes to this problem is *not* an appeal to higher reason but, rather, a need for a distinctively two-sided form of purposiveness (reciprocal action) and thus for the only kind of *object* with which such reciprocal purposiveness is truly possible ("another self-consciousness" (¶175)).

In section 3.2, I examine the general structure of the kind of 'bad infinity' Hegel locates in the mere pursuit of immediate desire-satisfaction and explain its connection to the more general nature of one-sided purposiveness toward passive objects. In section 3.3, I examine Hegel's argument that the problem of desire can only be overcome through a relation to "another self-consciousness." I argue that this need is by no means to be identified with the need for rational or

[55] Recall that here Hegel is not treating *all* immediate desire, but specifically desire whose satisfaction comes with the destruction and consumption of its object.

[56] In fact, as we will see, Hegel's critique of desire is very closely, and non-accidentally, related to Hegel's complex engagement with Fichte. Redding (2009) explores this connection in detail – particularly in relation to Fichte's concept of *Begehrung*. I think Redding's account is quite insightful, though I disagree with his claim that we should read Hegel's account of desire and recognition merely as a critique of Fichte (although I do think that is an important part of it).

norm-based self-governance. Rather, the need for other subjects is grounded in the need for the uniquely reciprocal *teleological* structure of the form of life and action enabled by such intersubjective relations. The result of Hegel's argument is that a free and self-sufficient life must be founded upon a self-sustaining relation of *reciprocal purposiveness* with other subjects, within which one's unilateral actions on mere objects (however impulsive or rational those actions may be) are a mere means. In fact, for Hegel, the overcoming of 'sensuous immediacy' through rational self-governance is *no freedom at all* unless it is in the service of a life of reciprocity through shared purpose with others. Or so I will argue.

3.1 The 'Bad Infinity' of Desire

3.1.1 The Problem of the Problem of Desire

As we've seen in the previous chapter, the target concept of the *Phenomenology*'s "Self-Consciousness" chapter is a form of 'making one's subjectivity objective.' Specifically, the central issue is a matter of actually realizing, through one's own action, a kind of freedom and 'self-standingness' (*Selbständigkeit*) which, Hegel thinks, is both enabled and demanded by the form of subjectivity (apperceptive consciousness) which distinguishes us from merely sentient animals. While apperceptive self-awareness thus forms the basis of this more robust self-consciousness, the latter requires something more than apperception – namely, the outer proof and realization of my otherwise merely subjective 'certainty' that I, *as* a conscious subject, am a truly free and self-standing being in my own right. To return to an earlier image, for Hegel, the consciousness of my realized freedom is like the oak of which mere apperceptive self-awareness (by itself) is the acorn.

For Hegel, as we have seen, consumptive desire-satisfaction (for an apperceptively self-aware subject) affirms this self-certainty at its most basic level. It is does so by simply showing that the sensible objects that I confront are no absolute limit to myself – as though my subjectivity

were merely an impotent, outward-looking perspective on the world – but that I, as a subject, am capable of making such things absolutely conform to myself and of thereby existing *for* myself by means of them. In this case (to return to Hegel's formula for this mode of self-consciousness) I 'make my own subjectivity objective' by literally making an external object into myself.

But Hegel quickly argues that immediate desire-satisfaction is also the most defective, most specious form of realizing one's agency and existing-for-oneself. This critique directly leads (in one continuous paragraph) to Hegel's argument that this defect in mere desire can only be overcome through a relation to "another self-consciousness" (¶175). His claim, in other words, is that one can truly realize one's freedom only in and through a certain relation with other subjects. As Hegel expresses the matter in his lectures: "The material in which the I, freedom, can be realized, can only be another self-consciousness. The latter self-consciousness is the reality, objectivity, and externality of the I and its freedom."[57]

What, then, is Hegel's analysis of the defect of desire? How does that analysis motivate his distinctively intersubjective solution, and what sort of intersubjective relation is required? Moreover, what kind of *freedom* does Hegel take to require such relations, and why? These are our questions.

The most straightforward explanation of the *defect* of immediate desire is a very traditional one – that insofar as my actions are governed by immediate desire (rather a higher form of reason), I am not truly free, since I am ruled *by* the contingencies of my immediate, natural inclinations, rather than ruling my own immediate desires – i.e. governing myself (and my desires) through reason. This is Robert Pippin's take on the matter: in the mere pursuit of immediate desire, one is "subject *to* one's desires [...] whereas what we want is a subject *of* desire, a subject determining

[57] *LPS* 190, *VPG II* 789

which desire is to be pursued and why, for reasons" (2010, 73). This assessment of Hegel's critique of desire corresponds to what I've called the 'normativity reading' of the Hegel's understanding of the need for recognition – that is, the view that the need for social recognition is ultimately grounded in (and even coincides with) the need for "normative self-determination" (2010, 19), i.e. the need to act, judge, and live according to *reasons* (norms, concepts, principles) rather than mere immediate inclination and sensibility.

But is this the right interpretation of Hegel's analysis of the defect of desire in *PhG* IV? Of course, in the bigger picture, Hegel certainly thinks that *one* of the problems with immediate desire is its mere 'sensuous immediacy.' In this respect, Hegel belongs to a very extensive philosophical tradition which takes true human agency to require a form of self-governance through higher forms of reason, rather than the impulsiveness of immediate desire. There is nothing uniquely Hegelian about that general idea, and the view that the mere pursuit of immediate desire-satisfaction is a defective, irrational form of agency is shared not only by the Kantians, but also the Platonists, the Aristotelians, the Stoics, the Epicureans, and indeed many of the Utilitarians. It is the standard view.

But defective forms of agency are typically defective in several respects and for several reasons, and the mere pursuit of immediate, destructive desires is a case in point. The important question is whether, of all its many defects, the mere 'immediacy' of its form of action is the one which Hegel is focusing on here and which, he thinks, points to a need to realize one's freedom in and through a social relationship. My claim is that it is not.

As an initial indication of this, we should note well that Hegel takes the problem of consumptive desire to reveal the need not only for a different *form* of action but also, more specifically, for a different *object* toward which my action is directed – one that is not a mere passive object, but another active subject like myself, "another self-consciousness" (¶175). Thus,

he writes, "A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much 'I' as 'object'" (¶177). Hegel characterizes this relation to a distinctive kind of object in terms of whether an object plays an active or a merely passive role in the realization of the subject's own purposes. Describing the requisite relation to another subject, he writes: "The first [subject] does not have the object [the other subject] before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it" (*PhG* ¶182). In other words, this relation is characterized by its distinctively *reciprocal* form of purposive action, by contrast to the completely one-sided purposiveness characteristic of desire's relation to its objects.

But even on its face, the kind of action characterized by this distinctive kind of object and this distinctive reciprocal purposiveness appears to be far more specific than action governed by reason rather than mere immediate impulsiveness. For instance, a skilled carpenter who designs and builds his own table certainly exhibits a form of action governed not merely by immediate impulse but by careful thought and attention, by patience and discipline, by deliberate design based on knowledge and long-term considerations (e.g. the enduring use and durability of the table to be produced). And even if his work consciously fulfills socially-established standards or norms of good craftsmanship, the *object* upon which his action is performed is certainly not one which 'does of its own accord what he does to it.'

These initial considerations are by no means a sufficient criticism of the 'normativity reading' of Hegel's critique of desire and the corresponding need for recognition. They do, however, suggest that the central requirement derived in Hegel's argument – the need for an object that is, of all things, another reciprocating subject – is something different and more specific than the general need for action determined by reason rather than mere immediate impulse. In what

follows, I will argue that the crucial distinction which motivates Hegel's transition from desire to recognition is not the distinction between natural, immediate impulsiveness, on the one hand, and action governed by reason, on the other. Rather, the central issue turns on a different kind of distinction – namely, the difference between one-sided purposive action (whose proper object is a mere passive object) and two-sided, reciprocally purposive action (whose proper object is another active subject like myself). On this reading, Hegel's fundamental critique of desire as a defective form of agency rests not its mere impulsiveness, but rather in the one-sided form of purposiveness which it shares in common with many non-impulsive, rationally-governed forms of action.

But why, and in what sense, should *that* be the central defect of immediate desire? To understand this point, we must begin by considering a more obvious and interpretively uncontroversial aspect of Hegel's critique of immediate desire – namely, his observation of its familiar insatiability and the endlessly repetitive cycle of satisfaction and want. Then we can better examine the question of the nature and the deeper source of the deficiency of immediate desire.

3.1.2 Insatiability and the 'Bad Infinity' of Immediate Desire (Echoes of Plato)

The most undisputed aspect of Hegel's critique of desire is his observation of a familiar feature of immediate desire-satisfaction. He notes, as others have before and after, that the kind of satisfaction gained by gratifying one's immediate desires is inherently transient and insubstantial. Immediate desire never attains its own goal (satisfaction) in any true or lasting form, but its fleeting gratifications are quickly replaced by the exact same unsatisfied state with which it began. As Hegel puts it, each of its satisfactions "is just as much no satisfaction" (*EPS* ¶478); "the desire is again generated in the very act of satisfaction" (*EPS* ¶428). The result is that the mere pursuit of immediate desire-satisfaction gives rise to a kind of futile repetition of the same pursuits again and again, like the unending task of Sisyphus. As Hegel puts it, "[desire] never absolutely attains its

goal but only gives rise to a progress *ad infinitum*" (*EPS* ¶428Z). Hegel's term of art for this kind of sheer endlessness is a 'bad infinity' (*schlechte Unendlichkeit*).

This aspect of Hegel's critique of desire is both familiar to readers and easy enough to understand in its own right. Indeed, the kind of endlessness and futility which characterizes the mere pursuit of immediate satisfaction has long been recognized by thinkers as diverse as Plato and Mick Jagger. But as with his original account of self-consciousness as desire, the all-too-familiar situation which Hegel observes in his critique of desire tends, precisely because of its familiarity, to mask both the subtlety and the generality of the deeper conceptual insight his argument is intended to illustrate. *Wohl bekannt, nicht erkannt*.

Specifically, it is easy to overlook the fact that Hegel does not characterize the central deficiency of immediate desire, as one might expect, in terms of the mere contingency, givenness, or insubstantial quality of any particular *content* of immediate desire. Instead, he characterizes its deficiency in terms of what may seem to be just the opposite – namely, a kind of unlimitedness or infinitude which undermines its capacity to attain true or lasting satisfaction. Hegel is by no means the first to view the pursuit of mere desire-satisfaction in this way. In Plato's *Gorgias*, for instance, Socrates compares such an insatiable pursuit (openly endorsed by his interlocutor Callicles) to the endless replenishing of a leaky jar or to the endless scratching of an infinite itch (493b-494c). In the *Philebus*, Plato makes the infinite or unlimited (*apeiron*) character of the aims of sensuous desire the central theme, and it is in these terms that Socrates explains the inherent futility of the pursuit of pleasure as an ultimate end. This aspect of Plato's treatment of sensuous desire-satisfaction is a repeated subject of praise in Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy, in which he discusses the *Philebus* at some length. He notes, for example:

> In the Philebus Plato investigates the nature of pleasure; and the opposition of the infinite and finite, or of the unlimited (ἄπειρον) and limiting (πέρας), is there more especially dealt with. In keeping this before us, it would scarcely occur to us that through the metaphysical knowledge of the nature of the infinite and undetermined, what concerns enjoyment is likewise determined; but these pure thoughts are the substantial through which everything, however concrete or seemingly remote, is decided.[58]

In fact, in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*'s own discussion of the finite, the infinite, and the 'bad infinite,' Hegel explicitly refers to Plato's treatment of these issues in the *Philebus* (*EL* ¶95).[59] While Hegel's and Plato's critiques of desire are far from identical, I note the comparison in order to highlight the fact that, as in Plato, Hegel's analysis of the defect of immediate desire-satisfaction fundamentally centers around its particular (and 'bad') form of 'infinitude.'[60]

Like Plato's *apeiron*, Hegel's 'bad infinity' admits of various particular forms. In the *Philebus*, Plato focuses particularly on the manner in which mere pleasure (like 'the big' and unlike 'the equal') has no internal measure of completeness but always admits of more or less (27e-28a). But there are two senses in which the aims of mere desire are unlimited (i.e. desire is always after *more*). One is like unbounded avarice – an unquenchable thirst for more and greater satisfactions. In that sense, desire could be compared not to a leaky jar but to a bottomless one. The other, related sense in which desire is always after *more* corresponds to the image of endlessly replenishing a leaky jar. Here, the 'more' that desire is always after is not merely that of a greater quantity or intensity of its satisfaction but that of a continual repetition. Every satisfaction gives way to some new unsatisfied desire, and so on ad infinitum. In Hegel's critique of desire in *PhG* IV, the kind of

[58] (Vol. 2, 69-70). Hegel discusses the *Philebus* in his 1819, 1823/4, and his 1825/6 lectures on the history of philosophy, and in all cases, praises Plato for characterizing pleasure not in terms of its mere singularity and immediacy but its infinitude (VGP I, 96; VGP II, 591; VGP III, 1069).

[59] Sholl Figueiredo (2016) also notes the influence of Plato's *Philebus* on Hegel's understanding of the finite and the infinite.

[60] Note, my claim is not that Hegel is explicitly referring to Plato and his *apeiron* in his own critique of desire (though, as Pinkard notes, Hegel was an avid reader of Plato from his early Tübingen days (2000, 27)). The important point is that Hegel's own emphasis on the 'bad infinitude' of mere desire-satisfaction is central to his critique and that elsewhere as well, Hegel explicitly acknowledges this as the defining defect of mere sensuous gratification more generally.

'bad infinity' on which Hegel focuses is like that of the 'leaky jar' in the *Gorgias* – the unending, insatiable drive to repeat its form of activity (a 'progress *ad infinitum*').

Hegel's account of desire in *PhG* IV does not concern all pleasure, but specifically the immediate satisfaction gained by the destruction and consumption of an otherwise independently existing object of desire. Indeed, as we will see, an important feature of this type of immediate desire is that its objects are natural, given objects, not objects already prepared for consumption (that is what distinguishes its satisfactions from the pleasures enjoyed by the 'master' who will enter the picture later). The focus of Hegel's critique (as we will see in greater detail) concerns the exact nature and underlying source of this kind of 'bad infinity' to which the mere pursuit of such satisfaction gives rise. But what does this character of immediate desire have to do with the central themes of Hegel's chapter – namely, the kind of self-objectification that corresponds to the realization of one's own freedom and self-sufficiency? To understand this, we must examine how Hegel's critique, while drawing on important aspects of a Platonic tradition, develops the matter in a few distinctive ways.

The first, as we will see, pertains to the fact that Hegel does not merely identify the unlimited, the infinite, with this bad form, but he distinguishes between this bad infinity and a 'true infinity.'[61] Specifically, in this context, Hegel examines the essential connection between, on the one hand, the unlimitedness which characterizes desire's insatiability and, on the other, the false, illusory sense of freedom *from* outer limitation which is experienced in the satisfaction of destructive desires. It is illusory precisely because the transience of such satisfaction requires that

[61] "In due course Plato equated the infinite with the bad and the determinate with the higher, and he defined the idea as the balancing of both, containing the boundary as bounded within itself. The truth is the unity of the infinite in which the finite is contained" (*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion 1824*, 309; cited in Sholl Figueiredo (2016, 574)). Aristotle, as I discuss more below, likewise notes a different (and good) sense of actions which are 'infinite' or have no limit (*peras*) – namely, those which, unlike mere *kineseis*, contain their end (*telos*) in themselves (*Metaphysics* 1048b19-20).

the subject repeat the process all over again, that it must confront another recalcitrant object whose initial opposition to its purposes must once again be *aufgehoben* in order to attain its own satisfaction, and so on ad infinitum. I will return to this point below.

The second distinction, crucial to our purposes, is that Hegel locates the *source* of desire's endlessly repetitive struggle to attain its satisfaction not just in its lack of governance through a higher form of reason, but rather, in its fundamentally asymmetric (indeed unilateral) relation to its proper objects – as Hegel puts it, its 'negative relation to the objects.' "Thus self-consciousness [as desire], by its negative relation to the object, is unable to overcome it [*ihn aufzuheben*]; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well" (¶175). To see what all of this means, we can begin by examining two alternative interpretations of Hegel's analysis of the problem with immediate desire.

3.1.3 The Source of the 'Bad Infinity' of Desire

Axel Honneth, for his part, does explain the problem of desire in terms of a false sense of limitlessness on the part of the desiring subject. But Honneth explains this in terms of the contrast between the limitations of the destructive *power* exhibited by one's desire-satisfaction and a kind of delusion of omnipotence allegedly implicit in the desiring subject's attitude toward the world. He thus reads Hegel's remarks about desire's incapacity to 'overcome the object' as indicating a "disappointment over the independence of the object" on the part of the desiring subject — that is, the subject's unhappy realization that it was deceived in "believing itself capable of destroying its object through the satisfaction of its needs, through the fulfillment of its desires" (2008, 84).[62] By contrast, Pippin takes the problem of the endless cycle of desire to be rooted in the fact that

[62] Butler (1982, 38) reads this claim similarly to Honneth.

immediate desire is a form of being ruled *by* one's desires, rather than governing one's desires through reason: "In this situation, to revert to the language we have used several times, one cannot be said to be the subject of one's desires but subject to one's desires" (2010, 80).[63]

To begin with Honneth's assessment of the problem, a clear objection to that analysis (as Pippin likewise notes (2010, 74n.)) is that the limited *power* of the desiring subject would only be a problem for that subject if we took the subject to be very self-deceived indeed – to suffer from delusions of omnipotence. In effect, we should have to ascribe to the desiring subject the delusional fantasy of Veruca Salt in Willy Wonka's factory — the clearly unsatisfiable desire to devour the whole world like a single bar of chocolate. But who is supposed to seriously believe herself capable of devouring the world into non-existence? Why should anyone even desire such a thing?[64]

In fact, a closer examination of Hegel's account shows that the situation is precisely the opposite of what Honneth takes it to be. It is true that consumptive desire aims at destroying its particular object (e.g. an apple), and it *succeeds* in that aim. But, for Hegel, it does not and cannot (for its own sake) aim to destroy the hand that feeds it (external nature) or to satisfy its desire once and for all. On the contrary, the kind of subjectivity at issue here is one which consists in and requires the continual satisfaction of desires, for it is *through* this continuing satisfaction that the desiring subject exists for itself, preserves itself, and affirms its 'self-certainty.' The need for the continued existence of its proper objects, of external nature as the persisting, independent source of the endless objects of desire, is rooted in its own form of actively existing for itself: "Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its satisfaction are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes

[63]Pinkard likewise analyzes the matter in this way (1996, 50-1).

[64] Honneth connects this view to the idea that small children have a false sense of unbounded power connected to their undeveloped sense of an independent objective world. But, as I've discussed previously, Hegel's account of self-consciousness is not about the developmental psychology of young children, but presupposes a subject of *consciousness* – one that is well-aware of an independent external reality, that has been liberated from a "childlike unity with the world" (*EPS* ¶ 413Z) and that affirms its own agency by demonstrating that the independence of given, external things is not absolute.

from overcoming this other: in order that this overcoming can take place, *there must be this other*" (¶175; my emphasis).

The desiring subject's self-perpetuating relation to an enduring otherness (external nature) is not just an unfortunate reality that must be confronted or tolerated. On the contrary, this enduring otherness is an essential, internal requirement rooted in the fact that desire-satisfaction is a form of internal purposiveness, a form of life. In satisfying my desire, it is *I*, the desiring subject, who persist in and through my relation to this object. But to persist as a desiring subject is precisely to continue to desire — i.e. to have some new desire and some new object through which to satisfy it. If my desire itself did not outlive the satisfaction of some immediate, individual desire, then that satisfaction would not only bring about the demise of the desired object but also the demise of the desiring subject, like the moth who reaches the flame. This simple point, as we will see, has significant consequences.

To return to the *Gorgias*, Callicles – who insists that the only happy and *free* life is one of endless, unrestricted desire-satisfaction (491e) – makes this very point as an objection to Socrates' criticism of such a life. Socrates had suggested that, in order to achieve fulfillment, one must instead have *limited* ends. In other words, one should not be like the leaky jar (endlessly replenishing itself), but like an ordinary jar, with a finite capacity and fixed point of fulfillment. Callicles' reply is that, to the contrary, the limitlessness of desire (its insatiability) is *precisely the point*, for the complete end of all want and desire would be the end of life itself:

> *Socrates: So then those who have no need of anything are wrongly said to be happy?*
> *Callicles: Yes, for in that case stones and corpses would be happiest. (492e)*

Callicles' counter-objection is a serious one. Life itself is not a limited end, like the filling of a normal vessel. If it were, then the fulfillment of one's life (like the fulfillment of any finite

aim) would be its *end* in both senses of the term. But life (whether as mere life or a life of freedom) aims at its own preservation, the continuation of its activity, and therefore (since that activity is purposive) the continual pursuit of one unfulfilled end or another.

Similarly, in Hegel's account, desire's insatiability and its continual dependency on external nature is rooted in the fact that desire is a form of internal purposiveness which is realized through a kind of negative action on some given object. That is, in desire, I positively exist for myself by opposing some other, some given reality, and by bringing it into conformity with myself and my purposes. Because the satisfaction of any one particular desire does not extinguish this inner drive (one should hope not), the action must be repeated again and again. If not for that persisting inner aim, I should not be continually unsatisfied, nor should I therefore continually struggle with (yet depend upon) the external world. One who does not wish to live and act faces no such difficulties. The dead are not burdened by the necessities of life.

But this very simple point which underlies Hegel's critique of desire shows that the core of its problem – the source of its 'bad infinity' – is in fact much deeper and farther-reaching than that of being "subject *to* one's desire," impelled by one's own desires as though by some external force. Instead, the problem appears to be a much more difficult, internal one – one that is rooted more generally in the need for continued life and action in the world. To see the nature and extent of the underlying philosophical problem exhibited by the insatiability of desire, let us review Hegel's critique.

Like Socrates, Hegel thinks that the kind of unlimitedness of the mere pursuit of desire-gratification is the wrong kind – a 'bad infinity' – an absurd and futile form of endless striving which can never attain its own end. But, in accordance with the central theme of his chapter on "Self-Consciousness," Hegel also expresses this conclusion in terms of his idea that the kind of freedom and 'self-standingness' which desire exhibits is as illusory and insubstantial as fleeting

satisfaction themselves. Specifically, his claim is not merely that desire is defective relative to some other, better concept of freedom. Rather, it fails relative to the very concept that it (defectively) instantiates.

As we've seen, desire-satisfaction (for a self-aware subject) is, for Hegel, the most basic form of 'making one's subjectivity objective' – namely, of (a) realizing a kind of negative freedom vis-à-vis the external world by intentionally confronting some would-be outer limitation and overcoming it through one's own action; and (b) thereby realizing a kind of positive 'self-standingness' or 'self-sufficiency' by making one's object conform to oneself and one's inner purposes and thereby preserving oneself.[65]

His critique of this form of self-consciousness is that, in truth, desire is just the opposite of this freedom and self-sufficiency: "In fact, the essence of desire is something other than self-consciousness; and through this experience self-consciousness has itself realized this truth" (¶175). The truth of desire-satisfaction is, in fact, a persisting condition of non-satisfaction, of continual outer dependency, and one in which the kind of limitation I confront and overcome in satisfying my desire simply reproduces an exact replica of itself the moment I overcome it. That is, the continued life of desire requires the reproduction of the desire itself and therefore the same form of opposition posed by some still-independent external object of desire. The structure of this activity is precisely Hegel's definition of 'bad infinity': "This *infinity* is the *bad* or *negative* infinity in that it is nothing but the negation of the finite, which, however, re-emerges afresh and thus is just as much not sublated [*aufgehoben*]" (*EL* ¶94).

At the same time, however, Hegel's own analysis of this 'bad infinity' of desire shows that the source of this problem is not restricted to the mere immediacy of sensuous desire. For, as

[65] To reemphasize the point, the kind of 'self-preservation' that Hegel takes to be at issue in the fulfillment of one's ends certainly includes, but is by no means limited to, mere survival (cf. *EL* ¶204R).

Callicles' own objection suggests, the source of this bad infinity appears to lie ultimately in the need for a continuing life of *action*. In fact, Hegel's critique of desire here makes absolutely no mention of its mere impulsiveness or lack of governance through reason. Instead, Hegel explains the problem in terms of (a) the subject's persisting need for a satisfaction and self-certainty that are conditioned by an 'other,' an object through which one fulfills one's ends, combined with (b) the "negative relation to the object" implied by the fulfillment of one's ends at the expense of the independent nature and existence of such an object. Consumptive desire, of course, exhibits an extreme form of this negative relation to the object. But the two general features which give rise to this 'bad infinity' are by no means unique to the mere impulsiveness of immediate desire.[66]

In fact, later in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel makes a similar observation regarding the pursuit of *moral* purposes. A life of moral action likewise depends, for its own preservation, on the continual activity of confronting and overcoming a corresponding 'other' – i.e. something which does not conform to its purposes, some new ill to be rectified, some new wrong to be righted. Otherwise, "moral action is ruled out, for action takes place only on the assumption of a negative which is to be overcome [*aufzuheben*] by the action" (*PhG* ¶620). Note the generality of this last remark about action and its connection to Hegel's critique of desire – namely, that desire relates to its object as a "negative" (¶168), and that "Self-Consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to overcome it" (¶175). Action generally relates to the given objects and circumstances on which one acts as a 'negative' – that is, as something which is not as it ought to be and must be brought into conformity with one's purposes through one's own action. This is

[66] In fact, Hegel takes consumptive desire to be a paradigmatic case of the inherent destructiveness of our fundamentally asymmetric practical relation to immediate natural things. Cf. *SL* 666, GW. 12.169; *Philosophy of Right* ¶59.

what distinguishes a practical from a purely theoretical relation to one's object: one aims, in one's relation to the object, to *do* something to it rather than simply letting it stand as it is.

