

The Master's Problem: Revisiting Hegel's Critique of Social Domination

Abstract: This paper argues for a reinterpretation of Hegel's internal critique of social domination in the famous 'Master-Slave Dialectic.' Hegel argues that, in addition to the evident injustice suffered by the enslaved, the arrangement also undermines the master's own purposes. Standard interpretations claim either that the unequal relation frustrates the master's desire for the other's recognition, or that he depends upon the slave in a manner that contradicts his supposed independence. I argue that these readings are both textually ungrounded and philosophically unsatisfying. The critiques they advance unwittingly rely upon straw man conceptions of relations of domination. Instead, Hegel's account turns on the way the means-end structure of mastery is ultimately self-conflicting. Drawing on Aristotle's idea that the master-slave relation is the consummate exemplar of a user-tool relation, Hegel presents mastery as the pursuit of the unconstrained power embodied in the complete control over a 'living tool.' Yet precisely because mastery itself becomes the master's highest end, he thereby assigns absolute value to a possession simultaneously regarded as a mere means—his slave. Thus, like King Midas, the inner demands of the master's domineering will can only be realized in the shape of something he himself views as a contemptible means.

Introduction

Hegel's famous 'Master-Slave Dialectic' offers an internal critique of the conception of personal freedom embodied in the direct domination of another. The social relation he considers is one founded upon the so-called 'right of conquest,' in which the victor of a mortal struggle agrees to spare the defeated party on the condition that he submit to a life of servitude. The ensuing hierarchy provides the master a permanent means for satisfying his needs and desires without labor or toil, for the hard work of executing his will has been imposed upon another. A privileged existence indeed. But Hegel argues that, in addition to the evident injustice suffered by the enslaved, the arrangement in fact undermines the master's own purposes. The master's very freedom, he claims, is compromised by its dependence upon the bondage of another.

This account is well known to anyone with the slightest acquaintance with Hegel's philosophy. It has attracted more scholarly literature than any other part of Hegel's work. Yet the very familiarity of Hegel's claim tends to obscure the immense ambition of his argument – an ambition which, I will argue, is left unfulfilled by the standard reconstructions of his critique. This ambition lies, above all, in the form of internal criticism Hegel adopts. For Hegel, the life of the master is the embodiment of a certain subjective ideal of existing purely for oneself. It goes without saying that this form of life fails to satisfy the higher standards of morality and true social justice. But if that were the master's *only* problem, and if he were nonetheless able to fully satisfy his own self-interest, then it seems we should be forced to concede something to the cynical view of Plato's Thrasymachus – namely, that the demands of social justice are, at base, simply the demands of subjecting one's own interest to the good of another. In other words, social justice would seem to be merely another form of social subservience. The seductive power of this form of cynicism has, of course, remained quite

formidable in our own time, and its very concept makes it impervious to moralistic criticism. But by giving an *internal* critique, Hegel's argument purports to show that the direct instrumentalization of others is in fact opposed to one's own individual freedom and self-interest. In this way, Hegel does not simply repudiate the underlying desire to exist for oneself. Rather, his claim is that this very desire can only be satisfied through relations of genuine mutuality and reciprocity with others.¹

A powerful view. But as often happens in such cases, the attractiveness of Hegel's conclusion has, I suggest, tended to lead scholars to overly simplistic and ultimately unsatisfying explanations of it. Indeed, according to the standard reconstructions of his critique, the master's situation appears to be so transparently opposed to his own aims and his own self-conception that – if this were true – it would be a great mystery that relations of domination have existed for so long and been sustained by so many otherwise clever people. In view of such analyses, more critical minds may be inclined toward a version of Sartre's complaint – namely, that Hegel's position rests upon an unrealistic philosophical optimism.² My argument in this paper is that Hegel's critique is far subtler than it is normally taken to be and that this is the source of its strength.

Two approaches to Hegel's account predominate in the literature. One centers on a certain understanding of the issue of social recognition that lies at the heart of that chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel characterizes the life-and-death struggle from which the master emerges as a struggle for *recognition*. In some sense, Hegel clearly thinks that the victor-turned-master does not ultimately gain what he was after in that original struggle. On a common reading of that view, the master's problem is that the recognition he sought is made worthless by the very fact that it is obtained through the coercive subjugation of the other. I'll call this the 'Self-Invalidated Recognition Critique.'³ The second, equally common reconstruction of Hegel's critique claims that the master's self-ascribed independence is undermined by the fact that his status and livelihood are ultimately dependent upon another – the slave.⁴ I'll call this the 'Unconscious Dependence Critique.'⁵

I argue that the apparent plausibility of these critiques rests upon a conflation of the relevant forms of recognition and dependency with alternative forms that do not properly characterize the matter at hand. Simply put, these critiques unwittingly rely upon a naive conception of the kind of recognition the master is after and the kind of power relations that define who is truly dependent upon whom. Hegel's critique is more clear-eyed about the situation. Contrary to the standard readings, I argue that, for Hegel, the master gets precisely the recognition he wants, and he is, in an important sense, precisely who he takes himself to be. But that is the source of his deeper problem.

