Subject as Substance

Freedom and Self-Identity in Hegel's Account of Self-Consciousness as Desire

Abstract: This paper defends a reinterpretation of Hegel's account of self-consciousness as desire in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his later *Philosophy of Spirit.* That account is typically taken to concern the merely animal aspect of human subjectivity and the role of natural life as the basis of human self-awareness. I argue that this is a misreading and that it obscures the more interesting role played by the concept of life (or internal purposiveness) in Hegel's understanding of self-consciousness and self-identity. Hegel, I argue, is engaging with a Kantian problem concerning two senses of self-identity and their corresponding forms of self-awareness – namely, my identity as a unified subject-of-consciousness (apperception) and my identity as unified object or substance. Hegel thinks that these apparently disparate forms of self-identity and self-awareness are in fact unified through a more fundamental self-relation – one defined by a conscious internal purposiveness, analogous to natural life, and aimed at a form of independence or self-sufficiency ('*Selbständigkeit*'). His claim is that, *for* an apperceptively conscious subject, the internally purposive activity of consumptive desire-satisfaction provides the most basic illustration of this unifying form of self-identity and the kind of self-consciousness that it involves.

1. Introduction

The famous "Self-Consciousness" chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* 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 gratification involves the destruction and consumption of their objects (ostensibly, desires like hunger). This is a surprising start to a chapter on self-consciousness, since, taken by themselves, such desires are common to all animals — not just rational or self-conscious ones. 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 curious beginning addresses that issue — or, perhaps, avoids it — by taking the opening subject of that chapter not to be self-consciousness proper but a kind of proto-self-awareness connected to the general animal drive for self-preservation (what Hegel elsewhere calls animal 'self-feeling').[1] I call this the 'desire-as-animality reading,' for it takes Hegel's account of desire to concern the standpoint of mere animality, or the human subject *qua* mere animal.[2] Under that approach, Hegel's treatment of desire is taken to serve a kind of prefatory function. It sets up the chapter's true topic by emphasizing the essential role of natural life and embodiment as the basis of all self-relating subjectivity, whether rational or not. This privative understanding of the kind of self-awareness represented by 'desire' also plays an integral role in the standard readings of the account of social recognition that immediately follows. That account is widely understood in terms of the idea that certain social relations are required for overcoming the standpoint of mere biological drive allegedly represented by the earlier 'desire.'

However natural this reading of Hegel's account of desire may appear, it requires biting a rather large interpretive bullet. Since no one takes Hegel to be making the

extraordinary claim that animal life as such is self-conscious (and rightly so), the desire-as-animality reading effectively requires the outright denial of the plain letter of the text. For in that chapter of the *Phenomenology*, in Hegel's later version of this 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 – something which, for Hegel, *distinguishes* us from mere animal life. Is there a way of understanding why *Phenomenology*, chapter IV begins in this way, without resorting to such interpretive measures?

My claim in this paper is that there is. I argue, first, that the desire-as-animality reading is demonstrably mistaken. More importantly, it conceals the account's highly novel contribution to the topic of self-consciousness by replacing it with a more commonplace claim regarding the natural, animal basis of human subjectivity. In fact, by assimilating Hegel's account of desire to the issue of mere animal life, the standard approach obscures the deeper function of the concept of life (or internal purposiveness) in Hegel's conception of the relation between self-consciousness, self-identity, and (as we will see) human freedom.

To begin, I argue (in section 2) that Hegel's topic is not immediate desire-satisfaction *tout court*, but immediate desire-satisfaction as it occurs by and for a distinctively human, thinking subject – one capable of saying 'I.' But to understand why Hegel regards such desire-satisfaction as the most basic form of self-consciousness, I argue (in section 3) that we must overcome a common misconception about Hegel's concept of self-consciousness more generally – namely, that it is essentially a variant of Kant's notion of apperception. Instead, I argue, Hegel regards apperception as an integral but incomplete *part* of self-consciousness in the primary sense. For Hegel, this incompleteness pertains to the fact that, as Kant himself insists, mere apperception is a purely formal and, in a sense, empty form of self-awareness – one that is seemingly disconnected from any consciousness of one's own substantial self-identity. Hegel's claim is that, by contrast, immediate desire-satisfaction (for an apperceptively self-aware subject) provides the most basic example of a form of self-consciousness that overcomes that emptiness.