Accordingly, the conditions that give rise to the 'bad infinity' of desire appear to pertain *generally* to the conditions of a persisting life of action – namely, the enduring need to fulfill one's purposes and to realize one's agency through an active relation to given objects, against which one must struggle to realize one's ends. It is no surprise, then, that it is not only Plato's Callicles, but also Sartre and Fichte[67] who, fundamentally moved by such a view of life, insist that, *in order to live freely*, one must persist in such an endless struggle to realize one's freedom with no hope for a true and enduring fulfillment of one's goal.[68]

So much for the greater depth and difficulty of the problem. Our aim now is to show how Hegel's analysis of the problem underlying the 'bad infinity' of desire leads him to the conclusion that overcoming this problem requires a distinctive form of purposiveness with a distinctive corresponding object – specifically, *reciprocal* purposiveness in relation to "another self-consciousness." To see how this argument works, we must make an important, methodological remark.

What defines Hegel's account of desire is that, in this case, the realization of one's own internal purpose (one's existence-for-oneself) is *identified* with the continual activity of satisfying

[67] On this point, it has been noted that Hegel's account of desire contains a thinly veiled critique of Fichte – namely, the idea that the condition of the 'I' (the free, self-conscious subject as such) must be one of endlessly striving to 'posit itself' by opposing itself to what is other to it, the 'not-I' (mere sensible nature), and by affirming itself and its freedom by overcoming the opposition of the 'not-I.' Cf. Redding (2009) and Clarke (2014). I think this general point is quite right and will discuss the matter more below. But we can only grasp the philosophical significance of Hegel's critique (and his solution to the underlying problem) by also appreciating the extent to which Hegel himself is deeply moved by some of the basic Fichtean ideas which give rise to this problem – above all, that one *does* realize oneself and one's freedom through an activity of overcoming limitations and 'reproducing oneself' in one's objects. In spite of Hegel's many harsh criticisms of Fichte, he did, after all, choose to be buried beside the man.

[68] Sartre expresses the point in reappropriated Hegelian language: "Human reality is by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state" (1956, 90). Later in *Being and Nothingness*, he puts the point more systematically in terms of the inherent impossibility of gaining substantial being (being-in-itself) for one's free subjectivity (being-for-itself), which he summarizes with the conclusion of the work: "Man is a useless passion" (1956, 784).

one's immediate desires. This is the way in which the subject's 'self-certainty' is substantiated. As we will see in the following section, the 'bad infinity' of desire arises not merely from its one-sided, negative relation to its object, but rather, from the identification of such one-sided activity with the subject's own existence-for-itself. In effect, it is the result of taking the fulfillment of such one-sided actions as an ultimate end – as the essence of one's freedom. This sort of argument is typical of Hegel's procedure. His claim is not that this form of existing for oneself and exhibiting one's agency is simply bad, false, or entirely illusory. On the contrary, we *do* (in part) exhibit our freedom in showing the power of our own self-purposive existence over mere things, by one-sidedly subjecting them our own purposes.[69] The problem arises, however, when one's existence-for-oneself is *identified* with such actions. In that case, the result is just the opposite of freedom, self-sufficiency, self-fulfillment.

Accordingly, the result of that argument will not be that a free life requires doing away with the enduring need for such actions and their ends, together with the enduring struggle against nature that it necessarily involves.[70] The result, rather, will be that such actions cannot be taken for what is *essential* and primary; they must be subordinated (as a part and a means) to a different form of action which thus constitutes the true, essential purpose in a free life. This sort of move exemplifies the general procedure of the *Phenomenology*. A certain attitude toward oneself and one's objects has an important, but only partial, subordinate validity – one whose inherently subordinate status is revealed by the absurdity and self-contradiction that arises when it is mistaken for something primary and essential. Accordingly, the partial validity of that subject-object relation

[69] "the realized purpose is the posited unity of the subjective and the objective dimensions. [...] the objective dimension is subjected and made to conform to the purpose as the free concept and, thereby, to the power over it." (*EL* ¶210)

[70] Indeed, as we will see in chapter five, the *mistake* of the 'master' in Hegel's subsequent treatment of his master-bondsman relation will be to adopt such a position.

can only be preserved and affirmed insofar as it is contained (as a subordinate part) within a higher, more complete relation.

In the present case, Hegel's claim will be that the freedom exhibited in one-sided action against passive objects can only be preserved insofar as it is integrated (as a subordinate part) within a relation of reciprocal purpose with another subject. To see why, we need to examine more closely the underlying conceptual structure – and therefore the deeper *cause* – of the 'bad infinity' which Hegel takes to be the result of the *identification* of one's existence-for-oneself with such forms of one-sided purposiveness.

3.2 The Teleological Structure of the 'Bad Infinity' of Desire

3.2.1 Finite and Infinite Ends: *Kinēsis, Energeia*, and their Unholy Union

As I noted earlier, we can distinguish two senses in which the aim of immediate desire-satisfaction is unlimited and thus two senses in which immediate desire is insatiable. In Hegel's critique of desire, the primary sense of this insatiability corresponds to the image of the endless replenishing of a leaky vessel. Here, the 'more' that desire is always after is not characterized by greater magnitude or intensity but by continual repetition. It seeks more of the same, not a greater dosage. And, as we have seen, the need for this endless cycle of desire and satisfaction is closely related to the need for the continuation of one's life and action. The inner source of *that* kind of bad infinity does not, therefore, seem to be so groundless or foolish as that of quantitatively unbounded avarice (like a bottomless vessel). Rather, the inner source of the unquenchable thirst which characterizes immediate desire's insatiability appears to be, in effect, the enduring lust for

life and action.[71] This is the strongest point of Callicles' argument against Socrates. Life is not like filling a vessel to the brim, at which point the task is complete. Its goal is not finite in that way.

For Hegel, the problem with immediate desire is not simply that its aims and activities are infinite, but that they are endless in a way that is self-undermining, for the reasons previously discussed. In order to see how Hegel thinks a relation of *reciprocal* purposiveness with another subject is uniquely capable of overcoming this problem, we must see how this 'bad infinity' is not merely rooted in the enduring need for a life of action, but rather, that it is the result of the identification of such a life with the kind of one-sidedly purposive activities that consumptive desire exemplifies.

To see this, we may begin by noting a central Aristotelian distinction which Hegel himself takes up and builds upon. Aristotle (like Callicles) insists that life is not a limited action with a limited end. But, for Aristotle, the sense in which it is unlimited is not that it cannot ever attain its end, but that it is an activity which contains its end in itself: "no action which has a limit [*peras*] is an end, but only a means to the end" (*Met.* 1048b19). Aristotle distinguishes actions which contain their end in themselves from those whose ends are external to the activity itself and are attained only at its *conclusion* (or outer limit). His terms for these distinct forms of activity are *energeia* and *kinēsis* (an ongoing movement *toward* an end).[72] An action of the latter kind is not complete (*teleia*) and is thus not itself an end (*telos*).[73] By contrast, two of Aristotle's primary examples of *energeiai* are *life* and *eudaimonia* – living and living well, "for happiness is a kind of life" (*Met*. 1050b1). That is, if life is a form of activity which is valued in its own right and fulfills

[71] Indeed, in the bigger picture, this kind of unlimitedness seems to be the deeper, inner source of the other kind of unlimited desire – boundless avarice.

[72] *Metaphysics* 1048b34. As Stephen Menn rightly notes, *kineseis* are, for Aristotle, a subclass of *energeiai*, so that his distinction is really between a primary sense *of energeia* which is not a kind of kinēsis and a secondary sense which is *kinēsis* (1994, 106n43).

[73] "οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα πρᾶξις ἢ οὐ τελεία γε (οὐ γὰρ τέλος)" *Met.* 1048b21.

its aim not in its final conclusion but in its continuing activity, then this is all the more true of a good life and the best life.

Hegel himself takes up this distinction between finite, external purposes (whose end comes only at the conclusion of the activity) and non-finite, internal purposes (activities which contain their end in themselves), and he explicitly credits Aristotle for his prioritization of the latter over the former (*EL* ¶204R). Indeed, for Hegel, life, and above all a free life, is an end unto itself which therefore aims not at its conclusion but its continuation. As Hegel puts it in the *Philosophy of Right* (¶27): "The abstract concept of the Idea of the will is in general *the free will which wills the free will*" – that is, it has itself for its end. And he repeatedly argues that *because* freedom aims at itself and its own preservation, it therefore must also aim at the preservation of one's natural life, which is, of course, a necessary condition of a free life.[74]

What, then, gives rise to the kind of 'bad infinity' which Hegel finds in the endless pursuit of mere desire-gratification? The short answer is that such a pursuit is a kind of undifferentiated, mongrel union of the kind of activity which is inherently an end in itself and the kind of activity which is inherently incapable of being an end in itself. In other words, this kind of 'bad infinity' arises when the kinds of activities *in which one's life consists* are ones which, by their very nature, have merely finite ends, are mere *kineseis*.

The myth of Sisyphus, of course, gives us the most vivid illustration of a life like this. Each activity in Sisyphus's life has a fixed, finite goal whose purpose is only attained at its conclusion: to get the boulder to the top of the hill. So long as he is still acting, his end is not fulfilled, and his activity is merely one of ongoing struggle against an external object (the boulder). As Camus famously points out, Sisyphus's only satisfaction, his only freedom from his burden, comes at the

[74] This, of course, is a central theme in Hegel's life and death struggle for recognition. It is a theme which also recurs in the *Philosophy of Right* (in, for instance, ¶127).

conclusion of that activity – the transient moment of rest in the brief transition from one activity to the next (2018, 121). In other words, his only freedom and satisfaction comes in the moment when he is *not* acting – when, to repurpose Hegel's phrase, he is not 'with himself in another,' but stands completely still and alone on his peak. Once he returns to acting and engaging with his 'other,' his tiresome object, he is again externally constrained by it. If he is to *continue* to live and act, he must repeat the same toilsome activity over and over again. That is what living is, for Sisyphus.

Sisyphus, of course, is cursed to such a life, and the assumption is that, were he not so cursed, he could pursue a different kind of life entirely. But could he? Or is his form of life (as Camus insists) the nature of life itself, so that we too are bound by a similar existence, knowingly or otherwise? For Hegel, as we have seen, the satisfaction of immediate desire does share this basic Sisyphean form. That is, the activities in which such a life consists are inherently *finite* – satisfaction only comes at the end, only when the object with which one struggles has been subdued, destroyed, appropriated. If such a life is to continue, its characteristic task must start all over again the moment it succeeds – not because of some divine curse, but because that is what its life, its 'freedom,' its satisfaction consist in.

And here we see the central problem raised by Callicles' position and Socrates' critique: (1) *Life,* and a free life above all, is an end in itself – one which seeks its own continuation; but (2) if one's life *consists* in the pursuit of finite ends, then the pursuit of such finite ends must be endlessly repeated. But such a life is inherently self-conflicting, self-defeating, for this reason: It requires that the kind of activity which is *not* an end in itself must be treated as though it were. The kind of activity in which I remain constantly burdened by some external restraint, and in which I gain satisfaction only at the end, is treated as something free and valued for its own sake. The result is an endless, futile struggle that can never truly attain its own fulfillment or liberation.

Plato framed this inner conflict in terms of an inherent dependence on a contrary state of pain and want, for that kind of satisfaction consists in the coming-to-be of one state through the passing-away of its contrary (hunger-satisfaction being the most obvious example). Accordingly, one who desires a life of such repeated pleasures must just as much desire their exact contrary – a continual repetition of pain as a necessary precondition of pleasure. Again, Socrates illustrates the point by arguing that Callicles ought to *desire* an infinite itch all over his body in order that he may endlessly enjoy the momentary relief of scratching it.[75]

Hegel emphasizes this tension as well. In his analysis, desire must, for the sake of its own self-preservation, never be satisfied. The logic of his argument is grounded in the fact that the activities which produce satisfaction of this type inherently have the form of a *kinēsis*.[76] The end, by its very nature, is the conclusion of a transition from one state to its contrary. With respect to this aspect of his critique alone, Hegel's argument would appear to be on all fours with familiar lines of reasoning in Plato and Aristotle. But what is unique about Hegel's critique of immediate desire – and what ultimately leads to his distinctively intersubjective solution – is his attention to the relation to the *object* (and the corresponding *kind* of object) which characterizes the merely finite ends of immediate, consumptive desire.

First, in order to emphasize the lack of *freedom* implied by an endless pursuit of immediate satisfaction, Hegel notes the corresponding dependence on the proper outer object with which one must endlessly struggle in such a life. He begins his critique of desire by emphasizing this point: "In this satisfaction, however, [self-consciousness] has the experience of the independence of its

[75] In fact, for Plato, the conflict is even stronger: namely, that these kinds of pleasure require the simultaneous coexistence of a contrary state of pain, for they occur only in the incomplete process of transition from a state of lack to a corresponding state of fulfillment (*Philebus* 50a-d)

[76] Cf. *Philebus* 54d-55a. In the *Philebus*, Socrates argues that pleasure itself is a process of generation (γένεσις). Aristotle denies that pleasure itself (of any kind) is a process of coming-to-be (a form of *kinēsis*), but he distinguishes between pleasures that only arise at the conclusion of a *kinēsis* from a contrary state (which are only 'incidentally good') from those that do not presuppose such a contrary state and are connected with *energeiai.* Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.12; X.3-4.

object. Desire and the self-certainty achieved in its satisfaction are conditioned by the object, for this self-certainty comes through the overcoming of this other; in order that this overcoming may take place, there must be this other" (¶175). What Hegel means by the experience of the 'independence of the object' is expressed in terms of the subject's inability to 'overcome' [*Aufheben*] the object.

As we have seen, Hegel's point is not that the particular object I desire cannot be 'overcome' – as though, like King Midas, my food turned to solid gold the moment I attempted to consume it. I *do* destroy and consume particular things. What cannot be overcome is the *kind* of thing that, in order to preserve my own life and activity – to gain 'satisfaction and the self-certainty achieved in it' – I *must* continually be overcoming again and again. That kind of thing must, therefore, stand as a continually opposing obstacle that must (for my own sake) reappear the moment I overcome it. To will a Sisyphean life is to will that the boulder always roll back in the end.

But here we can see why, for Hegel, the bad infinity of desire is inherently connected to the proper *object* of the kind of activity in which its form of internal purposiveness (its form of life) consists. The point is simple: the kind of internally purposive action whose proper object is a mere object, a mere *other* – something essentially distinct from myself – inherently has the form of a mere *kinesis*, i.e. an activity with a merely finite end. Whatever is essentially 'other' to oneself and one's own purposes (whatever they may be) *must be* fundamentally changed in order to be brought into conformity with oneself. The object's own nature must end to be replaced with mine. This is the double sense in which it is *aufgehoben*. Indeed, in the "Teleology" chapter of the *Logic*, Hegel notes this essential connection between these two aspects of the finitude of mere external purposiveness. Insofar as my end is realized only by externally imposing my purposes on a passive object, the fulfillment of that end can only come at the conclusion of the activity – i.e. when the

object has been finally brought into conformity with myself.[77] Such action must have the form of mere *kinēsis*, a one-directional change whose end is fulfilled only at the conclusion of the action. A life defined by such action – a life whose inner purpose is merely the continuation of such action – must therefore have the form of a self-imposed Sisyphean bondage.

This 'bad infinity' is, in other words, the *direct and necessary* result of the identification of the fulfillment of one's inner purposes, one's existence-for-oneself, with the kind of action whose proper object is a mere object. It is the direct result of identifying one's own life and freedom with action whose purpose must be unilaterally, externally imposed upon one's objects – i.e. with an essentially "negative relation to the object." This is the underlying conceptual structure of Hegel's brief critique of desire.

3.2.2 The Problem of Desire and the Problem of Fichte's Endless 'Striving'

To better appreciate Hegel's analysis of this problem (and the intersubjective solution he will propose), we must distinguish the defect inherent in consumptive desire from two other forms of deficient activity with which it might otherwise be conflated. First, immediate desire-satisfaction must not be confused with a *poiesis* in the strict sense that its end (its product) is merely a means toward some other end. This is the classic Aristotelian example of an activity which is not an end in its own right but a mere means – one which is thus distinguished from *praxis* in the strict sense. Immediate desire-satisfaction is not at all pursued for the sake of some *other* end. The point is that, although satisfaction of this type is pursued for no purpose other than itself, it is not the kind of activity that is truly capable of being an ultimate end in its own right.

Second, I have argued throughout that Hegel's critique of desire is not focused on its mere impulsiveness, its lack of governance through a higher form of reason – through laws, norms,

[77] Cf. *SL* 660, GW 12.163; *SL* 663/ GW 12.165; *EL* ¶ 205

principles, etc. Rather, it is focused on a different feature of desire and one which it has in common with many other forms of rationally-governed activity – namely, the one-side manner in which it imposes its purposes on a mere object, a mere 'other.' To bring this point into clear relief, we may observe the direct parallel between Hegel's critique of desire and his earlier critique (in *Faith and Knowledge*) of Fichte's conception of moral vocation of humankind (in the latter's 1799 *Vocation of Humankind*). The vocation Fichte defends in this text, far from a life driven by sensuous impulse, is that of a great moral crusade: the realization of one's rational autonomy (the essence of the 'I') through a continual opposition to what is 'other' to it – the sensible nature which exists both outside me and within me (the 'not-I'). The parallels between Hegel's critique of Fichte's *Vocation* and his critique of desire are so striking and so clearly non-accidental that their comparison merits quoting a passage from *Faith and Knowledge* at length. Describing Fichte's vocation, Hegel writes:

> If empirical reality, the sense-world did not have the whole strength of its opposition, 'I' would cease to be 'I'; it could not act, its high vocation would be gone. The supersensuous world is only the flight from the sensuous world. When there is nothing left to flee from, flight and freedom and the supersensuous world are no longer posited. This empirical world is, then, as much *in itself* as the I. At the same time, the relation [to the I] which the sensuous world receives in the act of will determines the way it has to be. For the essence of the I consists in acting: the absolute, empty thinking shall posit itself; but it *is* not posited, no being pertains to it. Yet the objective world is the being of the I itself, and the latter can only attain to its true essence by nullifying this being [of the world]. Thus nature is determined as a mere sense-world, as something to be nullified, and it must be recognized as such. On the other hand, if the I recognizes that it has being as well as the objective [world], then it recognizes itself as strictly dependent on the world and as trapped in absolute necessity. (175; GW 4.403)

This argument directly mirrors Hegel's account of self-consciousness as desire, and Hegel clearly has Fichte in mind in that account. His critique is essentially the same: the Fichtean moral subject (at least by Hegel's lights) is trapped in the same Sisyphean 'bad infinity' for the same basic reason. As in desire, the problem is not that overcoming the otherness of the sensuous world is too great a task for the 'I.' On the contrary, the task *must* be infinitely great for the sake of the

Fichtean moral subject itself. Like desire, its own activity and its own freedom *consist in* overcoming this 'other' – "self-certainty comes from overcoming this other: in order that this overcoming can take place, there must be this other" (*PhG* ¶175).

Thus, for the sake of its own life and activity, the subject must never truly attain its end, and it must remain in a relation of endless struggle and dependency with an equally self-standing sensuous world. If "the sense-world did not have the whole strength of its opposition, 'I' would not be 'I'; it could not act, its high vocation would be gone." In other words, for the sake of its own being and freedom, the subject must remain "strictly dependent on the world" and "trapped in absolute necessity." In order to be free, it must be forever unfree.

The reason, again, is that the desiring subject's life and action are defined by this one-sided, oppositional relation toward the other, this purely 'negative' relation: "Thus self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to overcome it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well" (¶175). In desire, as with Fichte's moral crusader, one who wills such 'freedom' must also will the boulder against which he must continually struggle – whether it be a mere external object of desire or (for the Fichtean subject) the recalcitrant irrationality of the sensuous nature outside me and within me.

The point here is not to assess whether Hegel's analysis of Fichte is a fair one.[78] The point, rather, is that the 'bad infinity' which characterizes the lowly activity of mere consumptive desire is one which, for Hegel, cannot be overcome simply by governing one's desires according to a higher form of reason and rational autonomy. In particular, it cannot be overcome through a mere appeal to the general idea of moral praxis. Instead, the problem lies in *any* form of life and action that treats the effort to unilaterally *change* some passive 'other' as its ultimate purpose – as the

[78] That being said, I think it is hard not to see the merit in Hegel's criticism, especially if one examines the third, concluding chapter of Fichte's *Vocation*.

kind of action which is one with the exercise of the subject's own freedom and agency. With this understanding of Hegel's analysis of the deeper problem with desire, the need for Hegel's distinctively intersubjective solution is no longer so difficult to see, and we can now turn to this.

3.3 Social Freedom as Reciprocal Inner Purposiveness

3.3.1 Subject as Substance, Spirit as Social Substance: 'I That Is We, We That Is I'

The problem with desire initially appeared to be rooted in the general nature of a self-sustaining life of action and practical engagement with the world. Such reflections could give the appearance that either (a) freedom in fact requires such a Sisyphean existence; or else (b) that, precisely because of the Sisyphean form of such a life, freedom can only be attained through an inward withdrawal from the world, through the pure life of the mind.[79] Hegel's basic claim is that this is a false dichotomy. One *can* live a truly free, practically engaged life in the world, and the analysis of the source of this false dichotomy shows the need for (and possibility of) a third option. The source of this dichotomy is not simply the general structure of a self-sustaining form of outwardly-engaged life, but rather, a particular *species* of such a life – namely, one which takes a particular kind of outer action (one-sided action on a mere 'other') to define the substance and essential structure of that kind of life itself. To understand how the practically engaged life *can* be a truly free life – and *only* insofar as its substance is one of reciprocal purposiveness with other subjects – we must distinguish the necessary features of this general kind of life from the specific differentiae of these two species of it.

[79] Indeed, Aristotle insists that precisely unlike activities whose end is something other than themselves, the actuality of infinite ends is *in* the subject (*Metaphysics* 1048b23-6). Again, when he gives examples of such activities that are more specific than life and *eudaimonia* in general, he names subject-internal theoretical acts (sight and contemplation). Cf. *Met.* 1050a35-7. This is a significant point of difference between Hegel and Aristotle (for whom, in relations of social reciprocity, the actuality of an activity which is an end in itself is *in* both the subject and object irreducibly).

For Hegel, two features, above all, define a life of self-conscious action as such: (1) that such a life is something self-standing, self-sustaining, self-preserving – as Hegel puts it, a kind of "living substance" (*PhG* ¶18); and (2) that this subsisting internal purposiveness is achieved only in and through an active, outer relation to one's objects. The subject-of-consciousness (the 'I') essentially stands in a relation to objects of consciousness. Fichte calls this the "law of consciousness: *no subject, no object; no object, no subject.*"[80] Although Hegel criticizes Fichte's essentially oppositional understanding of this subject-object relation, he by no means denies the general point. Indeed, Hegel's original introduction of self-consciousness as desire emerges from a critique of the kind of 'free subjectivity' which consists in relating only to itself in the absence of any other whatsoever. Hegel disparagingly characterizes such a self-relation as "the motionless tautology of: I am I" (¶167) – an empty and static form of identity hardly distinguishable from sheer death and nothingness.[81]

These two features of a self-conscious life form the basis of Hegel's dialectic of desire and recognition. The self-conscious subject must be something *substantial*, self-standing, a "living substance," and it must realize this self-relating *Selbständigkeit* in and through its relation to its objects. He writes in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, "the living substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself" (¶18). This form of 'living substance' is the central theme in Hegel's chapter on 'Self-consciousness' – i.e. the realization of one's own substantial subjectivity, one's own self-standingness, as mediated by this 'self-othering' in which

[80] *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), I, 183; English translation (2022, 271)
[81] This is a point Hegel repeats in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* (¶5).

I 'posit myself' (make myself objective) by realizing my own subjectivity in and through my objects.

Indeed, Hegel first describes the relation of recognition precisely in these terms. He claims that truly substantial subjectivity is only realized in the form of a social relation between independent subjects. He calls this social substance *Geist*, "this absolute substance [*Substanz*], which, in the complete freedom and self-sufficiency of its opposites, namely different self-consciousnesses existing for themselves, is their unity: I that is We, and We that is I" (¶178). This language of living substance and social substance should not be understood as some vague metaphor, but as a serious and consequential use of this philosophical category.[82] It denotes that which is truly self-standing, self-sufficient, the basis of its own activity; what remains itself in and through its changing states and circumstances; what, as *living* substance, is both the end and the means of its own existence. In sum, it denotes what is *causa sui* in the only true sense of the term.[83]

Expressed in somewhat less lofty terms, at issue is a form of life which is an enduring end unto itself and which is realized and preserved through a practical relationship to its objects. But, for Hegel, this structure of self-conscious subjectivity has necessary implications for the kind of *object* through which this self-standing existence must be realized and sustained. Above all, it requires a persisting relation to a corresponding proper object of its form of activity. This requirement is not limited to mere desire (or to the broader species of practical life defined by one-sided actions on its objects) but extends to any kind of self-standing life which is realized and sustained through a corresponding relation to outer objects.

[82] For a defense and exposition of the role of the category of substance in Hegel's theory of freedom, cf. Yeomans (2012, 197ff.)

[83] Hegel makes this point about Spirit as *causa sui* explicit in the *Philosophy of Right* (¶66R)

That is why the transition from desire to recognition is not a repudiation of the requirement of a self-standing other, but is *and must be* a distinction between a life defined by one persisting relation to one kind of self-standing other (external nature) and one defined by another persisting relation to a different kind of self-standing object – a self-standing subject. And here is where we see the importance of the distinction noted earlier – namely, a distinction concerning the question of which form of purposiveness is essential in one's life, defines the substance and structure of one's life, and which is merely a subordinate part of that form of purposiveness. The question is: given that any form of practical life consists in a persisting relation to a persisting proper object, what kind of relation to what kind of object defines and governs such a life? And is that relation one of freedom and fulfillment or one of endless dissatisfaction, limitation, and sheer outer dependency?

We have seen the defining structure of the latter form of life. It is one whose characteristic activity has the form of a mere *kinēsis* with a finite end which it must, therefore, endlessly repeat (since that is what its life consists in). And, as we have seen, that form of life is *one and the same* with the form of living whose proper object is a mere *other* (a 'not-I') – that is, something whose own independent nature and existence is essentially external to oneself and one's own purposes. In relation to such an object, the fulfillment of one's own purposes essentially consists in and requires a fundamental *change* in the object – i.e. breaking its own independent nature and replacing it with something external to it, one's own life and purposes. To employ the language of *PhG* IV, the subject's own satisfaction in this case only comes at the expense of the object's independence.