On the interpretation I will defend, the master's problem may be outlined as follows. For the master, the slave is a mere means, but he is also the perfect means, the absolute tool – the “ὄργανον πρὸς ὀργάνων,” as Aristotle puts it (*Politics* 1253b30). In this way, the master views the *ends* of that relationship as the various gratifications he enjoys by means of the other's work. But Hegel's claim is that, at base, what really holds ultimate value for the master is not these individual gratifications, but the complete personal power manifested in his standing ability to satisfy his capricious will without even needing to personally execute it. In other words, his most precious *end* is his own mastery. But just as 'being a parent' and 'having a child' are synonymous, so does the master's highest aim coincide with his possession and use of slaves – which, for him are at the same time a mere means. His problem, therefore, is akin to that of the miser or of King Midas. His attempt to fulfill his

unrestrained self-interest can only be realized in the reduction of everything to a mere means. In the servitude of another, he achieves this goal in the most complete way possible. But in this way, the realization of his very attempt to exist *for himself* is the possession and use of what he himself regards merely as a contemptible means.

My argument is given in four sections. In section one, I give a brief summary of the immediate context of Hegel's treatment of mastery and servitude in the "Self-Consciousness" chapter of the *Phenomenology*. In section two, I examine the standard reconstructions of Hegel's critique of the master and argue that they fail both exegetically and as arguments in their own right. In section three, I argue that Hegel's treatment of the master-slave relation must be viewed as a kind of paradigm of Hegel's understanding of the user-tool relationship more generally. In section four, I argue that the master's problem lies precisely in the fact that his attempt to fulfill the freedom of unrestrained self-interest results in contradictorily investing ultimate value in another subject *qua mere means*.

1. The Immediate Context of Hegel's Argument

1.1 Self-Consciousness and Selbstständigkeit

The primary aim of this paper is not to defend a comprehensive interpretation of the "Self-Consciousness" chapter of the *Phenomenology*, in which Hegel's 'Master-Slave Dialectic' appears, nor to engage in a detailed analysis of the developments that precede his account of the master-slave relation. Such an undertaking would extend beyond the scope of the present inquiry. Nevertheless, a brief outline of the sections leading up to Hegel's analysis of the relation of master and slave will help clarify the context of that account.

The *Phenomenology*'s "Self-Consciousness" chapter begins with a discussion of desire – specifically, with an account of a kind of 'self-certainty' that is affirmed by satisfying one's immediate desires through the outright destruction and consumption of an erstwhile independent natural object.⁶ Here, as in the remainder of that chapter, the primary sense of 'self-consciousness' is not merely that of self-awareness in general (for instance, the capacity for 'I-thoughts') but concerns a subject's attempt to give proof to the inner certainty of its own independence or *Selbstständigkeit* (literally, 'self-standingness'). That is, Hegel's chapter examines the way in which a subject shows itself not merely to be conscious of an independent external world but also of *itself* as a genuinely 'self-standing' being *within* the world.⁷ His claim is that, in immediate desire and its satisfaction, the certainty of one's independence is validated in the most basic way: through the direct demonstration of one's power over external things and one's ability to subject them to one's own self-directed existence.

The notion of *Selbstständigkeit* that governs the theme of that chapter carries the important ontological connotation of *substantiality*. In his lectures on Spinoza, Hegel glosses Spinoza's definition of substance as "*das schlechthin Selbstständige*" – "the purely self-standing" (VGP II, 715).⁸ In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel uses the language of "living substance" (PhG, ¶18) to characterize the *being* of a subject as such, and in his famous passage about the 'I that is We,' he describes *Geist* as "this absolute substance" (PhG, ¶177). As applied to the life of a self-aware subject, the term *Selbstständigkeit* also carries the more specific meaning of 'self-sufficiency,' and in his lectures on Aristotle's *Politics*, Hegel uses it to render Aristotle's *autarkeia* (VGP III, 1116).

The concept of 'self-sufficiency' thus introduced in Hegel's treatment of desire is characterized by an internal teleological structure closely connected to the concept of life generally. That is, it concerns a subject's capacity to exist *for itself* – to view itself as an *end* and to fulfill its internal purposes through effective action in the world. In immediate desire-satisfaction, we thus find the most rudimentary (and ultimately the most limited) example of Hegel's seemingly arcane conception of freedom and its corresponding form of self-consciousness: 'being with oneself in another,' 'finding oneself in one's object.'⁹ That is, in *devouring* my object, I give the most basic form of demonstration that the object is no real constraint to me but absolutely conforms to myself and my purposes, for it literally becomes one with me.

As I will argue below, this notion of *Selbstständigkeit* as a kind of unconstrained self-fulfillment is in fact never abandoned in Hegel's account but only further developed and transformed. It is the kind of independence the master aims to enjoy and *does* enjoy in a certain sense.¹⁰ But Hegel's claim will be that the master's life ultimately contains an abiding *constraint* to his own self-interest, and we will have to see why.