In section 4, I argue that the meaning of Hegel's claim does involve a close structural *comparison* to the concept of animal nutritive life generally. Hegel's claim is that, *like* the 'self-feeling' animals achieve through their nutritive activities, self-consciousness must be understood in terms of the subject's active experience of its own self-subsisting identity (its own self-sustaining form of life). And *like* the corresponding form of animal self-feeling, self-consciousness is attained by effectively performing the self-directed activities in which the subject's very identity consists. The crucial insight of Hegel's account of desire is that the structure of self-consciousness itself must be understood through the wider concept of internal purposiveness. But while the 'self-feeling' of animal nutritive activity involves the un-self-aware experience of *one* kind of internally purposive existence (natural life), the apperceptively self-aware equivalent of that activity introduces the experience of a higher form of existing for oneself – namely, human freedom. Hegel regards the conscious satisfaction of immediate desire as only the most basic (and most limited) form of this self-consciousness. But for that very reason, he takes it to provide the most intuitive illustration of the way in which a human subject is conscious of itself by literally substantiating its own identity as an independent subject and agent in the world. The aim of this paper is to defend this reading of Hegel's account and to explain the concept of self-consciousness developed in it.

2. Desire as Animality?

2.1 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 'shapes of knowing' discussed in the previous three 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" (*LPS* 186/GW 25.2: 783) 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" (*PhG* ¶174), or as one which views its object as "an enduring existence [*ein Bestehen*] which, however, is only *appearance*, or a difference which, *in itself*, is no difference" (*PhG* ¶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 destructible and conformable to itself.

Thus Hegel claims that "self-consciousness exhibits itself as the movement in which this antithesis [*Gegensatz*] is removed" — that is, it exhibits itself as the *satisfaction* of desire, in the which the object's original otherness or opposition to the subject is overcome (*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*" (*PhG* ¶174).

This account of self-consciousness-as-desire contains two especially striking features whose explanation will guide the rest of this paper. 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*.[3]

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.

2.2 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 the defect of immediate desire can only be overcome through a certain relation to "another self-consciousness" (*PhG* ¶175). 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 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.

Some version of that 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."[4] 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."[5] 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."[6]

In this vein, Judith Butler explicitly identifies the standpoint of 'desire' with animal nutritive 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."[7] Robert Pippin expresses a similar view, characterizing the kind of 'self-consciousness' represented by Hegel's 'desire' as a kind of proto-self-awareness connected to animal self-preservation: "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."[8] By comparison to Butler, Pippin's language seems to maintain a certain ambiguity over whether Hegel is literally speaking about a purely animalistic form of self-awareness. The talk of 'minimal reflective attentiveness' seems, perhaps, to indicate something distinctively human. At the same time, this phrase is used to elaborate a kind of self-awareness which 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."

Again, beyond the obvious resemblance of Hegel's account of desire to the structure of animal nutritive life more generally, the standard reading of Hegel's subsequent transition from desire to recognition provides a strong interpretive motivation for the desire-as-animality reading. For, according to the standard approaches to that transition, the whole point of 'desire' is that it represents what is, for all intents and purposes, the merely animal form of self-relation that is supposed to be overcome through recognition.

I will be arguing that this *not* the point of Hegel's account of desire. But without a doubt, Hegel clearly thinks that there is, at the very least, an important commonality between self-consciousness as desire and the 'self-feeling' experienced in animal nutritive life generally. Thus, in the *Science of Logic*'s discussion of animal nutritive life (what Hegel calls the 'Life-Process') Hegel repeats nearly verbatim what he 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)

And 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. (*LPS,* 185/GW 25.2: 782)

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, lend credence to the idea that the standpoint of animal life (or the human being *qua* mere animal) is the central topic of his account of desire.

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 consistently identifies desire as a form of self-*consciousness*. But ostensibly, self-

consciousness is *not* something common to all animal life. Indeed, in all 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, despite the important commonality between Hegel's account of self-consciousness as desire and his treatment of animal nutritive life as such, it becomes clear on closer examination that the identification of the two is interpretively untenable.

2.3 Self-Consciousness and Self-Feeling

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*).[9]

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'."[10] 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" — 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."[11] "But," he writes, "for just that reason this sensuous feeling of self [*Selbstgefühl*]

is not true self-consciousness [*Selbstbewußtsein*]."[12] Despite 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 these authors seem to draw a *modus ponens* inference where a *modus tollens* is better suited. 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*].[13] 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 a completely 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" (*LPS* 163/GW 25.2: 746). 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 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, 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 the *Phenomenology'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. I) and 'perception' (Chap. II), 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 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.

2.4 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 Lebendiges*]) 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.[14] 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 follows this passage, Hegel identifies 'life' and '*ein Lebendiges*,' not with the *second object* (the subject itself) but, rather, with the first, external object:

> 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.[15]

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 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 later transition, however, is not the topic of the present essay. The central question which remains for us 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.

3. Desire and the Concept of Self-Consciousness

As I noted at the end of section 2.1, Hegel's account of self-consciousness as desire raises a difficult problem 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, 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.