The alternative to that form of life – what is required to overcome that problem – is a form of activity whose fundamental purpose is not to *change* its proper object. That is, what is required is a form of purposive activity whose proper outer object conforms to the subject and its own inner

ends precisely *by being itself*, by preserving its own independent existence. This is therefore only possible if the proper outer object of my own internally purposive activity is, in its own right, essentially the same kind of being as *I* am in my own right. This object can only be another subject like myself, and the requisite activity must therefore be one of shared, reciprocal purposiveness, in which each lives for itself and is preserved through this activity.

In other words, what is needed is the kind of activity in which my own *satisfaction* – the fulfillment of my own internal purposes through the object – is realized not at the expense of, but *in and through* the independence of my object. This is possible only if the object is another subject like myself: "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*" (¶175). Let us see how this argument plays out in Hegel's text.

3.3.2 'Self-Consciousness Achieves Its Satisfaction Only in Another Self-Consciousness'

Our discussion of Hegel's transition from desire to recognition left off with the negative conclusion of his critique of desire: "the essence of desire is in fact something other than self-consciousness." Immediately following that claim, Hegel expresses the dialectical problem which emerges from that critique in these terms: how can one's satisfaction, the fulfillment of one's internal ends, be *united with* (rather than opposed to) the independence of its proper object? He writes:

> At the same time, however, self-consciousness is just as much absolutely for itself, and it is this only through the sublation [*Aufheben*] of the object, and it must attain its satisfaction, for it [self-consciousness] is the truth. For the sake of the independence of the object, self-consciousness can attain its satisfaction only by its [the object's] carrying out this negation within itself; (¶175)

We have now seen *why* the central problem that emerges out of Hegel's critique of desire is posed in terms of the problem of reconciling this need for satisfaction with the need for a correspondingly self-standing object. Both of these are internal requirements for any self-

sustaining form of existing for oneself through a practical relation to one's objects. The problem that gives rise to the 'bad infinity' of desire (or any form of life defined by such one-sided purposiveness) is that its satisfaction stands opposed to and comes only at the expense of its object's independence. There, satisfaction and the independence of the proper object of one's activity are, to use a mathematical example, like the positive and negative values of the non-converging infinite sequence, $a_n = (-1)^n$: -1, +1, -1, +1, …. Each value is replaced by the other, only to be itself replaced again, and so on without end. Thus, "the desire is again generated in the very act of satisfaction" (*EPS* ¶428) – mere desire cannot attain its satisfaction.

What is needed, then, is the kind of satisfaction which is united with the independence of the object of one's activity, one which is achieved in and through that independence and which, therefore, is as enduring as the object itself. But how can these two be reconciled?

As Hegel puts it, the self-conscious subject as such exists for itself, and it does this only through the *Aufhebung* of the object to which it is related – that is, only by overcoming the externality, the otherness of the object, by bringing the object into conformity with itself and its own purposes. The satisfaction achieved by the negation of the otherness of the object is one and the same with the object's effected conformity to the subject's own self-relating purpose. If this satisfaction is to be reconciled with and achieved *through* the independence of its object, then the negation of this 'otherness' of the object cannot, of course, simply be something done *to* the object. That is, the 'object' must be just as much the agent of that activity – it should have to conform to my purposes *through* itself. More precisely, the two of us must both be agents in this relationship.

From this point, the conclusion that the only *object* capable of such a relation is another *subject* follows fairly directly, and the remainder of Hegel's argument simply spells out this

implication.[84] According to the terms presented so far, what is required is a relation of reciprocal action between two independent agents, in which the purpose of each is the purpose of both, and in which, therefore, the independence of each is both preserved, acknowledged, and outwardly expressed. In other words, what is required is a relation of recognition. Indeed, just after Hegel explicitly states this conclusion, he describes the necessary relation to one's object in precisely this manner:

> The first [subject] does not have the object before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it. (¶182)

This is precisely the requisite 'self-effected negation' by the object through which 'self-consciousness can achieve satisfaction.' Thus "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*" (¶175).

Now, beneath the technical problematic of uniting one's satisfaction with the independence of one's object is really a very simple point. Everything changes in the structure of my action when the proper 'object' of that action is another free subject like myself; when the end I aim to achieve through my object is the object's own end; when the action by which I achieve it is just as much the action of the object. Above all, my relation to the object is not one of mere outer resistance to be overcome for my own ends. It is precisely the opposite. It is not like Sisyphus and his boulder. It is instead more like two climbers helping one another to reach the peak.[85] In like manner, and more generally, when the independent life and existence of both is an end for each, then my own

[84] In the following chapter, I will give a more detailed analysis of this reciprocal activity where each '"posits its otherness or difference as a nothingness, and in so doing is independent" (¶176), since this complex dynamic will form the basis of Hegel's account of a life and death struggle and of the 'master-bondsman' relation.

[85] Of course, as I will discuss in the following chapter, the defective, one-sided form of recognition which Hegel will shortly discuss is one in which it is really only *one* who does not resist the other but serves the other's ends.

free life does not come at the expense of the independent being of my object – through a perpetual state of antagonism. Instead, it comes in and through the independent being of the other. Put simply, insofar as each is an end *for itself and the other*, then the other, precisely because of his independent existence, is the enduring means to my own ends, the enduring source of satisfaction: I that is We, We that is I.

Here it must be emphasized that Hegel's original derivation of the need for "another self-consciousness," and his ensuing exposition of the "pure concept of recognition" (¶185), occur at the abstract level of philosophical analysis. Nothing has yet been specified regarding the various concrete forms that such a relation might take – whether in friendship, the family, civil society, the state, or otherwise. Accordingly, no distinction has yet been made between proper and deficient forms of recognition. Indeed, as we will see in the following chapters, the first concrete form of recognition Hegel discusses is one that he himself acknowledges is woefully inadequate to this initial, pure concept of recognition (the relation of mastery and servitude). In the following chapters, I will consider both why this relation is, for Hegel, a form of recognition at all (even a defective one) and why Hegel is especially interested in it. But, at this point in Hegel's argument, what we have is nothing but the pure abstract concept of a relation of complete reciprocity and mutual recognition between one "living self-consciousness" another (¶176). Of course, it will help to illustrate the meaning of this abstract concept by considering some concrete forms of it, as I will do in the following section. But first, we must review the initial, abstract argument for the need for recognition that we have just seen.

Just as the many defects of a life of mere desire-satisfaction are all too apparent, so are the many virtues of a life of shared purpose and mutual recognition. No one needs Hegel's particular authority to stamp a minus sign on one and a plus sign on the other. But Hegel's central thesis

concerns something far more specific about the nature and requirements of freedom. Among its other problems, the life of mere desire is not *free.* It is the opposite of freedom. The other life, *because* of its reciprocal structure, is free. It is the only free, practical life.[86] To bring this more nuanced point into relief, let us conclude by returning to a question I posed earlier: What kind of *freedom* does Hegel take to require this type of intersubjective relation, and why? What is the operative criterion of true freedom which at once shows the deficiency of immediate desire-satisfaction as well as the need for relations of recognition to overcome that deficiency?

3.3.3 Social Freedom as Self-Sufficiency and Freedom from Constraint

When explaining the Hegelian concept of freedom, scholars often appeal to Hegel's rather arcane formulation of "being with oneself in another" (*EL* ¶24Z) – a formulation which, as we have seen, is just as much a definition of the concept of self-consciousness at work in *PhG* IV. Now, if one simply presupposes that notion of freedom, it is not so hard to guess why Hegel would think that its paradigm is a certain kind of social relation. But this notion of freedom in Hegel is not a mere presupposition or assertion – as though it were simply a better way of viewing the matter than more traditional notions. Instead, if we look back on our accounts of desire, the problem with desire (its Sisyphean form of life), and the need for recognition, the central theme that guides Hegel's more complex development of the concept of freedom is, at its base, the most simple, unassuming concept of freedom possible – namely, *to not be constrained, limited by what is external to oneself*. The inner requirements of this most basic concept of freedom end up, for Hegel, developing into a much more robust notion of freedom. But that more robust notion is not merely a substitution of one distasteful notion of pure negative freedom for another, higher-minded

[86] In chapter 6, I will address the question of whether Hegel takes practical freedom to be the only form of freedom.

one. For Hegel, the more robust concept of freedom is really the *true form* of freedom from sheer external constraint. Looking back, we can see the central steps of this development.

Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness begins with the idea of the conscious subject relating *only* to itself in complete abstraction from any externality whatsoever: pure, 'absolute' freedom from what is external to oneself. The basic defect of this freedom, though, is that it is sheer nothingness, lifelessness, the "motionless tautology of: I am I," in which all life and being is simply external to it. Reality itself is its absolute constraint.

The problem of freedom from outer constraint, that is, only emerges for one who lives and acts. Chains and tombs are no restriction for the dead. But to live and act is to confront and thus to generate obstacles, to oppose oneself and one's purposes to what is merely given externally and therefore to face external limitations. Negative freedom must, at a minimum, be a *life* free from constraint. Indeed, even in ordinary experience, we see that one who values purely negative freedom is one who, by that same token, values existing through and for *oneself*. The latter (living 'self-standingness,' self-sufficiency) is really the substance and foundation of the former (non-limitation). But for Hegel, that means that freedom from outer constraint can never be a mere *absence* of constraint. It must be both the 'positing' and 'overcoming' (*Aufheben*) of constraints. It means intentionally confronting what is external to myself and affirming myself by bringing what is other into conformity with my own life, my own purposes. This most basic aspect of freedom (considered abstractly) remains, whether my life is one of moral action for its own sake or one of mere desire-gratification. That, in short, is why the mere concept of freedom from outer constraint presupposes and is founded upon the idea of freedom as a form of self-affirming, self-sustaining life – *living substance*.

This basic notion of negative freedom through 'self-positing' action is something Hegel inherits from Fichte and further develops (with important alterations). But this notion of existing

for oneself by confronting what is other to oneself and realizing oneself in and through that other is, at base, what underlies Hegel's seemingly vatic notion of 'being with oneself in another.' In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel expresses this very notion in terms of non-limitation:

> The will which has being in and for itself is *truly infinite,* because its object is itself, and therefore not something which it sees as *other* or as a *limitation*; on the contrary, it has merely returned to itself in its object. Furthermore, it is not just a possibility, predisposition, or *capacity* (*potentia*), but the *infinite in actuality* (*infinitum actu*), because the concept's existence [*Dasein*] or objective [*gegenständliche*] externality is inwardness itself. (¶22)

This notion of non-limitation and the overcoming of limitation forms the basic disjunction, for Hegel, between the true and false forms of non-limitation – between the 'truly infinite' and the 'bad infinity' which, as we have seen, constitutes the essence of mere desire and the Fichtean infinite striving. For Hegel, the defining character of the 'bad infinity' is its necessary endlessness. One limitation must be replaced with another as soon as the first is overcome, *ad infinitum*. That, as we have seen in Hegel's critique of desire, is the nature of its activity: the independent externality that it conquers in satisfying its desire – the boulder whose weight it must overcome to reach its end – must reappear once more the moment it has been *aufgehoben*.

This one-sided form of freedom from limitation, in other words, is self-undermining – its proper kind of object, its 'other,' must constantly oppose and limit it. It can never truly overcome this limitation – not because the object is too big or too strong, but because its very form of life requires constantly replicating similar limitations in order to enjoy the fleeting freedom and satisfaction of overcoming them. The *cause* of this unfreedom is, for Hegel, the one-sidedness of this form of action, but the *sense* in which it is unfree is, at base, that it is absolutely constrained.

The need for "another self-consciousness" – the need to realize one's freedom through a relation of reciprocal action between independent subjects – is, at base, the need to reconcile the conditions of freedom as a self-sustaining life of action with its inner aim of freedom *from* outer

constraint *through* an active life of inner purposiveness. This requires that one's enduring, standing relation to the proper object of one's action be one in which the persistence of the relation between subject and object is *not* one of outer constraint and limitation. Like external nature as a whole, and unlike fleeting, particular objects of desire, another subject is a persisting, self-standing object toward which I may act. But in an enduring relation of reciprocity with another subject, the persisting independence of the object through which I fulfill my purposes is not a persisting *constraint* or *obstacle* against which I must continually struggle to realize my purposes. On the contrary, in such a relation, the self-subsistence of the other is not a negative trait but a positive one. It is an enabling condition of my own fulfillment, not something over which I must continually triumph. What each achieves in such a relationship is a substantial, enduring existence-for-oneself – one which is not defined by outer restraint to be overcome but is instead defined by free reciprocity. Each 'does of its own accord what the other does to it.' That is the point: a free, outwardly engaged life *must* have a proper 'other,' an object toward which it acts, and its relation to that other *must not* be one of constraint and limitation. This is what a reciprocal relation to "another self-consciousness" provides. This is why it is a truly free life.

Again, at this point we are still considering the 'pure concept' of reciprocal recognition in the abstract, as "the unity of the complete freedom and independence of its opposites, namely, two self-consciousnesses existing for themselves." Of course, the determinate requirements for actually establishing and preserving such relationships are quite complicated. But as Hegel himself emphasizes, the most intuitive examples of this kind of relationship are love and friendship. Indeed (to return to our earlier themes), Aristotle notes that friendship is both a *hexis* (an enduring quality and disposition) and an *activity.* Critically, is an activity which is both an end in itself (a shared life) and one where the very existence and activity of the other is a source of satisfaction to each (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1157b5-23; 1159a16-30; 1170a13-b18).

But while Hegel regards love and friendship as the most intuitive examples of reciprocal purpose and recognition (at a personal, emotional level), his concept is by no means confined to relationships of personal attachment like these. The relation of reciprocal purpose, of the common will which is the will and the action of each, is the concept and substance of any true social community, from friendship to the family to civil society to the state. Indeed, as we will see in the following chapter, the notion of recognition which is central to *PhG* IV is ultimately one which is not dependent upon the personal, emotional bonds of intimate love or friendship.

3.3.4 The Priority of Reciprocal Purposiveness over Normativity

In chapter one, I discussed the view that the fundamentally social aspect of Hegel's theory of freedom is rooted in a kind of social-normative conception of the Kantian idea that freedom requires self-legislation through universally binding reasons, principles, or norms, rather than immediate natural impulse and inclination. This broader reading of Hegel's view of the social is, to a significant extent, founded upon a certain reading of Hegel's critique of immediate desire and his subsequent account of the need for recognition in *PhG* IV. That reading takes the defect of desire to be its merely natural aspect, its lack of governance through reason, and this is the problem to which 'recognition' is taken to be the solution.

In this chapter, I've argued that this reading is incorrect. The reason Hegel's critique of desire introduces the need for an *object* that is (of all things) another self-conscious subject, is that the problem with desire centers on its one-sided form of action on a merely passive object. The solution to that problem requires a form of reciprocal action, in which the action of one on the other is really the free action of both – each 'does of its own accord what the other does to it.' Here, the need to realize one's freedom socially is by no means identical with the need to act

according to norms, reasons, principles. It lies, rather, in the need for the distinctive freedom achieved through shared *purpose* and reciprocal action.

In fact, this conception of the social conditions of freedom is not limited to Hegel's account of recognition in *PhG* IV. These are also the terms in which he expresses the need for a social realization of one's freedom in the ethical-political theory of his *Philosophy of Right*. In the transition from 'Property' to 'Contract,' he writes: "as the existence of the *will*, its existence for another can only be *for the will* of another person. This relation of will to will is the true distinctive ground in which freedom has its *existence*" (¶71). Again, in 'Morality,' he makes a similar claim:

> While I *preserve* my subjectivity in implementing my ends (see ¶ 110), in the course of thus objectifying them I *at the same time* supersede this subjectivity in its *immediacy*, and hence in its character as my individual subjectivity.[87] But the external subjectivity which is thus identical with me is the *will* of others (see ¶ 73) — The basis of the will's *existence* is now subjectivity (see ¶ 106), and the will of others is the existence which I give to my end, and which therefore has this identity of my will and the will of others within it — it has a *positive* reference to the will of others. (¶ 112)

Note how this last passage exhibits the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness previously discussed. Specifically, it is a kind of 'self-objectification' which consists in objectively realizing one's own subjectivity in a teleological manner, i.e. in the realization of one's ends. But the kind

[87] Note, by this 'immediacy' Hegel is not specifically referring to immediacy in the sense of sheer natural impulse (we are well beyond that kind of immediacy in the 'Morality' section). Rather, as his corresponding discussion of teleology in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* makes clear, the relevant 'immediacy' is that of an unrealized (merely subject-internal) purpose confronted with an equally 'immediate' objective reality which confronts me. "The teleological relation in its immediacy is initially the external purposiveness, and the concept [the end] is opposite the object which is something presupposed." (*EL* ¶205). The relevant 'mediation' here is that of the realized purpose by means of the object, whereby my purpose extends beyond my individual self (i.e. into the external world): "Thus, the realized purpose is the posited unity of the subjective and the objective dimensions. [...] the objective dimension is subjected and made to conform to the purpose as the free concept and, thereby, to the power over it." (*EL* ¶210). It is in this sense that Hegel claims that the satisfaction of immediate desire is itself the "negation of *immediacy* and individuality" and "the identity of self-consciousness with its object" (*EPS* ¶429). (Clearly that satisfaction is not overcoming 'immediacy' in the sense of, say, a higher ethical perspective). In fact, Hegel's simplified (and much less illuminating) transition from desire to recognition in the *Encyclopaedia* "Phenomenology" follows the same basic logic as the passage from the *Philosophy of Right* just quoted: the inner aim of action is to externalize (i.e. realize, 'objectify') one's subjectivity, and this can only properly be done where the 'object' by which this is achieved is another reciprocating subject (¶429). For a useful discussion of this passage of the *Philosophy of Right*, cf. Yeomans (2015, 105-112).

of end-realization which, Hegel thinks, properly coincides with such a *self*-realization is one that is achieved in and through the will of others. Although Hegel's account of the need for recognition in *PhG* IV differs in many ways from his particular formulations of the need for a social realization of one's freedom in the passages just cited, its central claim is one that it shares in common with these and defines Hegel's social theory of freedom generally. One can truly realize one's freedom only in relations of reciprocal action and shared purpose with others.[88]

Of course, in the bigger picture, Hegel absolutely insists that any enduring relationship of social reciprocity ultimately requires forms of self-discipline and the common acknowledgement of normative constraints. Any substantial, enduring purpose at all requires such self-restraint, and reciprocal relationships are impossible if one's own purposes are fundamentally at odds with the other's. But these normative constraints, for Hegel, are not ends in themselves, as in the oft-parodied German idea of freedom which Hegel likewise mocks – e.g. "a view of morality as the perennial and hostile struggle against one's own satisfaction, as in the injunction: 'Do with repugnance what duty commands'."[89] Self-restraint through reason and duty is only really *freedom* insofar as it is, above all, an integrated *part* and enabling condition of actions and relations whose essence is *not* to be limited, constrained. This is why even true moral freedom for Hegel is not mere duty for duty's sake. Duty has its essential value only as part of the *positive* realization of one's own ends in a relation of shared will with another.

This point gets at one of the deep ambiguities of interpretations which ground the need for recognition in the need for normative rationality: Is the social needed for the sake of normative self-legislation or is normative self-legislation needed for the sake of true sociality? Hegel's

[88] In this context, it may be noted that, in the *Philosophy of Right* (¶113R.), Hegel ultimately claims that relations of mere contract do not sufficiently fulfill the positive social conditions of freedom, precisely because in such merely transactional relations, my own freedom and inner purposes are not truly an *end* for the other but are only, as it were, incidental to the purposes of that action and mainly serve as a *constraint*.

[89] *PR* ¶124R; Hegel's reference is to Schiller's parody of Kant in his and Goethe's *Xenien* (1915, 122).

answer is clear, and it is the latter. Limitation is for the sake of not being limited, and the true non-limitation (the *true infinite*) is in the free reciprocity of a true social community. In a word, man does not exist for the law, but the law for man.

Such free reciprocity is the true form of individual non-limitation, "the will which has being in and for itself [that] is *truly infinite*." Unlike the bad infinity that results from the idea of freedom as sheer boundlessness, the true condition of the will's not-being-limited is one which, in a sense, has limitations – namely, in the sense that it is a form of life and action which is *determinate*, has a determinate purpose, a determinate reality, and determinate bounds (the condition of anything *actual*). But the determinacy of its purpose does not have the form of a mere finite end (like the filling of an ordinary vessel), but rather of a determinate activity which is an end unto itself. And here that which limits oneself and one's action – the outer object which I confront in my action – is no true constraint or limitation. Rather, as a freely reciprocating subject, it is, in its very independence and externality to me, both a *means* to my ends and an end in its own right. Such is the nature of a relation of mutual recognition and shared purpose with others.

Conclusion

I argued above that, for Hegel, the 'bad infinity' of immediate desire, like that of Fichte's endless moral striving, is not merely the result of persisting action on mere nature, but the result of taking such one-sided action as an ultimate end – one that is identified with one's very existence-for-oneself. The value of such action can be preserved only insofar as it is integrated, as a subordinate part, a *means*, within a life whose fundamental purpose is one of shared, reciprocal purpose, and whose ultimate outer objects, therefore, are other free subjects as such. Indeed, a life of shared purpose with others is, and must be, mediated by such finite, outer actions. Of course, the relation between our inevitable ongoing struggles against the external world and their

'redemption' in relations of social reciprocity is a long and complex topic in Hegel.[90] In his original argument for the need for recognition, no such details are discussed but only the need for the higher freedom of social reciprocity. I note this relation in these concluding remarks not just to reemphasize an earlier point, but also because the relation between social recognition and mere outer toil will remain a central theme in Hegel's subsequent discussion of the first, defective 'appearance' of recognition – the one-sided recognition (and one-sided division of labor) in the relation of mastery and servitude.

What we have examined in the foregoing chapter, however, is only the philosophical explanation of the need for "another self-consciousness" as the *conditio sine qua non* of the enduring freedom and satisfaction of the individual itself. But the requisite social substance, the unity of the "complete freedom and independence" of its members, is, as Hegel well understands, as difficult to attain and preserve as it sounds. Where it does not yet exist, or where it has been broken and devolved into sheer antagonism between separate individuals, it requires bitter struggle and a long, difficult road to achieve. In the following two chapters, we turn from this "spiritual daylight" of the *concept* of Spirit (¶177), the 'I that is We,' to Hegel's account of one such bitter struggle and the one-sided outcome it produces: the relation of mastery and servitude. What we must examine above all are two questions: (1) W*hy*, for Hegel, the *coming-to-be* of the requisite form of social recognition and reciprocity requires such struggle; and (2) Why, in spite of the master's apparently offloading the life of endless toil onto another and restfully enjoying the fruits, this freedom is itself a specious and unsatisfying one, precisely because of its one-sidedness.

[90] Yeomans (2016) provides a good and extensive treatment of this topic as it appears in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right.*

Chapter 4. Recognition and the Life-and-Death Struggle

Introduction

Hegel's original argument for the need for recognition closes with an ideal picture of social harmony. Spirit is "absolute substance" – the living whole which, like the body, is greater than the sum of its parts.[91] At the same time, the living whole which is outlined *in abstracto* in this concept is quite unlike the individual body, for its parts do not have the status of mere subordinate instruments (organs). Rather, it is the unity of the "complete freedom and self-sufficiency of its opposites, namely different self-consciousnesses existing for themselves" (¶177). Each realizes its complete *individual* independence and satisfaction in and through this whole, and this is achieved through a relation of free reciprocity and mutual recognition.

From this beautiful picture of "spiritual daylight" (¶177), Hegel's account quickly takes a darker turn. We are suddenly discussing a bitter struggle for recognition, for which each stakes his own life *and* the life of the other. The result of that struggle is the establishment of a relation of mastery and servitude: the victor spares the life of the vanquished in exchange for the latter's absolute subservience. Thus, the first form of concrete recognition that emerges in Hegel's account is a one-sided recognition in which only one is, and is treated as, free.

Why does Hegel's account so quickly turn from a concept of social harmony to such an extreme image of social discord? Why can't 'the We' just be friends? What exactly does Hegel take this life-and-death struggle to be about, and what kind of recognition is at stake in it? Why

[91] In this respect, Hegel's image is akin to Aristotle's picture of the state, and we have seen Hegel's own version of the idea that "the isolated individual is not self-sufficient" (*Politics* 1253a25). That is, we have seen Hegel's derivation of the claim that individual *Selbständigkeit* requires participation in a social whole. In his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel directly (and approvingly) quotes from that same passage of Aristotle's *Politics*, that "whoever is incapable of entering into partnership, or who is so self-sufficing that he has no need to do so, is no part of a state, so that he must be either a lower animal or a god." (1253a27), and he renders Aristotle's '*autarkeia*' (self-sufficiency) as *Selbständigkeit* (VGP III, 1116)).

does that struggle give rise to a relation of mastery and servitude? How do these antagonistic relationships to which Hegel now turns relate to his original concept of recognition? Finally, is Hegel making a general claim that freedom and recognition require risking one's life (or being willing to do so)? These are the main questions to be addressed in this chapter. In the next chapter, I will closely examine Hegel's famous 'master-slave dialectic' which follows his account of this struggle – focusing especially on his argument that the freedom which the master enjoys is, at base, a specious one. To understand that dialectic, however, we must first establish how and why Hegel's account of recognition develops into a treatment of the relation of mastery and servitude.

My aim in this chapter is to defend a middle position between two influential approaches to Hegel's account. Kojève's classic reading of Hegel's 'struggle' not only understands that struggle to be a sheer battle for domination (i.e. for the kind of recognition given to a master), but it also takes the master-slave relation to be definitive of Hegel's general concept of recognition. By contrast, others maintain that Hegel's struggle is meant as an extreme example of a self-conscious subject's willingness to transcend its natural inclinations (even its drive for self-preservation) through a higher commitment to some socially-mediated, normative self-conception. Such views, far from taking the master-slave relation as an exemplar of Hegel's concept of recognition, regard that relation as a transparently self-contradictory attempt at the kind of norm-based recognition they take to be the central issue in Hegel's account.