1.2 The Struggle for Recognition and the Establishment of Domination

Following his initial discussion of desire, Hegel goes on to argue that this form of certifying one's own independence is ultimately specious and unsatisfying. He claims that its problem can only be overcome through a different kind of action with a different corresponding *object* – namely, "another self-consciousness" (PhG, ¶175). He characterizes that relationship as a certain form of *recognition*. For now, I will refrain from offering my own interpretation of that initial transition from desire to recognition, for its meaning is closely connected to Hegel's understanding of the 'master-slave' relation to be discussed shortly. I will return to the matter in section three.

Following a brief outline of the concept of recognition *in abstracto* (the "pure concept of recognition" (PhG, ¶185)), Hegel examines the issue at a more concrete level by considering what he takes to be the most rudimentary form of a subject's attempt to validate its 'self-certainty' by means of another's recognition – namely, in a life-and-death struggle. He claims that the kind of struggle under consideration can only end in one of two ways: either in the death of one party, or in the absolute submission of one to the other. Since the dead can neither give nor receive any form of recognition, Hegel claims that the only recognition to be gained from this struggle is the one-sided recognition achieved through the latter outcome – the defeated party's compulsion (on pain of death) to henceforth acknowledge the other as his master: "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 acknowledges his subjugation to him¹¹ – the *relation of mastery and servitude*" (EPS, §433).

In the ensuing social hierarchy, the enslaved party is compelled to endure a life of forced labor, motivated by the standing threat the master poses to his very survival. The master, for his part, continues to enjoy the satisfaction of his own desires. But by contrast to the activity discussed in Hegel's initial account of desire, the master's fulfillment of his needs and desires no longer requires that he provide for himself through his own personal efforts. In this way, he is freed from the burden of directly and continually struggling with nature to

satisfy his own ends, for someone else is now compelled to perform that labor on his behalf. In short, he frees himself from the curse of Adam by binding another under its yoke.

But Hegel claims that, because his freedom rests on the bondage of another, “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” (PhG, ¶192). As we will see, this idea that the ‘truth’ of the master is the life and action of the slave has several interconnected meanings, but an essential component is that the master is not truly free in his own right. His freedom is corrupted by the unfreedom of the other through which it is achieved: “The master confronted by his slave was not yet truly free, for he still did not fully behold himself in the other. Only when the slave becomes free does the master, consequently, become completely free as well” (EPS, §436Z). But why, and in what sense, does Hegel think that the master is not truly free? And how is this problem connected to the one-sided recognition which defines the master-slave relation? To set the stage for answering these questions accurately, I will show that the standard answers are inadequate.

2. Inadequate Perspectives on the Master’s Problem

2.1 *Appealing to the Asymmetric Authority Relation*

One of the most prevalent reconstructions of Hegel’s argument is what I’ve called the ‘Self-Invalidated Recognition Critique.’ On this approach, the master’s problem lies in his failure to truly obtain the recognition he desires from the slave. His very domination over the other guarantees that what he gains is nothing but the false appearance of the desired recognition. But because the master’s conviction in his own independence depends upon that recognition, his very self-conception is as false and empty as the recognition on which it is based. This is an appealing criticism, but I will argue that it ultimately relies upon an equivocation of very distinct issues.

Proponents of this critique typically understand the master’s self-ascribed independence in terms of a certain kind of authority – one which he seeks to validate by means of the other’s recognition. Thus Terry Pinkard writes:

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. (Pinkard 2018, xxiii)

Before evaluating the interpretive accuracy of this reading, I want to first examine the strength of the argument itself. Whether it is an effective internal critique depends upon the sense of the term ‘authority’ that it employs and whether a master’s assertion of direct lordship over another can even be understood as an *attempt* to gain the other’s recognition of his authority in the sense required by this argument.

For readers like Pinkard, Pippin, and Brandom, the kind of authority the master claims is a *normative* authority and denotes the objective, collectively-binding validity of his own

view of things.¹² An interest in another's recognition of this kind of authority consists, as Robert Pippin puts it, in an 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). This way of framing the independence the master seeks through recognition is based upon a common view that Hegel's theory of recognition is, in essence, an attempt to give a social-historical twist to a Kantian understanding of human freedom – namely, that to act freely is to act on the basis of universally binding principles, rather than mere natural desires and individual self-interest.¹³

This approach corresponds to a certain understanding of the kind of recognition at stake in the 'life-and-death struggle' from which the master emerges. On this view, Hegel's 'struggle' is meant to illustrate two individuals' demonstration of their absolute commitment to opposing normative claims and their ill-conceived attempt to resolve the dispute by force. Clearly, one cannot simply force another into that kind of recognition of that kind of authority – i.e. the genuine acknowledgement of the rightfulness of one's claims. As Pippin writes:

Throughout the rest of the chapter, Hegel shows the practical incoherence of any attempted resolution of such conflict by the establishment of mere power, or coerced recognition. It is clear that what is ultimately necessary for such a conciliation, for beings conceived as Hegel now has, is some resort to practical reason and so ultimately some shared view of a universal reconciliation. (Pippin 2010, 84)

Pippin thus makes short shrift of the master's interest in domination, and if his analysis of that interest were correct, then the master's aims would indeed be so transparently incoherent as to merit such a swift ruling. But the incoherency in this picture appears, on closer examination, to lie not in the inner intentions of slave-masters but, rather, in the corresponding analysis of them.