3.1 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 (*CPR* 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)."[16]

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).[17] 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, 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" (*CPR*

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)."[18] 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 "barbarous" (*SL* 691/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*.

3.2 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 paper, I must mainly limit my analysis of the question to the topic at hand — desire. To answer it, we need to 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).[19]

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, by 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.'[20]

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. 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 'abstract' or wholly negative freedom which, in desire, takes the form of a real, objective identity.

4. Independence and Self-Consciousness

4.1 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" (*CPR* A116).[21] This 'self-identity' denotes the identity of my one consciousness in relation to the 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.[22] 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" (*CPR* 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" (*CPR* 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" (*CPR* 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'" (*CPR* B423). 'I' in this sense is very much a 'mere representation,' and one which is "wholly empty" (*CPR* A346/B404). It is in this respect that Kant writes, "Through this I, or He, or It (the thing), which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = x" (*CPR* A346/B404).[23]

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. *CPR* 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" (*CPR* B134). This distinction between a mere serial consciousness of the manifold and a synthetic consciousness of their connection corresponds to Kant's distinction between the merely 'subjective unity of apperception' and the 'objective unity of apperception' (*CPR* 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).[24]

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.[25]

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 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[26] 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 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 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. That is why the central issue in the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on "Self-Consciousness" concerns the matter of objectively validating one's real independence through one's own action.

4.2 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. 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" (*EPS* ¶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.

4.3 Internal Teleology as Life and as Freedom

In section 2.1, 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 (if also most deficient) form of experiencing one's own freedom, its 'first and lowest level.' Following his initial account of desire, Hegel will argue that this basic form of existing for oneself is ultimately insufficient and unsatisfying. 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 implicitly free selfhood into its own end and in realizing that end in its outer existence.

5. Conclusion

Two points warrant particular emphasis in conclusion. First, as I've argued in this paper, 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, this reading of desire also opens a new and, I think, more productive avenue for understanding Hegel's subsequent account of the limitations of this 'first and lowest level of self-consciousness' and his transition to the issue of human social life. According to the reading I have defended, there is a far greater thematic continuity between Hegel's treatment of desire and his subsequent account of the need for a certain relation to "another self-consciousness" (¶175). Hegel's transition from desire to recognition is not suddenly making a great leap from the perspective of mere biological drive to that of human reason and self-consciousness. Rather, it concerns the difference between two forms of freedom as conscious internal purposiveness – a purely individualistic form and a social form. It involves the idea that a truly substantial form of existing for oneself comes only in the shape of a "*Zusammenleben des Menschen"* (*EPS* ¶433), a shared life of human beings in the strict sense of the term: a unified internal purpose sustained through the reciprocal action of its members, where each is both a necessary means and an end in itself. The meaning and argument behind that claim, however, will have to be topic of a separate study.

[1] Cf. SL 684, 686/GW 12:187, 12:189; EPN ¶¶357, 368, 373
[2] Varieties of this reading are found in Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 22; Kojève, *Introduction*, 39, Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life*, 101; Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, 19; Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 48; Brandom, "The Structure of Desire and Recognition," 130; Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, 61 – just to cite a few. Brownlee is a notable exception (cf. *Recognition and the Self*, 54-5).
[3] 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 follows: "Die Substanz aber ist das schlechthin Selbstständige auf sich beruhende" (Substance, however, is the purely self-standing which rests on itself) (GW 30.2: 715).
[4] *Recognition*, 69
[5] *Spirit of Trust*, 246
[6] "From Desire to Recognition," 77
[7] *Subjects of Desire*, 33
[8] *Hegel on Self-Consciousness,* 19
[9] Cf. *PhG* ¶258; *SL* 684/GW 12:187, *SL* 686/GW 12:189; *EPN* ¶¶357, 368, 373
[10] *Introduction*, 39
[11] *Hegel's Dialectic*, 60
[12] *Hegel's Dialectic*, 61
[13] Cf. *SL* 10/GW 21: 9; *SL* 698/GW 12: 197, *EPS* ¶¶387, 413, 473Z.
[14] Cf. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, 46; Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 48
[15] 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" (*PhG* ¶174).
[16] *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, 44
[17] Moreover, as Timothy Brownlee notes in this connection (cf. *Recognition and the Self,* 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'.
[18] *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, 44
[19] These observations show the error in McDowell's metaphorical reading of *PhG* IV which takes 'desire' to be a 'figure' for pure apperception. Cf. "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self," 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.
[20] 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).
[21] 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" (*CPR* 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" (*CPR* B138).

[22] 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. *CPR* A107).

[23] 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).

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

[25] 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. *CPR* A362-6)

[26] 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)

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