I will argue that the latter approach is right in taking Hegel's 'struggle' as an extreme (not a general) case of the conditions of attaining recognition, and it is also right in regarding the ensuing master-slave relation as a deeply defective case of the relation of recognition – not a general exemplar, as Kojève takes it to be. At the same time, I will argue that Kojève is right in viewing the recognition at stake in Hegel's depicted struggle to be nothing more than the recognition of sheer dominance. That struggle has nothing to do with an interest in mere honor or

in the esteem of one's peer, much less an interest in affirming any implicit, proto-normative claim through the validation given by another. The freedom of unbridled self-interest and personal domination is all that Hegel's depicted combatants are after. In fact, I will argue that we obscure the nature and philosophical significance of that struggle if we regard it even as an extreme or radically defective example of affirming some normative claim or commitment.

Instead, I will argue that Hegel's interest lies precisely in the fact that the freedom and recognition won through such unvarnished barbarism is not as obviously defective or self-undermining as many interpreters take it to be. The master's condition *does* realize this general concept of freedom-through-recognition, albeit in a perverse, one-sided, and ultimately inadequate way. Specifically, the master does, in a way, overcome the problem of immediate desire through a certain (coerced) unification of another's purposes with his own. This grim reality is the deeper source of Hegel's interest in the case. The master-slave relation constitutes, as it were, a self-directed skeptical challenge to the original concept of recognition – a challenge that takes the form of a kind of Thrasymachean cynicism.[92] This, I argue, is the interpretive lens through which Hegel's account of such radical social antagonism should be understood. It represents a move in the kind of "self-consummating skepticism" which, Hegel claims, characterizes the methodology of the whole work (¶78). The fact that a relationship which appears to be just the opposite of what was intended in the initial concept *does* nonetheless instantiate it (in a certain perverse way) poses a serious challenge, and the validation of that original concept against this challenge requires that Hegel be able to outdo that skepticism on its own terms. This is why Hegel must give such careful consideration to the inner problem (for the master) in the master-slave relation.

[92] That is, this relation represents the kind of idea to which the character of Thrasymachus gives explicit voice in Plato's *Republic* – namely, that the 'truth' of lofty, abstract notions of social unity is really, on the one hand, the power of the strong to dominate the weak, and, on the other, the servile self-discipline of the weak.

To show this, I begin, in section 4.1, by introducing Hegel's account of the life-and-death struggle, providing some initial context for that account and the general reasons for Hegel's interest in such an antagonistic encounter. In section 4.2, I examine the more difficult questions of the nature and significance of the struggle Hegel depicts, arguing that we misunderstand that account by viewing it through the lens of a normativity-centered concept of recognition. In section 4.3, I examine why, for Hegel, the very fact that this struggle exhibits nothing but a barbaric battle for personal domination is essential to his philosophical purposes in this part of his text.

4.1 Framing the Struggle

As I noted in the previous chapter, Hegel's initial account of the concept of recognition is presented at a high level of abstraction. Following his transition from desire to recognition, he maintains this abstract philosophical perspective for a bit, outlining the basic structure of the "pure concept of recognition" as one of complete reciprocity in which two independent subjects mutually transcend their 'otherness' as opposed individuals (¶¶176-184). Here, no mention is made of any life-and-death struggle or, indeed, of any concrete requirements for such a relationship. Hegel then flags his return from this high-level perspective to an examination of the experience of the concrete 'shapes of consciousness' that he has bracketed in this pure conceptual intermission:

> We now have to consider how the process of this pure concept of recognition, of the duplicating of self-consciousness in its unity, appears to self-consciousness. At first it will exhibit the side of inequality of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle term into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only *recognized*, the other only *recognizing.* (¶185).

His discussion then turns to matters of life and death, the mortal struggle for recognition, and the relation of mastery and servitude that emerges from it. Two things are worth noting about this transitional passage of the text. The first is that, from the outset, Hegel indicates that the *first* exhibition (*Darstellung*) of this concept is the one-sided recognition of the master as master by the

slave. There is not (nor will there be) any mention of a different, prior form of recognition connected to the struggle – say, some other form of honor or glory. Indeed, Hegel titles this subsection "Independence and Dependence of the Self-Consciousness: Mastery and Servitude."[93] The second point is that Hegel also indicates from the very outset that this first form of recognition does not adequately exhibit the "pure concept" he has just outlined. Rather, this first, one-sided recognition stands in direct contrast to the condition he describes in the immediately preceding sentence, according to which two subjects "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another" (¶184). I will return to these points in what follows.

The ensuing account of a 'struggle for recognition' and its culmination in a relation of mastery and servitude raises a number of difficult questions concerning both the nature of the struggle Hegel depicts as well as its connection to his original concept of recognition. To address those issues, let us begin by putting the central elements of Hegel's account of that struggle on the table. Here I permit myself to quote rather extensively from the text, reserving most interpretive matters for what follows.

4.1.1 Hegel's 'Struggle'

Hegel begins his account of this struggle by claiming that each subject, while internally certain of its own absolute freedom, its "pure being-for-self" (¶186), must give proof to this self-certainty by demonstrating it to the other, who does not yet acknowledge it:

> They are, *for each other*, shapes of consciousness which have not yet accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction, of rooting-out all immediate being, and of being merely the purely negative being of self-identical consciousness; in other words they have not as yet exposed themselves to each other in the form of pure being-for-self, or as self-consciousnesses (¶186).

[93] '*Selbständigkei*t *und Unselbständigkeit des Selbstbewusstseins: Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*'

This demonstration, Hegel claims, "consists in [each] showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific *existence*, not to the individuality common to existence as such, that it is not attached to life" (¶187).[94] In the proof of this freedom to one another, Hegel thus claims that "the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life and death struggle":

> And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the *immediate* form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure *being-for-self* (¶187).

But Hegel insists that it is not enough merely to stake one's own life. One must *also*, for the same reasons, stake the life of the other. "Just as each stakes its own life, so each must seek the other's death, for it values the other no more than itself" (¶187).

This struggle, Hegel claims, can only end in one of two ways. One is the death of one party. Actually dying in such a struggle would no doubt prove a certain detachment from one's natural life (in more than one sense). But such an outcome, Hegel insists, would be wholly unsatisfactory, both for the dead and for the survivor. It is unsatisfactory for the survivor because he gains no recognition from the dead: "that recognition is at the same time undone by the other's death" (*EPS* ¶432). On the other side, actual death is far from the intended outcome for either party. Each wants to affirm its pure *being*-for-self, and this cannot be achieved through sheer annihilation. Indeed, Hegel explicitly states that, while each is willing to *risk* its life, neither is willing to actually *die*:

[94] Of course, it should be emphasized that, in speaking of this demonstration of oneself as a 'self-consciousness' by showing that one is not bound by one's natural life, the term 'self-consciousness' here has the more robust sense that it has had throughout this chapter of the *Phenomenology* – i.e. one's objectively realized freedom, one's 'pure being-for-self' – and not merely that of the basic forms of self-awareness which distinguish us from mere animals. Hegel is not making the bizarre claim that two individuals need to risk their lives to show one another that they are not literal thoughtless brutes but self-aware subjects.

"each of the two self-consciousnesses puts the other's life in danger [*Gefahr*], and incurs a like danger for his own – but only danger, for each is no less bent upon maintaining his life, as the existence of his freedom" (*EPS* ¶432). Thus, Hegel concludes, "In this experience, self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness" (*PhG* ¶189).

Since neither would be satisfied by either his own death or the death of the other, there is, Hegel claims, only one alternative for them: the victor agrees to spare the life of the vanquished in exchange for the latter's utter servitude to him. Hegel puts the matter most clearly in the *Encyclopaedia* "Phenomenology":

> Because life is as essential as freedom, the fight thus ends in the first instance as a *one-sided* negation with inequality. The one combatant prefers life, preserves his single self-consciousness, but surrenders his claim for recognition, while the other holds fast to his self-relation, and the first recognizes him as his superior[95] – the *relation* of *mastery* and *servitude*. (¶433)

What follows in Hegel's account is a lengthy discussion of the relation of mastery and servitude from which this subsection gets its title. I will examine that account in detail in the next chapter, but the basic features of that relationship are the following. The master is now relieved of the endless struggle against nature otherwise required to satisfy his needs and desires. The slave performs that labor on his behalf, while the master simply enjoys the fruits of that labor without toil. By contrast, the slave is forced – by the omnipresent fear for his own life – to restrain his immediate desires in order to preserve the master's good pleasure, upon which his own life now depends. He is thus forced to develop the habits of discipline, obedience, and skill required for the enduring, productive work that sustains the two of them.

[95] Literally, the first acknowledges his subjugation to the other: "das Andere [....] vom Ersten als dem Unterworfenen anerkannt wird."

These are the basic (and generally well-known) steps of Hegel's 'struggle' and its one-sided outcome. The stark contrast between Hegel's initial 'pure concept of recognition' and the social antagonisms he goes on to discuss has often given rise to two opposing tendencies in the literature. Kojève's influential reading, for instance, focuses almost exclusively on the antagonistic part of the text, and he reads Hegel's treatment of recognition as essentially an account of a fundamental human drive for domination. Others focus almost exclusively on the brighter side of Hegel's account, while downplaying the more antagonistic aspect. Brandom, for instance, reads the whole matter of risking one's life as merely a particularly vivid illustration of what he takes to be the general theme of Hegel's account of recognition – namely, the self-conscious subject's capacity to constitute its own identity through a commitment to a normative self-conception. In fact, even Brandom's own example of such an extreme case appears to sanitize the situation Hegel describes. Rather than considering the more distasteful case of two hostile subjects risking *each other*'s lives, Brandom discusses a rather nobler example of a samurai proving his commitment to his own code of honor by performing the rite of suicide under certain prescribed circumstances (2009, 238).

I do not think that such one-sided approaches do justice to what Hegel actually intends in his account. As we have seen, Hegel notes from the start that the one-sided recognition of the master-slave relation is a deficient example of the concept of recognition, not a paradigm. Brandom, for his part, is right in taking Hegel's depiction of this 'struggle' to illustrate broader conceptual issues. Indeed, all of the many 'shapes of consciousness' depicted in the *Phenomenology* are intended as partial (and imperfect) exemplifications of some more general philosophical concept. But as we have seen already in Hegel's treatment of self-consciousness-as-desire, the fact that such cases are typically defective examples of a broader concept is generally central to Hegel's interest in them. This means that just as we go astray in identifying the general

concept of recognition with the defective case, we likewise miss the point by downplaying or sanitizing Hegel's interest in the defective case as such.

How, then, are we to make sense of Hegel's life-and-death struggle for recognition? Is Hegel making the general claim that to prove one's freedom and gain recognition from another, one must risk one's life – and, by the same token, the life of the other? Or, if the only recognition to be gained by this life-and-death struggle is, as Hegel seems to suggest, that of a master; and if that recognition is an inherently deficient one, why does Hegel's treatment of recognition turn to an account of this struggle? To answer these questions, we must begin with a few remarks on Hegel's methodology.

4.1.2 The Alternating Perspectives of the *Phenomenology*

Throughout the *Phenomenology*, we are continually alternating between two perspectives. One is the perspective of the various shapes of 'natural consciousness' at issue in each chapter of the text – i.e. the concrete forms of experience which Hegel takes to exemplify different philosophical concepts of the subject, object, and their relation.[96] The other is 'our' philosophical perspective, which examines these philosophical concepts both *in abstracto* as well as in the way they appear in these concrete 'shapes.' By examining certain internal tensions within these corresponding 'shapes of consciousness,' *we* the philosophers learn something about the internal tensions inherent in the broader concepts exemplified by them. We thereby further develop these

[96] In a way, these 'shapes of consciousness' play a somewhat similar role to those of the various interlocutors in Plato's dialogues. They are representations, embodiments, of a certain (ultimately deficient, one-sided) philosophical viewpoint. But unlike Socrates' interlocutors in Plato, the forms of 'natural consciousness' in the *Phenomenology* do not typically give explicit expression to the viewpoint they represent; they simply live out a certain perspective, so to speak. We, the observing philosophers, give voice to the concept and motivation of the perspective they exhibit.

concepts in a manner intended to resolve these inner tensions while preserving the philosophical motivations underlying them.

This general feature of the unique methodology of the *Phenomenology* is well known, but it is often difficult to understand both the relation and the distinction between what is going on at the higher philosophical level and what is going on specifically at the level of the 'shapes of consciousness' meant to exemplify that philosophical problematic. Indeed, even when Hegel turns from the more abstract perspective to an examination of some corresponding 'shape of consciousness,' there is always an ongoing philosophical commentary which is distinct from (but not always easily distinguishable from) the first-personal perspective of the kind of subjects he is describing. Thus, when Hegel's account of self-consciousness turns to the exemplification of its structure in immediate desire-satisfaction, it is clear that, from the first-personal perspective of the subject, the *aim* of its activity is not that of 'rendering its subjectivity objective by destroying its objects and revealing the nullity of the sensuous things which confront it.' Such a description does indeed correspond to something in that subject's perspective – namely, the experience of its own power over natural objects and their conformability to the subject and its purposes. But above all, the aim, as seen by the subject itself, is simply to gratify its immediate desires. The accompanying philosophical analysis is meant to show how, even within this most mundane of activities, something more substantial and philosophically interesting is occurring.

Our present aim is to understand the complex relation between these two perspectives as it pertains to Hegel's account of a life-and-death struggle for recognition. To this end, we can begin by considering the relation between the problem with immediate desire as experienced by the subject and that same problem as viewed from a higher philosophical perspective. There, the problem as experienced by the subject itself is, above all, a lack of enduring satisfaction, together with a deficient sense of self-sufficiency that comes with the endless effort to achieve such fleeting,

insubstantial gratifications. For *it*, these deficiencies are not experienced at the level of conceptual analysis but, in effect, at the level of subconscious feeling. Hegel, though, has given a conceptual analysis of this experience – namely, that such problems are manifestations of the inner deficiencies in the broader concepts of freedom, self-sufficiency, and the corresponding forms of self-consciousness which mere desire represents. He has located the source of that problem in the purely one-sided, negative relation to its objects which characterizes that form of self-relation. From that philosophical analysis of the problem, he has argued that the solution requires a distinctively *two-sided* form of purposiveness in which the subject's own satisfaction (the fulfillment of its own internal purposes, its existence for itself) is united with the independence of the object through which that satisfaction is attained. Specifically, the necessary solution to the deeper problem with desire is an enduring relation of reciprocity and mutual recognition between independent, self-conscious subjects.

The resulting concept of the necessary 'I that is We' is developed within this higher philosophical perspective. The 'shapes of consciousness' which Hegel now revisits have no notion of that philosophical analysis of the deeper problem with desire and its solution. They have not attained such an enlightened self-understanding. It is not *they* who are after some harmonious 'I that is We,' but it is *we*, the philosophers, who have understood that the underlying problem inherent in desire can only be overcome through this relation of complete reciprocity between free subjects. By contrast, the motivations of these 'shapes of consciousness' remain essentially the same as before (in the treatment of desire): namely, a rather barbaric form of interest in their own "satisfaction and the self-certainty obtained through it" (¶175).

That is, their relation to their objects is guided by a drive for personal gratification and the experience of individual power and independence thereby attained. Indeed, we should bear this in mind carefully when considering Hegel's description of the life-and-death struggle described

above. Just as these depicted subjects are (clearly) not pursuing a relation of harmonious reciprocity with one another, we likewise should not assume that Hegel is imagining them to be moved by an interest in "accomplishing the movement of absolute abstraction, of rooting-out all immediate being, and of being merely the purely negative being of self-identical consciousness" (¶186) – as though the motivation for their struggle were simply a mutual desire to demonstrate to themselves and the other their detachment from the constraints of their finite, natural embodiment. We will return to this matter below.

But what kind of recognition does Hegel take *them* to be after? What is the famous 'struggle for recognition' a struggle *for*, and how does that aim relate to Hegel's original, 'pure' concept of recognition? Why, for that matter, is Hegel interested in returning from the lofty heights of philosophical abstraction to the lowly perspective of combatants like these? Why return to the cave, so to speak, once we have basked in the 'spiritual daylight' of the pure concept of recognition – a concept of genuine reciprocity and mutual recognition? Finally, why should the first 'appearance' of this concept be an intersubjective relation established through such violent antagonism, rather than the most basic community in which human beings are born and raised – the natural community of the family, united by bonds of love? Let us begin with this last question, after which we can return to the other, more difficult ones.

4.1.3 Recognition beyond the Bonds of Familial Love

Hegel's 'struggle' is clearly some kind of variation on the Hobbesian theme of a 'state of nature' as a state of war (a point I will return to below). But, as in Hobbes, the 'state of nature' under discussion is not a condition of literal thoughtless brutes, but rather a condition in which human subjects retain their complete 'natural liberty' – i.e. unrestricted individual independence. The depicted antagonism between independent individuals is by no means a denial of the obvious

fact that, even in such a 'state of nature,' human beings are born, develop, and live within *families* – i.e. communities that are not defined by such absolute individualistic antagonisms. The combatants in Hegel's 'struggle' are not imagined as entering that conflict as solitary apes and emerging as thinking, speaking, social beings in a relation of mastery and servitude. What an absurd picture that would be.[97] They are the result of live birth and parental upbringing; they are not like octopuses emerging and developing in isolation. And they are to be understood as grown, speaking, apperceptively self-aware human subjects – even if these capacities are less-than-highly cultivated or reflective (they are not 18th-Century gentlemen engaged in a duel).

But if Hegel's account of recognition is ultimately about a form of freedom and self-sufficiency achieved through reciprocity and shared purposiveness with others, and if the sort of subjects under discussion are ones who are assumed to have already been brought up within the most basic community of shared purpose, the family, then what exactly do they lack, and why should any form of *violence* be needed to establish the intended subject-subject relation?

The short answer is that the kind of synthetic unity involved in Hegel's 'I that is We' involves an essentially different and far greater form of separate independence between its members than in natural familial relations. It is the unity of the "complete freedom and self-sufficiency of its opposites" (¶177). This is not the kind of unity exhibited by the natural family, especially in the absence of the legal-ethical structures under which the modern family stands. Indeed, this is why, while Hegel often uses the examples of love and friendship as the most intuitive illustrations of the true condition of non-limitation (the 'true infinity') exhibited in reciprocal social relations, he typically adds the qualification 'at the emotional level' or 'at the

[97] Although this remark does appear to be patently obvious, commentators have often run together (in a deeply ambiguous way) the account of recognition in *PhG* IV with the idea that our individual self-awareness – our very capacity to say 'I,' to be apperceptively self-aware – is, from its origins, inseparable from a second-personal relation to others and from our sense of kinship (i.e. generic identity) with others. Cf. Pinkard (2017, xxiii), Habermas (1976, 142-169).

level of feeling.'[98] In such relations (again, especially outside the liberal values which shape modern love and modern family life), it is sheer unity, the whole, that predominates. The individual is, as it were, submerged within that whole, like Aristophanes' lovers in the *Symposium* (189c-193e).

Hegel's philosophical interest in the contrasting forms of antagonistic, state-of-nature relations between self-interested individuals with no emotional, moral, or political bonds between them lies in the fact that he is interested in examining the profound inner tensions to be resolved in reconciling the immense individual independence demanded by self-conscious subjectivity with the equal necessity (for the sake of that very independence) of a community of reciprocity between independent subjects.[99] Hegel's central claim going into this 'struggle' has been that the concept of freedom as absolute, one-sided unrestrictedness and self-interest is not just *bad* (from some nobler perspective) nor is it entirely wrong-headed. Rather, that concept, when taken as absolute and primary, proves to be self-undermining. The particular manner in which it undermines itself shows that, in fact, genuine non-constraint and self-interest can only be realized, satisfied, in a relation of reciprocity and mutual recognition with others. All of this, however, has been discussed only at the highest level of abstraction, and in turning to the lowlier perspective of the combatants he depicts, Hegel is interested in examining how this abstract truth shows itself more concretely. He does so by considering the case of subjects who are themselves assumed to be motivated solely by a drive for unrestricted, individual gratification.

The foregoing provides a general, preliminary idea of what Hegel is discussing, why he is interested in it, and how the kind of motivations and aims assumed on the part of the subjects at

[98] Cf. LPS 194, VPG II, 796; *Philosophy of Right* ¶8Z

[99] Siep, discussing Hegel's struggle, expresses the matter in terms of the distinction between the "oppositionless relation of love and the immediate 'solidarity' of the family," and the "moment of distance [...] the assertion of the independence and difference of the individuals." Thus, "in the struggle for recognition, this moment of distance is radicalized" (1979, 63).

hand are not one and the same as those of the philosophical analysis which precedes it. The purpose of these remarks, however, has only been to clear away basic sources of possible confusion so that his central and more difficult questions come more readily into view. What we now need to examine is why Hegel is philosophically interested not just in any relation between independent subjects with no real bonds between them but particularly in a *life-and-death struggle* that ends in the establishment of a relation of mastery and servitude.

4.2 A Struggle for What?

Naturally, different interpretations of Hegel's general concept of recognition give rise to, and correspond with, many different views on the philosophical significance of the 'struggle' he depicts. But beyond this, these diverse readings also tend to correspond with competing views about the kind of struggle Hegel actually depicts. As we've seen, Brandom's reading goes for the illustration of a ritual suicide. Others have likened Hegel's example to that of Achilles' battle with Hector (Shklar 1976, 59) or the duel between Paris and Menelaus over the right to possess Helen (di Giovanni 2021, 160). It is notable that none of these examples ends in a life of servitude for the defeated party.

One might suppose that the nature of Hegel's 'struggle,' or even the fact that he chooses to employ such an extreme example, is fairly inconsequential for his philosophical purposes. But while certain details are unmentioned and obviously unimportant (how tall are these guys?), we should not be so quick to treat the few features that Hegel *does* choose to discuss as mere incidental details that may be substituted for others. Beyond the general principle that one's interpretation ought to agree with the text that is given (and not a different text in line with one's own interpretation), the philosophical point of a given example often depends quite a bit on a correct appreciation of the example itself. Just as not all desires exhibit the same interests or the same

kinds of subject-object relation, neither are all life-and-death struggles (or the kind of recognition at stake in them) homogeneous with one another. And just as we would completely misunderstand the philosophical meaning of Hegel's previous account of desire if we mistook the desire he discusses for, say, a yearning for philosophical understanding, so would we obscure the deeper point of Hegel's 'struggle' if we mistook it for something it is not. In fact, we will make significant progress toward understanding the relation between Hegel's concept of recognition and the 'struggle for recognition' by first getting clear about what kind of struggle he is and is not depicting and what kind of recognition he takes the combatants themselves to be after.

4.2.1 Conviction or Domination?

Kojève offers the most straightforward description of the struggle itself. In his reading, what motivates the struggle is a lust for domination, a desire for the kind of recognition given by a slave to a master. On this view, the issue is not merely an interest in the honor or esteem to be received from the other – much less an earnest interest in the other's approval or agreement – but only an interest in the outright submission of the other to myself and my arbitrary will. Naturally, any attempt at such domination would give rise to a hostile struggle in which both the life and the freedom of each are at stake. As I noted above, Kojève also views Hegel's *general* concept of recognition through the lens of this kind of struggle – as, in effect, an outline of a general human condition defined by social struggles for recognition and sovereignty that are ultimately so many forms of mastery and servitude: "That is to say that man – at his origin – is always either master or slave; and that true man can exist only where there is a master *and* a slave" (1980, 43). Indeed, Kojève takes this drive for domination to be the distinctively human desire – or rather, "'humanizing,' 'anthropogenetic'" (1980, 40) desire – and he insists that the existence of such a

drive cannot be explained but must be accepted as an "irreducible premise" (ibid.). I will return to this view below.

Kojève's analysis of Hegel's concept of recognition and the life-and-death struggle has largely fallen out of fashion in the last several decades, as has his description of the depicted struggle itself as one motivated by a sheer lust for domination. By contrast, on readings like those of Pippin, Pinkard, and Brandom (what I've called the normativity view), the link between the perspective of Hegel's philosophical problematic and that of the subjects engaged in a struggle is a broader issue of *authority.* Of course, authority has many different forms and many different senses, and we must be clear about what sort of authority may be at issue. On these readings, the central philosophical topic in Hegel's account is *normative* authority – namely, one in which my own perspective (my reasons, judgments, principles, etc.) has and is taken to have a kind of objective and intersubjectively binding validity. In other words, the underlying issue in such matters of authority pertains to normative questions – i.e. the individual subject's "desire to confirm that what it takes to be true or right or good is [true or right or good]" (Pippin 2010, 60).

I have challenged this normativity-centered reading of the central philosophical problematic of Hegel's account of recognition, and I will return to this broader issue below. The present question, though, is this. On these views, what is at issue *for* the subjects engaged in the depicted struggle? In these readings, the issue in this struggle itself pertains to their broader theme of normative authority and its corresponding recognition (if only as a deeply defective attempt at such recognition). As we have seen, Brandom takes the notion of risking one's life to serve merely as an extreme illustration of a larger point – namely, the willingness to sacrifice something for the sake of a higher, normative commitment with which one thereby identifies. Pippin's view is similar to Brandom's, though he takes the talk of such mortal commitment to some normative value to be more than an incidental example but central to Hegel's purposes: "It illustrates the possibility of

an independence from all dependence on life itself" (2010, 79). On Pippin's reading, Hegel's assumed occasion for this life-and-death struggle emerges from what is, at first, merely a competition over finite resources by desiring subjects. However, such a competition gives rise to a struggle concerning recognition and normative authority precisely because another subject does not merely impede one's desires physically but challenges them in a different way – namely, with regard to questions of justification, reasons, etc. (normative matters).[100] Thus, Pippin takes the proof of one's willingness to stake even one's own natural life over such normative commitments and challenges to be the central point in Hegel's struggle.

But is this the sort of thing Hegel is depicting in his 'struggle'? Like Brandom's illustration of the samurai's ritual suicide, this general framing of the issue does not seem to match the scenario Hegel describes and examines. If the combatants were risking their lives over some normative commitment – the rightness, goodness, or truth of their attitude toward things – then why would that struggle end in the victor's subjecting the other to a life of servitude so that he may turn to a life of idle pleasure? What kind of normative claim would he be aiming to validate if that were the case? Indeed, an essential part of Hegel's account of this relation is that, while the slave is forced to restrain his immediate desires (in order to serve the master), the master does not achieve any such discipline and instead pursues only his immediate desires (or, rather, makes the other provide for them). In this case, it seems like the assumed motivations of Hegel's combatants are anything but an interest in matters of objective truth, rightness, or goodness, but are, on the contrary, defined by base, unrestrained self-interest.[101]

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[100]Following his insistence upon the centrality of matters of life and death, Pippin summarizes his own interpretation as follows: "I think that what Hegel tries to explain at this point is why it is that we cannot treat as satisfactory any picture of a monadically conceived self-conscious desiring consciousness, a desiring being who can practically classify and who is aware of being a practical classifier and so has a normative sense of properly and improperly classifying, but is imagined in no relation to another such self-conscious classifier or imagined to be indifferent to another's construals and claims, his takings." (2010, 79).