That is, the apparent plausibility of this argument rests upon an equivocation of very different senses of 'authority' and its corresponding form of recognition. The major premise of this argument is: (P1) The value of another's recognition of one's authority depends upon one's own recognition of the other's authority to confer it. The minor premise is: (P2) The master (in asserting lordship over the other) demands the slave's recognition of his authority but does not reciprocate that recognition. Each of these premises is true, but only so long as each involves entirely different senses of 'recognition' and 'authority.' In the major premise (P1), recognition denotes, in effect, another's *approving judgment*. It is the kind of recognition that, as Aristotle puts it, one desires from "good men, and men who know" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1159a16).¹⁴ Why from them? Because one's interest in the approving judgment of another clearly depends upon the value one assigns to the other's point of view – i.e. the recognition of their 'authority' in *that* sense of the term. Clearly the attempt to gain that kind of recognition from another by *enslaving* him and subjecting him to a life of forced labor would be totally absurd and incoherent.

But it would be no less absurd to assume that that is the kind of recognition masters desire from slaves or the kind of authority they seek to impose upon them. On that view, the master's underlying interest in the slave's very subjugation would stem from an earnest desire for something akin to the validation a child seeks from a parent or a student from a teacher – as though what he really wanted from the slave were his honest approval and admiration, and he foolishly sought to obtain it by demanding his obedience on pain of death.

In other words, the Self-Invalidated Recognition Critique depends on the tacit assumption that the conqueror-turned-master does not really want to be the other's conqueror and master, but is really after the exact opposite kind of relationship. That is, it depends upon the assumption that what the master wants is, in effect, to do *right* in the other's eyes, and he tries to gain that acknowledgment through force. But the very concept of outright domination is the assertion of completely unaccountable power over another – to rule over another with utter contempt and indifference toward the other's judgment and interests. That is the kind of 'authority' a master asserts over a slave, and the corresponding recognition he demands is not that the slaves give him their stamp of approval (as though he were concerned about them) but only that they bow before him and obey, whether they like it or not. We should not forget the original significance of the kind of recognition conferred by literally bowing before another. It is not about endorsing another's will but, rather, submitting to it. To assert direct lordship over another is to compel such unconditional surrender. Proponents of the foregoing critique thus unwittingly mistake an interest in this kind of recognition with an interest in another's earnest approval, and they impute this mistake to the slave-master himself. But, unlike his interpreters, a master is quite unequivocal about the kind of recognition he desires from a slave. When he demands a 'Yes, sir' from the other, he is not after the other's opinion but only his trembling obedience.

Hegel, for his part, has a quite frank view of the kind of recognition one seeks to establish through sheer conquest over another. Discussing the life-and-death struggle for recognition in his 1825 lectures on the *Philosophy of Spirit*, he describes the impulse that motivates this combat as a lust for domination, "*der Trieb der Herrschsucht*" (VPG I, 468). He thus characterizes the sought-after recognition as follows:

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 [in this struggle] undistinguished from one's independence [*Selbstständigkeit*], 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. (VPG I, 468)

In other words, Hegel's claim is that the kind of independence one seeks to affirm through direct force over another is one that is completely unseparated from one's individual power and self-interest. But to recognize *that* kind of independence is simply to submit to the other's superior power to assert his individual will. That is the kind of recognition the conqueror-turned-master desires from the subjugated, and that is the kind of recognition he gets.

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, 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.

2.2 Appealing to 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" (Rousseau 1999, 46). 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" (Shklar 1976, 61).¹⁵ I've called this the 'Unconscious Dependence Critique.' Now, there is no question that the master, qua master, depends upon the slave for this identity, and the master also satisfies his needs and 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 a 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 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 social status and self-conception. Finally, Hegel himself clearly does not think that the bare fact of one's reliance upon others undermines one's freedom, for he ultimately wants to show that true freedom does, in some way, depend upon a certain relation with others.

These remarks, however, are intended only to bring into relief the kind of dependency that is really at issue in the Unconscious Dependence Critique. 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 his parents. Unlike a child, who *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 this sense, the most plausible version of the Unconscious Dependence Critique is the view that, beneath the appearance of dominance, the master's position is characterized by a kind of helplessness and precarity (i.e. a form of powerlessness), for both his status and the provision of his needs depend upon the obedient service of another, who by no means bears him good will.