[101] In this respect, Brandom's example is particularly inappropriate here, for what is central to the samurai's own self-conception is the fact that, like an English knight, he is a vassal, a *Knecht* who serves not merely a code but

Of course, we could take Hegel's account of these purely self-interested relations as the beginning of a kind of *reductio* argument (culminating in his critique of the master) which is intended to show the necessity of some other, higher form of social relationship. Pippin and Pinkard do read Hegel's account in that way, and I agree that something like that is going on here. But what sort of *reductio* argument could Hegel be introducing here, and how should it pertain to questions of normative commitments?

Pinkard argues that even the subjective self-interest of the victor-turned-master contains an implicit claim to (and interest in) a more objective, universal validity of his perspective, and this is what underlies the master's interest in the other's recognition (of that perspective). He writes:

> For him [the master], what counts as a good reason has to do with its fit with his own projects and desires (which are for him authoritative), and he can affirm this conception of what counts as a good reason only by being given recognition by the slave. The master therefore knows who he is, and he knows what things are only by having his self-conception affirmed by the slave. What he claims to know about himself and the world is therefore mediated by the slave. The slave further supposedly affirms the master's self-conception by working for the master on the things of the world. (1996, 59)

For Pinkard, this aim underlies the inner conflict in the actions of the victor-turned-master. The affirmation of the authoritative validity of his view of the world is confirmed only by one whom he does not recognize as an authority, and only because he has forced him to so affirm his point of view:

> To the extent that the master comes to realize this, he realizes that on his own terms he has failed. He has not established his own subjective point of view as the truth; he has merely managed for contingent reasons to have the slave accept it as the truth, with there being no further ground for the acceptance than the contingent fact that out of fear for his life, the slave opted to submit to the master. (1996, 60)

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a *Herr* (the shogun). While that kind of *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* relation obviously differs greatly from the paradigm case, this example of the samurai nonetheless involves precisely the kind of self-discipline through service that, for Hegel, is *not* presupposed here but emerges in the *Herr-Knecht* relation.

In other words, the victor-turned-master's attempt to gain such recognition by sheer force involves a kind of "practical incoherence" (as Pippin sums up the same point (2019, 84)).[102]

Now, if the master's relation to the slave were rooted in a need to gain the other's recognition of the truth and goodness of his own point of view, his own reasons, and if he thought he could satisfy that need by forcing the other, at pain of death, to spend his life slaving away in the field so that he could enjoy a life of leisure, then there is no question that his position would be totally incoherent. Indeed, it would appear to be a little too incoherent.

That is, the attribution of *that* kind of internal incoherence on the part of the master would require that we impute to him an interest in a kind of recognition from his subordinate that, in fact, appears to be quite foreign both to Hegel's depiction of him and, indeed, to the very concept of a master's relation to a slave. The master does not care what the slave thinks of his plans and desires. The slave's role is not to give his stamp of approval, to acknowledge the master's good reasons (as though his opinion mattered whatsoever to the master), but simply to carry out his orders whether he approves of them or not. That is the concept of the master-slave relation, and Hegel gives no indication that the master is after anything but the slave's labor and the kind of recognition that corresponds to it – i.e. unresisting subordination. In other words, such an interpretation of the master's internal problem appears to depend upon an equivocation of two incompatible senses of 'authority' – an equivocation which is then imputed to the master himself and his own interests. But the master, for his part, has no confusions about the kind of authority that interests him. His attitude is quite univocal: when he demands a 'yes, sir' from the other, he is not after his approval but only his obedient service.

[102] Siep views the matter in essentially similar terms: "Any truth claim must rather be intersubjectively "proven" (*bewährt*). The most elementary form of such a practical proof is battle. The battle or struggle for recognition of one's own take on the truth is as it were, the beginning of science." (2014, 92).

Even Pinkard seems to recognize the tenuous conceptual connection between the slave's alleged function of confirming the master's self-conception and his function of simply toiling on the master's behalf: "The slave further supposedly affirms the master's self-conception by working for the master on the things of the world" (1996, 59). In my view, the motivations for imputing such an unusual conflict of interests to the master spring only from the broader pressures of analyzing this relationship in terms of a certain reading of original Hegel's account of the need for recognition – namely, that it is primarily about the subject's need for mutually acknowledged norms of thought and action. I've argued that, instead, Hegel's original argument is primarily about the individual's personal interest in an enduring unification of another's *purposes* with his own. From that perspective, the master-slave relation does appear to be the kind of perverse, one-sided exhibition of that concept that Hegel takes it to be (as I discuss more in the following section). But this also means that any internal problem for the winner in this arrangement, the master, is not as glaring as it would appear to be on the alternative reading. Indeed, if mastery were so blatantly self-undermining, it would be a marvel that it has persisted for so long in the world and enjoyed by so many otherwise clever people. I will develop my own interpretation of the much subtler internal problem inherent in that situation in the following chapter.

4.2.2 '*Der Trieb der Herrschsucht*': Recognition in the 'State of Nature'

The foregoing suggests that, in spite of the other problems with Kojève's reading, his view of the nature of the depicted struggle and the subjective aims of the combatants fits much better with Hegel's text. Kojève, that is, takes the struggle to be a pure battle for domination – one which aims simply at the defeated party's recognition of the other as his master, as opposed to some loftier claim. On the one end, this brute, domineering aim would be much more continuous with the attitude of immediate destructive desire that Hegel had just discussed. On the other end, it

would explain why Hegel thinks the only possible outcomes of that struggle are death or domination, and the only satisfying outcome for either party is the latter. Hegel's victor does not seek merely to dispossess the other of some contested good (as in the duel between Menelaus and Paris). Neither is he merely driven by rage and a desire to destroy the other (like Achilles toward Hector). Nor is he, finally, after the honor and recognition given by his fellow warriors and countrymen, like a soldier risking his life for the sake of glory and public esteem. Instead, he is after the kind of recognition given by the vanquished, and his spoils of victory are the vanquished himself and the enduring fruits of his labor.

Hegel affirms this understanding of the 'struggle' most explicitly in his 1825 lectures on the Encyclopedia "Phenomenology," where he describes the impulse that motivates this combat as the drive for domination, "der Trieb der Herrschsucht" (VPG I, 468). He distinguishes the recognition sought through this struggle from higher, modern forms of recognition in the family, civil society, and the state, which are gained "completely without struggle [*ganz ohne Kampf*]" (ibid). By contrast, of his 'struggle for recognition,' he says:

> This recognition is not merely about honor [*Ehre*], the recognition in the opinion [*Vorstellung*] of the other, for just as one's immediate individuality remains [at this stage] undistinguished from one's independence [*Selbständigkeit*], so does opinion. Rather, the man must be recognized in the whole [of his] existence. But here, being recognized has to do with the relation in which I am the master and he is the slave and so must serve me in that way. (ibid.)

In other words, Hegel's claim is that, in his situation, there is not yet any higher criterion of *Selbständigkeit* – nothing to be confirmed by me or recognized by the other – apart from absolute, individual independence, unseparated from individual strength and self-interest. This is why, *under these conditions*, recognition from the other cannot be gained in any other manner than physical combat – risking one's own life and that of the other. This view also explains a point I

noted earlier – namely, Hegel insistence that, while each combatant is (*incidentally*) willing to put his life in danger (*Gefahr*) by endangering the life of the other, neither combatant is willing (like Brandom's samurai) to actually die (*EPS* ¶432). In this struggle, neither takes himself or the other to be answerable to anything higher than his individual self. Neither stands for anything universal. There is no higher commitment, purpose, value, or norm. There can be no positive relationship between two individuals claiming such unbounded freedom, no 'We' other than the subordination of the one under the other.

In his 1827/8 lectures on the topic, Hegel puts the matter in overtly Hobbesian terms: "In this struggle what counts is force [*Gewalt*]. It is a state of nature. They are external to each other, self-seeking, individual, and strange to one another" (VPG II, 789). Indeed, he expresses a similar position in his discussion of Hobbes in his lectures on the history of philosophy: "[Hobbes] further says that in this natural state, all have the will to injure one another. [103] He views this state in its true light, and there is no empty talk about a state of natural goodness. It is, rather, the brutish state of the unbroken personal will. […] According to the law [*Recht*] of the immediately natural, an irresistible might confers the right [*Recht*] to dominate *[beherrschen]* whoever is weaker" (VGP III, 1292-3).

In sum, Hegel's life-and-death struggle is in no way an example of a subject's absolute commitment to something greater than its individual self-interest. Nor is he making any universal claim that one must risk one's life (or the life of another) to prove one's freedom and attain recognition. *That* proof is only required in the state-of-nature condition Hegel describes in his illustration, just as the need to confirm one's self-certainty by simply destroying one's object was specific to the perspective of mere desire. In this case, a life-and-death struggle is required only

[103] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, chap. i. § 4-6

because, here, freedom has no higher form or meaning than individual power and unrestrained self-interest.

But why is Hegel interested in such a shameless display of barbarism? Is he simply making the obvious point that a better, higher form of freedom and sociality requires that, unlike these combatants, we overcome our one-sided individualism and establish some common ground? Or, by contrast, is he making the cynical point that the inner nature and foundation of human sociality is brute force and violence – that, as Kojève puts it, "man–at his origin– is always either master or slave; and that true man can exist only where there is a master *and* a slave"? No, Hegel's point is far more subtle and parallels his earlier interest in mere desire. Namely, he is interested in the fact that *in its very barbarity*, this struggle and its cruel outcome does exhibit – in a perverse, one-sided, and ultimately deficient way – the higher concept of individual freedom through social recognition that he had previously introduced *in abstracto*. As in Hegel's initial identification of the concept of self-consciousness with the lowly activity of immediate desire-satisfaction, the deeper meaning of such a struggle lies both in the fact that it does instantiate that concept and (as he will go on to argue) that it does so in a way which is internally defective. Let us examine the matter more closely.

4.3 The 'Self-Consummating Skepticism' of Hegel's Dialectic

I've noted the well-known point that, throughout the *Phenomenology*, Hegel constantly alternates between a high-level philosophical perspective and an analysis of concrete forms of experience that exemplify these abstract concepts. But these transitions in Hegel often take the very particular form of a kind of ironic bathos – namely, the descent from the loftiest philosophical notions to the lowliest forms in which they are exemplified. We have seen this already in Hegel's treatment of desire. Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness begins with the most grandiose Fichte-

inspired proclamations about the pure self-relating activity that is the 'I,' the absolute self-certainty that is achieved through the *Aufhebung* of all otherness – the overcoming of the immediate givenness of sensuous things and their incorporation into higher unity of the I's pure self-relation. From this, he pivots to his observation that the most basic illustration of this lofty structure is the immediate gratification of consumptive desires. Such a move is repeated in his transition from the pure concept of recognition to the barbaric struggle for domination which he then considers. To orient this move within Hegel's argument, we should note the *dialectical* argument-structure we previously observed in his treatment of desire.

In a manner typical of Hegel's general procedure in the *Phenomenology*, the kind of methodological bathos we've seen in Hegel's account of desire serves a threefold purpose. The **first** is that it represents a kind of skeptical retort to the initial, lofty philosophical notion. That is, the concepts are meaningless if they remain at the level of empty abstract formulations. The proof of this is that, without further determination, we see that *one* clear example of such a lofty concept is some lowly thing which seems to be precisely the opposite of what was intended. But **second**, and for just this reason, Hegel is also highlighting the converse – that what appears to be the lowliest, most mundane phenomenon actually contains an inner, if deeply imperfect, spark of a higher truth (we have seen this in the case of desire). The **third** step which emerges is the kind of move which, for Hegel, characterizes the methodology of his work as a whole: a "self-consummating skepticism" (¶78). That is, we achieve a stronger, truer determination of the original concept not by stubbornly resisting this initial skeptical reply but by accepting it… and taking it a step further. In the case of desire, this meant showing that even its base attempt at self-affirmation and immediate gratification was self-defeating by its own lights, and through this we derive a higher notion of the self-relation of the 'I' as the unity of two free subjects.

Hegel's struggle, and the ensuing relation of mastery and servitude, must be understood in terms of this first, skeptical retort to the lofty notion of recognition. As we've seen, the basis of this pure concept lies in the conditions of overcoming the inner defect of mere desire-satisfaction. At the conceptual level, desire proved to be an internally deficient form of 'making one's subjectivity objective' and thus existing for oneself (being free) in the twofold sense of (a) bringing one's objects into conformity with one's own, unrestrained internal purposiveness and thereby (b) giving substance and reality to this unrestrained internal purposiveness (one's 'pure being-for-self'). The basic problem with the form of 'self-objectification' achieved in immediate desire-satisfaction is that it is inherently fleeting, requiring constant struggle and repetition. The basic solution to that problem is a relation to a persisting, self-standing object through which an enduring source of satisfaction can be attained without endless struggle. This requires an object – namely, another subject – whose own internal purposes are united with mine and who responds to my own interests through its own action, who "carries out this negation [of its opposition to me] through itself" (¶175).

For Hegel, this type of reciprocity is enabled by the fact that another subject is uniquely capable of overcoming its "otherness or difference" and, in so doing, remaining self-standing (¶176). That is, only another self-conscious subject can, for its own sake and while remaining itself, also overcome its opposition to me and conform to my own purposes through its own conscious action. Of course, there are two very different senses of the subject's remaining itself, fulfilling its own purposes and mine, and thereby remaining 'self-standing.' The true, primary sense is that of being free, independent; the other, essentially connected to it, is that of merely staying alive. The distinction and essential connection between these two aspects of a "living self-consciousness" (¶176) is what comes to a head in Hegel's life-and-death struggle.

On that account, it becomes clear how the direct domination of another – achieved by making the other's continued life depend upon his service – *does* (in a certain way) provide a solution to the problem of immediate desire, at least for one of the subjects. The corresponding motivation for such domination (on the part of the subjects themselves) does not need to be simply posited – like Kojève's inexplicable, "irreducible premise," but can instead be readily explained. It is the only stable, enduring form of existing for oneself in the sense of unrestrained arbitrary will and individual gratification. It attains this condition by doing away with the struggle against the limitations of nature, by imposing that toil onto another, the slave.

In this way, the dark dialectical irony of Hegel's account shows itself. Hegel's initial, abstract discussion of the self-conscious subject's unique capacity to "[posit] its otherness or difference as a nothingness, and in so doing [be] independent" (¶176) is clearly intended as a description of the individual subject's capacity to transcend its natural finitude, its being merely one natural individual outside of others, its ability to rise above its individual existence and to thereby attain a higher independence than all other life and finite things. Hegel describes this feature of self-conscious life in terms of the notion of an individual life which enjoys the life of the genus (¶¶172-3; 175-6). This Hegelian concept is often immediately interpreted as the idea of the human subject's truly identifying with the whole rather than its mere individual self – the true 'I that is We and We that is I.' That nobler idea of a kind of human solidarity is clearly suggested by his talk of genus life, though it is not directly implied by it.

Rather, this subsequent descent from the high to the low corresponds to a lowlier form of identifying with the kind, the whole. For Hegel, the kind, the genus, manifests its higher life, its superiority over the individual, insofar as it persists in and through the coming-to-be and passing-away of the individuals which compose it, so that in this process the individual is shown to be

merely a relative end (a means): "the fate of a living thing is in general the *genus*, for the genus manifests itself through the fleetingness of the living individuals that do not possess it as genus in their *actual singularity*;" (*SL* 639, GW 12.141); "In the process of the genus, the isolated singularities of individual life perish" (*SL* 688, GW 12.191). The self-conscious subject, Hegel claims, is uniquely capable of assuming, *in* its individual life, its 'actual singularity,' the form of higher life that, in nature, is only exhibited by the unconscious process of the kind itself. The self-conscious subject is capable of assuming this higher form of life only insofar as its mere individual life is, *for it*, a relative end. But the way in which Hegel's combatants first assume this higher form of life through the reciprocal overcoming of their individual differences is by risking the individual life *of the other* and thereby endangering their own lives in the process. It is the attempt, in one's own individuality, to assume the standpoint of the kind in that one becomes master of life and death. In so doing, I show my own natural life and that of the other to be mere means to my own unbounded freedom and gratification. In other words, the manner in which the individual identifies with the whole, the 'genus,' is not like the way in which the revolutionary *citoyen* identifies with the republic but is instead like the way Louis XIV identifies with the state.

The product of this struggle is indeed the unification of the two in one social whole – namely, their unification *under* one of the two. The master is master of his own life and the life of the other. This asymmetric unification of each with the whole requires that the slave transcend his own 'individual immediacy' in a different form, by restraining his self-serving desires and their fleeting satisfactions (out of utter fear). Like a mere animal, he is attached to his own life, his own natural finitude. This is the "chain from which he could not break free" (¶190). But unlike the mere brute, he is also a thinking being, capable of grasping the will of the master, obeying and carrying out his orders, and shaping *himself* out of a standing fear of the other. He does not need to be directly guided like the ox, Aristotle's 'poor man's slave,' but is capable of 'carrying out his

self-negation through himself' – bringing himself, through his own action, into conformity with the will of the master. In short, the very features which render self-conscious subjects capable of freedom and independence – of truly transcending finitude, and of thereby forming a genuinely reciprocal social whole – also render them uniquely capable of relations of mastery and servitude – and even, under certain conditions, disposed toward them.

This is the first moment of skeptical retort – the social analog of Hegel's initial identification of the lofty notion of self-consciousness with immediate desire-satisfaction. We began with the beautiful, if abstract, idea that one achieves true freedom and self-fulfillment by transcending one's immediate individuality and uniting with others in common purpose and mutual recognition. Moreover, this self-transcendence is not a suppression of one's individuality but is instead its true fulfillment: "self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (¶175); "the community of a person with others must not be regarded as a limitation of the true freedom of the individual but essentially as its enlargement" (*DF* 145; GW 4.55). In other words, for Hegel, the necessity and possibility of a higher form of freedom, of true solidarity with the one's fellow self-conscious subjects, neither does nor should presuppose some purely universalist motivation that would enable and demand the subjugation of one's individual freedom and self-fulfillment.

But this powerful view also contains a darker truth. What emerges in Hegel's life-and-death struggle and the relation of mastery and servitude are two dispositions which, considered abstractly, seem to express the nobility and higher freedom of the human subject: the willingness to risk one's natural life for a community with others and the ability to restrain one's immediate self-interest in the service of another. But while these dispositions can and should take on higher forms, here Hegel is highlighting that their possibility need not presuppose such a noble spirit. The victor in Hegel's struggle proves his willingness to risk his life for the sake of a 'community' of

outright domination over another – the 'common' will which is really the will of one. The vanquished restrains his immediate desires in the service of another, but he does so purely out of an interest in self-preservation, even at the cost of utter servility. What motivates the transcendence of one's 'immediacy' here is nothing but the basest self-interest on the part of each.

This is the first, skeptical moment of this dialectic of recognition. As with his discussion of desire, we completely misunderstand Hegel's account if we do not recognize that, through the lofty rhetoric with which he describes this experience, the cynical voices of Callicles and Thrasymachus ring out: that what lies beneath the edifying language of the harmony of society are, on one side, the pure individual freedom of the strong as outright domination and unrestrained self-interest, and on the other side, the side of morality, the base servility of those who are simply unable to enjoy the pleasures of mastery (though they would if they could). But, again, as with his account of desire, we completely misunderstand Hegel's account if we mistake this first, one-sided cynicism for the inner or final truth of the matter.

The second aspect of this descent from the high to the low corresponds to a certain 'cunning of reason' which Hegel finds in the lowly forms of immediate desire and direct domination – namely, that a dark glimmer of higher truth is contained within these barbarous shapes. Far from regarding the hidden truth of human society to lie in the relation of violent domination exhibited in this case, Hegel makes the exact opposite claim: the inner truth in these violent relations themselves is the *higher* truth which is only properly realized in genuine forms of society yet is dimly and defectively revealed even in the most brutish of human relations. Hegel writes: "The struggle for recognition and the submission under a master is the *appearance* [*Erscheinung*] in which the shared life of humankind [*das Zusammenleben des Menschen*], as a beginning of *states*, has emerged. [...] Violence is the external or *phenomenal* [*erscheinende*] beginning of states, not their *substantial principle*" (*EPS* ¶433). Mastery and servitude is only the outer appearance, not

the inner truth of human social life. This, of course, does not mean that *in fact* such a relation is really a good one, a true *Zusammenleben*, nor does it mean that there is, in fact, some inner nobility in the master's own purposes – that, for instance, beneath his harsh exterior lies a higher interest in the slave (say, a genuine but misguided yearning for his admiration or approval). That inner truth is displayed, rather, like the inner truth of 'realizing oneself through unification with another' is displayed in the act of fulfilling my immediate desire by devouring something. The germ of higher freedom is concealed within the thick, dark husk of its most defective, rudimentary form.

However, the proof that the true inner *telos* of such defective cases is indeed something higher depends upon the third step in Hegel's dialectical progression. Just as immediate desire was shown to be inherently incapable even of achieving its *own* aim (satisfaction), so too must Hegel show that the master does not truly realize his own selfish purposes through his mastery. Without this last step, the (at best) ambivalent nature of the defective case would point to nothing beyond itself, and all claims to a higher, inner truth would amount to nothing but empty Panglossian optimism. As I indicated earlier, this demonstration in Hegel's 'master-slave' dialectic is far less simple than it is often taken to be. Indeed, the attractiveness of the result (for all those who love freedom and hate masters) too often undermines the patience required to actually demonstrate it.

But why not take the easier road? Why doesn't Hegel just take the Hobbesian approach and argue that we can only exit this violent state of nature and preserve our rational self-interest through a mutual relinquishment of our individual freedom to a common sovereign? Or, why not take the Kantian route and argue that true freedom requires the subordination of our individual interests to our own rational self-legislation: our true common sovereign, the universal moral law within us? The short answer is that, against Hobbes, Hegel denies that true individual self-interest requires, or is even compatible with, the sheer subordination of our individual freedom to the rule of another. And, against Kant, he denies that true individual freedom requires, or is even

compatible with, the sort of self-bifurcation involved in a sheer subordination of individual interest and satisfaction to an impersonal law of reason.

In his 1801 *Differenzschrift*, Hegel employs the language of mastery and servitude in his critique of Fichte's conceptions of just such a bifurcated self in his *Foundations of Natural Right* and his *System of Ethics*. Of the former, he writes: "As a result of the absolute antithesis between pure drive and natural drive [Fichte's] *Natural Right* offers us a picture of the complete mastery of the intellect and the complete servitude of the living being," (148) and of the latter:

> Now, of course, it seems preferable to be one's own master and slave than to be slave to a stranger. But if in ethical life the relation of freedom and nature is supposed to become one of subjective mastery and servitude, a suppression of nature by oneself, then this is much more unnatural than the relation in the *Natural Law* where the commanding power appears as something other, as something outside the living individual.[104] [...] In the *Ethics*, however, once the commander is transferred within man himself, and the absolute opposition of the command and the subservience is internalized, the inner harmony is destroyed; not to be at one, but to be an absolute dichotomy constitutes the essence of man. (DF 149-50; GW 4.59)

The views of Hegel's *Differenzschrift* clearly lie in the background of this discussion in the *Phenomenology*, but it is notable that, on Hegel's view, the ordinary relation of mastery and servitude is still not as 'unnatural' as its internalization. To return to a previous comparison, Hegel's view here is, in part, aligned with Plato's Callicles in the *Gorgias*. In response to Socrates' recommendation that one be "self-mastering, ruler of the pleasures and desires that are in himself," Callicles replies: "how can a man be happy if he is a slave to anybody at all?" (*Gorgias* 491d-e).

This is why Hegel's dialectic of recognition must, for him, take the form of 'self-consummating skepticism.' His reply to the kind of freedom-through-recognition that is found in the master cannot simply be an outright rejection of the interest of the master – complete individual freedom and satisfaction, attained through a relation to another. For Hegel, we do and must

[104] The 'external commanding power' in this case is the heavy-handed police arm of the Fichtean state, which enforces the law of the 'intellect' against the natural, criminal inclinations of the citizens.

maintain that there is an important, partial truth in the master's selfish perspective – i.e. that community with another really does serve the individual's personal self-interest and independence. That is why something *should* be conceded to the skeptical voice. The way the skeptic is outdone is not through the stubborn, one-sided insistence upon absolute self-sacrifice and the complete priority of the whole and the law over the part and the individual. The skeptic is outdone, rather, by showing that the personal interest and independence of the individual itself is realized only by a transcendence of an equally one-sided individualism. For Hegel, the first and crucial step towards this result comes in his internal critique of the master, and the task of the following chapter is to explain that critique.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I will make a final remark. As I have noted throughout this work, the standard readings of Hegel's account of desire and recognition adopt various forms of a common idea: (1) desire essentially represents human subjectivity at the level of mere animality or, more generally, the 'natural' dimension of our subjectivity; while (2) recognition essentially represents, in some way, the transcendence of that mere animality or our 'natural' subjectivity. The standard view takes this to be the crucial distinction which underlies Hegel's account of the defect of the former and the need for the latter. Without a doubt, there is an important element of truth in that picture, so long as we understand it in the proper sense and, above all, as only a *partial* truth. If taken as the essential aspect and purpose of Hegel's account, such a view badly obscures the aim and argument of Hegel's account.

As we've seen, a large part of the motivation underlying the standard readings lies in the fact that Hegel's initial account of desire clearly pertains (in some sense) to the more natural, animalistic dimension of human subjectivity. But first, the true sense of that idea is not that 'desire'

concerns the human subject qua mere animal. Rather, it corresponds to the most natural, animalistic aspect of a distinctively human independence and self-consciousness – in effect, the most basic form of unrestrained 'natural liberty' enjoyed by the subjects of a Hobbesian state of nature. Hobbes correctly describes this form of life as 'brut*ish*,'[105] but neither it, nor Hegel's account of it, can be understood if it is identified with the un-self-aware innocence of a true beast.

In the context of the present discussion, however, an equal source of textual motivation for the standard view lies in the central importance which Hegel clearly gives to the two forms of overcoming one's 'natural immediacy' discussed above: the slave's restraint of his immediate desires through service and the transcendence of one's natural life by showing one's willingness to risk it. Indeed, despite the obviously defective social relations on display in a life-and-death struggle and in mastery and servitude, it may seem as though, for Hegel, the important 'truth' contained in that otherwise dark story is just those two forms of 'overcoming one's immediacy.' This would seem to lend credence to the idea that the proto-normative issue of transcending the more natural dimensions of one's subjectivity is the central thing that Hegel is really interested in. There is, without a doubt, an element of truth in that idea, but an incomplete one.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the need for recognition in Hegel must not be identified with the need to transcend one's immediacy through a kind of socially-mediated, rational self-governance. Indeed, I've argued that Hegel does not take rational self-governance under shared laws or norms to *be* freedom – to be the substance of freedom itself. For Hegel, that is not a self-standing concept or form of freedom. Rather, its true substance is the more fundamental relation of reciprocity and shared purposiveness – the living whole or *Zusammenleben* attained and preserved through such reciprocity. It is in this context that the issues of overcoming natural

[105] *Leviathan*, part I, chapter XIII

immediacy come into play, insofar as such social relations *require* the overcoming of various forms of 'immediacy,' without which no genuine 'We' can be established. The transcendence of sensuous impulsiveness, natural life, is an integral but subordinate *part* of the freedom of social life. It is not the thing itself.

In the present context, Hegel's interest in the transcendence of one's natural immediacy does introduce these internal, proto-moral dimensions of human subjectivity insofar as they are required *for* the 'living substance' of a certain community of subjects. But there is a conceptual priority of the latter over the former. In fact, the profound error, the false consciousness that arises when the essence of this communal existence is misidentified with the rationalistic/moralistic dimension that is only a condition of that existence is precisely the topic of Hegel's subsequent critique of Stoicism and the Unhappy Consciousness. Such a mistake is a recurring theme in the *Phenomenology* and in Hegel's work generally.

It may seem strange to think that the core issue in a discussion of mortal combat and direct subjugation is the notion of community, of reciprocity. But the need to realize one's freedom not merely through self-discipline and reason but through a community with others is, for Hegel, the inner truth and purpose of even of these deficient shapes. What we must consider in the next and final chapter is, above all, the question of why this community is deficient for the *master* – why his individual freedom and satisfaction prove to be empty.

Chapter 5. The End and the Means: Master and Slave

Introduction

We now turn to Hegel's famous 'Master-Slave Dialectic.' The conclusion of Hegel's 'life-and-death' struggle is the victor's agreement to spare the life of the other on the condition that he submit to a life of servitude. As we've seen in the previous chapter, Hegel does regard the condition of the master as a perverse, one-sided realization of the concept of recognition. While Hegel indicates from the outset that this is a deficient (because one-sided) realization of the concept of recognition, the exact nature of that deficiency is not treated as obvious and trivial but as one which requires careful examination. Put simply, the master *seems* to overcome the problem of desire through a relation to another self-conscious subject, and in a certain way, he clearly does. He attains an enduring source of his own gratification without the need to endlessly struggle against the resistance and limitations of external nature. He does so by forcibly uniting another's aims with his own – by making the other, at pain of death, permanently toil on his behalf.

In critiquing this relationship, Hegel's aim is to show why the master's way of overcoming the problem of desire is internally deficient and unsatisfying. That is, he must show that this arrangement is not only defective by our standards or those of the enslaved, but also that what the master gains from this relationship does not truly fulfill even his own aims. Indeed, he will further argue that, by contrast, the servile life of the slave exhibits the basis of the very form of freedom which the master lacks. But only the *basis*. Hegel is not making the absurd claim that, in fact, the slave is truly free. What he is claiming remains to be seen.

The present chapter will focus primarily on Hegel's critique of the master, turning to his dialectic of the slave only in the final section. This is not because I think the role of the slave in this account is unimportant. On the contrary, by examining the situation of the master, we will see

why Hegel regards the slave's role in this relationship as, in fact, the most important element, "das *Hauptmoment,*" as he puts it (VPG II, 791). But Hegel's critique of the master is briefer and more easily misunderstood, and for these reasons alone it warrants greater consideration. Most importantly, I do not think we can appreciate the inner germ of freedom which Hegel sees in the slave except by understanding why what the slave possesses is the very thing the master lacks.

In section 5.1, I begin by reviewing the connection between mastery-and-servitude and immediate desire, focusing on how, for Hegel, the former is the result of an unequal distribution of two aspects of the activity of immediate desire-satisfaction. This feature of the relationship forms the basis of everything that follows. I then turn to the question of Hegel's critique of the master, and I consider three apparently straightforward approaches to that critique. The first is simply an appeal to Hegel's original concept of recognition. The second is an argument I have discussed in the previous chapter – namely, that the master unwittingly frustrates his own interest in being recognized by undermining the other's authority to confer the desired recognition. The third is the argument that the master's claim to independence is undermined by an utter dependency on the slave. I argue that none of these approaches will suffice. In fact, I argue that the problem for Hegel's 'master' ultimately stems from the fact that the slave's life and action are dependent upon the master in a particular way. Namely, they are dependent in the way that a tool and its action are dependent upon the user.

In sections 5.2 and 5.3, I argue that Hegel's critique of the master should be examined and understood in terms of the manner in which the slave is, for the master, a 'living tool' (as Aristotle puts it (*Pol*. I.4)). In fact, the slave in this story not only lives and works as the master's tool (a means). In addition, his role and his work as a slave is also the master's *product* and *achievement* – the living result of the master's dominance. In this respect, the slave's servile life is also a realized end for the master. It is not only a result that he has achieved *once* (in the original victory), but one

that he is continually realizing by exerting his dominance over him. In fact, I argue, this is the primary end which the master achieves. It is his only substantial, persisting accomplishment, compared to which the various fleeting pleasures he enjoys by *means* of the other are inconsequential. This, I argue, is the master's essential problem. The highest end that he realizes is an external product which, for him, has the value of a mere means, a thing, a tool. His story is like that of Pygmalion in reverse. Indeed, we find such a reversal in the story of King Midas, and his fate is, in effect, the truth of Hegel's 'master.'

In section 5.4, I examine Hegel's dialectic of the slave. There Hegel focuses not only on the proto-moral character formation which the slave achieves through his service, but especially on the manner in which that disciplined character is exhibited in the enduring products of his labor. I argue that the germ of freedom which Hegel attributes to the slave should not be viewed primarily in terms of this 'freedom' over his immediate desires (to which the master remains bound). Rather, Hegel is primarily interested in the way in which this character formation enables a higher form of externally realizing one's agency. The master's attitude only allows him to see his agency reflected in the subordination of his objects and subjects – that is, their reduction to disposable means. This is precisely his problem. The slave's character, by contrast, allows him to see his agency realized in the substantial, enduring aspect of his products. His proto-moral character is thus the basis (but still only the basis) of an agency which can fulfill its own ends in and through something which is truly an end in and for itself.

5.1 Setting up the Problem

5.1.1 **Master-Slave as the Bifurcation of Desire**

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have placed central emphasis on the essential connection in Hegel between life and free, self-conscious subjectivity as such. That connection is

by no means limited to the fact that a free, self-conscious life emerges out of our natural existence and continues to depend upon it (though this is certainly true). The point, rather, is that a free, self-conscious life must be understood as its own form of life, and even as the most complete form of life. It is a form of life not merely in the sense of a *mode de vivre*, but in the strict sense that it is a self-sustaining form of activity which is an end in and for itself.

The complex relation between mere life and free, self-conscious life becomes a central theme in Hegel's account of a life-and-death struggle and the ensuing relation of mastery and servitude. But the true dichotomy here is not between being a truly free subject, on the one hand, or being a mere animal, on the other. The latter is simply not an option for a self-aware subject. Those who are even capable of risking their lives, and of regarding mere life as a potential source of limitation, are well beyond mere animality already. As Hegel puts it in the *Philosophy of Right*: "When that which is deficient does not at the same time transcend its defect, the defect is for it not a defect at all. The animal is to us defective, but not for itself" (¶8Z). And the one who submits and relinquishes his freedom to preserve his own life is not, like one of Pinocchio's unfortunate friends, transformed into a donkey, a beast of burden, as his punishment. At issue is the relation between freedom and life *in and for* self-aware subjects who are not and can never be mere brutes.

Above all, in this part of Hegel's account, the crucial relation between mere life and self-conscious life centers on the distinction between two aspects of self-conscious life itself: namely, those which define its freedom and those which pertain to necessity, constraint, and dependency. What develops in his account is the explicit differentiation of these two aspects which previously appeared, mixed together, in desire.

As we've seen, desire, on the one hand, represents the most basic form of freedom vis-à-vis the external world. In desire, I exist for myself and my own ends through my objects, which do not truly constrain me but are made, through my own superior power, to conform to myself and

my purposes. At the same time, this form of freedom is essentially afflicted by an element of insuperable outer limitation and dependency – one which I have described as a form of internally generated Sisyphean struggle with the external world. In mere desire, these two aspects are unseparated and inseparable: the very existence-for-self that I realize through my one-sided, negative relation to my objects is what gives rise to that outer dependency and endless struggle. As Hegel puts it, "Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence" (¶195). This lack of permanence is what requires the endless repetition of the same efforts with no lasting result or fulfillment. These two aspects of desire – a basic freedom which is, at the same time, an enduring limitation and dependency – constitute its fundamentally ambivalent, self-conflicting form of agency.

Hegel describes the relation of mastery and servitude as a 'splitting-in-two' (*Entzweiung*) of self-consciousness. This takes the specific form of a bifurcation of desire – that is, a separation of its internally connected aspects of non-constraint and limitation, its *Selbständigkeit* and *Unselbständigeit*, into an unequal relation of separate, unequal subjects. The sense in which the master enjoys only the unrestricted, independent aspect of desire is evident. Through the toil of the slave, he exists for himself, fulfills his unbounded arbitrary will, satisfies both his needs and gratuitous desires, and he does so without the need for personal struggle against nature. The slave, on the other hand, endlessly confronts the resistance of nature on the other's behalf. In this way, his life is dominated by sheer necessity and dependency. His actions are not valued in their own right, pursued for their own sakes. They are merely a means – both for the master's good pleasure and his own survival (which depends on the other's good pleasure). But in either case, merely a means.

As we've seen in the previous chapter, what presents itself in the relation of mastery and servitude is the most obvious solution to the problem of desire (for the one party), for this arrangement is really the Sisyphean life divided in two. The transient repose and satisfaction which Sisyphus enjoys at the top of the hill becomes the permanent condition of the one, the master, while the endless toil which produces that rest and enjoyment is the permanent condition of the other, the slave. In this case, what stands at the bottom of the hill is unformed nature, on which the slave labors so that its fruits may be served to the master on a silver platter.

Hegel, as we know, will argue that the master is not as free as he may appear, nor is the slave as completely unfree as he may appear. But, again, the kind of dialectical inversion that Hegel attempts to make of this relationship is not some facile Panglossian optimism. The slave is unfree, and the master is, in a very evident way, free. We cannot understand Hegel's critique unless we reckon with the fact that there is an undeniable sense in which the master really is liberated from the very aspect of bondage which, by Hegel's own lights, afflicted mere desire – the aspect of sheer outer dependency and limitation. But Hegel still thinks that the freedom of the master is ultimately specious – not just by the lights of some external, high-minded concept of freedom, but by his own standard as well, in relation to the very form of freedom which the master *does*, in his own way, exemplify. Hegel's rationale here is the primary object of our investigation, after which we will consider the inner germ of freedom which, for Hegel, is buried within the servile life of the other.

5.1.2 Inadequate Approaches to the Master's Problem

Following his initial analysis of the master-slave relation, Hegel claims that, because the latter is not truly independent, "He [the master] is, therefore, not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness [of the slave]

and its unessential action." (¶192). As we will see, this idea that the 'truth' of the master is the life and action of the slave has many meanings, but an essential component is that the master is not truly free in his own right. His freedom is infected, as it were, with the unfreedom of the other through which it is achieved: "The master confronted by his slave was not yet truly free, for he was still far from seeing in the former himself. Consequently, it is only when the slave becomes free that the master, too becomes completely free" (*EPS* ¶436Z). But why, and in what sense, does Hegel think that the master is not truly free? To set the stage for answering this question accurately, I will show that three alternative answers are inadequate.

5.1.2(a) Appealing to Hegel's Original Concept of Reciprocal Recognition

Ostensibly, the simplest way to explain the false freedom of the master is simply to measure his freedom against Hegel's original concept of recognition – namely, that true independence requires recognition and reciprocity from another truly independent subject. Hegel's critique of the master will indeed be a reaffirmation of that claim, but this reaffirmation is not simply a repetition of the earlier, abstract result. If it were, then there would be no point in examining the master-slave relation in detail or providing any subtle internal criticism (as Hegel does). But, as shown in the previous chapter, the master-slave relation is itself a kind of self-directed skeptical retort to this original abstract concept of recognition.

Just as lowly desire-satisfaction presented an initial (if ultimately defective) example of the the loftier notion of self-consciousness that opened his chapter, so does the master-slave relation appear to provide a perfectly adequate solution to the problem of desire (at least for the master). The worry this presents is that, in fact, all that is needed to overcome the problem of transient satisfaction and endless struggle is not *really* a relation to a properly self-standing subject, but only a relation to another subject who is willing to subordinate his own desires to mine for the sake of

his own survival, if he must. Accordingly, the result of Hegel's critique of the master will not simply be a restatement of the original position (which has now been cast into doubt) but, rather, a more robust reaffirmation of that position – a reaffirmation achieved by determinately responding to the doubt cast by the master-slave relation.

The point of this critique, however, is not merely to defend his original 'pure concept of recognition' against a potential counterexample. His interest in the case lies, rather, in the need to make that pure, abstract concept more concrete – to introduce some of the more determinate conditions required to fulfill that otherwise entirely formal concept of complete mutuality and reciprocity. In spite of its defects, the master-slave relation presents the most rudimentary form of the realization of one's freedom and the sustained fulfillment of one's purposes through a relation of recognition and 'common' purpose with another. By showing the specific, internal defects of this concrete case, the original concept of genuinely reciprocal recognition will not only be reaffirmed but strengthened and made more determinate. To simply refer back to the original concept of recognition would thus undermine the whole purpose of his master-slave dialectic. Hegel does not, and cannot, simply rest on the laurels of that initial concept.

5.1.2(b) Appealing to the Asymmetric Authority Relation

Alternatively, we could reaffirm that original concept of recognition in terms of an internal critique of the master: namely, that the recognition given to him by the slave is worthless and unsatisfying because it is given by one whom he does not recognize equally but holds in complete contempt. I do think, and will argue, that Hegel holds *some* version of this view, but one that is far more complex and less obvious than the versions often ascribed to him.

As we've seen in the previous chapter, the easiest way to justify this kind of internal critique would be to impute to the master an inner interest in a higher form of recognition – one

which is directly opposed to the kind given him by a slave. That is, this internal critique is often spelled out in terms of the idea that the master is after a recognition of a certain kind of authority – one which requires that he, in turn, regard the one recognizing him as an authority in his own right. As Pinkard puts it,

> If self-consciousness requires recognition by another self-conscious person, then the other person has to have the authority to bestow that recognition. [...] The master demands recognition from the slave while also refusing recognition of the slave as even having the status to confer such recognition at all. This in turn sets up a contradiction: The master requires recognition from somebody else who by the master's own doing cannot be authorized to bestow such recognition. (2017, xxiii)

But whether that internal critique works turns entirely upon what kind of authority is at issue here. Above all, it depends upon whether the master himself is after the kind of recognition that would have to be given by *another* authority. On a common version of this claim, the authority at issue, as we've seen, is a kind of normative authority. One's interest in the other's recognition of that authority is an interest in the other's validation of one's proper commitment to or fulfillment of some normative value of one's own. *That* kind of recognition is, in effect, the kind which, as Aristotle puts it, one desires from those whom one regards as "good men, and men who know" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1159a16).[106] In that case, I might aspire to some ideal which I see as embodied in another. I thus regard this other as the true judge of my own attainment of that ideal. Recognition of this type is sought not only from those I regard as equals, but also (even especially) from those I regard as my superiors, those by whom I aspire to be treated as an equal – like the recognition a student desires from a teacher or an apprentice from a journeyman.

If Hegel's victor-turned-master were interested in something like this kind of authority (and the recognition that comes with it), then clearly his purpose would be undermined by enslaving

[106] Pippin (who, in his *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, interprets Hegel's critique along these lines) refers to this part of Aristotle in explaining the need for recognition from a recognized authority (2010, 76n.).

the one from whom he seeks recognition. But, as we have seen, what defines the victor-turned-master in Hegel's account is precisely his *lack* of interest in any such higher ideals. All that matters for him is his unrestrained individual will and power. The kind of authority he is interested in is comparable to that of a tyrant, an autocrat, a warlord – an authority which consists in absolute hierarchy, superiority. The kind of recognition demanded by that concept of authority is only that others *bow* before it. An interest in this kind of authority and corresponding recognition does not demand the other's honest judgment or approval – as though the other would have the gall to evaluate *him*, as though his opinion counted at all. On the contrary, like the tyrant, what the master wants is not the opinion or approval of an equal but the absolute deference and obedience of an inferior. The master, therefore, does not undermine his own claim to authority, his own self-ascribed social status, by treating the other as an absolute inferior (as the common story goes). On the contrary, he would undermine that status only if he *did* treat the other as an equal. Thus, in the *Politics*, Aristotle notes an internal tension that appears when a monarch genuinely seeks the counsel of his subjects, for he thereby effectively treats his counselors as equals, even while regarding himself as peerless (1287b30-5).[107] Hegel's master is free from this tension, for he in no way allows his slave to stand on equal footing with himself.

Here, as in many such cases, our critical work becomes much lighter if we assume our villain to be internally divided – unconsciously yearning after some nobler end that stands in direct conflict with his harsh words and cruel actions. But the truly cynical actors always slip through the cracks of that optimistic form of critique. Fortunately, Hegel makes no such optimistic assumptions. To see that what the master gains from the slave is ultimately unsatisfying to him,

[107] For Aristotle, although this is a genuine worry, the reliance on counselors does not in principle undermine the claim of the monarch's absolute superiority, since what ultimately matters is his final, unilateral *decision*.

we must do so in a different manner – one that does not presuppose that the master accords any worth and value to something higher than his own selfish power and satisfaction.

5.1.2(c) Appealing the Master's Dependency on the Slave

In his famous opening to *The Social Contract*, Rousseau writes: "Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. There are some who may believe themselves masters of others, and are no less enslaved than they."[108] One of the most common, and snappiest, readings of Hegel's critique of the master is a version of the last part of this Rousseauian line. It is the view that the master, while believing himself to be wholly independent, is in fact completely dependent upon another (the slave). As Judith Shklar puts it, "He thinks that he is perfectly autonomous, but in fact he relies utterly upon his slave, not only to satisfy all his desires, but for his identity. Without slaves he is no master" (1976, 61).[109] Now, there is no question that the master, qua master, depends upon the slave for this identity, and the master also satisfies his desires through the other's work. But does that really undermine the master's own claim, and is that really Hegel's take on the matter?

Mastery is, of course, a relational status and, like any relational identity, it is dependent upon the other relatum. Aristotle himself uses the example of master and slave to illustrate the category of relation: "All relatives are spoken of in relation to correlatives that reciprocate. For example, the slave is called slave of a master and the master is called master of slave; the double double of a half, and the half half of a double" (*Categories* 6b28-30). But Aristotle by no means takes that sense of dependency to invalidate the master's independence and superiority. Indeed, the master *wants* a relational status: superiority, the rule over another. The fact that this superiority

[108] Rousseau (1999, 46)
[109] Cf. also Siep (2014, 93) and Pippin (1989, 162).

requires an inferior – specifically, another who bows to him and serves him – does not undermine the master's self-conception but only affirms it. Moreover, that the master's life *without toil* depends upon the work of another is clear to him. Indeed, it is the whole point of the arrangement. These senses of dependency are neither unknown to the master, nor do they impinge upon his own status and self-conception.

Naturally, when we speak of the contrast between dependence and independence in the sense relevant to one's freedom, we do not mean the bare dependence of relatives as such – in the sense that the mother, qua mother, is dependent upon the newborn, or that the greater, qua greater, is dependent upon the lesser, etc. Rather, the type of dependence at issue denotes, in effect, a lack of control over one's own life, like the child who depends both upon the superior abilities and the goodwill of its parents. Unlike a child, who generally *can* generally count on the goodwill of his parents, the most complete form of dependence involves reliance on the goodwill of another who does not have one's interests at heart – like a prisoner who, but for his jailor, would die of hunger or thirst behind bars. In that sense, however, it is not the master who is dependent upon the slave in any way, but the slave who is utterly dependent upon the master. It is true that the master's livelihood and good pleasure depend upon the work of the slave, just as it is true that the slave does not genuinely bear goodwill toward the master. But the master does not depend upon the goodwill of the other, but only upon his own superior strength and his power to coerce the other by posing a standing threat to the other's life. It is the *slave*'s life that depends upon the good pleasure of one who does not have his interests in mind, for he is the one who stands to be killed the moment the other is unsatisfied.

5.1.3 The Slave's Dependency on the Master (Thralldom and Instrumentalization)

In fact, as I will argue in what follows, the problem with the master does not lie in the idea that he is dependent upon the slave. On the contrary, his problem emerges from the fact that the slave is dependent upon *him*. Again, the slave is dependent upon the master not in the sense that he is otherwise unable to fend for himself. He is not like the helpless child who has the good fortune of a competent parent who provides for him. Rather, he has the ill-fortune that his own life depends upon providing both for himself and his master. He is thus dependent, in the first instance, in the sense that his life is in thrall to another. But the slave's life and action are also dependent upon the master in a second, directly related sense. Namely, as a direct result of his thralldom, the life and action of the slave are dependent upon the master in the way that the *tool* and its function are dependent upon the craftsman. Hegel's analysis of the master-slave relation centers on this ancient, Aristotelian idea that the slave as such is a "living tool" (*Politics* 1253b29) – more specifically, a conscious one: "Because now only there is only one will, the will of the master, it is thus a self-seeking will, directed toward its own desires, and to this extent the slave is an instrument, not an end in itself, though this instrument is likewise a consciousness" (VPG I, 472).

This role as a living, conscious instrument means not only that the slave is used by his master, as a means toward his selfish ends. It also means that, like a plough or a beast of burden, the slave is fundamentally under the *control* of the master. Not directly, like a plough or an ox (that is the whole point), but indirectly, because unlike the plough, the slave can be moved not only by direct manipulation, but by fear. And unlike the ox, his motivating fear is not confined to present, perceptible dangers, but lives in the ever-present knowledge of the consequences of his disobedience. Accordingly, if the carpenter does not stand in a servile relation of dependency to his tools (which he can control, use, or replace at his absolute discretion), then this is all the more

true of the master in Hegel's account.[110] The master exerts even greater control over the slave than this, because, out of fear, the slave conforms through his own action to the master's will. The saw does not care if it breaks, if it is defective, if it is thrown out or destroyed. It is unmoved by its own wants, fears, or desires. Not so for the slave. This is why the slave is, for the master, the *paradigmatic* tool, the most perfect tool. Aristotle expresses the point quite explicitly:

> [T]he slave is himself an instrument which takes precedence over all other instruments. For if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, which, says the poet, "of their own accord entered the assembly of the Gods;"[111] if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves. (*Politics* 1253b32-35)

The injustice and perversity of the idea is evident to us: the slave is the perfect means precisely because he is an end *for himself*. He continually performs his work (even preserves and improves his capacity to do so) through his own efforts, precisely because of his self-awareness, his reason, and his desire to live. This is the great, horrific tragedy of the matter. What we now need to examine is how this defining aspect of servitude – to live not merely as a tool of the master but the consummate tool – comes to infect the master's own form of living for himself.

5.2 The Master-Slave Dialectic and the User-Tool Dialectic

As we've seen, the master overcomes the Sisyphean struggle of immediate desire-satisfaction by offloading the toils of life onto the slave while simply enjoying the fruits of the

[110] Siep (2014, 93) also emphasizes the important connection of Hegel's 'slave' to Aristotle's notion of the 'living tool' and to Hegel's own concept of the tool as such. But Siep uses that connection to argue that the master is dependent upon the slave. I think that is a mistake and that the opposite is the case (both in itself and for Hegel). The tool and its function are dependent on and derivative of the user and his agency. Indeed, as a broader conceptual point, Aristotle correctly uses this tool-user example to illustrate the notion of *pros hen* unity (or 'focal meaning') of different senses of a term. Namely, he notes that the sense in which the medical instrument is 'medical' is derivative of the sense in which the doctor himself is medical, for it is his practicing the art of medicine that gives the instrument that function and character (*Eudemian Ethics* 1236a16-25). In the following section, we will examine Hegel's own dialectic of the tool and the nature of its derivative, dependent status.

[111] Homer, *Iliad* 18.369

other's labor. Like desire, the master's freedom vis-à-vis external nature is one in which nature does not truly resist him but is made to conform to his ends. But unlike with immediate desire-satisfaction, for the master, this overcoming of the independence of natural things is not a transient result that must be repeated over and over, but a standing state. Through the mediation of the slave, the objects of the master's desire permanently conform to his will without resistance. As Hegel writes:

> What desire failed to achieve, he [the master] succeeds in doing, viz. To have done with the thing altogether, and to achieve satisfaction in the enjoyment of it. Desire failed to do this because of the thing's independence [*Selbständigkeit*]; but the master, who has interposed the slave between it and himself, takes to himself only the dependent [*unselbständig*)] aspect of the thing and has the pure enjoyment of it. The aspect of its independence, he leaves to the slave, who works on it. (¶190)

In this way, the work of the slave has a double function for the master. The slave permanently preserves the master by realizing the master's purposes *through* nature while also preserving his master *against* nature and the violent struggle against it that self-preservation otherwise requires. But this, for Hegel, is the essential double function of *tools* generally. The slave is thus the consummate tool. Indeed, the *Logic*'s account of the user-tool relationship employs the language of mastery and service in describing it.[112] Here, I will quote a rather long passage from the *Logic*'s "Teleology" chapter, for Hegel's master-slave dialectic is itself, in an important way, the consummate form of Hegel's dialectic of the purposive subject and the tool:

> That the purpose immediately refers to an object and makes it into a means, as also that through this means it determines another object, may be regarded as *violence* inasmuch as purpose appears of an entirely different nature than the object, and the two objects stand toward one another as self-standing totalities. But that the purpose posits itself in a *mediated* connection with the object, and *between* itself and this object *inserts* another object [the

[112] Hegel characterizes the user-tool relationship in terms of an *end-means* relationship. In speaking of the tool, he writes "with respect to purpose the object has the character of being powerless and of serving it [*dienen*]" (*SL* 661, GW 12.164), and he thus speaks of the tool as standing "under the dominance [*Herrschaft*] of the purpose" (*SL* 662, GW 12.165).