Without a doubt, the master would be in quite a bind if his lordship depended upon the goodwill of his slave. But, for that very reason, he does not rely upon that goodwill but

only upon his own superior strength and his power to coerce the other by posing a standing threat to the other's life. To suppose that the master is helplessly dependent upon the other is, in effect, to suppose that the slave is not performing forced labor but a kind of benevolent charity. Indeed, if the master's only problem were a lack of sufficient power over his situation (and the precarity that comes with it), then the appropriate solution would be the one masters have long adopted to address that concern – namely, to secure his position by the greater consolidation of power over the enslaved. He could fail in this endeavor, just as he could have lost the original struggle, but that is not a problem for the master as such but, rather, for the *would-be* master who fails to secure the dominance necessary to obtain coerced obedience. So long as the master maintains that dominance (through superior power), it is not he who is dependent in the relevant sense. On the contrary, it is the slave who is dependent upon the capricious will of another, for he is the one who stands to be killed the moment the master is unsatisfied. "Death," Hegel writes, is "the absolute master," (PhG, ¶194), and so long as death remains the consequence of insubordination, it is the master who makes the other's life depend upon his will, not the other way around.¹⁶

In fact, by contrast to the Unconscious Dependence Critique, I will argue that the master's problem emerges, indirectly, from the way that the slave is dependent upon *him*. The slave is not dependent upon the master 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 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 so of the master's relation to the slave (so long as he maintains superiority of power).¹⁷ The master exerts even greater control over the slave than this, because, out of justified mortal 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;” 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* 1253b30-35)

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 the master’s work 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.

3. The Master-Slave Dialectic and the User-Tool Dialectic

3.1 Freedom through Desire and Domination

We can only understand Hegel’s critique of the master by understanding, first, why the direct subjugation of another might, for the master, be regarded as an end in itself – as the *fulfillment* of a certain conception of a self-sufficient life. But this requires that we have a clear understanding of the unique kind of ‘being-for-self’ that the master enjoys. As we’ve seen, the kind of independence the master seeks is really a form of unconstrained individual self-fulfillment. (It is not a kind of pseudo-normative transcendence of his individualistic desires and self-interest). What we need to see is why, for Hegel, the master’s interest in *that* kind of independence leads to the assertion of absolute social hierarchy. To see this, we must understand both the similarity and the difference between the master’s independence and the kind of independence asserted through the direct satisfaction of one’s immediate desires.

As noted in section one, the latter independence likewise concerns a kind of unconstrained self-fulfillment. But the direct gratification of one’s immediate desires (through personal effort) is not *without* any form of constraint. The natural world does not simply conform to one’s wishes. Rather, to directly take what one wants from nature requires that one overcome the resistance posed by the independent existence of natural things (their own ‘*Selbstständigkeit*’). By successfully exerting one’s power over such things, one shows only that their independent existence is no absolute constraint but one that can be overcome through one’s own efforts.

But, for Hegel, the internal problem with *this* form of unconstrained self-fulfillment lies simply in its inherent transience and the corresponding need to endlessly repeat the effort. Immediate gratifications are fleeting and give way to new unsatisfied desires. Indeed, so long as I live and breathe, I *must* continue to desire and thus pursue some new desire for some new object.¹⁸ Accordingly, while I can certainly show that some individual object poses no absolute constraint to my satisfaction, I no sooner overcome that resistance than I must pursue some new desire and confront the resistance of yet another thing. So long as my independence rests solely on singular exercises of force in satisfying my immediate desires, I must therefore remain in a kind of Sisyphean existence. For like Sisyphus and his boulder, I may achieve my immediate goal and overcome the resistance of my object, but I must

endlessly repeat the process and remain in an interminable struggle against the constraints of the natural world. In sum, the unconstrained self-fulfillment that I achieve in immediate desire-satisfaction is, in both of its respects, as fleeting and insubstantial as the immediate gratification itself.

Here is where “another self-consciousness” enters the picture. Another person is capable of doing something mere things cannot: he can conform to my will *through his own action and intention*, and he can do so in an enduring way – without my having to continually struggle against him to fulfill my ends. Ideally, this would occur when our own interests are genuinely aligned, and when I in turn reciprocate that service (as in a true community of free individuals). Alternatively, I can create a kind of ersatz alignment of interests by, as it were, making the other an offer he cannot refuse (serve me or die). This is the kind of arrangement the master achieves. And by forcing another into unresisting obedience, he also frees himself from the need to struggle against the endless resistance of natural things, for someone else now performs that Sisyphean toil on his behalf. Thus, like in immediate desire, the master exists for himself by asserting his power over the resistance of his objects and thereby attaining his own enjoyment. But unlike in immediate desire-satisfaction (through one’s own direct efforts), the master overcomes the constraints of natural things in a more complete and permanent manner. 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 [*Selbstständigkeit*]; 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. (PhG, ¶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 *from* nature and the violent struggle against it that self-preservation otherwise requires. This is the kind of *Selbstständigkeit* the master achieves through absolute social hierarchy.

3.2 Independence Through a Tool

But the double function of the slave is, for Hegel, the essential double function of *tools* generally. The slave is thus the consummate tool, the paradigmatic tool. Indeed, Hegel’s general account of the user-tool relationship in the *Science of Logic* repeatedly describes that relationship through the language of mastery and service.¹⁹ 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 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 the object slave away externally²⁰ in its stead, abandons it to wear and tear while preserving itself behind it against mechanical violence. (SL, 663/GW 12, 166)

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 of external nature in his stead. As we have seen, for Hegel, the servitude of another thus provides the master with a more complete and enduring form of independence toward external nature than immediate desire-satisfaction. 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 a human being's forcible reduction to the function of a tool is hideous and deplorable. Our interest in this function pertains to its reverse side: how this unhappy condition redounds to the master himself.

4. The End and the Means

4.1 Servitude as the 'Truth' of 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:

In this recognition, the unessential consciousness [the slave] 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. (PhG, ¶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. But what does this claim really amount to?

As we've seen in section two, one way of understanding the sense in which the master's 'self-certainty' is (falsely) confirmed by the slave's recognition is to claim that the master holds certain beliefs about himself that depend upon the other's affirmation of their truth. I have argued that this is the wrong way of framing the whole issue. Instead, Hegel's way of framing the issue turns upon a *teleological* notion of seeing myself reflected in my object – namely, the other's conformity to myself and my internal ends, insofar as this is achieved through my own agency.

This framing provides a much more determinate way of approaching Hegel's claim that the truth of the master is the 'unessential action' of the slave. For this means, in the first instance, that the servile labor performed by the slave is the achieved product of the master's power over him. Thus, Hegel writes, "what the slave does is really the action of the master" (PhG, ¶191). The reason for this lies in the fact that this relationship has the form of a certain user-tool relationship. The action of the tool is really the action of its user, for the tool works only through the control its user exerts over it. The user performs an action *by means* of the tool. Similarly, the slave performs his service only because of the dominant power and control which the master exerts over him – it is the master who makes him do it. That is the sense in which the slave's work is an 'unessential action.' The point is not that this work is unnecessary, but that it is *action* only in a derivative sense. The master thus serves his own purposes, he "exist[s] only for himself" (PhG, ¶191), because of the coercive control he exerts over the slave – a control which, again, is remote, since the slave, unlike the plough, can be moved by *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 unfree 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 inquiry, we must be patient not to rush to a desired conclusion (the false freedom of the master) through an insufficient argument.

Insofar as the slave's action is really the *master's*, that action is nonetheless mediated by the subordinate work of the slave. The obviously servile *part* of the action (i.e. the work of the other qua tool) is the very thing 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 (a) what the master does *to* the slave, and (b) what he thereby does *through* the slave, for these are the only aspects of the relation that are ultimately attributable to the master himself.

Now what the master achieves *through* the slave is the 'pure enjoyment' of the fruits procured by the other's labor. What he does *to* the slave is simple: he holds him in

subjugation. That is, he effectively instrumentalizes him, puts him to work, and he does this by maintaining him in a constant state of justified mortal fear. In the former respect, the slave functions only as a means to some other end (the master's various enjoyments). In the latter respect, the slave's life of servitude is the intended *effect* of the master's dominant power. It is, I suggest, in this latter respect that the slave's life ultimately comes to corrupt the master's own freedom.

4.2 Master and Midas

To see why, we should first note that in this latter respect, a slave as such is the master's own product – the living product of his ongoing domination. 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. By holding the other's life in his hands, he has shaped and continually shapes the other into something that purely serves his own ends. He has forged a human being into a living tool and continues to preserve him in that state. Insofar as the servile life of the slave is both the initial and ongoing *product* of the master's action, the slave's servile life is, in this respect, an *end* that the master has realized and continues to realize – if only (importantly) a relative end.

The master's problem, I am claiming, lies in the fact that this product (his personal human tool) is really the master's highest end and his primary achievement. But why should we think this, and how would this undermine the freedom the master seeks – his unconstrained self-fulfillment? Let us examine the matter more closely.

First, it is important to reemphasize what kind of subject, with what kind of character, Hegel is considering in his discussion of the master. The master here is understood as the embodiment of a certain purely individualistic conception of freedom – the unrestrained fulfillment of an absolutely self-seeking will. To this extent, he does not acknowledge the independence of *anything* outside himself and can find satisfaction only in reducing other things (and people) to mere means. Put simply, to be absolutely self-seeking is to hold a domineering attitude toward the external world.

To see why a *human tool* should hold a kind of absolute value to him, we can again distinguish this product of his domination from the external ends achieved by means of it. They are, first, his natural self-preservation and, second, the various immediate enjoyments he obtains. But mere survival on its own cannot be his ultimate aim, for in merely surviving, he is no different from his slave, whom he holds in contempt. 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. The slave has allowed him to overcome the external side of the problem of immediate desire – namely, the endless outer struggle to obtain his gratification. But transient enjoyments provide no greater satisfaction on that account. He remains, in this respect, like the 'leaky jar' of Plato's *Gorgias* (493b), even though someone else is now tasked with endlessly replenishing him.

By contrast to these insubstantial objects and the fleeting pleasures they afford, what is essential to the master is (a) that these delights *always* be at his ready disposal and, most importantly, (b) that he *never* have to work for them. In other words, what really matters to him is to live the life of the master – i.e. to 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). Force another man to fish, and you eat freely for a lifetime. Above all, what matters is that his possession of this tool (and the idleness thus enjoyed) is the reflection, the realization of the power of his self-seeking will. In this respect, he is not unlike the miser, who ultimately 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.

The slave's life of servitude – his complete instrumentalization – is itself the highest achievement of the master, the most complete fulfillment of his interest in existing for himself. 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 that 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.²¹ Rather, the master's true fortune, the 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."