> tool], may be regarded as the *cunning* of reason. As remarked, the finitude of rationality has this side, that purpose relates to the object as a presupposition, that is, as external. In an *unmediated connection* with that object, purpose would itself enter into the sphere of mechanism and chemism and would therefore be subject to contingency and to the loss of its determining vocation to be the concept that exists in and for itself. But in this way, by sending an object as a means ahead of it, it lets it slave away externally[113] in its stead, abandons it to the wear and tear while preserving itself behind it against mechanical violence. (GW 12.166/ 663)

The master, of course, is the consummate embodiment of this cunning; the slave, by contrast, is the consummate tool which the master sends ahead to bear the brunt and wear of external nature in the master's stead. As we have seen, Hegel takes the service of the slave to be, by comparison to immediate desire-satisfaction, a (relatively) more complete realization of the subject's (here, the master's) existence-for-himself. And, for precisely the same reasons, Hegel claims that the *tool* is a more complete outer embodiment of the subject's agency than the immediate satisfactions produced by it:

> To this extent the means is higher than the finite purposes of external purposiveness: the plough is more honorable than are immediately the enjoyments which it procures and which are the purposes. The tool lasts while the immediate enjoyments pass away and are forgotten. It is in their tools that human beings possess power over external nature, even though with respect to their purposes they are subjected to it. (*SL* 663, GW 12.166)

Again, it goes without saying that the slave's forcible reduction to the function of a tool is hideous and deplorable. Our interest in this function pertains to its reverse side: how his deplorable status redounds to the master. To see how this role of the slave as a tool (a mere means) infects the *master*'s freedom, let's begin by introducing Hegel's all-too-brief explanation of the speciousness of the master's freedom. He writes:

[113] The term here is '*sich äußerlich abarbeiten*' which di Giovanni translates as 'do the slavish work of externality.'

> In this recognition, the unessential consciousness is for the master the object, which constitutes the *truth* of his certainty of himself. But it is clear that this object does not correspond to its concept, but rather that the object in which the master has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness. What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action. (¶192)

The meaning of Hegel's brief critique of the master is, in one respect, quite transparent, so long as we simply transpose the master-slave relation into Hegel's abstract formulas of freedom and self-consciousness – the reflection of oneself in another, the recognition of oneself in one's object, etc. In this abstract sense, it is obvious that the master's 'object' (the slave) is, for him, just the opposite of himself. More precisely, Hegel seems to be saying that, in some sense, what the master sees in the slave *is* himself, the 'truth' of himself. This is certainly an attractive idea to anyone who loves freedom and hates masters, but what does this claim really amount to?

Again, the meaning of this claim becomes far more transparent once we examine the teleological structures which underlie this subject-object relationship – namely, the structures involved in realizing myself (as an *end* unto myself) in and through the objects to which I am related. This is the common theme of Hegel's chapter on "Self-Consciousness" and the *Logic*'s chapter on teleology: the twofold activity of (a) distinguishing my own free subjectivity from what is simply given to me externally and (b) *realizing* that distinctive subjectivity by effectively bringing what is externally given into conformity with my subjectivity.[114]

[114] Hegel introduces this section of the *Encyclopedia Logic* in the same terms we see in his chapter on "Self-Consciousness": "Purpose is the concept that is *for itself* and that has entered into a free concrete existence [*Existenz*] via the *negation* of immediate objectivity. It is determined as something *subjective*, in that this negation initially is *abstract* and thus objectivity at first only stands over against it [i.e. the purpose]. [...] As this contradiction of its identity with itself opposite the negation and the opposition posited in it, it is itself the sublating [*Aufheben*], the *activity* of so negating the opposition that it posits it as identical with itself. This is the process of *realizing the purpose* in which, by rendering itself something other than its subjectivity and objectifying itself, it has sublated the difference of both, has joined *itself* together *only with itself* and has *preserved* itself" (¶204).

Herein lies the importance of the role of the slave as *tool*. When Hegel says that the truth of the *master* is the 'unessential action' of the slave, Hegel is, in the first instance, referring to an earlier point related to the master-slave relation as a relation between user and tool: the action of the tool is really the action of user. In the case of ordinary tools, this is evident. The tool is the cause of the effects it produces (that is, *it works*) only in a relative, derivative sense. The tool works only through the control exercised over it by the user. Its act of working is really the work of another, the effect of the user's action *on it*. The tool's action is really a passion, and the true agent of the tool's work is the user.

But Hegel takes this to be equally the case in the relation of master and slave: "what the slave does is really the action of the master" (¶191). The relation of master to slave is, in this respect, like the relation of user to tool. The slave performs his service only because of the dominant power and control which the master exercises over him – it is the master who makes him do it. The master thus serves his own purposes, he "exist[s] only for himself," because of the coercive control he exercises over the slave – a control which, again, is typically remote, since the slave, unlike the plough, can be moved by his *fear*.

Accordingly, Hegel's critique of the master is some version of this claim: *because* the action of the slave is really the master's own action, the 'truth' of the life of the master is really the servile life of the other. But in what sense? What aspect of the latter's servility infects the master's own freedom? Here, as throughout this chapter, we must be patient not to rush to a desired conclusion (the false freedom of the master) through an insufficient argument.

As we have seen, the kind of action through which the master exists purely for himself is a mediated one (namely, one mediated by the instrumental work of the slave). In this respect, it is *one* action which contains an internal division. The master's freedom, and the slave's unfreedom, are the product of this unequal division within the action. But this means that the most obvious

ways in which the action is *servile* pertain only to the one, subordinate part of the action that does *not* belong to the master – namely, (1) the slave's direct, violent confrontation with independent nature; and (2) the slave's acting, as a tool, through and for another (the master). Insofar as the servility of the slave pertains specifically to his own subordinate *part* of the action, it is precisely the kind of servility *against which* the master preserves himself. Accordingly, if the "unessential consciousness and its unessential action" are to be regarded as the 'truth' of the master's own life and action, then we must see how that servility is not merely contained within one part of the action (the lot of the slave) but infects the whole action and the master's own part in it, for it is only in that sense that this action is the master's own. In other words, we must focus our attention on what the master does *to* the slave and what he thereby does *through* the slave, for these are the only aspects of the relation that are ultimately attributable to the master himself.

To see this, we may note a third sense in which the action of the slave is servile: namely, his actions, his work, have the form of mere *poieses* – mere productions, activities which are not ends in themselves but means toward external ends. Again, the comparison with the "Teleology" section of the *Logic* is important here, for that section is itself about such external purposiveness. The character of that action is that its goal is external to the activity, both in the sense that its realization consists in imposing a subjective purpose on a passive external object, and in the sense that the action is not an end in itself but achieves its end only at the conclusion.

That aspect of the action, however, is by no means restricted to the *tool*'s part in it. Rather, precisely insofar as the tool functions as a tool (in this case, in the master-slave relation), this external purposiveness characterizes the master's action performed *through* the tool. Moreover (and this, as we will see, is really the crucial thing), what the master does, has done, and continues to do *to* the slave likewise has the form of a mere external purposiveness. It is only because of what the master does *to* the slave that he also does anything *through* the slave. *Qua* master, these

are his only actions, and for the rest he simply enjoys the pleasures of idle consumption (which is the point of this arrangement). Ultimately, the fact that the master's relation to the slave is fundamentally one of mere external purposiveness is, as I will now argue, the crucial sense in which the 'truth' of his own 'being-for-self' lies in the "unessential consciousness and its unessential action."

5.3 The End and the Means

5.3.1 The Slave as the Master's Tool and Product

To see how the servile status of the slave infects the freedom of the master himself, we must continue to examine the mediated nature of the master's self-relation. That is, we must consider the relation between, on the one hand, what the master achieves *through* the slave, and on the other, what the master has done and continues to do *to* the slave (to bring about the slave's functioning as a means). In the former respect, the slave functions as the intermediary efficient cause of the master's intended effects (his ends). That the slave thus serves as such an intermediary efficient cause – that, in his work (*Arbeit*), he *works* (*wirkt*) on the object – is what sustains the master's free, idle enjoyment. In this respect, the slave is a means for the master.

But, again, the slave's work is only an intermediate, derivative cause of its effects. Qua tool, his *Wirken* is itself only the result of the *Wirkung* of the user on him. The slave, qua slave, is an intermediate cause (the means) of the realization of the master's ends only because he and his work are in turn the intended *effect* (the result) of the master's power, the master's action on him. As we've seen, the fact that the life of the slave is the *effect* of the master is the foundation of their unequal relationship. In other words, the slave's having become a slave, and continuing to live and work as one, is the effective realization of the master's own purposive power and agency. He is, in this sense, the master's own *product* – and, indeed, his living product. He is a tool which the

master himself has fashioned and which the master is continually (if indirectly) maintaining and improving qua tool by continuing to inspire mortal fear in the other. Like one who cuts down a tree and transforms its material into a table that he keeps in his employ, the master has broken the independent existence of the other, his independent will. He has shaped and continually shapes the other into something that purely serves his own ends. Insofar as the life of the slave is both the initial and ongoing *product* of the master's action, the slave's life is, in this respect, an *end* that the master has realized and continues to realize – if only (importantly) a relative end.

Those who take the master's infected freedom to lie in his alleged dependency on the slave effectively take the slave to be primary cause and agent of the fulfillment of the master's ends. But if that were so, he would not be a mere means and tool (i.e. a mere intermediate cause), but the ultimate agent, which he certainly is not. In fact, the master's own infected agency is the result not of the slave's being a cause (even an intermediate one) and a means for the master's ends, but, on the contrary, is the result of the slave's being an intended effect and a (relative) end of the master. More precisely, it is the result of the fact that the slave's life is thus an intended effect and a realized end that, for the master, only has the value of a means.

To see why, we may distinguish the *other ends* that the master achieves through the slave (as a mere means) from the end that is the life and action of the slave himself. The former ends are, on the one hand, the master's natural subsistence and, on the other, the series of enjoyments which are procured through the slave's work. But neither are, on their own, really the master's ultimate end – the realization of himself and his agency. Insofar as he merely continues to live, he is no different from the slave. And insofar as he simply enjoys fleeting, transient pleasures, he is no different from one who leads a life of immediate desire-satisfaction (through one's own efforts, not another's). These pleasures come and go. Now he feels like some wine, now some grapes, some cheese, etc., and of course he gets his wishes, but these things are what they appear to be,

nothing more. Indeed, the slave handles the persisting, self-standing aspect of things so the master may deal only with what has already been rendered *unselbständig.* By contrast to these insubstantial objects and their corresponding pleasures, what is essential to the master is (a) that these delights always be at his disposal and, most importantly, (b) that he *never* have to work for them. In other words, what really matters to him is that he have a slave: "the means is higher than the finite purposes of external purposiveness [...] The tool lasts while the immediate enjoyments pass away and are forgotten" (*SL* 663, GW 12.166). Above all, what matters is that his possession of this tool (and the idleness thus enjoyed) is the reflection, the realization of his own superior power. In this respect, he is not unlike the miser, who cares little for the consumable goods he procures, but cherishes only the fact that, through his own power, he is a man of substantial *means.* Such means thus have the value of a primary end.

In other words, there are two kinds of ends that the master achieves (and only these two). One is the ends which are external to the slave's service, i.e. the fleeting pleasures for which the slave is a means. The other is the enduring life and service of the slave himself as the product and realization of the master's own agency – i.e. the existence of this substantial means as an *end*, as his own living achievement. The slave's life of service is itself the highest achievement of the master, the essential end that defines his own freedom and agency. The truly enduring product and reflection of his will and power – the only thing more substantial than the little pleasures that come and go – is his living tool. But this means that, like the miser, the highest and only substantial end which he achieves is something which is a mere means, not an end in itself.

Indeed, in this sense he is unlike the miser, who, like Silas Marner in his lonely cabin, at least cherishes his gold and looks upon it lovingly.[115] Rather, the master's true fortune, the

[115] *Silas Marner*, Eliot (1921).

substantial means he has acquired and preserves, is something he holds in utter contempt, something he does not even care to look at, something not to be seen or heard – "the unessential consciousness and its unessential action." This is the sense in which the recognition of the other is worthless to him – the other, which is the embodiment of his own freedom, his crowning, enduring achievement, is just a transparent means to him. But the only *other* ends and objects that he sees through this transparent means are even more inconsequential – the wine and the cheese, the insubstantial objects of fleeting satisfactions that he knows will come and go. To understand the broader conceptual point of *this* sense of the master's failure to see himself in the other, let us briefly review the teleological structures which, I have argued, constitute the meaning and necessity of the concept of recognition in Hegel.

5.3.2 Master and Miser: The End That Is a Means; the Means That Is an End

Throughout this work, I have argued that Hegel's seemingly arcane formulations of self-consciousness and freedom – 'making oneself one's own object,' 'being with oneself in another,' 'finding oneself in one's object,' etc. – must be understood in terms of his teleological conception of subjectivity as such: that the subject is a living substance, a purpose unto itself. Part of the 'pure being-for-self' of this free subjectivity consists in distinguishing myself, qua subject, from whatever is simply given to me. But that aspect, on its own, is an empty, abstract freedom. To give substance and reality to my subjectivity, my own inner purposiveness must be actually realized in and through the objects from which I initially distinguish myself. What it means to 'make my subjectivity objective,' to 'find myself in the other,' therefore, is that I realize and display my own pure internal purposiveness in the world, in my objects. Put simply, it means being an end unto myself and *actually realizing that end*.

But an object through which one realizes one's own purposes is, generally, what is called a *means*, and the requisite self-objectification therefore requires that the means conform to myself as an end in my own right. There are, however, many different forms and senses in which something can be a means, and these therefore correspond to the many forms and degrees in which I can be with myself in the object. One is the way in which the object of immediate desire is a means, and immediate consumption is thus, in one respect, the most complete form of realizing oneself in the object, for here the object is absolutely destroyed and converted into the subject.

But, as we have seen, for that very reason, the basic deficiency of this form of self-realization lies in the fact that such objects fulfill their purpose only in the fleeting process of their destruction. These end-fulfillments are thus inherently transient, while the subject (as a purpose unto itself) is something enduring. Put simply, the enduring end (oneself) is fundamentally incommensurate with the means. This is why the end (*I myself*) is never truly fulfilled but remains perpetually unsatisfied through mere consumption. To return to an earlier quotation: "Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence" (*PhG* ¶195). For just the same reason, the empty fleetingness of immediate gratification is just as much a problem for the sequence of idle pleasures enjoyed by the master.

Unlike objects of immediate satisfaction, the acquisition or production of useful goods – tools – is the fulfillment of an end which is not inherently fleeting. Tools fulfill their purpose not through their own destruction, but through their persisting existence – by their enduring use and by their relative strength and power over and against the objects on which they act. Their value, in other words, consists not in their insubstantiality (like consumables) but in their relative substantiality. Therefore, unlike mere consumables, they are not *merely* means but also have the value of relative ends. One aims at preserving their existence. In this respect, tools are objects in

which, as means, one's own enduring agency is more adequately realized: "the plough is more honorable than are immediately the enjoyments which it procures and which are the purposes. The tool lasts while the immediate enjoyments pass away and are forgotten." Tables, chairs, houses, clocks – these are all *instruments*, of course, but they are enduring, relatively substantial things which more properly correspond to our own enduring purposes. But, of course, these things are and can only be *relative* ends – that is, they remain a species of mere means. However much pride one takes in, say, a house built by hand, one would not die to save it if it were burning. Even bodily organs are only such relative ends, which is why limbs are willingly amputated if necessary for survival. As mere means, they are incommensurate with the inner purposes of the subject they serve.

As we have seen, for the master, the slave is the consummate tool, the perfect tool. The slave is an enduring means which realizes the master's purposes through nature while preserving him from the forces of nature and the endless toil against it. The enduring life and work of the slave – this 'unessential consciousness and its unessential action' – is the master's lasting achievement. The master-slave relation is thus, in a sense, the highest form of self-realization that may possibly be achieved through a tool, a mere means. Indeed, the master cherishes the slave even less than craftsman values his tools, and for him, all that is left is the immediate enjoyments which his tool procures, which pass away and are forgotten.

The empty, unfulfilling nature of the master's life of idle pleasure is not hard to discern. As we have seen, the master has been freed from the external side of the life of immediate desire – the continual confrontation with the independence of nature. But the other, inner side of immediate desire – the endless, monotonous repetition of fleeting satisfactions – remains untouched. He remains like Plato's leaky jar. The only difference is that now someone else endlessly replenishes him. One does not need to be a moralist to recognize the tedium and ennui

of such a life. But this means that, with such a life, the master does not even truly fulfill the thing he has been after, his own individual self-interest and satisfaction.

Of course, he may attempt to rectify this tedium in some other way, through other, more strenuous activities. That could take the form of an insatiable continuation of his struggles for dominance – in other words, a martial, tyrannical version of the bad infinite struggle of immediate desire – or perhaps some other activity. Our task at present, though, is not to chase our master down every possible escape route from the unfulfilling life of idle mastery. That such escape routes should be necessary is, rather, the whole point.[116] Our aim has been to explain why the kind of freedom, existence-for-oneself, that *consists in* this idle mastery is self-undermining. That freedom was defined by its similarity to and distinction from immediate desire. It consists in the endless, unrestricted gratification of one's immediate, selfish desires, but *without* a perpetual struggle to procure them. The topic of our present investigation is not some *other* freedom which might be enabled by mastery (so that mastery itself would be a mere means), but rather, the freedom that consists in mastery, so that the life of mastery itself is the end, the inner purpose. Accordingly, what required explanation was why this life cannot be a true end in itself, why it is unsatisfying for the master, and why it is therefore an internally defective form of existing for oneself. The reason is that the master is rich in means – he possesses the greatest means of all (a slave). But of that which is a true, enduring, and substantial *end*, he has nothing, and the product and substance of his freedom is, to him, a mere thing.

The result of this critique reaffirms a point I made in my discussion of Hegel's original argument for the need for recognition in chapter three. The objective realization of one's free subjectivity requires an enduring, self-standing object which is an enduring means – and,

[116] Hegel, for his part, does pursue several of these escape routes later in the *Phenomenology*, in his critique of Stoicism, of the valiant Knight of Virtue, and of the corrupted nobility of the *Ancien Régime*.

moreover, one against which I need not endlessly struggle to fulfill my ends. But such a means, as we have seen, cannot be a mere means for me. Rather, it must be *for me* something which is truly an end in and for itself. Such a relation is found in the genuine reciprocity and shared purpose of different subjects who recognize one another as free and independent: as ends which are the highest means and means which are ends in and for themselves.

5.4 Hegel's Dialectic of the Slave

5.4.1 The Slave's (Incomplete) Form of Being-for-Self

To conclude this account, we must turn to Hegel's examination of the other side of the equation – the slave's own relation to himself and his objects. As I noted above, Hegel's claim that the truth of the master is the life and action of the slave encompasses various interconnected meanings. Its essential meaning is that the true substance of this relationship ("das *Hauptmoment*") lies on the side of the slave (VPG II, 791). Indeed, Hegel goes on to discuss how the slave, through his own fear-driven character formation and the work that it produces, comes to see his own independence (*Selbständigkeit*; ¶195). Again, Hegel leaves no doubt that this independence must be understood in a merely relative, deficient sense. He is not making the facile and clearly untrue claim that the slave is in fact free, truly self-standing. Hegel, however, is interested in the manner in which the slave's life contains, in this deficient, relative shape, a higher form of substantial freedom.

We have seen the unfree aspect in which the slave is the substantial element in this relationship, fulfilling the role of a self-moving, self-forming, self-sustaining tool. In this capacity as the perfect means, he keeps the master's hands unsoiled by the earth and uncalloused by the direct use of his tool. He frees the master from the whole laborious affair. We now turn to the side of this unequal division of labor which enables and sustains that freedom – the slave's relation to

himself and to nature. For Hegel, what characterizes this side of the equation is its direct contrast to immediate desire. Above all, both the slave himself and the objects to which he is directed have two essential, distinguishing characters: they are the shaped products of the slave's own work, and they are enduring and stable – unlike the flux of immediate desires and their immediate objects. With respect to the objects, the slave does not just hunt and gather for the master but performs productive work and, above all, agricultural labor. He sows and reaps standing crops. For Hegel, the stable character of the inner and outer dimension of the slave's life are essentially connected: "Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing" (¶195). I will return to the object side of things in a moment, for Hegel's interest there lies primarily in the manner in which the object is the outward reflection and realization of the distinctive inner character that the slave is forced to develop.

Now, it is in Hegel's treatment of the slave's own subjectivity that his attention first turns toward the inner, proto-moral dimension of freedom. Up to this point, the subject's 'pure being-for-self' has taken the form of the overcoming and incorporation (*Aufhebung*) of something external, whether a mere object or another subject. True, the issue of a kind of self-transcendence first emerged in the life-and-death struggle, in the subject's staking its life and thus "showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode," showing that "there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is pure *being-for-self*" (¶187). But, as we have seen, staking one's life was only a necessary risk that Hegel's combatants had to take in order to subdue the life of another. Moreover, even if the victor in this struggle demonstrates that he is not absolutely bound by his natural drive for self-preservation, the higher freedom to which his natural life is thus subordinated remains that of his unbounded, immediate desire-gratification. While the slave's own manner of 'transcending his immediacy' is no more motivated by any lofty

commitments (only the interest in preserving his life at all costs), what he thereby overcomes – or rather, 'holds in check' – is his immediate inclinations and their fleeting satisfactions.

Hegel's description of the slave's internal, proto-moral form of self-transcendence reintroduces the same language of absolute negative freedom that he employed in describing the life-and-death struggle:

> But [servitude] does in fact contain within itself this truth of pure negativity and being-for-self, for it has experienced this as its own essential nature. For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute master. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, *pure being-for-self*, which consequently is *implicit* in this consciousness. Furthermore, his consciousness is not this dissolution of everything stable merely in principle; in his service he *actually* brings this about. Through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail; and gets rid of it by working on it. (¶194).

Confronted by the real threat of death, the slave experiences the worthlessness and insignificance of every particular, natural attachment – every fleeting desire and every fleeting object of desire. All this counts for nothing in the face of death itself. The rude awakening of his near-death experience, however, is not just one significant moment for him, but his enduring condition. He lives always with the sword of Damocles swinging over his head. Moreover, the result of this mortal fear is not merely a state of paralysis in which every thing and every purpose vanishes into the abyss of this absolute *Angst*. Rather, it is a productive anxiety in which the insignificance of finite, natural things – including his own natural inclinations – attains a corresponding objective realization. In developing the *habit* of obedience, the fleeting aspects of his inner motivations are suppressed and subordinated in the service of his master. And in his work, the merely given aspect of nature is also subordinated to an outer product which reflects his standing purposes: natural

fields are transformed to stable crops, natural things transformed to enduring products. In other words, unlike the satisfactions of immediate desire, his negative relation to nature and his power over it takes an enduring form, not a transient act of destruction. “The negative relation to the object becomes its form and something permanent, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence” (¶195).

5.4.2 Being with Oneself in a Self-Standing Other

What are we to make of this account of the condition of the slave and his own form of fulfilling the ‘pure being-for-self' of self-conscious subjectivity? On its face, it seems to have the atrocious markings of the idea of liberation through forced labor. And it would have that meaning if Hegel were claiming that, in spite of appearances, the slave *is* truly free. This is not Hegel’s claim at all. As in his previous account of the ‘pure being-for-self’ demonstrated through a barbaric struggle to dominate another, Hegel’s interest here lies in the inner, undeveloped germ of freedom that *we* can discern within this thick, dark husk of servitude.

Specifically, Hegel’s discussion of this ‘pure negativity’ of self-consciousness is a continuation of a central theme which has persisted throughout his “Self-Consciousness” chapter. As we’ve seen in our discussion of Hegel’s treatment of desire, for Hegel, an essential (but only partial) aspect of the concept of self-consciousness is a kind of complete negative freedom which he takes to be implicit in the nature of conscious subjectivity as such – namely, a kind of ‘abstract freedom’ connected to the emptiness of the mere ‘I’ of apperception. In desire, the life-and-death struggle, and in mastery and servitude, we find various forms in which the subject gives objective proof and reality to this freedom from all constraints and limitations to itself – though none of the depicted subjects has any lofty notions of freedom in mind but only so many shapes of base self-interest. Again, Hegel’s treatment of the slave is the first form in which this negative freedom takes

a truly inward turn, and not because the slave is inwardly moved by any desire or conscious intention to transcend his immediate inclinations, but because, in the service of keeping himself alive, he was forced to do so.

Moreover, for Hegel, what is truly essential in these various forms of negative freedom (whether turned outwardly or inwardly) is the *substantial* self-identity which the subject thereby achieves. As Hegel writes in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* ("Absolute Knowing"), "the 'I' is not merely the self, but the *identity of the self with itself*; but this identity is complete and immediate oneness with self, or *this subject* is just as much *substance*" (¶803). What we have in the life of the slave is the first form in which this negativity takes a truly substantial, enduring shape. It is the substantial factor in both the master's life and the slave's. And it is the enduring basis of the unequal community between them.