The master, of course, finds no satisfaction in the slave himself – as, by contrast, one finds lasting satisfaction in a friend. Naturally, his domineering will does not allow him to have a true friend at all, for that would require acknowledging another as an independent end, not a mere means. But the only other source of his satisfaction is mere things and the inherently fleeting pleasures they afford – the wine and the cheese, etc. One does not need to be a moralist to recognize that such things provide no lasting fulfillment – that the monotonous repetition of such superficial enjoyments renders them only more tiresome.

The freedom the master desires is completely unseparated from his own self-interest, for it consists simply in the power to attain his own personal fulfillment. But that is a power which he *lacks*, and what constrains him is not an external but an internal obstacle. Hegel's claim is that the desire to assert direct domination over another springs from the inherently domineering attitude of a purely self-seeking will. Such an attitude can only be satisfied in the subjection of everything else to one's will, and the domination of another human being satisfies the demands of that attitude in the most complete way possible. Thus, the master gets what he seeks – *a slave*. But the only thing that can satisfy him affords no true satisfaction at all, for his most prized possession, the supreme object of his domineering desire is, at the same time, something he despises – something he regards as a contemptible means. He is, in this way, like the wretched King Midas. The fulfillment of his innermost wish turns out to be nothing more than a lowly and unfulfilling means. In the servile life of the slave, therefore, the master unknowingly witnesses the outer image, the 'truth,' of his own inner problem: the lack of *Selbstständigkeit*, the complete powerlessness to attain his own satisfaction.²²

But, for these very reasons, Hegel's claim is not *merely* that the subjugation of another is at odds with the master's freedom. His claim, rather, is that his true defect lies in the *failure* to reciprocally recognize the other. His problem, that is, would not be overcome merely by retreating from the society of others and directing himself toward mere physical things – whether as consumable goods or inanimate tools (which he already possesses in abundance). To conclude this paper, I will offer a brief sketch of why the master's problem

lies not merely in seeking another subject as an absolute means to his own fulfillment, but rather, in his failure to reciprocally treat the other as an independent end in himself.

Conclusion: Overcoming the Master's Problem

As I noted briefly in section three, Hegel's original introduction of the need for "another self-consciousness" derived from the idea that – by contrast to mere physical things – another self-conscious subject is uniquely capable of serving my ends in an enduring way and through its own action. Hegel expresses this claim in terms of *satisfaction*: "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (PhG, ¶175). But, as also I noted in that context, another's unresisting fulfillment of my own purposes in no way depends (in principle) upon another's mere subservience to me. It occurs also when another genuinely regards me as an *end* and freely treats me as such.

But this also means that the enjoyment of a form of unconstrained self-fulfillment is no way restricted to the domination of another (which, indeed, does not even attain it). The reason the master accords such high value to the slave is precisely because of that unresisting conformity to his ends. His problem is not that he values the unconstrained fulfillment afforded by another self-conscious subject, nor is his problem that he thus values this other as a kind of ultimate end. The problem is that he values another human being *qua mere means* as an ultimate end. That is why, although he is not constrained by the other, he finds no true fulfillment in the other who serves him.

In order to achieve satisfaction in another's treating me as an *end*, I should have to reciprocally regard the *other* as a genuine end. This is the true enjoyment of unconstrained self-fulfillment in and through another: the freely reciprocated service of different individuals who value one another as ends in themselves. It is experienced in love and friendship, and in any community united by mutual recognition and genuine common will. Of course, this kind of non-constraint does not mean mere unbridled egotism – like the self-seeking will of the master. Rather, in recognizing the will of another, I must restrain my one-sided self-interest (like, in a way, the slave must also do). But insofar as I see my own will genuinely reflected in another's (who recognizes my will in turn), the other's will is no true constraint to my own, nor is my acknowledgment of it a form of servitude. Hegel describes such a relation as *Geist*, spirit: "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" (PhG, ¶178).

These concluding remarks are only the briefest sketch of the kind of freedom that, for Hegel, can only be achieved through the relation with another founded upon genuine mutual recognition and reciprocity. Indeed, in the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel himself only gives a very brief and abstract outline of this true concept of the freedom gained through mutual recognition. But, as I've argued in this paper, we best understand this freedom by seeing how it is, in an important sense, the very freedom the master aims to achieve through domination but cannot achieve by that means.

The master, as we've seen, has no interest whatsoever in something like Kantian moral autonomy – the subordination of one's own self-love to a universal moral law. Rather, he desires freedom in a very basic sense: unconstrained self-interest. Indeed, if we viewed the master's own problem only as a failure to act in accordance with universal norms or to do right in the other's eyes, then we should really have no critique of a purely egoistic

conception of personal freedom, like the kind sought by Plato's figures of Callicles or Thrasymachus. Moreover, if we claimed that the master lacked independence merely because his freedom and self-fulfillment relied upon the efforts of another, then we should not understand why, for Hegel, true freedom and self-fulfillment *do* depend on our relations with others.

Hegel's critique, I have argued, is far more interesting: by merely instrumentalizing others, one in fact deprives oneself of the only adequate means for truly enjoying one's own unconstrained satisfaction. Thus, one's very freedom *as an individual* achieves its fullest form in a genuine community with others – in the reciprocal promotion and enjoyment of one another's freedom. To close with a quotation from Hegel's *Differenzschrift*: "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).

¹ Some interpreters have argued that we should not read Hegel's account as a treatment of literal slavery but, rather, as a metaphor – either for a relation between different aspects of the individual subject (McDowell 2009; Stekeler-Weithofer 2008), or for non-reciprocal social relations more generally (Brandom 2019; Ikäheimo 2022). I agree that Hegel's treatment of mastery and servitude is also meant to have broader philosophical implications, but I think the metaphorical reading is misguided and obscures Hegel's argument (for instance, by wrongly assimilating slavery to the model of fundamentally different forms of non-reciprocity). Perhaps the most direct evidence against the metaphorical reading is that, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel concludes his lengthiest discussion of literal slavery by referring the reader to this part of the *Phenomenology* (and its corresponding section in the *Philosophy of Spirit*) for further discussion of the matter (PR, §57R).

² Cf. Sartre 1956, 318-329.

³ Cf. Pinkard 1996, 60; Pippin 2010, 84; Brandom 2019, 340.

⁴ Note, throughout this essay, I will translate Hegel's 'Knecht' as 'slave.' Miller translates the term as 'bondsmen,' (in keeping with his translation of *Knechtschaft* as 'bondage.') But bondsmen is a virtually meaningless term in English. Pinkard renders it as 'servant,' which is, in a way, a more faithful translation (the normal German term for 'slave' is *Sklav*). But while 'servitude' (like *Knechtschaft*) has clear connotations of bondage, the term 'servant' does not clearly imply that. Regardless of the term, the *Knecht* in Hegel's story is one who is forced to labor for the *Herr* on pain of death. That is slavery. Finally, I will forego the 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.

⁵ Cf. Shklar 1996, 61; Hyppolite 1946, 157; Siep 2014, 93; Pippin 1989, 162.

⁶ Specifically, the destruction of a "living thing" [*ein Lebendiges*] (PhG, ¶¶168, 174)

⁷ This sense of the term 'self-consciousness' marks a contrast to the preceding three chapters (collectively titled "Consciousness"), each of which has as its theme a certain conception of a truly 'self-standing' external object as such: first as the 'this' (Chapter I), next as the 'thing-with-properties' (Chapter II), then as an inner 'force,' and again as an unchanging realm of natural laws, etc. (Chapter III). The theme of chapter IV is the idea of the subject itself as what is truly 'self-standing.' Cf. Brownlee (2023, 45-6) for a related discussion of this point. Beyond the schematics of Hegel's text, the account of chapter IV has as its proximate background Fichte's conception of self-consciousness as the subject's continual activity of 'positing' its own freedom through its transcendence of natural limitations. Redding (2023) gives an insightful account of the pervasive Fichte-reference in *Phenomenology* IV (though I disagree with his view that Hegel's account is merely parroting Fichte for the sake of critiquing him).

⁸ Translations from the German editions of Hegel's works are my own. Where published English translations are cited, I have frequently modified them for clarity and precision.

⁹ Cf. EL, §24Z, PR, §22

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- ¹⁰ The subsection of the chapter in which Hegel's treatment of mastery and servitude appears is titled: "*Selbstständigkeit und Unselbstständigkeit des Selbstbewußtseins; Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*"
- ¹¹ "das Andere [...] vom Ersten als dem Unterworfenen anerkannt wird."
- ¹² Cf. Pinkard 1996, 53-59; Pippin 2010, 19, 85; Brandom 2019, 340.
- ¹³ Cf. Kant, *Groundwork* 4:422. This reading of Hegel's theory of recognition is expressed most explicitly in Pippin (2000)
- ¹⁴ Pippin (2010, 76n.) refers to this part of Aristotle in explaining the need for recognition from a recognized authority.
- ¹⁵ Cf. also Hyppolite 1946, 157; Siep 2014, 93; Pippin 1989, 162
- ¹⁶ For an excellent treatment of the classical notion of slavery as dependence on the goodwill of another, cf. Skinner (1998)
- ¹⁷ 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 *proshen* 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).
- ¹⁸ "Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its satisfaction are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from overcoming this other: in order that this overcoming can take place, *there must be this other*" (PhG, ¶175; my emphasis).
- ¹⁹ 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).
- ²⁰ The term here is '*sich äußerlich abarbeiten*' which di Giovanni translates as 'do the slavish work of externality.'
- ²¹ *Silas Marner*, Eliot (1921).
- ²² This is why Hegel's treatment of mastery and servitude is followed by a discussion of Stoicism. For Hegel, to the extent that the master might consciously feel and reflect upon the emptiness of his *outer* life, he does not view it as a product of his mastery but, rather, as the inherent state of things (why else would life be unsatisfying to one who has everything?). Accordingly, Hegel claims that the proximate (and inadequate) solution to this problem is the stoical, inner withdrawal from worldly affairs and the conviction that no true fulfillment can be found in them, regardless of whether one is "on the throne or in chains" (PhG, ¶199).

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