But, as we have seen, the subject's self-identity is, at the same time, always a relational identity. It is a self-relation which internally contains a relation to one's objects: no object, no subject. If I am not at one with the objects that correspond to my own substantial purposes and actions, my own relation to the world, then I am not at one with myself. This is why, even though Hegel's account of the slave introduces proto-moral themes of attaining a stable, habituated character and holding one's immediate desires in check, this alone is not sufficient even for the relative, defective independence which the slave achieves. What is essential, rather, is that this internal negative freedom have a corresponding outer realization – specifically, the enduring products of the slave's labor. "It is in this way, therefore, that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the self-standing being [of the object] its own self-standingness" (¶195). Through his enduring products, in the crops and orchards that he has planted and sustains, in the livestock which he domesticates and preserves, he relates to an object which is at once self-standing, substantial,

and is, at the same time, the product of his own work, the outer fruit and manifestation of his complete detachment from the insignificant natural aspects of his existence. "The shape [of consciousness] does not become something other than himself through being made external to him; for it is precisely this shape that is his pure being-for-self, which in this externality is seen by him to be the truth" (¶196).

Has Hegel, then, introduced a genuine substitute for recognition from another subject in the form of productive work? Is he suggesting that there is another perfectly adequate (perhaps even superior) way of finding oneself in one's object via the enduring products of one's own labor, as outer manifestations of personal, inner development? By no means. At risk of repeating myself, the slave is a slave – i.e. he is *not* free, *not* truly with himself in another, *not* truly unconstrained, *not* truly self-standing. Hegel's claim is that, in spite of his servitude, the slave is nonetheless able to achieve a partial, defective form of self-realization. We should not mistake the slave's ersatz self-realization for the genuine article. This is not to deny that, especially in the case of *unforced labor*, Hegel thinks there is an important way in which one can express one's inner freedom and personal self-development in certain inanimate material products. The topic of that form of realizing one's agency more generally (beyond the form it takes in servitude) is far too large to treat here. For now, it will suffice to say that, for Hegel, that form of outer self-realization is successful precisely to the degree that it partially approximates the manner in which one realizes oneself in promoting, sustaining, and enjoying the free life and action of another self-standing subject as such (a point I will return to in a moment). There is a reason the fictional figures of Pygmalion and Geppetto, despite their expert craftsmanship, cannot be satisfied so long as their products remain lifeless and unconscious. Theirs is the highest form of the kind of self-realization achieved, in part, by the slave. Their work is a mere approximation of earnest, personal devotion

to something truly self-standing, and in order to fulfill their wish, their objects must take on a life of their own and thus cease to be the mere product of another.[117]

In the case of the slave's form of 'being-for-self,' what is essential to Hegel is the direct contrast to the master's relation to his objects. As we have seen, what defines that relation above all is that the master relates only to the insubstantial, non-self-standing (*unselbständig*) side of his objects – both in the case of nature (which only comes to him ready-made for his enjoyment) and, of course, in the case of the other subject, the slave. Indeed, precisely because of the purely selfish, immediate nature of his will, this is the *only* way in which he can see his will reflected in his objects – as a mere subordinate means. This, as we have seen, is the basis of his problem.

By contrast, the slave relates both to the other subject (the master) and to nature itself *qua* something self-standing. In relation to the latter, however, the substantial, self-standing aspect of his object is not merely a reflection of its sheer, independent otherness (as in immediate desire's relation to unformed nature). Rather, the self-standing character of *his* object – namely, the enduring quality of his material and agricultural work – is instead a reflection of his own craft and discipline. It is an expression of the power he has gained over himself and his objects only through the mortal dread which, like the droning undertone of a pipe organ, underlies his whole existence. Most importantly, unlike the master, he is *capable* of realizing and reflecting his own self in the substantial, enduring aspect of his objects precisely because he has overcome the selfish immediacy of desire and developed an enduring character – one whose proper outer manifestation comes in the form of disciplined, formative action.

[117] Here we may note a partly analogous line of thought in Aristotle, who takes the parent-child relationship to be the paradigm of a producer's finding himself in his product (and thus loving the object as himself). "The cause of this is that existence is to all men a thing to be chosen and loved, and that we exist by virtue of activity (i.e. by living and acting [*prattein*]), and that the handiwork [*ergon*] is in a sense, the producer in activity; he loves his handiwork, therefore, because he loves existence. And this is rooted in the nature of things; for what he is in potentiality, his handiwork manifests in activity" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1168a5-9).

This is the main takeaway from the slave's condition: only through self-discipline, through desire held in check, is a subject *capable* (note the modality) *of overcoming the* common problem of both immediate desire and the selfishness of sheer domination. The *realized* solution to that problem lies, namely, in a subject's successfully finding the expression of his own agency not in the insubstantial side of things (as pure, subordinate means), but through something truly self-standing. Only when one can find and fulfill oneself in and through a self-standing other can one enjoy a free and substantial selfhood in one's own right. This requires the kind of inward self-transcendence that is exhibited in the first instance (but by no means the last or proper one) through sheer obedience.

But again, moral self-development, as an end in itself, is not the central point here. It is not as though all the slave needs to be free is to achieve moral self-discipline in a higher form – not under the arbitrary will of another but through the self-legislation of his own reason. True, that would be a big step in the right direction, but it is not the ultimate end or moral of this story. What is central here is not *simply* the inner self-development of the subject but the manner in which it enables a different, substantial form of realizing one's own subjectivity in another, a self-standing object as such. But in the case at hand, the self-standing others that are sustained through the slave's disciplined action remain objects which, for him, are not truly ends in themselves. They are, on the one hand, the master and his idle pleasure (which is only a means for his own survival), and on the other, the agricultural and material products that are themselves merely relative ends (i.e. means). Put simply, whatever inner form of being-for-self and self-realization *we* may discern in his life, that life is obviously not fulfilling for *the slave*. Naturally, he does not and cannot find his inner purposes and freedom fulfilled in this life. At the end of the day, his relation to both his crops and his master remains one of endless toil.

To truly find himself in his action, the slave not only requires a higher form of self-discipline (under an internally recognized law), but above all, he requires that the outer efficacy and expression of that self-discipline be realized in something which is, for him, also an end in itself and recognizes and treats him in like manner. Love, friendship, ethical and political reciprocity and shared purpose – only relationships of this kind can truly unite one's inner character with one's outer objects and one's outer agency with one's inner purposes. This is why Hegel always retains the view that, even from a moral standpoint, the only true realization of my free will and subjectivity is in the reciprocating will of another.[118]

Conclusion: A Kingdom of Ends?

I conclude with a remark on a Kantian principle that has loomed in the background of this work. Kant's categorical imperative is meant to express the law of freedom, the highest principle of one's own autonomy. One is free only to the extent that one's actions are governed not by nature and the self-love common to all creatures, but by the universal reason which transcends our individual self-interest and elevates us above all natural life. But we are only finite rational beings, and as such, we are also natural, sensuous creatures. So long as we live and breathe, individual self-love will always be with us. It stands as a constant and powerful temptation against our higher reason. This is why the principle of freedom takes the form of an imperative, and a moral one at that. We *ought* to be free, whether we like it or not.

[118] To return to a passage from the 'Morality' section of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (¶112): "While I preserve my subjectivity in implementing my ends (see ¶ 110), in the course of thus objectifying them I at the same time supersede this subjectivity in its immediacy, and hence in its character as my individual subjectivity. But the external subjectivity which is thus identical with me is the will of others (see ¶ 73) — The basis of the will's existence is now subjectivity (see ¶ 106), and the will of others is the existence which I give to my end, and which therefore has this identity of my will and the will of others within it — it has a positive reference to the will of others."

There is thus, for Kant, "only a single categorical imperative and it is this: *act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*" (*Groundwork* 4:421). That is, act only according to general principles whose validity is not merely subjective (relative to my peculiar interests) but objective (equally binding for all rational beings as such). As we have seen in the foregoing chapters, this Kantian idea plays a central role in what I've called the 'normativity readings' of Hegel's concept of recognition. According to this approach, the need for recognition likewise pertains to the need to overcome one's natural sensibility by acting according to principles (norms) which are (and are recognized to be) equally valid for all – at least, for the relevant social-historical group.

I have challenged this approach. Nonetheless, one of Kant's alternative formulations of this single categorical imperative does express something closely akin to the reading I have defended in the foregoing chapter. "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (4:429). Direct mastery over another is, of course, the most radical violation of such a principle. The implication of Hegel's critique of the master is likewise that such a relation to others stands in conflict with one's true freedom.

Indeed, the master more generally represents the consummate form of personal freedom as unrestrained, immediate self-gratification – precisely the kind of tyrannical freedom represented by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*. For Hegel, this is the deeper cause of the master's problem. Because of this attitude, he can only affirm himself by reducing everything and everyone to a mere means. Only in this way can he feel free, powerful, accomplished. But for just this reason, everything he has, produces, and achieves can only have the value of a mere means.

As I noted in the introduction, the story of Hegel's master is, in effect, the story of King Midas. Like the lonely king who has turned even his daughter to gold, the master's freedom is, so

to speak, trapped within him. The moment it becomes efficacious, the moment it might yield some substantial product, it is transformed into something with a completely different character, something *unselbständig*. The master is thus a prime example of a general claim Hegel makes in the *Philosophy of Right*: "What the subject is, is the series of its actions. If this is a series of worthless productions, so is the subjectivity of the will just as worthless. If, by contrast, the series of his deeds has a substantial nature, so also is the inner will of the individual" (¶124). The slave, by contrast, occupies the beginning (but only the beginning) of a more substantial inner nature, expressed and realized in a series of substantial products.

In this way, Hegel's account appears to have resulted in something akin to Kant's categorical imperative. Indeed, his result also points in the direction of the view espoused by the 'normativity reading' – namely, that true freedom requires a transcendence of natural, immediate inclination in favor of a reciprocal relation with others governed by mutually acknowledged norms. Has Hegel, then, simply arrived at a modified version of Kant's categorical imperative by other means? Yes and no. The way Hegel has arrived at a similar destination is not a mere ladder that may be kicked out at the end. Hegel's account does not proceed from the notion of an internal cleft within the individual subject. That is, it is not based on the idea that one's own sensibility and individual self-love is a kind of 'other within,' so that to act on its behalf is to be ruled by another, to act heteronomously. For the same reason, it does not take the very concept of free action to imply that I act not out of self-love or my individual interests, but on the basis of what is common to myself and others without distinction – our universal reason.

Instead, Hegel's account has begun with the opposite notion of freedom – unrestricted power in the service of individual self-interest. While he does take this form of freedom to be, as it were, all too 'natural,' he does not regard it as something merely natural (like the animal's innocent self-preservation). Rather, it is natural self-interest transformed and rendered tyrannical

by self-consciousness. His argument, however, is not that this aspect of purely individual liberty and self-interest is, in its very nature, sheer heteronomy. His claim is that one's very individual freedom and self-interest can only be truly achieved, can only attain its own end, by overcoming its one-sided, immediate form and attaining a higher one – one which is informed by a developed inner character and a true unification with the ends of others.

Moreover, in this account, the need to treat others not merely as means but as ends in themselves is not derived by presupposing the other's value as an end in itself – regardless of my own interests. Rather, it proceeds from the idea that, to be free, one *must* relate to another as a means. This, Hegel thinks, is what the master gets right (if for all the wrong reasons): "The material in which the I, freedom, can be realized, can only be another self-consciousness. The latter self-consciousness is the reality, objectivity, and externality of the I and its freedom."[119] Here, the relation of my freedom to another is, at least in one respect, like the relation of carpentry to wood. As we have seen, this is the primary respect in which the master realizes his freedom by means of the slave. But, Hegel has argued, another can only truly fulfill this function as a means to one's own freedom and *self*-fulfillment when he is not a mere means but an end in himself. If we wish to be free, we cannot leave one another alone. This is the true basis not only of conflict, strife, and domination, but also of the higher truth concealed within those antagonisms – that a genuine community with others, united by the bonds of reciprocity and mutual recognition, is the true condition of freedom.

The consequence of this approach, therefore, is not that Hegel merely achieves a Kantian result by other means, but that he has given a fundamentally different meaning to this result. This is the importance of the method of 'self-consummating skepticism' discussed in the previous

[119] *LPS* 190, *VPG II* 789

chapter. In the face of empty, abstract notions of community founded on the members' voluntary transcendence of their one-sided egotism, Hegel does and must concede something to the skeptic. There is an important truth in the idea that the real basis of community of free individuals, a kingdom of ends, neither is nor should be reliant on the self-abnegating good will of its members under a universal law of reason. But it is just as false that the true basis of a community centers on the brute self-interest of its members and their mutual instrumentalization, for such one-sided egotism is inherently self-undermining.

Accordingly, the state of freedom to be gained by treating another as an end in itself does not require suppressing my own individual freedom and interests. On the contrary, my own freedom is fulfilled and expanded in this relation. "The community of a person with others must not be regarded as a limitation of the true freedom of the individual but essentially as its enlargement. Highest community is highest freedom, both in terms of power and of its exercise" (*DF* 145; GW 4.55). And while the enjoyment of that freedom does indeed require subordinating one-sided egotism to something more universal, that 'universal' is not merely an inner feature or faculty that we have in common, nor is it merely a collectively binding norm or law that we all acknowledge. The universal is rather, the living whole, the "absolute substance" in which each part is both a means and an end, for itself and for one another. It is the unity of shared inner purpose, founded upon the 'complete freedom and independence' of its members. This is the meaning of Hegel's concept of mutual recognition. This is the way in which each is only truly conscious of itself and its freedom in and through another.

Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks on "Self-Consciousness" and Absolute Knowing

I want to close this account by returning to a few of the broader interpretive questions introduced in chapter one. As I noted there, the approach I have chosen in my reading of *PhG* IV has been to bracket (as far as possible) questions about the ultimate aims of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, Hegel's conception of 'absolute knowing,' and the function of chapter IV as a particular 'station' on the road to that concept. The choice was made not because those questions are unimportant (far from it), but because a sufficient answer to them requires far more than could be given in a brief, introductory way. To rely too heavily upon such answers at the outset would have been, in effect, to ask the reader to take my word on the matter or to judge my global interpretation on the basis of its facial plausibility. In any case, I have opted for a different approach.

For similar reasons, one must be cautious in extrapolating from a close reading of one part of that text to an interpretation of the whole. But the *Phenomenology* does not proceed in the kind of cumulative, 'synthetic' procedure found in a textbook on geometry or in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Otherwise put, the 'imperfect modes' of knowing[120] that make up the many stations toward Hegel's conclusion are not incomplete in the way that the foundation or framework of an unfinished house are only incomplete parts of an intended whole. Each chapter represents, in its own way, a certain conception of 'absolute knowing' itself and a certain procedure for critiquing that conception. In this way, each part is a microcosm of sorts, and an adequate understanding of the part offers a partial window into the whole.

In the interpretation I have defended, the need for recognition introduced in *PhG* IV should not be understood in terms of a rational subject's more general requirements to act and judge

[120] Hegel's "Advertisement," in Pinkard (2018, 468)

according to universal, objectively valid norms of thought and action. Indeed, I've argued that it should not even be understood more in terms of the practical dimension of that requirement, even if such normative requirements do enter the picture in an indirect way. The need for recognition, I have argued, is not primarily about the need for common norms and principles but the need for a shared *life* in the fullest sense of 'life' itself – human freedom. It concerns the joining of the internal purposes of different individuals within a unifying whole, the "*Zusammenleben des Menschen*" (*EPS* ¶433).

This need is introduced in terms of the problematic of exhibiting one's freedom and realizing one's 'being-for-self' through practical interaction with one's objects. That investigation leads Hegel to the result that the kind of self-directed action which can truly fulfill one's inner purposes must be reciprocal action between different subjects, who function as both means and as ends for one another. Indeed, Hegel's stated interest in the barbarous relation of mastery and servitude is (among other things) that it is an initial, rudimentary 'appearance' (*Erscheinung* in a kind of double sense) of this shared life of humankind "as the beginning of states" (*EPS* ¶ 433). In other words, by contrast to the 'immediate unity' of natural family love, it introduces a mediated, internally-organized social whole, a proto-political formation.

But what does all of this have to do with the issue of 'absolute knowing'? One way of viewing the matter is to take Hegel to be defending a kind of social pragmatism, according to which the ultimate framework and measure for all our knowledge is the function it serves within the practical aims of a human community. I do not think that is the lesson. Hegel characterizes the project of the *Phenomenology* as a kind of 'introduction' to his *Science of Logic*. But in introducing the aims of the project of the *Logic* itself in his preface to that work, Hegel approvingly discusses

Aristotle's account of knowledge for its own sake in the first book of the *Metaphysics*. Characterizing the purpose of the *Logic* itself, he writes:

> "In so many respects," says Aristotle in the same context, "is human nature in bondage; but this science, which is not pursued for any utility, is alone free in and for itself, and for this reason it appears not to be a human possession." (*SL* 14, GW 21.13)

Hegel's quotation is something of a paraphrase (he often quotes others from memory). In Aristotle's own words:

> Clearly then it is for no extrinsic advantage that we seek this knowledge; for just as we call a man free (*eleutheros*) who exists for himself and not for another, so we call this the only free science, since it alone exists for itself. For this reason its acquisition might justly be supposed to be beyond human power, since in many respects human nature is servile; (*Metaphysics A*, 982b22-6)

Hegel's whole discussion in the Preface to the *Science of Logic* fits quite poorly with the view that, for Hegel, the highest forms of knowledge concern the practical purposes of a human community. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes that "reason is *purposive activity*" (¶22), and, naming Aristotle, he immediately clarifies that he is not speaking about external purposiveness (what is done for the sake of something else), but that which is a purpose unto itself. Indeed, in his *Encyclopaedia* system, Hegel's treatment of the freedom achieved in the ethical-political life of a human community ('Objective Spirit') is only the penultimate part.[121] The system concludes with 'Absolute Spirit' as art, religion, and philosophy. As I noted in chapter one, that final section ends with a direct quotation from Aristotle's discussion of the divine life of *autonoeisis* in *Metaphysics* **Λ** (*EPS* ¶577). It seems that, for Hegel, the most perfect, the 'absolute' form of freedom and self-knowledge is not the practical *Zusammenleben* of ethical-political communities, but that of philosophical science itself.

[121] That section of the *Encyclopaedia* is expanded as Hegel's broader *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

How, then, should we understand the relation of *PhG* IV to the theme of absolute knowing? Its primary themes of the social realization of practical freedom and self-knowledge appear to have their fullest development in Hegel's treatment of 'Objective Spirit' in the *Encyclopaedia* and in the *Philosophy of Right*. In spite of the fact *PhG* IV is itself clearly playing on a central theme of Enlightenment political theory (namely, a 'state of nature' as a 'state of war'), Robert Pippin resists earlier tendencies to read this chapter as primarily a discussion of the purpose and foundations of human social-political communities, "as if beginning the book again on a new topic" (2010, 64). His view that the primary lesson of that chapter concerns objective norms more generally stems, in large part, from a well-founded interest in integrating the chapter within the wider topic of 'absolute knowing.' I agree that *PhG* IV should not be read as a straightforward intervention concerning the foundations of political theory – as though he were just taking a brief intermission to offer his own version of the Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Locke's *Second Treatise*, or Rousseau's *Social Contract*. But would it be such an obvious departure from the topic of 'absolute knowing' to talk about human practical freedom and its relation to the nature and inner purpose of social-political communities? I do not think so.

Pippin (like McDowell following him) views Hegel's interest in absolute knowing through the lens of the aims of Kant's Transcendental Analytic. That is, he takes Hegel's central interest to concern the conceptual, non-empirical conditions of all objective experience, and he takes Hegel's chapter on "Self-Consciousness" to correspond roughly to the role Kant assigns to apperception in the Analytic. But, as I indicated in chapter one, I think we make much better sense of Hegel's chapter on "Self-Consciousness" and the project of the *Phenomenology* as a whole by taking his primary engagement with Kant to concern not his analytic of the pure functions of the understanding, but his notion of pure reason (*Vernunft*). The very fact that Hegel describes his own methodology not as an analytic but as dialectic strongly suggests that this is the more apt

comparison. And the fundamental theme of the 'absolute' and 'absolute knowing' corresponds much more closely to Kant's notion of the aims of pure reason as an unconditioned cognition of the unconditioned itself.

In the particular context of *PhG* IV, we have seen that the most pertinent forerunner to its notion of self-consciousness is not Kantian apperception but, rather, Fichte's notion of the 'practical I' and the absolute positing of its freedom through its overcoming of the 'not-I.' But for Fichte, as for Kant, practical freedom and our own self-knowledge of it is characterized by a fundamental distinction from apperceptive empirical judgment. The former, unlike the latter, is not fundamentally *conditioned* by what is given to it empirically. True, our practical freedom is (in an important sense) conditioned by outer objects and our theoretical awareness of them. But what is empirically given is not an absolute constraint or limitation. Rather, the inner *Bestimmung* of the practical 'I' is to confront such limitations only for the sake of transcending them and affirming its own absolute freedom.

As I have argued from the outset of this work, Hegel's engagement with Fichte in *PhG* IV is a complex, multisided one. I've argued that Hegel's account of the need for recognition is directly connected to his wider critique of Fichte's concept of the *Bestimmung des Menschen* and the 'bad' or 'false' infinitude which, Hegel thinks, defines Fichte's notion of practical freedom. But Hegel's own treatment of this issue, both in *PhG* IV and elsewhere, is itself a further development of that Fichtean theme. His central claim in *PhG* IV is that the *true* infinity of the subject's practical freedom can only come in the form of the *Zusammenleben des Menschen*, whose fundamental unifying principle is not common legal rights, nor is it a common moral law. Rather, it is a shared internal purpose defined by the reciprocal action of its members and their mutual recognition of one another as ends in themselves and for each other.

In other words, the central theme of *PhG* IV is not the subject's objective knowledge of any finite object whatsoever. Instead, it is the objective knowledge of something far more absolute – the subject's own 'infinite' freedom. Like Fichte, Hegel thinks that this self-knowledge can only be attained through the subject's own action of overcoming the externally limiting 'otherness' of its objects and 'positing itself.' But unlike both Fichte and Kant, Hegel thinks that we can have a truly objective knowledge of our practical freedom. For unlike Fichte and Kant, Hegel thinks that the inner infinitude of this freedom can be made *actual* in this life and this world – namely, in a certain form of community with others. An earnest investigation into the knowledge of one's practical freedom, realized in the form of social-political communities, is not a departure from the topic of absolute knowing. On the contrary, it is a departure from the topic of merely finite, limited forms of knowing, with their finite objects.

Finally, our investigation into this topic also tells us something more general about Hegel's concept of the 'Absolute' itself. Hegel's famous 'I that is We' passage makes unshrinking use of two of Kant's own notions of the 'unconditioned' Ideas of Reason: "absolute substance" and "complete freedom" (¶177). Indeed, the notion of the self-conscious subject as *substance* is a central theme in *PhG* IV and throughout the *Phenomenology*, from its first discussion of "living substance" in the Preface, to its concluding treatment of Absolute Knowing, where Hegel writes: "the 'I' is not merely the self, but the *identity of the self with itself*; but this identity is complete and immediate oneness with self, or *this subject* is just as much *substance*" (¶803).

But Hegel's notion of the subject as substance is by no means a return to the position of rational psychology which Kant critiques in his "Paralogisms." Nor is Hegel merely making the Strawsonian naturalist point that the conscious subject is also, necessarily, a physical object with physical properties. Rather, as Hegel indicates in his critique of Kant's Paralogisms and in the

introduction to his *Philosophy of Spirit*, he is returning to a more Aristotelian concept of the subject as *living substance* (cf. *SL* 692, GW. 12.195; *EPS* ¶ 378). That is the central concept of the soul in Aristotle's *De Anima*. Indeed, Hegel's very concept of the social-political *Zusammenleben des Menschen* is, in part, a return to Aristotle's idea of the *polis* as a living whole – one that is prior to the parts, who are not truly self-sufficient in isolation. Hegel does depart from Aristotle's own organicist notions of the community by placing far greater emphasis on the freedom of its individual members (all of them). But he does so because he thinks that the true self-sufficiency of the greater whole requires the genuine individual freedom of its members (and vice versa).

But this alternative notion of the subject as substance also corresponds to a more general departure from Kant's conception of the unconditioned. In Kant, the very concept of the 'unconditioned' has the form of a kind of one-directional foundationalism. Freedom is uncaused causality, substance is the absolute substratum of many accidents; it is not itself a mode of something more fundamental. Of course, Hegel's response to these wider issues is too large a topic to address in these closing remarks, and Hegel's own treatment of these issues is primarily developed in the *Logic*. For now, I will only make the following brief remarks. Hegel does not simply accept Kant's notions of the 'absolute' as the true concepts of these matters, and he does not claim that, contrary to Kant's views, we can know (or *be*) the unconditioned as Kant himself understands the unconditioned. In the *Logic*, he will argue that those conceptions of the unconditioned are *internally* defective. They fail to coherently express the very notions of *being* self-standing, of not being grounded in something else.[122]

But in the foregoing study of *PhG* IV, we have already seen, in part, how Hegel understands the true *Selbständigkeit* of the self-conscious subject. It is not a mere absence of any external

[122] Naturally, this claim about the *Logic* cannot be defended here, and I can only recommend Christopher Yeomans' excellent treatment of the topic in his *Freedom and Reflection: Hegel and the Logic of Agency* (2012).

conditions. On the contrary, it essentially depends upon various externalities, whether in the shape of natural things or other subjects. But the subject, through its own activity, shows that these conditions are not true externally determining constraints. It does so by overcoming the sheer externality of these things, by incorporating them in various ways into its own internal purposiveness. In this way, Hegel is taking up and further developing the Fichtean notion of the finite subject's transcending its own limitations by means of the very things which appear to constrain it. But Hegel has placed that notion on a more Aristotelian foundation of internal purposiveness and the subject's genuine unification with the external objects that it knows.

The highest life, the highest freedom is the inner purpose which does not need to subdue or dominate everything 'other' in order to satisfy its own ends. It preserves and fulfills its self-standing identity through the self-standing independence of its objects. While Hegel thinks the highest form of this complete self-sufficiency comes in philosophy itself, that freedom is not restricted to such divine affairs. It is manifested in any true community of separate individuals who live through free reciprocity and the mutual enjoyment of one another as ends in themselves.

Again, the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology* gives us only a partial view into these wider topics. The concrete shapes that such communities must take are only treated in the remainder of *Phenomenology* and, above all, in the *Philosophy of Right*. The more abstract concepts of the infinite, the unconditioned, essence, substance, and so on, have their proper treatment only in the *Science of Logic*. Nonetheless, this chapter of the *Phenomenology* has served as the window through which so many readers have gazed into Hegel's broader system. I have attempted to make it a bit more transparent.

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